

# Care and Maintenance of the Clarinet

## You Will Need:

- 1) Swab. Silk or microfiber work best because they absorb moisture and rarely get stuck. Cotton swabs are okay. Do not use felt swabs; they smear the water around instead of absorbing it.
  - Your swab should have a covered weight on the end. No bare metal.
  - Avoid a “Pad Saver” swab (fuzzy stick). They don’t get moisture out of the instrument.
- 2) Soft cloth.
- 3) Cork grease or paraffin wax.
- 4) Pad cleaning paper.

## Daily Care

- 1) Never leave your instrument by itself. It takes very little time for someone to take it.
- 2) Never leave your instrument on the ground, on a chair, on a music stand, etc. Always keep your instrument in your hands or in the case.
- 3) Do not let other people use your instrument unless you teach them the right way to hold and use it.
- 4) Do not use your case as a chair or step stool. It is not designed for that kind of weight.
- 5) Lay your case flat on your lap before opening it. Do not let it “fall” open.
- 6) Do NOT grab the long rods on the clarinet when putting the instrument together.
- 7) Twist the parts of your instrument together. Do not rock them in to place.
- 8) Secure all loose items in your case. Anything loose will damage your instrument.
- 9) Do not put music in your case, unless space is provided for it. If you have to fold it or if it touches the instrument, it shouldn’t be there.
- 10) Avoid eating or drinking anything but water just before playing. If you must, rinse your mouth with water or brush your teeth before playing.
- 11) Grease your corks only when it is needed, and don’t use too much grease.

## Daily Cleaning

- 1) Keeping your instrument dry when you are not playing it is the most effective way to keep it in good condition.
- 2) Loosen the ligature, **remove the reed** and wipe it dry with the swab or your arm. Put it in your reed case.
- 3) Remove the mouthpiece, roll the swab and push it through the bottom of the mouthpiece. Move it back and forth until the mouthpiece is dry. Dry the mouthpiece tenon.
- 4) Put your mouthpiece and ligature in the cap and in the case.
- 5) As you take the bass clarinet apart, drop the weight through each part and pull the swab through to dry the inside. If you feel it get stuck, STOP pulling. You will probably only make it worse. Pull it back out the way it went in.
- 6) Knots in your swab string will make it shorter and harder to use. Undo them as soon as they appear.

## Weekly Cleaning

- 1) Wash the swab by soaking it for 3 minutes in a sink filled with lukewarm water and soap or a mild detergent. Rinse thoroughly. Let dry completely.
- 2) Wash the inside of the mouthpiece with warm (NOT hot!) water and a mild soap. Do not scrub it. Rinse and dry.
  - Try to keep the cork dry. If it gets wet, just dry it as soon as you are done. You may need to grease it.
- 3) Carefully wipe the keys ONE AT A TIME and the body clean with a soft, clean cloth. Be careful not to snag any springs.
- 4) Make sure the screws at the ends of your rods are not sticking out.
- 5) While you are practicing, leave the case open in the sun. The warmth will dry out any moisture and discourage moths from living in the case (they like to eat pads).
- 6) Vacuum your case.

### Every Four Months

- 1) Dust in between the rods and keys if they are dirty. Use a watercolor paintbrush or pipe cleaners.
- 2) Clean the pads. Put pad cleaning paper or a NEW dollar bill under the pad, press the key and pull the bill out slowly. Don't push too hard or you will rip the paper!
- 3) If any corks or felt bumpers are missing, have them replaced. If they are missing, you may hear metal hitting metal when you push your keys. You should never hear this on an instrument that is working properly.
- 4) Check your pads for tears in the skin and discoloration. Worn-out pads will not seal and will make playing the instrument more difficult.

### Regular Check-ups

To keep your instrument in top working condition, have it checked by a qualified repair person once per year (Winter break is better than summer, repair shops are not as busy). Woodwind instruments will stay in top form if they are overhauled every three to five years. Regular maintenance keeps an instrument in good playing condition for a period of years, rather than allowing it gradually to deteriorate, becoming more difficult to play and more expensive to repair.

