

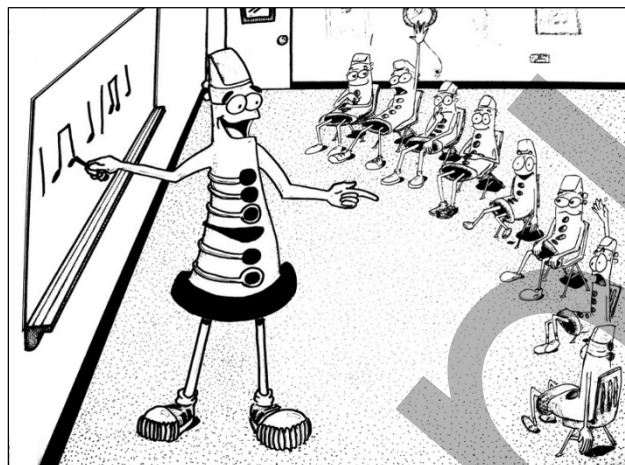
So You Want to Play the
Clarinet

by Paula Corley

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*Cartoon characters by Jeff Rogers
Additional artwork by Jessica Heintz
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Choosing an Instrument

Wood or Synthetic?

The material used to make a clarinet is not as important as the instrument's overall construction quality. Wood is the popular choice among professional players, but not all wooden clarinets are of high quality. Accomplished players who practice regularly will benefit from a higher quality, hand finished instrument. Synthetic clarinets can be excellent choices for beginners and for marching band. Expect to replace your clarinet if you use the same one for marching and concert playing.

Mouthpieces and Reeds

There is no "one size fits all" for mouthpieces and reeds. The mouthpiece and reed strength will affect the clarinet sound. As you learn to play better, you will outgrow your beginner equipment.

Mouthpiece Terminology

Tip opening

- **Tip opening:** the distance between the reed and the mouthpiece surface that allows the reed to vibrate creating the sound.
- **Open Mouthpiece:** large tip opening. Open mouthpieces are designed for soft reeds. Mismatching a harder reed to an open tip may make the sound fuzzy and difficult to blow.
- **Closed Mouthpiece:** small tip opening. Closed mouthpieces are designed for harder reeds. Mismatching a softer reed to a closed tip mouthpiece may create an uncharacteristic clarinet sound.



Reed Terminology

- **Soft Reed** (thinner tip) - Strength 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5.
- **Hard Reed:** (thicker tip) - Strength 4, 4.5, 5.
- **Medium Reed:** Strength 3, 3.5.



Reeds come in slightly different shapes and finishes. Climate affects reeds. For example, when it is raining or humid, reeds will swell, making them feel harder to blow.

Suggestions:

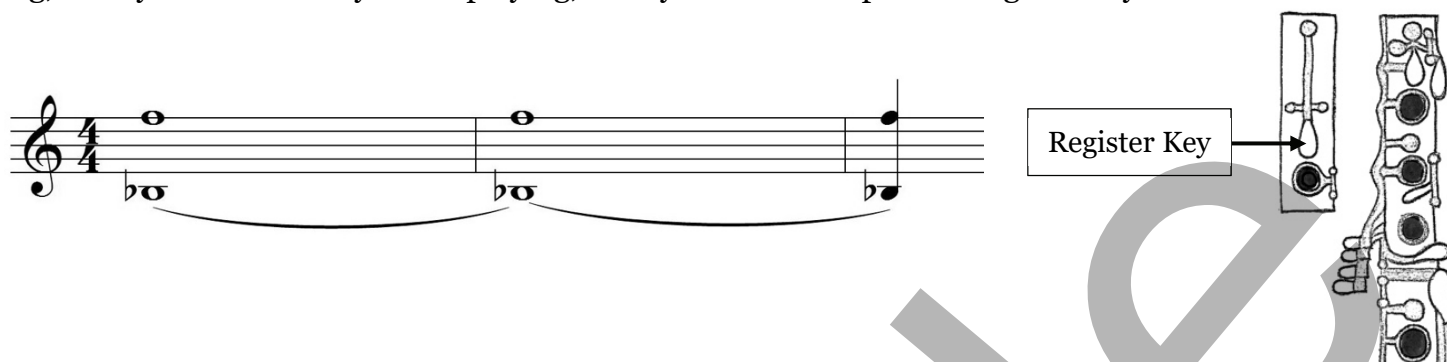
- Use the correct strength reed for your mouthpiece. Choose medium strength reeds to start. A reed and mouthpiece combination that has little or no resistance is not recommended. A characteristic clarinet sound is created with modest resistance.
- Store reeds properly in a reed case to avoid damage.
- Reeds do not last forever. Have several working reeds at all times. Rotate reeds and avoid playing on the same reed constantly because reeds can wear out quickly.

Equipment Recommendations for Beginners

- Synthetic clarinets are great for marching band and first-year players. Wooden clarinets are more expensive and should be chosen carefully. Ask for assistance when choosing your instrument.
- Mouthpiece: choose based on these factors: 1) ease of blowing, 2) pitch (tuning).
- Ligature: metal is a good choice for a vibrant sound.

Sound Check

Now would be a good time to check your sound and embouchure development. Play the line below with a strong, steady sound. While you are playing, have your teacher open the register key.



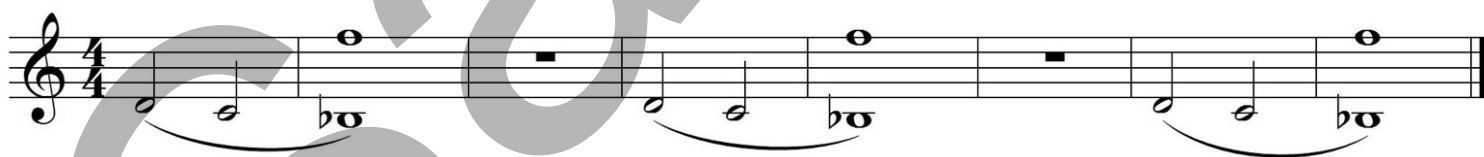
Did the higher note speak when the register key was pressed? If not, here are some suggestions:

- Use "faster" air.
- Make sure your tongue is high and forward, close to the reed. Think "e".
- Be sure your top teeth are gripping the top of the mouthpiece. The clarinet embouchure must be very firm. Go back to the barrel and mouthpiece to see if you are playing a clear, focused sound.
- Take more reed surface inside your mouth. Adjust the bottom lip down on the reed so that it can vibrate freely.
- Check your reed. Is it worn out or too soft?

Air support must be strong to make the clarinet work properly. The clarinet is an air-resistant instrument. This means that you must breathe deeply and blow enough air through the instrument to create resistance.

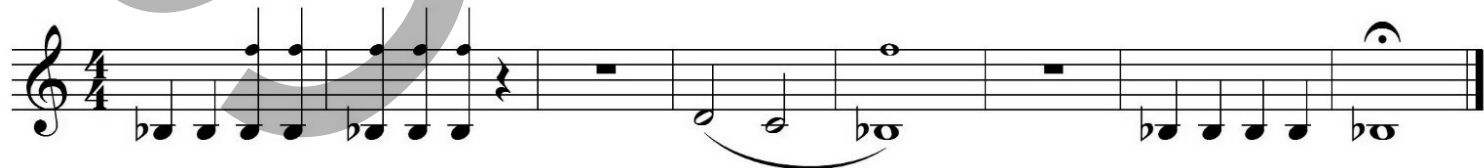
When everything is working properly, go on to the lines below. Have your teacher help you open the register key where indicated. Next, try opening the register key without help. It is very easy to uncover the back hole when you press the register key. If you uncover the thumb hole when you press the register key, you may SQUEAK! It will take time and patience to learn to open the register key without squeaking.

Tone Developer #1



Tone Developer #2

Add the register key after the B-Flat speaks.

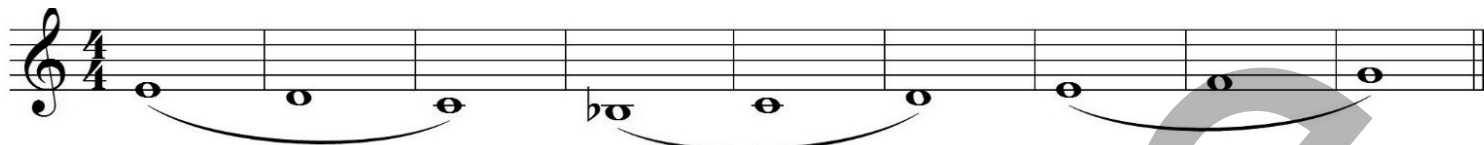


Things I need to practice:

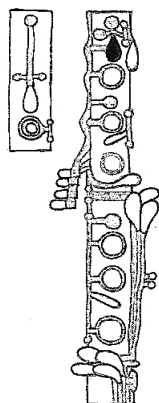


Melodies That Use A

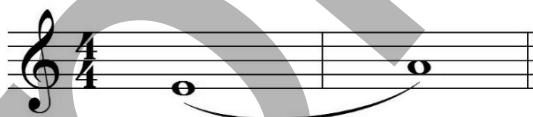
Long Tone Warm-Up: Always play a warm-up before you practice. The warm-up below should be played slowly with three notes per breath. Slur everything.



New Note: A



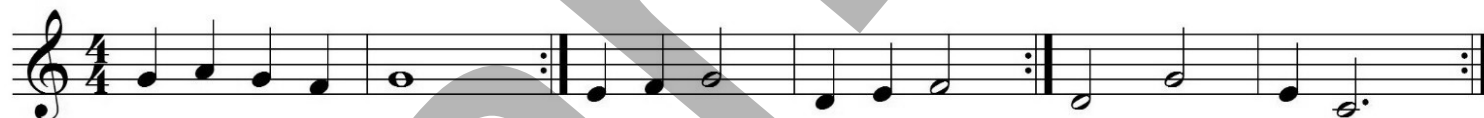
Playing A will require special use of the left index finger. Finger E. Slowly roll the index finger back and up to open the lever key for A. Use the area of the index finger near the knuckle to open the A key. Work for a smooth motion with no "blips." Keep the unused fingers down and close to the instrument.



London Bridge



Practice Exercise for London Bridge



Twinkle Twinkle Little Star



Fine

Da Capo al Fine

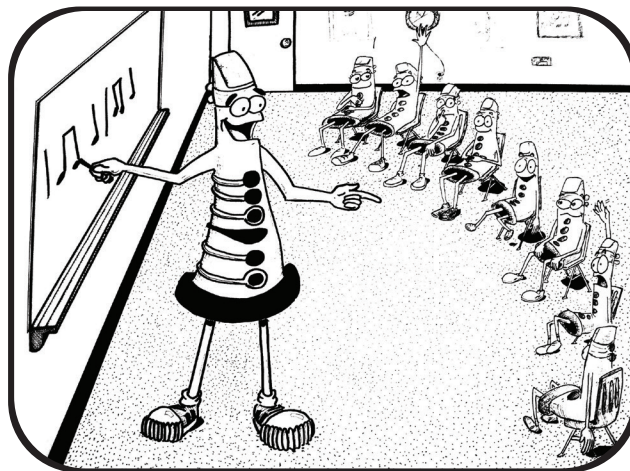
Da Capo: (dah cah' po) means beginning. **Fine:** (fee' nay) means finish.
Da Capo al Fine: go back to the beginning and play to the Fine.

Jolly Old St. Nicholas



First and Second Endings: Play from the beginning through ending one. Repeat from the beginning and play the second ending. (Skip the first.)

So You Want to Play the Clarinet is a carefully sequenced book for beginner clarinetists that emphasizes good tone quality and phrasing. The range is moderate, from the lowest E to third line B-flat. Rhythms and basic techniques needed for first semester performance are included. For the best result, follow the lessons in order. With regular practice, you can teach yourself to play.



Paula Corley is a Texas music educator whose passion is the clarinet. She is the ‘mayor’ of Clarinet City, a website for all things clarinet and is currently the pedagogy chairman for the International Clarinet Association. Paula is also the instructor of clarinet at Texas Lutheran University and the founder of clariNETWORKS, an annual event for students and teachers of all ages that provides access to some of the clarinet world’s most successful clarinet teachers and performers. She is an artist-clinician for Buffet Crampon and Vandoren.

Originally from Mississippi, Paula is a career music educator, having taught many years in public schools and in higher education. Her books about clarinet and clarinet teaching are well-known and her articles about clarinet pedagogy have appeared in *The Instrumentalist*, *The Texas Bandmasters Review*, *The Clarinet*, and *WAVE* - an online resource for music educators hosted by Vandoren. Paula has over 40 conference presentations to her credit including The Midwest Clinic, ClarinetFest, Texas Music Educators Association, Texas Bandmasters Association, and workshops in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Indiana, Mississippi, North Carolina and Virginia.

Paula supports new music and has commissioned two original works - *Unfamiliar Territory* for clarinet and wind band by Michael Markowski and *Road Trip* for clarinet quintet written by Clifton Jones. Links to recordings of these works can be found on her site **clarinetcity.com**, along with articles, videos, and helpful information that is free to download.

Paula is a graduate of Southern Methodist University and Mississippi State University where she was named Alumnus of the Year for Music in 2013.

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