

## **Bassoon Basics Handout**

### **Physiology of Performance**

Mindful preparation: tall torso, grounded feet, loose neck, floating head

- Bring the ground up to you if you need to while sitting! Use a book or a stool.

Tension in the upper body should not exist. The throat should always stay open. It helps to practice staying open playing scales on a regular basis to make this habit form.

The biggest tip: take your time, and be patient with yourself. Good habits are built slowly and with intention. Bad habits can be built quite quickly and are difficult to break. If you need to stop and adjust every ten seconds to ensure proper form, then do so.

#### **Embouchure: how to create**

Begin by whistling the lowest pitch you can. Then whistle an octave higher. Begin tightening the lips into an "O" form – continue whistling until the sound stops. This is how engaged each muscle in your embouchure must be. Practice doing this before you set up with the reed to feel the engagement and cushion from the lips.

### **Basics of Attack and Release**

#### **Attack**

Proper preparation before an attack is crucial. Order of events in order to have a good attack:

- 1) full set of air/emb prior to sound,
- 2) vowel/air direction and speed set-up:
  - this means knowing exactly what comes before you even breathe
- 3) breathe with low ab expansion
- 4) experiment with different tongue placements and articulations (T, D, Th)
5. Air is a constantly engaged; tongue is the valve.
6. support must immediately be present before the note even begins. Engage the abs
7. IMMEDIATELY notice if there is any tension in the upper chest, neck, or throat.
8. Deliberately release any tension present.
9. This process is best done daily during the daily routine.

#### **Release**

Goal: to imagine your entire body to resonate as if it were a string instrument  
First, focus on rounding the embouchure to the reed to cushion and support  
Then close the jaw just a little to release the sound  
Make sure you have a syllable chosen during the entire sound

AIR NEVER QUILTS – sometimes even after the reed stops vibrating

Exercises:

Long tones – focus on starts and ends of notes, maintaining the vowel or shifting vowels to make color changes within the notes

Begin with metronome = 60, hair pins, 10-8-6-4 beats

**Attack/Release Exercises** must become a part of your Daily Routine

### "Singing" Vowels while you play!

Basics of Toe, Tah, Two, Tay, Tee, and Tie (most open to more closed oral cavity)

Purpose: ease of flexibility, color and pitch control

Syllables to protect embouchure cushion

Not instead of air, with air and emb motion!

Be sensitive to **your own natural voicing**; discover and use

## Vibrato

Vibrato should not be automatic. Vibrato should always be intentionally used to further the musicality of the work. Questions to ask: Do I want to use abdominal vibrato? Glottal vibrato? Jaw vibrato?

It is very important that we practice using different speeds of vibrato (which is basically an oscillation above and under a pitch. Long tones come particularly handy here. I use a more glottal vibrato, much like a singer. Practice doing both abdominal movement and glottal. I would not encourage jaw motion – this can often lead to manipulation of the embouchure that is entirely unnecessary. Experiment with different rates of oscillation – note what feels natural in each range and on each note. RECORD yourself doing this so you can listen back.

## *Interpreting the Music*

Step One: Score study – what does the composer instruct in the music? Dynamics, articulations, etc. Composer's performance style and knowledge of period performance practice

Your perceived mood or spirit of the piece and the rate of change within

Total commitment to your inner musical voice

Discover the dialogue between groups and phrases

- Formal and harmonic analysis leads this discovery

A performer's tools include the subtle or vibrant use of

- Dynamic scaling, true legato connections, accent quality, attack/release as texture, coloration, rhythmic/pulse integrity, metric accentuation, clarity of intonation, clarity of flow to a point or region

Your ideas are good - if you think and make vibrant!

*Notate* discoveries and concepts of gesture, this allows and encourages evolution

### Developing a Practice Routine

Daily Routine (scales, long tones, etc.)

Technical Etude

Concert Etude with Recording/Listening

Solo Literature with Recording/Listening and Listening with Score

Orchestral Literature with Recording/Listening and Listening with Score

- Develop organizations and charting that work for you - keep a notebook, develop a practice routine template
- Recording/Listening is an essential component of development
- Singing, conducting with rhythmic drill and “visualizing performance” are elements of practicing – sometimes even more useful than technical practice

### Practice Techniques

Practice slowly enough to feel your posture and air flow while keeping a lightness of technical control.

Practice sessions should always be mindful sessions. Do not try to rush a session in order to just “get to the technical difficulties.” A practice session with solid technique in which you do not play more than scales or etudes is still a productive practice session. Do not skip the foundational steps in practicing.

Practice points of awareness:

Breath preparation and release on EVERYTHING

Become aware of where tension lies – take time to actively release it

Stretch the body and the arms/hands prior to practice – treat your body like an athlete’s

Technical practice tips:

Clap rhythm, sing pitches

Play as notated **slowly** with focus on air support and its fluctuation

Use altered rhythms and articulations

Change articulation – start by slurring everything, then change articulation patterns (slur 2 tongue 2, etc)

Find your Perfect Practice Tempo and develop from there

Always practice at each tempo **with** musical gesture. DO NOT just focus on getting the right notes.

### Recommended further readings:

Burns, Michael. “Thoughts and Strategies for Bassoon Vibrato.” *The Double Reed* 28, no. 2 (2005): 121-124.