

## Looking after the Bassoon (Jun 2017)

### The instrument case

An instrument case that holds the Bassoon snugly is essential. The keys will be bent if the instrument can move in the case while being carried. Do not lock the long-joint and short-joints together when they are in the case (unless you absolutely have to due to the design of the case) - if the case is dropped the joint lock is likely to break from one or other of the joints. Cork grease, cleaning rods, and swabs are required to be kept in the case; nothing else should be kept in the case unless there is a specific compartment for it.

### Maintenance

The instrument's mechanism should be oiled occasionally using instrument oil in a needle dispenser. If dust or fluff does gather on the instrument it should be brushed away with a shaving brush.

The tenons and sockets of all woodwind instruments distort and the joints become tighter or looser in the different seasons of the year; because Bassoons are made of Maple the tenons and sockets distort more so than on other woodwind instruments and the joints can quickly become too tight or too loose (the joints need to be loose enough to assemble the instrument but tight enough to provide an airtight seal). The best solution to this problem is to have corked tenons which are then wrapped with lapping thread so the player can add or remove thread as required: if the tenon is too loose then the player should grease the tenon, wrap lapping thread around the tenon a few times, smooth the thread down, and then assemble the instrument to check the tenon is tight enough; if the tenon is too tight they should remove some of the thread and then re-grease the tenon.

### Servicing

The instrument should be serviced regularly to ensure it is operating correctly. The pads, corks, and felts on the instrument (and also the adhesives which keeps these items in place) deteriorate over time. On older or poorer quality instruments the mechanism itself starts to wear and keys can become loose or jammed; usually such deterioration is gradual and the player subconsciously compensates by blowing harder and pressing harder on the keys. Without servicing the deterioration continues - the quality of tone diminishes, the instrument becomes less responsive, and the tuning becomes unreliable; the deterioration continues until something major goes wrong and the instrument becomes unplayable and in need of considerable repair. Bassoons are particularly prone to leaking pads especially on the bottom joint. Unique to Bassoons are 'compound tone-holes' where one pad is covering more than one hole - these pads need regular checking by a repairer. Also, whereas other wooden woodwind instruments are made of very dense and stable Rosewoods (such as African Blackwood) Bassoons are made of much softer Maple that is vulnerable to water damage and is a lot less stable.

As a general guide to the frequency of servicing - if you have one main woodwind instrument and you are under grade 5 (or have been playing less than 5 years) you should have the instrument serviced approximately every two years, if you are above grade 5 (or have been playing more than 5 years) then you should have the instrument serviced approximately once a year. If you have more than one main woodwind instrument then each instrument probably gets used less often so you can go longer between services. If you are doing exams on the instrument it is best to have the instrument checked (and any repairs done if necessary) a couple of months before the exams so that you know the instrument is working reliably when you go into the exam; players often blame themselves for the poor sound they produce when actually the instrument is at fault.

### **Adjusting to your instrument if it has just been serviced:**

When an instrument is overdue a service you (the player) has to compensate for the instrument's various problems. You have probably developed habits of pressing harder on the keys, blowing harder, and manipulating your embouchure as necessary to help tune the notes. You may not even been aware that you were doing these things. You now need to stop compensating for the problems you were having with the instrument – therefore you need to break the habits you have developed. The easiest way to do this is to spend your next two or three practices working on scales and arpeggios only; use a light finger pressure and a light breath pressure and try to play quietly. If you do not practice scales and arpeggios then practice some easy pieces of music so you can concentrate on your finger and breath pressure rather than the notes.

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