

Looking after the Oboe (June 2022)

Cleaning the instrument

- If dust or fluff does gather on the instrument then gently brush it away with an (unused) shaving brush or small (10-20 mm) width (unused) paint brush.
- Occasionally polish the keys to prolong the life of the plating. Use a silver cleaning cloth (for silver plated keys) or a brass cleaning cloth (for nickel plated keys).
- Once a month (if you feel competent) use a precision screwdriver to gently check none of the screws that hold the keys in place are working loose (Do not check the adjusting screws)
- If the pads become sticky use (Yamaha) pad cleaning papers to clean the pads: - dab a little meths onto the paper with a cotton bud, place the paper under the key pad, hold the key lightly closed and pull the paper through. Now the pad is clean place a sheet of (Yamaha) powder paper under the pad, hold the key lightly closed, and pull the paper through.

Cases and case covers

Oboes are easily damaged and an instrument case that securely holds the Oboe is essential. The keys will be bent if the instrument can move in the case while being carried. Nothing else should be kept in the case unless there is a specific compartment for it (or it can fit in the bell). Case covers are useful if you need to carry a stand or sheet music.

Instrument stands

Some players find the hassle of assembling and dis-assembling the Oboe can prevent them practicing. If the Oboe is placed on a stand after playing it can be left assembled and it will drain properly (although it is vulnerable to being knocked over). If the stand is to be kept at home, buy one with the largest base possible because this will be the most stable; if the stand needs to be used at performances as well as at home, then a smaller stand that fits inside the case, or the case cover, or perhaps the bell, might be better. Children might be better off placing the instrument under their bed (remove the bell and rest the instrument with the holes pointing upwards), the instrument won't drain effectively but it might be played more often and it won't get knocked over.

During performances it is best for the player to keep hold of the Oboe with the **holes facing upwards** and the instrument tilted down (rather than place it on a stand) doing this will help the instrument drain and also keep it warm so it stays in tune.

Servicing the instrument

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.

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 to three 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, although this will depend on how much playing you do.

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 preparing for an exam on the instrument it is best to have the instrument checked a few weeks before the exam so that you know it 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. Test your Oboe with the following exercises, in all cases you should be able to play the notes without squeezing the keys hard or blowing hard: G# down to F#; Low C down to B; Low C down to Bb; and whilst holding LH little finger Eb open play Low C.

Adjusting to your instrument if it has just been serviced:

When an instrument is overdue a service the player has to compensate for the instrument's various problems. You probably developed habits of pressing harder on the keys, and blowing harder, and manipulating your embouchure as necessary to help tune the notes. You may not even have been aware that you were doing these things. Once the instrument is serviced you 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 'easy' scales and arpeggios only and to play quietly – this will enable you to focus on using a lighter finger pressure and a lighter breath pressure than was previously necessary. If you do not practice scales and arpeggios then practice some easy pieces of music instead.

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