

Looking after the Recorder (June 2022)

Assembly

The Recorder has two or three sections depending on whether it has a separate foot joint. There is the '**head-joint**' (which the player blows into); the '**body**' (with most of the '**tone-holes**'); and sometimes a separate '**foot-joint**' (with just two little tone-holes for the little finger). The body of the Recorder has a '**tenon**' at the top end that fits into the '**socket**' of the head-joint (and if there is a foot-joint there will also be a tenon at the bottom of the body to fit into the foot-joint socket).

On wooden Recorders each tenon has a ring of cork (or lapping thread) to help create an airtight seal between the parts of the instrument, occasionally these tenons must be greased to ease the assembly of the instrument and protect the cork (or lapping thread) from water damage. Plastic Recorders do not usually have a ring of cork or lapping thread on the tenons, but the tenons still need to be greased occasionally to help seal the joints and ease assembly. When assembling the instrument **always twist the joints together**.

Warming up the instrument

Each woodwind instrument has particular maintenance problems; Recorders are particularly affected by water from the player's breath blocking the air passage (the 'windway') at the top of the mouthpiece – this either stops the instrument playing or makes it play quieter than it should.

Before playing the player should warm-up the instrument by holding it in their hands for a few minutes until it feels warm. This prevents an excess of water condensating from the player's breath and blocking the windway of the mouthpiece in the first few minutes of playing.

Inevitably there will be occasions when there will be a build up of water in the windway of the mouthpiece which 'blocks' the recorder. **If the instrument is made of plastic** the player can clear the passage by covering the little 'window' in the head-joint and blowing hard; **if the instrument is made of wood** the player must clear the passage with a sharp **intake** of breath because if they blow hard they may damage the 'ramp' (the sharp edge that creates the sound).

Recorder players often have to switch between various Recorders during a concert, and it is common practice for the players to lay Recorders on the floor whilst not in use - however this is not a good thing to do. The floor is the coldest part of a room (unless there is under-floor heating) so a Recorder will cool down, plus if laid down horizontally excess water cannot drain from the instrument. The best practice is to place a Recorder on a stand that is on a table near the performer – this helps reduce the cooling of the Recorder and helps the instrument drain, and this will help prolong the playing time before the windway becomes blocked.

Maintenance

A Recorder requires very little maintenance. After playing the Recorder use a Recorder mop to clean the head-joint, body and foot-joint of the instrument.

Keeping the windway clean: sometimes deposits build up in the windway (the entrance to the windway is the small slot at the top of the head-joint that the player blows into; the air exits the air passage at the small rectangular opening called the 'window' and strikes the ramp to sound a note). Hold the head-joint of the Recorder to the light to see if the windway is clear; use a piece of card to clean the windway if necessary (inserting it from the window end of the air passage, and being careful not to touch the ramp).

Keeping the tone-holes clean: deposits can build up in the tone-holes of the instrument. To clean the larger tone-holes use cotton buds and meths. For smaller tone-holes that cannot be cleaned using cotton buds use pipe cleaners.

Oiling the bore of wooden Recorders: three or four times a year oil the bore of the instrument. The easiest way to do this is to use a piccolo cleaning rod (or Flute cleaning rod for larger Recorders).

1. Clean all the tone-holes with cotton buds and Meths (methylated spirits)
2. Tear a small square of kitchen towel and insert this into the 'eye' of the cleaning rod.
3. Dip the secured kitchen towel into some Meths and clean the bore of the Recorder.
4. Once the bore has been cleaned (and has dried) thread a fresh square of paper towel into the eye of the cleaning rod
5. Place a few drops of bore oil (or Sweet Almond oil) onto the paper towel and polish the bore of the instrument (avoid getting oil on the face of the 'block' at the top of the bore where the windway terminates).

Re-corking or re-lapping tenons: There are three different methods for creating a seal between the tenon and socket: covering the tenon with cork, covering the tenon with lapping thread, or covering the tenon with cork and adding lapping thread over the cork. Cork is usually found on student instruments and lapping is often found on professional instruments. The advantage of cork is that its 'springiness' provides a better seal but the advantage of lapping thread is the player can add or remove thread themselves when necessary. Generally the joints on a Recorder will be tighter or looser in different seasons of the year and bearing in mind that some woods (particularly European Boxwood) are unstable it can be very handy for the player to be able to adjust the seal themselves. I recommend that tenons are corked and then finished with lapping thread so the player can make adjustments as they wish.

Another issue is that the different methods of sealing the tenon have a different effect on the resonance of the assembled instrument, for the vast majority of players this is of no concern but some players may feel it is relevant and therefore have a preference as to how the tenons are sealed.

Servicing and repair

The most common repair required is the replacement of the cork on the tenon joints – any woodwind instrument repairer can do this. On larger Recorders with keys it is occasionally necessary to replace the pads or springs – again any woodwind repairer can do this.

Beyond this Recorders do not require servicing and rarely need repair – but when a repair is required it is best to use a Recorder specialist (such as the technician at the Early Music shop). Below is a list of repairs best carried out by a Recorder specialist.

Cracks: sometimes wooden Recorders develop cracks and these need gluing and/or pinning.

Thumb bushing: the thumbhole can get badly notched by the player's thumbnail so sometimes it is necessary to rebuild the thumbhole.

Re-voicing: over time the wood will distort – this is particularly true of the block (the block is the shaped piece of wood that has the function of absorbing water to prevent the windway blocking - it forms the floor of the windway). This distortion can adversely affect the intonation and response of the instrument - a specialist repairer can reshape or replace this block - this is known as 're-voicing'.

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