

One phase of the ---

CLARINET CLINIC --- Robert E. Lowry, Clinician  
Morningside College  
Sioux City, Iowa

MID-WEST NATIONAL BAND CLINIC  
Chicago, Illinois

\*\*\*\*

### Problems of Articulation

Entirely too many of us today are willing to accept the rumors that are carelessly repeated concerning tonguing problems as related to clarinet playing. We are led to believe that a talent for tonguing is God-given and that limitations concerning its facility and finesse are preordained. This fatalistic philosophy is certainly not going to effect better future results. I trust that some of the conceptions to follow will alleviate many of the problems regarding this subject of articulation.

I have been forced to conclude that incorrect impressions of articulation are inevitable if the student follows the printed instructions in the majority of our published clarinet methods of today. Judging from the students that come to my attention, I am firmly convinced that private and regular supervision is a necessity, otherwise the young clarinetist most always acquires incorrect habits of tongue action. Yet, in tonguing, just as in the other aspects of clarinet playing, the most natural way will bring about the best results. We'll discuss this seeming incongruity later.

For now, let's try an experiment. Allow the tip of your tongue to contact back of the upper teeth at the gum line. There we feel the tongue in a natural position at rest. Now, exhale a stream of air past the tongue. If the muscles of the tongue are in the correct balance of relaxation, a "purring" sound or flutter will be audible and only the small tip will be in conscious motion. Notice that only a few of the taste buds make contact. Notice further that the tongue in this most natural motion (while working with the stream of air) is an up and down action --- not "out and in" or "back and forth" like a snake. You will also note that the back of the tongue is in more of an "L or la" formation (or perhaps "TH or the formation) rather than the traditional "T or tu" position. With this form of motion, we find that the back of the tongue is not encouraged to move. Good! Because the back of the tongue must remain free to focus the stream of air into the clarinet mouthpiece to assure accurate tonal placement in the various registers. We also notice that the jaw does not move along with the tongue. This common fault among amateur clarinetists not only slows the facility of articulation but also results in distortion of tone and intonation.

Earlier, we mentioned that this "natural" tongue action would not come about unless it was supervised. Why not if it's so natural? In most cases the student, whether conscious if it or not, objects to the tickling of the reed's vibration to the more sensitive taste buds at the tongue tip. In actual practise, it is because of this hyper-sensitive region that we ultimately gain better tongue technic and more musical results. Inevitably, without guidance, the student will curl the tip down and out of the way forcing the more bulky portion of the tongue (towards the middle) to "attack" the poor little reed.

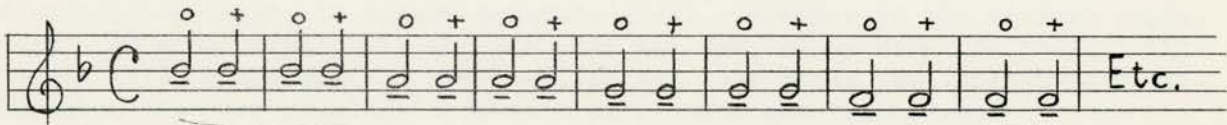


What a misnomer that word "attack" is! After living with the term long enough, we as instructors learn to read a false meaning into it, but did you ever consider what the word portrays to a young student? He knows that Roy Rogers attacks the villain! The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor! The word is always synonymous with violence, except in music. Yes, we can speak of a "delicate attack", but the results of an atom bomb are probably none the less devastating just because it was more gently released from the bomb bay

At this point, allow me to advocate that a very legato tongue technique should be developed first. The student's early exercises and melodies will immediately take on a new musical meaning rather than one of mechanics. We should articulate the reed in the same manner as we articulate the words in a song --- without stopping the sound, but merely interrupting the vibration of the reed. In other words, we "interfere" with the reed's vibration with our tongue tip, but do not completely stop it. Do we ever need a square, explosive attack? Certainly! But after the legato tonguing is developed, it takes very little artistic endeavor to acquire these variations of tongue technic. Conversely, it does take a lot of conscientious practise to train the tongue tip to approach the vibrating portion of the reed without stopping the tone

Legato tonguing is also the secret of rapid articulation. Usually, with the older suggested approaches to tonguing, the student doesn't realize that he has any deficiency of tongue technique until he encounters an elongated passage of sixteenth notes to be performed in a staccato style at a prestissimo tempo. When the problem is finally brought to the instructor's attention, all too often the time honored advise is "take it home and practise it slow, gradually increase the tempo, etc." So the student goes home and "tut - tut - tut's" along with a questionable degree of success. He is striving for a fleet row of musically reiterated sounds --- a "string of pearls" to be picturesque. What he usually ends up with is a batch of mechanically forced accents that more nearly resemble noises emitting from a hammer mill

In training the tongue tip to become accustomed to the reed's vibration, an exercise of articulation in slow motion would be in order. After experimenting in the easier throat register, the exercise should be extended to cover the entire clarinet range



The first note should be normal, but on the third beat, the tongue tip should raise to the reed and hover within the vibrating area without stopping the sound. On the next beat, the tongue tip should quickly drop out of the way, allowing a full tone to again appear. The resulting affect in sound will be similar to the trumpet player as he places his hand in the bell. This second note will be of a muted or covered nature while the tongue is interfering with the reed's regularity of vibration



After we have trained the tongue tip to be consistent in slow motion, the following procedure would be suggested for warm-up and analysis as we develop the technic of legato tonguing

PRACTICE AND REPEAT IN ALL REGISTERS

SIMILE

OPTIONAL

As the notation changes from measure to measure, make certain that the tone quality remains constant. As the faster note values are encountered, there seems to be a tendency (probably from old habits) to change the position of the jaw. Do not allow the back of the tongue to change position. Leave it relaxed as the more rapid tip action is called upon. There should be absolutely no movement visible from without

Even though our discussion of this subject has been brief, we probably should not consider the tonguing topic complete without some mention of "double and triple" tonguing. I am inclined to believe that if the added amount of time that it requires to practise these techniques were spent on the correct study of single tonguing, there would never be a technical need for them. My major objection is that the execution of double and triple tonguing involves the movement of the back tongue regions. This cannot be accomplished without a sacrifice of tone quality. That choice does not have deserving merit in my estimation

Best of luck with your single and legato tonguing!

Robert E. Lowry --- Director of Bands  
Morningside College - Sioux City, Ia

Earlier, we mentioned that this "natural" tongue action would not come about unless it was supervised. Why not if it's so natural? In most cases the student, whether conscious if it or not, objects to the tickling of the reed's vibration to the more sensitive taste buds at the tongue tip. In actual practice, it is because of this hyper-sensitive region that we ultimately gain better tongue technique and more musical results. Inevitably, without guidance, the student will curl the tip down and out of the way forcing the more bulky portion of the tongue (towards the middle) to "attack" the poor little reed.