



ClariNotes



Clarinet Voicing: Hee Haw! The Key to Tone, Range, Intonation, etc...

“EE” Tongue Position

- The back of the tongue should be arched, like when you say the word “Hee.” This helps to speed up the air and focus the sound. The “ee” tongue position is a crucial component, in addition to embouchure fundamentals. It should be used from low “E” and up into the altissimo as the principle voicing.

“Ah” Tongue Position

- When you reach the extreme altissimo the voicing necessitates a change to more of an “aw” syllable. This enables the clarinet to over-blow into the register from around high G6 to C7.

Exercises:

• Register Change Warmup

After slurring this exercise, play each phrase while fingering the lowest pitch. Articulate the above two pitches without adding the register key or changing fingerings.



- High “E” to High “A” - Hee Haw - Altissimo “E” and altissimo “A” may be played with the exact same fingering. The difference between the two notes is in the voicing. Practice alternating back and forth between these two pitches, without changing the fingering. Use an “ee” syllable voicing for the “E,” and an “ah” syllable voicing for the high “A.”
- Bugle Calls - While fingering a low “E,” and while plugging the end of the bell with your leg, you can make the clarinet sound like a harmonica and play bugle calls (similar to a trumpet player). Experiment with simple bugle tunes like “Taps” and “Reveille.”

“I’M NOT A SINGER! WHAT DOES MY VOICE HAVE TO DO WITH PLAYING THE CLARINET?”

Voicing refers to the shape inside the mouth while playing the clarinet. We refer to this space as the “Oral Cavity.” The shape created by the back of the tongue has a large impact on tone quality, intonation, register change, articulation, basically everything about playing the clarinet well. Many young teachers focus on the clarinet embouchure, but neglect teaching students about what needs to happen inside the mouth. Helping students play with proper voicing, right from the beginning, has a large impact on how successful they will be as clarinetists. Bad habits with tongue position are very difficult to overcome, but relatively easy to teach beginners. I like to have students whisper the word “hee.” We do this with a lot of air, like a cat hissing. Then, while playing, we shape the airstream with a “hee” syllable. The “ee” shaped tongue is key to playing the clarinet.

About This Newsletter

My intention for this newsletter is to offer tips and techniques for teaching and playing clarinet. Feel free to contact me with topics or questions.

Dr. Adam Ballif
ballifa@byui.edu
www.adamballif.com