

Routine Maintenance for Clarinets

Introduction

When students are quite new to learning the Clarinet, it is most likely that they will own or hire, what is known as, a 'student' clarinet. These are usually made from an ABS resin material which is lightweight but helps to produce a similar sound to that of a more expensive instrument made from granadilla wood. So that the integrity and playability of the instruments remains in top form, there are some regular small maintenance tasks to complete on a fairly regular basis.

Student Clarinets

Instruments from new often take a little time to loosen up in certain places, namely the joints and the associated corks.



Each section has a joint which keeps its seal by using cork around the jointing male end. This cork can become very dry, and is often dry on a brand new instrument. This usually requires greasing with the 'cork grease' which you buy from your local music shop. The best time to grease the corks is at the end of the practice session, this way the grease has time to soak into the cork which makes it easier to slide the sections together the next time you use the instrument.

The worse time, but often unavoidable, to grease the corks is just before you put the instrument together. All that happens, particularly on tight joints, is that you push the grease down the cork and create a build up at the bottom.

Although it is unlikely that a student clarinet will have silver plated keys, the keys over time can become a little dull so it is worth having a silver cloth available to give them a quick shine. At the end of each practice you should dry out the instrument thoroughly, you will need a pull through to do this.



These have a weight in the end of the chord which you drop through the instruments and pull the cloth section through the instruments sections. It is better to do one section at a time with the instrument taken apart. You may need to pull the cloth through each section several times.

You can also use pad savers to soak up the moisture inside the barrel of the two main sections. It has recently come to

light that these items should not be left inside the sections for long periods of time.

Apparently, they can rot the pads because the moisture stays on the pad savers and the pads then soak up the moisture. The advice from professional repairers seem to be leave them in to dry out the sections but take them out after a few hours.



These tasks should be complete at least weekly, but some as described are daily or after each practice.

Professional Clarinets (Granadilla Wood)

All of the tasks for student clarinets also apply for the more expensive instruments. The main difference is that the more expensive clarinets are wood which produces another maintenance task to complete.

Every 6 months, usually good to time this with the change of the climate from summer to winter. Wood changes and can dry out in different climates it therefore needs to be oiled on down the inside of each section. You need to obtain the proper 'bore oil' which is available from your local music shop. You will also need a slightly different type of pull through that will help to coat the inside of the instrument with the oil.



Rather than being a cloth fabric this is more of a micro-fibre or leather material. Using a few drops of the bore oil onto the cloth and letting it soak into the entire cloth, pull it through each section of the clarinet a few times. When you look down the inside of the clarinet section it should look shiny.

I usually schedule this for my instruments sometime during the Easter break and at the end of autumn. This will prevent the wood from drying out and cracking. Unfortunately, a cracked wooden section is not repairable, you would have to replace that section.

General Tips

There is another article on cleansing your mouthpiece, please download that and read. Change your reed regularly, not only for hygiene reasons but also to help to maintain a good quality sound.

Never pick up your clarinet, particularly if it's on a stand, by the mouthpiece or barrel. It is likely that the weight of the rest of the instrument would mean that it could drop off the mouthpiece or barrel and fall to the ground. Always pick up your clarinet with your hand firmly around the centre of the entire instrument.

Don't stand your clarinet on its bell, either on the floor or on a table (or similar). It is likely to be knocked or just lose its balance and fall over. The only way to stand a clarinet vertically is to purchase a proper clarinet stand from your local music shop.

The screw threads on any of the varieties of ligature (metal or leather) often need an oil. You can use something like WD40 or a thin oil for that task. This probably needs doing once per month.

Periodically check the joints for wear. If when the instrument is put together you can feel a slight wobble, i.e. a joint moves up and down or side to side, it probably means that the clarinet needs to be looked at by a professional repairer. Another sign is if the instrument becomes more difficult to play or you seem to be needing to blow harder to create the same results.

Do not try to repair an instrument yourself, they are a work of integral engineering and require a properly trained person to do the repairs. Speak to your local music shop, they will either have a service or know of a local person that is qualified.