



## Wood Care for Your Clarinet or Oboe

by Yamaha

Beyond maintenance procedures used for plastic oboes and clarinets, these are some steps we recommend to properly "break-in" and maintain your carefully crafted wood instrument:

When first playing a new instrument, replacement joint, or one that has been allowed to dry out for a long time, (weeks/months/years), a gradual playing-in is the best approach. For example, play the instrument 5-10 minutes the first session, then swab it out - including the tenons and sockets where end grain can absorb water more easily - then after it sits at least 4-6 hours (or the next day), play a few minutes longer, etc... adding 5 or so minutes to each session. After this gradual playing-in period of a week to 10 days, playing for long period of time will not cause a radical change in the wood's moisture level - and therefore is less likely to cause any problems. If this schedule is not entirely possible, the main idea is: don't play for 2 hours the first day, with just a quick swab at the end of that time! In dry conditions, a small humidifier placed in the accessories area of the case (available at music stores) can be beneficial.

Avoid playing the instrument when it is very cold to the touch! It needs to warm up to the air temperature of the room or outdoor environment, gradually if possible, before warm air is blown through it! Holding the instrument under a jacket, or just opening the case 20-30 minutes in the room before playing can be helpful.

When playing for longer periods of time, swab out more frequently - a "handkerchief" swab can often do a better job than other types. It is important that the swab is not overly tight when pulled through. Any attempt to force a tight swab through should be avoided before the bottom end of the swab disappears into the joint, so that it can be carefully backed out.

Generally, the treated wood of a new instrument or joint doesn't need further treating, but if the bore (interior surface) gets a very dull, dry look, careful application of bore oil can help seal the wood to prevent excessive moisture absorption - another potential cause of cracking. An overly dry bore, with many open-grain surfaces can actually play like the bore was a bit oversized, changing tone and intonation characteristics. A conservative approach to oiling is recommended - both in the amount of oil applied, and the frequency. Excessive oil can gum-up pads and affect tone. Apply a few drops of good quality oil on a soft stick-type swab, or a handkerchief swab (just for that purpose) and draw it through the joint, repeating the process until the bore has a uniform sheen and is not overly wet. If a stick swab is used, open any closed keys and blow a focused airstream into all tone holes to blow out any excess lint. A dry bore can be treated a couple of times in a six month period, and then once or twice a year if needed. Some instruments have a more highly polished bore that needs little or no oiling. Some players have the bore polished with beeswax or furniture wax - although this can affect tone, as can excessive oiling.

These steps will provide proper maintenance for your wood oboe or clarinet, and help prevent surface cracking. In the unlikely event that a crack develops, it is not as serious a problem as you first might think. Many artists/performers and teachers play on instruments that have properly repaired cracks - some even feel that it "frees-up" the sound, and causes the instrument to play better! Some manufacturers provide for replacement of the affected joint within six months of ownership and traditional pinning repair in the the 6-12 month period of ownership. If this kind of work is needed after the warranty period, a skilled repairperson can do an effective, inconspicuous job repairing the instrument at a reasonable cost.

Fine wood instruments should be treated with respect, but also played and enjoyed for the warm tonal characteristics they yield. It is very important that good care and maintenance is provided. In addition to owner care, this involves regular visits to a reputable woodwind technician - much like what is involved in maintain a car. This can be several times a year for some students and frequent players, or as little as once every few years. Worn pads should be replaced with quality pads as needed, to ensure good tone hole covering. Key openings and adjustments (key regulation) need to be checked/adjusted periodically. With these things in mind, your instrument will both provide years of musical use and enjoyment, and also maintain its value.

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