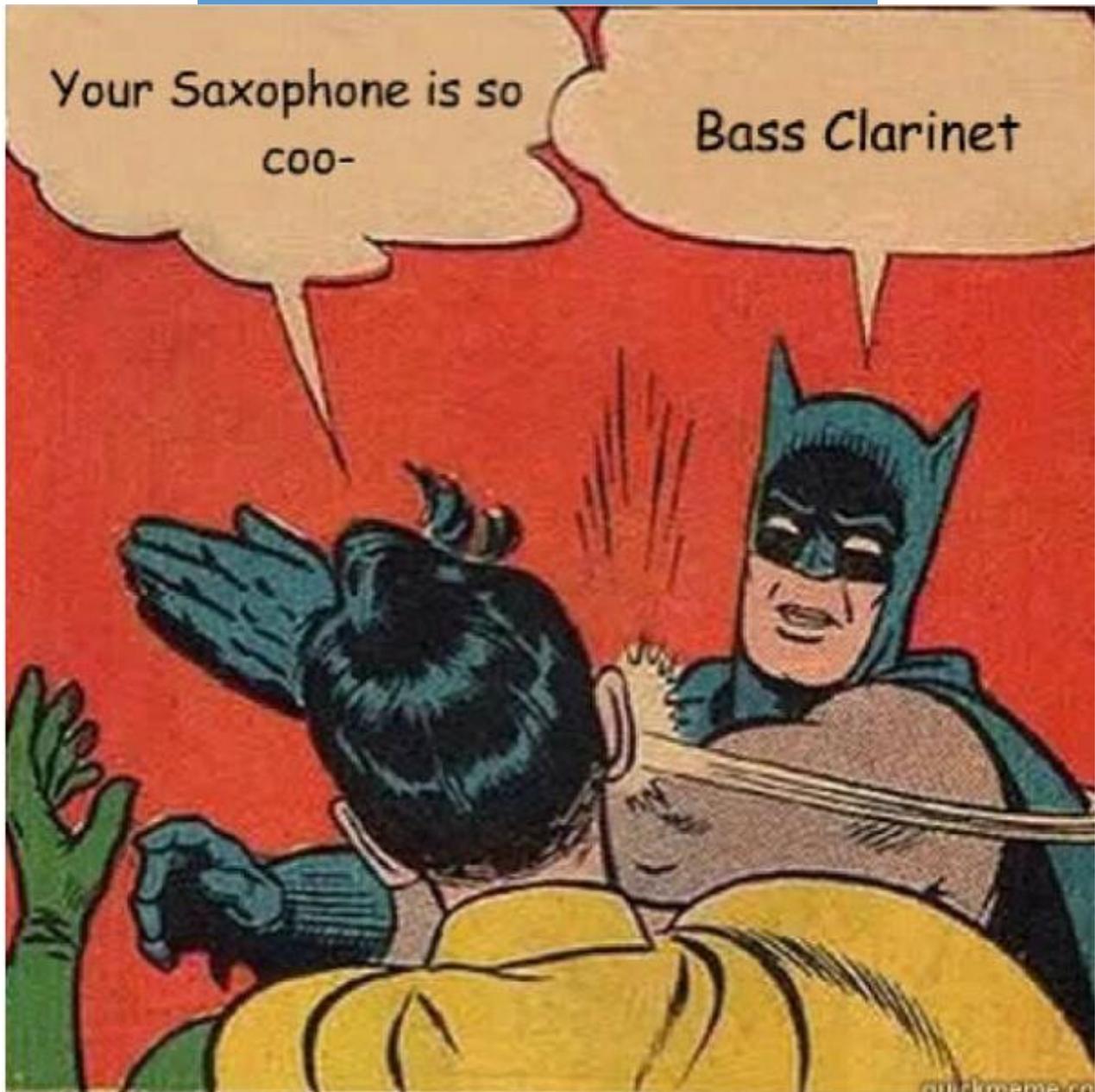


BASS CLARINET: A BASIC MAININECE GUIDE



Dr. Connor O'Meara, 2017

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Notes To Readers

The bass clarinet is a wonderful instrument that has been part of most every type of music ensemble. It was first used in operas at the beginning of the 1800's and as continued to find a voice in orchestral music, jazz bands and wind ensembles.

While the clarinet is noted for its tremendous range, it is the bass clarinet that deserves recognition for the largest range out of all instruments in the woodwind family. While not all ensemble music suggests this, the few solo works and extra-ordinary ensemble works prove that the bass clarinet is a tremendous instrument capable of most anything.

As for the instrument itself and the true purpose of this guide, it is necessary to leave you with a few notes to keep your instrument in good working order:

- **Bass Clarinets are FRAGILE! It does not take much to break your instrument. While it is large, the key work is easily knocked out of adjustment.**
- **Bass Clarinets are EXPENSIVE! The most commonly used bass clarinets for marching band start at \$2000. Most professional model instruments used for concert season start at \$8,000 and go to \$13,000+.**
- **Repairs are not easy or cheap! The average repair tech charges \$80-100+/hr for repairs. On some bass clarinets there are over 30 keys, all of which bend easy and are interlocking with other mechanisms... Make informed decisions about how you store and care for your instrument.**

Required Equipment

Silk TENOR SAXOPHONE swab (the T. Saxophone swab fits the bore of the bass clarinet better than a bass clarinet swab).

<http://www.wm1st.com/p-392-hodge-tsb1-tenor-sax-swab-silk-black.aspx>



Tuning Slide/Cork Grease

<http://www.wm1st.com/p-485-selmer-2942sg-tuning-slide-cork-grease-15-oz.aspx>



Reed Case- many available! Bass clarinet reed cases are often cross listed with tenor and baritone saxophone reed cases- if ordering online be sure the reed case will fit bass clarinet reeds. The new D'Addario Reed Guard is very good, comes in multiple colors and is under \$12.



Assembly

Before going into any details about assembly, one note about daily storage and transport:

- **While the bass clarinet is in its case, it should always remain lying flat- the case handle should be on the side. When the case is opened, the key work of the bass clarinet should be facing up.**



- **The bass clarinet should never be stored or transported in any other position like the example below:**



First Steps of Assembly

- **Needed Materials: Tuning Slide Grease, Paper Towel**

All parts of the bass clarinet should always be easy to put together. This avoids any need for excess gripping on keys which can bend.

If parts of the bass clarinet are difficult to get together, the corks will need grease. Please refer to required items for the recommended type of cork grease.

To grease the corks, start by squeezing a small line of grease onto the cork.



Spread the grease evenly with your fingers and clean up with a paper towel.

Assembly of the instrument, bottom to top!

- **Begin assembly with the bell and the lower joint of the bass clarinet. Note, the bell includes one key with a connecting arm that must be correctly aligned with the body of the lower joint. (Yellow Arrow points to connecting arm)**



- **When assembling the bell to the lower joint, the key on the bell must be pressed down so the connecting arm correctly moves over the lifter mechanism on the lower joint (lifter mechanism shown by the yellow arrow).**



Assembly of the lower and upper joints of the bass clarinet

- Special care **must** be taken in this step. Most bass clarinets have two or sometimes 3 different bridge keys unlike the Bb clarinets single bridge key. Incorrect assembly of these two joints may damage the bridge key rendering the bass clarinet **unplayable**.
- The bridge keys are inter-locking. While holding the upper joint of the bass clarinet, hold the E and D keys down so the upper joint bridge key moves.



- Now carefully twist the upper joint into the lower joint aligning the bridge keys. Take special care that key work does not bind or collide between the upper and lower joint. The blue arrows show which bridge keys align.

Bridge Key Alignment: Upper Joint to Lower Joint



NEVER HOLD/CARRY THE BASS CLARINET BY THE UPPER JOINT OR NECK! THE REGISTER MECHANISM ON ALL BASS CLARINET IS FRAGILE, NEVER GRIP AN INSTRUMENT BY THE TOP OF THE UPPER JOINT!

- **ALWAYS SWAB THE ENTIRE INSTRUMENT WHEN FINISHED PLAYING! EVEN THE BASS CLARINET NECK!**

Weekly Care

Check periodically for cracks. Visually inspect under keys for small hairline cracks.

Check periodically for loose screws. Consult a teacher for help with minor adjustments.

Use cork grease/oil and lubricate the bass clarinet neck on instruments with a two-part detachable neck.



Bass Clarinet Mouthpieces

A good mouthpiece is the difference between a great sound and a poor sound. The mouthpiece is your first point of contact with the bass clarinet! A good mouthpiece is optimized to be reed friendly and designed to accommodate the idiosyncrasies of the instrument so you don't have to.

While bass clarinet mouthpieces are expensive, consider the money spent by Bb clarinetist who upgrade to a new clarinet. Buying your own high quality mouthpiece is an investment in your continued playing experience on an instrument you don't have to purchase.

There are two routes to go when purchasing a mouthpiece: custom or factory. Most factory mouthpieces are quite good, but custom mouthpieces are made with much better consistency. In many cases, custom mouthpieces are close to the same cost as a factory mouthpiece.

Factory Mouthpieces:

Selmer Focus Bass Clarinet Mouthpiece

Vandoren B-40 or Vandoren B-44

Custom Mouthpieces:

Behn SONO bass clarinet mouthpiece

<https://www.clarinetmouthpiece.com/product-page/sono-bass-clarinet-mouthpiece>

Clark Fobes CF bass clarinet mouthpiece

<https://www.clarkwfobes.com/collections/low-clarinets/products/nova-bass-clarinet-mouthpiece?variant=6111353797>

Clark Fobes CF San Francisco mouthpiece

<https://www.clarkwfobes.com/collections/low-clarinets/products/san-francisco-bb-clarinet-mouthpiece?variant=6111847237>

Mouthpiece Care

At least once a week, the mouthpiece must be cleaned. Mix equal parts hydrogen-peroxide with water in a small glass and place the bass clarinet mouthpiece *tip down* into the glass. If the water level goes above the cork, drain some off. Never let the cork of the mouthpiece soak. Allow the mouthpiece to soak for 10-15 minutes. It will fizz and bubble as the hydrogen-peroxide kills bacteria.

After 10-15 minutes, take the mouthpiece out and carefully remove any “left-overs” with a q-tip. Wash the mouthpiece off and dry.

Reeds

Take care of your reed and it will take care of you! At all times you must:

- **Have 4 reeds in good condition at all times. This is not negotiable!**
- **Store reeds in a good case. The plastic holders they come in are not acceptable.**
- **Keep some new reeds as backup's at home or in your case.**
- **Synthetic/plastic reeds are OK on the marching field.**
- **Use humidity packs to help prevent reed warping. The humidity packs keep reeds in a stable environment when not being played.**
 - **Humidity packs- 62% RH seems to be ideal for bass reeds.**
 - **For storage of reeds in a large ziplock bag, use Bodeva 62% RH 60 Gram packs**
 - **For Rico Reed cases, use Bodeva 62%RH 4 Gram packs**



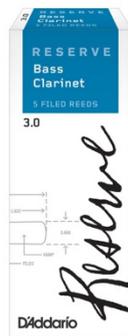
Always talk with your teacher or band director about which reed strength is correct for you. Generally, bass clarinet requires a softer (or lower number) reed than Bb clarinet. Depending on the type of bass clarinet mouthpiece you have, # 2 ½, #3 or #3+ reeds are likely ideal.

There are many different types of reeds on the market, however, there are two major brand that are trusted universally: Vandoren and D'Addario.

Plastic reeds have come a long way since the concept was first introduced. While they do not offer the same quality of sound as a good cane reed, plastic reeds do have their merits.

Generally, the strength numbers on Legere reeds are not equivalent to traditional cane reeds. Most players find that a #3 D'Addario or Vandoren reed is equivalent strength to a #2 1/2 Legere reed. A general guideline to consider with plastic reeds is to buy a reed either #1/4 or #1/2 *lower (softer)* than what you currently play on.

For D'Addario, there are two reed types on the market which are equally consistent. Students will find one or the other to be ideal.



For Vandoren, the V-12 and V-21 type are most consistent.

