



A PRO'S GUIDE TO  
**WARMING UP  
ON THE CLARINET**

[LEARN MORE AT TONEBASE.CO](https://tonebase.co)



# Table of Contents

Introduction . . . . . 01

Concepts . . . . . 02

I. Sound . . . . . 04

II. Fingers . . . . . 11

III. Tongue . . . . . 15

IV. Repertoire . . . . . 24

Conclusion . . . . . 28



# Introduction

Musicians are all too familiar with the physical aspects of playing their instruments. In order to be successful in tackling the most challenging repertoire, our bodies and minds should be conditioned on a daily basis.

From the beginning, a “warm-up” is a reminder of the fundamentals necessary to connect with our instrument. As we develop into serious students and potentially professionals we can utilize the “warm-up” as the primary vehicle to overcome bad habits and establish the basis for how we transform our skills into art.

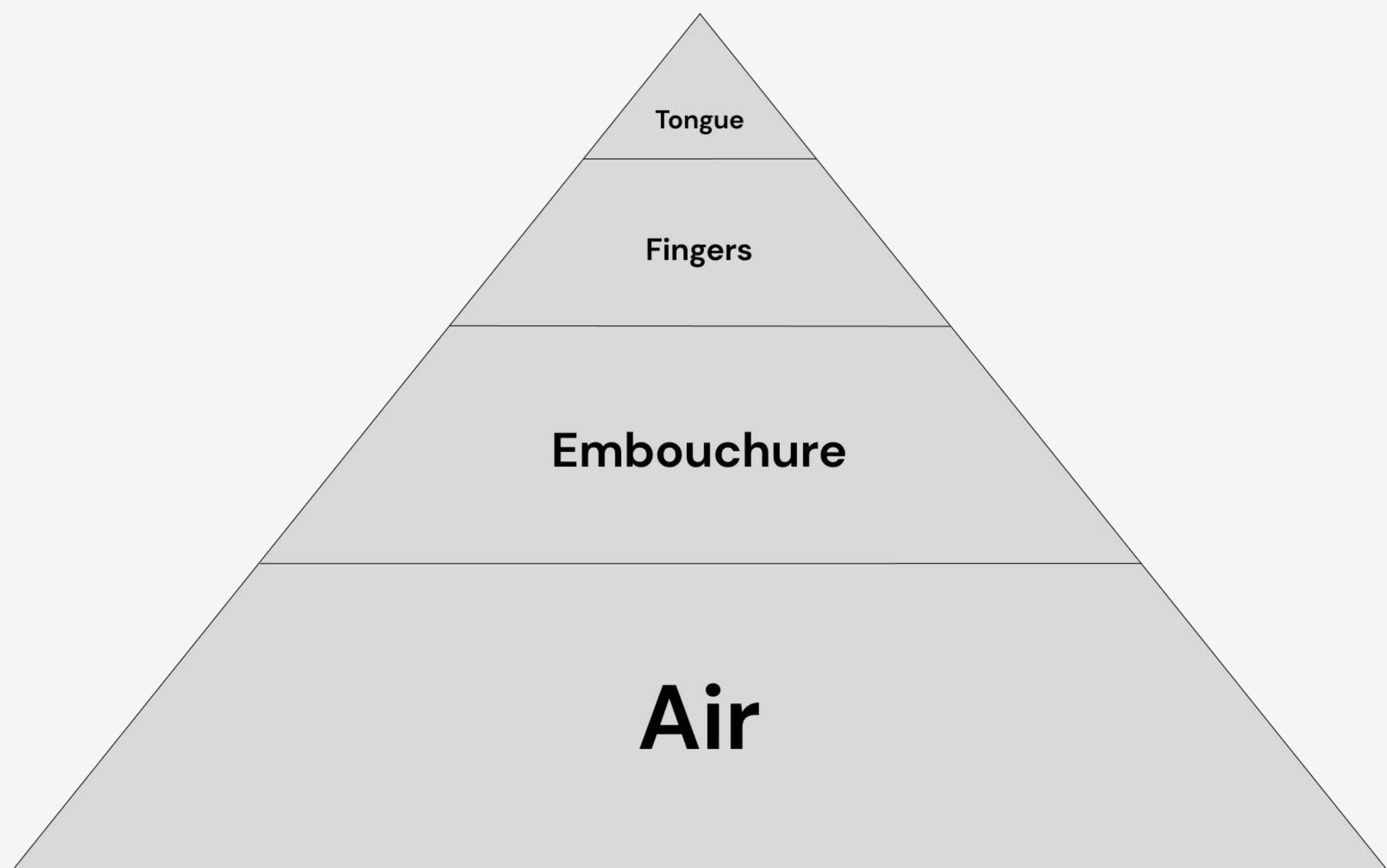
More specifically for clarinet, **our fundamentals of air, embouchure, fingers, and tongue all require conditioning.** Aspects of all of these tools manifest in our etudes, concerti, and orchestral excerpts. I propose that we address each of these components daily in a well developed and thorough routine.

In the material that follows, we will address specific exercises that one may use to develop the highly-polished attributes needed for effortless playing. Additionally, examples will be provided to show how these concepts can be adapted to common excerpts from the repertoire.



# Concepts

When we break down the tools we use to play clarinet, we can identify the following: Air, Embouchure, Fingers and Tongue. I believe that the priority or importance of these tools directly correlates with the physical effort necessary for each one.



The pyramid above highlights the hierarchy of our skills and also the order in which they should be addressed, from bottom to top.

---

## Air

It all starts with air. If there is no air, then the reed cannot vibrate and we have no sound. If there is no sound there is no music! Additionally, the type of air we use must be rich, supported, and focused. In fact, our use of air is the most athletic aspect of our playing. We must learn that deep full breaths require the correct effort to maintain and tame the sound.



## Embouchure

As we know, we cannot simply blow at the reed and mouthpiece and expect any sound, let alone a beautiful one. A well developed embouchure economizes our airstream to facilitate the optimum vibration of the reed against the mouthpiece. Our embouchure is not only how we glue our lips to our mouthpiece, but an entire matrix of resonance that our tongue, hard palate, and cheek muscles create. While an athletic endeavor in and of itself, the muscles of the embouchure must be conditioned for slow, still endurance rather than power. Think: yoga instructor rather than power lifter!

## Fingers

The culprits for timing, rhythm and all of our complicated passages. Our fingers must be conditioned to be agile, active and controlled. Much of the complicated work from Weber, Nielsen and Françaix concerti comes from the coordination of our fingers. Despite the complicated patterns we demand from our fingers, they must be relaxed at all times. Think: cooked pasta noodles!

## Tongue

The most relaxed of all of your tools should be your tongue. When we speak, we move our lips, tongue and jaw all together to shape each syllable. On clarinet, we must keep our jaw and lips still while the tongue moves very lightly, and only from the tip! The tongue is a muscle – in fact, it is the strongest muscle in your body – and requires regular exercise. Furthermore, the daily practice of finger-tongue coordination is a must.

---

On any given practice day, its recommended to spend some time working on each of these attributes first in isolation. After which you can then coordinate them together.

Always begin your practice session slowly, allowing your mind to warm up along with your body.



# I. Sound (Air + Embouchure)

As it is difficult if not impossible to divorce the practice of embouchure from the application of air. These two tools are integrated into one category of warm ups.

That being said, it is important to do some light warm ups without the clarinet at all. Use a “breath builder” with the smallest opening to reinforce a consistent and powerful airstream. For example, hold a small coffee straw with your embouchure muscles blow supported air through without biting and disengaging the chin muscle and corners.

## A. Tribute to LC

A great method for homogenizing registers and sound is a warm up handed down from Leon Russianoff to one of my teachers, the great Larry Combs. Focus on maintaining a consistent sound in both the low and middle registers, but keep a consistently engaged embouchure and fast air stream. Be mindful that you keep the muscles of the embouchure the same throughout the whole exercise, and do not “adjust” to ascend to the 12th. Only add the register key and nothing more.

Quarter note = 72

The musical notation consists of five staves, each starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The notes are as follows:

- Staff 1: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5
- Staff 2: Bb3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, Bb4
- Staff 3: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5
- Staff 4: Bb3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, Bb4
- Staff 5: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5

Each staff contains a slur over the notes and ends with a whole rest.



Tribute to LC (cont.)

The musical score consists of ten staves, each beginning with a treble clef and a common time signature 'C'. The music is a single melodic line per staff, with notes connected by a long, sweeping slur that spans across multiple measures. The notes are half notes. The key signature and specific notes vary across the staves, including natural, sharp, and flat variations of the notes G, A, B, and C. The final measure of each staff contains a whole rest. The tenth staff concludes with a double bar line.



## B. Baermann Yoga

The next exercise I crafted myself in the midst of preparing for multiple auditions in one year. I realized, somewhat later in life, that slow practice is not just for fast technical exercises. If the purpose of practicing slow is to afford oneself enough reaction time to execute a given technique, then it can be used in development of a beautiful sound and pristine legato. I use the Broken Chords section from Baermann Book Three as another exercise to build consistent airflow and stable embouchure.

Take note of the resonance and focus of your “best” notes, and lead with your airspeed to the notes before and after. Additionally, the more you treat each note as the same with your embouchure, the more each will sound similar, homogenizing the altissimo, clarion, and chalumeau registers. Practicing all 24 keys takes a bit of time, so I recommend doing 1 page per day.

**VERY SLOW Sixteenth Note = 72**

Broken Chords

C major



A minor



G major



E minor



F major



The image displays five staves of musical notation, each representing a different key signature: C major, A minor, G major, E minor, and F major. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature symbol (natural for C major, one flat for A minor, one sharp for G major, two sharps for E minor, and two flats for F major). The notation consists of a continuous sequence of sixteenth notes, grouped into pairs of beamed notes. The notes are organized into four measures per staff, with a repeat sign at the beginning and end of each measure. The exercise is titled 'Broken Chords' and is intended to be played 'VERY SLOW' at a tempo of 72 sixteenth notes per minute.



Baermann Yoga (cont.)

D minor

D major

B minor

B flat major

G minor

A major

F sharp minor

E flat major

C minor



Baermann Yoga (cont.)

C minor

E major

C sharp minor

A flat major

F minor

B major

G sharp minor

D flat major

B flat minor



Baermann Yoga (cont.)

F sharp major



D sharp minor



G flat major



E flat minor

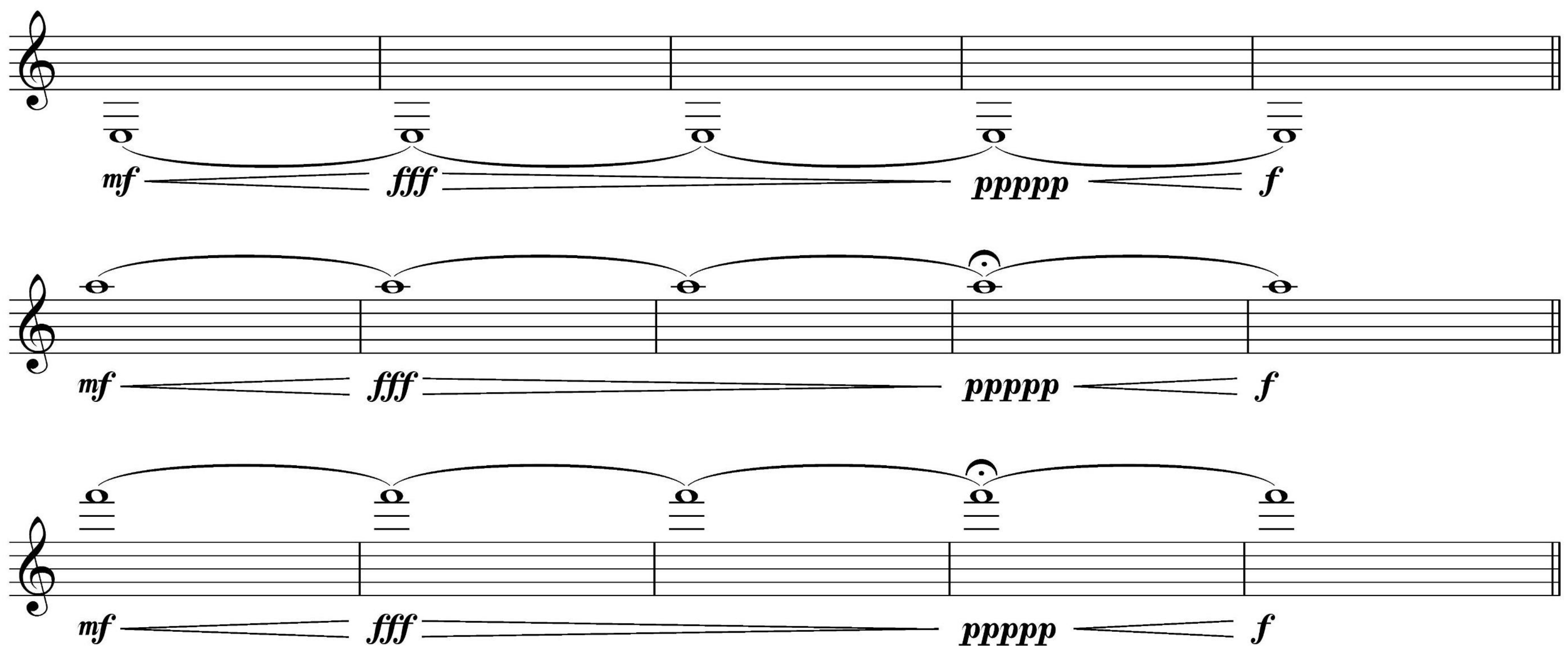




## C. Go into the Light

A very famous Clarinet Rabbi always encouraged me to explore the extremes of dynamics, without negatively affecting pitch and sound quality. The strength of the embouchure, both chin and corners, will give you great control of pitch and sound quality, regardless of dynamics.

1. First pick a note in various registers. Start with something stable like a low E, and then move on to something more precarious, like a clarion A, or an altissimo F.
2. Start at mezzo forte, then crescendo to *fff* (fortississimo!), and diminuendo until almost no sound remains. Stabilize this level and make sure you are not going too sharp, and that the sound does not become overwhelmed with noise.
3. Crescendo back to a robust and healthy forte.
4. Use a tuner at all times to keep an eye on pitch. When you start feeling pretty good about your consistency, set your tuner to a drone to train your ear to hear pitch and adjust as necessary.
5. Feel free to break up this exercise as much as you need. For example, start from nothing (*dal niente*) and crescendo conversely from *fff* (fortississimo) and diminuendo to nothing (*al niente*).





## II. Fingers

When we are young clarinetists, challenging passages with many notes often seem like our greatest challenge. In my experience, familiarity with all possible permutations of scales, arpeggios, and other patterns within tonal harmony will make training your fingers a breeze. It just takes discipline and perseverance!

A dedicated routine of some of the following will be sure to make the likes of Weber's Concerti or even Nielsen Concerto great opportunities rather than loathsome ordeals.

### A. Albert Scales

In my education I used the J.B. Albert Scales book as my primary source for developing good speed and facility. How to practice these can and should be applied to any technical passage.

1. Each page and key signature will take one week.
2. Decide on a goal tempo. This should be an achievable albeit uncomfortable tempo. Playing this tempo on the exercises in C major should be doable in a few days, but the exercises in Gflat major will require all seven days of the week.
3. Decide on and mark your fingerings in advance of practicing.
4. On each day, start at half of your goal tempo. Progress through each exercise until the end of the page. Do not proceed until you can accurately play each exercise at the current speed. If one exercise requires more attention than the others, feel free to slow down your tempo on that one more.
5. Once you reach the end of the page, move your metronome up. We used to say "two clicks", but as dial metronomes are slowly going out of fashion, you can use quarter note equals 60, 66, 72, 80, 88, 96, 104, 112, 120, 132, 144, 160, 176...
6. On each subsequent day, return to half speed and begin again. You will find that you will get further along in each tempo as the days go by.
7. The best edition of these can be found within:
  - a. J.B. Albert, *24 Varied Scales and Exercises*, edited by Julie DeRoche
8. A sample is provided on the next page.



Albert Scales (cont.)

This page contains nine staves of musical notation for Albert Scales. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, triplets, and slurs. The first staff is in common time (C) and features a series of eighth notes with slurs and a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff is in 3/4 time and features a series of eighth notes with slurs and a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff is in common time (C) and features a series of eighth notes with slurs and a triplet of eighth notes. The fourth staff is in common time (C) and features a series of eighth notes with slurs and a triplet of eighth notes. The fifth staff is in common time (C) and features a series of eighth notes with slurs and a triplet of eighth notes. The sixth staff is in 3/4 time and features a series of eighth notes with slurs and a triplet of eighth notes. The seventh staff is in common time (C) and features a series of eighth notes with slurs and a triplet of eighth notes. The eighth staff is in 3/4 time and features a series of eighth notes with slurs and a triplet of eighth notes. The ninth staff is in 3/4 time and features a series of eighth notes with slurs and a triplet of eighth notes.



Albert Scales (cont.)

The image displays four staves of musical notation for Albert Scales in 3/4 time. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The first staff shows a scale with eighth notes and slurs. The second staff includes sixteenth-note runs with a '6' above the staff and a '6' below the staff. The third staff features a scale with slurs and a '6' above the staff. The fourth staff continues the scale with slurs and a '6' above the staff. Each staff concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.



## B. Baermann Scales

Perhaps the most comprehensive appendix of scales and arpeggios for clarinet is the Third Book of Carl Baermann's *Complete Method for Clarinet*. Using the method described for the Albert Scales, I would adapt the content for a more advanced player.

Choose one pattern of exercises, but playing in all 24 keys. For example:

1. Every week choose a new style of exercise. The interrupted scales, thirds, broken chords, sixths, and returning scales are my personal favorites.
2. Each day go through all twenty four keys gradually increasing the speed in each exercise.
3. Change up which exercise you are working on each week.

### Interrupted Scales



### Returning Scales





# III. Tongue

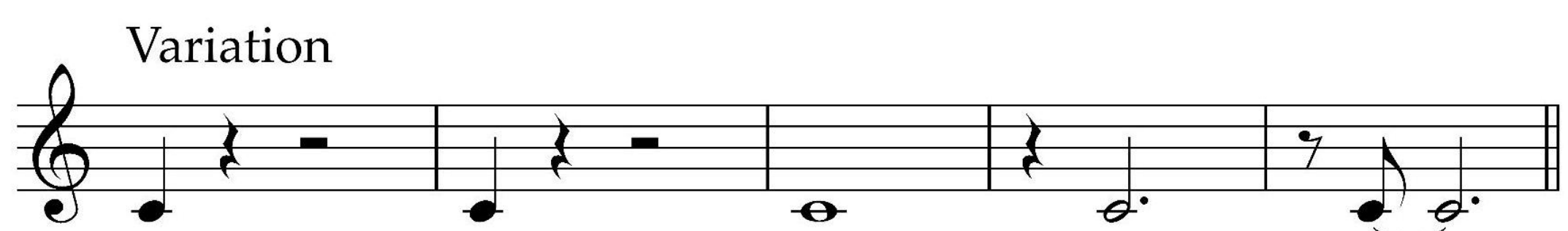
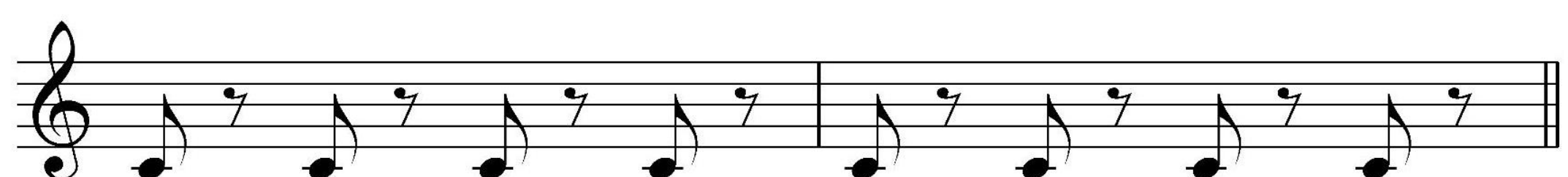
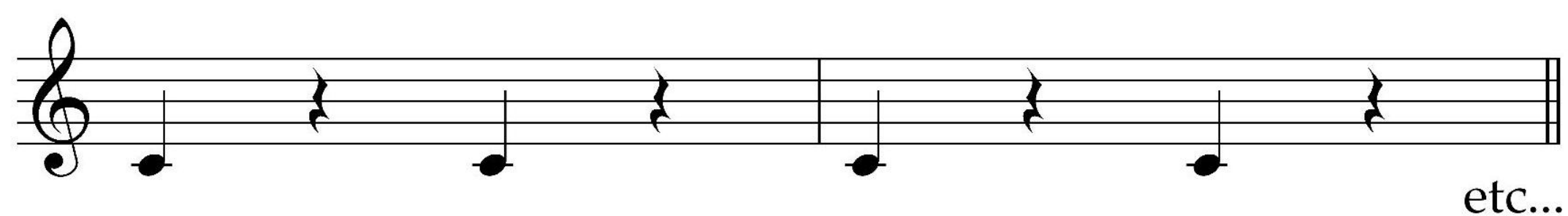
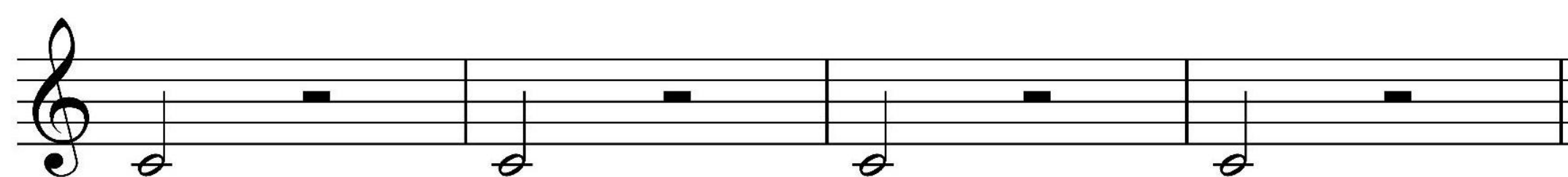
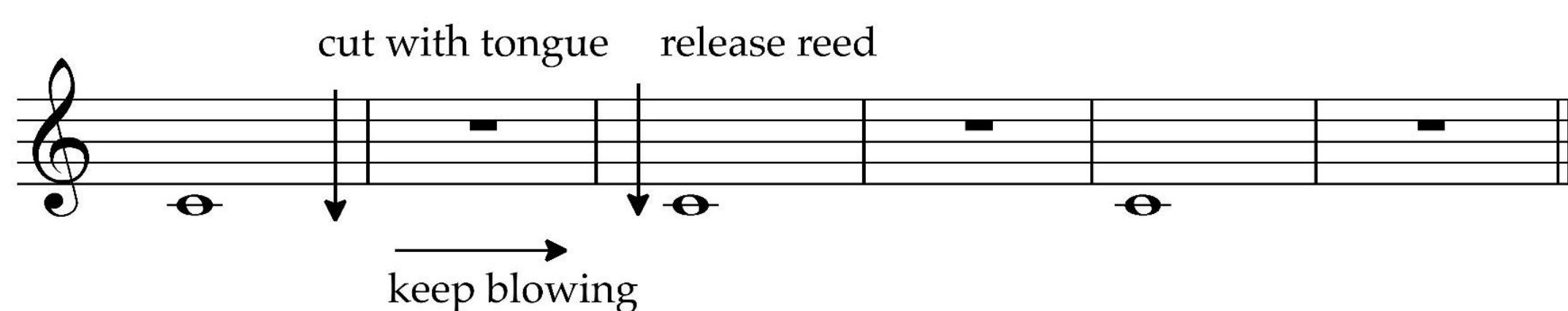
Articulation can be the most difficult skill on the clarinet to master. This probably is because the amount of tongue, surface area of the reed, and breadth of motion of tongue are all extremely small.

## A. Stop Tongue

This can be a very frustrating exercise so I would do this sparingly once you have the basic mechanics mastered.

1. Pick any note and begin playing.
2. Cut the note off clearly and abruptly by applying the tip of your tongue to just under the tip of the reed.
3. Continue to exhale, despite having your tongue on the reed, stopping all sound.
4. Make a clear and immediate beginning of a new note, by swiftly releasing the tongue from the reed.
5. Repeat.
6. Vary the amount of time spent both on and off the reed.
7. Use a mirror to make sure that the lips and jaws, or embouchure are not moving when the tongue moves.

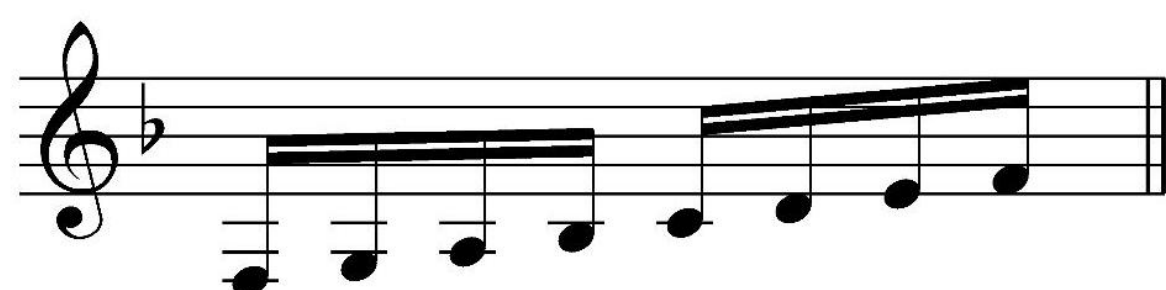
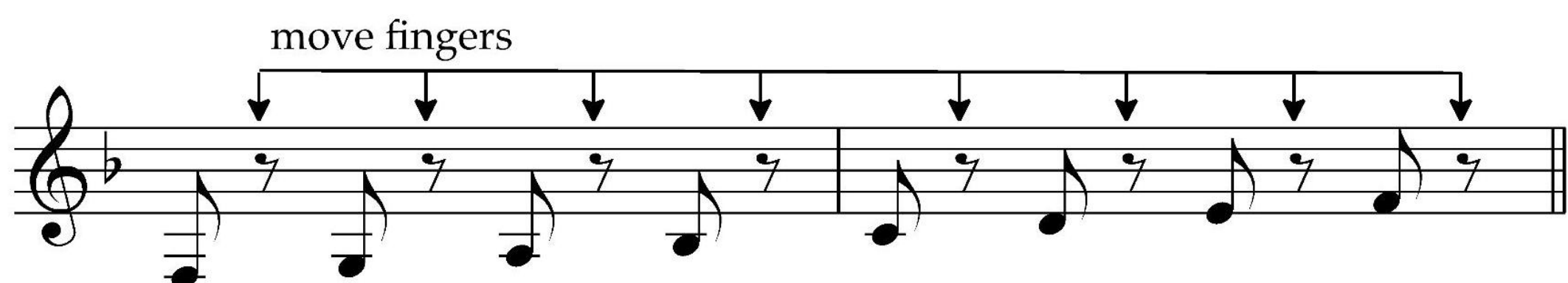
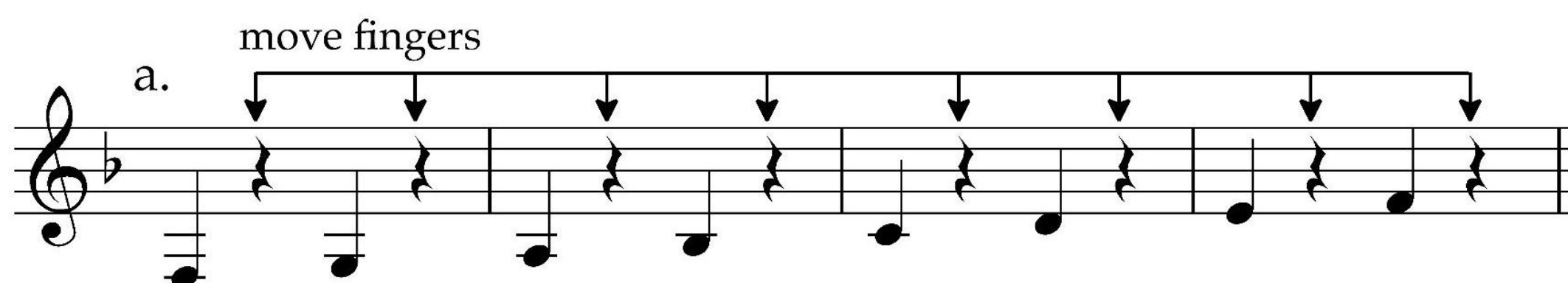
This exercise is to make sure we are able to use the tongue without moving the components of the embouchure AND keep the airflow consistent.



## B. Prepared Fingers

Repeat the process of the Stop Tongue exercise but integrating finger coordination.

1. Pick a scale of your choice.
2. Play the tonic of the scale.
3. Initiate the Stop-Tongue exercise, and once your tongue is on the reed, move your finger(s) to the next note of the scale. Do not stop blowing air and do not wiggle/alter the embouchure.
4. Remove your tongue to play the next note.
5. Continue up the scale and back down.
6. Gradually increase the speed of this process.
7. Vary the material of the pitches included. You can use a scale, arpeggio, or pattern from your favorite solo piece.

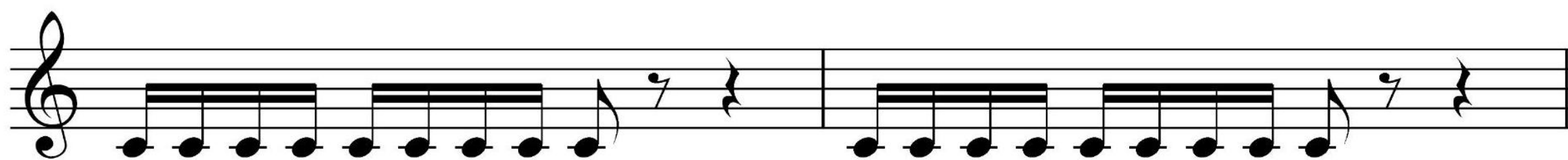
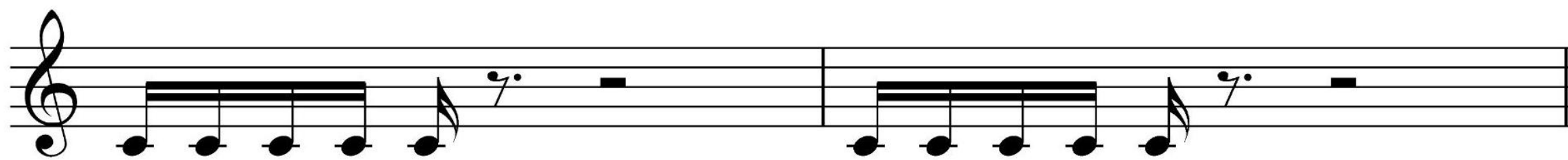
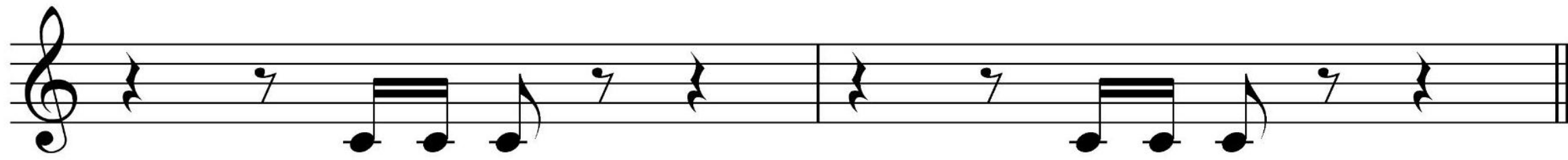




## C. Isolated Speed

We all have nightmares about Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Smetana's *The Bartered Bride Overture*. Moreover, anything with rapid articulation can be a challenge for those of us with a very remedial double tongue. Developing speed will help mitigate the anxiety over the worst articulated passages.

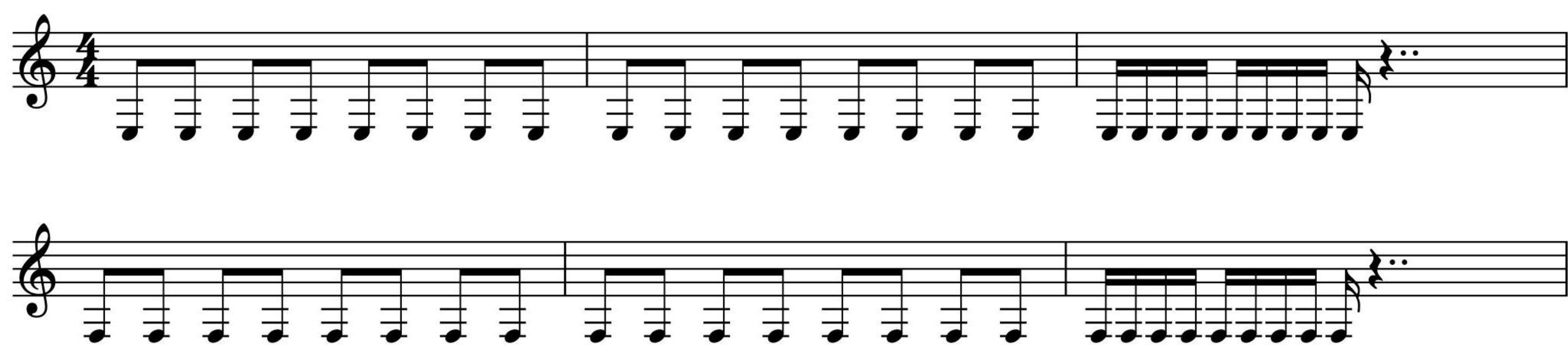
1. First begin with short bursts of fast notes, you can do them spurts of 3, 5, or 9 notes.
2. With this exercise you can push the limits of speed as endurance will be a factor



# D. Endurance

Developing solid articulation endurance will play into how you can apply your speed to long sustained repeated passages. The following exercise will condition your tongue to handle such passages.

- 1. Find a tempo you can play at that is about 80% of your max speed.
- 2. Elongate or abbreviate the exercise below for each pitch as much as you'd like.
- 3. Ascend through the registers from low chalumeau E to altissimo E
- 4. Ascertain which register gives you the most trouble and assess how you can make this more similar to the registers in which you are more successful.



Continue chromatically up to high E...



E. Combination and Coordination

- 1. Find a way to incorporate different rhythms into the above “Endurance” exercise.
- 2. You can vary the previous example by changing up the rhythms as below

a

b

c

d

e

f

# Combination and Coordination (cont.)

3. Furthermore, add in some more complicated passages to start approaching articulation on both stepwise and arpeggiated patterns. Set a modest but not slow tempo (quarter note = 72) and play the page once slurred. Return to the top and play the whole page tongued.

## Klose Scales

The musical score for 'Klose Scales' consists of 12 lines of music, each representing a different key. The keys are: C Major, A Minor, F Major, D Minor, Bb Major, G Minor, Eb Major, C Minor, Ab Major, F Minor, Db Major, and Bb Minor. Each line contains a single, continuous arpeggiated scale pattern, typically spanning two octaves. The patterns are written in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The notes are beamed together in groups of four, creating a rapid, flowing effect. The keys are indicated by the number of sharps or flats at the beginning of each line: C Major (no sharps or flats), A Minor (no sharps or flats), F Major (one flat), D Minor (two sharps), Bb Major (two flats), G Minor (one sharp), Eb Major (three flats), C Minor (three flats), Ab Major (four flats), F Minor (four flats), Db Major (five flats), and Bb Minor (two flats).



Klose Scales (cont.)

25 Gb Major Eb Minor

28 B major

31 G# Minor E Major

34 C# Minor

37 A Major F# Minor

40 D Major

43 B Minor G Major

46 E Minor

49 C Major

The image displays a musical score for Klose Scales, continuing from a previous page. It consists of eight staves of music, each representing a different scale. The scales are: Gb Major (starting at measure 25), Eb Minor (starting at measure 28), B major (starting at measure 31), G# Minor (starting at measure 34), E Major (starting at measure 37), C# Minor (starting at measure 40), A Major (starting at measure 43), and F# Minor (starting at measure 46). The notation includes treble clefs, key signatures, and scale patterns with various accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals). The scales are written in a continuous line across the staves, with measure numbers 25, 28, 31, 34, 37, 40, 43, and 46 indicating the starting point of each scale. The final scale, C Major, starts at measure 49 and ends with a double bar line.

Langenus Articulated Passages

The image displays eight staves of musical notation, each containing a single melodic line. The notation is written in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The passages are characterized by rapid, articulated runs of eighth and sixteenth notes, often grouped by slurs. The key signature for the first two staves is C major, while the remaining six staves are in B-flat major, indicated by a single flat (B-flat) in the key signature. The passages are organized into four pairs, with each pair consisting of two staves. The first pair (staves 1 and 2) is in C major. The second pair (staves 3 and 4) is in B-flat major. The third pair (staves 5 and 6) is in B-flat major. The fourth pair (staves 7 and 8) is in B-flat major. The notation is clean and professional, typical of a music manuscript.



Langenus Articulated Passages (cont.)

The image displays seven staves of musical notation, each featuring a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation is organized into seven horizontal systems, each containing a single staff. The music consists of continuous, flowing passages of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together in groups. Each staff begins with a series of ascending notes, followed by a series of descending notes, creating a sense of movement and articulation. The passages are connected by long, sweeping horizontal lines, suggesting a continuous melodic line. The notation is clean and professional, typical of a musical score. The final staff ends with a double bar line and a fermata, indicating the end of the passage.

# IV. Repertoire

Hopefully, the previous exercises practiced in isolation will start to bring out greater reliability in the fundamentals. Whether it be poor habits, or passages learned poorly, our fundamentals and their potential shortcomings really come to light in the most important pieces of repertoire.

If one is working on orchestral repertoire, or even preparing for a professional audition, we can easily be disturbed by particular passages or specific intervals that give us trouble. It is advisable to turn those passages into the warmup themselves!

Here are a few examples that the diligent clarinetist can use to address problems in repertoire:

## A. Brahms Symphony No. 3, Mvt II.

If the intonation and legato of Brahms 3 are your issue, make large intervals part of your daily routine.

Cl. in A

The image displays three staves of musical notation for Clarinet in A, representing excerpts from Brahms' Symphony No. 3, Movement II. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 9/4 time signature. It contains several measures of music with various dynamics and articulations: *messa voce* (written above the staff), *p grazioso* (written below the staff), and *pp* with an accent (>) (written below the staff). The second staff continues the musical line with a *p* dynamic marking below the first measure and a *pp* dynamic marking with a hairpin (written below the staff). The third staff starts with a *p* dynamic marking below the first measure and features a circled letter 'C' above a specific measure, likely indicating a point of interest or a common problem area for students.



Brahms 3 Exercise

Turn the struggle of crossing the break into your strength!

1.

repeat as necessary

repeat as necessary

repeat as necessary

B. Beethoven Symphony No. 6, Mvt I.

If the repeated articulation across the range of the clarinet in Beethoven 6 gives you trouble, explore changing the articulation, or focusing on the most troublesome notes.

K

Cl. in Bb

Measures 1-12 of the Clarinet part. Measure 1: *f*. Measures 2-3: *p*. Measures 4-5: *f* with trills. Measures 6-7: *dolce*. Measures 8-12: *f* with trills, ending with *pp*.

Beethoven 6 Exercise

Turn the struggle of crossing the break into your strength!

a.

Exercise a: Trill exercise with slurs and dynamics. It consists of two phrases, each starting with a trill (marked '3') and followed by a slur over a series of notes. The first phrase ends with 'etc...'.

b.

repeat until articulation is ideal

Exercise b: Trill exercise with slurs and dynamics, including a repeat instruction. It consists of two phrases, each starting with a trill (marked '3') and followed by a slur over a series of notes. The first phrase ends with 'etc...'. The second phrase is marked 'repeat until articulation is ideal'.



# C. Prokofiev Peter and the Wolf

The excerpt from Prokofiev’s Peter and the Wolf contains one of the most challenging passages for our fingers in the whole orchestral repertoire. Master this passage by not only slowing down the chromatically ascending triplet figure, but also by changing up the rhythm.

20 Nervoso ♩ = 96

Cl. in A

4

7

10

*f a tempo p rit. narrator*

## Peter and the Wolf Exercise

start ♩ = 60, then 66, 72, 80, 88, 96...

1.

2.

3.

4.

# Conclusion

The above is a sampling of methods and exercises I have been using for about 15 years. Feel free to take the above exercises and make them your own. Modify them to your playing needs and your schedule.

The musician's life can be an overcommitted one, so do not feel the need to complete all of these tasks every day. Instead, abbreviate and condense as related to your current concert schedule, leaving time to work on orchestra repertoire, solo works, and various etudes.

Please enjoy, and feel free to send your comments here: [team@tonebase.co](mailto:team@tonebase.co)

## **Carmen Izzo**

Principal Clarinet, Boise Philharmonic

Bass Clarinet/Asst. Principal Clarinet, Las Vegas Philharmonic





# tonebase Clarinet – Coming Summer '24

We hope you have enjoyed this guide to warming up! Ready for more helpful clarinet resources?

Stay tuned for the release of tonebase Clarinet! Over the next few months, we'll be sharing updates ahead of the launch including new artists added our roster, courses we're filming, and more. Whether you play professionally or just for your own enjoyment, there's going to be something for you on tonebase!

Feel free to write to [team@tonebase.co](mailto:team@tonebase.co) with questions, comments, or corrections. We can't wait to share with you all what we've been working on!



[LEARN MORE AT TONEBASE.CO](https://tonebase.co)