

The Mystery of “Those” Clarinet High Notes – Part 2

How Do We Make Those High Notes Sound Better?

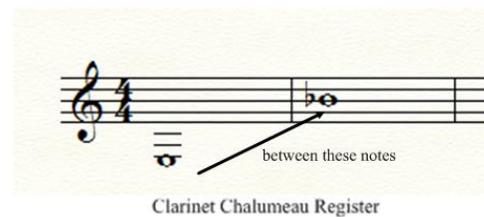
By NAFME Member Meghan Cabral

This article is part 2 of “The Mystery of the Clarinet’s High Notes” which appeared in the August 2017 issue of *Teaching Music*.

As previously discussed in the August 2017 issue of [Teaching Music](#), it is all about oral cavity placement. High tongue + firm embouchure = good tone (in all registers).

The first step to playing the higher notes on clarinet is first to have students set their inner embouchure (voicing), and then their outer embouchure will give them much success.

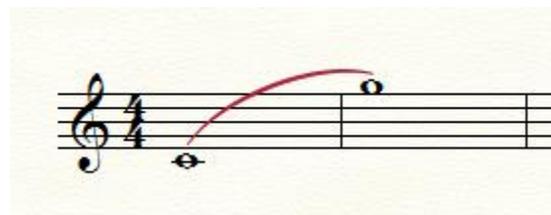
So now once we get the students playing the high notes, how do we work the high notes to sound better?



Popups

Step one - the Popups.

Continue to have students play a full C, (this is the C in the Chalumeau register of the clarinet) add the register key and then hold the note. I tend to have the students start on a full C, work their way down to a low E, and then back up to a thumb F.

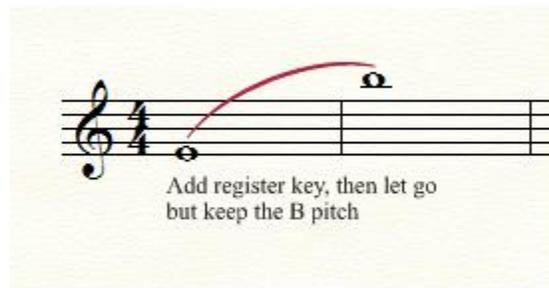


- So what if the students aren't able to "pop" out some of these notes? Go back to the original process, find mouthpiece fulcrum, reset inner and outer embouchure and begin again! (See the previous article, “The Mystery of the Clarinet High Notes”)
- Chances are if the inner and outer embouchures are both set, have the student take in much more mouthpiece than they think they need. They should be able to take in

enough mouthpiece where the low note doesn't "squeak" on its own but the high notes pops out easily.

Step two - the Popups TAKE 2.

Once the students can get all the original notes from the popup exercise, this next exercise will test their inner embouchure. Have the students start on an E (thumb, plus 1), play and hold with a good, full sound, add the register key, and once it pops up then ask them to let go of the register key. If their inner voicing is working the note should stay as one ledger line above the staff B. If their voicing is too low the note will drop back to a thumb, plus one E. This will work if their voicing is "eee, ooo" – with their corners in and AROUND the mouthpiece.

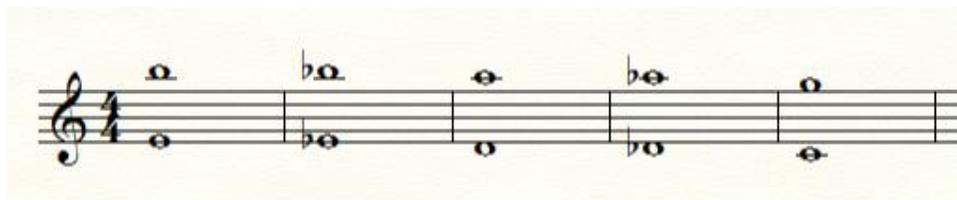


- if the note drops, have the students push their corners forward more around the mouthpiece - thinking about holding the mouthpiece with their corners (forcing an "oo" outer voicing) Make sure that the students are then thinking much more "eee" (a high tongue for their inner voicing)
- Students should continue this exercise chromatically (or in a scalar pattern), down to a middle C. This is as far as I typically go with my MS students. When I am working with more advanced MS students or my private students I will have them keep doing down to an A (two ledger lines before the staff)
- (Yes I do this with my MS students!! Maybe not my first-year players but definitely starting with my 2nd and 3rd year students! And no, I don't see my students daily! I see them on a rotating lesson basis.)

Step three – the squeaking exercise!

I have my students work on what I call "the squeaking exercise" – what kid doesn't love squeaking? Here's their opportunity in a controlled, learning environment to experiment a little with squeaking (without getting yelled at). Have students play a thumb E. Then tell them to intentionally make it squeak. They will have to have a tongue placement that is very high in their mouth, and they might need to take in more mouthpiece. Once they get it once see if they can play thumb E, then tongue high B with no register key and without moving their outer embouchure.

- I recommend no matter what your instrument is, picking up a clarinet and trying this yourself! It is all about experimenting for yourself and the student. The best way for you to describe the feeling of making the clarinet "squeak" is knowing exactly what it feels like yourself.
- Once students are successful on E have them try on an Eb, D, Db, and C. Then they can work their way back up to a thumb F.



Have student tongue the lower pitch, then try to TONGUE and have the higher pitch speak without using the register key!

Step Four - this is beginning to get more advanced but it is a fantastic next step for those students that are ready!

The next step would be to see if they can repeat the "squeak." Have your students go back to a thumb E and tongue, slow quarter notes, to "squeak" a high B. (So this is playing the B without the register key) Then have them repeat the the high B by tonguing quarter notes. Again, having them continue down Eb, D, etc. and then back up to thumb F.



Play and tongue the low note first. Then have student tongue the high note without the register key, and repeat the high note

These exercises will help to get the students a much clearer, more focused Clarion range on the clarinet. The students will learn muscle memory of their inner and outer embouchure for their higher notes.



Altissimo Register on clarinet
C# and above



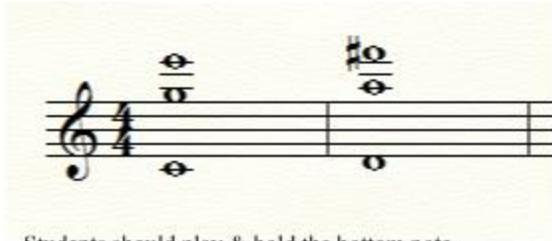
What about the Altissimo Register?

These next steps added to the original exercises are great for all band teachers, not just high school teachers who need the Altissimo register sounding clear. It's my belief that the higher, more focused a student can play, the better everything below it sounds!

The exercises remain the same, nothing changes except we add an extra step.

Let's take Step 1 from above – these are great exercises for all students, not just high school students.

- For this I would start with a C - middle of the staff. Have students play and hold middle C with a full clear sound – add register key with a full, clear sound to get the G above the staff, then lift up your first finger (left hand) and out should come the high, altissimo E. For tuning purposes, then have the students add the Eb pinky key. (This is a popup in 3 steps)
- If the altissimo E doesn't come out, have students try sliding their top left finger off the key, and half hole like an Oboe player. This is NOT a permanent fix, but it might help the air stream on the clarinet.

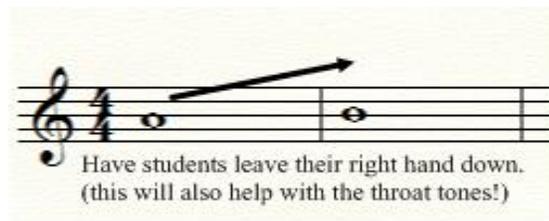


Students should play & hold the bottom note, then tongue and "squeak" the middle note without the register key. If students then try to tongue and "squeak" the top note without any fingering change. (If they need to, leave off the register key but lift up the top finger - left hand)

Let's look at step 3 from above – the squeaking exercises.

- Just like harmonic exercises on flute, clarinet players can get different registers (like octaves on flute but the clarinet is in 12ths), with false fingers.
- Once the students are able to get some squeaking (no register key) into the clarion register on clarinet, have them try squeaking one more register into the Altissimo.
- Students would again start on a thumb F, or thumb-plus 1 E, and tongue a squeak - getting the high B or C. Then have the students try squeaking one more register! This is a false fingering but it will change their voicing to get the pitch out!
- Have students continue this chromatically down to at least middle C. Once on middle C, students would squeak the G, (without register key), and then the altissimo E (false fingering, leaving their first finger of left hand down!) if students can get the G, but not the E, have them leave the register key down, but lift their first left finger!

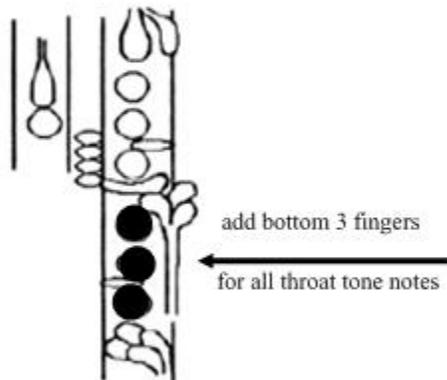
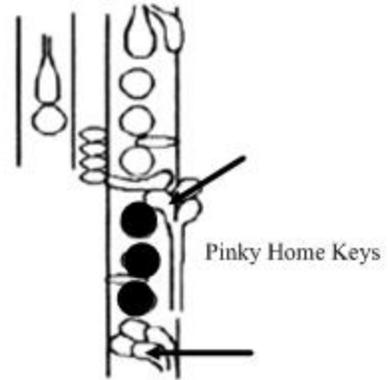
Now what about the (evil), "break?" One adjustment I have made with younger students is when initially teaching them how to play the throat tones (G, G#, A, Bb), I have my students play with their right hand down. I even have the students change the fingering chart in their book to have the bottom 3 holes colored in. This helps with the transition long before they even know what "the break" is.



Once the students are ready have them practice going between A to B slurring. What will make it easier is making sure the students keep their hands close to the keys!

A few tricks for this.

- Have students think about their pinkies sitting on the B and C keys as "home keys." I tell my students that their pinkies should always remain on top of those home keys. The pinkies never like leaving home. To show them, I roll up a piece of tape and put it on the keys and then ask the students to stick their pinky on top. This forces the pinky to remain on the pinky keys. I have students play something without the register key, like an F or G major scale while keeping their pinkies "tapped" to the keys. The while keeping the pinkies close to the



keys I have students play A to B over "the break." Keeping the fingers close is the best way to encourage good technique that will help students to be successful.

Patience is key. But if you set the students up for success right from the beginning, when you teach them G (with the hand down), the students will have a very easy time transitioning to these high notes.

Teach the high notes in isolation first, without even showing them where on the music the clarion register notes. If you make the clarion register notes “fun” for the students, with squeaking exercises that seem silly to the students but are really a serious fundamental exercise, the students will succeed. The “break” on clarinet isn’t anything more than putting down a different series of fingers.

There are many layers to the clarinet as there are to all musical instruments. Having high expectations that the students can play “high” notes from the first few months of beginning will help the students succeed throughout their musical education as clarinet players.

About the author:

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