

MOTIVATION PROBLEMS AT THE BEGINNING OF BASSOON EDUCATION

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Abstract

Until today, educational materials written for bassoon contain many topics that help the instrument to be played theoretically. At the beginning of the education process, the role of the instructor in the process of keeping the instrument in balance, its adaption to with the reed, breathing - body control and learning of fingerings comes into prominence. In such an important process, the combination of many factors can reduce the motivation of the student.

The beginning process of instrument education which is one of the most important stages in the continuity of education is a difficult process in which the student, the instructor, the materials used and the instrument form a whole.

Keywords: bassoon, education, motivation, tone, intonation, embouchure.

Introduction

Bassoon is a woodwind instrument composed of a conical tenor joint, a boot joint, a bass joint, a bell joint and a bocal. It is made of maple and played with double reed. It is produced in two different systems as German (Heckel) and French (Buffet).

The beginning of the bassoon education consists of two basic subjects connected to each other in terms of learning the breathing technique and providing technical skills. It requires that these two elements should be made in harmony. Knowledge and efficient use of time are important. It requires being mentally and physically ready for the continuity of the education process and a high motivation.

The large and bulky structure of the instrument can cause tension in the body muscles of students aged 10 to 12 years and may cause tingling and pain especially in the left arm. Failure to overcome these physical problems at the beginning of the education process affects education and professional life negatively. In a study by Brusky, it is stated that 86% of bassoon players suffer from performance-related musculoskeletal disorders due to injury and performance (Brusky, 2009, p.62).

Objective

The aim of this study is to investigate motivation problems at the beginning of bassoon training. For this purpose, answers for the following questions will be searched:

- a) The effect of embouchure on playing
- b) Harmony of the reed with bassoon
- c) Breath control
- d) Physical problems
- e) The effect of fingerings on performance
- f) Tone color and intonation problems

Methodology

In this study, motivation problems at the beginning of bassoon education have been observed, solutions have been offered by developing strategies for the continuity of the process in a positive way.

Limitations

This study has been limited by using the German bassoon as a base which was developed by Wilhelm Heckel.

1. Embouchure

The embouchure required to play the instrument is the position that the lips roll inward to cover the teeth. In this position, the lips and jaw should be in a relaxed position so that the air can be easily transferred to the instrument and a natural vibration can be achieved.

The “normal” playing embouchure for all bassoonists is dependent on their facial and jaw structures (Garcia, 2011, p.8). The best method is to find a solution based on a person's own physical structure with trial and error method. A comfortable embouchure increases the vibration of the reed and it creates the natural tone color of the instrument. Hoff suggested that forming the embouchure is similar to whistling, and Polisi explained that the bottom lip needs to cushion the reed for effective tone production (Gainacopulos, 1988, p.25-26). Each different position affects the pressure applied to the reed, the tone color of the instrument, the intonation, the mouth and throat opening, and the muscle tension of the body.

The traditionally accepted embouchure is that the upper jaw should be farther forward than the lower jaw (Figure 1). In this position the upper lip is closer to the first wire of the reed. It is very difficult to achieve this position at the beginning of the education process. During this process excessive pressure on the lips reduces the vibration of the reed and makes sounds difficult.

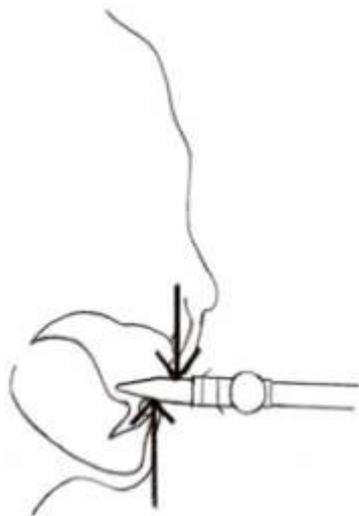


Figure 1, The position that the upper jaw is more forward than the lower jaw. (overbite embouchure) (Garcia, 2011, p.25).

The basic and necessary thing for the creation of sounds is air. Lips direct and support the air. In achieving of the sounds it is necessary that upper lip should be stabilized and lower lip should be directive. With a decrease in blowing intensity in the lower notes of the instrument, the lips move towards the tip of the reed and their tension decreases. With an increase in blowing intensity in the upper notes of the instrument, the lips move towards the back of the reed and their tension increases. Regardless of the type of embouchure used, the jaw should be kept as relaxed as possible during playing and practice time. Chronic tensing of the jaw muscles is known to cause wear and tear in the temporomandibular joints (Dawson, 2002, p.113).

2. Reed

The amount of air and pressure required for the sound of the instrument is proportional to the opening, the thickness and hardness of the reed. If the amount of air is not sufficient, the lip pressure applied to the reed increases and the lip muscles are crushed. At the beginning of the education process, a soft reed should be chosen in which the student can easily make sounds. An improperly selected reed causes excessive tension in the body and especially in the respiratory system. It distorts the intonation, makes the audio inputs, nuance differences and articulation difficult.

The duration of use varies according to the quality of the cane, the user and the environmental factors. Depending on usage, after 20-30 days, its vibration is reduced and becomes useless. The shape of the reed, its adjustments and its harmony with the instrument directly affects the sound quality. In terms of continuity of education, it is important for instructor to test each reed and select proper hardness reeds that can produce sounds comfortably.

3. Breathing

The focal point of playing the bassoon is breathing. In addition to the vital functions of breathing in daily life, controlling the breath gives a different meaning to the functionality of

respiration. The sound quality of the instrument is directly related to the breathing technique of the performer. Unconscious breathing causes the body to contract and be tired earlier, at the same time it affects the tone color and intonation of the instrument negatively (Hopa,2013,p.110).

At the beginning of the education process, it is important that each student should learn the breath control. This skill allows the body to relax and the instrument to be played comfortably. The aim of breath control is to balance the tone and its volume by supplying the amount of air and pressure at different rates that the instrument needs for each pitch. This control aims to breathe in a shorter time than breathing in daily life, to hold the breath and to breathe out in a longer period of time than breathing out in daily life. Therefore, it requires conscious use of muscle and muscle groups that are effective in breathing (Hopa,2013,p.110).

The ability to breathe and support the breath is dependent upon posture. If the player is slumped in any direction, breath support will be altered (Cox,2009,p.117). Tension in the muscles can cause the breath to be faster and inadequate (superficial). In this case, the air cannot be easily transferred to the instrument and the natural tone color of the instrument cannot be achieved. How often one should breathe and how deeply depends on the tempo and on the length of the musical phrase, not on the number of notes or number of bars (Rahn, 1947, p.16).

4. Physical Problems

The bulky structure of the instrument is a problem for young students. The weight of the instrument varies between 3 and 4 kg according to the structure of the wood and mechanism system. With the use of the instrument strap, a large part of this weight is distributed over the body. However, bending the instrument slightly forward in order to achieve the playing position reflects some part of the weight on the left arm. This may cause pain in the left arm especially at the beginning of the education process. In a study on the musicians' health at the University of North Texas, they stated that musicians playing bassoon most commonly have problems on the left side of their body and especially on the left wrists. In this study, it is observed that this situation is most commonly seen in girls aged 11 to 18 who play bassoon (Thrasher and Chesky,2001,p.159).

Stabilization of the instrument on the body with the strap provides the balance of the instrument and helps the reed to approach the mouth's cavity with a straight angle. The differences of each instrument such as the height control, the strap (back, shoulder, neck and seat strap), balance hanger and bocal affects the position of the elbows by changing the instrument's pressure on the left arm and the distance to the right thigh. This causes the center of gravity of the instrument to change.

There is no standard way to sit or stand when playing the bassoon. This lack of standardization makes it extremely hard to gain definitive information on how bassoon players function on a musculoskeletal level, because each different support method puts different stresses on different parts of the body. It is not difficult to infer that with the problems associated with the design of the instrument and the multitude of support systems in practice there are numerous PRMDs (performance related musculoskeletal disorders) in this population (Brusky, 2009,p.5).

Tension can have a direct impact on a musician's ability to perform optimally on their instrument. Unnecessary muscle tension results in inappropriate muscle contraction as a result of

more muscle fibers contracting than are required. Excessive contraction may result in difficulty performing precise movements, fingering combinations, or achieving the level of control demanded by musicians (Groth,2016, p.24).

It can be advantageous to wait for permanent teeth to replace the milk teeth. Especially transitioning from another instrument to the bassoon in the age range of 13-15 years, may have positive results in terms of completing part of body development.

5. Fingering

Another factor affecting the tone color and intonation is the fingering. So far, published materials belonging to the instrument and materials showing fingerings have caused many different fingerings to occur. The fact that the instrument has a complex combination of fingering causes an increase in muscle tension in the body. The alternative positions used to make up the deficiencies of the instrument in terms of intonation and nuance and to play trill keys are completely different. Most of the time, these alternatively used positions can cause distortion in the natural tone color by affecting the vibration of the instrument. For this reason, the fingerings used at the beginning of the education process should be checked continuously.

Pedagogically, beginner method books for woodwind students often start the performer with an open fingering, because open fingerings on an instrument allow the student to become comfortable with the back pressure of the reed or mouthpiece-reed combination without additional resistance from the body of the instrument (Bowling,2016,p.51). The posture of the instrument is directly related to the arms and wrists. At the beginning of the education process, left hand wrist position is an issue that requires attention. The left index finger's full - half closing function and the left thumb's position to cover the holes indicate the difficulties of the process. Closing the keys or holes with excessive pressure may restrict the technical ability by damaging the flexibility of the fingers and wrists.

It is very difficult for people who have not completed their finger structure development to master the key system of the instrument. Most of the instrument sounds are achieved by fingering combinations. The fact that the bassoon has a very large fingering combination emphasizes the need for the fingers to work synchronously. Learning the basic fingerings at the beginning of the education process prevents motivation problems.

Practice fingering the instrument without blowing it since the fingering is so complicated to the novice that he cannot divide his attention between fingering, breathing, blowing, rhythmic values, attack, and so on. Before the fingers can act spontaneously on fingering patterns which have been learned by repetition, a mental picture of each fingering must be formed. You must know what pitch a certain fingering will produce before blowing the instrument. You must also hear the pitch before it is produced, since it is very easy to play out with the correct fingering on the bassoon if you do not "hear" a pitch before it is produced. The sooner the mental picture of fingering is transferred to the sense of touch the quicker will be the development of technic (Rahn, 1947, p.38).

6. Tone Color and Intonation

The tone color and intonation of the bassoon are directly related to the key settings of the instrument, the reed used, the breath control and the embouchure. At the beginning of education, tightening of the throat, wrong breathing technique and incorrect embouchure cause the notes to

become sharp. Exercises to improve the breathing technique prevent the tightening the lip and throat, increase the body control and achieve the natural vibration of the reed.

Conclusion

The beginning process of bassoon, which is one of the most difficult stages of education, is an important process in terms of learning the harmony between body and instrument. It requires the elements that include breathing and body control to work in harmony with each other and aim to achieve the natural tone color of the instrument. The acquisition of these elements as a skill at different times supports the process to be easy and understandable.

The fact that the bassoon is a large and heavy instrument causes pain in the body muscles of the students, especially between 10 and 12 years old, and adversely affects the educational process. The smooth and comfortable playing position supports flexible use of the body and technical skill. It prevents excessive fatigue.

The best embouchure is where the natural vibration of the reed is achieved. In this position, the lower jaw is more backward than the upper jaw. In order for the instrument to be played comfortably, it is necessary to adjust the height of the instrument on the body and to achieve the embouchure without deteriorating the natural posture of the head. Intonation problems indicate that embouchure and breathing technique are not used correctly. In this process, choosing a reed that the student can play comfortably increases the student's motivation.

The materials used in the process of making the reed directly affect the tone color of the instrument. The structure, hardness, shape and adjustment of the cane gain importance in terms of providing communication with the instrument. In this process, choosing a reed that the student can play comfortably increases the student's motivation.

Achieving some tones of the instrument with various fingering combinations can cause muscle tension in the body to increase. Structural differences in the key system of the instrument can affect fingering combinations negatively and it can cause several problems. For this reason, it is necessary to pay attention to synchronization of the finger movements and to the key system of the instrument to be smooth.

It is of great importance that the problems occurring at the beginning of the instrument education should be identified and resolved by the instructor. It is the responsibility of the instructor to identify the problems that occur due to the incorrect use of the body, their frequency and reflection on the education process. Ignoring the pains that occur during this process can cause various physical injuries, and can make it impossible to play the instrument.

The bassoon education consists of a combination of physical and mental practices. Being mentally ready to play the instrument helps to achieve the aimed performance quality. This increases motivation, contributes positively to the concentration and education process.

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