Basic Preparation for Oboe Auditions by Using Selected Oboe Excerpts

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BASIC PREPARATION FOR OBOE AUDITIONS
BY USING SELECTED OBOE EXCERPTS

By

Shen Wang

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

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A doctoral essay submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

BASIC PREPARATION FOR OBOE AUDITIONS
BY USING SELECTED OBOE EXCERPTS

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This essay describes basic preparation techniques for oboe auditions through examples demonstrated in selected oboe excerpts. The application of these methods in the selected oboe excerpts will help to reinforce the objective of each outlined preparation technique.

Three aspects regarding preparation techniques are discussed. *Technical Preparation* describes different practice methods intended to increase technical performance consistency for an audition. *Performance Internalization* details the mental approach to accurately prepare a solo audition before an audition committee. *Critical Factors Involving Reed Preparation* describes effective processes in reed preparation through the analysis of reed-making sources.

*Basic Preparation for Oboe Auditions by Using Selected Oboe Excerpts* is intended as an audition preparation source for amateur oboists. This essay can additionally serve as a basic and fundamental reference for higher level performers who are preparing to play auditions.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of western music composition, the oboe has been most prominently utilized within the genre of orchestral composition. Numerous composers of orchestral music have demonstrated their admiration of the oboe’s expressive potential by writing intriguing melodic lines for it. In the Baroque period, Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel wrote many lyrical oboe solos. Ludwig van Beethoven, arguably the most important composer in the transitional period between the Classical and Romantic eras, included several famous oboe solos in his symphonies. Johannes Brahms, Maurice Ravel, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, and Richard Strauss all provided the oboe a prominent voice in their compositions.

The oboe often carries numerous vital solos during orchestral performances. Maurice Ravel in *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and Ludwig Van Beethoven in *Symphony No. 7* provided the oboe prominent introductory statements to their works. Other examples demonstrate a similar compositional tendency by placing important oboe solos at the beginning of movements in orchestral works. This is evidenced in the following compositions: the second movement of Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No. 4*, the Minuet from Ravel’s *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, the second movement of Mahler’s *Symphony No. 3*, and the Gavotte & First Variation of Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella Suite*.

No other woodwind instrument can duplicate the distinctive tone color of the oboe. This is one reason for its permanent place in the orchestral ensemble.
Occasionally, an oboe solo will introduce a motive or a theme. At other times, an oboe solo will emphasize a melody or a theme after it has been presented by the larger ensemble. The examples presented above strongly suggest that an oboe player’s ability to present solos well is essential to any ensemble performance. Due to this fact, oboe auditions are mostly devoted to the oboe’s solo excerpts.

Most oboe auditions held in the United States proceed in stages. A successful experience through all stages of an audition is imperative in order for a candidate to advance to the final round. The audition committee must be convinced that the candidate is able to present the required solo excerpts under pressure with secure technique and correct musical characteristics. The oboist’s success in winning over the audition committee is dependent on adequate preparation and accuracy of execution.

The Purpose

This essay will provide three necessary aspects on how to prepare for an oboe audition. They are instrumental practice, performance internalization, and critical factors involving reed preparation.

The Problem

The author will describe the basic preparation for an oboe audition in three sections. The first section deals with preparation through instrumental practice. There are excerpt studies compiled and annotated by very successful players – for example, *20th Century Orchestra Studies for Oboe and English horn* by former principal oboe of the Philadelphia orchestra, John De Lancie, and *Orchestral Excerpts for Oboe with Piano Accompaniment* by the principal oboe of the Boston symphony orchestra, John De Lancie, 1

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The ideas disclosed in these sources may be variably informative to some oboists, but they are less beneficial to players who are not as technically advanced as these legendary oboist editors. *Technical preparation* will provide direction on how to practice and solve problems that are presented in the difficult solo excerpts on the instrument. In order for orchestral oboe candidates to find the core problems in the excerpts it is key to isolate and understand what category of playing ability each excerpt is based on.

The selected excerpts that will be discussed in detail and which illustrate exclusive demand on fingering and tonguing techniques are: the overture to Rossini’s early opera *La Scala di Seta*, the opening solo excerpt of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* by Maurice Ravel, and the tutti section from rehearsal letter A to B from Richard Strauss’s tone poem *Don Juan*.

The following examples deal exclusively with three crucial factors in effective excerpt performance. They do not necessarily burden the oboist with regard to fingering technique. Their focus as outlined in the examples below is on one’s ability to control dynamics, intonation, and the capability of expressing musical direction. The examples

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provided in this discussion are: Brahms’s *Violin Concerto, Second Movement*, from the beginning to measure thirty-two, the opening lyrical solo from Rossini’s *Overture to La Scala di Seta*, Strauss’s tone poem *Don Juan* from rehearsal letter L to N, and the first twenty-one measures of the second movement in Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No. 4*.

The second section deals with *performance internalization* in preparation for playing oboe excerpts in auditions. To provide clarification, mental practice for the purpose of this investigation should not be misunderstood as anxiety or stage-fright management. There exist a handful of psychological or medical solutions dealing with such issues. Psychological solutions can be found in *The Audition Process* by Stuart Dunkel. Additionally, medical solutions using medications such as Digoxin or Beta-blockers can be utilized under a doctor’s care. *Performance internalization* for the purpose of this research will focus on the thoughts and mental impulses that can be carefully prepared in advance in order to control those which may occur while performing an excerpt in an audition.

Information and suggestions that were found in books, articles, or online sources were limited for the purpose of addressing mental practice in this investigation. The main focus of this section is not to show a variety of methods and audition tips on how to deal with mental stress caused by intense audition situations. The purpose instead is to provide a number of suggestions and practice methods of how to keep mental focus throughout the complete performance of excerpts during audition situations. Through the method of mental practice introduced in the essay, the audition candidate will be able to present the audition excerpts at his or her highest level of playing ability. The effective application of the information investigated in the mental practice section will provide the
candidate a better chance to remain focused on the musical task at hand during an audition performance.

In an article, clarinetist Lindsey Berthiaume exclaims, “Choosing the right reed for the job is half the battle”. This statement expresses the high importance of the third and last subject: reed preparation for auditions. There are many oboe reed-making guides written including: *Oboe Reed Making: A Modern Method* by Peter Hedrick, *Practical and Progressive Oboe Method: Reed Making, Melodious and Technical Studies* by Albert J. Andraud, *The Oboe Reed Book* by Jay Light, *Essays for Oboist* by Jay Light.

These are extremely helpful sources for people who are learning how to make an oboe reed, but not much attention is given to explaining how to select a reed for auditions. Choosing a reed is just as important, if not more so, than knowing how to construct reeds. There are many different factors to consider when choosing a reed. Two such examples for consideration are the different sizes of the ensemble, and the variables in performing spaces. A reed might work very well for a symphony orchestra concert, but may not serve as well for the purpose of auditions. In addition to introducing and discussing the main principles of a finished American style reed and explaining which principles are the most essential factors in serving audition purposes, some audition recommendations will

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5 Albert J. Andraud, *Practical and Progressive Oboe Method; Reed Making, Melodious and Technical Studies* (Cincinnati: Southern Music Company, 1948)

6 Jay Light, *The Oboe Reed Book* (Des Moines, IA: Drake University, 1983)

be addressed in reed-preparation. The recommendations include: choosing the cane: breaking in a reed; awareness of reed change caused by altitude and humidity; when to do the finishing touches; reed care and maintenance. Furthermore, based on the reed making books by Jay Light, Weber & Capps, Albert J. Andraud and Peter Hedrick, a weekly audition reed making and preparation method will also be available in this essay.

**Review of Literature**

**Related books**

*The Art of Oboe Playing* by Robert Sprenkle is a book covering a broad range of topics, and provides solutions to help oboe students and teachers solve the identified problems. The book is a very useful resource for educators who must find solutions to problems encountered by their students. It covers subjects ranging from tone production to various aspects of cane processing and reed making.

*The Practice Handbook* by Linda Gilbert is a workbook that includes the basic principles and techniques of successful and organized practice sessions. Its method is appropriate for various educational levels, from elementary to conservatory. It is a highly recommended handbook by leading educators and institutions for all levels. The method will also prove to be useful for audition preparations.

*Sound in Motion: A Performer's Guide to Greater Musical Expression* by David McGill is a comprehensive study borrowing concepts that the well known oboist Marcel Tabuteau used to develop musical imagination. This book provides insightful musical

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ideas which are helpful for instrumentalists in developing their overall musicianship skills.

The Oboe Reed Book by Jay Light is a manual for making, understanding, and adjusting oboe reeds.\textsuperscript{11} With great clarity and detailed explanation the author effectively advises on suggestions that are helpful and cautions against adherence to ill-informed practices and ideas in reed making. It remains a standard book of reference for oboe reed makers of every level.

The Audition Process by Stuart Dunkel has as its main focus anxiety management and coping strategies.\textsuperscript{12} Based on Mr. Dunkel’s experiences in taking a large number of auditions, he believes and explains that there is more to taking an audition than merely performing well. His work will offer some psychological help for anyone planning to take an audition.

Essays for Oboists by Jay Light takes the techniques used by the best instructors and offers clear explanations to serve the purpose of improving oboe playing.\textsuperscript{13} The author offers an intelligent rationale for following the procedures of reputable instructors in a format that proves to be extremely beneficial and enjoyable.

Related Articles

The Orchestra Audition - How to Audition by Brad Howland is an online educational article which focuses on the idea that audition success cannot be disassociated from effective preparation. Brad Howland emphasizes that “Careful preparation is essential for success.” The article further discusses audition strategies such

\textsuperscript{11} Jay Light, The Oboe Reed Book (Des Moines, IA: Drake University, 1983)


\textsuperscript{13} Jay Light, Essays for Oboists (Des Moines, IA: Drake University, 1983)
as “automatic pilot,” “simulate the stress of the audition,” “practice at different tempos,”
“play mock auditions,” “record yourself,” “dress up in your audition clothes,” and “learn
everything you can about the excerpts.”

*Mouthpiece and Reed Guide* by Lindsey Berthiaume is another online educational
article which offers knowledge and insight into reed preparation. Even though some of
the information regarding the methods on how to choose a mouthpiece for a clarinetist
may not be useful to oboe players, some of her insights may in fact be of significant value
to oboists. She summarizes the issues in the article by exclaiming, “The first issue
presented in the article is selecting a ‘good reed,’ with the second being selecting the
‘right cut’ of reed for the music you are playing.” This will help provide psychological
guidelines for oboe players.

*Fundamentals of Oboe Playing III - Reed Making* by Martin Schuring contains
discussion of the complex construction and the short life of oboe reeds, daily attention to
the craft of reed making, and the steep learning curve which frustrates oboists of all
levels. The article presents guidelines for reed making starting with the two golden
rules of oboe reed making: sharpen your knife and don't make any mistakes. This
literature not only includes a reed adjustment guide, but also covers the following

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14 Brad Howland, “The Orchestra Audition - How to Audition,” Musical Education On-Line,

15 Lindsey Berthiaume, “Mouthpiece and Reed Guide,” Musical Education On-Line,
http://www.childrensmusicworkshop.com/resources/articles/reedmpguide/index.html (accessed March 5,
2009).

16 Ibid.

subjects: common actions and their effects; possible cures for common problems; general observations; and a section on English horn reeds.

Related Audio Sources

Oboe audition committees include not only the oboe players of the orchestra and the music director, but also members of the orchestra who play instruments other than the oboe. Most music directors who make the final decision at an audition do not attend or listen to auditions until the semifinal or even the final rounds. In other words, it is very important that the audition candidates not only convince the oboe players on the committee, but also the other players whose primary instrument is not the oboe. The reality is that only when one gets enough votes by playing in front of a committee of mixed instrumentalists, will one advance to the next round of the audition. Therefore, it would be a huge advantage for the audition candidates to know and understand how non-oboe players would play the oboe excerpts if they were asked to play them on their own instruments.

There has always been an undefined close connection between bassoon and oboe, the double reed instruments. Due to the similarity of sound production and tone color, well-known composers wrote similar solo melodies for both instruments. Scheherezade by Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 4 are both not only very beautiful and meaningful works but they appear on the must-prepare category for all oboe and bassoon auditions. For this reason and for the benefit of all audition candidates, the author is not only going to look into an orchestral excerpt from an oboe player’s point of view but also from a bassoonist’s perspective. The teaching CDs for bassoon players,
Orchestral Excerpts by David McGill\textsuperscript{18} and Orchestral Excerpts Christopher Millard\textsuperscript{19} have proven to be very popular and helpful to many musicians.

Former principal oboist of the Cleveland Orchestra, John Mack made a teaching CD, Orchestral Excerpts for Oboe with playing demonstration and spoken commentary.\textsuperscript{20} This CD recording also covers some of the most important audition excerpts. The recording CD, Marcel Tabuteau’ lessons,\textsuperscript{21} legendary former principal oboist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, explains and demonstrates his phrasing system that is now largely considered and accepted as the foundation of the American school of wind playing. This phrasing system will be incorporated in the discussion of this paper. In the recording, Mr. Tabuteau talks about wind control, breathing, his number system, tone color, singing intervals, inflection distribution, practice routines, and articulation. The writer chose to cite information from both John Mack and Marcel Tabuteau as supporting material for this essay.

Even though Mr. Mack had been taught by Mr. Tabuteau, their playing styles and points of focus are individualized and equally important to oboists in this country. In Mr. Mack’s recording, he demonstrates how the oboe excerpts should sound musically whereas Mr. Tabuteau explains how to physically create different musical effects on the oboe. By way of comparison, it would be easier to understand if both John Mack and

\textsuperscript{18} David McGill, Orchestra Excerpts for Bassoon with Spoken Commentary, Summit Records, DCD 162, 1994.

\textsuperscript{19} Christopher Millard, Orchestra Excerpts for Bassoon with Spoken Commentary, Volume 2, Summit Records, DCD 220, 1998.


\textsuperscript{21} Marcel Tabuteau, Marcel Tabuteau’s Lessons, principal oboe of Philadelphia Orchestra, Boston Records, BR1017CD, 1996.
Marcel Tabuteau were teachers of painting. Mr. Mack shows what a finished painting should look like, however Mr. Tabuteau shows how to use the paint brush.

Through the above recordings, the author will focus on showing the most beneficial phrasing presentations that represent oboe and bassoon excerpts. These audio sources do not contain information about how to prepare mentally. At an audition, candidates must consistently present the excerpts correctly while under pressure, therefore other sources of information will be used.

**Methodology**

There are three sections that will investigate and outline the purpose of this essay: *Technical Preparation; Performance Internalization; Critical Factors Involving Reed Preparation*. Each of the preceding main sections will be broken-down into additional sub-categories. These sub-categories are described in greater detail below.

**Technical Preparation**

The methodology of technical preparation for oboe auditions will be approached from four aspects: *fast moving passages; rapid tonguing passages; extreme register release; and melodic passages.*

**Fast Moving Passages**

By using selected audition excerpts, *Le Tombeau de Couperin* by Maurice Ravel and the tutti section from rehearsal letter A to B from Strauss’s masterpiece *Don Juan*, the author will introduce fundamental practice methods. These include practicing the problematic sections of the excerpts in various rhythmic patterns, and creating note groupings and successively adding to the group to improve the player’s consistency and accuracy in playing fast passages of excerpts.
Rapid Tonguing Passages

Selected audition excerpts will serve as examples of difficult passage examples. The excerpts that will demonstrate difficult rapid tonguing passages include the overture to Rossini’s *La Scala di Seta*, and excerpts from Mendelssohn’s *Scottish Symphony*. The author will provide a series of tonguing exercises such as those included in *The Art of Oboe Playing* by Robert Sprenkle and David Ledet, *The Practice Handbook* by Linda Gilbert, and the teaching CD by Marcel Tabuteau. The author will also introduce some practice methods in double tonguing technique derived from the excerpts.

Extreme Register Release

The author will offer suggestions on how to deal with the soft low note attacks by the positioning of the reed and embouchure. Example excerpts used will be the opening solo from Mahler’s *Symphony No. 3* and Strauss’ *Don Juan* from Rehearsal letter L to N. With regard to excerpts that concern the immediacy, delicacy, and consistency of high note attack, the author will include an example from *Symphony No. 5* by Shostakovich to demonstrate some practice methods.

Melodic Passages

Excerpts such as the second movement of Brahms’ *Violin Concerto*, from the beginning to measure thirty-two, the opening lyrical solo from Rossini’s *Overture to La Scala di Seta*, Strauss’ tone poem *Don Juan* from L to N, and the first twenty-one measures in the second movement of Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No. 4* share the common difficulty of wind control. Wind control is not only the foundation of basic tone production on the instrument, but also of dynamics, intonation and the capability of showing musical direction. A number of practice methods for wind control, singing
intervals and inflection distribution based upon the insights of the educational CD recording of Marcel Tabuteau’s lessons and those found in David McGill’s performer’s guide Sound in Motion will be introduced.

Performance Internalization

The methodology of internal preparation for oboe auditions will be approached from three aspects: internal practice for fast moving passages, internal practice for slow melodic passages and internal practice strategies as a rehearsal guide prior to the audition. These aspects are supported in many sources, some of which will include articles and books by Brad Howland,22 and Stuart Dunkel.23

Internal Performance Practice for Fast Moving Passages

The author will provide detailed internal performance practice methods for the following excerpts: the Overture to Rossini’s La Scala di Seta, the opening solo excerpt of Le Tombeau de Couperin by Maurice Ravel, and the tutti section from A to B for Strauss’s Don Juan. A few of the mental processes that will be discussed are a note grouping system, a dynamic system and what to think of before playing an excerpt.

Internal Performance Practice for Slow Melodic Passages

The solos from Brahms’s Violin Concerto, Mvt. 2, from the beginning to measure thirty-two, the opening lyrical solo from Rossini’s Overture to La Scala di Seta, Strauss’ tone poem Don Juan from L to N, and the first twenty-one measures in the second movement of Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 4 will be used for the introduction of mental practice in terms of dealing with melodic passages. The author will not only offer some


suggestions for possible breathing options, but also explanations on a variety of musical ideas based on the insight of different resources: the *Orchestral Excerpts for Oboe with Piano Accompaniment* by John Ferrillo;24 *Sound in Motion: A Performer's Guide to Greater Musical Expression* by David McGill; and the educational CDs by John Mark and Marcel Tabuteau. 25

**Internal Practice Strategies as a Rehearsal Guide Prior to the Audition**

The author will introduce and discuss several internal practice strategies as a rehearsal guide prior to the audition. These strategies include: simulate the stress of the audition: practice at different tempos: play mock auditions: record yourself: dress up in your audition clothes: learn everything you can about the excerpts: how it is helpful to practice how to keep one’s mind busy before, during, and after playing excerpts. These aspects are supported in many sources some of which will include articles and books by Brad Howland,26 and Stuart Dunkel.27

**Critical Factors Involving Reed Preparation**

The section of reed preparation for oboe auditions will include three aspects: *cane selection, primary principles of a finished American-style reed, and critical factors involving reed preparation for audition purposes*. Audition insights that address reed preparation will be cited from the articles and method books by Lindsey Berthiaume,


Peter Hedrick and A. J. Andraud. In addition, the author will provide a weekly reed-making plan.

Cane Selection

The author will provide some suggestions on how to select useable cane based on looking at the color, fiber, and marks of the tube cane.

Primary Principles of a Finished American Style Reed

The main principles of the American style reed will be introduced based on several reed-making resources. These include: *Oboe Reed Making: A Modern Method* by Peter Hedrick; *Practical and Progressive Oboe Method; Reed Making, Melodious and Technical Studies* by Albert J. Andraud; *The Oboe Reed Book* by Jay Light; Marcel Tabuteau’s *Insights on Reed Making*;

Critical Factors Involving Reed Preparation for Audition Purposes

It is essential to examine the differences between playing in an orchestra and playing individually. The author will investigate the factors involving reed preparation for the purpose of auditions. This will include a discussion that projection and loudness are not the same. Other items for discussion include playing against the reed’s resistance, issues of finding the right balance between quick response and pitch stability, and selecting the right cut of reed for the music you are playing. 

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29 Albert J. Andraud, *Practical and Progressive Oboe Method; Reed Making, Melodious and Technical Studies* (Cincinnati: Southern Music Company, 1948)

30 Jay Light, *The Oboe Reed Book* (Des Moines, IA: Drake University, 1983)

Audition Tips Addressing the Preparation of Reeds

The recommendations that the author will include are issues regarding breaking in a reed, awareness of reed change caused by altitude and humidity, when to do the finishing touches, places to make and adjust reeds, and reed care and maintenance.
CHAPTER TWO

TECHNICAL PREPARATION

At a master class in the Manhattan School of Music, the principal oboist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, Richard Woodhams, stated emphatically, “The candidate who plays everything printed on the page will mostly advance to the later rounds. It is crucial to play everything with good intonation and more importantly with a steady tempo”.

The methodology of technical preparation for oboe auditions will be approached from four aspects: fast moving passages; rapid tonguing passages; extreme register attacks; and melodic passages.

Fast Moving Passages

The main focus of the section is to help the candidate improve his or her fingering accuracy when performing technically challenging excerpts. The author chose to approach this challenge by demonstrating a few different fingering practice methods using selected audition excerpts.

The oboe solo in the allegro section from Rossini’s overture to the opera La Scala di Setta, Example 2.0, appears on most orchestral audition lists. This excerpt contains multiple challenges. The first difficulty is to play every note with clarity and a steady tempo.

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allegro tempo. The second difficulty is consistent tonguing. Suggestions on how to deal with the former challenge will be introduced in this section.

Joseph Robinson, principal oboist of the New York Philharmonic, suggests that the use of a metronome is critical to maintain an excellent level of preparation. In a master class Robinson stated, “I play everything with a metronome once a week, to keep myself on the right track.” This comment by a performer of such immense talent and success validates all suggestions to frequently utilize a metronome in practice. Robinson has held a position in a major orchestra for over twenty years, and is still playing everything with a metronome once a week.

Example 2.0. Rossini’s overture *La Scala di Setta, Allegro*

Marcel Tabuteau’s statement, “Finger with your fingers, and tongue with your tongue” is simple and straightforward advice. It implies quite literally that playing notes

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33 Joseph Robinson, “Practice Routine” (lecture, Manhattan School of Music, New York, NY, March 9, 2001).
is mainly fingering work, and achieving correct articulation is tonguing work. Based on this interpretation, the author believes that when working on challenging fingering passages, one should try to temporarily leave the tonguing problems out of practicing. This can achieve practicing the fast technical passages with as much slurring as possible so that the fingering challenge is being isolated and addressed without the interference of the tonguing actions. This will help to avoid the confusion that any tonguing problems may contribute in a fast fingering section. By practicing in this manner the candidate may more clearly identify which fingering shift may still require additional attention.

The first method of practicing the La Scala di Seta excerpt is to change rhythms, keeping the quarter-notes as they are, and changing every other eighth note into a dotted-eighth note, Example 2.1.

Example 2.1. Rossini’s overture La Scala di Seta Practice Method 1

The second aspect of this approach is to reverse the dotted rhythm as shown in Example 2.2.

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Example 2.2. Rossini’s overture *La Scala di Setta* Practice Method 2

The third practice method will focus on dealing and solving a shorter but more problematic section from excerpts, Example 2.3. Due to the variety of technical ability from different candidates, the author will pick one section of the excerpt as an example based on a hypothetical assumption.

Example 2.3. Rossini’s overture *La Scala di Setta, Allegro*, mm. 8-9

This practice method suggests that players begin playing with just the first two notes, G and F sharp, and then restart again from the beginning of the measure, and every time the player restarts, one more note should be added, Example 2.4.

Example 2.4. Rossini’s overture *La Scala di Setta* Practice Method 3

First time:  
Second time:  
Third time:  
Fourth time:  
fifth time:  
sixth time:
This method requires the player to work on the difficult section multiple times in succession. It also strengthens the candidate’s ability to concentrate during this repetitive procedure.

The next excerpt chosen by the author is from Bizet’s *Symphony in C*, Example 2.5. The lyrical solo excerpts from the second movement of the symphony and the allegro oboe excerpts from the third movement are frequently asked for in both ballet and symphony orchestra auditions. The challenge of playing such fast excerpt in a live performance is not only its length and speed. One must consider that in all likelihood the excerpt must be played twice. Therefore, the consistency of one’s technical ability is critical in order to achieve a successful outcome.

Example 2.5. Bizet’s *Symphony in C*, mvt. 3
Another reason that this excerpt was chosen as an example in this investigation is because it is written in a different meter than the first excerpt example. Using this excerpt as a model, three additional practice methods will be introduced. Example 2.5 demonstrates that the excerpt contains numerous continuous triples, comprised of quarter notes and half notes, and was composed in 3/4 meter. The first two practice methods introduced for Rossini’s overture *La Scala di Seta* would not work as effectively on this excerpt.

The fourth practice method is intended for successfully performing groups of running triplet. The approach in this case is to play every measure that contains three quarter notes in the syncopation shown in Example 2.6.

Example 2.6. Bizet’s *Symphony in C* Practice Method 1

![Example 2.6. Bizet’s *Symphony in C* Practice Method 1](image)

The fifth method will be approached in two steps. The first step is to change all the half notes into two repeated quarter notes. The second step is to change the meter into 2/4, and change the last two quarter notes into eighth notes. It should look like the Example 2.7.
Example 2.7. Bizet’s *Symphony in C* Practice Method 2

The sixth practice method should be very easy to follow but will be just as helpful and important as the fifth practice method. In contrast to the fifth method, Example 2.8 is altered so that the first and second notes of each measure are changed into eighth notes.

Example 2.8. Bizet’s *Symphony in C* Practice Method 3
The same methods can also be applied when working on other fast moving passages, such as the tutti section of *Don Juan*, a tone poem composed by Richard Strauss, Example 2.9.

Example 2.9. Richard Strauss’s *Don Juan*

It is imperative when executing the above practice methods that the performer practices all the excerpts with a metronome. Excerpts such as *Don Juan* especially require the use of a metronome during practice. A candidate who does not convincingly distinguish the dotted rhythms as different from a triplet feeling in performance is not prepared to make a successful audition appearance. Regular and conscientious use of a metronome in practice will help achieve success in this area.

The most problematic technical aspect to consider in the above excerpt, Example 2.9, is the eight groups of running triplets. It is essential to practice each group slowly...
from the beginning. Five different practice methods will be provided through illustration as followed.

The first method is to change every second triplet eighth note into a dotted sixteenth rhythm as seen in Example 2.10.

Example 2.10. Richard Strauss *Don Juan*, Practice Method 1

The second method will be similar to the first method except the dotted sixteenth note rhythm must be reversed, Example 2.11.

Example 2.11. Richard Strauss *Don Juan*, Practice Method 2

The third method involves changing all the groups of triplets into syncopated rhythms as shown in Example 2.12.
Example 2.12. Richard Strauss *Don Juan*, Practice Method 3

The fourth method involves changing the first note of every single group of triplets into an eighth note and changing the other two notes of the same triplet group into sixteenth notes, Example 2.13.

Example 2.13. Richard Strauss *Don Juan*, Practice Method 4

The fifth method shown in Example 2.14 is to change the first and second notes of the small triplet group into sixteenth notes and keep the last note of the triplet group as an eighth note.


“Double tonguing can be used on the dotted sixteenth notes after the high E and start the high Bs written in the original part. By doing so, it will help to improve the
clarity of the articulation and accents, especially in a large space” exclaimed Joseph Robinson in a master class session.35

Example 2.15. Maurice Ravel’s *Le Tombeau de Couperin*

In his orchestra oboe audition CD John Mack states, “I can assure you, it is easier to play in the orchestra than it is by yourself”.36 This comment would not only be a very precise description of all the excerpts mentioned so far, but a perfect warning for the candidates who are looking forward to preparing the opening solo excerpt in Maurice Ravel’s *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Example 2.15. Joseph Robinson commented regarding this opening solo: “This excerpt is going to be asked on most oboe auditions, it

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35 Joseph Robinson, “Audition Advice” (lecture, Manhattan School of Music, New York, NY, October 11, 2002).

will be smart and worth one’s time to put it under the telescope, and work on every single note.” 37

This solo excerpt is one of the most difficult oboe excerpts to prepare for an audition. By looking at the illustration above, the notes may not seem as difficult as the excerpt from Don Juan. It also appears to incorporate fewer accidentals and a smaller tessitura than may be expected. Some individuals may question why such an excerpt should have such high importance in auditions. Having the opportunity to prepare and perform this excerpt on several auditions, the author realizes and believes that a multi-task mixture is what makes playing the excerpt such a challenge.

Since the focus of this section is to improve fingering techniques, the author will introduce some practice methods to help strengthen fingering techniques. Other practice methods dealing with other playing tasks will be mentioned in later sections.

Running sixteenth notes are the foundation of this excerpt. The performer must primarily focus on this critical aspect in order to convey a sense of ease and confidence to the audition committee when performing this solo under pressure. Fortunately, because of the nature of the notes and meter of this excerpt, all the practice methods mentioned in the earlier section of this investigation can be effectively applied during the technical preparation of this piece. All the practice methods discussed above appear in the examples below for Ravel’s Le Tombeau de Couperin, Example 2.16 to Example 2.21.

37 Joseph Robinson, “Audition Advice” (lecture, Manhattan School of Music, New York, NY, October 11, 2002).
Method one:

Example 2.16. Maurice Ravel’s *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Practice Method 1

Method Two:

Example 2.17. Maurice Ravel’s *Tombeau de Couperin*, Practice Method 2

Method Three:

John Mack elaborates that, “the fifth and sixth bars are the most problematic of all because my fat fingers might get tied up sometimes.”

For this reason, the following two measures in Example 2.18 serve as a sample that require method three for preparation practice.

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Example 2.18. Maurice Ravel’s *Tombeau de Couperin*, Practice Method 3

suggested practice method:

First time: \( \text{\includegraphics[width=0.3\textwidth]{example1.png}} \), Second time: \( \text{\includegraphics[width=0.3\textwidth]{example2.png}} \),

Third time: \( \text{\includegraphics[width=0.3\textwidth]{example3.png}} \),

Fourth Time: \( \text{\includegraphics[width=0.3\textwidth]{example4.png}} \),

Fifth time: \( \text{\includegraphics[width=0.3\textwidth]{example5.png}} \), and so on.

Method Four:

Example 2.19. Maurice Ravel’s *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Practice Method 4

\( \text{\includegraphics[width=0.6\textwidth]{example6.png}} \)
Method Five:

Example 2.20. Maurice Ravel’s *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Practice Method 5

\[\text{Music notation}\]

Method Six:

Example 2.21. Maurice Ravel’s *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Practice Method 6

\[\text{Music notation}\]

Once the foundation consisting of the running sixteenth notes is well prepared, the candidate should start preparing the smaller detail of the excerpt. This occurs in measures two, four, ten and twelve, which have a grace note at the beginning and middle of each measure. The primary challenge of playing these measures is playing them in time with the correct rhythm. The following suggestion by John Mack is helpful in
developing the necessary technique for this passage of the excerpt, Example 2.22. He states, “You practice first without the grace notes and repeating the A”.

Example 2.22. Maurice Ravel’s Le Tombeau de Couperin, Practice Method 7

Another practice method that helps the performer to keep a steady tempo in these measures is listed in Example 2.23. After playing the grace notes along with the first two sixteenth notes, the performer rearticulates the following A as four repeated sixteenth notes. This practice method will improve both mental and finger control.

Example 2.23. Maurice Ravel’s Le Tombeau de Couperin, Practice Method 8

It is necessary to keep one’s hands and fingers as relaxed as possible when playing technical passages. Due to the mechanical construction of the oboe, keeping hands and fingers relaxed can be a challenge. The challenge for the performer is not just pressing the fingers down with ease, but also lifting the fingers back up with the same effortless technique and agility. This concept of finger and hand relaxation and agility is critical in the second measure of the excerpt as shown in Example 2.24. The longer sustaining dotted eighth A in measures two and four of the excerpt is simply a fingering action of lifting up the left hand ring finger.

Example 2.24. Maurice Ravel’s Tombeau de Couperin, mm. 1-4

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For the benefit of audition candidates, it is necessary to remind the performer that Ravel specifically asked all the grace notes to be placed on the beat.40

*Rapid Tonguing Passages*

Solo excerpts from Rossini’s *La Scala di Seta*, Debussy’s *La Mer*, and Mendelssohn’s *Scottish Symphony* will be the main focus of this section. Some explanation of basic articulation principles will also be provided as a part of this section. A helpful and effective peripheral exercise is to practice all scales and arpeggios in a tongued style on a daily basis. Understanding the principles of articulation and being able to use the tonguing technique correctly is essential.

“Slurred-Detached Articulation” is one of the lessons from the educational CD by Marcel Tabuteau. Tabuteau states, “With the problems of articulation, it is rather strange; you have to do the opposite of what you think to obtain the right results”.41 He further explains and demonstrates this point in the group of three notes shown in Example 2.25. It is a common mistake to think that the first two notes are slurred and the last one is detached. Tabuteau emphasizes, “The first note is *attacca*. The second note is the only one slurred!”42 Tabuteau advises using an articulation that resembles “Tee Long Taa”. This tonguing practice and performing method is used by Tabuteau to effectively obtain desired results when executing the three-note passage that is shown in Example 2.26.

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42 Ibid.
Example 2.25. Example of Articulation

“Tee-down! Long-down! Taa-up!” is a more detailed and clearer explanation offered in Tabuteau’s lesson. The “Taa” articulation is the only one within the group that serves as an up impulse. Its purpose is very clear, which is to serve as the preparation for the next downward impulse.

The method of articulation shown in Example 2.26 will help to create the correct articulation required by the composer. Through conscientious and dedicated application, this method will help the performer to achieve an ease of articulation that will help especially when a similar figure is demanded repeatedly.

Example 2.26. Tee-Long-Taa Method

Applying Marcel Tabuteau’s insights of articulation from his lessons as a principle, the author will elaborate some suggestions of articulation in dealing with various articulated combinations. These suggestions appear in Examples 2.27 – 2.31.

Example 2.27 suggests how to articulate two slurred and two tongued patterns as one rhythmic figure. The author would like to clarify that in the following examples, “D” is an indication of downward inflections, and “u” stands for upward inflections.

Example 2.27. Articulation Method 1
Example 2.28 suggests how to articulate three slurred and one tongued patterns as one rhythmic figure.

Example 2.28. Articulation Method 2

Example 2.29 suggests how to articulate one tongued, two slurred and another tongued as one rhythmic figure.

Example 2.29. Articulation Method 3

Example 2.30 suggests how to articulate one tongued and two slurred as one rhythmic figure.

Example 2.30. Articulation Method 4

Example 2.31 suggests how to articulate one tongued and three slurred as one rhythmic figure.
Example 2.31. Articulation Method 5

There are a handful of successful players whose tonguing speed is naturally very fast. As a result, these players have never felt the necessity to learn the double-tonguing technique. Many players’ natural tonguing speed is not fast enough to execute certain excerpts in the required tempo. In these cases it is critical to learn how to make appropriate use of the double-tonguing technique.

The first thing to do when learning a new skill is to gather as much information and insight about that skill. The online dictionary Dictionary.com defines double-tonguing as, “To interrupt the wind flow by moving the tongue as if pronouncing t and k alternately, esp. in playing rapid passages or staccato notes on a brass or wind instrument”. 43 The definition clearly states that the most common syllables for double tonguing are “Te” and “Ke”. It also reminds one that the technique of double tonguing is an interruption of wind flow. It may be worthy to stress the point that wind flow is the primary source of sound when playing a wind instrument. Any level of technical finesse and virtuosity that is supported by an insufficient wind flow is pointless.

The action of double tonguing on oboe can be understood in greater detail. At a slower tempo in practice, double tonguing requires four movements to complete. The first movement is articulating the “T”, is the first single letter of “Te”, which simply

starts the first staccato note. The second tongue action “e”, is the second letter of “Te”,
may seem trivial but it is critical in establishing the end of the first movement of the
tongue and placing the tongue in position for the third tongue motion that starts the next
note. The third tongue action “K” is also the first letter of “Ke”, which triggers the
beginning of the second note is the result of a fast and focused air stream. “e” is the
fourth, final tongue action and the last letter of “Ke”, is the concluding syllable which
stops the second tongued “K” articulation and immediately prepares the tongue to repeat
the four-step process. If double tonguing is used continuously in a fast allegro tempo, the
second tongue action “E” may not be apparent at all. In this sense, fast double tonguing
could be construed as a three-step process of “T”, “K”, “E”, instead of the outlined four-
step process.

The “K” syllable is comparably weaker than the “T” articulation. The energy
source for tonguing is a combination of air and tongue, but the drive for the reactive “K”
articulation is only based on air articulation. A considerable effort is required to balance
the volume of the two articulated tongue motions “T” and “K”. In most cases it is the
“K” motion of the double tongue method that requires additional strength and attention to
air usage. The following examples, 2.32 through 2.36, provide practice methods in
developing suitable double-tonguing technique.

Example 2.32. Double Tonguing Practice Method 1
A majority of oboe audition candidates choose to employ double tonguing technique when performing the solo at the beginning of the allegro section from Rossini’s opera overture *La Scala di Setta*. The articulation suggestion provided by the author in Example 2.37 is optional.
Example 2.37. Optional Articulation for Rossini’s *La Scala di Setta*

Notice that the notes marked with an accent need to be emphasized. This will serve the purpose of maintaining musical flow as well as show the sense of pulse. The author would like to clarify that showing the sense of pulse while playing does not mean playing the music at a slower tempo or with steady pacing. Playing the music in a steady tempo will provide the educated listener an impression of superb rhythmic control. Bringing out the sense of pulse while playing will help distinguish the musical style of a particular work to the audiences or committees.

Example 2.38. Rossini’s *La Scala di Setta*, mm. 15-16

Example 2.38 outlines one of the most challenging sections from the excerpt. It is essential to keep the tempo steady all the way to the low C. Also, it is expected that the player will perform this excerpt in one breath. Since this spot occurs at the end of the excerpt, a common result is that the tempo may be rushed during these two measures.
One should try his or her best to play these two measures with a steady tempo and show the musical pulse as clearly as possible.

Furthermore, it is extremely difficult for players to articulate all the notes in such a fast speed with clarity, especially towards the end of the descending scale. Two solutions will be suggested in dealing with this task. The first solution is to try to play a crescendo all the way through these two measures. In order to increase the volume, players should try to open or loosen their embouchure while increasing the amount of air going into the reed. A reasonably less tight embouchure will allow the reed to vibrate and respond quicker. Increasing the speed of air efficiently will always help to produce sound from a wind instrument.

The second suggestion is to gradually push the reed against the upper lip starting from the second measure in Example 2.38. This will help to effectively improve the security of low range attacks. This technique will be mentioned again and explained in greater detail in the next section of this chapter.

The excerpt taken from Debussy’s *La Mer*, Example 2.39, will often cause extensive trouble in auditions, specifically for those candidates who choose to play the excerpt exactly as it is notated.

Example 2.39. Debussy’s *La Mer*
It is impossible to know how lenient and understandable the audition committee will be in deciding what they discern to be the definitive interpretation of the excerpt. One should be cautious when adding slurs to an excerpt passage to compensate for a lack of tonguing ability. Also, because the triple tonguing technique can be difficult to master on woodwind instruments, particularly the oboe, it may not be the solution to deal with passages involving odd-numbered fast staccato notes. On this issue, we again should be reminded of the comment by Richard Woodhams of the Philadelphia Orchestra in a master class session, “The candidate who plays everything printed on the page will mostly advance to the later rounds”. Based on this comment, one should realize that when in doubt and when the performer is trying to persuade an audition panel, it is favorable to play the music as it is printed. In other words, editing or changing any tiny part of the original work may be viewed as cheating or a disrespectful action to the composer. The author is going to provide the most effective solution based on real audition experience, Example 2.40.

Example 2.40. Playing Method for Debussy’s _La Mer_

Suggested playing method:

![Suggested playing method](image)

Not suggested for any audition:

![Not suggested for any audition](image)

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The methods shown in Example 2.40 suggest applying the double tonguing technique when playing through the excerpts. The fast tongued sixteenth notes may first appear to be four groups of triplets. However, these twelve sixteenth notes can also be divided into six separate groups, which make using double tonguing possible. Candidates should be aware that even when the utilization of double tonguing makes this excerpt playable, one should still try to convey a sense of triples as the correct musical pulse. This would require the ability to play the K syllable with equal force to the T syllable in order to present the proper accentuation with alternating T’s and K’s on the first notes of triplets. Examples 2.32 through 2.36, the double tonguing practice method introduced previously, are some helpful exercises which would help the players to achieve this skill.

Rushing the tempo may be another problem that might occur when applying the double-tonguing technique. The performer should be aware that when a passage is played by double tonguing, it may feel a lot easier to double-tongue than to maintain the use of single tonguing. Additionally, the purpose of the double-tonguing skill is so that the music will be played accurately when fast articulation is notated. The last excerpt presented for the purpose of learning to apply the double-tongue technique is from the second movement of Mendelssohn’s *Scottish Symphony*, Example 2.41.

Example 2.41. Mendelssohn’s *Scottish Symphony*, mvt. 2
The usual tempo marking in this excerpt is quarter-note equals 126, however this is rarely considered the ideal tempo for orchestral performances. Even though the preferable tempo for most conductors is considerably slower than the printed tempo marking, it should not be considered an effort in futility to learn this excerpt at the printed tempo. The candidate should always be well prepared for unexpected audition situations. For instance, when listening to this particular excerpt, an audition committee may be interested in discerning the performer’s technical limitations. It is not abusing the rights of the performer for the audition committee to ask the player to repeat the excerpt again with an even faster tempo.

There are two different approaches that are effective in applying the double-tonguing technique in the *Scottish* symphony excerpt. The first approach is to apply the double-tonguing technique to every one of the articulated sixteenth notes, Example 2.42. This approach is strongly recommended by Joseph Robinson. He impressively and successfully demonstrated this in one of the master class sessions that he held in his career.\(^{45}\)

Example 2.42. Tonguing Method for Mendelssohn’s *Scottish Symphony*, mvt. 2

\(^{45}\) Joseph Robinson, “Audition Advice” (lecture, Manhattan School of Music, New York, NY, October 11, 2002).
If one wishes to learn and use the approach provided above, it is essential to be able to accurately begin the double-tongue technique on a “K” attack instead of the “T” attack. This is necessitated by the transition from the three tied notes (A, E and G) into the articulated sixteenth notes that follow as shown in Example 2.42. An effortless and appropriate interpretation is only possible when the performer is suitably accustomed to this unusual articulation sequence.

The second approach to deal with the excerpt will only work when the performer is capable of single tonguing the passage in the required tempo for the duration of at least three consecutive sixteenth notes, Example 2.43. In contrast to the first approach, the main advantage to the second approach of single-tonguing is that it may save precious preparation time before auditions if double tonguing, as used in the first approach, hasn’t been mastered to its full benefit.

Example 2.43. Tonguing Method for Mendelssohn’s *Scottish symphony*, mvt. 2

*Extreme Register Note Release*

The low register response issue on the oboe is problematic even to some of the most advanced oboe players. Audition excerpts are to be played in real time as if it were performed in a life concert, without any delay for low note response. This issue is just as critical in an audition situation as in live performances.
Before proceeding with the discussion concerning tonguing attack problems, a couple concepts will be presented on how to release notes. Jay Light offers the following insight regarding the release of notes. Light explains, “Your tongue starts against the front of the roof of your mouth, right behind your upper teeth. At the moment you want the sound to begin, the tongue is pulled back, and the air pressure you have built up behind your tongue is released”.  

Example 2.44. Strauss’s *Don Juan*

A common note release approach that many oboists are taught is a “three-stage attack.” The first stage is to take a breath. The second stage is to set the “ideal” embouchure, position the tongue on the reed and blow. The third stage is to release the tongue. With this awareness, the player should be encouraged to use a “two-stage attack” approach in order to reduce the risk of unwanted accents. Jay Light describes this

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46 Jay Light, *Essays for Oboists* page 53-54 (Des Moines, IA: Drake University, 1983), 53-54.

47 Ibid., 55.
approach as taking a breath as the first stage, and releasing the tongue and air at the same
time as a second step.\(^{48}\)

The lyrical solo oboe excerpt between music letters L to N of Don Juan by
Richard Strauss as shown above is one of the most popular lyrical excerpts to be asked
for in auditions, Example 2.44. The two low D’s, in measures one and seventeen,
represent a challenge in low register note release. This passage may not be problematic
during a practice session, but there is an increased likelihood of stress in a live audition or
concert setting. The successful execution of the solo in a stressful setting will define
one’s true mastery of this solo.

Light asserts the importance of a consistent attack on the low D’s in this excerpt.
He comments, “If you can attack low D’s consistently, even loud, you have figured out
one of the hardest parts of playing the oboe”.\(^{49}\) This statement reflects the importance
and difficulty of securely releasing the low D’s. Joseph Robinson introduces one concept
of playing that can be valuable for dealing with the attack issues presented when playing
the low D’s. Robinson states, “One should try to push the reed against his or her upper or
lower lip when starting notes; I pick the upper lip for the lower register.”\(^{50}\) This idea was
presented in a Master class setting. Pushing the reed slightly against the upper lip while
releasing the air and tongue will help to increase the consistency of starting the low
register notes. One should be aware not to apply too much force when pushing the reed

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 56.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 54.

\(^{50}\) Joseph Robinson, “Audition Advice” (lecture, Manhattan School of Music, New York, NY,
October 11, 2002).
against the lips, because the opening of the reed will be improperly closed when too much pressure is applied.

The author would like to add that the “ideal” embouchure may not necessarily be the exclusive embouchure setting and it may even involve a biting action. A biting action may cause an improper bend in the opening of the reed. This may further result in an increased difficulty to produce a consistent and secure attack. For this reason, the performer must be discouraged from biting on the reed when trying to release notes. This common note release approach often produces an unintentional accent at the beginning of notes which makes it less appropriate for low note production.

Releasing high register notes in time and with delicacy is another formidable challenge for oboe players. The solo excerpt from the third movement of Shostakovich’s Symphony No.5 will be borrowed for this discussion, Example 2.45.

Example 2.45. Shostakovich’s Symphony No.5, mvt. 3

\[\text{Example 2.45. Shostakovich’s Symphony No.5, mvt. 3}\]

The idea behind the first method of high note release is derived as an extended interpretation from one of Robinson’s previously mentioned recommendations on releasing low register notes. His previous statement regarding low register release conveys to the performer a similar approach to releasing high register notes. It implies that the player should push the reed against the lower lip for releasing notes in the high register.

The second method is also an extension of previously introduced method. When trying to release the high C, one should not only push the reed against the lower lip, but
also pull the lip muscle towards the corner of the mouth. In other words, one should imagine making a smiley face with the embouchure while pushing the reed against the bottom lip. Setting the embouchure this way will result in more high vibration out of the reed which will greatly increase the security of the pitch when releasing the high C’s.

The difficulty of releasing the three high C’s is because of that note’s overt resonance. The high C’s are rhythmically placed as pickups and have to be released with a sense of delicacy.

The author suggests making a slight change from the “Two-stage attack”.51 The suggestion is to keep the first stage as it is, but eliminate the tongue action while releasing the air at the completion of the second stage. The challenge for the performer in this approach is that the elimination of the tongue action will necessitate great skill in manipulating the air and embouchure usage to start the note in the correct time spot. The timing of the attack and the immediacy of the release will be the critical skill that needs to be accurately executed. In order to accomplish this, the performer will need to dedicate sufficient practice to acquire the desirable control of this technique. Make the adjustment described above and breath into the reed rather than build up pressure with the tongue on the reed. A slight shutting of the reed aperture with the lips may make this approach more consistent.

Extreme register note release problems and challenges may not always occur in the beginning of a phrase. In most cases, slurring or leaping from the high or middle register to the lower register will be just as challenging. One of the many well-known audition excerpts from Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella* serves as an example to introduce a couple of practice methods in dealing this problem, Example 2.46.

51 Jay Light, *Essays for Oboists* (Des Moines, IA: Drake University, 1983), 56.
Example 2.46. Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella*

The three low C’s at the end of the first three measures from the excerpt in Example 2.46 may present difficulty to the performer. Since the first three measures of Example 2.47, all begin in the middle register, it is not necessary to play the entire measure with the embouchure and reed placement as though it were starting from the low C. The challenge is to successfully leap down from the middle C to the C an octave lower with consistency. A couple methods will be suggested to help players achieve this goal.

Example 2.47. Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella*, Excerpt, mm. 1-3

The first method is intended to help successfully release the low C from the middle register. In this case it is the middle C. The player should say “TEEEY-YAAAH” while playing through this interval.52 “TEEEY” is assigned to most of the former notes before getting into the lower register notes, “YAAAH” naturally will help to

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52 Jay Light, *Essays for Oboists* (Des Moines, IA: Drake University, 1983), 38.
create a larger space in the mouth. This will greatly increase the chance of successfully releasing the low notes in oboe playing.

Joseph Robinson offers the second method that will be introduced. He suggests that one should imagine that the lowest part of his or her chin is pointing towards the ground when playing or slurring from a higher register into a lower one. This action will also allow the player to gain enough space inside the mouth for the release of low notes as seen below, Example 2.48.

Example 2.48. Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella*, Excerpt, mm. 7-10

Intonation is another issue that a player should be made aware of when playing leaps either ascending or descending. The last three measures from the same excerpt present the challenge mentioned above. Pushing the reed downward and inward against one’s embouchure right before releasing will help to hit the correct pitch when leaping up to the high C’s from middle C. The author suggests to take a breath right after the first quarter note of the last measure has been played. This action will allow the player to gain some time before playing around the area near the tip of the reed. This is often forgotten after one has played around the middle and high register for a while.

Jay Light offers additional tips regarding sound production. He writes, “Good support and speed of the wind is the answer for evening out the sound and getting rid of any quivering or vacillation of the pitch. Also, committing to memory the exact pitch is of great importance.”53

53 Ibid., 38.
Melodic Passages

Long tone practice will help players to gain playing endurance so that longer phrases can be effectively performed. However, such capability is not the only requirement for performers to present melodic passages with expressiveness. There are certain basic elements that a performer needs on an instrument in order to convincingly display musicality in lyrical passages. These elements include the changing of dynamic, color, and musical direction. String players create these effects mainly with superb and flexible control of their right hands. Marcel Tabuteau clearly expounds upon a connection between wind playing and bowing. He writes, “Wind control is equivalent to the bowing distribution on the string instrument.”

Excerpts such as Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 4 and the second movement of Brahms’ Violin Concerto all share the common difficulty of wind control. Marcel Tabuteau offers insight into effective playing technique methods to achieve the expressive potential of lyrical passages. His suggested phrasing methods are the most effective playing techniques to achieve and express the musical demands when performing these audition excerpts: these are the number system and the method concerning the inflection distribution. Combining both phrasing methods, the number system and the idea of inflection distribution, is most effective; however, in order to do that, one has to understand each of them separately.

The oboe solo excerpt from the second movement of Rimsky-Korsakov’s Scheherazade is an ideal example to consider when trying understanding the number system. The numbering system is especially helpful when performing a musical line

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without a clear indication of dynamics or phrasing characteristics. Example 2.49 demonstrates the phrasing skill to be used to maintain a lively and animated melodic line.⁵⁵

Example 2.49. Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Scheherazade*, mvt. 2

If one were trying to apply the number system when playing the first five measures of the excerpt above, it would appear as: 112 223 33 4 3 11 2 2233 2. In addition, Marcel Tabuteau states, “Remember the progression of the numbers is not exactly a crescendo or diminuendo. It is rather a scaling of color”. In other words, as the number sequence increases or decreases, the dynamic volume of the passage and the intensity of the tone color should also increase or decrease. A further explanation of this idea would be the lower the number, the more quiet and dolce the note is played. A higher number signifies more volume and more brilliance. Tabuteau combines those elements to produce scaling of colors.

Every meter contains a natural musical pulse. Composers choose the meter which best serves their composition purposes. Such compositional freedom and tendency is frequently found within contemporary works. Contemporary and even late Romantic era composers have used mixed meters to more specifically convey the musical pulse in their writing.

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It is the musician’s responsibility and in their best interest to present the music with close adherence to the composer’s original intentions. Inflection distribution is one of the most helpful phasing methods to understand and consider. It is helpful in terms of showing the musical pulse represented in various compositional meters.

Inflection can be understood as up and down motions occurring naturally within the musical meters. The first few measures of the well-known lyrical solo from Strauss’s tone poem *Don Juan* is a perfect example in demonstrating the idea of inflection distribution, Example 2.50.

Example 2.50. Strauss’s tone poem *Don Juan*, Excerpt, mm. 1-10

The above excerpt in Example 2.50 is not rhythmically complicated. For this reason it is a very useful passage to introduce how to distribute inflections. The solo was written in 2/2 meter, which shares similar tendency of musical pulse as if it were written in 2/4 meter. It is commonly known that the musical pulse of 2/4 is a strong first beat, and a weaker or softer second beat. Tabuteau offers the following statement, “You must play the life of the note; keep the music alive.”56 In applying this concept of musical pulse to the Don Juan excerpt, it does not imply simply that the first beat is loud and the second is soft. Instead it tells us that no matter what kind of music one is playing, the motion or direction of the music must be presented as though the music has come to life and has a heartbeat of its own. When the phrasing concept along with the inflection

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phrasing technique is applied to the first melodic line of the excerpt, it could appear as shown in Example 2.51 below.

Example 2.51. Phrasing Method for Strauss tone poem *Don Juan*

![Example 2.51. Phrasing Method for Strauss tone poem *Don Juan*](image)

One should play the first half note D with an up inflection (u), motion to a note, to show that the musical motion moves from the weaker beat into the down beat or the stronger beat of next measure. Down inflection, landing on a note or repose, will be marked as (D). Vibrato is strongly suggested when playing longer notes such as the D’s from the second and the fourth measures of this solo. The vibrato technique is one of the most efficient playing options to apply in order to maintain a sense of forward motion to the music. The three quarter notes, D, E, and F sharp should be played as three ups. The syncopated figures that appear on the ninth and eleventh measure of this melody should be played with a downward motion on the half note and an upward motion on the following quarter note. In most cases, when a note is slurred through the beat or measure, it is suggested to blow an up inflection or apply a *poco crescendo* all the way through it. This will also maintain the musical motion and life of the sound that should be sustained when playing such notes.

The author will use the first two measures in the beginning of the oboe solo from the second movement of Brahms’ *Violin Concerto* as an example to explain how both phrasing methods can be combined into one concept, Example 2.52.
Example 2.52. Phrasing Method for Brahms *Violin Concerto*, mvt. 2

The top row, listed as inflection, below the music example suggests how one should show the musical motion through the method of inflection distribution. The bottom row, listed as number sequence, provides an idea of how to apply the number system.
CHAPTER THREE

PERFORMANCE INTERNALIZATION

The methodology of internal preparation for oboe auditions will be approached from three aspects: internal practice for fast moving passages; internal practice for slow melodic passages; and internal practice strategies as a rehearsal guide prior to the audition. These aspects are supported in many sources. These will include articles and books by Brad Howland, and Stuart Dunkel.

Internal Performance Practice for Fast Moving Passages

The author will provide detailed internal performance practice methods for the following excerpts: the overture to Rossini’s La Scala di Seta; the opening solo excerpt of Le Tombeau de Couperin by Maurice Ravel; and the tutti section from A to B of Strauss’s Don Juan. A few of the mental processes that will be discussed include a note grouping system, a dynamic system, and what to think of before playing.

The solo excerpt from the allegro section of Rossini’s La Scala di Seta is one of the most difficult audition pieces. Most audition candidates will only focus on solving its technical challenges in terms of safely playing the excerpt from the beginning to the end. Commonly, when preparing the excerpt, many players would forget how musically such a technically challenging excerpt could be presented in a performance perspective. Many times when the excerpt is played either in an audition or in a lesson, it is likely that the

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music could sound much like an etude. It is understandable if this is the outcome when dealing with the fingering and tonguing difficulties during the technical preparation stage of practice. More regrettably though, from a performance or an audition point of view, an etude-like impression may greatly affect one’s audition advancement. Some suggestions with accompanying verbal explanation that focus on performance internalization are presented in the examples below beginning with Example 3.0.

Example 3.0. Articulation Suggestion for Rossini’s *La Scala di Seta*

Suggested articulation when using single tonguing:

It is essential to play the first two eighth-notes in the same tempo as the rest of the excerpt would be played. Internally singing the last few measures from the previous violin *tutti* passage may be very helpful, Example 3.1. This will aid the performer in consistently starting the oboe solo in a comfortable and appropriate tempo.

Example: 3.1. Playing Method for Rossini’s *La Scala di Seta*
In Example 3.2, the candidate should try to play an up inflection through the first two notes of the solo to prepare the listeners for the high B. The appearance of the B is not only the first downbeat of the piece, but it also shows the musical pulse of the excerpt. The next eight notes in the second measure should be presented in a very steady tempo maintaining direction toward the C at the beginning of the third measure. By the third measure, the player must settle into the tempo that has been established and maintain this tempo until the end of the passage. The eighth notes occurring on the weaker beats after the quarter notes should be played with an upward motion towards the upcoming notes. This internal action will keep the player from rushing through the less technically complicated areas. Secondly, with the implementation of the up and down markings suggested from the examples, a sense of musical pulse and harmonic progression should result.

Example: 3.2. Phrasing Method for Rossini’s *La Scala di Seta*

The eighth measure to the eleventh measure should be seen as a section where the performer should emphasize the musical expressiveness of the excerpt. When asked to play musically, it is a common and arguably amateur performance tendency to interpret an imaginable *ritard* from the ninth measure into the tenth measure. The best choice is to keep the tempo steady unless the audition committee offers other instructions. The player may choose from several different ways to group measure eight and nine internally according to his or her comfort.
Example 3.3. Phrasing Method for Rossini’s *La Scala di Seta*

Example 3.3 outlines an important musical purpose. This example illustrates the purpose of creating a sense of direction toward the climactic solo passage in the tenth measure. According to the audition guideline mentioned by Richard Woodhams, “The candidate should play everything printed on the page.” With this simple statement in consideration, the author suggests playing the accent as it is marked. 59 Various choices of articulation regarding the eleventh measure of the excerpt have been played in auditions. One should not be overly burdened in determining which version of articulation should be played, as long as the measure serves its most critical function. Its purpose is to serve as a connecting point from the slurring section to the reappearance of the tonguing section, Example 3.4.

Example 3.4. Phrasing Method for Rossini’s *La Scala di Seta*
Note grouping, number system, and inflection distribution are the three primary essentials to follow regarding internalizing the performance options for the opening solo excerpt of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* by Maurice Ravel shown in Example 3.5.

Example 3.5. *Le Tombeau de Couperin* by Maurice Ravel, mvt. 1

First and foremost, one can never emphasize enough the importance of beginning with an acceptable and comfortable tempo. It is strongly recommended to create an internal starting routine that establishes an appropriate tempo to begin the excerpt. The indicated tempo marking, dotted-quarter note equals 92 on the metronome, may be too fast as a performance tempo. The tempo that appears to be chosen by performers such as Tabuteau and Mack also suggests a similar notion. According to their recordings, the tempo can be interpreted as dotted-quarter note equals 87 to 89. Robinson commented on the author’s choice of tempo. In a screened audition with the author performing the excerpt at the indicated tempo, Robinson noted, “The tempo is too fast. It sounded as
though you were playing an etude." The fast tempo marking can result in a performance that lacks the necessary musical interpretive subtleties including the ascending and descending flow of the passage.

A few suggestions of performance internalization using a combination of note grouping, number system, and inflection distribution will be provided in the following examples. Note-grouping suggestions are indicated by the brackets above each musical line in the musical example, Example 3.6.

Example 3.6. Phrasing Method 1 for Ravel’s *Le Tombeau de Couperin*

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The performance internalization that is recommended by Robinson in the example above is to group the six sixteenth notes within one slur as half down–half up. Grouping notes in this way makes playing three downward sixteenth notes and three upward sixteenth notes in the beginning melodic sequences easy to follow. The previously mentioned statement of Tabuteau, “Finger the notes with your fingers; tongue the notes with your tongue” is also reinforcing that it is critical that the dynamic assigned according the number system, should not be interpreted by the tonguing action of articulation. Measures seven, eight, and nine present an ideal place to apply the tonguing technique “Tee Long Taa”, which was previously introduced through musical Example 2.26 in the second chapter. Tabuteau introduced this in a lesson entitled “slurred-detached articulation”.61 Again, when performing the articulations as indicated, the tonguing action should not interrupt the player from presenting the dynamic marks printed on the score.

Example 3.7. Phrasing Method 2 for Ravel’s Le Tombeau de Couperin

The second way of grouping the six sixteenth notes is as shown in the Example 3.7 above. Grouping notes in this manner may create higher consistency for some candidates to help play the upward inflection more successfully. It is important to ensure that the “inner work” is prepared and ready to aid the performer in preparation for the

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next downward inflection that is played.\textsuperscript{62} It is most effective to perform measure five in a soft but secure dynamic level, with increased crescendo toward the end of measure six.

The eighth-note “A” appearing in measure seven and eight should not be played too softly. As the lowest note of both measures, it will sound soft enough in comparison to the others. Another problem that may occur when playing the A too softly in an orchestral setting is that the other instruments may cover the note. To correct this balance issue, John Mack recommends, “crossing out the diminuendo all the way down on the ninth measure.”\textsuperscript{63}

It is preferable for the solo to be played with one breath. It is not uncommon for a player to lose concentration and run out of air when reaching the end of the excerpt. The author encourages repeating the last full measure during practice, Example 3.8.

Example 3.8. Practice Method for Ravel’s \textit{Le Tombeau de Couperin}

![music notation]

Frank Rosewein, principal oboist with the Cleveland Orchestra, commented further on an intonation aspect of this passage. In a recent master class at the University


of Miami he cautioned, “The last note [F sharp] tends to get sharp on the oboe.” To correct this tendency, the player should try pushing the reed up slightly against the upper lip when the excerpt reaches the tenth measure. This will not only help with the intonation on the F sharp, but also with releasing the low notes.

The last fast moving passage that will be discussed is from the beginning tutti section of *Don Juan* by Strauss, Example 3.9. Normally, the candidates will be asked to play from rehearsal letter A to B, but the author has experienced being asked to play from the very beginning to Letter D. Therefore, it is strongly suggested to prepare the fast tonguing section right before rehearsal letter A. The double tonguing technique, mentioned in a previous chapter is strongly recommended when dealing with this section of the composition.

Example 3.9. Strauss *Don Juan*
Once again, internally preparing the tempo of the excerpt is a vital first step and should become an essential part of the practice routine for this excerpt. There is a phrasing concept in this excerpt that is difficult to indicate clearly on the musical example. It should nevertheless be explained in greater detail. The previous chapter discussed an oboe performance concept that focused upon keeping the longer notes alive and vibrant throughout their duration. Even in an excerpt of an exceedingly fast tempo, there is still an important contrast between shorter and longer note values. In the third measure of Example 3.9, the longer notes in the measure are; the high E dotted eighth note, and the high B slurred quarter note. When playing a dotted rhythmic figure such as the first beat of this measure, it is suggested to divide the high E into three sixteenth notes, and blow a tiny crescendo based on the number system as 123, and then play the C sharp, Example 3.10. This kind of internal work keeps the performer from compressing the note value. This technique will also facilitate in successfully sustaining the volume of the longer note.

Example 3.10. Phrasing Method Explanation 1

When dealing with cases wherein the quarter note is slurred into the next beat, one should consider using a similar method as presented in the previous example. However, since the note value is notated into the next beat, the first eighth note of the following triple figure should be regarded as the arrival point of the B, Example 3.11.
Example 3.11. Phrasing Method Explanation 2

The discussed approach may be regarded as too complicated. However, when the performer has grown accustomed to it, he or she may transition from being an undisciplined player to a sophisticated musician. Internally dividing all the quarter notes into triplet eighth-notes written in the excerpt is strongly suggested in order for the candidate to perform the excerpt with the correct note value, Example 3.12.

Example 3.12. Note Grouping Suggestion for Strauss Don Juan

The grouping option provided in Example 3.12 above, may help some candidates to play the running triplet figures in the beginning few measures. The author feels that it is more comfortable to play four groups of eighth-notes internally, instead of three groups of triplets based on how the excerpt is notated in the first few measures.

There are many different fingering options on oboe to choose from when playing the high notes involved in the excerpts. It is probable that different fingerings may work best on different types of oboes. It is essential that the individual performer determine which fingering choices are most suitable for their playing capability. This is especially critical when working on fast moving passages; there should be no unplanned fingering changes during practice sessions once the fingering decision has been made. Unfortunate
risks are involved if a fingering decision is made during performance. This seemingly miniscule level of oversight in preparation can negatively impact a candidate’s level of concentration, which is vital in an audition experience.

*Internal Performance Practice for Melodic Passages*

The oboe excerpt from the second movement of Brahms’s *Violin Concerto* is one of the longest existing lyrical oboe solos written for concertos. It may be a piece that is not strikingly challenging from a technical perspective. There are, however, several elements in this excerpt that challenge the musicianship of any candidate. Playing every note alone will not appropriately prepare any candidate to standout in an audition. Instead, some key points of musical internalization will be provided that will help to satisfy an audition committee.

The phrasing and grouping suggestions from a musical and performance perspective are going to be provided in the examples beginning with Example 3.13.

*Example 3.13. Phrasing Suggestion for Brahms’s Violin Concerto, mvt. 2*
It is necessary to offer an additional suggestion in the excerpt Example 3.13. Even though a diminuendo is notated under the F’s of measure five and six, the candidate should continue to maintain a forward direction sustaining quality. This will avert any undesired drop in melodic tension throughout these two measures. Changing the intensity of the vibrato on the F’s will create a forward sense of motion. This again will help the player to propel the melodic line through the measures. It will be beneficial to add a little embouchure vibration on the upward inflections to maintain energy and drive on the notes that occur on the weaker beats. The middle C from the eighth measure should be regarded as the end of the phrase; however, not too much time should be spent when ending the C in order to keep an appropriate sense of tempo. The performer should strive to hear the pitch of the high C and internally prepare the note release, while ending the musical phrase from previous measure. It is critical to sustain the note in the eleventh measure for the correct duration. This is especially vital when playing alone in audition situations.

The diminuendo, printed on most of the original oboe parts of this excerpt, should not occur too early when playing the F that is tied over from measure fifteen to sixteen. The three eighth-notes after the F must be played with a clear up inflection as intensification of the musical tension and in preparation for the reappearance of the beginning melodic sequence in the oboe solo.
The D flat at the end of measure twenty-two may have a sharp intonation tendency, especially on the descent from the upper register. To correct this, the performer should cover the half-hole a bit more with the fingertip. This should complement any other physical adjustments that are made to bring the pitch down.

Other instruments of the orchestra join the passage consisting of the last four notes of the excerpt. A new challenge is presented to the performer. After performing an extended cumbersome solo passage demanding tremendous endurance, the oboist must maintain proper control of consistent note releases. In solo playing every note is audible and the performer should be concerned with precise tempo and release. The same high level of concentration, attention to note release, and careful intonation, must be maintained when the ensemble section resumes at the end of the oboe solo.

Subdividing internally is a very helpful playing habit to develop not only for the purpose of winning auditions but also for rehearsals and performances. The author suggests counting two sixteenths when playing the eighth-notes in this excerpt. The same principle applies to quarter-notes that should be internally subdivided into two eighth-notes.

The miscounting of rests is one common mistake that is viewed very negatively by an audition committee. To avoid this, the performer should continue counting through the rests of their part. Another approach could be to sing the orchestra part. Either of these approaches should be emphasized in daily audition preparation practice. Regarding optional breathing points, the author suggests that as long as the breathing spot does not break apart a musical phrase, then the personal comfort of the performer should be primarily considered.
Example 3.14. Phrasing Suggestion for Rossini’s *Overture to La Scala di Setta*

The second melodic passage, Example 3.14, will be discussed in this section is the well-known opening solo from Rossini’s *Overture to La Scala di Setta*. The technically challenging passages that occur later in the allegro section can cause premature stress on the performer while performing the opening solo. This is a common distraction. Part of the stress may be the performer’s realization that the audition committee has the right to terminate an audition in progress if they are not minimally satisfied with the performance. It is equally important that the beginning of the solo is prepared and presented with an
equal amount of effort as the latter part of the excerpt. The expression, “Focus on the task at hand” should be reinforced during audition preparation.65

The author would like to add a few suggestions for the benefit of the candidates pertaining to Example 3.14. It is recommended to start the solo from the very beginning unless instructed otherwise. Starting the excerpt from measure four provides a clearer picture of the performance for the listener. Furthermore, starting from the beginning may make playing the upcoming melody easier to perform.

It should be expected that not everyone on the committee would be an oboe player. The other instrumentalists on the audition committee may not be aware of certain musical liberties that are assumed or allowed in this excerpt. It is essential to know that the votes of non-oboeists are equally important as the votes of the oboe players on the committee. For this reason, during preliminary rounds, the excerpt in Example 3.14 should be performed without the liberties that may be otherwise allowed in performance. The sixteenth-notes should maintain a sense of direction, but it is critical to stay exactly in tempo.

A combination of up inflection and vibrato is suggested on the pickup C and A from measure five to seven. This will be helpful in terms of presenting the musical motion and direction written in the solo by the composer. Robinson offers an important oboe-phrasing concept when assigning the dynamics for the ups and downs. He states, “The arrival point does not necessarily have to be stronger in volume than the buildup.”66

In measure eleven, the half-note D leading into the quarter-note C, presents a

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65 Joseph Robinson, “Audition Advice” (lecture, Manhattan School of Music, New York, NY, October 11, 2002).

66 Ibid.
special task of blowing through an interval. John Mack comments, “People tend to hide the C’s coming up and down anyway”. It is problematic on the oboe when the C is started too softly in comparison to the D. Joseph Robinson teaches a unique method in getting the proper sense of blowing through an interval change.

At first, someone has to hold down the left hand F key while a second person is fingering and preparing his or her air and embouchure for playing the middle E. The note should be played from piano to forte in the course of four slow beats. For the duration of these four beats, the person that is holding down the F key should release the key without any warning to the person playing the oboe. The performer may be surprised by the effect, but the result should be that the F is smoothly transitioned into the E without any gap. Another phenomenon that results is that since the air position and embouchure were originally set for the middle E, there are no physical adjustments required to achieve the intonation and tone color of the note once the F key is lifted.

The same playing concept can be applied to measure eleven. Towards the end of the D, change the air speed and position of the embouchure for middle C. Then, with consideration for an earlier statement, “…finger the note with your fingers…” simply finger C. It is important to remember that the C still needs to be tapered carefully within the right length.

The four beats of rest that occur before the half-note G in measure fourteen should be counted with strict precision. Another passage where the concept used in measure eleven can be transferred is the spot that includes a slur from the G to the high D. Setting everything up for the high D while blowing the G into the down beat of next measure will

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help to release the high note securely. Notice that since the high D is notated on the
weaker half of the first eighth beat in the measure; it should not be played with a bigger
volume than the previous note on the stronger half of the same eighth beat.

When the music reaches the high B on measure seventeen, the player should try to
avoid a dramatic dynamic change. Instead the concern should be to keep the clarity of
musical motion into the next measure. Joseph Robinson and Frank Rosewein offer
identical advice concerning ornamentation. They suggest that the ornamentation in the
eighteenth measure should be brought out of the texture. In this case, they refer to the
lowest note, which is the middle B.

The diminuendo that is printed on some scores beneath the last eight sixteenth-
notes of measure nineteen should not occur too soon or too dramatically. The breath
should occur on the meter change, and from a musical and performance perspective, it
should be taken quickly.

Example 3.15. Phrasing Suggestion for Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No. 4*, mvt. 2
The oboe solo comprised of eighty-eight notes that begins the second movement of Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No. 4* is considered a standard excerpt. The technical demands of control and flexibility in the oboe solo demonstrate the difficulty of the excerpt shown in Example 3.15. When performed with finesse and perfection, the result can be particularly gratifying in light of the complicated nature of this excerpt.

John Mack explains that other instruments share the similar melodic line. He advises, perhaps as a cautionary note, that careful attention should be given to the specific dynamic markings that are assigned to each part. The musicians should strive to interpret the composer’s intentions by carefully adhering to these specific shading contrasts in their parts.

It is important to understand the style and tempo markings that accompany this excerpt in order to adhere to the composer’s intentions with regard to the tempo and character of the solo. The tempo of the solo should not be too adagio. The composer indicates the following instructions: *Semplice; ma grazioso; and andantino modo di canzone.* This indicates that the solo should be played in a manner that is more song-like and approaching a vocal style rather than resembling an instrumental piece. John Mack adds additional insight into the interpretation of the character of the solo. He notes in performance, “…not to clip the slurs too much…because it is not a vocal thing to do.”

In addition to the tempo and character expectations of the above excerpt, it is essential to internalize the inner pulse of the solo before performing it. As seen in the three eighth-note anacrusis in the beginning of the solo, the sense of pickup should be conveyed and emphasized in performance, Example 3.15. It should become a routine for

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68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.
the performer to ensure that there is sufficient breath support to begin the solo. The chosen tempo should be comfortable and allow for correct interpretation of the character of the solo. One method that the author suggests for preparing the beginning of the solo is to slowly inhale to full capacity, then immediately tilt the head forward with a slight jerking motion. This may help to internalize the pulse of the three eighth-notes that comprise the anacrusis to the solo.

Example 3.16. Practice suggestion

![Example 3.16](image)

Candidates could follow the instructions in Example 3.16 as a practice method that will help to develop control and flexibility in order to improve the connection of the upward and downward inflections. The first step should be to slur through all six notes with the assigned dynamic numbers. Secondly, the performer should add the extra tonguing action that is required between the third and fourth notes. There should be no other obstacles that prevent successful use of the method shown in Example 3.15.

Vibrato should be used and understood only as an ornamentation technique. An inefficient or forceful use of the vibrato technique will hinder the clarity of the up and down inflections. The musical line may also be compromised with an inappropriate use
of vibrato. Nevertheless there is certainly an appropriate application to a well-executed vibrato. Example 3.17 will help to explore a few places where vibrato may be effectively inserted in performance.

Example 3.17. Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No. 4*, mvt. 2 mm. 1-7

The first spot where vibrato can be added is on the B flat in the first and fourth measures. This will help to give a sense of musical flow. The second spot that vibrato can be added is on the F in measure six. David McGill offers information advice on vibrato application. He states, “Gaps in scale-wise patterns can also indicate where groupings start and end.” The first note of the new group will be strengthened when vibrato is added to the F, which aligns on a weak beat in the measure, Example 3.18.70

Example 3.18. Phrasing for Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No. 4*, mvt. 2

Vibrato along with the up inflection that is indicated in the music example should be added for the last note of measures fourteen, sixteen and eighteen. This will help the

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player to achieve the crescendo required for those measures. In addition, it will aid in preparation for gaining enough volume for the diminuendos.

John Mack suggests postponing the diminuendo printed in measure nineteen. He explains that if the diminuendo is to be played where it is notated, the solo might get covered up in a symphony orchestra performance. However, in an audition situation, the candidates do not have to worry about being heard even though the solo ends on the less projecting register of the instrument. The task at the end of the solo is to smoothly taper the last note without any sense of ritard.

Internal Practice Strategies as a Rehearsal Guide Prior to the Audition

David McGill offers the advice that candidates should have the discipline to effectively prepare their daily routines so that it most nearly resembles an audition. He states, “Relying on inspiration to strike is a sure recipe for failure”.71 A few internal practice strategies as a rehearsal guide prior to auditions will be introduced and suggested.

Audition panels will frequently require candidates to play excerpts in a slower or faster tempo. Because the performer has prepared an excerpt at a certain tempo, it will be most uncomfortable to present the same excerpt at a different tempo than what they prepared. Several critical aspects can change when a player is asked to perform in a different tempo. The speed of the vibrato can be altered. The length of staccato notes can become questionable. Predetermined breathing places may be entirely useless. Even the length of rests and the character and style of the music may be affected. To some inexperienced candidates, such a minor change caused by the change of tempo may lead to a musically fatal mistake in auditions when playing excerpts. Brad Howland and Joseph Robinson both assert the need to adjust one’s practice routine for this possible

71 Ibid., 277.
audition scenario. To paraphrase their statements they say, “Practice all the excerpts with different tempos.”72

The author suggests that all excerpts should be practiced in three or four different tempo levels. The metronomic difference between each level of tempo should be around four metronomic numbers. For the speedy passages, the candidate should try to prepare playing the same excerpt at a much slower tempo while maintaining the same level of comfort and confidence. If the committee asks to play the allegro section of Rossini’s *La Scala di Seta* in a slower tempo than double tonguing may prove to be awkward. To address this possible scenario, single tonguing the excerpt in practice is a beneficial routine.

For audition situations, it is encouraged to perform all the slow lyrical excerpts on the faster side of the tempo indication. Playing the slow lyrical excerpts in a slightly faster manner is not intended to prevent breathing issues that may be encountered in an audition. Rather, the objective with this subtle audition technique is to create a sense of fluency and excite where normal orchestral accompaniment is lacking. Nonetheless, lyrical solos should also be prepared at a slower than indicated tempo in the event that it is asked for in an audition.

The three most valued friends of a musician are the tuner, metronome, and a recording device. Of these three, the tuner and metronome are arguably the most common practice devices utilized by musicians. However, a recording device should be considered as necessary as a tuner and metronome. Regular recording of practice sessions will reveal audible insights into a performer’s accuracy of intonation and rhythm.

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More importantly, it can aid the candidate in acquiring a suitable performance perspective to investigate their presentation quality of excerpts.

It is recommended to not mix the practice session with the recording session for the purpose of saving precious practice time before auditions. Time, energy, focus and patience may be consumed by the physical process of continually turning the recording device on and off. Time, energy, and focus are three primary elements that assure the quality of practice sessions. Also, the candidate should not try to record oneself when there are outstanding technical difficulties in the excerpt. This will merely serve to waste practice time. Recording sessions will directly improve technical performance abilities. Instead, as mentioned above, the recording device is a more useful measure of progress in excerpt preparation during the final stages of preparation.

One of the most indispensable internal practice preparation methods is to play mock auditions. Mock auditions should not be held at the earlier stages of the preparation period. Before trying to play in a mock audition, the candidate should have spent adequate time working on the required excerpts, so that he or she has reached a high level of consistency. The technical and musical preparation of excerpts should be near perfect when considering mock auditions. An unpleasant mock audition as a result of inadequate preparation may internally and negatively affect a performer’s performance confidence and momentum.

In establishing a mock committee for a mock audition, it should be expected that not all committee members must be experts of your instrument and repertoire. For the purpose of mock auditions in fact, they may not even all be musicians – merely discerning listeners will suffice. One of the most common mistakes that can affect
audition outcomes is when a performer tries to be better than themselves. According to David McGill, the secret of winning an audition is to “have a plan for every note you play”.73 David McGill urges performers to recognize that a mock audition is simply an opportunity to measure the musician’s performance plan when it is executed in front of an audience. Mock auditions do not need to serve a function of critical feedback. A mock audition is a practice tool that provides an imitated experience in order to improve the outcomes of a real experience.

When playing a real or mock audition, candidates should avoid doing things that have not been prepared in practice. It may also be effective to employ more avant-garde techniques toward audition preparation. One example of this could be to dress in formal audition attire during the mock audition preparation stage. The idea behind this is that any dissimilarity that occurs in a real audition can prove to be an extra distraction. To prevent foreseeable issues, audition attire should be warm rather than cold, and loose rather than tight. When a player feels cold, the result could be that the candidate is more susceptible to uncontrollable quivering – which can transfer to the tone quality. Looser clothing can free the body to comfortably convey body language in an unrestricted manner.

It is important to establish an internal preparation routine that focuses on the transition time between excerpts. The routine should attempt to keep the performer’s mind busy before, during, and after playing each excerpt. David McGill makes a comment that can be amended to support this suggestion. He writes, “Knowing what you will do at every moment of the music will keep you focused on your playing instead of

73 David McGill, Sound in Motion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 277.
on the audition situation.” 74 One of the ‘in-between-excerpt’ routines for a performer to establish is to consider the technical sections in regard to style, tempo, and other issues that are specific to each excerpt before starting the performance.

After an excerpt has been performed in an audition, the performer must not exert energy on past reflection. It is critical to focus on the upcoming task and excerpt. As long as the audition committee does not terminate the candidate’s right to continue, or does not ask for the excerpt to be repeated, than it is essential to maintain concentration on the present. David McGill suggests that it is in the performer’s interest to understand the human mind in regard to past and present focus capabilities. McGill writes, “The human mind can be aware of more than one thing at a time, but it cannot actively think of more than one thing at a time.” 75 This statement asserts the need to avoid the distraction of the excerpt that has been completed and to direct all active attention to the present task.

74 Ibid., 277.
75 Ibid., 277.
CHAPTER FOUR
CRITICAL FACTORS INVOLVING REED PREPARATION

The section of reed preparation for oboe auditions will include three aspects: cane selection; primary principles of a finished American-style reed; and critical factors involving reed preparation for audition purposes. Audition insights that address reed preparation will be cited from the articles and method books by Lindsey Berthiaume, Peter Hedrick, and A. J. Andraud.

Cane Selection

Oboe players not only have to spend much time and energy to prepare themselves on many performance aspects, but an equal amount of attention should also be directed toward reed preparation. It is common that oboe players feel confident and well-prepared to perform the physical requirements necessary for performance. However, fewer performers are confident in their ability to produce or acquire a suitable reed. With limited preparation time before an audition, candidates should develop a reed preparation approach that is more efficient and effective. A candidate’s time should be considered a valuable commodity, and if fewer hours can be spent on reed preparation, than more hours may be devoted to performance preparation.

The quality of the cane will directly affect the turnout of a reed. Knowledge of cane selection is an important step in reducing the time devoted to reed preparation. The first step of cane-selection is to examine the outside of the tube. The candidate should
ensure that the room in which they are working is well lit. If possible, the room should be one that is exposed to direct sunlight for maximum benefit.

The color of the tube surface reflects the age of the cane. If the tube color is greenish or yellowish, than it may be too young for audition use. This cane may be kept in a clear plastic bag and stored in a room with maximum sunshine exposure. If the tube color is dark brown, it suggests that it may be too old for consideration. The ideal color of tube is dark yellowish or golden. This color indicates the appropriate maturity and strength of the product.

The candidate should next examine the tube cane for any marks or scratches. This also reflects on the maturity of the cane. A cane that is scarred by marks will provide a softer tone color when it is stripped into a reed. Additionally, when a cane with excessive marks is stored improperly, than it is susceptible to damage by rotting. This type of cane should be carefully avoided.

When selecting usable pieces from gouged cane, one should pay close attention to the evenness of the fiber from the side that has been gouged. The quality of the inner fiber, because it is closest to the inner side of the cane, will designate how the tip will turn out. The tip is the most important part of the reed. The inside of each piece will eventually become the walls of the reed chamber, where most of the air will travel through when playing. The evenness and smoothness of the inside are of considerable importance.

Choosing the straight part of the tube cane before gouging will also save possible frustration for the latter part of the reed-making process. This can be done by rolling the tube on a flat surface within eye level in front of the light. The part of the tube that
blocks most of the light when touching the surface should be kept. This straightness of the tube will assure the tightness of the two blades of the reed. If the cane is not flat enough, the reed will have looser sides. This will directly affect the pitch stability. Furthermore, the blades might be too tight, which will leave the reed maker with a very tiny opening to work with. For the benefit of the readers, the picture below will more sufficiently explain the point.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{66} Jay Light, \textit{The Oboe Reed Book} (Des Moines, IA: Drake University, 1983), 34.
At the end of this section, the author will share a few insights about different hardness of cane. Cane that is either too hard or too soft should not be chosen when the candidate is trying to produce a high quality reed in limited time before an audition. Hard cane is always considered to produce a brighter tone color. It is the most challenging to work with. A reed made of hard cane will not only tend to have cracks or splits, but will also take a long time to break in. When time is not a great concern, making a reed with hard cane may be worth the effort. This type of reed may provide a longer period of service. On the other hand, cane that is too soft will not take too much time to work with, and for this reason, it is frequently recommended only for beginning players and reed makers. Reeds that are made out of very soft cane will have a shorter life. They have difficulty in settling down due to their wide grain and weak texture.

The candidate should choose the hardness of the cane that is somewhere between hard and soft. A cane that is not too hard or soft will take only average time to work with and it is not difficult to break in or settle down.

*Primary Principle of a Finished American Style Reed*

Before the existence of the American style reed, legendary oboe players such as Marcel Tabuteau and his teacher, Georges Gillet, were already internationally respected. This suggests that there is not necessarily a style of reed that should be considered the most superior or advanced. A significant element of reed style selection remains an individual preference based on comfort and suitability.

The author has had eight years experience playing and constructing European style reeds. More significantly, the author has been successfully making American style
reeds for fifteen years. Based on this experience, the insights regarding American style reeds can be considered valuable and accurate.

Crowing “C” in octaves simultaneously without too much physical force is probably the most distinctive characteristic of the American style reed after comparing all aspects with other styles. When a finished reed crows “C” in octaves, it will require less embouchure effort to place the pitch when playing the upper octave. According to Jay Light, a finished reed that crows below “C” will be flat overall in pitch and will sag in the upper octave.\(^{67}\) In America, it could be considered unstable. This tendency of flatness could be further exacerbated when playing without sufficient enforcement from the embouchure. There are remedies to overcome the problem of an unstable reed. One method could be to use a tight embouchure or simply bite the blades to raise the pitch up. However, issues of endurance and other musicianship problems could surface in the process.

Some American reed players, during their training, make and play on reeds that crow higher than “C.” The overall pitch on such reeds will be sharp, and they will not have good response when playing fast tonguing passages. Due to the lack of vibrancy and flexibility of the reed, the dynamic range will also be restricted. The problems associated with a reed that is too stable should also be a concern for American reed players and makers.

Instrumentalists from the most prominent orchestras have the ability to play \textit{tutti} accompanying sections with the most careful and soft dynamic, often marked \textit{piano dolce}. For the oboist, there should not be a dramatic contrast of the reed whether performing in an orchestra or an audition. Realistically the discipline required to ‘play on one bow hair’

\(^{67}\) Ibid., 80.
is not found in school orchestras or in some cases, in full time performing groups. Consequently, many amateur oboists attain their best results by playing on a reed that is too heavily built or very noisy.

Due to the reason presented above, it is necessary to examine the differences between playing in an orchestra and playing individually. Reeds that work efficiently and contain a comfortable resistance when performing with a regular orchestra in a large concert hall may sound too heavy and produce a sense of dullness in when performed alone in a smaller room. When choosing an audition reed, it is critical to find the right balance between quick response, blowing resistance, and pitch stability.

The candidate may try using the crowing method provided to monitor the condition of the prepared audition reeds. The first crowing test is for response. If the reed produces an effortless sound with minimal air and a relaxed embouchure, then it signifies that the tip of the reed is thin enough. Remember, the tip of the reed is the part of the reed that should vibrate first and allow quick response.

The second crowing test is to check on the heaviness of the reed. After the reed starts to make a sound with a small amount of air, then the performer should increase the air speed or simply blow more wind through the reed. If the crow comes very easily, it means that the reed might not be resistant enough to hold itself together when playing loud passages. If the crow never occurs regardless of the amount of air being blown then it may be an indication of too much resistant or stiffness in the reed.

There are two ways to check for the stability of a reed. The first way is combining both crow methods mentioned previous. If both the soft sound and the reed crow turn out to be “C” s, then the player should know it is a stable reed.
Another way to test the reed stability is to try to crow the reed with the whole reed up to the cork in the mouth. The performer should then try blowing with a full and open throat airstream. If the reed still makes a “C” sound, it may be considered a stable reed.

Maintaining a correct concept of tone production will be as beneficial for the candidate as being a skillful reed maker. A noisy reed may shout louder when playing within a group, but because it lacks focus in the sound, it may be difficult to use in audition settings and when performing solos in orchestra. Often when choosing or making a reed, oboists think of three aspects: darkness; thickness; and loudness. However, an oboe audition is not a competition of who can produce the darkest or loudest sound on the instrument. An ideal reed should neither contain too much harshness in the sound nor too much darkness or dullness. Too much harshness from the reed tends to be problematic when seeking a pure dolce tone color. Too much dullness tends to cause a depressed sound. Even if it does produce a warm color tone quality, the sound may not project in a large hall. It is important to find on a reed the best combination of response, pitch level, stability, and dynamic range, as well as the ideal tone quality. Marcel Tabuteau’s idea of tone is, “the quality that carries is the amplification of a dolce tone, the dolce tone is the nearest to zero…the louder you play, the less it carries.”68 This opinion from the master clearly indicates that projection and loudness within the tone are not the same.

Regardless of whether the reed produces a thinner and lighter tone, or darker and thicker tone, if there is no focus, core, or stability in the tone, the sound will not project. An example mentioned by Robert Weiner is very helpful when trying to further

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understand tone concept with regard to projection. Playing an unfocused sound is like hitting a big beach ball - the ball will not travel far at all. On the other hand, playing with correct focus and solidity in the tone is like hitting a golf ball. It is much smaller in size, but will travel much further.69

Audition Advice Addressing the Preparation of Reeds

Choosing a reed to play for an audition is unlike picking reeds for any regular concert performance. A large variety of excerpts with different challenges must be presented in quick succeeding order. The reed chosen for a regular concert will be based largely on the particular type of concert music. There is the additional benefit of being able to switch reeds during the concert. Lindsey Berthiaume suggests that audition reed selection may require audition experience. This experience will help to determine the appropriate cut of the reed based on the audition music.70

A mixture of technical and lyrical passages will be included in every round of auditions. The reed should allow the candidate to be able to play everything that is required in each round. One should not be too concerned about being heard since everything is played alone. It is a better approach to play with a lighter, stable, and responsive reed than playing on a loud, heavy, and stiff reed. The darkness or warmness of tone color is not the primary concern in an audition situation. As long as there is focus and stability in the sound, than there should be enough attraction in the tone color for the listeners.


The use of a brand new reed should be avoided in auditions. Even a very well constructed new reed will go through some changes during performance. A dependable reed is prepared not just in its initial construction but also in its further usage in performance. This is called ‘breaking-in’ a reed. The ideal situations where a performer may choose to ‘break-in’ a reed may be in a rehearsal, practice session, or perhaps at a lesson. The reed should be understood to be a tool that allows the player to make music. In practice sessions though, most players will make adjustments to compensate for the imperfections of their reeds. It is essential to play with people whose primary focus is to make music. This is the ideal situation for making an honest determination if a reed is comfortable and suitable for the task.

A reed that is ‘broken-in’ will still change due to the change of altitude and humidity. How dramatic the change will be depends upon where the reed was made and where it will be played. It may not be possible to have enough time to make new reeds and break them in at the city where the audition is held. Therefore, the author recommends storing the audition reeds while simultaneously making and practicing on new reeds. The final adjustments the audition reeds, if possible, should be made the day before or even the day of the audition. The candidate should ensure that the knife is sharp. Major adjustments should be avoided on the audition reeds before the audition. This is especially important near the tip and heart areas of reeds.

There is a difference between playing on an older reed that has been well cared and maintained, and playing on a reed that is old and dirty. A poorly maintained old reed that has been preserved for an audition may function well for a short period of time. Of course, there is the danger that it may unexpectedly become dull sounding at any time,
therefore, an additional critical step in audition reed preparation is to keep the interior and exterior of reeds clean.

To avoid getting the reed dirty, it is imperative that the performer brush his or her teeth before performance. If a reed should get dirty, it should be carefully cleaned with soap and warm water. The inside of a reed should be cleaned with a pipe cleaner. After each performance, the reeds should be completely dried before placing them back in the reed case. Reed cases with air holes will help to prevent growth of mold.

Conclusion

*Basic Preparation for Oboe Auditions by Using Selected Oboe Excerpts* is intended as an audition preparation source for amateur oboe performers. The application of the three preparation techniques described in the document will help to reinforce the objectives detailed in each method. The three topics - *Technical Preparation, Performance Internalization, and Critical Factors Involving Reed Preparation* - should be periodically reviewed and reapplied for them. Serve as basic and foundation reference for higher level performers who are preparing to play auditions.
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