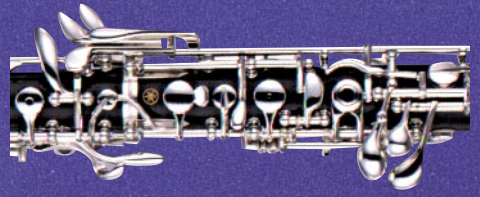




YAMAHA

Educator Series

WIND INSTRUMENTS



Oscar Petty

Oscar Petty earned his Bachelors Degree from Montclair State University under oboist Leonard Arner and a Masters Degree from Rutgers University Mason Gross School of the Arts under oboist Marsha Heller. Mr. Petty has recorded a CD with the Billings Montana Symphony and a CD featuring the music of composer Mario Lombardo. Mr. Petty has performed in the USA and abroad. He teaches at Arts High School in Newark, New Jersey and is a Yamaha Artist.

How to Select a Good Oboe and English Horn Reed

By Oscar Petty

The reed is the command center of the oboe and English horn. Therefore, it is very important to choose a good one. In my many years of teaching and performing I have seen professionals and students face difficult moments by playing on poorly made reeds. Reeds that are poorly made are unstable and lack focus in terms of tone production. Some students have wanted to stop playing because of bad reeds and bad instruments.

The reed plays a vital role in producing good tone quality, response, intonation and articulation. A good oboe reed normally will be 70 to 71 millimeters in length when finished and “crow” (sound) a concert C when blown into by the player. Most store bought reeds are of poor quality and rarely give the player what is required to produce good tone quality. When you visit the local music stores or mail order web sites you should ask for the best quality cane reeds that they have in stock. In most cases, the higher the price, the better quality of the reed. Reeds that are made out of synthetic materials are very expensive and produce a harsh tone quality and wild intonation (i.e. the “duck sound,” which is unacceptable). Therefore, it is advisable that students and directors stay away from using synthetic reeds. Another style of oboe reed that students and directors should avoid are those with a wire around it. The reed with the wire around it indicates that the blades of the reed will not close properly. Oboists often use the term “seal” to judge the quality of a double reed. If a reed has a poor seal it will leak air and be difficult to control; avoid this type of reed.

The English Horn reed is the exception to the wire rule; it requires a small wire around the base of the reed as part of its natural construction. Sometimes reed makers will wrap a thin piece of plastic near the bottom of oboe and English horn reeds to insure that the reed will not leak air from the sides. This is standard procedure for many reed manufacturers and no cause for alarm.

I recommend that reeds be purchased in bulk or a minimum of three reeds at a time. Reeds that are purchased at music stores and through the mail can vary in terms of quality from company to company. This is because the reeds may be made partly by hand and partly by machine.

Oboists must keep in mind that a brand new reed out of the box may not be a good one; you must try several reeds at a time and pick the one that sounds the best. A tuner can be used to check the intonation and pitch. A good reed should play at A=440-441 at room temperature. In terms of reed strength, beginning oboists should play on soft to medium soft reeds, medium hard for the intermediate level student, and for the advanced level student a harder reed. If a reed is too stiff, it can be adjusted by carefully scraping the tip and heart of the reed with an oboe reed knife. Remember that a reed that is too easy to blow will not produce a rich tone quality or good intonation.

Oboe and English horn reeds can be costly if you don't make your own. The average cost of oboe reeds is between seven and nine dollars. English Horn reeds cost a little more – about twelve dollars. All of these prices will vary depending on the vendor and quality.

I recommend that you encourage your students to seek out a private teacher that is student-friendly. A professional will be your greatest living resource guide. He or she will be able to tell you where to purchase quality reeds and cane. Finally, performing artists are known by the tone they keep; therefore, good tone quality should never be sacrificed. For more information log on to my web site at www.pettymusic.com.