

# The Clarinet

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Photo by Neal Postma

2018 American Single Reed Summit participants and faculty

## THE AMERICAN SINGLE REED SUMMIT

by Alanna Benoit and Karmin Mazzocchi

From October 25 to 28, 2018, Truman State University, located in Kirksville, Missouri, hosted approximately 300 attendees for the inaugural American Single Reed Summit. It was a success, featuring master classes, performances, lectures and workshops of all kinds. There were many featured international clarinet artists including Radovan Cavallin (Spain), Antonio Saiote (Portugal), Dominique Vidal (France) and Sarah Watts (U.K.), who each gave unforgettable performances and master classes. The summit was established by board members Larkin Sanders, Neal Postma, Kristine Dizon, Stacy Christofakis, Sara Eastwood, Scotty Phillips and Kevin Vorabout. Numerous Truman State professors and volunteers

helped to facilitate the event, including Jesse Krebs (clarinet) and Xin Gao (saxophone), resulting in a seamless and engaging experience for all who attended.

Well over 100 events took place, immersing each participant in the wonderful world of single reeds. Lectures on a wide variety of subjects were given, ranging from “How to Perform with Electronics” to “Humor in the E-flat Clarinet’s Orchestral Repertoire” to “Extended Techniques for Contrabass Clarinet.” Others included “Solo Clarinet Works by Women Composers,” “Never Have a Bad Reed Again,” and “Real-time Ultrasound Articulation Imaging.” Recitals of all types were performed each day, including world-premiere performances by The Room 9 Duo, Betty

Bley, and the Capstone Quartet (with clarinetist Osiris Molina), as well as a bass clarinet choir tribute concert to Harry Sparnaay. The exhibit hall was booming with excitement from a variety of vendors, including Lomax Classic, ReedGeek, Wiseman Cases, Buffet Crampon, Brian Corbin Products, Legere Reeds, SaxQuest, Vandoren, Silverstein Works, Lohff & Pfeiffer, Conn-Selmer, Rovner Products and Yamaha.

The goal of the American Single Reed Summit is to help foster deeper connections between clarinetists and saxophonists on all levels while creating meaningful musical experiences, and to this end it was a huge success. Participants left inspired and excited for the next summit in 2020!

# Pedagogy Corner

by Paula Corley, ICA Pedagogy Chair

## ALL IN GOOD TIME

*Strategies for improving rhythm with Michelle Anderson, Betty Bley, Paula Corley, Larry Guy and Jenny Maclay*

**T**he study of rhythmic pulse in music research literature is broad and ongoing. John Bipsham's study suggests that rhythmic pulse is unique to humans and evolved specifically for music.<sup>1</sup> The Phillips-Silver study found that only one participant from a large test group failed to find the "beat" when listening to music, but that same participant could synchronize with a metronome when no musical sound was present.<sup>2</sup> A colleague who recently served on a panel for hiring a new orchestral musician described the audition this way: "All of the finalists had great tone and technique, but the winner had the best rhythm." Despite the wealth of research and commentary on the topic, the question remains: *How do we strengthen our sense of rhythmic pulse?* This question was posed to a diverse panel of clarinetists representing different ages, backgrounds and experiences. The following suggestions for improving rhythmic pulse were collected through a series of email correspondences.

**Larry Guy** writes:

A sense of rhythm involves imagining with great clarity when the next beat will occur. Once one can anticipate its arrival with accuracy, it is relatively easy to place the notes going into that beat, so long as one's concentration is kept. This is a unique type of ongoing concentration and can be developed in time, even with students who are not particularly gifted rhythmically.

**Michelle Anderson** observes:

Many smart music students can figure out how a rhythm should go but they cannot keep a steady beat while trying to perform those rhythms. Other than the classic "speed up when it's easy and slow down when it's hard" it is common to hear a student who plays the rhythm approximately right because there is no underlying pulse to support it.

### 1. EMPLOY MOVEMENT.

There are many ways to incorporate movement into music learning, including tapping and clapping. **Larry Guy** acknowledges that foot tapping is a controversial topic. He states:

Many teachers forbid students to tap their feet. However, I find it to be of great benefit to students at a certain level

in their development. It allows the next beat to be felt with clarity. As the student matures, there comes a time when foot tapping is relinquished, but it can serve a useful purpose to the young player.

**Jenny Maclay** agrees and suggests that players "become physically involved with the rhythm. Tap your toe or use another subtle gesture to internalize rhythm." **Michelle Anderson** adds,

The more physical students are in pulse training, the more quickly and deeply they will learn this. My most effective pulse training exercises have students clapping and tapping rhythmic patterns on as many of their body parts as they are comfortable using. Tap a beat along with a metronome or recorded music... on forearms, knees, shoulders, head, thighs, and anywhere we can gently reach as we sit in playing position. There is something about literally feeling a pulse on different parts of our body that activates our brain to notice this pulse more keenly and learn it faster. For more advanced students, have one hand beating duple and the other triple.

### 2. UTILIZE THE METRONOME.

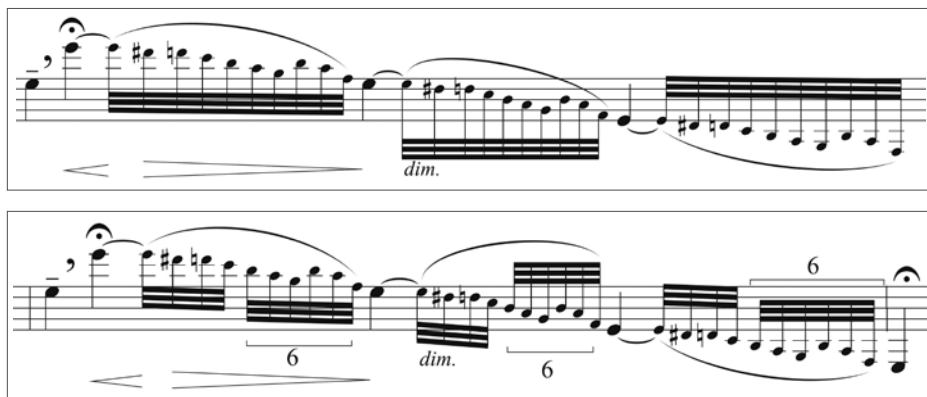
The panelists agree that the metronome is an important tool. **Betty Bley** states, "In my private studio, I insist on correct counting from the beginning. Even my youngest clarinet students are required to use a metronome during daily practice sessions at home and during their lessons with me." **Larry Guy** believes "The metronome is not a dictator, but rather a collaborator. The metronome will reinforce that sense of the next beat and aid in accuracy." **Jenny Maclay** suggests using metronome games to develop rhythmic skills and gives us an example:

Guess the Tempo. As the name implies, the object of this game is to guess the tempo of the metronome without looking. This will improve accuracy when performing a wide variety of speeds in music and is especially useful when sight-reading. Have your students not only guess the tempo but also assign it an Italian vocabulary word (*allegro*, *moderato*, *lento*, etc.).

### 3. SUBDIVIDE.

Larry Guy outlines specific techniques for successful subdivision:

Subdivide all compound meters. By subdividing them into the lowest common denominator, it becomes possible to keep the tempo steady and to stay accurate between beats. But don't just subdivide in the mind – lightly tongue the subdivisions to give much more clarity. Always subdivide large groups of notes into smaller groups and create as many different groups as possible. This will aid in achieving technical clarity as well as help the player direct the notes within a large group. This is especially helpful in cadenza-like passages.



Example 1a and 1b

Example 1a (as written) and 1b (practice suggestion); used by permission from Rose 32 Studies, No. 21, edited by Larry Guy (Rivernote Press)

Another strategy from Larry Guy is to “subdivide long notes before shorter ones and subdivide according to the note value of the shorter notes.”



Example 2a and 2b

Example 2a (as written) and 2b (practice suggestion); used by permission from Rose 32 Studies, No. 3, edited by Larry Guy (Rivernote Press)

Larry Guy emphasizes that “one must find the speed proportion between duple and triple and be able to shift from one to the other without changing tempo.” Paula Corley agrees, saying “the ability to maintain steady pulse in and out of changing subdivisions is an advanced skill that must be practiced. Teaching this skill away from the repertoire is a good option.”



Example 3; used by permission from *Daily Workouts* by Paula Corley

### 4. PAY ATTENTION TO SILENCE.

The panelists agree that players often lose rhythmic pulse during rests. Jenny Maclay reminds us to “avoid ‘resting’ during the rests. Just because you’re resting doesn’t mean you’re not accountable for good rhythm. Rests are also part of the music and thus part of the rhythm.” Larry Guy suggests that we “always sustain a longer note into a rest that follows it. This allows the player to sustain the tempo and prevents a moment of uncertainty concerning the next beat.” Paula Corley advises us to remember that “The tempo is established with the first breath before playing any phrase. Everyone should recognize the tempo from the preparatory breath.” The legendary Miles Davis said “Silence is more important than sound. It’s not the notes you play, but the notes you don’t play.”

### 5. USE NATURAL RHYTHM.

In his article *Rhythms of Learning* Brewer writes, “Our bodies pulse with the rhythm of breath, heartbeat, cycles of energy and attention, hunger, sleep cycles – every aspect of our existence flows with rhythm. While we may not be consciously aware... rhythms guide and direct our life.”<sup>3</sup> Larry Guy uses walking as a strategy:

Walk with the student across the studio, concentrating on seeing and feeling the moment of each next footfall. This is a method for developing the awareness of the oncoming beat. Once one feels the steadiness of the next beat, devise some easy rhythms to sing or clap into the next footfall.

Jenny Maclay says, “When the clarinet is not in my hands, I play the ‘air clarinet’ in time to my surroundings – ticking clocks, the turn signal on my car, or to the beat of a song on the radio.” Paula Corley allows students to find their natural tempo first. “Listen to prepared materials without an audible metronome first and determine ‘their’ tempo. Next, set the metronome at that tempo and have them play again. Assess, adjust, and develop a plan for gradually getting to the desired tempo.”

**6. EXPAND YOUR RESOURCES.**

**Betty Bley** suggests these tools for improving rhythm:

- The *I Read Rhythm* app (Rolf's Apps) is available for Apple and Android. "A drum head appears on the screen and participants are challenged to tap notated rhythms with the app metronome. Errors are indicated on the screen for immediate feedback."
- "Smart Music Classic (www.smartmusic.com) has 10 levels of sight-reading exercises that provide instant feedback on rhythmic accuracy. At the end of each exercise students see errors and receive a score. Students can repeat the exercise as many times as needed to improve accuracy."
- *Winning Rhythms*, a book by Edward Ayola (www.kjos.com), "guides students through very simple to very complex rhythms in a systematic manner."

For more advanced students **Paula Corley** suggests *Contemporary Rhythm and*

*Meter Studies* by Elliot Del Borgo (www.halleonard.com) as an "excellent tool for teaching complex subdivision in unusual meters. Etudes are reasonably short and there is a companion duet book where both players have equal roles."

Good rhythmic pulse is a skill that can be learned and maintained. **Betty Bley** believes "teaching correct rhythm requires a lot of patience and persistence," and reminds us that "if you invest in your students, everyone reaps the rewards when they succeed." **Jenny Maclay** adds, "Developing rhythmic precision and stability doesn't happen overnight – it takes deliberate practice over time." **Larry Guy** reminds us:

Rhythm constantly evolves. Evolution starts with the first note. Every subsequent note relates to notes that have preceded it. Phrases relate to each other as parts of a building and if constructed correctly, the musical architecture

can be seen and appreciated in an aesthetic way.

**ENDNOTES**

- 1 John Bipsham, "Rhythm in Music: What is it? Who has it? And why?" *Music Perception*, 24 (2), 125-134, 2006.
- 2 J. Phillips-Silver, P. Toiviainen, N. Gosselin, O. Piché, S. Nozaradan, C. Palmer, & I. Peretz, "Born to Dance but Beat Deaf: A New Form of Congenital Amusia," *Neuropsychologia*, 961-969, 2011.
- 3 C. B. Brewer, "Rhythms of Learning," retrieved November 16, 2018 from www.rhythmsandlearning.com.

**ABOUT THE WRITERS**

*Backun Clarinet Artist Michelle Anderson is from Vancouver and hosts a popular clarinet teaching site www.clarinetmentors.com, with excellent instructional videos and materials about playing clarinet.*

*Betty Bley is a successful teacher, performer and Vandoren Regional Artist in northern Virginia. Find Betty at www.theclarinetstudio.net.*

*Pedagogue and performer Larry Guy has served on some of the most prestigious music faculties in the U.S. and has several respected books and articles to his credit. Find Larry at lguyclarinet@gmail.com.*

*Jenny Maclay is a Vandoren Regional Artist and the author of the popular clarinet blog www.JennyClarinet.com. A graduate of the University of Florida and Versailles Conservatoire, she is currently pursuing her doctorate at the University of Montreal.*



*Paula Corley is a Texas music educator whose passion is clarinet. She is the "mayor" of Clarinet City (www.clarinetcity.com), pedagogy chair for the International Clarinet*

*Association and the clarinet instructor at Texas Lutheran University.*



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