

LOHFF & PFEIFFER (L&P) USA

New and used Instruments– Repairs - Optimization and Customization

How to find a good student clarinet (or upgrade an older instrument)

Introduction

As a student of the clarinet, the time will come when you decide to buy an instrument of your own. With a little guidance, this can be an exciting experience. A new instrument can help you explore new horizons, allow you to develop new skills and help you achieve your goals. Your new instrument will be like a best friend, and can be a path to a rewarding lifetime hobby, or even to a profession in music. Here at L&P we have been supplying quality instruments to students, teachers and professionals for over 40 years. Based on our decades of experience with players at all levels, we believe we are in good a position to offer some helpful advice. Many bad decisions are made simply due to a lack of information. In this article we are happy to share our observations, and help you avoid the most common mistakes.

Hidden Costs of Focusing on Price

Let's start with the primary, and sometimes only, consideration given to a purchase, namely the PRICE. Unlike many consumer goods, which are increasingly short-lived and disposable, buying an instrument is a decision you are making for the long term. Besides the upfront cost, consideration must also be given to the time and energy which you will invest in the instrument over many years. Too much focus on the initial price is a common mistake we see over and over again. A good solution doesn't need to be expensive, but a poor choice can be costly, not just financially, but also in terms of wasted time, frustration and disappointment. In the long run, you will find that initial costs will in fact be relatively low, when you recognize just how much time you will spend with your instrument.

Better Decision Making

The good news is that the best solution for each player is NOT the most expensive option. To make the right decision, you do however need to know a little more about the requirements, possibilities, advantages and disadvantages of some features, as well as the risks. You should also not overlook other experts that you have access to. Teachers for example often complain to us, that students show up with instruments they bought without consulting them first. As a parent or student, we would encourage you to share this article with your teacher. We would be happy to engage in a discussion with them about your needs.

What to Look For

"You need a reliable instrument, which will allow you to learn to play as quickly and correctly as possible. It should also be fun to play. If it doesn't sound right, you should make sure that it's not the instrument's fault." **Wolfgang Lohff**

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How Bad Habits develop

As a student or as a professional player, you will always have to spend a lot of time practicing. You will repeat things again and again. Learning to play an instrument is like learning a new language. You will have to listen to your teacher, and repeat things many times. It is job of your teacher to point out bad habits and correct them as soon as possible, to avoid them becoming engrained in your technique. With a new language, the goal is to speak it fluently. Similarly, in our musical endeavors, we must learn to make our instruments speak properly!

But what if your instrument has problems that you are not aware of? Many students are placed in this situation, and unknowingly compromise their technique. You will in fact spend many hours learning bad habits to compensate for mechanical issues. Depending on the instrument, you might have to press harder, blow harder, or force intonation changes to notes that are out of tune. These habits will be very hard to get rid of later on. At L&P we see often see players repeat the same mistakes over and over again. Unfortunately they wasted a lot of time of time learning bad habits, without being aware of them.

So what kind of problems can instruments have?

Leaks

As a clarinet or woodwind player, the primary thing you work with is your air. You blow the air into the instrument, and want to transform as much of it as possible into a sound controlled by you. Of course air is rather thin, and you can't see it, which is exactly why so many problems go unnoticed. Some of the most overlooked problems are leaks. They can occur at pads, the cushions on the keys which close the tone-holes, or at the tone-holes themselves, or even from your fingers.

Consider a car with a hole in its gas tank. You can certainly still drive, but your gas mileage will be bad. Clearly, you would not drive a car with a gas leak for very long. The same applies to a woodwind instrument. A leaking instrument doesn't resonate properly, plays out of tune, and sounds uneven. You will also have to blow more air into it to start a note, and your breath won't last as long as it could. Leaks also prevent an instrument from producing the right overtones (which give color to your sound).

Pads

The pad type and quality are also very important for a good seal that is long-lasting. Unfortunately, many student instruments have pads which don't seal and have a short life-expectancy (only a year or two). At L&P, we have found that that cork, impregnated leather pads, as well as our patented "Silent Pads" give the best results. They seal better from the beginning, are moisture as well as bug (yes, bug) resistant, and last up to 20 times longer. We are consistently achieving long-lasting and air-tight set-ups with the use of the right materials, combined with our years of experience.

Other common problems

- Badly adjusted key-heights will cause response, intonation and sound problems.
- Poorly adjusted key "relations", side-play in the keys, and other mechanical issues can cause leaks and coordination problems. These make it very hard to learn proper coordination between your individual fingers.
- Springs can be badly balanced: too weak to seal, or too strong, resulting in stress or pain.

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Some Instruments may also be bad for your health

- One health-related consideration is that many student instruments have nickel plated keys. Nickel is a cost-effective coating, but you need to be aware that it can cause nickel allergies. Nickel may also build up in your body over time.
- The silver on silver-plated instruments has antibacterial properties. This is a clear advantage, and as such, **L&P recommends silver plating on keys**. Furthermore, silver-plating lasts longer than nickel, and also helps your instrument holds its value over time. Please note that silver plating of keys is now a service offered by L&P at competitive pricing.
- Other health-related problems can arise from a poorly aligned mechanism, or from a thumb / hand-rest in the wrong position. You may have to stretch your fingers, or press keys harder than normal. This can cause stress and pain.

All the problems listed above can cause frustration and disappointment. With the wrong instrument, you not only have to learn how to play the clarinet, but you have to master the particular problems of that instrument. As a student, you might even be thinking about giving up on your goals. Before bad habits and mechanical problems completely discourage you, it is important for you to know: it doesn't need to be that way!

A better way

“At L&P we believe that whatever you learn on a fault-free, well-adjusted instrument, you learn for life. As your technique improves, you can build on it with a better instrument and enjoy a better sound. You don't need to relearn the basics, and you don't waste all that time!” **Wolfgang Lohff**

The Solution

Over the years, we have seen many frustrated, talented players and teachers, with instruments in bad shape. We believe our experience has allowed us to develop a better solution. As specialists in optimization and customization for many of the top professionals (orchestral and soloist) around the world, we understand what it takes to meet the needs of a wide spectrum of demanding players.

It turns out that for students, we can offer new as well as used instruments, as long as they have the required characteristics. A good student instrument should have a robust body and mechanism, and a well-balanced acoustic design. Silver-plated keys to prevent nickel allergies are an additional benefit. We provide the final touch with a professional setup - cork and impregnated leather pads - just as we do on top-of-the-line instruments, to make it all work well for the student. The results of this new approach have been overwhelmingly successful.

Even though a new student instrument may have a plastic body, it still allows students to improve their playing skills right away, instead of wasting time learning how to fight with their old instrument (which can be traded in).

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We came up with FIVE possible options

- 1) **NEW STUDENT INSTRUMENT WITH [LP Pro](#) SETUP:** We decided to offer our full [LP Pro](#) setup on brand new student clarinets. In fact they get the same treatment as the orchestral / professional instruments. With these upgrades, they play surprisingly well, right from the beginning. They are also reliable and long lasting, and we back them with a [full 3-year warranty](#). We will always offer to take back your instrument as a trade-in, whenever you wish to upgrade. L&P can also provide financing options if needed.
- 2) **A SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATION:** The new Buffet Crampon Premium is a big improvement over earlier “student” models. The fact that it even has silver-plated keys, together with our LP Pro setup, makes it our preferred beginner instrument.
- 3) **NO-RISK UPGRADE TO AN EXISTING INSTRUMENT:** If you already own a clarinet, don’t hesitate to contact us for an appraisal and free advice regarding the possibilities to improve it. In case you are uncertain whether or not to invest in your old one, we offer a risk-free Win-Win option. Before you abandon your older instrument, we will restore and optimize it entirely. If you like the result, you pay just for the work. Otherwise, trade it in, don’t pay for the repair, and pick the instrument you like from our large selection of new and restored ones. You can find many of them listed them on our webpage www.clarinet.dk
- 4) **SMALL-HANDS OPTION:** In case, that you or your students have small hands or tiny fingers we offer special small hand altered versions. We can either customize an instrument you already have or you can choose one from our inventory.
- 5) **ACCOMMODATION FOR DISABILITY:** We also offer a so-called covered hole or plateau version, in case you have developed some hand or finger handicap, which makes it difficult to cover the ring-keys properly.

We hope you have found this article helpful. Please let us know how we can assist you with your individual needs.

More Information

On our new website www.clarinet.dk you will find many articles on all aspects of the clarinet; ways to improve it, model descriptions, tips and advice, as well as an overview of many new and used instruments available. At L&P we are delighted to serve professional musicians, their students, and professionals in all walks of life. Your passion for music performance inspires us to exceed your expectations, by providing and maintaining instruments of the highest quality.

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