

OCARINA NOTEBOOK (or Agenda)

(by *Emiliano Bernagozzi*)

What you are about to read is not a book, not a method, and neither is it a treaty. It intends to be simply a ready-made *Notebook*, to provide advice and to help you play the Ocarina in the best way possible, whether as a soloist, in a chamber music group, or even in a septet (in the famous and historic Italian *Settimino* tradition). I hope that my words will be helpful in solving problems of each and every kind: in such a way that children, beginners and experienced musicians can perform all the music they wish in the best way and in the correct manner. For a competent musician, who comes to the ocarina with experience of any other wind instrument, the path will be much easier and more enjoyable, but all can benefit from the advice and tips offered in this notebook.

Here are some general points of vital importance with regard to studying the ocarina:

1. Take up the Ocarina only if you want to, otherwise you won't succeed with it! It is practically useless to spend time studying at the same time as wanting to do something else.
2. Once the decision to study has been taken, it will make your life more difficult. Examine every detail of your sound and your technique, as would a pernickety inspector, so as to identify weaknesses and be able to eliminate them. Only in this way can improvement be made quickly. Remember that your best teacher will be you yourself.
3. Try and study all that you cannot play comfortably. Do not be lenient with yourself, do not limit yourself to only playing pieces which are not challenging.
4. Given the fact that studying is hard work, both mentally and physically, always check that the position of your hands and your body posture is correct: it is important to consult a good teacher for everything relating to these issues.

I want to clarify a very important point: there is no magic in these words of mine, but if you truly have the desire to play well and are willing to invest a reasonable amount of time and work to achieve this goal, the results will not be long in arriving. It is a simple matter of TIME, PATIENCE and INTELLIGENT WORK. My advice is aimed at eliminating unproductive study. If you follow all the instructions, you will get twice the improvement in half the time. GOOD WORK!!!

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1. HOLDING THE INSTRUMENT AND USEFUL TECHNICAL-PHYSICAL INFORMATION:

The instrument must be held horizontally with the mouth of the ocarina facing the lips and consequently with the thinner part of the ocarina towards the right.

There are ocarinas with 10 finger holes in the purely Italian tradition and ocarinas with 12 holes that are more typical of the Far East, northern-Europe and America. This means that each hole must be closed with a finger, or two fingers must also close two holes each for the 12-hole ocarinas. The latter belong to the family of instruments with two sub-tones: B/A together with the passing semitone Bb/A# for instruments in C, and F#/E together with the passing semitone F natural for instruments in G: the notes can be varied by the tonality of the instrument but the positions of the holes always remain the same.

With the *Gravi* instruments, the bass ocarinas, there may be fewer holes to cover and consequently a lower extension of the scale. This varies from manufacturer to manufacturer; typically the **C1/1-SC** and **G2/2-SG** ocarinas have a chromatic range of a thirteenth plus the two bass sub-tones. The ocarinas **C3/3-AC** and **G4/4-AG** have a chromatic range of an eleventh plus the two bass sub-tones. The **C5/5-BC** and **G6/6-BG** ocarinas vary greatly depending on the manufacturer; in general they have a chromatic range of no more than an eleventh, but most commonly achieve a chromatic range of a ninth plus a single sub-tone, in contrast to the higher Ocarinas. The **C7/7-CBC** ocarina has a chromatic range no greater than a ninth plus a single bass sub-tone.

The **LEFT HAND** must be positioned on the part of the instrument that stretches from the centre to the widest part (called *the cap*), turning the palm towards the face and placing all the fingers on every hole in a natural and homogeneous manner; the thumb on the hole in the back of the instrument, the index finger on the first hole on the front, opposite the thumb, and then the ring, middle and little fingers aligned with the remaining finger holes.

The **RIGHT HAND** should be placed on the part of the instrument that stretches from the centre to the tip of the thinner end, in an opposite way to the **LEFT HAND**, i.e. turning the palm forward, as when greeting someone; and consequently positioning the thumb over the remaining hole in the rear of the instrument, then the index finger over the first free hole from the centre towards the right end (usually above the thumb of the same hand) and then sequentially the middle finger, ring finger and little finger. If the directions have been followed correctly, all the holes on the instrument should be covered (only one should always remain open, the one between two thumbs for the whistle, where the sound is made and exits. **THIS MUST BE ABSOLUTELY ALWAYS OPEN**; as well as the smaller holes for the sub-tones, which must also remain open.

This position, with all 10 fingers placed correctly on the holes, gives the note of C.

The most important advice that I can give, to get a correct closure of the holes, is to use the rounded fleshy part of the finger and not the tip, the rounded part is soft and supple and makes it easier to grip the fingers on the holes of the instrument.

2. POSITION OF THE LIPS AND THE PRODUCTION OF SOUND, CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SEVEN OCARINAS OF THE SEPTET (SETTIMINO):

To produce the best sound from the instrument, the mouthpiece has to be inserted between the lips to around half a centimetre, held firm but not nervously or taut, to make sure that all the blown air converges directly in the whistle and that there are no external leakages of breath.

It is advisable not to have too much of the whistle in the mouth; too much, more than a centimetre, can drastically complicate the use of the tongue in the staccato (single, double and triple tonguing that we will encounter later on) and for phrasing, as well as negatively impinging on quality of the sound.

Ocarinas from different parts of the world and from different manufacturers all have well-defined characteristics that differ from one another, as with all instruments of the classical type (flutes, oboes, clarinets, etc, etc...) and different marks have their own unique timbre and emission; remember that Ocarinas of the same size and from the same manufacturer may have substantial differences between them.

Let us begin with a fundamental issue: the ocarina cannot produce musical dynamics, that is the FORTE and the PIANO, or pass through the CRESCENDO or DIMINUENDO, such that when the performer plays FORTE the ocarina grows in pitch and on the contrary drops when playing PIANO. This is the big "limit" of the ocarina, but also poses the greatest difficulty in measuring the breath in order to execute a musical piece.

This being said, however, here is some important and fundamental advice required to correctly execute a musical scale on the ocarina. For all seven ocarinas (from the largest to smallest) the more bass notes have to be played very delicately and softly without attacking the instrument, as an unpleasant and out of tune sounds is obtained that is brittle, with increasing pitch. Whilst the scale ascends (i.e. towards the high notes), the emission has to be increasingly sustained, helping intonation and a good sound with a greater force of air. If too little air is blown on the high notes, a sad sound is obtained with diminishing pitch.

Italian ocarinas have a very high degree of imperfection and therefore my advice is to practice them in a very precise and careful way to obtain a good result, but they have a huge advantage in their greater versatility and capacity for musical expression.

Ocarinas from the Far East are instead much more precise and balanced in intonation between *bass* and *acute*, but still require a great deal of attention with regard to the use of the breath.

It is also true that, with years of study and experience, even if minimally, dynamic effects can be achieved (i.e. playing loud or without affecting intonation) by adding or removing fingers from their original positions for the notes, by acting on the issue of breath in order to correct the pitch itself, and thereby achieving dynamic tonal effects of great interest.

For an accomplished musician, it is fundamental to understand the problems of intonation with the ear itself, respond with great mental agility and practice on the required amount of air pressure necessary. The beginner will need the help of a teacher to understand, through practical examples, how to resolve these problems.

The **C1/1-SC OCARINA** is the smallest and highest of the septet of ocarinas. It is certainly the most virtuosic, but is very difficult to play in unison with the others for the simple fact that it is usually, from the technical, expressive and dynamic viewpoints, the one with the most complex parts. To play this instrument well takes a lot of talent, years of study and experience, a great character, and no fear of playing in public. I recommend gaining experience with the other high ocarinas (**C3/3-AC** for example) before playing this instrument in a group, so as to refine the technique for the notes, for the issue of breath, and the musical repertoire. This ocarina is very suitable as a solo instrument.

The **G2/2-SG OCARINA** (along with the **G6/6-BG**) is the most important instrument of the septet; it is the BRAIN of the group and certainly the most difficult ocarina to play. It is very suitable, in fact the most suitable, to the solo repertoire, with piano, guitar, strings, etc, etc..., because it has a great flexibility of sound and great technical prowess with which any type of music can played.

A great deal of experience is needed to play this instrument well, great mastery of the instrument and the music that is to be confronted, years and years of experience and great mental agility, as well as solid nerves and strong control of the emotions.

To succeed in playing this instrument to its full potential a great deal of study is needed; with careful attention to technique, intonation and phrasing.

The **C3/3-AC OCARINA** is the melodic instrument *par excellence* for its warm and harmonious sound, the *tenor* of the group, which sings the great melodies. It is an instrument that lends itself very well to the solo. Although its sound is not too generous, it is well compensated by a beautiful timbre. The **C3/3-AC** can perform large pages of virtuoso music even though its extension is not as broad as its two higher sisters.

To play this instrument well requires a solid mastery of articulation, great musicality and knowledge of the repertoire. It is very difficult in terms of intonation since it often, when playing in the Septet, finds itself playing on the octave with the **C1/1-SC**, and therefore must adapt itself to a far more difficult and complex instrument.

For me, it is the Ocarina with the most beautiful characteristics in the ocarina family, and is also very suitable for teaching introductory level and for introducing children to music.

The **G4/4-AG OCARINA** is definitely the instrument within the group that binds the bass ocarinas (**C5/5-BC**, **G6/6-BG**, **C7/7-CBC**) with the high section (**C1/1-SC**, **G2/2-SG**, **C3/3-AC**) and thus has a double identity, that of supporting the accompaniments and reinforcing the melodic part; DEFINITELY A COMPLEX AND DIFFICULT INSTRUMENT!

To play this instrument well, a great mastery of articulation and instrumental technique is required, as well as a deep knowledge of the musical repertoire. If all these features are not part of you, it will be very difficult to achieve good results on this ocarina.

The **C5/5-BC OCARINA** is the instrument of accompaniment *par excellence*. It is a very interesting ocarina, with a warm and deep sound, and is not too difficult to play, even if it is complex and delicate.

To play this instrument well requires a profound sense of rhythm. The **C5/5-BC** often has uplifting rhythms to play that, if not executed with precision, become harmful to the proper execution of any piece of music, and can lead to a negative affect on the performance of the group. Therefore, be careful not to underestimate this particularity!

Moreover, everything concerning articulation, intonation and technique in general is of fundamental importance with this instrument; if you do not have these requirements it is best not to play the **C5/5-BC**!

For the **G6/6-BG OCARINA**, the discussion relating to the **G2/2-SG** also applies, although along different parameters; it being the least devoted to the solo and virtuosity. The **GL6/6-BG** is a fundamental instrument for the *Settimino*; it is the ENGINE, the HEART of the group, and an instrument of extreme difficulty.

To play this ocarina well requires a great sense of rhythm, a great mastery of technique and intonation (it is necessary to find a just, clean and precise sound). Moreover, it requires a good knowledge of the repertoire to express to the full an articulation that provides security to the whole group.

It is important to study this magnificent instrument well, to understand it, and to take full advantage of all its technical and musical possibilities. I think that all the musicians who approach the ocarina should make a thorough study of this instrument in order to learn to play it.

The **C7/7-CBC OCARINA** is the bass, the deepest and most *fundamental* of the group. As the lowest instrument, its most important characteristic (which is also its limit) is **NOT HAVING** a great power of sound. It also has little technical agility to take advantage of, with relative dispersion of air.

Consequently, the bass is a very difficult and exacting instrument to play, and above all, a musician who does not have enough experience and technical/rhythmic flexibility will always end up behind the tempo, as this instrument is not very agile.

To play the bass well requires good physical prowess and it is necessary to use the throat as much as possible to help the formation of the sound, in order to give it the most sonorous and intonated sound possible; if the bass is out of tune, the entire *Settimino* will be negatively affected.

Of all the seven ocarinas, this is the one that needs to be played in a different way from the others, with more of a view to the quality and construction of the sound. It has to be played a great deal to understand its nature and characteristics **and the rest takes care of itself**.

IMPORTANT:

Throughout my experiences around the world, I have had the pleasure to meet, see and hear a lot of people and a large number of groups that play the ocarina. One thing that has really struck me is seeing strange formations, each labelled as a *Settimino* (the meaning of which is a "GROUP FORMED BY SEVEN INSTRUMENTS", and more specifically of ocarinas) consisting of 8, 9, 10 and even more instruments; I want to ask a question, WHY?

In all sincerity, I hate and censor all ocarina formations that want to perform *in Settimino* when there are more than seven of them, because it is already difficult to keep seven ocarinas in tune, let alone 8, 9, 10, etc...

The Italian tradition gave rise to this wonderful grouping and it must continue as such. Otherwise, it would be like going to listen to a string quartet and seeing 5, 6 or 7 people on stage ... we would then no longer be talking of a quartet.

I censure all this, particularly as no arrangements exist, nor will be written, to justify the numbers in the groups that I've seen. Although I do sympathise with all the teachers, who out of need when faced with a large number of students, want them all to play together. And on this issue I do agree with the expansion of the group, but would like to offer some advice:

1. Never double up the high ocarinas, absolutely rule out doubling up the C1/1-SC, G2/2-SG and the C3/3-AC;
2. Only double up the following ocarinas: G4/4-AG, C5/5-BC and G6/6-BG;
3. Always leave the bass C7/7-CBC as a solo instrument, as with the higher ocarinas;
4. In cases of forced and necessary doubling up, a lot of work is needed on the tuning of the doubled ocarinas. Always look for instruments that are compatible with each other and that are also well tuned, and of the same brand or manufacturer if possible;
5. It is very important that all septets should have ocarinas that are well tuned and in harmony with one another in order to obtain optimal tuning overall and the most balanced sound;
6. In cases of very large groups (Ocarina Orchestras) I advise including more C7/7-CBC ocarinas, and moreover, by adding the reinforcement of a string bass, which will help the bass section and bring the best out of the rest of the group.

I ADVISE WORKING ON THE *SETTIMINO* WITH THE MAXIMUM COMMITMENT, SERIOUSNESS AND DILIGENCE TO OBTAIN THE BEST RESULTS POSSIBLE.

VERY IMPORTANT:

HERE IS A REALLY FUNDAMENTAL PIECE OF ADVICE FOR ALL – BEGINNERS, YOUNGSTERS, CHILDREN, ADULTS, ANYONE WHO TRIES THE OCARINA AND THE SEPTET IN PARTICULAR:

IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT (ESPECIALLY FOR THE MORE DIFFICULT TUNES) TO ORGANISE THE PRACTICE BY DIVIDING THE GROUP INTO TWO SECTIONS. THE FIRST, CONTAINING G4/4-AG, C5/5-BC, G6/6-BG, AND C7/7-CBC, IN ORDER TO OPTIMISE THE PRACTICE TIME IN ORDER TO PRECISELY IMPROVE INTONATION, PHRASING, OVERALL RHYTHM, AND EVERYTHING REQUIRED DURING THE REHEARSAL OF ANY MUSICAL WORK.

THE OTHER SECTION THEREFORE CONSISTS OF THE C1/1-SC, G2/2-SG, C3/3-AC, AND THE G4/4-AG. AS CAN BE SEEN, THE G4/4-

AG APPEARS IN BOTH SECTIONS IN VIEW OF THE FACT EXPLAINED EARLIER; THAT IT SERVES THE DOUBLE ROLE OF A MELODIC INSTRUMENT AS WELL AS ONE OF ACCOMPANIMENT. THIS SECTION IS THE MOST DELICATE AND, DURING PRACTICE, A GREAT DEAL OF CAREFUL AND ATTENTIVE CARE HAS TO BE TAKEN WITH REGARD TO INTONATION (VERY DIFFICULT BETWEEN THE C1/1-SC, G2/2-SG and C3/3-AC OCARINAS, THEREFORE REQUIRING SPECIAL CARE AND STUDY) PHRASING (THIS SHOULD ALWAYS BE THE SAME FOR ALL MEMBERS OF THE GROUP IF ITS WANTS TO BE A PROPER GROUP!), AND EVERYTHING NECESSARY TO STRENGTHEN THE SECTION, SO THAT NO TIME IS LOST ON INDIVIDUAL PROBLEMS WHEN IT PRACTICES WITH THE COMPLETE SEPTET.

IT IS TAKEN AS UNDERSTOOD THAT THE PERFORMANCE IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EACH AND EVERY MEMBER OF THE SEPTET, SO THE INDIVIDUAL PARTS HAVE ALWAYS TO BE WELL STUDIED IN ORDER TO COME PRACTICE WELL PREPARED.

NEVER TRY SONGS OF A DIFFICULTY EXCEEDING THE AVERAGE CAPABILITY OF THE GROUP SO LONG AS THERE IS POTENTIAL FOR THE TECHNICAL IMPROVEMENT OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF THE GROUP. IN THIS WAY EDUCATIONAL WORK CAN BE CARRIED OUT THAT IS DESIGNED TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE LEVEL AND TEAM SPIRIT OF ALL IN THE GROUP.

ANOTHER THING THAT I BELIEVE IS VERY IMPORTANT IS TO IDENTIFY WHO IS THE "LEADER" WITHIN THE SEPTET, THE ONE TO TAKE ON THE TECHNICAL AND MUSIC RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE GROUP, AND WHO MUST TAKE THE LEAD IN THE RESOLUTION OF WHATEVER TYPES OF PROBLEM THAT MAY ARISE. THIS PERSON MUST HAVE DECISIVE CHARACTERISTICS:

1. GREAT MASTERY AND KNOWLEDGE OF ALL SEVEN OCARINAS (MAYBE EVEN OF DIFFERENT STYLES OF OCARINA AND MANUFACTURERS);
2. A GREAT KNOWLEDGE OF ALL KINDS OF MUSICAL REPERTOIRE;
3. PRACTICALITY IN ORGANISING PRACTICE IN A CONCRETE AND DECIDED WAY WITHOUT ANY TIME WASTING;
4. HAVE GREAT CHARACTER AND AUTHORITY;
5. HAVE THE ABILITY TO BRING OUT THE BEST FROM EVERY INDIVIDUAL MEMBER OF THE GROUP ON THE MUSICAL AND TECHNICAL LEVEL;
6. THE LEADER IS ALSO THE PERSON WHO OUGHT TO KNOW HOW TO "HARMONISE" – WHICH MEANS SOLVING ANY PROBLEMS IN ALL PARTS OF A WORK DURING THE REHEARSAL: PHRASING, MUSICALLY, IN TERMS OF TECHNIQUE, etc... THEREFORE THE *LEADER* MUST COMMUNICATE DURING REHEARSAL IN SUCH A WAY AS TO OPTIMISE THE TIME TO BRING ABOUT THE BEST OUTCOME FOR THE WORK. IF TOO MANY PEOPLE ARE OFFERING ADVICE AT THE SAME TIME, NOTHING WILL BE UNDERSTOOD AND A SATISFACTORY RESULT WILL NEVER BE ACHIEVED!
7. THE *LEADER* MUST ALWAYS DEMAND THE MAXIMUM CONCENTRATION AS PRACTICING, ESPECIALLY FOR SEVERAL HOURS, BRINGS WITH IT PHYSICAL AND MENTAL FATIGUE. HIGH LEVELS OF CONCENTRATION AND STUDY WILL ALWAYS DELIVER THE BEST RESULTS.

3. TECHNIQUE – GENERAL NOTE:

Regular study, carried out every day and with great perseverance and sacrifice, is the only thing that can ensure the best advancement in technique. Time lost one day cannot be recovered the next day. An athlete, who stops training for two days, cannot try to recover what he has lost in a day: there's a risk of pulling a muscle.

Study technique with regularity. Dedicate more time to tonality and to the songs that give you more problems. The "weakest" players need to study more intensely.

When you encounter a problem, stop and slowly repeat the passage that causes a problem, as many times as is need, with the aid of a metronome. Importantly, use a system to break the difficult passages down, alternating different rhythms, staccato and legato, whilst maintaining maximum concentration on correct articulation. Never try to follow the tempo of a difficult piece immediately, you will ruin everything and waste time that you can never recover; to study well requires a calm, very patient, and lucid mind.

In all exercises:

1. Always maintain a correct posture, never study sitting down.
2. Always give great concentration to intonation and the articulation of passages.
3. Play with metronomic precision.
4. Try to maintain the correct position of the hands, but never tighten the muscles and tendons, stay relaxed.

I cannot stress enough that making progress in terms of technique is a matter of **TIME**, **PATIENCE** and **INTELLIGENT STUDY**.

4. RELAXATION TECHNIQUES:

Choose several books of the same thickness as the width of your hand. Lie on the floor with your knees raised and slightly apart. Put the books under your head and keep your hands and arms at your sides. You will notice an arching in the lower back, which should gradually go away. It normally takes about five minutes in order for the bottom of the back to come into contact with the floor. As this happens, you will feel the spine lengthen slightly, and feel the need to move your hips a little further down. Hold this position for at least ten minutes.

Many artists, musicians and actors make use of this exercise to loosen the muscles and relax before going on stage.

In having to confront long and tiring hours of study, you will find this muscle relaxation useful, both during and after study sessions. It is particularly beneficial to eliminate any tension that may arise during the study of particularly difficult technical problems.

5. TRILLS:

The greater part of those preparing themselves to play the ocarina avoids studying trills. Trills are difficult but are also very important for the development of a good technique.

In getting started, pay careful attention to the following points:

1. Even when you play slowly, move your fingers up and down very fast, focusing equally on both the rise and the fall of the finger: you will find the second movement easier (because there is a support in the form of the finger hole in the instrument) whilst the rise, which has no support, will be more problematic, PAY ATTENTION.
2. In these exercises you should be meticulously rhythmic. Play the trill along with the metronome, with the intention of playing a very precise rhythm and not just a series of notes – exactly the number of notes in the required time.
3. IMPORTANT: Do not move your hands while performing a trill, but only the finger that is performing it!

If you feel some discomfort in the wrists, arms, shoulders or neck whilst studying trills, consult your teacher about issues relating to correct posture, or try the relaxation exercises.

6. ARTICULATION – LEGATO (SLUR):

Articulation is the language of music. Whatever the power of your musical ideas, you will never be able to transmit them clearly to the public without the help of good articulation.

When we describe someone as eloquent, we mean someone who can express themselves clearly.

In music it is the same thing, but in learning a wind instrument the term articulation generally means two things:

1. The use of legato and staccato.
2. The use of the tongue.

At this point it becomes very difficult to explain or give advice with written words without practical examples on how to articulate a musical phrase, or even a simple quatrain of notes. I feel compelled to advise you to consult a good teacher, who will be able to guide you in the best way to resolve any type of problem in may encounter.

As far as articulation is concerned, my words absolutely cannot replace the advice of a good teacher.

In the history of music, musicians have used legato in different ways and for different reasons. In the eighteenth century, the points at which to perform the legato depended largely on conventional practice and the technical possibilities of the instrument. Here are some rules: generally notes were tied when they were part of a sequence and the intervals up to a fifth; with regard to the latter, to tie or articulate them was a matter of taste; intervals larger than the fifth were generally articulated. If, in a passage, there were series of recurring groups of two, three or four notes, then these were tied together.

The practice varied depending on the historical period.

In the nineteenth century, the ligatures were used to give “variety” to the music. In addition, the use of legato depended on the customs of various nations. Without going too much into details, let us try and understand the most important thing, which is what effect legato has for a wind instrument and, above all, what contribution it makes to musical expression.

A LEGATO PLACED ON TWO MUSICAL NOTES INCREASES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FIRST OF THE PAIR AND REDUCES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SECOND.

It has been in large measure accepted that this principle has precedence over any other conventional rule.

There are countless examples of exceptions to the rule, but this will suffice for the time being, as the basis for a better

understanding of the issues regarding articulation.

Naturally, if you feel that all the notes should have EQUAL importance, you can articulate them all, or even slur them all (I strongly discourage the latter with the ocarina, for which it is always wise in the interest of better articulation to pronounce all off them with a smooth and accurate staccato): depending on taste and the musical passage in question.

Do not forget that this rule is only a PRINCIPLE on which to build your own ideas for the reading of the music.

There are DIFFERENT WAYS of playing a phrase: for example, all notes can be articulated with the tongue, but the first of each group (the one that constitutes the skeleton, the backbone of the phrase) may be enhanced or slightly elongated. Still, it is important to understand that, when you master a wide repertoire of music, there will still be many nuances and differences in each type of articulation, so that each and every individual musician, instrumentalist, *ocarinista*, will articulate all the notes very carefully whilst the public may perceive them as being practically tied. To an attentive ear there is a great deal of difference.

THERE ARE MANY COLOURS IN THE PALETTE OF ARTICULATION.

This is a very important aspect of interpretation. It will never be possible to interpret music without proper articulation!

7. ARTICULATION – SINGLE STACCATO (SINGLE TONGUING):

Staccato is the language of the ocarina, and the study of articulation is vital to play the instrument. Simple staccato is the most important articulation. To study this technique you have to think and pretend, as with other wind instruments, that the double staccato does not exist. You have to study the simple staccato in order to make it very fast, do not be lazy, and do not use the double staccato. A good simple staccato will help considerably in the pursuit of fluidity in the double and triple staccato.

First of all, for the simple stroke of the tongue, moderate the speed of the tongue and look for “elasticity”.

The correct use of the tongue is of fundamental importance to the staccato. Primarily, you should keep in mind that different tongues (understood in the literary sense of the word) have different degrees of clarity: of course, every language is usually understood by the people living where it is spoken, but some languages are by far clearer than others – THIS ALSO GREATLY INFLUENCES PRONUNCIATION OF THE STACCATO FOR WIND INSTRUMENTS IN GENERAL.

The French have been taught by tradition with a natural emphasis on the movements of the lips, tongue and throat.

Let me explain specifically what it takes to perform a simple and effective staccato on the ocarina.

It is very important to note that the Ocarina is not played from the throat, but rather with the front of the tongue. Therefore, make the movement of the tongue as near as possible to where the sound is produced: this will facilitate a more precise attack and require less force.

The simple staccato is made by placing the tip of the tongue against the upper lip, withdrawing it quickly, and proceeding with an emission of breath.

Many young instrumentalists are advised to pronounce the syllables “TA” or “TU” or “DA” or “DE”, all are correct and, of course, each pronunciation results in a change in the type and effect of the staccato.

If we want to obtain a bright and crystal staccato, full of energy, the harder “TA” or “TU” syllables should be pronounced, whilst if we want to articulate a more gentle phrase with a soft staccato (staccato-legato) the softer “DA” or “DE” syllables should be pronounced.

Other basic rules to remember and put into practice.

1. Absolutely do not move your lips and jaw during the staccato.
2. Do not increase the air pressure behind the tongue and always try to keep the mouth well relaxed.
3. Study the exercises slowly and gradually bring them to high speeds to strengthen the muscle that moves the tongue, and to ensure that this develops elasticity in order to perform a fast and precise simple staccato.
4. There is no need for the double staccato – it would be like cheating!
5. In perform all exercises, try to get the highest accuracy and a clean sound.
6. Studying only for a short time, but often.
7. When your simple staccato has reached a satisfactory speed, the diaphragm can cease acting on every single note, but must continue in support of the sound.
8. When the tongue has been strengthened, the muscles will be able to support the simple staccato for much longer phrases.
9. Try not to create too much turbulence inside the mouth with an overly vigorous use of the tongue. Quite often, if the movement of the base of the tongue is excessive, it disturbs the flow of air through the mouth. Painstaking study, combined with a good dose of patience, will help you to transfer the impulse from the base of the tongue to its tip, resulting in a lighter and cleaner articulation. Think of these exercises as exercises on the sound, and not simply as training of the tongue.

Remember that, after several months of systematic study, you will find yourself feeling that everything seems simple and natural. YOU will find on YOUR OWN way to use the staccato in the manner, and with the expression, that you prefer more and like more, in such a way as to vary your articulation with great mastery. At this stage your palette will be rich with many additional colours.

THE REST DEPENDS ON YOU.

REMEMBER: before moving on to the systematic study of “double tonguing” and “triple tonguing”, make sure you have good control of the simple staccato, this will save you time and help you in learning all the other forms of articulation. Time will reward you well for it.

YOU MUST BE MASTER OF YOUR OWN TONGUE, NOT ITS SERVANT!

8. ARTICULATION – DOUBLE STACCATO (DOUBLE TONGUING):

Before embarking on the study of the “double staccato” it is necessary to have gained a good control of the simple staccato.

If you are a beginner, consult a teacher for an explanation of the mechanism of the movement of the tongue.

Do not expect immediate results.

To obtain the double staccato, alternate the syllables “TA” and “K” or “DA” and “G”. I suggest you practice it until you have attained a good mastery of the study. In order to achieve maximum agility, alternate different vowels in the following way: DU-GA-DA-GA-DI-GE-DE-GE-DU-GA-DA-GA-DI-GE ... so as not to “bore” and “confuse” the brain. In other words, alternate vowels at pleasure without a specific order, **and always think of not playing from the base of the throat but at the tip, towards the lips, without ever interrupting the flow of air.**

Regular exercise will facilitate fast movements of the muscles of the oral cavity. Study the basic articulation of the double staccato, without the instrument, while walking, on the bus, in the shower, etc. In this way, you can save precious time for the real study. Approach the study of the double staccato with the rigorous use of the metronome, so as to achieve precision and absolute rigor from the beginning. Start slowly, but try to increase the speed with each passing day.

Do not study the double and triple staccato too slowly: the “K” and “G” should be unconditioned reflexes. It is better to practice the first few times on short passages, repeated many times, and then extend the musical periods of staccato further and further until obtaining a range worthy of a good performer. All this will be possible after months of systematic study. Make sure that, with each passing day of study, the tongue, as opposed to the throat, moves with a clockwork mechanism: in a precise, clear, delicate, and very careful way. Do not be in a rush!

Think of these exercises as if they were studies on the sound, that also involve the use of the tongue, and above all BE VERY PATIENT.

I implore you, do not play the double staccato too slowly – it won’t help you. The return of the tongue must be a movement produced by a reflex. Studying it slowly is like trying to learn to run or to jump by performing the actions in slow motion: it’s not very useful!

As with the other exercises for the simple staccato, we can also use some ligatures for the double staccato (without shortening the last note of the legato) to give the tongue a brief rest, as well as alternating the phrasing. Try to make your tongue as fast as possible, but always remember to take care of the quality of the sound.

It is possible, and only human, that you will encounter some problems during the study of the double staccato:

1. *You cannot move your tongue with an acceptable speed?* Practice without an instrument, on the bus or while walking, etc. Do not use the instrument as a gym exercise. Keep the tongue forward, close to the teeth. Over the weeks, the base of the tongue, which is the cause of problems in the mouth, will move less and less, and most of the action will move to the tip. At this point, the articulation will become clearer.
2. *The tongue is tired?* This is quite normal. Practice every day, both with and without the ocarina. When the tongue gets really tired, study a piece involving legato for a few minutes, so as to give the muscles of the tongue a little rest. Then resume with the staccato.
3. *The articulation is shaky: the “K” is weaker than the “T”?* This is also a normal problem. Perform the exercises on the double staccato by beginning with “K”. This will help to strengthen the weak staccato by eliminating any rhythmic untidiness and make your technique more consistent. These exercises and advice have no musical value, but are very important if you intend to achieve greater freedom of articulation, both on a purely muscular level as well as the mental.

9. ARTICULATION – TRIPLE STACCATO (TRIPLE TONGUING):

By now, you should be accustomed to a certain way of studying the staccato, and you should be familiar with alternating the staccato with the tongue and the throat.

For triple tonguing, alternate the following letters “T” “K” “T” in sequence, with the same technique used for double tonguing.

Never approach a new exercise until you have perfectly mastered the previous one. In addition, follow these guidelines:

1. Study without the instrument, the movement of the tongue must be controlled;
2. Strike with the tongue forward in the mouth, try to be clear and precise;
3. Use these guidelines and advice as if they were exercises on the sound;
4. Always look for the greatest perfection and quality; never be satisfied with your-self!
5. Try to increase the speed of the staccato day by day;
6. Study the triple staccato little by little, but often.

IT TAKES A LONG TIME TO ACHIEVE A GOOD TECHNIQUE AND A GOOD ARTICULATION: THE TRUE SOLUTION IS CONSTANT PRACTICE!

10. THE STUDY AND TECHNIQUE OF BREATHING:

Breathing and the body:

First of all, given that you have survived and have played without reading these tips, there can't be many errors in the way in which you breathe normally. Although playing notes on a reed, as the ancients did, is fairly simple, the demands of the ocarina call for special attention be devoted to breathing.

Strangely, we breathe in the most normal and natural way when we are in a horizontal position, this is our most relaxed position. Any difficulty in breathing comes when we are upright.

Players of wind instruments need a lot of air in their lungs, and the maximum control on **INHALATION** (when air taken into the lungs) and on **EXHALATION** (when air is expelled from the lungs). More air is needed to play the ocarina than required to play other wind instruments. The demand can vary from the smallest to the largest ocarinas, but it is necessary to ensure that this basic process is learnt correctly. It should also be kept in mind that playing the ocarina requires great control of the **EMISSION** of breath, in view of the fact that playing **MORE** or **LESS** strongly varies and changes the pitch of the instrument in a significant way. If careful attention is not paid to these issues, the results can be disastrous, with devastating consequences on the final result.

We do not intend to go into the strictly physiological problems relating to the taking in and expulsion of the breath, which could potentially be misleading and confusing, and end up being useless or even stupid. It is not necessary to know all the precise mechanical processes to drive a car. Neither is knowledge of the medical aspects of breathing necessary for playing a wind instrument. Therefore, we will limit ourselves to an examination of the details strictly relating to playing the ocarina.

Of the many opinions on breathing, one thing is undeniably clear: **IT IS WRONG TO LIFT THE SHOULDERS DURING INHALATION**. The reason will become clear once you have begun the exercises. It is wrong to tighten the throat, as this facilitates the production of a bleating vibrato that usually causes stiffening in the oral cavity. Raising the shoulders makes it impossible to properly control the emission of air from the lungs, and does not agree with the manner in which the sound of the instrument should be developed in relation to the cavity of the mouth and throat.

IN SHORT, DO NOT DO IT!

The chest cavity contains the lungs. The ribs are connected to the spine at the back and the breastbone at the front. In effect, the lower ribs are connected directly to the sternum. Due to this peculiarity, the lower ribs have a greater capacity for extension (elasticity) compared to those above and, also due to the increased softness and flexibility of the bones and tissue, are capable of a certain degree of expansion. Beneath both lungs is a membrane, not unlike a drum skin, called the diaphragm.

The muscles of the diaphragm may be contracted or relaxed. When they contract, the diaphragm flattens; when they relax the diaphragm assumes its natural position, in the shape of a dome with the convex side upwards. The muscles can only work in one way, by contracting. When contracted the diaphragm flattens and allows air to enter the lungs. The abdominal muscles are used to let the air out of the lungs. With one's hand on the abdomen, one can feel these muscles contracting or relaxing, as when ones coughs or laughs. Normal breathing involves the contraction of the diaphragm to lower the lungs, and this creates a vacuum in the lungs, allowing air to enter through the mouth. By relaxing the diaphragm and contracting the abdominal muscles, the diaphragm resumes its normal dome-shape, causing the air to escape.

This is roughly the amount of air required for a large sigh; to play the ocarina we need a greater amount, and it is for this reason that we must do the exercises that will be explained below.

EXERCISE 1°

Place one hand on the abdomen: during INHALATION, the abdomen should flex outwards (i.e. inflate and swell the stomach and kidney area), whilst during EXHALATION it should fall back into place.

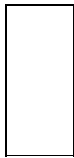
If you have any difficulty with this experiment, sit down on a chair and bend your upper body forward to touch the ground with your hands, with the abdomen resting on the legs. INHALE and rise up slightly as you do so: you should feel the pressure of your abdomen on your thighs. Alternatively, lie on your back on the floor, put a book on your abdomen and inhale and exhale slightly. If this exercise is done properly, the book will rise during INHALATION.

You should become "leaner" whilst EXHALING and "fatter" whilst INHALING.

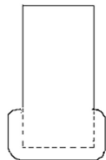
Now place your hands on your hips, with the palm facing outward, so as to rest your wrist on the bone of the pelvis. Breathe as indicated previously, pushing the abdomen outwards, but this time continuing to INHALE and thereby expanding the rib cage in a lateral direction.

You become **LARGER**, not **TALLER**. The following pictures will help you understand better.

1. Let us assume that the lungs are a box:



2. When you make a small breath, the bottom expands:



3. When you take a deep breath, for which the rib cage also extends to the sides, the lungs look like this:



4. If the shoulders are raised, the lungs look like this:



Note well that the abdomen becomes thinner when the shoulders are raised.

So far, this should be fairly simple. Unfortunately, the position in which the ocarina is held tends to favour breathing with high shoulders, especially with beginners, who have a rigid and not very natural body posture in the first weeks.

CORRECT POSTURE IS ESSENTIAL FOR PROPER BREATHING, ESPECIALLY FOR THE OCARINA-BODY RELATIONSHIP, AND FOR THE POSITION OF THE HANDS AND ARMS, WHICH SHOULD ALWAYS REMAIN RELAXED.

Observe yourself in front of a mirror. Does your chest tend to rise when you breathe? This should not happen. Are you raising your shoulders?

Just to check: with your arms resting beside your body, breathe deeply whilst deliberately raising the shoulders and contracting the abdomen. Then repeat the breathing whilst resting your wrists on your hips and filling the abdomen first and then the chest. Do you notice any difference?

Take the ocarina and play some long notes, being careful not to raise your shoulders, nor contract the throat as you breathe. Always use a mirror during these exercises.

Play some pieces and monitor yourself throughout. To gain proper control of the breath, **EXERCISE I°** is sufficient for the time being.

To INHALE a truly abundant amount of air, you need to study **EXERCISE II°**, which I will explain in a moment.

Breathing and thoracic capacity:

Your lungs have an expansion capacity that is far greater than the size of your chest; the limiting factor is the ribs that prevent it. This section is about increasing the actual expansion of the thoracic cavity to enable the lungs to take in a greater quantity of air.

The difference between the expansion and contraction of your ribs directly determines how much you can play without the need for another breath.

EXERCISE II°

Place the back of your hands on your hips. Begin by expelling all the air in the lungs. ALL the air and not only a large part of it: YES, ABSOLUTELY ALL THE AIR! You must almost feel ill. Now INHALE slowly through your nose.

Start by filling the abdomen, and then try to expand the rib cage. It may also happen that you feel your back fill with air. INHALE as much air as you can. DO NOT EXHALE; now take in a little more air. OF COURSE YOU CAN DO IT! Still a bit more, and if possible, still some more air. HOLD ON TO IT. Now EXHALE slowly. Get rid of all the air in your lungs and continue to EXHALE until you can't do it anymore. Take a rest. Repeat the exercise again. Repeat it six times.

The whole cycle of the exercise is a bit difficult, is it not? Your ribs are not accustomed to such a movement. Ask a friend to measure your ability to expand with a tape measure; the measurement should be made a little under the armpits. Expel all the air out and take your chest measurement (with the lungs completely empty). Now INHALE whilst expanding your chest as much as you can, and take a second measurement (full lungs). The DIFFERENCE between the two measures is your expansion capacity.

Without training, the difference is probably somewhere between two and five centimetres. Take note of the following table:

| MONTH | YEAR | EXPANSION |
|-----------|------|-----------|
| | | |
| JANUARY | | |
| FEBRUARY | | |
| MARCH | | |
| APRIL | | |
| MAY | | |
| JUNE | | |
| JULY | | |
| AUGUST | | |
| SEPTEMBER | | |
| OCTOBER | | |
| NOVEMBER | | |
| DICEMBER | | |

If you make around six large expansions and contractions several times a day, you will double your expansion in the space of 12/18 months! This means eliminating any concern you may have with regard to long phrases. You should continue this exercise until your expansion has reached approximately twelve (12) centimetres. Although larger people have some advantages, the size of your body is not decisive: it is your ability to expand that counts. Even small or lean people can run a long race.

At the end of the exercise, test yourself with a musical phrase that you know well. Every week, check whether you manage to get further than last time, before finding yourself running out of air. Record the point at which you stop in order to see the improvements.

After about 12/18 months of exercise, you should have doubled your expansion, perhaps even earlier than that.

We are certainly not talking about a difference in your level of performance; only and exclusively about how to use the breathing technique.

Breathing and musical phrasing:

Find a sentence with commas and semicolons. There are many in this NOTEBOOK of mine. Take notice of how these signs can have an influence on a sentence. Take notice of when you take a breath.

1. These signs contribute to the SENSE of the sentence.
2. They aid the transfer of meaning.
3. The type of writing adopted can serve as a means for communicating the concepts expressed by the author.

ALL THIS ALSO APPLIES TO MUSIC

Signs of breathing are not the enemy. Yes, THEY ARE NECESSARY, BUT SHOULD BECOME PART OF THE MUSICAL EXPRESSION AND NOT REPRESENT A PHYSICAL INADEQUACY.

Prick a finger with a needle. Before you scream in pain, you take a quick breath. Think about it. The sudden release of breath becomes part of your expression of pain. The same thing should happen in music.

In music, breathing cannot be precisely explained; all we can do is provide some general guidelines. The breaths and the pauses, wherever they are taken, can be justified only in terms of the performance.

There are many opinions on where to breathe.

A BREATH CAN ADD EXPRESSION TO A MUSICAL PHRASE. BUT ALSO DIMINISH IT.

BREATHING WILL CREATE FEW PROBLEMS WHEN YOU HAVE LEARNT TO GO ALONG WITH THE FLUID DEVELOPMENT OF A MUSICAL PHRASE.

Here are some tips:

1. In a piece that you are studying, mark the points where you think it is appropriate to take a breath.
Ask yourself, as a guide:
a) Is there harmony?
b) How does the bass line proceed?
c) Where does the melody go?
2. Do not divide the music into equal slices, to make it appear symmetrically distributed. You can also take more than one breath in the same bar, if you wish, or if you need it. Several small breaths can resolve themselves in a subsequent long sentence that will be more satisfactory from the musical point of view.
3. Learn to breathe quickly: you will find several suitable exercises below.
4. Make the music more expressive with your breaths: the breath then becomes an integral part of your expression.
5. When you mark the breaths on a piece of music, check if there are similar phrases for which you should, as far as is possible, favour a symmetrical choice of breaths; but keep in mind the points – 1: a, b & c. – listed above.
6. The note before the breath should never be thought of as *diminuendo*, or played as an epilogue of the musical phrase. This would result in a fall and announce the arrival of a breath long before it happens, even creating a sense of anxiety.
7. The note immediately prior to the breath should maintain its high quality up to the point in which it is dropped.
8. The note immediately after the breath should be resumed where the previous note was left off. It would be wiser to think of a kind of *crescendo* of sound, and keep it held right up until the end of the sound itself.
9. The note after the breath should be more musical and expressive than the previous one.
10. Before you take a breath, never let yourself run out of air, or rather never arrive at the end of a note, or a phrase, at the extremity of your lung capacity.

Here are some exercises to work on:

With the ocarina, begin by playing a quick breath, filling your lungs to the maximum. Are you making a noise when you breathe? If the answer is yes, the cause may be that you have your shoulders raised and therefore your throat is closed, or your mouth is not sufficiently open. Lower the jaw to align the upper teeth to the lower ones and take in air. You should feel a cold sensation on the teeth. Repeat the exercise with your teeth more separated from each other, this time you should feel a cold sensation in the throat. Open your mouth and throat wide, so that the feeling of cold reaches the lungs. YOUR BREATH WILL NOW BE SILENT.

SOME GOOD ADVICE:

1. LEARN TO SING YOUR SOUND.
2. FEEL HAPPY!
3. IF THE WEATHER IS BAD, PRETEND IT ISN'T.
4. IF YOU HAVE NO DESIRE TO STUDY ON A PARTICULAR DAY, DO NOT DO SO, IT WOULD BE LOST TIME, BETTER TO HAVE A REST (BUT STUDY DOUBLE THE DAY AFTER!)

11. NERVOUSNESS:

Every one of us has disadvantages (and advantages) with regard to nervousness. A performer who never has nerves is truly a rare beast. Nervousness is essential for execution. I know this is a difficult statement to accept, when you're knees and hands are shaking, nausea overtakes you, your mouth is dry, when you are short of the necessary saliva for the *staccato*, and you are in a sweat (including the hands that are slipping on the instrument) – all of which conspire against any musician!

Nervousness is the effect produced by two substances, called *adrenaline* and *acetylcholine*, within the *sympathetic nervous system*. Adrenaline, acetylcholine, and other substances with long names, are produced by glands in the body in response to orders given by the brain. The task of adrenaline is to allow a more immediate response to danger: the *fight-or-flight* response. When man, armed with just a club, came face to face with wild animals, his glands produce adrenaline to give his muscles a boost, which allowed him to fight more vigorously or run away faster.

In the absence of a fight, or a flight, adrenaline generates excitement. Nevertheless, the adrenaline, like any musician or actor can tell you, is very important for a public performance.

It helps one play better.

Unfortunately, the body provides more than is actually needed. This amount in excess is what concerns us, because it is the adrenaline that makes the dry mouth, the knees tremble, and so on, while on the contrary, it is due to acetylcholine that we become pale, blood pressure is lowered, and we feel sluggish.

How does all this come about? Nervousness is triggered by CONSCIOUS ANXIETY, or rather a SUBCONSCIOUS CIRCLE (SUBCONSCIOUS CYCLE).

It will not be easy to identify which of these two in particular is the cause of your anxiety.

CONSCIOUS ANXIETY can be avoided in several ways: but first of all, we must determine the cause.

1. Fear of the public or *stage fright*: in your first appearance on the stage as you look at your audience. There is no wild animal there in the middle of them! Speak out, announce the songs that you're going to play, tell some anecdotes relating to them. All this can help you overcome fear, even if you waste a little time.
2. Learn the music well: never perform songs in public that have a difficulty beyond your capacity. Memorise the difficult passages. If you are truly prepared, and are master of what you are about to play, you will be able to overcome the panic, like having an autopilot.

A SUBCONSCIOUS CIRCLE is a recurring fear that rages in the unconscious part of your mind: that there is more or less something to be afraid of. For example, you have had three or four unpleasant visits from your boss. The moment you are informed that your presence has been requested again, although this time to receive congratulations on good work of various kinds, the adrenaline will come back into circulation, and you become afraid. Your suffering from an incomplete circle: BOSS = FEAR = ADRENALINE.

Unfortunately, we have the tendency to worry about being afraid, and the consequences that this may have a negative impact on performance.

We know that fear leads our body to produce adrenaline, and this will provide the best setting for apprehension.

At this point, the circle closes: CONCERT = APPREHENSION = ADRENALINE = FEAR OF FEAR = MORE ADRENALINE, etc... etc... It may be possible to break the cycle by using one of the methods described below.

Individuals are mainly divided into two groups, when they are anxious, or are affected by adrenaline or by acetylcholine.

Naturally, between these two groups there are various different nuances.

To figure out which category you belong to, try one of the following:

1. Keep some sweets handy to melt slowly in the mouth on the day of the concert, to maintain a constant blood glucose level, which may fall due to anxiety.

OR

2. Take a pill for seasickness; the sort that are easily found in any type of chemist.

DO NOT USE BOTH THESE METHODS AT THE SAME TIME.

Try them separately on less important occasions, so as to ascertain which of the two will bring you more benefit. Do not forget to try method 1 first, and remember that a little nervousness can make for a better performance.

A simple, but very effective, tip is that before an important concert, and even better a few days before, you make use of herbal teas several times a day to relax the mind and body, for example CAMOMILE, VALERIAN, or PASSION FLOWER.

Concentrate on relaxing your body and mind by doing some simple exercises during your working day: for example, start thinking of slowing down your pace when walking; when you are talking, try to do it slowly; and it is very important that, on the day of the concert, you make time for a healthy rest of the body.

If after several of these experiments, you still continue to be very nervous, taking a drink before a show can be a great help. / *hesitate to recommend this measure for fear of being misunderstood*. But a small amount of alcohol taken before a show can do wonders. It can be the tool to break the cycle of fear. Contrary to widespread belief, when you are in the throes of strong anxiety or apprehension, only a small amount of alcohol is absorbed from the stomach, so the possibility of becoming drunk is unforgivable...! Having travelled so far along this difficult journey, the more advanced students might like to know that drugs are now available that can help in the case of nervousness and that should be taken into account during important occasions. Experiments conducted on

music students, in several music schools in London, have had promising results. These drugs, known as beta-blockers, limit the effects of adrenaline on the body, with no or minimal side effects. They are only available with a medical prescription. They should be tried first on occasions of little importance, so that you can properly evaluate your reaction.

However, I do not wholeheartedly recommend these therapies, as I believe that a healthy fear should be overcome without the use of drugs.

In any case, for readers who have some doubts on the use of alcohol or any other drugs, it should be born in mind that the effects on the body of nervousness and tension over time can result in a lot of damage. For an advanced level instrumentalist or for a professional, an international competition, an important audition, or a solo concert can all mean the culmination of years of study and achievement. A nervous breakdown at this point could be very harmful.

Whatever the approach, it is better to consult **Chapter 4 and the RELAXATION TECHNIQUES**.

12. IMPROVISATION:

Improvisation is the impromptu art of creating music, generally playing the melodic patterns, or the melodies, on a series of given chords, or on a bass line.

Improvising is like speaking on a particular **SUBJECT** or **THEME** without having a written or prepared speech in advance.

Is a written text needed to converse with someone? Of course not! And you also don't need to have a sheet of music in front of you to perform. But to make sense of it, you need a **SUBJECT** or **THEME** on which to improvise.

The two most common forms of musical improvisation are **JAZZ** and **BAROQUE** (improvisation of the seventeenth century). Surprisingly, these two **MUSICAL FORMS** are very similar in that both are based on the same chord progressions. It is the style that is different.

To begin with, we should do a simple exercise to recognise chords and cadences, and then to arrive at realising a harmonious whole.

Ask a friend to play a few chords over and over on a keyboard or a guitar without stopping (or make use of technology; a computer on which you yourself can compose something that might sound like a pianist or guitarist). If you're in a small group (which would be ideal), take turns to try and improvise a few notes. In this way, ideas are passed from one player to another, mutually stimulating the imagination of all.

Take, for example, 4 bars of 4/4 (four fourths) and play 3 Cs located on the third space plus a pause on the fourth bar. Using this little exercise as a starting point, start to free your mind from the printed music by playing as many variations as you can around the 3 Cs.

Try to do at least 20 of them or maybe even 30.

Make your mind elastic and given free rein to all the fantasy that your brain can achieve, use different rhythms, passing notes, arpeggios, scales, trills and various embellishments, staccato and legato notes, whilst phrasing them in different ways.

NOW, THERE ARE SOME RULES FOR IMPROVISATION:

1. Play just about anything that comes to mind. When you are more relaxed try to FEEL the harmonic movement of the line of the chords that you have available, or of those who accompany you.
2. Relax, there are no "right" or "wrong" notes, but only "good" and "bad" taste.
3. The important thing is to strive to create, to play with simplicity, nobility, spontaneity and clarity. Consequently, do not go crazy by trying to put as many notes as possible in your improvisations; rather, be simple and economical.
4. During the first exercises and experiments, it is advisable to have a written harmonic line to refer to, to understand the key and the chords to be followed, in order to play more easily and build your improvisation. With study, practice and time, you will be able to play without reading the chords, and just need to know the key, and then follow progressions with any harmonic turn with your instinct and ear.

13. PLAYING BY MEMORY:

For all musicians and soloists, playing by memory means liberating your mind.

All piano and string soloists play from memory. Wind instrumentalists sometimes do so, but as there is no tradition of memorising the concertos, sonatas and other work, most of the time they do not. This is a pity, as the musicians who play from memory can confirm that this will certainly lead to more freedom in musical expression.

ANYONE CAN PLAY BY MEMORY, IF THE APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM IS CORRECT.

There is no need to waste time acquiring the memory! YOU HAVE ONE ALREADY. You just need to exercise it.

Here are some tips:

1. Don't become transfixed by the music all the time, like a rabbit before a snake. This applies to scales, exercises, in actual fact for EVERYTHING! Try to get away from the music stand. Look out the window and continue to play, but do not blame yourself if you're wrong. You do not need written notes to hold a conversation; neither do you need the score for playing an instrument.
2. Do not try obsessively to avoid mistakes. If you make a mistake, it's not going to be a dramatic thing. Indeed, we learn a lot more from the mistakes than from the great masters. **TRYING NOT TO MAKE MISTAKES IS OFTEN THE GREATEST OBSTACLE TO A RELIABLE MEMORY.**
Try to enjoy the freedom from dependence on a score. Understand that this may require some time, but the effort will be well rewarded.
3. Learn to improvise (consult chapter 12. IMPROVISATION).
Learn to *create a prelude*.
In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was common to *create a prelude* before a study or a song, with freedom of both rhythm and expression. There is no need to be told what to play: you just have to have the courage to try.
4. Gradually get used to looking over your score when you perform in public, to do this it is important that you have great confidence in the song being played, but you will find that it will help you free your mind to play with great mental clarity and expressiveness.