

## SOME MORE THOUGHTS ON PRACTICING

By MICHAEL BURNS, *EDITOR*

In my last article I outlined some hints and suggestions concerning the practice process. There are some other important aspects of practicing that were left out of that article that I would like to touch on in this one.

**Practicing should be a regular occurrence.** It is far more beneficial to the player to spend some time every day practicing rather than to do longer practice sessions several days apart. That is, it would be better for a player to spend 30 minutes practicing every day for a week than to do two practice sessions of two hours each. Even though the latter example has given more practice hours in the week (four instead of 3 1/2) over time the regularity will pay off more.

Obviously, the more time spent in each of the regular practice sessions the better. However, **spending hours in the practice room does not necessarily mean that you are practicing well.** Practicing needs to be efficient, and usually a short intensive practice session is more productive than a longer inefficient session. Practice to fix mistakes, not reinforce them. Simply running through a piece several times is not efficient practice. See the last article for some suggestions on how to increase practicing efficiency.

**Don't just practice notes, always aim for the music.** You should always monitor and work on tone, intonation, dynamics, and phrasing, not just technique.

**EVERY musician should own a metronome and use it when practicing.** We all need to develop a strong sense of rhythm, and a metronome helps in this task immensely. Most instrumentalists need to be able to follow an external beat, whether it be from an orchestra or band conductor, colleagues in a chamber ensemble, piano accompanist, or what have you.

In order to do this we all need to develop a strong sense of inner rhythm and working familiarity with the concept of subdivision. This should be worked on in the practice room using the metronome. It can be very useful to a student to set the metronome at the faster tempo of one of the subdivisions (perhaps 2,3, or 4 times the beat tempo) rather than at the given beat level. Conversely, practicing with the metronome only clicking once per every two, three, or four beats, or even once per measure makes the player have to subdivide the inner beats

to stay in time. Of course you will also set the metronome to the beat itself often. Which tempo you set the metronome to would be determined by the music and the individual player. Remember, **the metronome never lies!** If a player is not used to using one in their practicing they may be surprised at how much their tempo fluctuates.

If possible, **a regular time should be set aside for practicing every day.** This time should be adhered to no matter what. If you have a scheduled practice time you are much more likely to use it. It is all too easy to procrastinate, put it off, get involved with other activities and the practice gets neglected and forgotten. This situation often leads to the scenario mentioned above where the player needs to catch-up and do a long practice session to try to make up for the skipped practice time.

**The more you practice, the better your playing becomes.** When you improve on your instrument it becomes far more rewarding and enjoyable to play. Music is supposed to be fun! Many see practicing as a drudgery that has to be suffered through, but when done well it is extremely satisfying, and yet, practicing can and should even be fun.

In the last article I mentioned the importance of incorporating a good warm-up into your practice routine. The following is a list of some recommended sources for woodwind warm-ups:

**Flute:** Marcel Moyse. *Daily Exercises*; Paula Robinson. *Flute Warm-Ups*; Taffanel-Gaubert. *Daily Exercises*; Trevor Wye. *Practice Books for the Flute*

**Clarinet:** Kelly Burke. *Clarinet Warm-Ups*

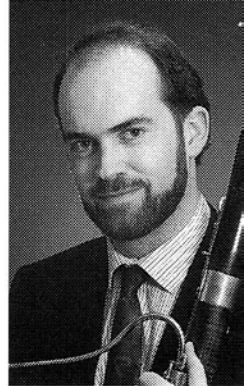
**Oboe: ?**

**Bassoon:** Fernand Oubradous. *Complete Exercises for Bassoon*; Simon Kovar. *24 Daily Exercises for Bassoon*; Chris Weait. *Bassoon Warm-Ups*

**Saxophone:** Larry Teal. *The Saxophonist's Workbook*; Steven Mauk. *Saxophone Warm-Ups*

Mary teachers also advocate having students create or write their own warm-ups for their instrument. Others may borrow warm-up routines from other instruments, for example many woodwind players use the famous brass warm-up patterns outlined in the Arban-Clarke

method for cornet. The books listed above by Robinson, Burke, Weait, and Mauk give a very thorough approach to the warm-up process for the specific instrument, but could easily be adapted to other instruments. I do not know of a similar book for oboe.



### About the Author

**Michael Burns, Bassoon, holds a B.M. with Honours from the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, an M.M. from New England Conservatory, Boston, and a D.M.A. from the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati. Currently he is Assistant Professor of Bassoon at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and the Bassoonist in the Eastwind Quintet. He has held teaching positions at Midland College in Texas, and Indiana State University in Terre Haute.**

As a performer, Burns has played Principal Bassoon in the Midland/Odessa Symphony Orchestra in Texas, the Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra, the Richmond (IN) Symphony, and numerous groups in his native New Zealand. In addition he has performed as a member of the Cincinnati, and New Zealand Symphony Orchestras.

Currently he performs regularly with the Greensboro and Salisbury Symphony Orchestras, and as an extra with the North Carolina and Charlotte Symphony Orchestras. Burns is also becoming a regular performer at the International Double Reed Society Conventions. At the most recent convention in Chicago he performed one of his own compositions, *Swamp Song for bassoon and electronic tape*. Burns' principal teachers include William Winstead, Sidney Rosenberg, Sherman Walt, Leonard Sharrow, and Colin Hemmingsen.

If you would like to submit an article to be considered for publication in *Woodwind Notes* please contact the woodwind editor, Michael Burns at the following address:

Dr. Michael Burns, Assistant Professor of Bassoon, School of Music, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC 27412-5001, (910) 334-5970, e-mail: [mjburns@hamlet.uncg.edu](mailto:mjburns@hamlet.uncg.edu)