

Petition

The need for suitable clarinets for young students

Firms: Yamaha, Buffet, Selmer, Jochen Seggelke, Georg Hufnagel

Zurich/Lucerne, December 2015

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the annual meeting of the Swiss Clarinet Society on 31 October 2015, we made the decision to send a petition to the firms Buffet, Selmer, Jochen Seggelke, Yamaha and Georg Hufnagel. Please be so kind and sign the petition yourselves as well as forwarding it to clarinet pedagogues in other countries. [Additionally, we may send it to further/the following clarinet builders]

Since the production and sales of clarinets on the one hand and the nurturing of young talent on the other hand are very interdependent, we find it important to inform you about the outcome of our symposium, in the hope that we can, together, find a solution for the existing problems.

In recent years, there has been a wonderful development in the construction of clarinets. Balanced tone, intonation, tone color and workmanship have developed very positively. For the low instruments bass clarinet and contrabass clarinet there have even been new, significant developments. It is pleasing to see how results of research and considerations of the specific physical properties of clarinets as closed pipes in the present-day construction of instruments are being continually better understood and are being used to produce better and better clarinets.

Nevertheless we cannot overlook the fact, that in recent years the number of students has been continually decreasing. While other instruments such as the violin, the piano and the recorder are actually experiencing a boom, the clarinet is steadily, inexorably losing ground. Clarinet teachers have been trying for years with dedication and creativity to turn the tide, but the turning point has not yet been reached.

Already around 10 years ago, we have wrestled with this phenomenon and came to the conclusion that in present-day society, the need to make instrumental instruction available to younger children is felt. Selection of an instrument takes place at a younger age today, therefore it is necessary to meet the needs of these musically interested young children with a good selection of quality instruments. With instruments such as string instruments, piano or even the recorder, it is no problem to meet this social development. Not so with the clarinet.

Many clarinet pedagogues have recognized this development and have set out on the journey. Many have developed the tools needed to provide children from age 5 on with up-to-date, age-appropriate instruction.

As with other instruments, it is also very important to provide young clarinetists with the opportunity to play in ensembles. Ensemble playing increases self-confidence and motivation, and promotes social connections. Clarinet teachers go to great lengths to build up suitable groups, to prepare literature and to organize projects in order to strengthen and support the joy of playing an instrument. For the very reason that there are often fewer children who choose the clarinet, it is decisively important that it is easily possible for these young clarinetists to play together with other instruments and with groups of mixed ages.

Despite great efforts, we have to this day, not been successful in effectively working against the sinking popularity of the clarinet. In the following paragraphs, we would like to offer a short explanation for this.

To this day, there is still no suitable instrument for an early start on the clarinet.

For the first year, it is still possible to teach the basics on the existing beginners' instruments such as the tiger-striped clarinet in high G. However, there is no available instrument for the next stages.

One could consider the Eb-clarinet or the high Ab-clarinet for this purpose since they have suitable key-work and are the right size. However experience shows that for playing in mixed groups, they present the children with enormous difficulties. Here is an example: if we take a piece for mixed ensemble in the key of C Major, the Eb-clarinets must play in A Major. Or if we take Bb Major, the tiger-striped clarinets have Eb Major, which also presents difficulties and poor-sounding notes. The best key is still F Major: the tiger-striped clarinets have Bb Major, die Eb-clarinets D Major, the Bb-clarinets G Major. Also this is not so easy and, in addition, we unavoidably run into a further difficulty: If we have to put a piece into many keys, it can no longer be avoided that some notes land in the overblown register because the melodies end up exactly between the registers. Unfortunately, constant changing between the clarinet- and the chalumeau-registers is difficult for beginners.

In short: difficult keys and the technical demands of changing registers make it continually impossible to have the children play in mixed groups. Playing together is difficult, not only with other wind instruments but also with brothers and sisters who play piano, cello or recorder. Since the children have these problems for 2 – 4 years, until they finally grow bigger and can then manage to play a C-clarinet, it is not an especially attractive perspective. The parents also notice this.

For years, we pedagogues have been trying to solve these problems and at this year's symposium, we reached the conclusion that we need a **new instrument with the following characteristics:**

In order to facilitate learning the clarinet for young beginners, it is necessary to develop a new instrument in-between the tiger-striped clarinet which is pitched in high G and the existing C-clarinet. This clarinet should have complete key-work and also be pitched in high G.

The high G-clarinet to be developed must have the following characteristics:

- Light-weight and well balanced
- A beautiful tone with a very well-functioning mouthpiece (possibly an Eb mouthpiece)
- Good intonation
- An almost full set of keys but without the left-hand Eb key and without the Bb and C side trill-keys.
- The new G-clarinet should be rented out by music stores and be reasonably priced.
- For reasons of economy and environmental protection, the new instrument should be robust enough to be well playable for at least five years. Repairs should also be worthwhile.

In conclusion, we would like to point out another important pedagogical reason for using clarinets in the key of high-G: A clarinet in this key, when played in the [common] keys of F, G, Bb and C Major and in the parallel keys of E, G, A and D minor, matches the range of singing children exactly!

In addition, the high-G clarinet is, from a medicinal point of view, just the right length to enable the clarinet-playing child to sustain an ideal posture and to be able to play with perfectly angled arms. No longer is a defective posture caused by playing an instrument which is too large.

The undersigned would heartily welcome the development of a suitable instrument for smaller children in the near future.

We are only too happy to contribute our know-how and dedication in order to help insure a quick and successful development.

With this new clarinet, we hope to effectively reverse the failing popularity of the clarinet [and so continue to provide you with long term customers]. We hope we have aroused your interest.

Sincerely,

Sibylle Schuppli
Hanstoni Kaufmann