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Oboe Embouchure

Examine the picture of facial muscles below. Take some time to study the illustration carefully. Then go to a mirror. Look at your facial construction and consider which muscles are used to play the oboe.



From *What Every Musician Needs to Know About the Body*, by Barbara and Benjamin Conable, Andover Press, 2000.

Embouchure is a word that describes the formation of the lips and facial muscles that surround the reed in order to play the oboe. The embouchure is one of the most important components to playing oboe with beautiful sound and good pitch

Some characteristics of a GOOD OBOE EMBOUCHURE

1. The lips should surround the reed like an inverted whistle with an airtight seal.
2. Teeth should never come in contact with the reed--lips act as a cushion between the teeth and the reed.
3. The embouchure should maintain a rounded feeling at all times. Like whistling, the lips should be firm but not tense.
4. A good embouchure should facilitate stable pitch and accurate intonation.
5. Flexibility is a key element to a great oboe embouchure. For example, when playing large intervals the embouchure must be supple enough to relax or tighten appropriately to allow notes to speak easily with good intonation.
6. A successful embouchure permits beautiful, resonant tone quality at any dynamic level.
7. No puffy cheeks or air "pillows" in the lower lip--allow the facial muscles to form directly around the gums and teeth.

Four-Step Process to Forming a Great Oboe Embouchure

1. **Bring your lips together as if whistling.** When whistling, the lips are drawn together in a rounded position that is slightly in front of the teeth. The chin is flat and the sides of the lips are drawn together. Another way to think about this is to mimic the sound of an owl: Whooo-whooh.
2. **Now, imagine your lips are creating an *inverted* whistle.** The lips will be formed as if whistling, but are now also slightly drawn inward. Be careful that you do not bring the jaw forward at the same time.
3. **Next, place the oboe reed (without the oboe) on the bottom lip.** Only the VERY tip should be inserted just past the red, soft, fleshy area of the inner lip.
4. **Surround the reed with your lips to create an airtight seal and blow through the reed.** Think of the lips as a cushion and support for the reed. The lips should never suffocate the reed, because the reed still needs to vibrate freely. When you begin blowing through the reed, the embouchure should gently hold and support the reed.



Hoo! Hoo!

C! C! C! Exercises

1. Place your lips on the thread portion of the reed and blow (your lips should NOT be touching the cane). Ideally the pitch sound, or “crow” should be the pitch C.
2. Second, form your embouchure around the very tip of the reed and create the exact pitch that sounded with step 1. If the pitch is flat, think of the numbers on a clock. Then, imagine your embouchure is round, like the clock. Think of where 2 and 10 are on the clock and use the lip muscles that would be at 2 and 10 to apply more pressure on the reed to bring the pitch up.
3. Next, put the reed on the oboe and play a C (third space, treble clef) with the same embouchure as in step 2

Flexibility Exercises on the Reed Alone:

1. **Say “EEEEEEEEEE”**
Form your embouchure around your reed and begin blowing. Next, while blowing position your embouchure to say “EEEE.” The pitch of the reed should go up.
2. **Say “OOOOOOOOOH”**
Form your embouchure around your reed and begin blowing. Next, while blowing position your embouchure to say “OOOOH.” The pitch of the reed should go down.
3. **Say “EEEE---OOOOOH”**
Alternate between “EEEE” and “OOOOH” sounds. It might sound like a sliding kazoo. Discover the highest and lowest notes that you can play. Can you play a short song such as “Three Blind Mice,” “Row Row, Row, Your Boat,” or even “Yankee Doodle”?

Practicing this sort of flexibility will be important for playing the oboe. Low notes need more of an “OOOO” embouchure, and higher notes need more of an “EEEE” embouchure.

For HOMEWORK:

1. **Memorize: the Four-Step Process for Forming a Great Oboe Embouchure**
(Each of you will demonstrate this for me next week in a short quiz)
2. **Practice the C!C!C! Exercises** at home for 5 minutes each time for at least 3 DAYS before we next meet.
(Each of you will demonstrate this for me next week in a short quiz)
3. **Practice the Flexibility Exercises on the Reed Alone** for 5 minutes each time for at least 3 DAYS before we next meet
(Each of you will share a short melody with the group next week)
4. **Write** down any questions that you have below: