

INTONATION

Paula,

I stumbled across your website today while looking for some assistance on a tuning question. I am delighted to have found your Ask Paula section, and am hopeful that you can help me. I am an adult amateur clarinet player, having played through high school and college, and now playing in local volunteer ensembles. I recently bought a clarinet: a 1972 R13 Buffet. It is a great instrument for me, and I enjoy how much easier it is to play than my Evette that I had in high school and college. However, the instrument consistently plays quite flat, and I never had that problem with my Evette. I cannot figure out what to do. I have purchased different size barrels, and I can come close to being in tune with a 64 mm barrel. However, it still plays flat and my throat tones are just terrible. It is really noticeable in band rehearsal. I am wondering if I should try a new mouthpiece. I have a Vandoren B45 currently. Do you think that changing my mouthpiece will help, and if so, do you have any recommendation on what models to look at?

Katrina

Dear Katrina:

Thank you for your excellent question. I am delighted to hear that you are playing in volunteer (community) bands and ensembles and that you like Buffet Crampon clarinets and Vandoren products!

Here is what I would suggest:

1. Set a reference pitch tuner (or keyboard instrument) to the note F#. Play only on your mouthpiece and barrel and check to see if your pitch is close to F#. If it is flat, then your issue could be the mouthpiece/reed combination or the shape of your oral cavity when you play. Oral Cavity: Tongue position very high and close to the reed HEE or TEE when you tongue.

2. Mouthpiece/Reed combination: A B45 is one of the more open mouthpieces and works best with a softer reed. I do not recommend this set-up because I find it hard to focus the sound which could be causing you to sound flabby. Soft reeds and more open (free blowing) mouthpieces have their place (Jazz) but can be difficult to control in classical playing.

3. Better matches for the R13:

M30: Not as open as the B45; medium everything; works well with 3 or 3.5 reeds. Dark, vibrant sound. This is my mouthpiece of choice.

M15: More closed tip opening than the M30 so harder reeds 3.5 or 4. Many of my students like the compact sound they get with it.

4. Barrels: Phil Muncy (www.muncywinds.com) has designed some terrific barrels for Buffet Crampon. You might call and talk with the experts there about your tuning issues and get a suggestion. Phil also knows a lot about clarinet model years and can tell you about manufacturing for almost any particular year.

Thanks again for your excellent question. I hope my suggestions are helpful and that you will write back and let me know how things work out!

Best,
Paula Corley

P.S. Put some orange peels in your case (just overnight) occasionally to keep the wood looking good.