

ELLENWOOD'S LIST OF MUSICAL NECESSITIES

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BODY

Your physical home on this earth and the wondrous container of your energy, mind, and skills. Feel your weight, feel the gravity that embraces you and connects you to the earth. Balance yourself, whether sitting or standing. Feel your place in the physical world. Align and expand. Cleanse yourself with the breath, releasing excess tension.

MIND

Your thoughts, your awareness, your memory, your beliefs, and the filter of all your experiences. Prepare your mind to create. Let everything you do be part of an intentional creative act. Open your senses, observe, feel, and listen—to the sensations in your body, to the thoughts in your head, to the sounds you produce. Approach everything with curiosity, as if encountering everything for the very first time. If you feel anxious, stressed, or afraid, dialogue with yourself about your fears; name them. Be gentle with yourself. Not every thought or feeling you have is true. Quiet the negative voice. Engage the curious and observational voice. The truths you may struggle with the most are simply these, but they are true, nonetheless:

"I am capable of growth. With mindful and consistent effort, I will be able to do the thing that seems impossible right now. By choosing to learn and develop my skills, I will claim power and control in my art-making and in my path through life."

THE IDEAS

The conceptual forms of everything you will create, prompted by engagement with the musical notation, your instrument, your experiences, and your imagination. The sound you want to produce. Pulse. The rate at which the music unfolds. The shape of the line. The character of the passage. The narrative, the story, the framework. The way in which the music moves and flows—or doesn't. Decisions about the infinite choices available to you that cannot be shown in the musical notation—the limitless gradations of volume, the full spectrum of tone colors, the patterns of inflection and shaping, the subtle changes of emotion. Everything that you bring as YOU—your life, your understanding, your experiences—to your artistic expression; the qualities and characteristics that make you sound like YOU. Everything that you hear and learn and observe, OUTSIDE OF YOURSELF, that you wish to incorporate into your playing; creative influences and inspiration.

PHYSICAL TOOLS

An artist-quality clarinet that is well-maintained. Crack-free. Pads that seal completely. A perfectly-aligned bridge key mechanism. A mouthpiece-reed-ligature-barrel combination that allows you to produce a focused and resonant sound easily, efficiently, and with good intonation. Swab, reed case, key oil, and jewelers screwdriver. Pencil. Musical scores. Web-based resources, scores, and recordings.

AIR

AIR, MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE.

Center it as low as you can in your body, fill yourself up. Channel it through your throat and mouth, shape and focus it with your tongue. Let it flow from you—sometimes rapidly, sometimes slowly, depending on the quality of sound and the dynamic level...but you must move the air. It is the raw material for your art-making, the paint for your brush. Without air, you cannot paint on the canvas of time. This is true in music and in life.

EMBOUCHURE

Supportive. Shaping. An embrace that allows the reed to sing and move. Anything more is stifling and restrictive, and the reed will let you know. Trust is perhaps the biggest part of this, and daily practice and experimentation will help you to learn trust. You might have to learn to open more, and to hold on a little less tightly. Give your reed freedom to sing, while being supportive. This concept is also important in human relationships, too.

FINGERS

Curved, Natural. Free of excess tension, but active and directed; not passive. Close to the clarinet. Positioned where they are needed—over specific tone holes or key levers. Dropping into place with rhythmic precision, positively and efficiently covering tone holes and activating key levers. Choreography, on a digital scale—coordinated, precise, efficient, organized and almost surgical. Scales, arpeggios, and technical patterns are the laboratory for experimentation. Work slowly, in front of a mirror...or record yourself. Observe, adjust, incorporate. You'll always want to go faster than you should. Slow things down. Work to make everything feel as effortless as you can. Pay attention to the accumulation of tension...stop, isolate, and release.

TONGUE

The least possible amount of motion. The smallest possible surface area of contact. The tiniest possible distance between tongue and reed. You should feel the crescent of the reed tip vibrating across the top of the tip of the tongue. When you're articulating efficiently, it will be so easy that it feels "wrong." You may spend many hours "working hard to not work so hard." This is the nature of the journey. Accents are produced by sudden shifts of speed and volume of the AIR, not the force of the tongue.

INDEPENDENCE

Artistic clarinet playing is the precise coordination of independent processes. Air, embouchure, fingers, and tongue are independent from each other. They are separate trains on parallel tracks. When learning new music, isolate each process, then begin combining them.

REST

You will need breaks. Take them. Set a timer. You will accomplish much more when you are fresh and not over-tired. You will also help prevent physical injuries.

COURAGE, COMMUNICATION, CONNECTION

Three Cs. Fundamentally, being a musician is about opening and making yourself vulnerable, saying the things that are deepest within you, and creating a resonance with those who are listening to what you are expressing. You have the power to heal yourself and others. The way that you play a phrase can help someone recognize something in their heart; it can show them to themselves in a new way, it can affirm for them that they are not alone. In a modern world where attention and disconnection are engineered and monetized, live music-making becomes an essential force for connecting, healing, and community-building. It is something to be given with sincerity and generosity, and it is a beautiful and poignant declaration of our shared humanity. Everything you do in your daily practice and preparation is in the service of sharing the most eloquent, beautiful, powerful, and meaningful expression that you can with others. And nobody cares if you aren't technically perfect—they care about the things you expressed, the ways in which you GAVE, and how listening to you made them FEEL.