

DCB Weekly

Issue 11

Saturday 30th May 2020



Welcome to the eleventh edition of the DCB newsletter. Remember we have our Zoom chat this morning at 10am. Looking forward to seeing you there if you can manage.

Welcome from the Chair

Good morning everyone and I hope you are all enjoying the lovely sunshine we have had over the last few days.

This coming week will see some easing of the lock down which is good news and a tentative step in the right direction, but there is still a long way to go before we can get back to anything resembling a rehearsal together. I have been Zooming with Making Music and chatting to other musical groups across the UK to see how they have been coping. All of them have similar issues with playing and recording and we are all having to learn new technical skills. It is good to hear though, that research is being done to see how playing wind instruments may impact on our rehearsals in the future and any measures we may need to take. That being said, I hope as many of you as possible will get involved (individually, of course) in The Nevis Ensemble, for which entries have to be in by this Sunday. All the information can be found on their website:

<https://nevisensemble.org/>

The bad news is I am still without my bassoon!



Have a lovely weekend. Stay safe, stay well.

Robert's section follows overleaf...

Musical Director's update

Good morning again everyone,

I really enjoyed seeing some familiar faces a fortnight ago on Zoom and I hope many of you can make it again this morning.

Here is a suggestion for this week for a bit of fun and to improve control sustaining quiet long notes.....

LONG NOTE COMPETITION!

Just record yourself playing one long note and send your recording to the DCB email address.

Try playing about mp on a middle register note and see how long you can play for.

RULES, Ha!

No Circular Breathing

No Video Edits!!

Please don't injure yourself and only play to your capability. For practice try timing yourself, then repeat and you often beat your previous attempt.

Whatever study or solo work you are working on try playing just one phrase.

Repeat but sing out loud with your best tone and be free.

Take a deep breath before you start and only think about the phrase and the music. Nothing technical to do with your chosen instrument.

Sing again and then repeat on the instrument.

Aim to be as free with your instrument as you are when you sing and stay RELAXED at all times.

If the rhythm is causing any concern then then use your clapping technique from the last week or two to improve it.

End Goal.....To be Free, Relaxed, Focus on Tone, Phrase Shape!

Have fun!

Robert



Meet the band

This week, **Moyra** shares the story of her love affair with her beloved harpsichord.

During our recent DCB Zoom catch up, a few sharp-eyed individuals spotted in the background, not shelves of books like on BBC interviews, but rather, what it has been suggested, looks like a blue piano; it is in fact a harpsichord. This has caused a lot of interest during Lockdown, on one occasion resulting in an impromptu performance for colleagues during a 'virtual tea break'. So here is the story of my love affair with what I have discovered is the 'Marmite' of musical instruments; harpsichords, you love them or loathe them.

It began at the Lammermuir Music Festival a few years ago, at a harpsichord recital in a country house in the peaceful East Lothian countryside. The sound was so gentle and refined; I was mesmerised. After a chat with the tuner, I set about finding out more; where to acquire one, how to look after it in our damp old farmhouse. I hired one from Colin Booth, a well-known harpsichord builder, recitalist, teacher and writer on early music. He despatched it north from his Somerset home and I set about exploring the intriguing world of the harpsichord and early music. It was then I discovered the range of views; "I love it" enthused Jan (3rd clarinet DCB), "it would be great to play some recorder music together". "Bag of nails. Bag of nails" opined a local professional musician however, looking pained. The worst however was reserved for a friend who mischievously quoted the famous conductor and impresario, Sir Thomas Beecham, "*The sound of a harpsichord – like two skeletons (frolicking) on a tin roof in a thunderstorm*". The only other instrument I have heard people refer to with such derision is the viola (What is the difference between a dead skunk and a crushed viola on the road? You will see skid marks in front of the skunk – apologies viola players, someone else told me that). The harpsichord also seems to evoke extremes. Needless to say, after a short period of rental, Colin and I came to an agreement about cost and the harpsichord settled in to stay.



So why this passion? I still love playing piano, which I have done since childhood, the clarinet which I took up later in life and my little English concertina which is great for playing folk music at 'the acoustic jam' in our village. The harpsichord offers something quite different however, and I would argue has really enhanced my understanding of musical interpretation. Geek warning; unlike the strings of the piano which are struck by hammers, the strings on the harpsichord are plucked, meaning there can be no variation in volume (hence why the piano was so revolutionary and called the pianoforte, the "quiet loud"). Similar to the widely ranging public opinion, literature varyingly describes the sound of the harpsichord as "brittle, rattling and clipped"¹ (bags of nails? skeletons on tin roofs?), alternatively, "a rich sound whose clarity informs the complex contrapuntal melodies of baroque music"². The production of sound in turn influences the nature of the music itself. The

¹ McNamee, David. (2010) Hey, what's that sound: Harpsichord. *The Guardian*. 4 January 2010.

² Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and Chorale. *Harpsichord*. <https://philharmonia.org/learn-and-listen/baroque-instruments/harpsichord/> Accessed 13 May 2020.

sound fades quickly so the need for ornaments and trills to sustain. Being honest, as a pianist I have sometimes avoided music with trills and 'ornaments' viewing them as fussy, awkward and difficult; they didn't appear to have a function, rather just part of the style of the period. When playing harpsichord however (or maybe it is just the influence of my superb teacher) each ornament has a purpose, sustaining the sound, leading the music somewhere, relating to the different voices in contrapuntal music and somehow more natural to the instrument. You need to think through in context and then work out how to play each individually.

Same applies to phrasing; in much piano and indeed clarinet music, phrasing and dynamics are clearly marked. I know in my head that composers and editors cannot mark in all the dynamics and you still have to interpret musically, but I confess, I can become a little lazy. Early music has no such markings however; 'unmeasured preludes' have no time signature or bar lines, and it is expected that you know how to perform it, drawing on the conventions of the time. You really need to work hard and engage with the music; where are the phrase endings, where are the cadences, where is it going, what is happening around this ornament? Such practice spills over into other performance, piano, clarinet, even on my concertina.

This week in a Zoom lesson with my teacher, I began working on Basso Continuo, to better accompany Jan on recorder once we are able to socialise. For those of us old enough to remember 'Figured Bass' as part of Higher Music at school when, to me, it was a dry and tedious exercise, suddenly in context, 'Basso Continuo' is fascinating and fun. Again, I really needed to dig down to understand the music, the harmonies, key changes, phrasing and where the music was going. What am I going to do with this passage? How will it relate to the recorder? Some of the approaches are in fact similar to Jazz, 'swinging' the quavers ('notes inégales'), and as above, deciding how I am going to play music with no editorial marks or phrasing, along with someone else. It really appeals to the rebel in me who doesn't like being told what to do.

And I haven't mentioned tuning. A friend recently told me that he was thinking of buying an electric harpsichord; I was horrified! Sunday afternoons spent tuning the harpsichord, trying to avoid pinging strings, the ultimate exercise in mindfulness; it is all part of the experience.

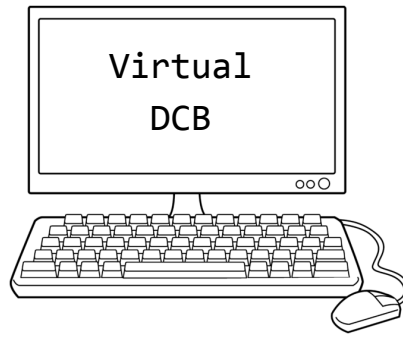
I do wonder what Handel would make of our world; my teacher in Glasgow observing and offering feedback from a box nearby (my laptop); me tuning the harpsichord to an App on my phone, quietly cursing when it froze and I had to fall back on tuning by ear but secretly enjoying the challenge.

Yes indeed, harpsichords, you love or loathe them. I know where I stand, but you have to be thick skinned;

*Why did Bach throw away his harpsichord?
Because it was Baroque.*

Thank you Moyra for introducing us to the fascinating world of the harpsichord. We'll all know what to look out for on our next DCB Zoom chat!

If you would like to contribute something for a future newsletter, either on your own or with members of your section, please get in touch via the usual email address - dunbartonshireconcertband@gmail.com. We would be delighted to hear from you!



Don't forget that we have our fortnightly Zoom meeting this morning at 10am. Why not come along and have a chat? Here's the link to the meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89738504796?pwd=VVgrY3JLOHlzZ2tMcDRWRGNsYnkwdz09>

David and Sharon have shared a link to their virtual performance of a cover of Cab Calloway's *Minnie The Moocher*. Definitely one to get your toes tapping! You can have a listen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxUvSa2dc6Y>



A few of the band recently recorded parts for **Flatbush Waltz**, a classic klezmer-style tune composed around 1980 by Andy Statman. The piece was named after the eponymous district of New York City, Andy's home town.

The parts were expertly created by Alan Cooper, who then edited the recordings together to produce the finished piece. If you'd like to have a listen, head over to the DCB website [here](#).

The recording was (loosely!) based on the Itzhak Perlman version, which can be found in the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUOkNfjsL78>



Don't forget that if you'd like to be part of the Nevis Ensemble's *World Wide Living Room Ensemble*, the deadline for submitting a recording of Auld Lang Syne is **Sunday 31st May**. Full details can be found in issue 9 of DCB Weekly.

If you'd like to submit a recording of *Bring Me Sunshine* for Make Music Day, the deadline for submission is **9am on Monday 8th June**. Full details can be found in issue 10 of DCB Weekly.



Cameron has shared some links to a play-along series released by bass clarinet virtuoso Michael Loewenstern on his YouTube channel *Earspasm*.

The collection of (bass) clarinet duets and ensemble pieces cover a wide range of styles and difficulties, so there should be something for everyone.

While these are originally for clarinet or bass clarinet, soprano/tenor sax, trumpet/cornet, and Bb treble clef-reading lower brass players may also find some of them suitable, range permitting.

The play-along videos can be found in this playlist:

<https://bit.ly/EarspasmPlayAlongPlaylist>

All of the relevant sheet music is either shown on screen or can be found here:

<https://bit.ly/EarspasmPlayAlongParts>

Clarinetists, in particular, may also wish to check out Michael's other videos for some useful tips and tricks. These can be found in the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/earspasm/videos>



Happiness is a good reed

Have you ever wondered how **Alan Cooper** makes his oboe reeds? Read his blog below to find out!

As you all know, oboists are delicate, sensitive creatures who don't like to talk about their reeds (unless there is an 'r' in the month, or not). But way back at the start of lockdown, Secretary Susan suggested that I do a reed-making blog for the DCB Weekly. So here goes... not a blog as such, but just an indication of what we have to go through to make those quacky/ducky noises that you all love.

There are four (no, five) basic steps in making a reed:

1. Get some cane, plus lots of other gubbins
2. Shape the cane
3. Tie it on to the staple
4. Profile (scrape) the reed...
5. Toss it in the bin and start again

Harriet's lovely bassoon cartoon from Issue 3 sums it all up really, but with knobs on for oboes...



The oboe reed cane (*arundo donax*) is the same as that used for bassoons, clarinets, saxophones, and bagpipes(!), but just smaller diameter. Real professionals would start here...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7ecDsto-GY>

...but I'm lazy and buy already matured and processed pieces of gouged cane.

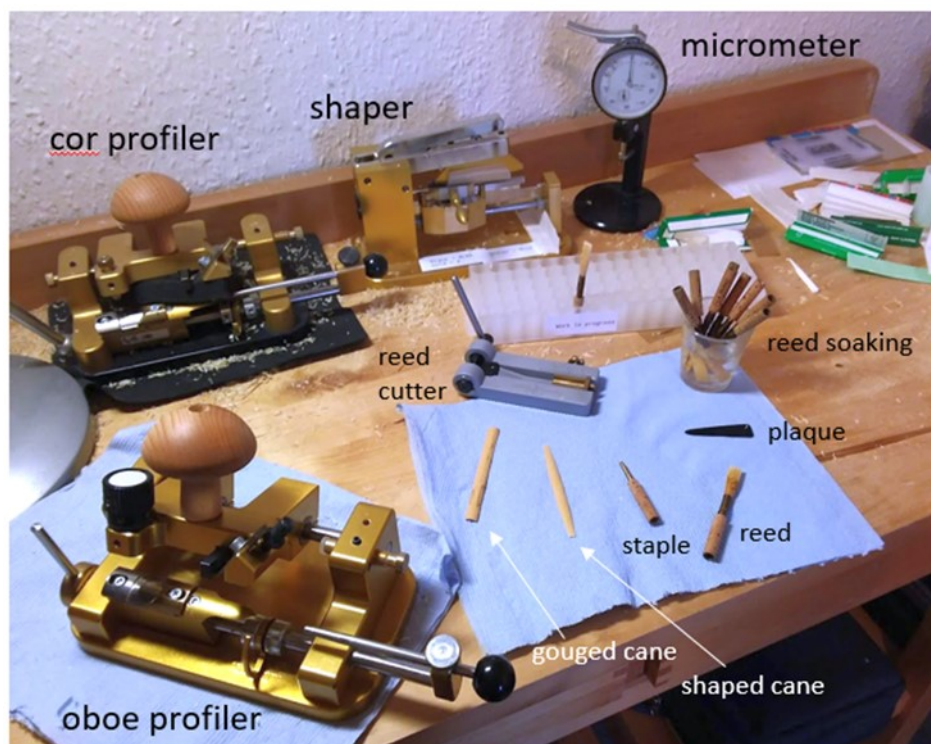
(continued overleaf)

Here's some YouTube videos of me doing the stuff over the last couple of weeks:

Shaping the cane: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMOClh62c4U>

Tying on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_Sok1Oj5Pw

Profiling: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UaV6PT_Vn_8



Some of the kit, with a collection of pretty coloured thread for tying on, and a convenient waste basket...

I use different colours of thread for cane from different sources or different reed shapes and scrapes.

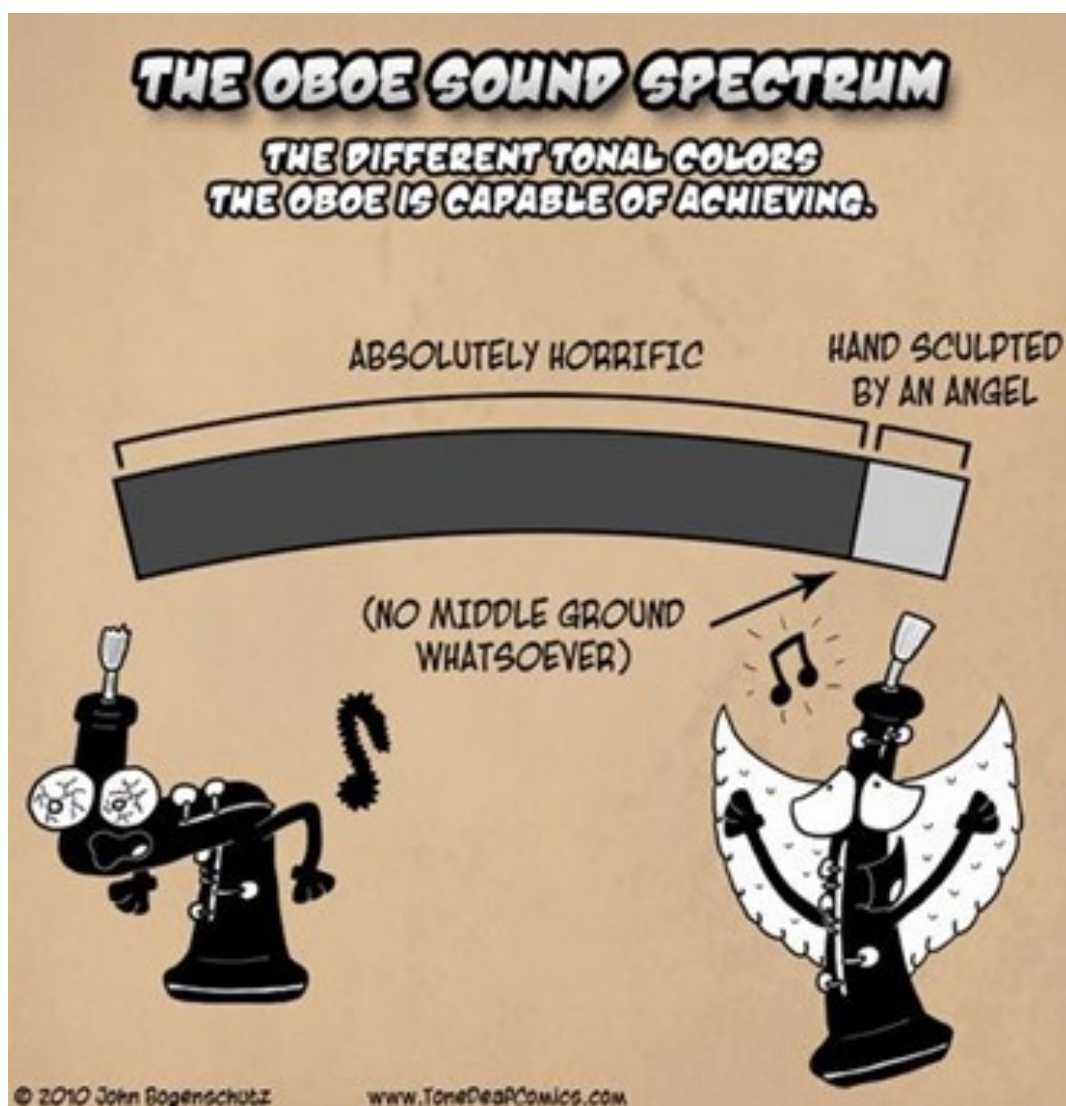
Doesn't make much difference. It's mostly psychological... brown ones are sounding good this week...

(continued overleaf)



Why bother?... Can't you just buy reeds?... Yes, but...

Commercial reeds are expensive, £15-25 per reed, and don't always work. Plus you don't know whose lips they touched last - reed making involves a lot of sucking and blowing. And, until recently at least, customers could often test out reeds in their favourite oboe shop before buying (with the rejects probably being sent out to mail order customers). Making my own reeds is not really any cheaper – the kit is expensive, and it's time consuming. But it can be satisfying, gives me a better understanding of the reed, and is a good excuse for not practising those traumatic scales!



Recipe corner

Louise has shared a recipe for vegan banana loaf, which sounds absolutely delicious. Why not have a go at making it this weekend? According to the recipe book, it tastes even better with some peanut butter spread on top!

Vegan banana loaf

Ingredients

250g plain flour	3 ripe bananas
75g light brown sugar	60ml almond milk
75g white sugar	2 tbsp maple syrup
1½ tbsp cocoa powder	1 tsp apple cider vinegar
½ tsp bicarbonate of soda	1 tsp vanilla extract
½ tsp salt	60g dark chocolate
½ tsp ground allspice	50g pecans
110g dairy-free butter	



You will also need a food processor

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 170°C. Line a 1kg loaf tin with parchment paper.
2. Pour all of the ingredients except the dark chocolate and pecans into a food processor and whizz them to a thick mixture. Take out the blade and scrape any excess mixture back into the bowl.
3. Break the dark chocolate and pecans into small pieces and tip them into the bowl. Mix everything together.
4. Pour the mixture into the lined loaf tin and put it into the oven. Bake for 60-65 minutes, or until a skewer inserted into the middle of the loaf comes out clean.
5. Take the tin out of the oven and leave the bread to cool to room temperature. Remove the bread from the tin and cut it into slices to serve.



Keeping in touch

As well as our online message board, we now have a Facebook page for band members as another way of keeping in touch. This is separate from the existing public page for the band, and is a private page for current members only. The aim is to use it to post videos or audio of any music you've been recording with any groups (or solo), photos old and new, links to articles you'd like to share, details of other concerts you're playing in (when we get back to playing in concerts!) etc.

If you're already on Facebook and a friend of one of the admins, you should have received a request to join the page. Someone who is already a member of the page can invite other band members to join. These requests will be approved by the admins. If you don't have a Facebook account, you'll need to set one up if you'd like to access the page.

If you already have a Facebook account and haven't received a request to join the page, please let us know by emailing dunbartonshireconcertband@gmail.com

And finally...

Please feel free to contact us via the usual email address at any time:

dunbartonshireconcertband@gmail.com

Keep practising!

