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Chapter Six

SOLVING REED PROBLEMS

TROUBLE-SHOOTING REED PROBLEMS These remedies produce other results as well as the one for the indicated problem. For example, closing the tip opening changes the pitch, response and air flow. Play the reed first, then examine it to determine what steps to take. "Balance" means match up the size or shape of blades, edges or tip. Test reed after each remedy.

PITCH:

E \flat in staff is flat

REMEDY:

shorten blade
narrow blade
close tip opening



REED RESPONSE:

Hard to blow

REMEDY:

close tip opening
balance blade edges
balance tips of each blade
thin profile
narrow spine

Flat overall

close tip opening
move blade and or middle wire
forward 1 or 2mm ($\frac{1}{32}$ " - $\frac{1}{16}$ ")
shorten or narrow blades
use shorter bocal

Unfocused note starts

seal leaky butt
firm up wires, especially middle wire
make tips same length
balance tip
ream tube

Sharp overall while playing

use faster air
lower tongue toward "awh"
round
loosen grip of lips on reed
use "open" throat—avoid choking air with larynx
open tip opening
slightly thin front $\frac{1}{3}$ of blade
move blade and or middle wire
back 1 or 2mm ($\frac{1}{32}$ " - $\frac{1}{16}$ ")

Too hard to sustain notes

close tip opening
reduce overall profile thickness

Tongues too hard

seal leaky butt
firm up wires, especially middle wire
smooth blades
reduce overall profile thickness

If still sharp overall:

blades too short/narrow: NEED NEW REED!
use longer bocal
next reed lengthen/widen tube
next reed lengthen/widen blades

Slurs poorly

balance tip thickness
balance blade thickness
make blades smooth

TONE OF REED IS:

Inflexible

REMEDY:

middle wire too round
blades too thick overall

Too easy to blow & flat

shorten or narrow blade

Dull

thin down or balance tips
reduce overall profile thickness
do scraping cycle(s)
narrow spine

Too easy to blow

open tip opening
sand around tips

RANGE:

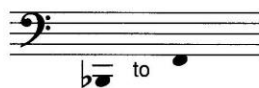
Lowest notes weak

REMEDY:

thin blade edges near ledge
balance edges

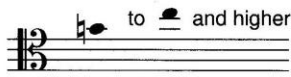
Too bright, reedy or nasal

raise throat arch
make German blade profile



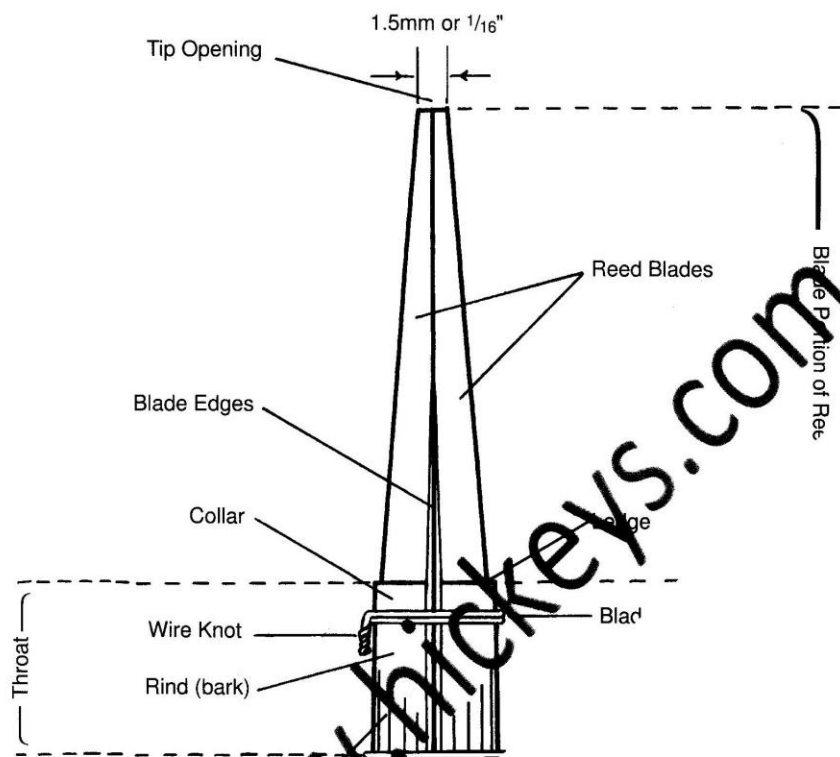
Highest notes hesitant

balance blade edges
thin tip corners



ABOUT PLAYING SHARP It is very common to hear about bassoonists playing sharp. This is rarely a reed problem except when a reed is getting old. Playing sharp is most often caused by one or both of the following: 1) too tight an embouchure—too closed, tongue too high in mouth, lips pulled too tight across the reed; and/or 2) not enough air support. It sounds like a contradiction, but slower air speed produces sharper not flatter pitch on the bassoon. It does this because the embouchure closes the reed tip when the air support is reduced.

Bassoon embouchure is not just the part you can see—the jaw, cheeks, facial muscles (the visible embouchure)—it is also the tongue and throat opening (the invisible embouchure).



Butt Opening



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