

Book Reviews: Teaching Woodwinds a Method and Resource For Music Educators

By: Michael Burns

[Burns, Michael](#). "Teaching Woodwinds: A Method and Resource Handbook for Music Educators, William Dietz, General Editor (Review)" *The Double Reed* 21 (October 1998): 102-104.

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Article:

Teaching Woodwinds: A Method and Resource Handbook for Music Educators, William Dietz, General Editor, with Jerry Kirkbride/Hal Ott/ Mark Weiger/Craig Whittaker.

Firstly for my double reed audience, let me say that the chapters in this text relating to the bassoon could be of use to any bassoon teacher whether teaching beginners or college students. I am adopting the text for my woodwind methods class but will also be excerpting materials to supplement my university bassoon studio teaching. As stated several times below, the descriptions and illustrations are excellent. While I have some differences of opinion about some of his pedagogical approaches, for the vast majority of the text I feel that Dietz's descriptions are right on the money.

This text is intended, as the subtitle would imply, as a resource for a band director or teacher of woodwind methods classes. For many years now the only textbook in common usage for these purposes was the Guide to Teaching Woodwinds by Frederick Westphal. This new text has a new and different approach to the teaching of woodwinds, one which I feel is logical and necessary. That is to have each instrument's materials be written by a separate specialist on that instrument as opposed to the entire text having a single author. Of course there are disadvantages to having several authors, lack of consistency being perhaps the most obvious, but I feel that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, especially when dealing with the double reeds, and welcome this approach.

In order to create as much consistency as possible amongst the different authors William Dietz acted as General Editor. He also contributed the bassoon chapters and it is those which I will address primarily in this review. Dietz is professor of music (bassoon and wind chamber music) at the University of Arizona and has extensive experience as both a performer and teacher of bassoon.

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction describing the essential characteristics of the modern German system bassoon, followed by a brief history of the instrument. Mention is also made of the French bassoon and the contrabassoon. The following section gives a very concise yet detailed and accurate description of the assembly of the instrument with very good illustrations to aid the written descriptions. Finally there is a brief paragraph about care and maintenance.

Chapter 2 deals with fundamentals of bassoon playing starting with breathing, then the embouchure. Again, good descriptions are supplemented by clear diagrams. A fairly extensive section on tonguing follows including what to aim for and some trouble shooting. I particularly like the description and illustrations used in the section on coordinating the tongue with the air pressure where the analogy of a water hose is used to great effect. Next comes a section on tone production and vibrato. In the latter we have a somewhat contentious description of diaphragm vibrato. Based on medical evidence and Christopher Weait's research indicating that the diaphragm is an involuntary muscle which cannot be used to produce a vibrato I would suggest that the description should perhaps refer to the abdominal muscles instead of the diaphragm. Perhaps this is just a matter of semantics but it

is rather an important one. Posture and hand position are discussed next with good descriptions and illustrations of a variety of problems as well as the desired set-ups.

Chapter 3 is entitled the preparatory octave and includes musical exercises and melodies to be played by the student along with a description of ways to play in tune on the bassoon. The range used is from open f to low F filling in all of the chromatics. Dietz starts off with the open f. For my taste I prefer to start a student with the C in the staff with the three fingers of the left hand down so that they have a stronger sense of stability and don't feel that they might drop the instrument—again a minor quibble.

Chapter 4 is entitled bassoon technique and leaps right in with an excellent description of the half-hole technique. Again, the illustrations are a major bonus. Several exercises and tunes that include half-holing follow. Next is what Dietz calls the Upper register, the a through d above the staff, again with several exercises and melodies. His description of the reasons for and execution of flicking technique included here are really quite good. Once more this is an issue of strong and divergent beliefs amongst bassoonists and Dietz is fairly careful to try not to step on any (or many) toes! The chapter continues on to f above the staff to complete the second octave.

Chapter 5 is called the extreme ranges of the bassoon and extends down to low Bb and up to high d. There is a very good description of some factors (condition of the instrument and reed) which may affect the production of the lowest notes on the bassoon. However, I feel that he omits the one which I feel has perhaps more effect than the others which is lower jaw placement. Even with an instrument and reed that work perfectly well a student is going to have difficulty producing the lowest notes if their lower jaw is too high.

Chapter 6 is additional information and includes guidelines for choosing a bassoon student, and for choosing a bassoon, information on the bocal and a brief but informative section on reeds, tools and adjustment. Also included are brief descriptions of methods and study materials, solo pieces, chamber music, a briefly annotated listing of some selected and representative works for bassoon, and a listing of additional resources. The chapter ends with a very good pictorial fingering chart.

The chapters of the text dealing with the other instruments are also very strong in general (please see the review of the oboe chapters also in this issue). One disappointment for me is that Jerry Kirkbride advocates the “smile” embouchure in his clarinet section while most clarinet teachers and players that I have contact with consider this to be an outmoded approach. This is a small but very important issue in a book intended for future band directors. As in the bassoon section there are bound to be differences of opinion about some pedagogical issues between the authors and individual readers. Overall, however, I think that this is an excellent resource for the band director or methods class teacher and student, one which should also be considered by teachers and pedagogues on the individual woodwind instruments.

About the Reviewer ...

Michael Burns, bassoon, holds a BM with honors from the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, an MM from New England Conservatory, Boston, and a DMA from the College-Conservatory of Music of North Carolina at Greensboro, and he is the bassoonist in the Eastwind Quintet. He has held teaching positions at Midland College in Texas, and Indiana State University in Terre Haute. As a performer, Burns has played principal bassoon in the Midland/- Odessa Symphony Orchestra in Texas, the Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra, the Richmond (IN) Symphony, and numerous groups in his native New Zealand. In addition he has performed as a member of the Cincinnati, and New Zealand Symphony Orchestras. Currently he performs regularly with the Greensboro Symphony Orchestra, in the Eastern Music Festival, and as an extra with the North Carolina and Charlotte Symphony Orchestras. Burns is also becoming a regular performer at the International Double Reed Society Conventions. He is also a composer and at the two most recent conventions he has performed (along with other works) some of his own compositions: Swamp Song for bassoon and electronic tape, and Riffs for flute, bassoon and piano. Mr. Burns' principal teachers include William Winstead, Sidney Rosenberg, Sherman Walt, Leonard Sharrow, and Colin Hemmingsen.