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A Comparison of Traditional American, German and French Oboe Reeds

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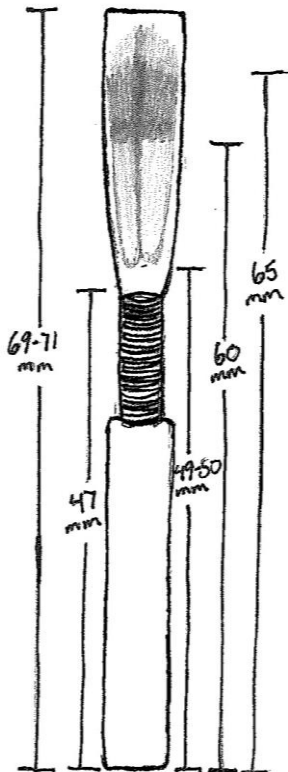
Introduction

As an oboe player who has lived in Montana my entire life, I have almost exclusively been exposed to one style of reed making. During my time at the University of Montana I learned there are different styles of reeds all over the world, and they can be drastically different from the reeds I have always played on. The following document is my interpretation of the characteristics of three predominate styles of oboe reeds; the American, German and French. I researched the design of each reed style and created a detailed diagram based on that research. I then tried my hand at making reeds of each style. The reeds I made are what my observations of the playing characteristics are based on. Oboe reeds vary greatly for every player, but the following information is based on my best approximation of the average.

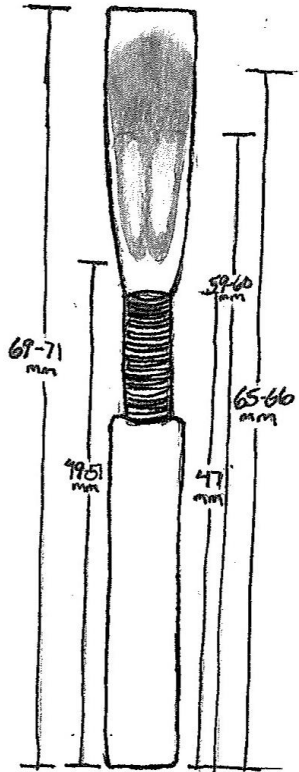
All reeds were made using the following materials:

- Pisoni cane of 10mm - 10.5mm diameter
- 47 mm staples
- -1 Gilbert shape

Below is a diagram and a photo of my typical reeds for reference.



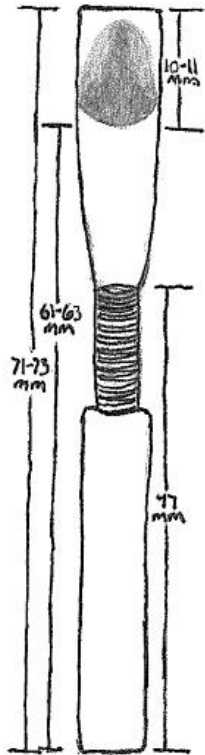
American Scrape



Observations:

- The air stream needed to get the reed vibrating is relatively intermediate – not forceful, but also not minimal.
- The articulation is usually easy and clean in all registers except in the lowest register of the oboe – these notes speak clearly with some embouchure adjustment however.
- Pitch is quite stable and reasonably easy to control except in the extreme upper and lower registers. The reed also provides a lot of flexibility to be able to adjust the pitch using embouchure and air as needed.
- Pitch is also more challenging to control with a wide change in dynamic or on larger interval leaps.
- Tone appears a little more flexible and requires some additional cushioning in the embouchure to produce a controlled tone. There is a wide range of tone colors available with fairly minimal embouchure adjustment in the middle range, but it is more challenging in the upper and lower ranges.

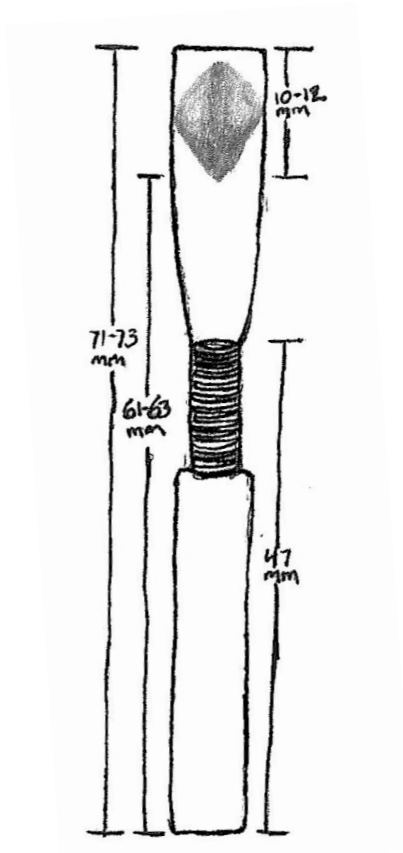
German Scrape



Observations:

- The air stream needs to be quite fast and vigorous to get the reed vibrating. It also requires a decent amount of embouchure pressure
- Articulation is challenging, although easier in the middle and upper registers
- Articulation is particularly challenging at faster speeds or in the low range of the instrument
- Pitch is very stable throughout the range of the instrument, but is not easily manipulated or adjusted
- Pitch maintains stability at varying dynamic levels, but playing softly requires extreme effort in the embouchure
- Tone is easy to control and keep centered
- Some flexibility of tone color is possible in the middle to upper range, but requires significant embouchure and air adjustments

French Scrape



Observations:

- Air stream required to make the reed vibrate is quite minimal in the middle and upper register but requires significantly more force in the lower register.
- Articulation is easy and clear in almost the entire range of the instrument, but presents more challenges in the lower range.
- Pitch is generally stable but tends to be challenging to control in the upper register.
- Throughout the range of the instrument the pitch is quite flexible – almost to the point of being difficult to control.
- The tone is quite flexible in the entire range of the instrument.
- Small embouchure or air adjustments can easily provide a wide array of tone colors – particularly in the upper range.

References

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various. "The Oboe Reed Room." *IDRS Forum (TM)*, www.idrs.org/IDRSBBS/.