

# COORDINATION

## AIR, FINGERS AND ARTICULATION

BY LOBKE SPRENKELING

*For recorder players and other wind players*

*Before we dive into the coordination between the three elements air, fingers and articulation, we should first work on the separate elements. Isolating them and breaking them down into small comprehensible chunks is an essential tool for great coordination.*

## AIR

In the article on the use of air, we saw that each note on the recorder has its own centre. Once you have worked on finding the centre of the separate tones, the next step is to connect the centres of different tones.

Start practising this through movements of seconds, in a scale, and work up towards bigger intervals. Also, begin with long notes, then speed up. The faster you go, the less you can focus on consciously finding the centre of each tone, which means it requires already some experience in separate and long notes. Practise the change from note to note, from centre to centre, stitching them together:

- In seconds
- In thirds, fourths, fifths etc
- Eventually in octaves etc

If you don't find the centre of the tone immediately, you can repeat (always in a very conscious way), so that you create the right muscle memory of your breath support, or in other words: until your body gets the feeling! You will also notice that in larger intervals, going up is quite different from going down. Going up means switching to faster air, while going down requires even better breath control when immediately slowing down the air.

Finally, this is also about the coordination between the different ways of blowing: not only faster or slower, but also broader or thinner air.

## FINGERS

In order to make sure your fingers collaborate with each other, keep in mind these key point:

- Small, efficient, relaxed, rounded movements.
- Give your brain the time to know what the fingers are doing. If it doesn't grasp the finger movements, then NAME the fingers that change. Practising slowly and consciously is necessary for the brain to form the correct muscle memory.
- Observe how the fingers are playing together like children. Who is jumping and who is landing?

*Video about this subject: <https://youtu.be/aNYN7HhSIwQ>*

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- Watch the sensation of gravity in the fingers. Lifting a finger is more work than dropping it. How does it feel?
- If one finger is late, then do the opposite in an exaggerated manner. Move it far earlier than the other fingers. Shorten bit by bit the time of being early, until it moves exactly on the same moment as the other fingers. This happens more in fork fingerings than in other combinations.
- If you repeatedly leave out one note in a scale or melody, do the opposite: elongate it a little bit more than the other notes and work towards making it equal to the others. In this way you make sure you don't skip that note, by making it conscious.
- We can practise difficult combinations by playing with rhythmical patterns. Start with dotted rhythm. Then 1 long and 2 rapid notes, shifting them along the melody. After this 1 + 3 and 1 + 4, etc.

## ARTICULATION

The subject on smoothly combining different articulations, has been well covered in the article on articulation.

Remember that the tongue always depends on the air.

If you have trouble with combinations of articulations in a piece you play, or in their coordination with the fingers, first try playing them all on the same tone.

A good exercise for an articulation pattern is playing it on the same tone in, for example, groups of four, and then jump on to the next tone. In this way, you could make a scale of a repeated articulation pattern.

## AIR + FINGERS

If we work on changes in the air by playing different combinations of notes, first we can merely focus on the air. The second step is to focus on the coordination between the air and the fingers, making sure that they change simultaneously. Especially in jumps this can be challenging.

## AIR + ARTICULATION

Since air is essential for a light and precise articulation, when working on articulation we automatically include its coordination with air. There are some more detailed things to explore in this section, such as:

- How does air help with soft articulation in the higher notes, or in jumps?
- How do we control it in staccato?

Remember it's always a question of sensing and listening.

In "The Complete Articulator", it shows very well that T doesn't have to be on a strong beat. So how do you show that a note is the strong beat of the bar if it doesn't have a strong articulation? It is about the subtle energy of the air flowing towards the strong beat WITHOUT pushing or coming out of its center. Here we learn how different combinations of air and articulation can be coordinated.

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### **ARTICULATION + FINGERS**

As for all aspects of coordination, the first time you practise something, do it slowly and consciously, so that your brain has the time to encode the right muscle memory.

Some important tips for this combination:

- Be aware that the tongue should follow the fingers, because these are just a bit more precise.
- Relax as much as possible: while the air support is steady and strong (which can support the softest, and slowest air), the fingers and tongue are light and small. Relax your shoulders and think of your posture.

Be as conscious as possible of everything you are doing. Relax as much as possible, because as soon as you tense up, you are working against yourself. Work with different rhythmic patterns.

### **COORDINATION IN A MUSICAL PIECE**

Here we are!

Finally we've arrived at the point of combining the three elements when studying a musical piece.

Here are some tips to get you along the way:

1. Find out where it works and where it doesn't.
2. Isolate the part where it doesn't work; first make sure the fingers are well coordinated and relax as much as possible.
3. Work with rhythmic patterns (dotted rhythm, 1+2, 1+3 etc.)
4. Make sure you are well concentrated, while working through intense listening and feeling, so you can detect not only where it isn't working, but also why. Regularly stop and notice how it feels. It allows you to correct rapidly, becoming very precise with minimal effort. It is actually a highly mindful practice, which can be very pleasant!