

POSTURE

BY LOBKE SPRENKELING

For recorder players

GENERAL BODY ALIGNMENT

Let us first look at the posture of our body. Make sure it is aligned to avoid unnecessary tension, so: head over heart, heart over pelvis. The shoulders are relaxed. Did you know that your head weighs between 5 and 10 kg? This is why it is important to maintain the head straight on top of the shoulders.

Make sure your knees are not locked but loose. Stand with your feet hip-width apart, with your body weight evenly distributed upon both feet.

Maintain the recorder in an angle of about 45 degrees from your body. Also be sure to keep the recorder more or less in front of the body and not to the right side. A bit to the side is not bad, but if it is too much to the side, it makes it difficult to blow straight into the recorder, thus impeding a relaxed and evenly distributed embouchure.

Stand (or sit) with the recorder in its angle of 45°, with your shoulders relaxed and your elbows hanging down but not pressed into your body. There is a little bit of space between your elbows and your torso, but you shouldn't lift the elbows because you will tense up the shoulders.

Focus on the space within the circle that your arms make when playing the recorder. Notice how much space there is actually around you. Feel how much space there is at your back. Imagine all the space above you. Even focus on the space under your feet, under the floor. Feel how the Earth supports you!

Being conscious of all this space helps you to get a better connection with your body while playing. It avoids unnecessary muscle tension and makes correct breathing technique easier. When you are nervous, for example in a performance, it helps you to relax.



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

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HOLDING THE RECORDER

Technically, there can be two points of support, but three points give much more stability, and they avoid a rigid left thumb.

1. The lower lip. The recorder is lying on top of the lower lip, which will always carry the weight, also when we open our mouth to inhale.
2. The right thumb. This finger is positioned, more or less, between finger hole 4 and 5. Its direction is perpendicular, and it either supports the recorder on the side or in the middle.
3. The right little finger, just below the little ridge above the last finger hole (not below). Without this third support point, the recorder is unstable and there is almost always a tendency of the left thumb to support the weight, which gives this finger a lot of pressure and takes away its possibility of moving freely.

We only use the right little finger when no fingers of the right hand are covering any holes.

This means that there will always be an alternation between the right little finger and the other right fingers.

In order to learn how to use this mechanism, start by playing 012345 (e on soprano, a on alto). Then play 0123 (g on soprano, c on alto), placing the little finger just below the ridge above the last finger hole. Alternate between the two, until they are coordinated perfectly.

Now do the same without the left hand, so take the left hand into the air. In this way, we make sure that we put all the weight on the right hand, and that the coordination must be perfect or else the recorder will become unstable.



EMBOUCHURE

The jaw has to be loose and in a neutral position. I call this the “dumb face”: it is when you are awestruck and leave your mouth hanging open a bit. Make sure the jaw doesn’t move while you play!

The greater part of the tongue is also relaxed within the mouth, lying down as one big piece of meat. It is only the tip of the tongue that is active.

The embouchure itself is loose, with a slight U-shape (or “kissy mouth” shape), where the cheeks and the space between the nose and mouth are relaxed, so that they can serve as resonance chambers.

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FINGER POSITION

Locked finger joints with pressure on them (because the fingers are pressing down on the recorder) are detrimental. Chronic pressure can wear down the joints, which could lead to arthritis, in addition to creating other types of inflammation, such as tendinitis.

This happens most often in the case of the left thumb, with either inflammation of the tendon at the base of the thumb joint or an inflammation of a nerve, because the channel there is very narrow. While in traditional instruments such as the tin whistle or the ney, the fingers are straight, on the recorder we play with rounded fingers, covering the holes with the finger tips.

The positioning of the finger holes as well as their shape are much better suited for rounded fingers than straight ones.

Straight fingers will make the entire hand work, while rounded fingers are much more efficient and healthier for the hand.

For a healthy hand position, focus especially on three fingers: the middle fingers and the left thumb.

If I place my middle fingers "diagonally on the tip" (so not completely on the tip but rather on the fleshy part), then the other fingers will position themselves in a healthy way.

The thumb posture is essential. Not only to prevent injuries but also for an efficient change in posture between the first and higher registers.

The thumb should NOT have a locked joint. It can be straight but with a loose joint.

This will form an oval shape between thumb and the other fingers:



Remember that your hand is different from someone else's hand, so your exact posture is going to be a little bit different from other people's.



"AH" / "OH"

When you inhale, open your mouth as if you were saying "Ah" or "Oh". This way, your inhale is soundless and efficient. The weight of the recorders stays on your lower lip.

Not like this:



But like this:



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THUMB POSITION

Cover the hole close to the finger nail. This is probably not going to be in the middle but rather a bit on the side.

Make sure your thumb nail is clipped in such a way that when half opening the thumb hole for the high registers, the nail defines the exact separation between the closed and open part of the hole, but doesn't dig into the wood on the edge of the hole.

To open the hole halfway, just bend the thumb joint, and this will work like a harmonica door: it will automatically lower the finger tip a bit so that it ends up opening the hole partially.

You shouldn't move anything else, nor the wrist, nor the elbow. The thumb movement is a sliding one, so you should not press with the thumb into the recorder.



SEMITONES IN THE RIGHT HAND

In order to cover only half of the finger holes 6 and 7, we slide the whole hand rather than the finger.

We make a slightly turning sideways movement of the wrist. Something between looking at your watch (turning movement) and a sideways movement of the wrist. The fingers are dragged along.

Note that we need to use this movement quite often, as G sharp on the soprano and C sharp on the alto use half of the sixth finger hole.

