



The Recorder Maven

Recorder Advice From Elijah Ducon

Dear Elijah,

I can get a high 'D' on my bass recorder when I am at home practicing, but it won't speak when I get to my weekly consort. Is there some fool-proof way of getting it to speak every time?

Mystified in Manhattan

Dear Mystified:

A recurring problem on both F and C instruments is being able to sound the note that corresponds to fingers 1-2 and 1/2 thumbing --high 'D' on altos and basses and high 'A' on sopranos and tenors.

The problem is usually two-fold. First, the player adds air as he/she lifts to this note. Second, the player often adds pressure to the thumb. Both of these spontaneous reactions are due to fear of not getting the note. And, of course, the note doesn't speak. (Fear is a poor advisor!) Try not to help the recorder when trying to achieve the notes in the upper register. Adding more air and pressing harder on the thumb will almost always have an

adverse effect. The engineering of the recorder is such, that gentle lifting and dropping of the fingers and steadily focused air currents are enough to make the notes speak easily.

On your bass, practice playing a long tone on the high 'C'. Try to relax while playing it. Be aware of your thumb and finger pressure. Place them on the holes. Don't dig in. Then, in the middle of the tone, lift your third finger without bending your hand upward and without applying more pressure to the thumb. Don't add more air. The high 'D' should speak easily. Then try to play the 'D' on its own. And then play various notes, each moving to the 'D'. Really relax! Then try that passage in the piece you are playing with your consort.

I know it may be harder to relax when you are playing with your group and are in the throes of having to get the note. A sensory recall of success at home and a bit of *sang-froid* may help in this situation.

Unfortunately, the words fool-proof and recorder don't normally go hand in hand. But focusing on relaxation and enjoyment and allowing the instrument to do what it was created to do without trying to help out will garner more positive responses more often.

Good luck!

Elijah Ducon

Please send your questions for The Recorder Maven to: elijahducon1@gmail.com