

# *l'Histoire du Clarinette*

## **Part 1**

This is the story of the clarinet (image 1), a musical instrument born of the Stone Age (image 2), reared during the Me Decade, but not housebroken until 4 p.m. on a recent Saturday afternoon. It – that is, the clarinet, not the afternoon – consists of a cylindrical pipe (image 3) made out of wood, metal or occasionally liquid nitrogen with a nose-shaped opening at one end and an hispid mouthpiece (image 4) at the other end which conceals a small bellows. The clarinet's enclosed air column is activated by a single reed of bituminous coal (image 5). When fluid from the clarinetist's spittle gland comes into contact with the reed, the instrument somehow attains sentience, to the extent that it is often smarter than its player (image 6).

Early clarinets were made of wicker (image 7) and used in religious ceremonies to carry holy water (image 8). In fact, the word wicker is a derivation of vicar, a parish woodwind priest, and a sticky wicker was a priest who (image 9) ... well, never mind. But its open weave design coupled with the instrument's numerous keyholes (image 10) caused it to leak, and it eventually fell out of clerical favor.

At one time, clarinets were used by witches (image 11), warlocks and research scientists to dabble in alchemy (image 12). By squeaking through a mouthpiece fashioned from bat wings (image 13), a skilled clarinetist could turn gold into water and sometimes back again. But gastrointestinal ailments (image 14) often resulted from swallowing the reed and the occult practice eventually died out. For generations thereafter, the clarinet was stigmatized because ignorant people mistook it for a small, burrowing rodent (image 15) that destroyed croplands and silage (image 16). But when an article in a woodwind trade journal hypothesized that the clarinet didn't bear its young alive after all and, therefore, could not be a member of the vole family, the clarinet immediately enjoyed a period of relative popularity (image 17), which is only now beginning to wane.

## **Part 2**

In the third century, an Irish mensch named Patrick (image 18) longed to play clarinet in the local town band, but restrictive dental work condemned him to a life of poor tone quality. Still, his constant practicing helped to drive the snakes out of Ireland (image 19), an achievement for which he was later besainted. The fact that thousands of irritated countrymen left with the snakes is rarely mentioned.

From Ireland, the clarinet followed the migratory path of moths (image 20) to the nomadic camps of Romany, Bohemia and Las Vegas, where its ability to effortlessly crank out seductive Latin melodies made it a three-to-one choice of gypsies over symphonic orchestras in their ballroom dance studios (image 21).

## **Part 3**

Just as one determines a tree's age by counting its rings, a clarinet's age can be ascertained by counting the number of keypads it has (image 22). For bass clarinets, use bass ten calculations; for basset horns (image 23), count the ears. For contrabass clarinets – also called bassinets (image 24) – apply the third pluperfect axiom of Chaos Theory and stand clear.

The clarinet makes a fine meal. Cooked properly (image 25), the instrument's eggs, or clarova, are considered a delicacy in certain Western cultures (image 26), and the glutinous fluids which accumulate on the inside of the neck make a mouthwatering marinade when cured.

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Inverted, the clarinet becomes an elegant wine vessel (image 27), plus its many keys allow the holder to precisely dial in the proper serving temperature (image 28) in Fahrenheit, Celsius or Klingon.

An ignominious descendent of the early clarinet was the clarannoyance (image 29), a disturbingly shrill instrument employed during the French Revolution to torment political prisoners. Mechanical improvements gradually transformed the clarannoyance into the guillotine (image 30).

### **Part 4**

Good posture is vitally important to achieving superior clarinetics. If one leans too far to the right, the pitch can change dramatically and without warning. *[demonstration]* Equally crucial to instrumental proficiency is bladder control. Players should refrain from consuming large quantities of fluidic material if extended clarinary performances are anticipated soon thereafter.

Few duets exist for clarinet and saltine crackers because crumbs from the latter tend to collect along the edge of the reed, befuddling the sound. *[demonstration]*

The clarinet was once a terrible weapon of war (image 31). Santa Anna attacked the Alamo with five thousand men armed with clarinets and, the valor of David Bowie and Jiminy Crockett notwithstanding, roundly drubbed los Alamigos. Soon thereafter, the bayonet (image 32) was forever removed from the bell, and it became an instrument of peace (image 33).

### **Part 5**

Asked to describe the instrument he helped to popularize, Benny Goodman once cryptically said of the clarinet “It is bigger than a mailbox (image 34) but smaller than the bread inside.” He never elaborated. The Goodman University Science Department also proved that the clarinet is immune to the Doppler effect. Its frequency remains constant, no matter if it approaches or moves away from the listener. *[demonstration]*

Contrary to popular folklore, clarinets are not lighter than air. *[toss faux clarinet]* However, the molecules of clarinets are in constant motion, and the instrument must be always locked in its case or grasped tightly when playing. Otherwise it may escape into what musicologists term an Algonquin Hole (image 35), doomed to drift in and out of tune and focus for eternity. (*Un-focus image.*)

To recap, the clarinet is the national instrument of Bali (image 36), where it is used primarily as an agricultural tool to till croplands and disperse seed or fertilizer. Its resemblance to the haggisfish (image 37) has caused it to be overharvested in the North Sea, where it is officially listed as endangered. Albert Einstein (image 38), upon first hearing its plaintive trill, was moved to modify his  $E = MC^3$  theory to the more familiar  $E = MC^2$ . And the clarinet is one of only two musical instruments that sound better played underwater (image 39). Due to logistical constraints, this will not be substantiated today.

### **Part 6**

The clarinet: advanced single reed technology in a convenient, analog format (image 40).