David Charlton

Classical clarinet technique: documentary approaches

The clarinet tutors published in the late 18th and early 19th centuries contain many details of technique that are relevant to present-day players. This article aims to offer some new considerations for practical use; its title is intended to reflect the mainly literary nature of the exercise. A chronological list of source material, which is mainly of French or German origin (the English tutors and newspaper reports are generally rather uninformative), is included at the end. It offers certain new datings which modify those in Warner's perenially useful *An Annotated Bibliography of Woodwind Instruction Books, 1600–1830*.1

1 The French tradition as it was perceived

Reed-below clarinet technique was not officially recognized at the Paris Conservatoire until Friedrich (Frédéric) Berr (1794–1838) became unsalaried titular professor there in 1831.2 A resident of Paris throughout his working life, Berr was nevertheless born in Mannheim and trained in Frankenthal, and thereby appeared to be an example of the victory of German over French technique. His two clarinet methods, both of which appeared in 1836, constitute important documents for the French performance tradition;3 other published sources also attest to its nature.
The first generation of clarinettists to arrive in Paris, around 1748, comprised Gaspard Proksch, Flieger, Schenker and Louis. The first pair became especially active in orchestral work.⁴ They did not perform as soloists at the Concert Spirituel, as far as is known: that distinction went to Joseph Beer (1744–1812);⁵ and it is with him that later perceptions of a tradition began. Originally a trumpeter in Bohemia, Beer settled in Paris after 1763, and subsequently took up the clarinet.

Le 1er Virtuose qui se distinguait il y a 30 ans dans le Concerto de Clarinette fut un Allemand nommé Bauër; il jouait toute sorte de musique sur la Clarinette en Ut, ce qui me porte a croire que celle en Si Bémol est d'invention postérieure à cet Artiste . . . ⁶

The first virtuoso who became famous 30 years ago in clarinet concertos was a German named Bauër; he played all kinds of music on the C clarinet, which leads me to believe that the one in B flat was invented after his time . . .

I know of no other evidence concerning precisely the size of clarinet supposedly used by any named performer in 18th-century France.

Beer played solos in at least 26 concerts given in Paris between Christmas Eve 1771 and 1 November 1779; he then left France to embark on a wider European career.⁷ Press reports of his early concerto performances tend towards epithets such as ‘brillante’ and ‘précise’, when not preferring imponderables like ‘soul and taste’. One critic made veiled allusion to Beer’s ostentation in cadenzas: ‘let a clarinettist keep up a cadenza for 160 seconds . . .’, though the context suggests this was an exaggeration.⁸

Soloists at the Concerts Spirituels later included Rathé (soloist 1777–82), Michel Yost (ibid 1781–6), E. Solère (ibid 1782–90), Xavier Lefèvre (ibid 1783–90) and Hostié (ibid 1787–8). Beer appears to have taught the favourite, Yost, usually known simply as Michel (1754–86), who in turn taught Lefèvre (1763–1829).⁹ An examination of the surviving press reviews of relevant concerts provides some further clues about solo performance. Rathé was vividly described in the Mercure de France, repository of the fullest critiques.

Cet Artiste paroit avoir une vive chaleur de têle & une grande force de poitrine. Il parcourt avec une agilité merveilleuse toutes les dimensions possibles de son instrument. Il en tire des sons fort agréables dans l’aigu & le médium; mais le volume & la qualité des sons graves sont une telle disparité avec le reste, qu’on les croiroit sortis d’une autre espèce d’instrument.¹⁰

This artist appears to have intense fervour and much strength of chest. He runs over the whole compass of the instrument with marvellous agility and draws most pleasant sounds from its upper and middle range; but the volume and quality of the low sounds are so ill-matched with the rest that one would think they issued from a different kind of instrument.

According to a rare objective description, Michel Yost also displayed not dissimilar qualities.

M. Michel . . . a déployé de la force, de l’aisance, des sons très-agréables . . . ¹¹

M. Michel . . . exhibited strength, facility, very pleasant sounds . . .

Against the background of a style perhaps notable equally for strength and agility as for tone (one can be no more specific) was heard the playing of a presumed Teutonic visitor named Wachter. Wachter remains a shadowy figure: he appeared in seven concerts between 1782 and 1790, and only Gerber’s dictionary notices him.¹² But he was picked out for special mention straight away. In 1786 two reviews of Christmas concerts described certain striking effects which, by implication, were admirable and uncommon.

Le son qu’il tire de cet Instrument est d’une force & d’une beauté surprenantes. Il a une grande volubilité avec infiniment d’expression. On a sur-tout admiré l’art avec lequel il nuance son jeu & la manière dont il enfile & dégrade les sons.¹³

The sound he draws from this instrument has a surprising strength and beauty. He combines great fluency with immense expression. One above all admired the skill with which he nuanced his playing, and the way he swallowed and shaded off the sounds.

The second review is particularly important for its use of the simile of a glass harmonica. This is firstly because it provides an objective measure of Wachter’s exploitation of pianissimo, and secondly because the identical simile was to be used in 1808 by a German writer attempting to characterize the ideal qualities of the reed-below technique.

Les sons qu’il tire de cet instrument ressemblent souvent à ceux de l’harmonica dont ils ont la pureté . . . ¹⁴

The sounds he draws from this instrument often resemble those of the glass harmonica, whose purity they have . . .

. . . der sanfte, runde [Ton], welcher bey der Klarinette, vorzüglich gut getragen. sehr oft vollkommen dem Tone der Harmonika gleich . . . ¹⁵

. . . that soft, round [tone], which on the clarinet, especially well played, very often resembles that of the glass harmonica . . .

Xavier Lefèvre’s playing, in the context of French tradition, was described when his brother Louis-François still taught at the Conservatoire:

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... l'anche tournée du côté de la lèvre supérieure qui doit être dans ce cas recourbée et appuyée fortement sur les dents: c'est ainsi que jouaient MICHEL, les frères le Fèvre, etc. ...16

... the reed turned to the upper lip which in this case must be curved and pressed strongly on the teeth: that is how Michel, the Lefévre brothers, etc., played ...

Xavier Lefèvre taught at the Conservatoire until 1824, and his famous Méthode de clarinette was both translated into German and subjected to revision by an eminent pupil, Claude-François Buteux.17 The latter declared that he wished ‘usefully to transmit the teaching’ received from Lefèvre and so provided—at least in a historically rearguard defence action—an unusually detailed appreciation of the virtues of reed-above playing.

Ce principe ... a l’avantage de faire obtenir de la mobilité et de la sensibilité dans l’exécution; plus de netteté et de mordant dans les sons détachés et généralement plus de vigueur dans toute l’étendue de l’instrument.18

This principle . . . has the advantage of giving mobility and sensitivity in performance; greater clarity and bite in detached sounds and generally more strength throughout the instrument’s range.

The critic and historian F. J. Fétis had grown so tired of the prevailing French technique that by 1828–9 he was campaigning for its demise. Passages such as the following must therefore be regarded as propaganda, though their overall tendency is probably trustworthy.

les artistes allemandes ... visent à une grande douceur de son ... Parmi nous, et particulièrement dans l’école de M. Xavier Lefèvre, on vise à un grand son ... on ne peut jouer piano ...19

Lefèvre possédait un beau son, et cela est incontestable sous le rapport du volume, mais ce son était ce qu’on peut appeler le son français, parce qu’il est plus puissant que moelleux.20

German artists ... aim for great sweetness of sound ... Here, especially in the school of M. Xavier Lefèvre, one aims for a large sound ... one cannot play piano ... Lefèvre had a beautiful tone, unquestionably so from the point of view of volume: but this was what one might call the French tone, since it is more powerful than mellow.

Fétis ascribed one cause of the ‘French tone’, as it was then taught, to over-strong reeds: see section 4 below. Felix Mendelssohn, writing to Zelter on 15 February 1832 about the Conservatoire orchestra, found clarinets and timpani alone a cause for complaint.

die erste Clarinette, die schreit und einen steif, nicht angenehmen Vortrag und Ton hat ...

The first clarinet [J. F. DaCosta, a pupil of Lefèvre], who shrieks and has a stiff, unpleasant delivery and tone . . .

The outlook of French players had already begun to be influenced by Iwan Müller, inventor of the 13-keyed clarinet and a virtuoso himself, and Heinrich Baermann, whose 1817–18 visit to Paris had a lasting impact. In particular, their influence coalesced in the person of Friedrich Berr, and this proved decisive. A further influence may have been Giovanni Gambaro (1785–1828), whose playing on a Müller instrument ‘created a sensation’ after he came to Paris in 1814.21 Yet Gambaro’s clarinet tutor [1820] deals with the six-keyed instrument and advocates reed-above technique.

Berr’s tutors provide very useful and unique information for the Restoration period. If it is to be related to Müller’s periods of residence in Paris, the following extract from Berr’s 1836 Traité must refer to 1820–25: Pamela Weston has shown that the only other period that Müller was in Paris was before 1815, too early for his new instrument to have been accepted, and not a time when Berr was present.

Plusieurs artistes de l’école française, après avoir entendu le célèbre Müller dont le talent pour la difficulté n’avait point d’égal, ont voulu changer leur embouchure et jouer l’anche en-dessous: mais ils ne pouvaient obtenir une qualité de son satisfaisante, parce qu’on leur avait enseigné le viciéux système de mordre sur le bec.22

Several artists of the French school, having heard the famous Müller whose virtuosic talent had no equal, wanted to change their embouchure and play with the reed below; but they could not obtain a satisfactory tone quality because they had been taught the incorrect method of biting into the mouthpiece.

This habit of Müller’s, wrote Berr, ‘existed above all in Germany’, ‘gave a bad tone quality; and harmed flexibility of expression’. How much credence should be lent to this last as a blanket judgment remains unclear, since Berr never worked in Germany. Fétis, who met him in 1816, says in the Biographie Universelle that he had learned clarinet during his earlier military service, but only preferred it to the bassoon after going to Paris in ‘1819’. This date may be misleading: Berr’s own evidence is that he was there the year before to hear Baermann play. It appears, therefore, that it was Baermann who sowed the seeds not just of Berr’s solo career, and maybe his reed_below technique, but also of French conversion to that technique.

L’avantage de jouer l’anche en-dessous est démontré par les plus habiles clarinettistes. Tous les artistes reconnaissent que nulle part on ne peut obtenir les piano et les pianissimo comme en Allemagne. Le célèbre Baermann nous a fait entendre en 1818 à Paris des sons pianissimo qui étaient tout-à-fait inconnus en France ...23
The advantage of playing with the reed below is proven by the most skilled clarinetists. All artists admit that nowhere can one obtain piano and pianissimo like Germany. The famous Baermann gave us in Paris in 1818 pianissimo sounds that were totally unknown in France.

Not content just to note Baermann’s visit, the first French tutor issued thereafter (Vanderhagen, [1819]) even printed an illustration of the German instrument. It had twelve keys and a half-inch adjustable ‘pump’ section within the barrel to arrest moisture and facilitate pitch adjustment.

Significantly, this tutor refrained from mentioning reed position at all; it was as though the ageing Vanderhagen realized that French playing could never be the same again. Likewise, Müller [c.1821] and Carnaud (1829) declared some impartiality in their tutors over this issue, while the former gave three reasons for preferring the reed below.

Examination of the press reports shows that Baermann played in at least six concerts: Christmas Day, 1817, then in 1818, on 29 January and 3, 8, 17 and 21 March. Although reed position was never mentioned, the very earliest report showed in full measure an appreciation of his very unfamiliar style.

Cet artiste étranger tire une qualité de son toute particulière de son instrument, et l’extrême douceur de son exécution laisserait peut-être quelque chose à désirer sous le rapport de la vigueur: mais, lorsqu’on l’écoute, il est difficile de songer à le critiquer.25

This foreign artist draws a wholly distinctive sound from his instrument, and the extreme softness of his playing would possibly leave something to be desired as regards energy; but, on hearing him, it is hard to think of being critical.

And G. L. P. Sievers in the Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung agreed, maintaining that nothing was played above mezzo-forte: ‘but sugar upon sugar still remains sugar!’26

A decade later Fétis assumed that Lefèvre and his associates had also witnessed these revelations.

Malheureusement il y a de l’entêtement de la part de nos artistes. Ils ont entendu Baermann et Müller; ils sont témoin des heureux résultats obtenus par M. Beer [Berr] en suivant les principes de l’école allemande, et ils s’obstinent dans leur routine... La réforme est urgente.27

Unfortunately, our artists show stubbornness. They have heard Baermann and Müller; they are witnesses to the happy results obtained by M. Beer, in following the principles of the German school, and they persist in their routine... Reform is urgent.

Berr’s pupil, Klosé, asserted that ‘in his hands the clarinet became a new instrument’,28 and it is worth noting that by this stage French students could, under Berr’s guidance, readily reverse their technique: a fortnight’s practice was sufficient to convert them to the German way.29

To bring this account full circle, it must be mentioned that Berr himself believed he had inherited the Teutonic reed-below tradition as established by Joseph Beer: that is, after Beer had left Paris in 1779–80.

Joseph Beer, virtuose au service du Roi de Prusse, avait fondé vers la fin du 18e siècle une école de clarinette qui a produit plusieurs artistes... [y compris] Baermann.30

Joseph Beer, a virtuoso in the service of the King of Prussia, founded a school of clarinet playing near the end of the 18th century that produced several artists... [including] Baermann.

The wording used by Fétis in recounting Joseph Beer’s ‘conversion’ in Brussels by one Schwartz leaves no doubt that Fétis believed it was here, c.1780, that Beer heard and adopted reed-below style.31 This requires investigation. Nevertheless, extraordinary as it sounds, Beer co-founded two separate traditions, one French and one German: in Paris before 1780 and in Potsdam after 1792, with Tausch. The second was ultimately destined to replace the first.

2 Articulation: Reed above

Contemporary documents attest three possible methods of articulation: with the chest, the throat and the tongue. Chest articulation was briefly mentioned in Heinz Becker’s wide-ranging article in 1955;32 throat articulation does not appear to have attracted conspicuous published comment.

(i) The classical citation for chest articulation comes towards the end of Valentin Roeser’s tutor for ‘those who compose for clarinet and horn’. Roeser (c.1735–c.1782) came from Germany to Paris perhaps as early as 1754, and may perhaps be identified with the player of the ‘corno bassetto ou contre-clarinette’ in the Lenten concerts of 1774.33

Beaucoup de doubles Croches dans le mode parallele ne sont point en usage sur la Clarinette, attendu que la Poitrine doit substituer au coup de Langue, à cause de la position de l’Anche qui se trouve sous le Palais de la Bouche...34

Many semiquavers repeated on one note are not used on the clarinet, since the chest has to substitute for the tongue stroke, owing to the reed’s position beneath the palate of the mouth...

This is not isolated evidence. Also in Paris at this period was the Würzburg clarinettist Philipp Meissner...
(1748–1816), surely the 'Philippe' whom the same source notes as a soloist in Lent, 1774.\footnote{Meissner is the hypothetical ‘missing link’ between documentation like Roeser’s and the known practice of chest articulation, in that it is known from a later account (see below) exactly how Meissner’s technique worked, using the reed-above position. Moreover, chest articulation certainly existed around 1800, being discussed knowledgeably in France and Germany just after. Lefèvre counsels avoidance of it, but in vivid terms:}

\textit{En jouant de la clarinette, il faut éviter de faire agir par secousses, le gosier ou la poitrine, pour donner l’air nécessaire aux articulations . . . Ceux qui jouent de la poitrine se fatiguent beaucoup et ne peuvent avoir d’égalité dans leur jeu . . .} \footnote{Second type, the notes must be performed short, pushed firmly, and with much evenness . . . To give the impulses the necessary power, the lips must be somewhat held together:}

In playing the clarinet one must avoid making the throat or chest move jerkily, to provide the necessary air for articulation . . . Those who play from the chest get very tired and cannot play evenly . . .

Backofen [1803] only discusses the throat, not chest, articulation. But Joseph Froehlich (1780–1862), the distinguished Würzburg musician and university teacher, left a unique account, contained within his exhaustive \textit{Musikschule}. 'The playing of this fine artist [Meissner] demonstrates that a lively and brilliant playing style, coupled with a full tone capable of the most delicate shadings, can result from this method.' \footnote{Although, as Becker pointed out, Froehlich’s overall comparison of the tonal characteristics of reed-below and reed-above playing is self-contradictory, nevertheless his account of articulation is clear.}

\textit{Um diesen Vortheil zu erhalten, spreche man in das Instrument ein leichtes h [ha] welches nur bey tieferen Tönen härter angesprochen wird, bey deren Vortrage man sich auch etwas Vorschub durch das Nachhelfen mit den Lippen verschafft.} \footnote{To obtain this advantage one speaks a light h [ha] into the instrument, more firmly spoken only in lower notes, in whose performance one also gets support through the help of the lips.}

Froehlich’s stress was on lightness; the chest should neither be heard in action, nor suffer any strain. His musical examples relevant to chest articulation are as follows:

\textit{Bey der Bindung wird die erste Note angesprochen, und die andern werden daran geschleift.} \footnote{And Froehlich qualifies the matter:}

In slurs the first note is spoken, and the others slurred from it.\footnote{The first method [reed-above] does not allow for the tongue to be used precisely and securely . . . Blatt [c.1828] admitted both reed positions. Albeit he was a professor at the Prague Conservatoire, his evidence lends a useful sense of proportion by mentioning two reasons why the tongue should not necessarily be used in reed-above playing: extraneous noise, and lyrical style.}

\textit{Die 2º Art, die Noten kurz, und fest abzustossen, muss mit vieler Gleichheit ausgeführt werden . . . Um dem Stosse die nöthige Kraft zu geben, muss man die Lippen etwas zusammenhalten.} \footnote{It is striking that both the anonymous German 'M'. (1808), Froehlich and Blatt [c.1828] all seem to regard tongued articulation as inherently unsatisfactory, perhaps not even to be used, for the reed-above player. M. inclines to the latter view since he says in passing,}

\textit{Wäre es einmal eingeführt, das Blatt auf die weiche Unterlippe zu legen . . . wodurch ausserdem jede Art der Zunge, wie bey der Flöte, nicht nur möglich, sondern leicht wird . . .} \footnote{Were the practice of placing the reed on the soft lower lip to be introduced . . . whereby, besides, every type of tonguing— as on the flute—would become not simply possible but easy . . .}

\textit{Andere Noten, die besaidt, muss man bemerken, dass bey der Zunge die Zungenkante nicht viel geöffnet werden darf, und dass bey der Muschel, bey der Veröhnung . . .} \footnote{And Froehlich qualifies the matter:}

\textit{Bey der ersten Art lässt sich die Zunge nicht so genau und sicher anwenden . . .} \footnote{The first method [reed-above] does not allow for the tongue to be used precisely and securely . . . Blatt [c.1828] admitted both reed positions. Albeit he was a professor at the Prague Conservatoire, his evidence lends a useful sense of proportion by mentioning two reasons why the tongue should not necessarily be used in reed-above playing: extraneous noise, and lyrical style.}

\textit{Cette dernière méthode [anche au-dessous] a l’avantage de pouvoir appliquer le coup de langue en articulant tu ou tout, ce qui de l’autre manière a des inconveniens, puisqu’il en résulte un sifflement préjudiciable au son. Cependant le coup de langue n’est}
pas une chose indispensablement nécessaire pour un instrument comme la Clarinette, dont la tache est d’imiter la voix humaine.\textsuperscript{42}

The latter [reed-below] method has the advantage of allowing the tongue-stroke, by pronouncing tu or tou; certain drawbacks arise in applying this to the other [reed-above] manner, since it produces a hissing which is detrimental to the tone. However, the tongue-stroke is not indispensable to an instrument like the clarinet, whose task is to imitate the human voice.

Unfortunately Blatt did not go so far as to describe any alternatives to tonguing.

Perhaps chest articulation died hard, even in France: final warnings against it occur in Gambaro [1820], Vaillant [1830] and Buteux [1836].

The first French tutor [1785] to describe the ‘orthodox’ tongued articulation was that of Amand Vanderhagen (1753–1822), who was in fact trained in the Netherlands. It is tempting to speculate from the evidence so far produced that players in France like Roesser and Meissner, and perhaps Joseph Beer and his followers, used chest articulation as a staple part of their reed-above technique, not least in the 1760s and 1770s. After all, Lefèvre still knew of practitioners. To Froehlich, the technique was the very key to expressive playing because it was not possible to ‘produce all the types of articulation that the [tonguing clarinettist] is able to’, the singer’s art, the true goal of all instrumental performance, could still be more closely emulated.

\textit{seine Art zu schattiren, alle Nuancen im Ausdrucke zu geben… ist weit einfacher, mehr wahr, und daher eigentliches Mittel zu der seelenvollen Darstellung eines Ganzen von Empfindungen.}\textsuperscript{43}

the way he can give shade and expression to every nuance… is far simpler, more true, and thus the means whereby a totality of feeling may be soulfully expressed.

It is therefore my opinion that chest articulation, as a possible and natural adjunct to early expressive technique, warrants further investigation. In fact some evidence of the co-existence of different articulation techniques can be produced. Maybe chest and tongued articulation had also co-existed.

(ii) The earliest source of information about throat articulation appears to be the first of Vanderhagen’s three tutors. After describing the clarinet’s tonguing syllables (\textit{d} and \textit{f}), the author discusses their varied application. Arriving at slurred groups of three, he says:

\textit{pour les distinguer trois par trois, il faut faire sentir la première, non par un petit coup de Langue, mais par une petite expression de la gorge. Car en marquant trop la première par un coup de langue, cela ressemblerait positivement à:}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{tonguing}
\end{center}

to mark them off three by three, one must make the first felt by a small expression from the throat, not by a small tongue stroke. For the first [note], over-emphasised by a tongue stroke, would positively sound like:

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{tonguing}
\end{center}

This makes the valuable suggestion that players should mix types of articulation: Lefèvre once again implies knowledge of throat technique while at the same time denying its utility.

\textit{ceux qui jouent du gosier ne peuvent pas exécuter des morceaux vifs, parcequ’ils ne trouvent jamais dans cet organe assez de mouvement et d’agilité pour être d’accord avec les doigts…}\textsuperscript{45}

Those who play from the throat cannot play lively pieces, because they never find enough rhythm and agility in that organ to agree with their fingers…

The notion of a kind of coughing action, obviously difficult to control, is borne out by Backofen, who the next year put a useful perspective on the same technique in not limiting it to either reed position in particular.

\textit{Die Klarinettisten brauchen dreymittel die Noten abzustossen, die Zunge, die Lippen oder die Kehle. Die erste Art ist die beste… denn sie binden alle Noten, eben so wie diejenigen, die mit der Kehle stossen. Fallen auch bey diesen die Grimassen weg, so haben sie wieder eine andre Unannehmlichkeit, nehmlich diese, dass man jeden Stoss der Kehle hört.}\textsuperscript{46}

Clarinetists use three ways of articulating notes, with the tongue, lips or throat. The first way is the best… for they [i.e. players using their lips, who also make dreadful faces] slur everything, just as do those who push with the throat. And if the latter do not make grimaces, they yet have another disagreeableness, namely that one hears each throat impulse.

Although Vaillant [c.1830] and Buteux [1836] still warned against throat articulation, it is preferable to imagine that, with all its limitations, this played a minor role by 1800. But how important might it have been in the Baroque period, for example? When used with the older quasi-trumpet timbre and in simpler rhythms, it might well have been acceptable; the ‘cough’ would have seemed less intrusive.

(iii) Of all woodwind instruments, the 18th-century flute had the most complex tongueing possibilities; the almost fantastic detail in J. G. Trompitz’s \textit{Ausführlicher und gründlicher Unterricht} (1791), chapters 8 and 9, bears eloquent witness to that. For reed-above
clarinets, the tutors limit themselves to two categories selected from either the normal separation, the simple dot, or the dash. The slurred dot played a surprisingly small part in these sources, compared with the instructions for oboe by Garnier and Vogt.\(^4\) Aside from the ambiguous Rybicki, Table 1 shows that not before Berr's teaching did it become established. Possibly the softer separation was not used so much in a tradition that recognized 'greater clarity and bite in detached sounds' (see Buteux in section 1). Detailed descriptions of reed-above tonguing date from rather later.

Le bec ne doit pas être trop enfoncé dans la bouche, autrement il nuirait au jeu de la langue qui, en s’approchant du palais et en se retrouvant ensuite, sent de soupape au souffle . . .\(^4\)

The mouthpiece should not be pushed too far into the mouth, otherwise it would prejudice the play of the tongue which, nearing the palate and drawing back again, serves as a valve for the breath . . .

The following quotation provides an interesting contrast:

\(^{49}\) on obtient cette action en touchant l’extrémité de l’anche avec celle de la langue, de manière à boucher l’intervalle existant entre le bec et l’anche . . .

According to Backofen, this articulation was especially hard for the beginner, as 'the tongue is greatly incommode by the mouthpiece, which practically fills the mouth'; those using it 'often misapply their tongue, and sometimes perform gentle, singing passages roughly, through this improper use' (ibid, p.12). To place this kind of observation next to those of Froelich is to sketch a picture displaying little uniformity of objective or results, especially considering that the towns of Würzburg (where Froelich taught) and Nürnberg (where Backofen taught) are only about 50 miles distant. The latter writer declared no preference for reed above or below.

A summary of the basic categories of tonguing is presented in Table 1; it is, of course, always necessary

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### Table 1  Tongued articulation: reed above

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Name of stroke</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Notation dot</th>
<th>Syllable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vanderhagen [1785]</td>
<td>ordinaire</td>
<td>liaison entre toutes les notes</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>articulé</td>
<td>petit repos entre chaque note</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Instructions [c.1785]</td>
<td>staccato</td>
<td>very spirited and distinct manner enchaîne plusieurs notes sans cependant les couler détaché toutes</td>
<td>✔, ✔</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanderhagen [1799]</td>
<td>sec</td>
<td>n’interromp jamais le son</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>moelleux</td>
<td>détache les sons</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michel [c.1801]</td>
<td>détaché ou</td>
<td>pincer les lèvres et donner le coup de langue avec force et vigueur</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coupé</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backofen [1803]</td>
<td>piqué</td>
<td>frapper légèrement</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>TÜ</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>scharf angeblasen und länger gehalten</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>[shorter than the above]</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>schwachen Zungenstoss . . . der Ton keineswegs ganz unterbrochen</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rybicki [c.1825]</td>
<td>sec</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>Dİ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>doux</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Müller [c.1821]</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>[not explained]</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>Tİ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willman [1826]</td>
<td>staccato</td>
<td>press the lips and tongue each note with promptitude and vigour</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>piqué</td>
<td>with less force and the notes . . . blown with a looser lip</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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to bear in mind the words of Vanderhagen, 'There are still other tongue strokes, but as they can only derive from those I have spoken of, teachers will acquaint pupils with them'.

3 Articulation: Reed below
As discussed in section 2(i), the writer known as M. (1808) observed that tonguing became 'not simply possible but easy' with reed below. Froehlich gave the syllable 'tu' for those using the same position, which allowed 'an advantage as regards articulation with the tongue (for example, in playing rapid staccato passages); but [was] a disadvantage in so far that he cannot rapidly alternate with such equality between the high and low registers'. Precisely similar points were advanced by M. concerning leaps; but as he wanted to portray a simple antithesis between the shortcomings of the flashy reed-above style—as he saw it—and the virtues of the honest, Mozart-endorsed reed-below style, he omitted to say that the fastest tonguing was also the prerogative of the latter. For the tongue had rather further to travel in the reed-above style, a point that Fétis adduced in favour of the Germanic practice:

... la langue n'étant point obligée de remonter, comme dans la manière française, agit bien plus librement.

... the tongue, not being obliged to go back up, as in the French style, acts much more freely.

Berr's two tutors describe the staccato (dash), the pointé (dot) and the pointé-lié (slurred dot). Both the last two involved holding a note until the next was articulated, but the pointé-lié was tongued in a softer manner.

4 Teeth, grip, tone
The evidence collected by Heinz Becker and T. Eric Hoeprich points to a general lack of teeth marks upon surviving mouthpieces of 18th-century clarinets, and Hoeprich concludes 'Whatever the reed position, both the upper and lower teeth would have been covered by the lips'; he notes the opposite prescription in Vanderhagen (1785), seen below. However, Becker claimed that reed-above players' upper teeth were in contact with the reed when playing. Neither of these conclusions seems to me to be universally correct. Certainly, the evidence points to problems in reed-teeth contact for the reed-above player. Avoiding contact between reed and teeth is unanimously counselled by the French tutors, as well as Froehlich (see illus.1) and an anonymous English author writes:

2 The English clarinettist T. L. Willman. A lithograph from his clarinet tutor (c.1826): note the lever for right thumb. As can be seen, Willman played with reed above.

'be careful that the Teeth do not touch the Reed in blowing'. Later sources provided reasons why this advice was necessary:

Allein wie ist es möglich, einen sanften und zarten Ton zu bilden, wenn man das fibrirende Blatt mit den Zähnen berührt? Hierdurch muss ganz unvermeidlich ... ein scharfer Ton herauskommen ...

But how is it possible to form a soft, sweet tone when one touches the vibrating reed with the teeth? A piercing tone must quite inevitably result.

Le contact des dents sur l'Anche produit un sifflement qu'il faut soigneusement éviter.

Contact of the teeth on the reed produces a hissing which must be carefully avoided.

Although M. gave no other possibility than the above-mentioned contact, his polemical stance once again makes for selectivity in his evidence.

Touching the mouthpiece with the teeth on the opposite side to the reed was permitted by a minority of teachers only.

[jl faut] ... appuyer le bec sur les dents ...

[one must] ... rest the mouthpiece on the teeth ...
This idea was paraphrased in Vanderhagen [1799] and in Michel [c.1801]: but it was opposed by the tutors of Blasius [1796], Lefèvre [1802] and all later Frenchmen.

Likewise, reed-below German players could regard teeth contact as normal.

... und die harte Rinde des Schnabels mit dem Zahne vorsichtig zu berühren . . .

... and touch the hard surface of the mouthpiece warily with the teeth . . .

Moreover there is strong evidence that Müller gripped the mouthpiece with the teeth, and that this habit was copied to an extent in France, that is until the influence of Berr began to be felt.

de l'autre manière, qui est celle que les Allemands ont introduite depuis peu en France, l'anche est tournée du côté de la lèvre inférieure qui pince seule et les dents de la machoire supérieure sont appuyées sur le bois du bec, ce qui donne beaucoup de solidité à l'embouchure . . .

In the other way, that which the Germans introduced a short while ago in France, the reed is turned to the side of the lower lip, which alone grips, and the upper teeth lean on the wood of the mouthpiece, giving much solidity to the embouchure . . .

In his Traité, Berr claimed that Müller and Germans in general bit into the mouthpiece. Here he provides what may be unique evidence that only by using his teeth grip could Müller manipulate the newly-invented keys that required the right-hand thumb to act. These were the c'/e flat’ and the b'/c sharp’ styl keys. For Berr, whose right thumb played the traditional supporting role, these keys would have obliged him either to bite into the mouthpiece, or else support his instrument on his knee to stop it from falling. Müller regarded the right thumb as available for the new keys simply as a consequence of reed-below position; but the evidence of Berr and Carnaud really negates Becker’s theory that all reed-below players had free use of that thumb.

Tonal considerations will always remain imponderable, and it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the factor of reed shape and design. Becker was surely right to stress the individuality of 18th-century clarinet techniques; even Froehlich’s careful attempts at description ran into trouble. It is essential not to be influenced by current national tendencies in reed design when reconstructing Classical practice; they may have been precisely the opposite, and in any case regional differences must have been considerable.

Il est temps . . . que les élèves apprennent à jouer avec justesse, à respirer à propos, à phraser, à adoucir le son, et surtout à éviter les accidents qu'on nomme couacs, en se servant d'anches plus faibles.

It is time . . . that the pupils [of the Ecole Royale] learn to play in tune, to breathe at the right time, to phrase, to tone down their sound, and above all avoid accidental squawks by using weaker reeds.

Müller [1825] also emphasized the shortcomings of the straight-filed reed, whose use distorted the player’s features through sheer effort, but we do not know at which school in particular (if any) his remarks were aimed.

It would be quite wrong to conclude from the available evidence that there was one French tradition opposed to one German one; an extroverted, strong-toned one as opposed to an introverted, mellifluous one. What may be observed is the possible presence of the latter tendency embodied in Wachter in pre-Revolutionary Paris, and the widening appreciation everywhere that the clarinet should become versatile in its tone, articulation and technique. During the early Classical period, the evidence suggests diversity and change both in France and in Germany. To judge from the technique of Meissner, chest articulation appears to have been no stranger in Paris than in Wurzburg; while Vanderhagen implies that mixed methods of articulation, including from the throat, were normal. Reading Backofen, we may be impressed by the absence of chest articulation, as much as by the funny faces and throat sounds that were part and parcel of clarinet playing that he knew in the southeast. Scanning the number of French tutors published, we may consider that not everyone went to the Conservatoire; the influences of Müller’s playing (as well as his instruments), of Baermann’s and of Berr’s, form the most significant counterbalance to that of Lefèvre (‘more powerful than mellow’) after about 1817 in Paris. The end of the Napoleonic wars promoted exchange of ideas and experiences; the impact of such exchange is admirably reflected in the empirical way that Froehlich discussed clarinet technique when he revised his thoughts for publication in 1829—thoughts that are only now readily available.

Appendix  Chronological list of sources quoted

Asterisked entries offer dating different from those in Warner, An Annotated Bibliography of Woodwind Instruction Books, 1600–1830
V. Roesser, Essai d'instruction à l'usage de ceux qui composent pour la clarinette et le cor (Paris, [c.1764])
[Anon.], The Clarinet Instructor (London, [c1780])

[Anon.], Compleat Instructions [sic] for the Clarinet (London, [c.1785]).

F. Blasius, Nouvelle méthode de clarinette (Paris, [1796]). Dated by publisher's address in A. Devriès and F. Lesure, Dictionnaire des éditeurs de musique français (Geneva, 1979), i, p.129.


A. Vanderhagen, Nouvelle méthode de clarinette divisée en deux parties (Paris, [1799]). Dating by plate number from Devriès and Lesure, Dictionnaire des éditeurs, i, p.129.

V. Michel, Méthode de clarinette (Paris, [c.1801]).


J. Froehlich, Vollständige Theoretisch-praktische Musikschule (Bonn, [1810–11]). IIth Abtheilung.

A. Vanderhagen, Nouvelle méthode pour la clarinette moderne à douze clés (Paris, 1819). Dating by plate number in Devriès and Lesure, Dictionnaire des éditeurs, i, p.129.


F. Rybicki, 'Methode pour la clarinette' (Paris, Lyon, [1825]). Dating from internal evidence: presence of metal ligature and 13-keyed clarinet information, plus printing style.

T. L. Willman, A Complete Instruction Book for the Clarinet (London, [1826]).

F. J. Blatt, Méthode complète de clarinette (Mayence, Paris, Anvers, [c.1828]). The copy in the Hague Gemeentemuseum [NL-DHgM] shows this not to be the same as Blatt's more common method of 1841–2, issued by Schonenberger.


P. Carnaud, Nouvelle méthode de la clarinette moderne (Paris, 1829).

P. Vaillant, Nouvelle méthode de clarinette à cinq et à treize clés (Paris, [c.1830]). Strictly speaking this publication lies before or after 1830, not appearing in the exhaustive data in François Lesure et al, eds. La musique à Paris en 1830–1831 (Paris, 1983).

F. Bertra, Traité complet de la clarinette à quatorze clés (Paris, 1836).

F. Bertra, Méthode complète de clarinette (Paris, [1836]). Dated by Conservatoire deposit annotation in F-Pn copy Ch.1.

C. François Buteux, Méthode de clarinette d'après celle composée par X Le Fèvre (Paris, [1836]). Dating by Conservatoire deposit annotation in F-Pn copy Ch.10.


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C. Pierre, Histoire du Concert Spirituel (Paris, 1975), p.150. However, a 'clarine' concerto was performed by the bassoonist Kermazin on 25 March 1750: see concert nos 396, 398, 401, 403 in ibid.

V. Michel, Méthode de clarinette (Paris, [c.1801]), p.2.

Ber played in London in 1772 and 1774, as noted in P. Weston, Clarinet Virtuosi of the Past (London, 1971), p.31. Records from 1774 in relevant daily papers contain no reviews of his concerts.

Mercure de France, Jan. 1779, i, pp.47–8. Other reviews in ibid, March 1772, p.159; June 1772, p.149; April 1775, ii, p.180; May 1775, p.164; Nov. 1779, p.33.

Mercure de France, Nov. 1783, p.132, on the occasion of Lefèvre's début. Weston, op cit, p.60, implies a rather later début for Lefèvre, but an earlier one for Yost.

Mercure de France, June 1780, p.41. Report partially and incorrectly transcribed in Pierre, op cit, p.214. This book does not provide complete references for reviews for either Journal de Paris or Mercure de France in its programme section.

Mercure de France, April 1781, p.32.

H. G. Gerber, Neues Historisch-Biographisches Lexikon der Tonkünstler, ed. O. Wesely (Graz, 1966), iii, col.491; no bibliographic data given.

Mercure de France, Jan. 1787, pp.40–2.

Journal de Paris, 27 Dec. 1786, pp.1513–4. I draw no conclusion from the further remarks: 'Il a paru consoler le Public de la perte de Michel'.

M., 'Ueber die Klarinette', Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung [AMZ], (1807–8), 16 March, col.385.


See references to Louis-François Lefèvre and Buteux in Lesure et al, eds. La musique à Paris, op cit.

Buteux, Méthode de clarinette d'après celle composée par Xavier Le Fèvre (Paris, [1836]), p.3.


Weston, Clarinet Virtuosi, op cit, p.156, adding that Gambaro 'passed on his enthusiasm for Müller's clarinet to Ber'.


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34Weston, op cit, pp.133–4, mentions only the first two concerts. Reviews appeared in Journal de Paris, 26/7 Dec. 1817; 11 March 1818; 22 March. Journal des débats, 26/7 Dec. 1817; 31 Jan. 1818; announcements in these two and Le Moniteur universel and La Quotidienne.

35Journal de Paris, 26/7 Dec. 1817, p.4.

36Sievers' reviews are the most detailed by far, and deserve scrutiny. See AMZ, xx, issue 3 (21 Jan. 1818) cols.38–9, and issue 9 (4 March 1818), cols.180–1

37Fétis, 'De l'exécution musicale', op cit, p.226

38H. Klosé, Méthode pour servir à l'enseignement de la clarinette à anneaux mobiles (Paris, [1843]). Introduction

39Berr, Traité, op cit, p.8

40Berr, Méthode complète de clarinette (Paris, [1836]). p.1. Berr's assertion here that 'Des l'origine de la Clarinette, les Allemands jouèrent l'anche en dessous' modifies an assertion in the important article by T. E. Hoeprich, 'Clarinet reed position in the 18th century', EM, xii (1984), p.50: that Backofen [1803] was 'the only method which suggests that clarinettists in the 18th century played with the reed against the lower lip.'


43On the date 1754 see Elaine Keililer, untitled communication in JAMS, xxviii (1975), p.567. On the 1774 concert. see C. Pierre, Concert Spirituel, op cit entry 921, p.303. 'Valentin'

44V. Roeser, Essai d'instruction à l'usage de ceux qui composent pour la clarinette et le cor (Paris, c.1764), p.12

45The assertion that Meissner played often at the Concert Spirituel (NG based on MGG) stems from Gerber's Lexikon; he was not a well-known soloist there. So do the details in L. Bechstein's novel, Clarinette (Leipzig, 1840), ii, pp.67–73.

46K. Lefèvre, Méthode de clarinette (Paris, [1802]), p.10

47Trans. by W. Waterhouse in 'Joseph Fröhlich on Clarinet Reed Position', Clarinet and Saxophone, xi (Sept. 1986), p.38. The reader will here find extended passages from Froehlich [1810–11] and its revision in the rarely-found Systematischer Unterricht . . . (Würzburg, 1829). But Waterhouse did not include the technical information that follows.

48J. Froehlich, Vollständige Theoretisch-praktische Musikschule (Bonn, [1810–11]), ii, p.14

49Ibid, p.20

50H. M. 'Über die Klarinette', op cit, col.385

51Froelich, op cit, p.14; trans. W. Waterhouse

52F. J. Blatt, Méthode complète de clarinette (Mayence, Paris, Anvers, [c.1828]), p.4

53Froelich, op cit, p.14; trans. W. Waterhouse

54A. Vanderhagen, Méthode nouvelle et raisonnée pour la clarinette (Paris, [1785]), p.9

55Lefèvre, op cit, p.10

56J. G. H. Backofen, Anweisung zur Klarinette nebst einer kurzen Abhandlung über das Basset-Horn (Leipzig, [1803]), pp.11–12

57F. J. Garnier, 'Méthode raisonnée pour le haut-bois [1802]; G. Vogt, 'Méthode de hautbois', F-Pn Cl.50

58P. Vaillant, Nouvelle méthode de clarinette à cinq et à treize clefs (Paris, [c.1830]), p.5

59Buteux, op cit, p.12


61Trans. W. Waterhouse, op cit. These rapid leaps are indeed a hallmark of reed-above playing. Joseph Beer evidently however exploited them with his later technique, judging from the facsimile in Weston, op cit, pp.32–3.

62M., that is, took the solo style in Mozart's Concerto and Quintet as evidence: 'Der unsterbliche Mozart, der die Klarinette sehr zu schätzen wusste, hat . . . dieses bestätigt' (col.[386]).

63Fétis, 'De l'exécution musicale', op cit, p.226

64Hoeprich, op cit, p.51

65Becker, op cit, p.283

66Froehlich, op cit, p.13; [anon.], The Clarinet Instructor (London, [c.1780]).

67M., op cit, col.385

68Buteux, op cit, p.3

69Vanderhagen, op cit, pp.2–3

70M., op cit, col.385

71Carnaud, op cit, p.6

72Berr, Traité, op cit, p.2

73Becker, op cit, pp.285–6, argues that Müller's new instrument, of itself, promoted reed-below playing.


75Müller, Méthode pour la nouvelle clarinette et clarinette-alto (Paris, [c1821]), pp.21–22

46Trans. Waterhouse, op cit (n.37)