

# TIPS ON CHOOSING A RECORDER

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This chapter is a reprint of the ARS brochure of the same name, a collection of tips from various sources (see bibliography).

## WHAT KIND OF RECORDER DO YOU NEED?

- Do you want to play solo repertoire? *Look for a sound that will project.*
- Do you want to blend with other instruments in an ensemble? *Look for a less penetrating sound.*
- Will you want this instrument to function in a variety of contexts? *Choose a clear, warm sound.*

## TAKE WITH YOU

- An electronic tuner for checking pitch.
- A recorder-playing friend, or your teacher, for a second opinion.

Try several recorders of the same voice and model, following the steps below. Be gentle with the instruments, don't overplay or overblow. Set aside instruments you don't like, and continue with the ones you do like.

## I. GET A FEEL FOR THE GENERAL SOUND OF THE RECORDER

### PLAY

- Long tones in each range (play the same range on each recorder and compare).
- A simple melody that you know well.
- Slow slurred major and minor scales, both sharp and flat keys.

### LISTEN

- For fuzzy or unclear notes, or air noise in the high register.
- Pay attention to how hard you must blow, and how difficult it is to find the correct thumb hole opening.

## II. CHECK INTONATION WITH THE TUNER

### PLAY

- A slow chromatic scale over the entire range using your own natural blowing.
- Intervals, especially octaves.
- On the alto, check high A, B flat, C, D, E, and F; on the soprano check high E, F, G, A, B flat.
- A variety of arpeggios and major and minor scales

### LISTEN

- Watch the tuner, but don't automatically adjust.
- A consistently sharp instrument can be adjusted by pulling out the head joint, but a consistently flat instrument will be more difficult to play in tune.

### III. CHECK RESPONSIVENESS

#### PLAY

- Long tones (check soprano low C, D, high G#, C; alto low F, G, high C#, F).
- Experiment with left thumb position on the high notes.
- Play a long tone, starting softly and gradually increasing pressure until the note cracks.
- For high notes, play four rapid staccato notes in a row on one pitch. Try different tonguing syllables: TK, DG, Tdl, Ddl.
- For low notes, tongue lightly, then increase pressure.

#### LISTEN

- High notes should respond easily and clearly.
- The more dynamic range, the better.
- For a burble on the low F, F#, G, and A (alto); low C, C#, D, and E (soprano).
- On high notes, rapidly played notes should sound clear without much “chiff.”
- Check where the sound cracks on low notes.

#### PLASTIC VS. WOOD: Some pros and cons

##### PLASTIC – PRO

- Cheaper than wood recorders of comparable quality
- Lighter weight
- Consistent in quality
- Can be played in a variety of temperatures and venues, even camping
- Can be washed

##### PLASTIC – CON

- Not as aesthetically pleasing
- Windways tend to clog, since plastic does not absorb moisture
- Slippery in the hands

##### WOOD – PRO

- Less likely to clog
- More pleasing to hold and play
- Tone appears to be more flexible and pleasant
- Much of the building and voicing done by hand

##### WOOD – CON

- Wood can crack
- More expensive
- Heavier than plastic



## LOOK FOR INSTRUMENTS WITH CURVED WINDWAYS!

Wide, straight windways do not allow for variation in tone, intonation may be faulty, and high notes difficult to play. Look down at the top of your recorder if you are not sure.



NO



YES

## MORE SUGGESTIONS

- Attend workshops and festivals where you can ask professionals what recorders they play and recommend. Some workshops include exhibitions of recorder vendors.
- Visit the ARS website to locate chapters, consorts, and recorder teachers in your area.

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