

Bassoon and Oboe Brands and Models

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Wood vs. Plastic vs. Composite

Why are some instruments made of wood and others of plastic? Each material has its advantages and disadvantages, including tone quality, cost, and durability. One makes a selection depending on the types of use the instrument will receive.

Seasoned, quality woods used in instruments are expensive and increase the cost of the instrument. It takes years to properly cure the grenadilla wood for oboes and clarinets, and the maple for bassoons. Wood is thought to have a warmer sound, though acousticians will debate whether bore material will effect the sound. Wood oboes also have a serious danger of the upper joint cracking, brought on by rapid changes in temperature and humidity. When cracked, the instrument must be repaired professionally. As the two smallest bores of the bassoon are lined with hard rubber, the tone quality argument seems more obscured.

Plastic has the advantage of being more durable and will not crack, though perceived to have a less-warm tone. Plastic, however, when cold, will take longer to warm up and bring the instrument to pitch. Though many student instruments are made of plastic, some professional models include upper joints of crack-proof plastic that are actually more expensive than their wood counterparts (due to the fact that the plastic wears out their tools used to ream out the bore faster than does the wood). These instruments are often the choice for professionals who play many outdoor concerts.

Some instrument makers are using a composite resin material, using grenadilla sawdust and polycarbonate (Buffet calls this "Greenline"). They will not crack, and many like the tone. These instruments have not been out long enough to see how they hold up over time.

In general, I would recommend plastic or resin for any junior high level school-owned instruments, due to its extra durability. However, for individually-owned instruments, I would choose a wood instrument.

Keys

Oboe

Many student model oboes do not come with a low B-flat key. This is a note found frequently in High School level music, and is something to seek in an instrument. Also desirable is a forked-F resonance key that improves its sound without using the E-flat key. A left-hand F key is a desirable, though not essential feature.

Bassoon

One can get innumerable extra keys on a bassoon, many of which are used quite infrequently. These extra keys include high D and E, and trill keys. Also added are extra rollers, found on the right and left thumb keys. I recommend that you save your money.

Professional Level Bassoons (\$18,000+)

Heckel

Up to about 1993, Heckel (Biebrich Germany), had almost exclusive placement in professional level instruments. Their prices, even for used instruments are in the \$20,000-\$30,000 range. There are no model numbers, as each instrument is custom built with whatever extra keys and features that are ordered. Serial numbers can give you information about their ages, and new instruments are have numbers in the 13,000's. Particularly valued are instruments with serial numbers in the 8,000's, made around World War II.

Fox Model 601

An instrument becoming more popular in professional circles, and threatening Heckel's exclusivity is the Fox (South Whitley, Indiana) Model 601. These instruments have a big sound, and an even scale, and with a going price of around \$17,000, they are a real option to the more-expensive Heckels.

Semi-professional Level Bassoons (\$8,000-\$15,000)

Fox models 1, 2

These are “long bore” instruments which are more stable in pitch, but less projection than the short bore instruments. They are identical except the model 1 has more rollers between keys.

Fox models 101, 201

These are “short bore” instruments that are more flexible in pitch and have more projection of tone, used by many college students and professionals. They are identical except the model 101 has more rollers between keys.

Puchner

Another German made bassoon, these are widely used by Europeans. A model sold here in the U.S. is adjusted by Hugh Cooper (formerly teaching at University of Michigan), known as Cooper-Puchner.

Polisi, Mooseman, Yamaha, Schrieber

These brands are less popular, but still can be found in the market.

Student Level Bassoons (\$3,000-\$7,000)

Fox Model 3, 4

This is a plastic instrument commonly owned by schools and universities for techniques classes. The plastic body stands up to more abuse, but takes longer to warm up if the instrument is brought in cold for an early morning rehearsal. There is only a cosmetic difference between the models 3 and 4, so the model 4 is more common with schools who must deal with a budget.

Fox Renard 220

“Long bore” maple instrument with full key work, popular with many high school students and community orchestra players.

Renard 240

“Short bore” maple instrument, popular with many high school students and community orchestra players.

Fox Renard Model 41

“Long bore” plastic instrument

Fox Renard Model 51

A plastic instrument for small hands. The keyword has been moved closer, with the right third finger B-flat key eliminated. As most young players can reach the keys of a standard bassoon, this instrument is needed only in very special circumstances.

Schreiber

This is a brand that thirty years ago was quite commonly found in schools. Their wood student model was acceptable.

Linton

This instrument has been around a long time, but never been valued as much as those above.

Various other Brands

It seems that a number of instruments, reportedly manufactured in China, are finding their way to the market. I would not consider any purchase without seeing the instrument first hand.

Bassoon Bocals

One good way to upgrade an instrument is to replace the bocal. This is especially true if the old bocal has been dented, cracked, or bent in some way. Lengths vary with numbers of 0-4 with 0 the shortest, and numbers 1 and 2 the most common. *Though a longer bocal might seem the cure for sharp players, it is only treating the symptom. Opening the embouchure will lower the pitch and produce a better tone.*

Heckel bocals are legendary, cost in the \$500 range, and may greatly improve a mid-range instrument. There are a number of designs, some that are meant to aid in special cases like very-high notes. Edmund Nielsen in Chicago carries a big supply and will send you a number of bocals on approval.

Fox CVX and CVC bocals match up very well with some of their instruments, and are a step up from their C bocals. These sell in the \$350 range. As of 1998, Fox has a *CVX* and *CVC* bocals in the \$500 range which they claim are of a new level of quality.

Professional level Oboes (\$5,000-\$8,000)

Loree

Almost like Heckel with bassoon, Loree oboes are dominant in the American market. Their "AK" bore improved the pitch in the low register, and are about the only model of new Lorees now sold. Prices for new Lorees are about \$5500 in 2008.

Yamaha 800 Series (831 or 841)

These instruments are comparable to Loree in quality and price. The oboe section of the Philadelphia Orchestra now plays on these instruments, and this marketing strategy has boosted Yamaha's sales.

Marigaux

These instruments are comparable to Loree in quality and price. Peter Cooper of the Colorado Symphony plays on one of these.

Laubin

This instrument is comparable to Loree in quality and price. American made, there is currently a five-year wait for a new instrument.

Gordet

Another French instrument, comparable to Loree

Covey

Another American maker, not as popular as those above

Mid-level Oboes (\$2,000-\$5,000)

Used Oboes from brands above

One can often find a very good value in a gently used instrument. Be sure to arrange for an approval period to confirm the advertised condition of the instrument.

Fox Renard 400

This is an all wood instrument, priced about \$4,500.

Fox Renard 450

This instrument has a crack-proof upper joint, priced at \$4,200

Fox Renard 300

This instrument is all plastic, selling for about \$3,200. It has a left-hand F key

Yamaha Model 441

Plastic or wood body, with low B-flat and forked-F resonance, priced around \$2,500.

Student-level Oboes (less than \$2,000)

Yamaha Model 241

This is a resin-body instrument with a low B-flat, priced around \$1900.

Bundy

This plastic instrument is quite common, found frequently as a rental instrument. It has no low-B-flat, nor any extra keys, and the workmanship is not particularly good. They are a less-expensive option for an instrument.

Barrington

This oboe has the advantage of a low B-flat key and an F resonance key, about \$1000.