

Bassoon Repairs on a Limited Budget

By Elizabeth Rusch Fetters



Most band directors are feeling the pinch of limited budgets these days. However, you can often continue to use older bassoons without incurring costly repairs.

The quickest and cheapest way to bring an old bassoon to playable condition is to check the pads so the instrument seals properly. Repair only pads or corks that need it. The repair technician should also check the seal on the U-bend or round metal portion on the bottom of the boot joint under the metal cover.



A thin piece of cork seals the U-bend and is easy and inexpensive to fix.

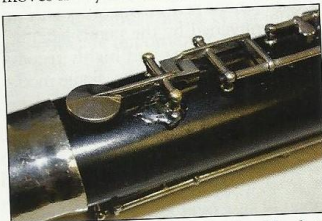


This shows a close-up of a bassoon's cork on the U-tube that is in excellent condition. If it does not look like this, replace it.

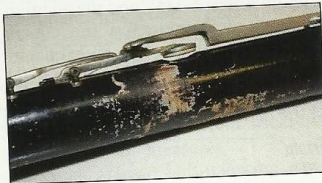
You should also look down the bore of the instrument to check for anything that doesn't belong there.

Typically repairs to a bassoon with a plastic body are cheaper than wood instruments that warp. Although plastic can be less forgiving, cracks are easily filled with a resin or epoxy. Cracks in plastic bassoons often materialize near posts. An epoxy applied with a careful

hand may fill a crack on an old instrument and restore a post to its upright position. Make sure that the key still moves freely once the post is replaced.



On this bassoon a crack was glued back in place with epoxy. It is not pretty, but it secures the post and holds the key on.



The finish has worn off on a plastic bassoon. This problem is merely cosmetic and not worth paying to fix.

If you have two old bassoons in your instrument closet that do not work, try to make one useable instrument from the two. It is not the best solution, but you can often swap a broken joint from one instrument to another. This works best if the instruments are from the same manufacturer. Make sure the joints fit snugly together or the instrument may not play correctly or stay together. Small components, including seat straps, bells, and bocals, are the easiest to trade. Key designs vary greatly from manufacturer to manufacturer, so unless the bassoons are from the same manufacturer and have reasonably close serial numbers, do not attempt to swap them.

Always try to switch a bent bocal. A new bocal can almost always make a bad bassoon sound better. If you do not have one available, purchase a new

one. For two to three hundred dollars – a fraction of the cost of a new bassoon – you can purchase a new bocal that will greatly upgrade your instrument. Also, bocals are like mouthpieces. Just as you do not want students sharing trumpet mouthpieces, they should also not be sharing bocals. Bocals have a very small opening that can easily harbor bacteria and is very close to the player's mouth. For safety, each student should have their own bocal and reed on which to play.

For those with new bassoons, make sure to return the instrument to the factory each year for an overhaul. The first year is often free and you only pay for shipping.

Do not bother paying to have an old, cracked, wooden bassoon repaired. Old wood bassoons may have problems which are not immediately apparent to the naked eye but could result in an unplayable instrument with warped tone holes, disfigured bore, dry rot, or deep cracks. Dry rot, especially, is not worth having repaired. Have a qualified technician look over instruments for these damages. For newer wood bassoons, invest in an instrument humidifier to keep moisture levels high in the case and prevent cracking. Assign a student the task of filling an instrument humidifier weekly or more frequently in dry weather.

Take the time to explain to students how to care for their instruments. Preventative maintenance and good student habits will go a long way to saving money. □

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