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**Interview with Kimball Sykes - First Clarinet**

National Arts Centre Orchestra

*FOURTH STAGE*

March 14, 2002

**Please introduce yourself and describe your position with NACO.**

My name is Kimball Sykes. I'm principal clarinet of the National Arts Centre Orchestra.

**Can you please explain a little bit about your position?**

There are two clarinets in the orchestra. I am the principal. I am responsible for playing most of the solos in the orchestra.

**What is the most challenging thing about playing the clarinet?**

The most challenging thing about playing the clarinet is making this wooden tube with holes in it express the music that I hear in my mind. When I'm playing well what I hear in my mind and what comes out of the instrument is the same thing. It's easy to say but difficult to do.

**How much time did you spend practicing as a student and how much time do you spend practicing now?**

When I was a student I probably played 45 minutes to an hour a day. Now, if I don't have rehearsals during the day I try to practice for two-and-a-half to three hours a day.

**What do you enjoy most about your career?**

The thing I enjoy the most about my career is that when I go to work it doesn't feel like a job. It's what I love to do and I just happen to get paid for it.

**How do you feel after a concert?**

If the concert goes well I feel good. I feel a sense of accomplishment. If the concert doesn't go well, I think, "What can I do for the next time or for the next performance?"

**What is your favourite part of a concert?**

I guess my favourite part of a concert is the end because there is that sense of accomplishment after you finish.

**What are some examples of useful techniques or tips that you were taught and which you never forgot?**

I had a teacher once tell me that if I know what I want to do musically it will solve all of my instrumental and technical problems. When I think about it, for the most part he was right. If you're just learning to play tennis and you want to hit the ball over the net you start to think, "If I do *this* with my hand or if I put my feet *this* way then I'll be able to get the ball over the net." Sometimes it doesn't work and you end up hitting it into the net. At some point though, if you just imagine hitting the ball over the net, it works. It's the same thing for music. If you imagine the way that you want to sound then the body will do what it has to do in order to make that sound.

**Can you demonstrate some warm up pieces or techniques?**

Here's a chromatic warm up that you can do to get your fingers moving in the morning.

[Kimball demonstrates this on his clarinet on video]

And you continue that all the way up to the B-flat scale.

**Can you provide techniques and practical examples for proper or improved:**

**Embouchure**

The best thing to think about when you are thinking of your embouchure is not to bite. Think more of just gripping the mouthpiece.

[Kimball demonstrates this on his clarinet on video]]

To do that you have to push your jaw out just a little bit.

**Breathing**

When you breathe you should think of filling the bottom of your lungs first. Its like if you pour water into a balloon it'll start filling up the bottom. Try to keep your shoulders from rising. Often times when people take a quick breath they raise their shoulders but you don't want to do that. When you take a nice big breath, fill the bottom first. When you want to release the air it's almost like gravity is collapsing the lung cage.

## **Tone Quality**

### **TAKE TWO:**

An ideal clarinet sound has a nice balance between the upper partials and the lower partials.

[Kimball demonstrates this on his clarinet on video]

If you have too many of the higher partials in the sound it will sound like this:

[Kimball demonstrates this on his clarinet on video]

And if it's too dark it'll sound like this:

[Kimball demonstrates this on his clarinet on video]]

## **Advise for students interested in pursuing a career as a clarinet player?**

If you wish to become an orchestral clarinet player the best thing is to be in a city where there is a very good orchestra and go to concerts. Go to a concert hall and hear it happening. You should probably also take lessons from people that are doing it professionally, from members of the orchestra.

This is just a little excerpt from the cadenza from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*.