

# **THE BREATHING BOOK**

*Oboe Edition*

**Stephen Caplan**

Foreword by

**Allan Vogel**

The Breathing Book  
Oboe Edition  
Stephen Caplan

MPM 02-001  
\$19.95  
© 2014 Mountain Peak Music

2700 Woodlands Village Blvd. #300-124  
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001  
[www.mountainpeakmusic.com](http://www.mountainpeakmusic.com)

This publication is protected by Copyright Law.  
Do not photocopy. All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-1-935510-63-5

# Contents

Foreword .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	ii
Introduction: Breath Mastery in One Month .....	1
Lesson 1: Using Kinesthesia .....	2
Lesson 2: How do you sit? How do you stand? .....	4
Lesson 3: Finding Balance at the AO Joint .....	6
Lesson 4: Free the Neck! .....	8
Lesson 5: One Jaw.....	10
Lesson 6: The Reed-my-Lips Joint.....	12
Lesson 7: The Shape of the Spine.....	14
Lesson 8: Organize your torso around your CORE! .....	16
Lesson 9: The Centrality of the Spine.....	18
Lesson 10: The Gathering and Lengthening Spine.....	20
Lesson 11: Lying Around .....	22
Lesson 12: Locating the Lungs.....	24
Lesson 13: The Abdominal Cavity.....	26
Lesson 14: The Pelvic Cavity .....	28
Lesson 15: The Pelvic Diaphragm .....	30
Lesson 16: The Natural Coordination of Breathing.....	32
Lesson 17: The Breathing Joints .....	34

Lesson 18: The Arms .....	36
Lesson 19: The Throat .....	38
Lesson 20: The Diaphragm .....	40
Lesson 21: The Abdominal Wall is All Around .....	42
Lesson 22: Engaging Pelvic Floor Muscles.....	44
Lesson 23: The Legs .....	46
Lesson 24: Freeing the Leg Muscles.....	48
Lesson 25: Support .....	50
Lesson 26: Constructive Rest .....	52
Lesson 27: How Much Air? .....	54
Lesson 28: Mapping the Oboe .....	56
Lesson 29: Feeling Faint? .....	58
Lesson 30: Da Capo .....	59
About the Author .....	60

## Foreword

For the hundreds of years that instruction on wind instruments has been given, most good teachers have tried to stress the overriding importance of having superb wind. One can only begin to imagine all the practices and images that have been expressed in many languages and in different types of societies. Just as a player's level of playing is no better than his intonation, the overall quality of one's playing is also dependent upon the wind stream. On the oboe, as we all know by now, you need well prepared air to begin a note, to continue it decently, and to end it as it should be ended. However, there is so much else to think about and to work on, that this all-important factor is often not what it could be in us.

In *The Breathing Book*, Stephen Caplan has given our evolving tribe of oboists a valuable tool which will be of great benefit. It offers an extremely clear and accurate picture of the parts of one's body that are involved in our breathing and our playing and guides us to putting these into practice with some of our favorite melodies and scale patterns. Our knowledge and awareness of our bodies can increase both while playing and not playing the oboe. Many fuzzy notions, not to speak of complete misconceptions, are cleared up with the aid of wonderful illustrations and language that speaks from an oboist to oboists. Stephen's writing style is engaging, convincing, and communicates with a variety of tones, just like good oboe playing.

It is wonderful that this book gives us a series of practical exercises to help focus on the quality of one's breathing. We may know about how we should breathe while playing the oboe, but, if we forget to practice our daily exercises, we might not really do it well when it most matters, say, in a concert when we can be a little preoccupied. Of course we will learn a lot in the 30 days of (a little) work that Stephen recommends, but we should find our own ways to carry this into the rest of our days. We owe this to all the people who listen to us play our great and difficult instrument.

**Allan Vogel**

Principal Oboe, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra

Faculty: California Institute of the Arts, Colburn Conservatory of Music, and the University of  
Southern California

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Barbara Conable, founder of Andover Educators—her knowledge and mentorship is a never-ending source of inspiration (pun intended!)—and I am grateful for permission to use information from her book, *What Every Musician Needs to Know About the Body*.

The encouragement of my fellow Andover Educators has been energizing, particularly David Vining and Amy Likar—together we *will* put music education on a firm somatic foundation! When writing this book I often thought of my first oboe teachers, Robert Krause, Sally Bennett Faulconer, and Earnest Harrison, who helped me understand how a systematic approach to a problem will garner success. I thank UNLV for the Sabbatical Leave that allowed me to complete this project.

Finally I acknowledge, with love, my wife Adrienne, and daughters, Alyssa, Sara and Anna, who for years have endured the accumulation of reed scrapings on floors and the funny sounds at odd hours of the day and night that resulted in this publication.

# Introduction

## Breath Mastery in One Month

*The Breathing Book* will significantly improve your breathing in about a month. Each lesson takes only a few minutes and can easily be added to your daily practice routine. These thirty lessons give you a greater understanding of breath mechanics, and increase your awareness of the movements of breathing that create good oboe sounds—the foundations of breath mastery!

Understanding breath is the key to improving every aspect of oboe playing. This is why so many oboe teachers have developed tricks for teaching breath control. Unfortunately, there are many half-truths and untruths that have been perpetuated in the oboe world related to breathing. There are metaphors about breathing that have been passed on from teacher to student that sometimes cause more harm than good. What does it really mean to “breathe from the diaphragm,” or “play with an open throat”? What IS a “column of air”?

The best way to understand breathing is with the truth, not with catchy phrases or enigmatic metaphors. A thorough explanation of the structures and movements of breathing and how they relate to good oboe playing can be found in my book *Oboemotions: What Every Oboe Player Needs to Know about the Body* (published by GIA Publications). There you will also find information about unique breathing concerns, such as circular breathing and velopharyngeal incompetence, which are not discussed in this book.

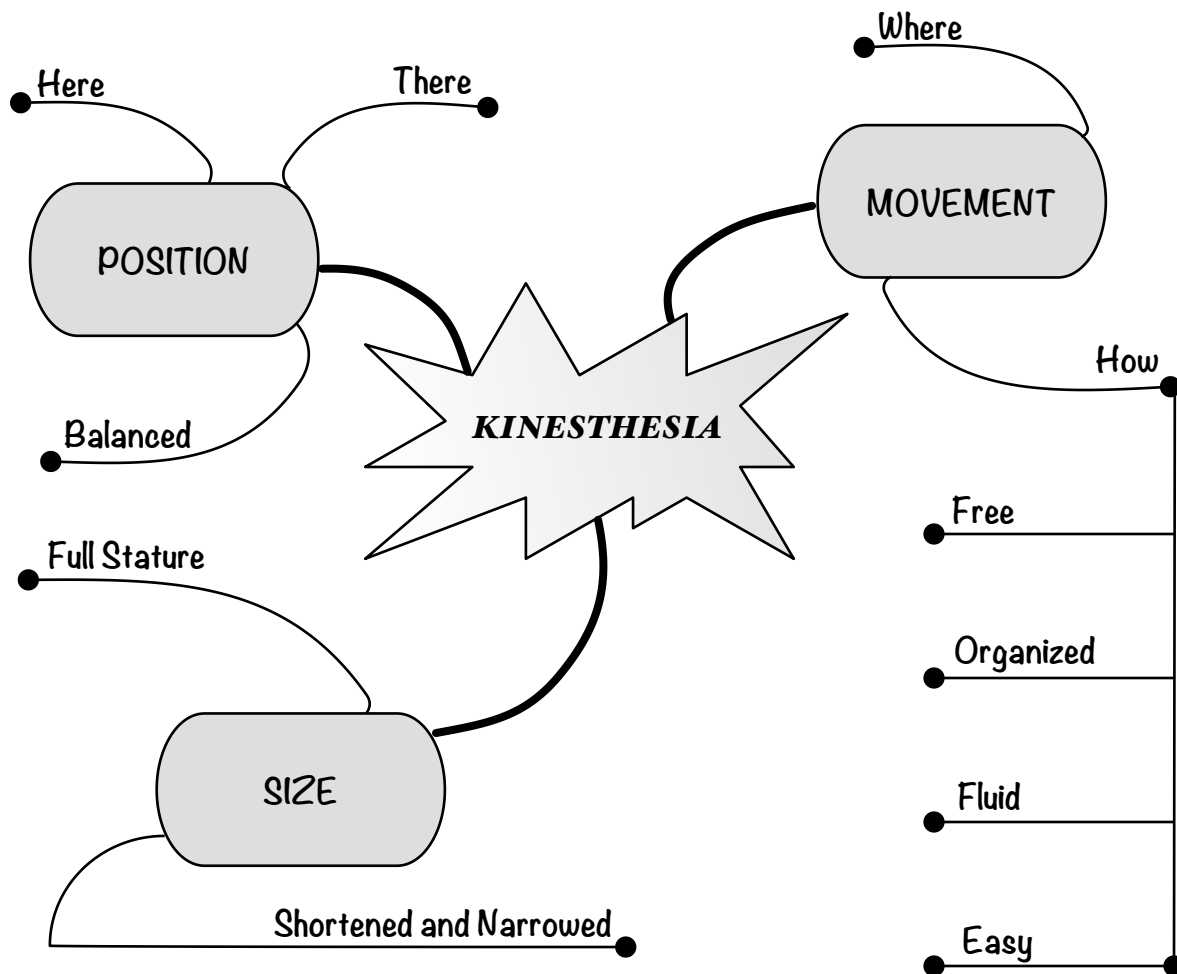
In *The Breathing Book*, I now offer thirty breathing lessons. Each presents a key point about the anatomy of breathing with special attention paid to the detailed images provided by Benjamin Conable and others, and then suggests a musical example with which you can begin to embody this information into your own daily practice and performance.

This approach will improve your breathing, and will also make your practice and performance more effortless, more accurate, and more enjoyable.

## Lesson One: Using Kinesthesia

*Double reed players, like all musicians, must breathe to stay alive.*  
But for us breath also brings our music to life: Breath brings a reed to life, creating vibration.

Oboe players must become conscious of their breathing. To increase our awareness of breathing, we must use **kinesthesia**—our movement sense.



Each of us has **6** senses. Not **5**.

Kinesthesia tells us things about ourselves that the other five senses don't tell us. It tells us whether we are moving, and how we are moving. Kinesthesia also tells us our size and our position. We can use kinesthesia to notice how much air we breathe in and out. We can become conscious of the quality of our breathing as we create music. With our sixth sense, we can feel our bodies whenever we like: in the practice room and in performance.

## Lesson One Practice: Using Kinesthesia

*Using your kinesthesia, notice your breathing.*

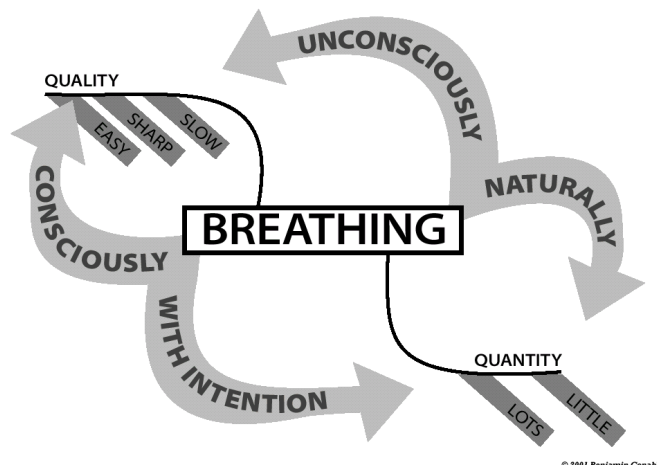
*Take your time.*

*Like watching the ocean waves when sitting on a beach, notice the breathing cycle: inhalation and exhalation.*

*Notice what parts of your body respond to inhalation and exhalation.*

*Notice how the parts of your body move.*

Vibration is movement, and breathing is movement. All double reed players need to map the structures and movement of breathing accurately in order to perform with ease. We breathe with our whole bodies. Every cell is nourished with oxygen and purified when we breathe. The whole torso participates in the movement of breathing, each area (chest, abdomen, pelvis) in a different way. Joints move, some slightly, some greatly. Our heads respond to movements of breathing; our legs support breathing.



Breathing is a top to bottom event.

When we inhale, air enters our body through the nose or mouth and makes its way to our lungs. When we exhale, the air exits through our nose or mouth.

We breathe with our whole bodies.