

General characteristics

To meet the varied artistic and developmental needs of the player, the various models of Leblanc clarinets have differences in tuning ratios, tonal color, depth and flexibility. Beyond those needed individual differences, all models share the following common features:

Direct tone emission. This feature results in instantaneous speaking of the clarinet tone at *all* dynamic levels (especially piano), and the feeling that one need not labor with air and embouchure to be “in the heart of the sound.” By comparison, other clarinets seem reticent in their speaking qualities and lack the immediate presence and clarity of sound found in Leblanc clarinets.

Balanced blowing resistance. This means that right-hand and left-hand notes blow with the same resistance. This feature results in matchless evenness in tone color throughout and raises the clarinet to new levels of ease in tone production, effortlessly smooth legato, security of response and dependable articulation.

Other brands of clarinets market acoustical designs that cause one hand to blow with greater resistance than the other. This sort of design results in a clarinet that changes in tone color and response from register to register and from hand to hand, requiring the player to “create the evenness” by means of *embouchure/air-pressure exchange*. The even tone color and response inherent in the acoustical design of Leblanc France clarinets eliminates much of the physical effort required in controlling response and tone on other brands of clarinets.

Stability in timbre, tuning and tonal shape. When we say that Leblanc clarinets are *stable in timbre* we simply mean that the tone color remains the same, whether at louder dynamics or softer dynamics. For instance, when most clarinets are played at louder dynamic levels, the tone easily becomes bright, thin and distorted. This is especially true of the upper register. This brightness creates an edgy, metallic tone that is unpleasant to most listeners’ ears. This is *not* true of Leblanc clarinets. The higher tones of the Leblancs remain round and full with no metallic edge—even at the loudest

dynamic levels.

Also, Leblanc clarinets are *stable in tuning*. Clarinets usually play sharper at softer dynamics and flatter at louder dynamics. While it is not possible to eliminate the pitch variation present as dynamics change, Leblanc clarinets minimize the pitch fluctuations in extremes, enabling the player to play softer without playing sharper and louder without playing as flat as on other brands of clarinets.

Stability in tonal shape is achieved by building a certain “hold” in the clarinet tone, especially for the upper register tones. By “hold” we are referring to the fact that Leblanc clarinets maintain the shape and refinement of tonal definition, even at the loudest dynamic level—much like a balloon, which when blown up gets larger, but keeps the same basic shape as when it was small. This feature, combined with *pitch stability*, allows the player more embouchure flexibility and relaxation, virtually abrogating the need for the player to “grab” at the sound to keep it from spreading.

All of these playing features, *direct tone emission, balanced blowing resistance, and pitch, timbre and shape stability*, give Leblanc clarinets *playability*—the experience of unmatched expressive freedom, playing ease, and security that has compelled many artists who have been longtime devotees of other brands of clarinets to switch to the new Leblanc clarinets.

Your initial experience

Because many clarinetists have played instruments for years that do not have the efficient playing features of the Leblanc clarinets (balanced blowing resistance, hold, and stability in pitch and dynamics), initially they are likely to do a number of things with air and embouchure-pressure exchange that are unnecessary when playing a Leblanc.

Many of the qualities in tonal evenness and response that must be created by the player on other models are built into Leblanc clarinets. Consequently, the sooner you relax and trust the Leblanc to supply what you would otherwise have to create on your old instrument,

the sooner the superior playability of the Leblanc becomes evident. Most significantly, the beautiful hold and tonal definition in the new Leblancs eliminate the need to constantly “grab” with the embouchure to maintain the shape of the tone.

Basic terms defined

The following terms are used to describe the playing characteristics of Leblanc clarinets. Understanding them will help you in selecting the instrument that is right for you.

Modes: This term refers to the various registers of the clarinet. The Bb soprano clarinet has three modes: chalumeau (low register), clarion (middle register), altissimo (high register).

Tuning ratios: This term refers to the relationship in tuning between two notes of different registers that use the same tone hole. For instance, both first space F and high C are emitted from the first finger hold. If, when played, we find the F is five cents flat and the C is five cents sharp, we say the ratio spread between these two notes is 10 cents.

Bore definition: Basic bore size refers to the cylindrical part of the middle third of the French clarinet’s bore.

Polycylindrical: Refers to the upper third of the left-hand joint, which is characterized by a series of cylinders connected by conical, stair-step-like reductions. All new Leblanc clarinets have one variation or another on this basic bore configuration.

Leblanc clarinet construction

All Leblanc wood clarinets, both midline student and professional models have *integral tone holes*. This means that the raised tone holes are actually part of the clarinet’s body. Other manufacturers turn the wood bodies into cylinders and then use plastic inserts for their raised tone holes for all wood models except their top professional models.

While *integral tone holes* are more difficult to manufacture, we at Leblanc are sure that both the tone and construction of the clarinet are superior when this is done.

Acoustical types

There are three types of acoustics in the new line of Leblanc clarinets.

The first type is used in our entry-level professional clarinets, the Esprit and Sonata. This acoustic produces a pristine, beautifully focused tone, outstanding, well-defined intonation, and extraordinary ease and efficiency of tone production—optimum features for the advancing player's improvement in tone and technical development.

The second and third types are both used in professional model clarinets. These two types are strongly related and differ primarily in the placement of the register tube. Varied placement of this tube creates different tuning ratios in the first and second modes, as well as other subtle playing characteristics in blowing resistance, legato and tone quality. Both types of acoustics produce a tone that is mature, full, resonant and flexible.

Entry-level professional clarinets

1040S Esprit and
1020S Sonata

Technical features

Materials: The Esprit and Sonata use the finest select African grenadilla wood throughout. Like all Leblanc wood clarinets, the bodies have integral tone holes.

Acoustics: 14.65 mm bore with a polycylindrical reversing-cone feature in the upper joint. Lower speaker-tube placement produces somewhat wider upper-joint tuning ratios in the first and second mode.

Mechanical: The Esprit and Sonata have the finest features of the famous Leblanc mechanism: separate-post-mounted in-line trill keys. The Esprit also has separate-post-mounted C#/G# and Ab/Eb trill keys.

Most outstanding playing features

The Esprit, while not quite as agile as the Sonata, has a tone that is deeper and more flexible, enabling the player to create wider degrees of color and shape variations for expressive purposes.

The Sonata has the classic balance of playing efficiency and tonal beauty and flexibility that make it one of the world's finest clarinets.

Who will want to play these models?

While the Esprit is defined as an “entry-level” professional instrument, players consistently find that the Esprit plays better than and sounds comparable to other manufacturers' professional models. Because of the Esprit's maturity in tone, it is probably the best value of any clarinet on the market. The Esprit is truly the professional clarinet without the high price tag. College students who are majoring in music, advanced high school students, as well as many professional clarinetists will find these instruments to be of interest. Many professionals will find the Sonata to their liking as well because of its greater tonal flexibility and depth.

Professional clarinets

1188S *Infinité*

Technical features

Materials: Selected top-quality African grenadilla wood.

Acoustics: 14.65 mm bore with large offset polycylindrical reversing-cone feature. Lower placement of the speaker tube produces somewhat wider “R13-style” upper-joint first-and-second-mode tuning ratios.

Mechanical: See Esprit mechanical features.

Most outstanding playing features

The *Infinité* has the outstanding response and evenness typical of Leblanc clarinets and exceptional tonal depth and resonance in addition to the famous Leblanc balanced-key action.

Who will want to play this model?

All serious clarinetists and younger players who want a top-line clarinet that they can “grow into.”

1189S and
1189SL *Concerto*

The Leblanc *Concerto* models share the same acoustical features but differ mechanically. The 1189S has the offset-style mechanism, while the 1189SL has the in-line style. Otherwise, they are the same instrument.

Materials: Hand-selected African grenadilla wood.

Acoustics: 14.65 mm bore with large polycylindrical offset feature. Higher speaker tube produces excellent upper-

joint first-and-second-mode tuning ratios.

Mechanical: See above.

Most outstanding playing features

Optimum flexibility and resonance are combined with a very dark tone. Tone color and response are remarkably even from the right-hand to the left-hand clarion tones. Smoothness, roundness of tone throughout, silky legato and stability of tone color and shape even in the loudest dynamic levels make this instrument a dream to play. Speaker-tube placement pulls normally sharp upper-clarion tones down into pitch; this enables the player to voice the upper-clarion tones *up* into good tonal center without creating the usual sharpness.

1190S *Opus*

Materials: The finest hand-selected unstained African grenadilla wood.

Acoustics: See *Concerto/Éternité*.

Mechanical: The *Opus* has offset-style mechanism, left-hand Ab/Eb key, lower pad resonators and adjustable thumb rest.

Most outstanding playing features

See *Concerto/Éternité* playing description.

Who will want to play this model?

The most discerning players who want only the top-line, state-of-the-art instrument.

2007S *Symphonie VII*

Materials: The finest hand-selected unstained Honduran rosewood.

Acoustics: See *Opus*.

Mechanical: The *Symphonie VII* has offset-style mechanism, left-hand Ab/Eb key, lower pad resonators and adjustable thumb rest.

Most outstanding playing features

Its mellowness and warmth of tone and unparalleled responsiveness.

Who will want to play this model?

The most discerning players who want the most expressive clarinet ever, for use in orchestral and chamber music settings.

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