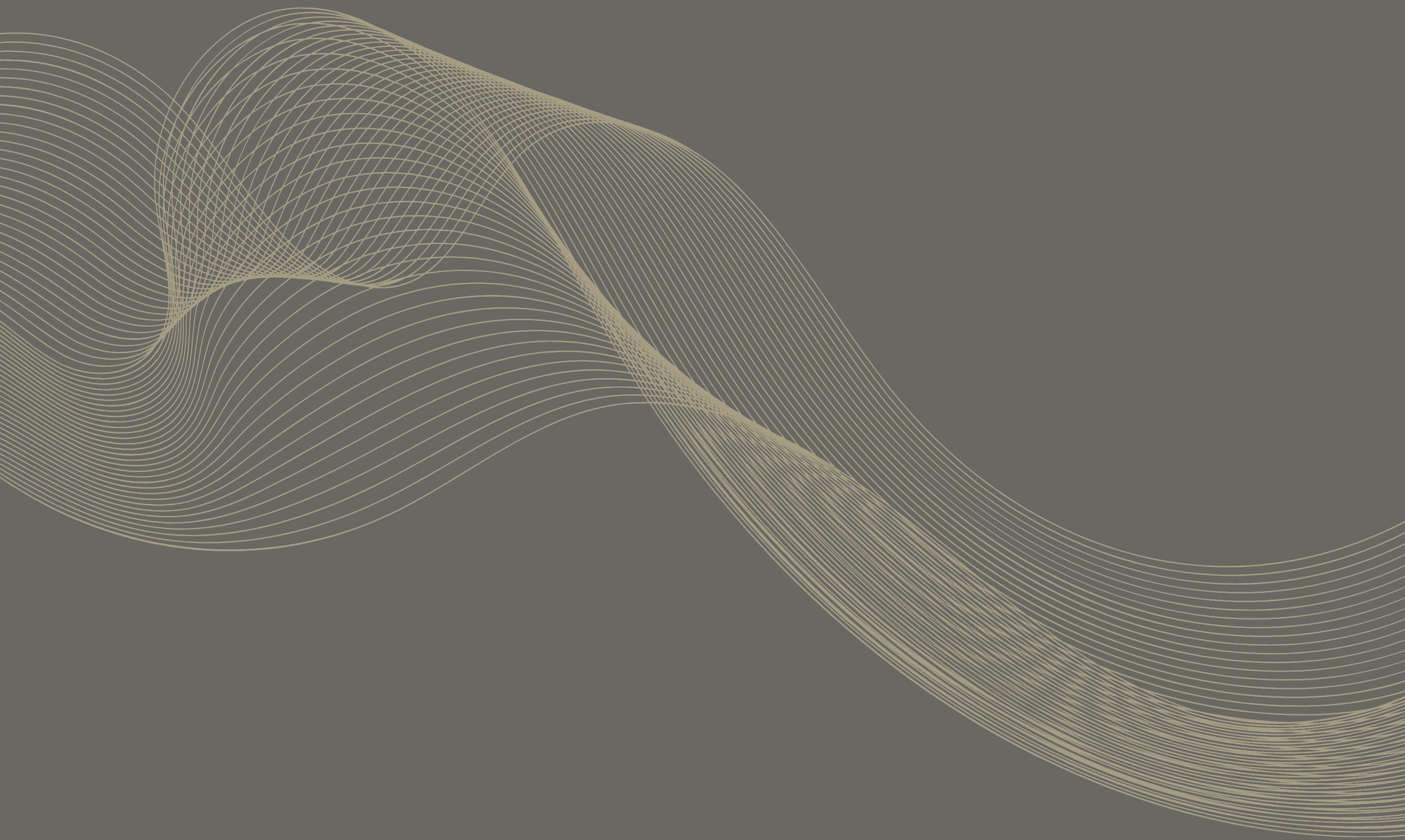


SHARON KAM

Tongue Position



ABOUT THIS COURSE

It is no secret that having a good tongue position improves many facets of your sound, including the intonation, color, and legato phrasing. In this course, soloist

Sharon Kam takes you through the foundations of forming a good position, which will help you improve all of those things. She guides you through how to think about the shape of your mouth with certain vowels and demonstrates the effects of placing your tongue in both low and high positions, as well as explain problems you may encounter while playing and practicing music, with specific notes you can check to make sure your tongue is in the right place. If you're looking to improve your tongue position, this is the course for you!

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OVERVIEW

A good tongue position is essential to producing a great sound on the clarinet. Awareness of the position will allow you to play with a better legato, give you a better color in your sound, and have better intonation. Further, it will help you solve problems you may encounter when practicing your pieces. This lesson will offer some tips on working with your tongue position and how to think of it better conceptually.



THE GARDEN HOSE ANALOGY

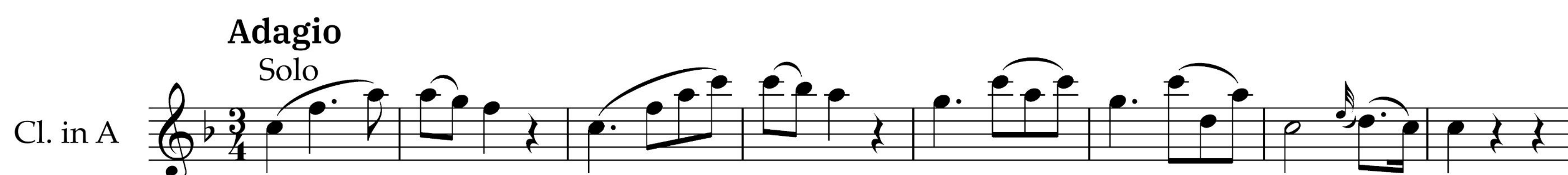
You can think of your tongue position like a garden hose. When watering a large garden, without making any extra effort the hose will only reach as far as your arm can stretch. However, if you place your thumb over the outlet, making a smaller opening, you can change the stream and allow the water to spray out and reach much further. The same concept can apply to forming your tongue position inside your mouth from playing.

Essentially, the effect occurs when the tongue is raised slightly. Try making a “hee” sound, like you’re a cat hissing, or trying to make a German “sch” sound. The most important thing to remember while trying to do this is not to move your lower jaw while bringing your tongue up.

PRACTICING TONGUE POSITION AWARENESS

Certain notes on the clarinet make it much easier to hear when the tongue position has shifted. The difference in the sound comes from changing the velocity of the air, and you'll also be able to hear the intonation slightly higher. There's also a change in how the air is concentrated inside the clarinet.

Take a look at the second movement of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto and try playing any of the notes in the higher register. A tongue position too low will create undertones on those notes instead of a full, clear, and supported sound. If we raise the tongue high enough, those undertones will go away. Try shifting your tongue position as you play a high C and notice the difference in sound and tone.



Take a look at the second movement of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto and try playing any of the notes in the higher register. A tongue position too low will create undertones on those notes instead of a full, clear, and supported sound. If we raise the tongue high enough, those undertones will go away. Try shifting your tongue position as you play a high C and notice the difference in sound and tone.

Shifting your tongue position while playing notes in the low register of the clarinet can also build awareness of how high or low your tongue position actually is. The key to making this kind of practice effective is to make sure not to change anything in your embouchure or move your lower jaw and keep an "e" shape in the mouth. Notice the change in intonation and the color of your sound when you try to practice this way. If you bite down more on your mouthpiece, you'll notice a much stronger difference. Although holding an "e" shape in your mouth to keep your tongue position up may not produce as beautiful of a tone color as with an "o" shape, this "e" shape will also ensure that you are more in tune.

Another register of the clarinet where you can hear the difference in tongue position is the throat tones. If you try practicing the opening of Debussy's *Premiere Rhapsodie*, where the first few notes are all in this range, a low tongue position makes it sound a bit tired. With a higher tongue position, a steady embouchure, and a relaxed lower lip, you can hear more life in the sound.



LEGATO PLAYING

Another invaluable tool to help you practice having the correct tongue position is to practice music or phrases that require legato. As we play higher, we tend to raise our embouchure and add tension to our shoulders and body. To counteract this, try focusing on having tension only in the tongue as you raise it while keeping your shoulders and the rest of your body relaxed. We also need to ensure we are blowing with a faster air speed to maintain the legato, and this can be much easier maintained with a higher tongue position. If you try to play a low C to a high C in a legato style, for example, try to move the tongue up to a higher position while on the low C **before** approaching the high C. If you don't adjust your tongue at all, you will notice an undertone coming out in your sound.

Your ability to change your tongue position while playing will not only help you play a better sound but also allow you to find stability in your musical phrasing.

The arpeggios leading up to high C in the second movement of Mozart's *Clarinet Concert* are great examples of music you can practice this on.