When an instrument is in rather decent condition but has some problems, generally it does not need a 'Complete Overhaul'. Rather, we refurbish or 'Play Condition' the instrument so it is fully functioning as when it was new.

There can be a large difference among repair shops what that means exactly, so it is best for the customer to make their expectations clear so everyone is on the same page. Sometimes those expectations can be very expensive or very difficult to achieve, and that is why communication is key.

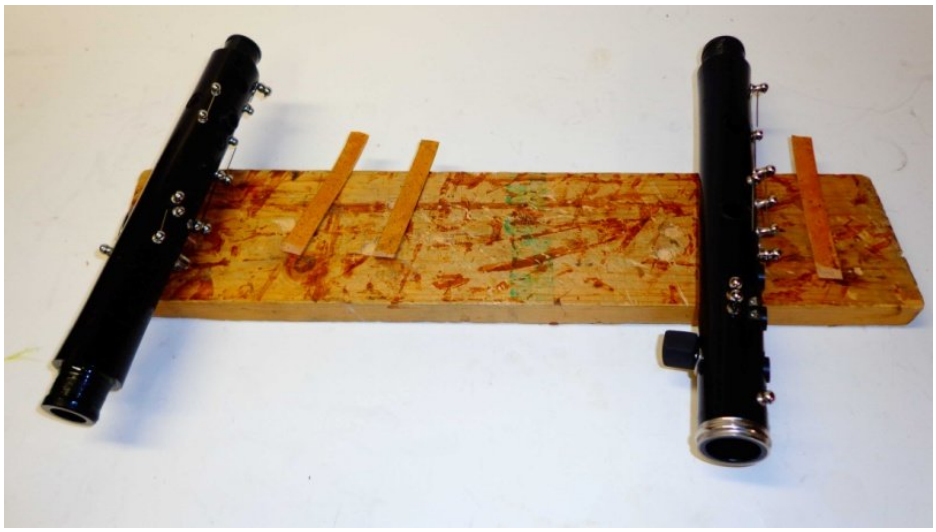
My choice in repairs will always default to, 'As good as I can make the instrument, within reason'. For instance, I don't re-plate (and with a Clarinet, the Nickel content is high enough that they rarely lose plating). I don't have the equipment for that nor do I wish to risk my health or the environment using such chemicals.

Regardless, that is something usually prohibitively expensive and certainly not for most student instruments. But I do feel that if the keys can be improved by appropriate buffing, then that is what should be done. And it isn't just for cosmetic reasons.

The process of buffing and removing the buffing compound will dislodge any dirt and grime so there is much better response in the action.

This Clarinet has some obvious problems. The upper tenon cork is missing, plus the lower tenon cork is partly missing. Close inspection showed me that the middle tenon cork was rather loose, although still attached.

Whether it will last 2 days or 2 months is unknown, but one thing is certain and that is that all the tenon corks should be replaced. It is false economy to do the minimum, especially in this instance.



Some manufacturers use cork tape, and that will always fail much sooner than using real cork properly cemented in place. I wouldn't think of using synthetic corks, although at some point it might become price-prohibitive to do so. But for now, it is affordable.

I buy my cork in varying thicknesses, so I can select a size that is 'just a bit too thick' and then can sand the cork to fit once it is cemented and attached. There is a lot of hand-work in replacing a tenon cork, but it is one repair that can easily outlast the pads if done properly.

Cork does shrink a bit with age, so I make certain the cork tenons are a good firm/tight fit. This is no time to miss using corkgrease! While you can usually skip application once the cork has been greased often over time, a new cork needs corkgrease EVERY time for at least a month.

The keys and pads on this instrument were in great condition, but I still gave the surface of the keys and bell/barrel rings a slight buffing, just to freshen things up. After a good cleaning all the parts assembled smoothly.

I mentioned the use of Key Oil on another page, but it bears repeating again:

People get carried away with the use of Key Oil. I don't believe it belongs in Care Kits, nor that anyone except your Professional Repair Technician ever apply Key Oil. It is more likely that such oil will cause many more problems than it will prevent. Oil attracts dirt. It is as simple as that. Plus, if you use one of those huge containers that are sold in the Music Store, it is very likely that it will be splashed all over the instrument and onto the pads, which will ruin them.

How do I use Key Oil? I put a few drops on the paper towel that is underneath the instrument parts and then touch my finger tip into the towel. That applies just the right amount to my fingers, and then I handle all the key rods, cleaning them with my fingertips/oil, and roll the rods on the dry paper towel section. That leaves the slightest coating/glaze of Key Oil on the rods. That's all you need!

I NEVER apply Key Oil to the keys/screws/rods when they are still mounted on the instrument, only when disassembled. The reality is that either a key fits or it doesn't fit. Trying to use Key Oil to make a key work smoother is a temporary fix at best. A correct repair will just burnish/straighten the key/rod/screw so it fits properly.

No matter what, when an instrument is successfully Play Conditioned, it should be done to a level that, with normal playing, the instrument should be relatively trouble-free for at least a year.

I reassembled the Clarinet, checking the action as I proceeded. Then I made any adjustments that were easily seen by eye. I made sure there was slight movement in the 'A' key before it engaged the 'G#' key. I checked the height of the alternate 'Eb' keys so they opened about the same. I checked the bridge to make sure all pads closed at the same time and nothing held open. I checked all the ring keys so they were the correct height in relation to the chimney holes and that nothing was binding. I know the typical 'trouble spots', so I double-check them!

Finally, it is time for me to actually PLAY the instrument! I go up and down the chromatic scale, checking for clear tone and even playing/tension on the keys, within the tolerances of the particular Clarinet.

With this Yamaha model, there are always going to be some variations compared to a wooden Buffet R-13, but it should still feel and sound right. If it doesn't, I check the areas of the instrument for a problem. This Clarinet played perfectly the first time, with no further need for adjustments. The instrument was finished and ready to be wiped down again and placed in the case.

Since I always use my own mouthpieces, special attention is given to the customer's. I recondition it and remove whatever scratches I can, and disinfect it with special solutions made for that purpose. I check the tenon cork and fit it in the barrel. Nothing is assumed.

Only when everything is as it should be that the case is closed and ready for the customer.