

Instrument review

Nuvo: DooD and TooT

Wind instruments are complicated and expensive. They weren't designed with young children in mind. The constituent parts can be damaged or lost. Fine co-ordination needs to be learned. Pupils have either been able to cope with this or not, and have persevered or not.

The role of the teacher is of course vital, but what about the instruments themselves? Learning an instrument means learning to do lots of things at the same time. We as teachers try to break them down and separate them, but in recent years instrument designers and manufacturers have been doing the same, stripping away some of the complexity, using tougher materials, building flutes and clarinets that yield quicker results for the young beginner.

The latest are the TooT and the DooD – a flute and single-reed instrument from Nuvo, makers of the JFlute and Clarineo.



Made from silicone and plastic, available in black or white with coloured trim, the **TooT** is roughly the same size as a fife and has a range of just over an octave. Unlike a fife, it's possible to play chromatically, with double holes (as on the recorder) on the C, D, F and G holes. It's light and feels pretty unbreakable.

The really interesting thing is that it comes with two lip-plates – one a standard flute/fife one to be blown across, and the other with a sideways fipple, to be blown into like a recorder. Nuvo describes the TooT as 'the ideal stepping stone between the recorder and the JFlute'. The idea is that the pupil becomes confident with flute posture and (similar) fingering, and only then moves on to tackle the embouchure. I've taught a lot of young fife players and see the appeal of this – instant, pleasant results in terms of getting the sound and freedom to concentrate on fingering and musicianship. Embouchure development takes time, which we often lack in group teaching situations. The sound is softer than a recorder, even when blowing too hard as young beginners are wont to do – in fact it requires more air pressure than I expected when I had a first try.

Swapping the lip-plate is a little tricky – definitely a job for the teacher rather than the pupil. The sound when using the standard lip-plate is much more satisfying, richer and less shrill than a fife.



I was interested to try out the **DooD** – the clarinet is more complex than the flute and I was keen to see how the reed and ligature had been simplified. It's small and very light – only a little longer than a descant recorder. Like the TooT, it has a range of a ninth.

The big development is the plastic, durable reed. It's very easy – I'm not a clarinet specialist and I could do it in seconds – to lift the ligature, place the reed and then snap it back into place. The movable thumb rest helps with positioning.

Getting the first sound was also relatively easy, although it required lots of pressure, and of course no clarinet design will ever eliminate the dreaded squeaks. Two reeds are supplied with the DooD – a 1 for beginners and a 1½. It's also possible to use a standard Eb reed – again enabling the basics to be learnt before introducing the fiddly stuff.

Chromaticism is possible due to the key design: the keys are very light, with a very small hole in the centre that is easy for small fingers to cover. To get the chromatic notes, the player presses the key without covering the hole.

Like Nuvo's Clarineo it's in C, with the fingerings similar to flute and recorder rather than the B-flat clarinet, so there is no transposition to deal with and there are instant opportunities for ensemble playing.

All wind teachers have horror stories about grimy and encrusted instruments and reeds, but one of the great things about both instruments is that they are totally waterproof, making them easy to clean – they're even dishwasher safe.

Despite being extremely light, the TooT and the DooD have a nice feel – far from flimsy. There are also lots of free resources including sheet music, backing tracks and an iPad app on the Nuvo website. (I was slightly confused by the fingering charts until I realised the left hand was at the bottom – they'd imagined the instrument in the player's mouth rather than standing alone.)

Both instruments are capable of a lot, and are a good start for young players. Perhaps for a child going from recorder to DooD to flute to clarinet the different systems could get confusing. But overall the adaptations go a long way to enabling young learners to solidly establish the basics – while of course being much cheaper than 'full' flutes or clarinets.

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