

Latest Ligatures!

This is a follow-up to “*Ligature Choices for Clarinet and Saxophone*,” published in Clarinet & Saxophone magazine in 2015, as requested by reader Steve Wilson and editor Chris Walters. I had found the ligature of my dreams just after the previous article was published. So...those ligatures are now included in this update, along with other ligatures brought out in the 4 years since.

Some players maintain that ligatures make little difference to one’s tone and articulation, but “blind side by sides” (both in person and with recordings) have yielded opinions from many players that contradict the “nay-sayers.’ All of these players could discern differences that are frequently far from subtle, and they largely agreed with each other on their preferences. I note that many nay-sayers on single reed chat-lines and bulletin boards mock differences in ligatures and other equipment without ever having tried them.

Here are all the ligatures I’ve kept that I’ve found excellent, and there are obvious differences in the sound of even these terrific products, let alone some poor ligatures. They are ranked at the end of the article. You can see my top choices on the mouthpieces to the left.



In the previous article, I established that ligatures with two vertical rails contacting the stock of the reed, with the least material of any kind contacting the mouthpiece will seat the reed well while allowing the reed and the mouthpiece itself to vibrate as much as possible. Yes, our imagination of our own sound is the most powerful element that influences our tone and articulation and musicality, but the design and quality of the mouthpiece, reed and ligature is next in importance.... more important than our instrument, as long as it is a decent horn with reasonable intonation and pads that seal!

Silverstein Ligatures



I was an early adopter of these, and they are now well known and popular. I purchased 14 of them for all sizes of saxophone and clarinet in 2015, and Silverstein gave me an extra two for bass clarinet with silver-plated and gold-plated bars to test against the standard titanium. I found titanium darkest and most resistant, silver brightest with greatest ease of articulation, and the gold bars had the most burnished shimmering ring. I set up my jazz mouthpieces with titanium and classical mouthpieces with gold. I also found that two “fine tuning” bars on each side delivers a denser core sound.

It is the only non-two rail ligature that has ever given me good results. I believe this is because the cord on this ligature is so high-tech, firm and dense that it will not “flatten,” and maintains minimal surface contact with the reed. The “fine tuner” bars on either side of the reed can be moved from right beside the reed to any point around the circumference. Legendary British clarinetist Leslie Craven worked with acoustic scientist Dr. Robert Watson, using a high-end digital oscilloscope to chart frequency response with the Silverstein ligature for all partials from 256 hertz to 12,536 hertz, capturing all possible harmonics of the fundamental tone. This scientific testing against four other highly respected ligatures backed up the subjective opinions of many single reed players that the Silverstein ligature provides an incredibly rich sound with great ease of articulation, and the spectrum analysis proved that adjustment of the sidebars alters the focus of the sound, generally providing more high partials closer to the reed, enhancing projection; and less high partials when moved towards the sides, giving a warmer sound.

I used these ligatures exclusively until I purchased some newer high-end ligatures for this article.

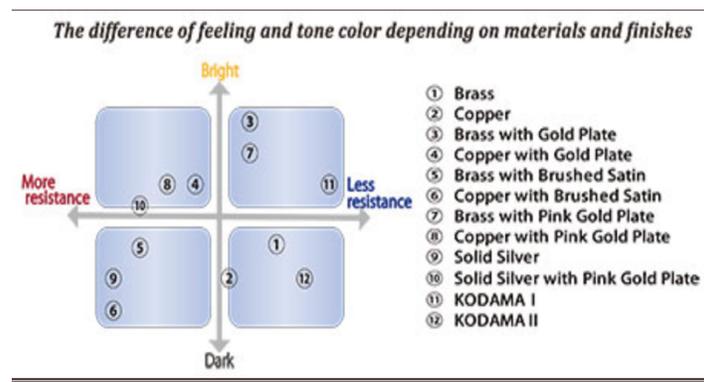
Ishimori Wood-Stone Ligatures



Since Ishimori Wind Instruments opened as a repair shop and manufacturer in Japan in 1951, they have been trusted deeply by professional and amateur players all over the world. They are a small company that specializes in handmade saxophones, ligatures and reeds in addition to repairs. Their booth at the National Association of Music Manufacturers show (the largest manufacturing show of any kind in the world) continually sells out before many players get to try their products.

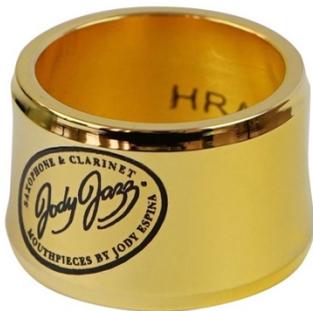
One of the players in my bass clarinet quartet, Pacific Blackwood, uses their solid sterling silver ligature on both bass clarinet and clarinet. I liked them so much that I changed my setup on those two instruments from the Silverstein's that I loved so well. They have a darker, more compact and focussed sound, incredibly resonant. I found I could play harder reeds with them as well.

The ligatures are available in many metals and plating variations, including the Kodama models with Macaranduba wood instead of metal rails. You can see that my preference for ligatures tends to be dark and resistant...the Solid Silver model in this particular case.



It was hard to be sure what would fit my various saxophone mouthpieces, and there is a waiting list for these ligatures, so I did not spend the \$5,000 Canadian it would have cost to refit all my mouthpiece setups. I'm now glad of that ...since the next ligature is my new favorite, and it is 1/3rd the price of the Ishimori...and half the price of Silversteins!

JodyJazz Power Ring



Jody Espina showed up at the NAAM show decades ago, carrying around pocketsful of mouthpieces for players and dealers to try. Now JodyJazz is one of the best manufacturers in the world and have just established the Chedeville line of excellent classical mouthpieces. The JodyJazz Power Ring ligatures are made to fit all their products, and the HR* line will fit most Alto and Tenor hard rubber mouthpieces. The HR* Tenor also fits the Vandoren V16 jazz baritone mouthpieces and most alto clarinet mouthpieces. The CL1 gold plated and CL1S silver plated clarinet ligatures fit almost any soprano clarinet mouthpiece.

I find it is better if they fit the slightest bit loose, as I can use a thin Vandoren mouthpiece patch on the back of the mouthpiece to get exactly the placement I like on the reed stock and the fit is then snugger and more secure. There are two sizes of Alto ligature; the HRA1 and smaller HRA1 minus. The HRA1 minus also fits most clarinet mouthpieces and it has more mass, so the tone is even richer and more resonant!

Unfortunately, the Baritone HRB1 is too small for classical baritone mouthpieces, but I've asked them to develop a version for their exceptional Chedeville mouthpiece which would fit most classical baritone mouthpieces and possibly bass clarinet as well. Nothing is made yet for Soprano Saxophone, or Eb Clarinet.

The Power Rings are a work of genius. They are milled from solid brass with Computer Numerically Controlled equipment, then plated with 24K Gold or Sterling Silver. They are concave both inside and out, so the reed and the mouthpiece are each contacted at only four points. I liked the first version of this product, but the second version is even better. It is designed with greater thickness and heft together with more pronounced side curves and extreme contoured edges both top and bottom. The heavy mass of the ligature lends incredibly rich resonance to the tone, while the limited contact points allow for great life in the sound and terrific ease of articulation.

These are Power **"Tone"** ligatures, not just Power "FULL!" Don't let the marketing of power to jazz and commercial musicians deter you...these are beautiful classical ligatures with the most resonant core sound you've ever heard for soloists, wind ensemble, and chamber players. For symphonic players, it's challenging to quickly move the mouthpiece from A to Bb to C clarinets without ligature slippage...so I still have my Ishimori ligature and two others in my double case.

They are incredibly convenient...I didn't realize how much time I spent fiddling with ligature screws before I started using Power Rings, and they are **much** less expensive than most high-end ligatures!

AK Ligature



This revolutionary new ligature from Nevada is handled by four dealer's world-wide:

- **USA** Kessler & Sons Music – www.kesslerandsons.com
- **Canada** Backun Musical Services – www.backunmusical.com
- **Japan & South Korea** Dolce Musical Instruments Co., Ltd – www.dolce.co.jp
- **Norway** G24 – www.g24.no

It is only available currently for clarinet, but there are plans to develop them for all single-reed mouthpieces. The design and engineering are amazing and yield a ligature that is kind of fussy to fit, but the results are superb. With the Sterling Silver plates (and so far, I have always preferred solid sterling silver when available) the results are very similar to the Ishimori sterling silver ligature, very firm and compact and resonant tone, but just a little freer blowing and slightly easier articulation. If it weren't for the JodyJazz Power Ring, I would be using this ligature on clarinet.

The reed plates are held on by a magnet, which lets them vibrate quite freely, and there are two designs...one with full rails and another with "scooped out" rails so they contact the reed a little less.

To set up the ligature:

Step 1: Loosen the top screw so that the ligature can easily slide on to your mouthpiece to its playing position, with the ligature lever open, which is up over the screw. Once you have the ligature in the position that you want it, tighten the top screw until it is snug. Do not over tighten the screw.



Step 2: Tighten the reed plate screw until you feel it get a little snug on the reed. Once you feel this screw get a very small amount of resistance, stop turning it.

Step 3: Flip the lever down to add just the right pressure to the reed. As with any other ligature, I find this to be just barely enough pressure so that you cannot move the reed from side to side with your fingers easily.

This is an excellent ligature, but expensive. You cannot choose between the brass plates or sterling silver plates. You have to buy the ligature with the brass plates and then

pay extra for the sterling silver plates. This comes to \$425 Canadian with customs and tax, the single most expensive ligature on the market.

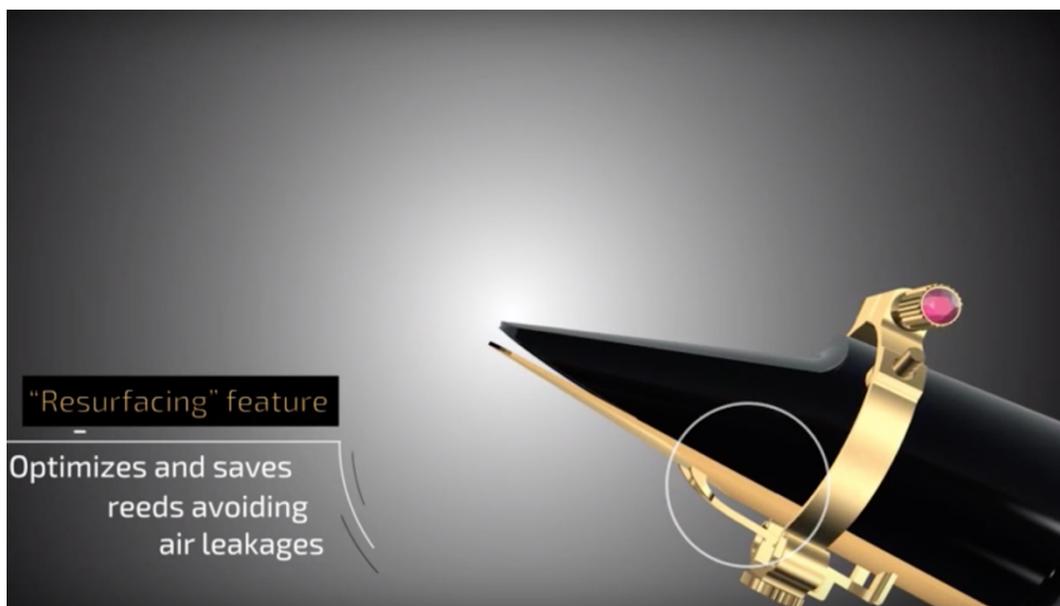
I had the Silverstein, Ishimori, AK and Power Ring ligatures in my double clarinet case all summer and kept coming back to the Power Ring. They're all fantastic and they're all still in my case. I use the Power Ring for everything but orchestral and then use the others when I have to switch mouthpieces quickly from A to Bb or C clarinet. Clarinetists at festivals and rehearsals are forever trying these out and exclaiming over them.

JLV Ligature



Here is a ligature that is as original in design and engineering as the AK model, and nearly as expensive, but with very poor results. Jean-Luc Vignaud has designed a solution for a problem that does not exist!

The ligature is designed for the upper two prongs to go on the vamp of the reed and bottom two prongs on the stock, and then add enough pressure to counteract top to bottom warpage as shown in the diagram below. This is called the “Resurfacing feature.”



It's nonsense. When laid against a straight edge that is level to within a micron one easily sees that there is no top to bottom warpage on reeds. The warpage is always from side to side, and can be easily corrected by scraping the reed table with a ReedGeek.

Placing the prongs on the vamp of the reed dampens the reed's vibrations dramatically in the lowest registers....and when one adds more pressure to counteract non-existent warpage, this gets worse...very dull and unresponsive indeed.

Furthermore, the prongs for the clarinet ligature are 11 mm apart and contact the reed at the very edge on each side, dampening vibrations. The Wanne silver clarinet ligature plate reviewed in the previous ligature article was also 11 mm wide, and when cut and bent to 8 mm performed magnificently. So, I adjusted the JLV prongs to 8 mm apart and then placed the ligature so the top prongs were on the stock rather than the vamp of the reed and it played very well. However, to spend over twice as much as a JodyJazz Power Ring for this poor design and then have to alter it doesn't appeal to me.

Great engineering to no purpose! I'm out \$300 CDN on this one...and glad I sprung for the brass instead of the silver or gold model!

Rovner Light



This is the least expensive and best value ligature I've tested in 5 years, but only if you adjust the ligature so that the metal pins are on the reed rather than the fabric. I'm not a fan of any fabric or leather ligature, even those with two rails contacting the mouthpiece, as I find the fabric or leather dampens reed and mouthpiece vibrations. This light version has thinner fabric than Rovner's dark model, with a "window" cut into it, so it is preferred when placed with the fabric over the reed as designed, but even better when reversed.

I have experimented with this ligature with students who have very little disposable income. The ligature has the virtues of being inexpensive and unbreakable, so I run into a lot of beginners who have purchased this ligature or have had it supplied with their school instrument.

If I am lucky enough to run into the "light" instead of "dark" version, we have less fabric to dampen reed and mouthpiece vibrancy. We simply remove the knob, reverse the screw and refasten the knob so that the pins are now in front on the reed like so:



We now have a very inexpensive two rail ligature with less fabric on the back of the mouthpiece than the dark to dampen the mouthpiece's vibrations!

I demonstrated this at last year's British Columbia Music Educator's conference to a few dozen educators while I was at the Vandoren booth handing out Juno reeds. The teachers were gob-smacked at the difference in focus and projection. I wish all the music educators at the conference had been there, because I'm forever having band teachers tell my students that they've got their ligatures on backwards and making them change it back!

Of course, I recommended the Vandoren Optimum ligature at the booth more highly, since it has three plate options and one of these plates is a true two vertical rail option! The Rovner is not in that league, but it is not bad when inverted, and it is very inexpensive!

Selmer Gold Lacquered Ligature



Simple and elegant and inexpensive. I'm not a fan of ligatures with "sideways" metal contacting the reed, but at least they have not compounded that problem by putting sideways "rails" on the metal. That really does dampen reed vibration. The Selmer, if

not tightened too much, is relatively warm and responsive, but not in the league of the better ligatures featured here.

Ligaphone Universal Ligature



An expensive ligature for what it is! For the same price as the *stellar* JodyJazz Power Ring, you get thin steel plate with thick or thin canvas contacting the reed. You can also spend up to an additional \$60 Canadian for various plating. The sound is very free and clear but characterless with very little colour. The single virtue outside of being very free-blowing is that it will fit any size of mouthpiece...there is even an extension for contra-bass clarinet mouthpieces. Sandro of Massullo Music gave this to me since he knew this article was in the works...and it is in my gig bag for emergencies only. Handy!

Yanagisawa Yany SIXS



Yanagisawa has long had a reputation for excellence of design, engineering and quality control, and this is a brilliant idea with a critical flaw. Using four ebonite strips to for minimal contact with the mouthpiece and four brass discs for minimal contact with reed is very forward thinking indeed.

The only flaw is that this is marketed for both clarinet and alto sax and the “discs” that contact the reed are spaced 13 mm apart...**FAR too FAR apart** for clarinet and also too far apart for alto saxophone reeds to vibrate properly. 8 mm is ideal for soprano clarinet and 11 mm will work for all saxophone reeds and bass clarinet. It is axiomatic that one must not contact the sides of reeds for them to vibrate properly. Daniel Bonade

got that right in 1955 when he invented the two-rail ligature and filed his patent. You'd think after 65 years that everyone would know.... It's a shame, since this would be a top ligature if Yanagisawa got the side to side contact spacing right.

BG Duo



This ligature has a fatal flaw that it shares with the BG Tradition ligature. It's too "tall" and its vertical rails are too long. It is 30 mm from top to bottom. The average height of all my other ligatures is 23 mm, so its rails are 30% longer than normal, covering far too much of the stock of the reed. The tone is dampened and the articulation is not "free." It is slightly better than the Tradition version because there is some "give" to the rubber contacting the mouthpiece underneath the tightening screw and there are side rails preventing full "wrap-around" contact with the mouthpiece. Not recommended until BG redesigns the height to under 23 mm.

Our last two ligatures are back to specialty custom items, both marketed by Duo Music via <https://www.duoclarinetshop.com>.

Triebert Orphée Rose Gold Ligature



Hand hammered brass with rose gold plating. I was excited to try this, but it has two flaws in addition to being very expensive. First, there is not enough space across the plate holding the three brass studs.... the bent sides contact the edge of the reed...even the quite narrow Vandoren V21 reeds I use. So.... the sound is dampened dramatically. I fixed that with some specialised pliers and a vise and a small jeweler's hammer.



Now the reed is not contacted by metal on its edges at all. However, the tone and articulation are still muted because the three studs are too large. It's really a beautiful ligature but it doesn't sound that beautiful. Nice and warm, but muted.

Duo Glossy Ligature



Similar design to the Triebert Orphée by clarinetist Patrick Messina. This has four smaller studs. The previous model had one stud centred at the top of the reed stock and two at the bottom. I wish I could try that defunct version. This is more vibrant than the Triebert ligature I modified because the studs are smaller. It is silver plated, and not that pricy.... I would be willing to pay for a solid sterling silver model with just three studs and I bet it would earn a place in my clarinet case with the stellar JodyJazz Power Ring, Silverstein CRYO4, Ishimori Sterling Silver and AK Sterling Silver ligatures!

Ranked Ligature Listing from 2015 and 2019 Articles (with some issues noted)

Highly Recommended

Recommended

Recommended with Reservations

Not Recommended

1. JodyJazz Power Ring (too slippery for orchestral clar.)	13. Rico H (sideways bar over reed dampens vibration)
2. AK w Silver Plates (clarinet only)	14. Bonade (soft metal bends and touches reed edges)
3. Ishimori Sterling Silver	15. BG Super Revelation (fabric dampens mouthpiece)
4. Silverstein CRYO4	16. Rovner Versa (fabric dampens mouthpiece)
5. Rovner Platinum (too slippery for orchestral clarinet)	17. Rovner Versa X (fabric dampens mouthpiece)
6. Wanne Enlightened w Silver Plates (bent to 8 mm for clarinet, 11 mm for saxophone)	18. Rovner Light w pins on reed (fabric dampens mouthpiece)
7. Peter Spriggs Floating Rail (clar/bass clar only)	19. Selmer (sideways metal contact on reed)
9. Francois Louis w rubber coated SS plates (or substitute Wanne silver plates bent to 8 mm or 11mm)	20. Yanagisawa SIXS (brass discs contact reed edge)
10. Brancher (very thin metal body can have solder fail)	21. Ligaphone Universal (thin metal, colourless)
11. Duo Glossy (clarinet only)	22. BG Duo (metal too long on reed stock)
12. Vandoren Optimum w 2 vertical rails (too much metal)	23. BG Tradition (metal too long on reed stock)
	24. Triebert Orphée (metal contacts reed edge)
	25. JLV (prongs too long and wide and contact reed edges)

Jody Jazz Power Ring Fitting Chart (only includes mouthpieces in my collection)

CL1 or CL1S	Tenor HRT1 or HRT1S on Alto Clarinet	Alto HRA1 or HRA1S	Alto HRA1- or HRA1S-	Tenor HRT1 or HRT1S
Backun Vocalese	Backun	D'Addario Select Jazz	D'Addario Reserve	Chedeville
Backun MoBa	Lomax Classic	JodyJazz HR*	JodyJazz HR* pre 2016	D'Addario Select Jazz
D'Addario Reserve	Selmer C*		Lomax Classic	JodyJazz HR*
Leblanc Vito	Selmer C**		Lomax Prelude	Otto Link Vintage rubber
Lomax Classic Aria	Selmer HS*		Lomax Vintage LA	Lomax Classic
Lomax Classic BA5	Vandoren 5RV		Rousseau Classic R	Lomax Vintage LA
Lomax Classic Bb	Vandoren B40		Rousseau Classic NC	Lomax Prelude
Lomax L'Opera	Vandoren B44		Rousseau Classic RC	Selmer Concept
Lomax Prelude	Vandoren BD5		Selmer Concept	Rousseau Classic R
(Likely all Lomax)	Yamaha Standard		Selmer Larry Teal	Rousseau Classic NC
Selmer Concept/Focus			Selmer S80	Selmer Concept
Selmer C85 series			Selmer SD20	Selmer Larry Teal
Greg Smith custom			Vandoren V5 A Series	Selmer S80
Vandoren B series			Vandoren Optimum	Selmer SD20
Vandoren BD5			Vandoren V16 Jazz	Vandoren V5 T Series
Vandoren M Series			Yamaha Custom	Vandoren Optimum
Vandoren 5RV			Yamaha Standard	Vandoren V16 Jazz
Viotto French models				Vandoren V16 Baritone
Wanne Gaia				Yamaha Custom
Yamaha Custom				Yamaha Standard
Yamaha Standard				

Chuck Currie, Clarinetist and Saxophonist

Chuck performs with the Vancouver Island Symphony, the Pacific Symphonic Wind Ensemble, Amici Musica, Sax Noir sax quartet and Pacific Blackwood bass clarinet quartet.

Mr. Currie is a Vandoren, Backun Canada, and Conn Selmer artist-clinician performing on Backun Lumiere Clarinets, Selmer Privilege Bass Clarinet and Yanagisawa Silver Sonic Saxophones.

He has performed at Canadian Music Educator Association conventions, World Association of Bands and Ensembles conferences, North American Saxophone Alliance conferences and at International Clarinet Association Clarinetfests.

He teaches at St. George's School and his own Sax Noir Studio, and conducts clinics throughout British Columbia. Students have successfully auditioned for national and international ensembles.

www.saxnoir.com

