The Trouble With Tenons (with apologies to Captain Kirk)

I would like to give some suggestions regarding “tenons” – those horn parts that meet when putting saxophones, clarinets, and flutes together. This does NOT apply to brass instruments!

When metal parts meet, such as joints of the flute and saxophone necks, lubricant should not be used. The fit should be snug. If a flute joint tenon or saxophone neck tenon becomes too tight, it will be either the result of the accumulation of dirt or damage. In the case of the former, simply cleaning the joint with paper will usually be enough. In the event of damage, a trip to the repair shop is in order. If the foot joint of a flute keeps falling off when the student is playing, you can be certain that it needs to be tightened! The looseness of flute foot joints is usually the result of carelessness in assembling the instrument. The saxophone tenon screw should not need to be tightened much to keep the neck from moving around during playing. I often see saxophone students loosening this tenon screw too much. This is a tension screw, and trying to loosen the neck by turning the screw all the way out is futile. In addition, this can cause students to lose tenon screws.

Parts that fit together using cork (clarinets) need cork grease. New corks tend to absorb cork grease. The need for cork grease diminishes over time. New corks may need grease every day. Older corks may need grease every 6 months. A repairman can easily adjust tight or loose corks. Remember that it is much easier to remove cork than to add cork. If the clarinet tenon is too tight after adding cork grease, only then should the cork be reduced. There should be no wobble in the joints. Corks will compress slightly over time, so new corks should be a little tight.