

# The Bass Clarinetist's WORKBOOK

## PART II

by David Bourque

This is the second in a series of annotated bass clarinet excerpts. With the exception of some bar numbers, the printed excerpt that accompanies the commentary is unaltered from the orchestral part. The player may find it a useful exercise to read the commentary and then add markings to the clean part.

### GUSTAV MAHLER, SYMPHONY NO 1, D MAJOR "THE TITAN," MOVEMENT I

This movement is not technically difficult, but it has some places that are delicate, transparent and challenging for intonation. This is orchestral chamber music at its finest.

This symphony is a classic example as to why playing an excerpt audition should not be the sole criteria to consider when filling an orchestral position. There is much that needs to be done "on the stand" and the sophisticated awareness required to play fine ensemble, excellent intonation, blend and balance cannot be heard in an excerpt-only audition. However, there are things that one must do at an excerpt-only audition that can be heard by the committee, else one will not get the chance to try them "on the stand."

**Measure 5:** The two opening half notes are usually a challenge for intonation. Playing in three octaves with the English horn and two flutes can be difficult. The strings are playing natural harmonics and these sound flat. The bass clarinet is playing a chalumeau B that is often sharp. The traditional result is that the first note the bass clarinet, English horn and the flutes play usually sounds out of tune and generally sharp. In consideration of the low pitch of the string harmonic, be prepared to play lower than the tuning pitch. I pull out the neck about 1/8" for this opening. To

see what it might be like onstage, try having the tuner sing an A a few cents flat and play against it. Confer with your wind colleagues and make sure you have octaves within yourselves. In order to give a pitch base for your colleagues to "lock on," it is helpful if the bass clarinet plays *mp* with the English horn and the flutes playing *pp* or less.

The next excerpt is common on auditions. This is a distant fanfare in the two clarinets and bass clarinet. It needs to be very soft, but very clear in articulation. Be sure to quickly push in if you have pulled out to deal with intonation issues in the previous bars. Play this excerpt more like *ppp* and for articulation clarity and be sure all of the notes start with a very square "T" syllable. There is no *crescendo* over the excerpt. Pick up the tempo from the Ada-

gio to a *piu mosso*, around mm. 126–132. Start the *accelerando* where indicated and reach 138–144 by the downbeat of measure 2. Start the *rit.* on the last beat of the bar, and slow down considerably so the tempo reached is about 108. There is still a *molto rit.* to follow which brings things back to *Langsam* as in the beginning. The accents are important. They need to be clear and bell like, but still in *ppp*.

**Rehearsal No. 1:** This passage has similar intonation issues to measure 5. Be prepared to pull out again for this excerpt, and if you need to, add the lowest trill key(s) for the *f* and *g* if they are flat. In lieu of pulling out, I play the long B without the register key and I vent the front hole normally used for altissimo. This makes for a B that is lower in pitch, softer and more covered. This fingering has more resistance, so be aware that it may tend to speak a bit late.

**Measures 26–27:** This rhythmic diminution of the descending perfect fourth interval (a key cell for the entire symphony) is a solo. Play it at least *mf* with an air, not tongue *sf*. Make a quick *dim.* to *p* and a further *dim.* to *niente*.

The musical notation consists of several staves. The first staff is labeled "Langsam, Schleppend" and contains measures 4, 5, and 6. Measure 4 has a *pp* dynamic. Measure 6 has a *ppp* dynamic. The second staff is labeled "Piu mosso" and contains measures 126, 127, and 128. Measure 126 has a *pp* dynamic. Measure 128 has a *pp* dynamic. The third staff is labeled "Im Anfang sehr gemächlich" and contains measures 26 and 27. Measure 26 has a *pp* dynamic. Measure 27 has a *pp* dynamic. The fourth staff is labeled "Im Anfang sehr gemächlich" and contains measures 26 and 27. Measure 26 has a *pp* dynamic. Measure 27 has a *pp* dynamic. The fifth staff is labeled "Im Anfang sehr gemächlich" and contains measures 26 and 27. Measure 26 has a *pp* dynamic. Measure 27 has a *pp* dynamic. The sixth staff is labeled "Im Anfang sehr gemächlich" and contains measures 26 and 27. Measure 26 has a *pp* dynamic. Measure 27 has a *pp* dynamic.

**Rehearsal No. 2:** This needs to be played a solid *f* with a steep *dim.* right away.

**Im Anfang sehr gemächlich:** This is a counter subject to the main theme. It is a solo, and should be played more like *mp* than *pp*. Play this line very *legato* with a singing style. Play the accents with the breath inside of this *legato*. Give it direction to the long B and put a slight *tenuto* over this B making up the time over the rest of this bar. Enjoy the *tacet* for the rest of the movement, but be aware there is a repeat that is often taken that returns to just before this solo.

## ABOUT THE WRITER...

David Bourque has been the bass clarinetist in the Toronto Symphony Orchestra since 1983. A regular guest instructor at