

## More Thoughts On The Bass Clarinet Audition And The Art Of Playing Bass Clarinet In A Symphony Orchestra

By J. Lawrie Bloom and David Bourque

*J. Lawrie Bloom (LB) writes:* There are certain inherent problems that must be addressed when auditioning for an orchestral bass clarinet position. These all have to be successfully dealt with to obtain the job.

First, the audition committee is often unacquainted with the repertoire asked. They can sight-sing the parts, but don't know the idiomatic voice of William Schuman or Meyerbeer, the way they might know Brahms. Therefore, it is the candidate's job to know the more unusual pieces so well that they can "sell" them to a committee that isn't sure exactly what they want to hear. Sometimes they are not even sure what a really good bass clarinet should sound like, so you had best be sure yourself.

Second, you are actually auditioning for clarinet and bass clarinet. A smaller orchestra may have a bass/utility position where they can ask you to play any part, larger orchestras with the grueling schedule we now keep, need the bass clarinetist to give the 2<sup>nd</sup> player some time off. So at the audition, there are reed issues, and you need to be comfortable ~~with~~ going back and forth and playing difficult passages on each instrument.

Third, there are excerpt books available to begin to learn the orchestral repertoire, but excerpt books do not have full parts, and have a tendency to have some small mistakes, be it notes, dynamics or clefs. In just the last couple years I have called the personnel managers in several orchestras holding bass clarinet auditions to let them know that materials they had sent out, or suggested the candidates work from, had mistakes. Luckily, they were appreciative, and made the corrections. In a situation where there are wrong notes in the materials supplied or requested by an audition committee, a candidate who plays the part with corrections will sound wrong to the committee, which is not fair to the candidates that have corrected the mistakes in the parts.

*David Bourque (DB) writes:* The most important thing that a player needs to remember is that the audition has absolutely nothing to do with the job. Just because you can play an excellent audition and win a job does not mean that you can keep that job. If you have a job, it does not mean that you can play well enough at an audition to win another job. This is a deep flaw with the process, and if you wish to read more on this vast and challenging topic, please refer to my article *Some Thoughts on Orchestral Bass Clarinet Playing* in *The Clarinet*, Volume 41 Number 2, pages 64-65.

The way one needs to play to *win* a job is completely different from the way one needs to play to *keep* the job. Committees are not used to hearing the excerpts alone - i.e. without their playing along - and as a result at the auditions, they do not recognize how loudly the bass clarinet sometimes needs to play in the orchestra. At the audition, one needs to demonstrate dynamics and articulation, but these should never be extreme or sound coarse. The dynamics in the full orchestra setting are much greater than at auditions. In the orchestra, notes can and should be played extremely short if the music calls for it. This kind of playing will sound rough and somewhat gross at an audition. A hard “T” sound to begin notes is the norm in the orchestra, but this is rarely heard at auditions. An aside: be sure to maintain a focused sound when exploring these extremes in the orchestra – it is easy for the bass clarinet sound to become spread.

Play the excerpts the way they are supposed to sound in the orchestra and you will be bounced from the audition, and in short order. Keep these two techniques separate, and you have a chance at winning *and* keeping the job.

Preparation for auditions must be thorough. Detailed score study and listening must be an integral part of preparation. The committee should be able to recognize that you are “hearing the orchestra” as you play the excerpts.

As Lawrie said above, it is important that you know what a really good bass clarinet is supposed to sound like. there are different approaches to bass clarinet sound, but the one that worked for me was making the bass clarinet sound like a giant clarinet. For example, the sound that I try to get in the clarion range on bass is similar to the sound of the clarinet in the chalumeau.

### **Tales from On The Stand – *Some Orchestral Humor***

DB- One of the great gifts of playing in a major symphony orchestra is the enjoyment of the sophisticated but often quirky sense of humour of the musicians. Wayland Mosher, the late contrabassoon player of the Toronto Symphony (he played in the TSO c. 1945-1972), said “the orchestra is the only animal that has its ass at the front and its horns at the rear”.

There is a tale about the legendary bass clarinetist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Rosario Mazzeo (BSO member from 1939-1966). Mazzeo had missed an entry and a very famous conductor, one with a reputation for being a bit nasty, asked him “Mr. Mazzeo, do you know where we are?” Mazzeo replied: “No Maestro, I’m lost too”.

Even violinists have their moments. A violinist in the L’Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, the late Adolfo Bornstein, was known for his uncanny ability to get off humorous zingers aimed at the conductor. On one occasion, music director Charles Dutoit saw Adolfo looking at his watch multiple times during a rehearsal. Dutoit, a

bit perturbed, said “Adolfo, why do you keep looking at your watch? Are you checking the *time*?” to which Adolfo replied in his gravelly voice, “No Maestro, I’m checking the *day*.” On another occasion, Adolfo was called into Dutoit’s office to discuss Adolfo’s playing. Dutoit said to him, “Adolfo, I am concerned about how you are playing. Members of your section are saying things about you.” Adolfo replied, “Maestro, you should hear what they are saying about *you!*”

## Keeping The Job

### Prepare your parts by checking a full score.

DB- While bass clarinetists are expected to read bass clef fluently, bass clarinet parts in bass clef can be confusing as to what octave we should be playing. Much of the time, we read the notes in treble clef and play the same fingerings as we would on the clarinet – the notes will sound one octave lower than on the clarinet. Sometimes, the bass clef is an extension of the treble clef- i.e., ledger lines are replaced by changing clefs (e.g., *Le Sacre du Printemps*), so the parts in bass clef sound one tone lower than written rather than the 9<sup>th</sup> lower when in treble clef. Other times, when the part is in bass clef and switches to treble clef, the treble clef sections need to be played up the octave (e.g. Dukas *Sorcerer’s Apprentice*, Rachmaninov *Second Symphony*). Any confusion is usually clarified by looking in the score: checking the architecture of the line, what octave the bassoons and celli are playing in if they are playing with the bass clarinet, etc. There is usually ample evidence to make an informed choice.

A number of years back, the Toronto Symphony was playing Webern *Sechs Orchesterstücke, op.6*. This piece has one of the more confusing notations that I have come across in the bass clarinet literature. The beginning of the second piece started with a *Hauptstimme* marked over the bass clarinet line, indicating a ‘solo’. In the score, this solo is in B flat, in treble clef, starting on a thumb F. It has a footnote: “*ohne Octav-Transposition*”. Does this mean that we should play clarinet fingerings (it will sound one octave lower than written)? Or does it mean that the part in the score has not been transposed up the octave, but the part should be up the octave? Confusing, eh?

Like many performance parts we play, these were rental parts, and were quite worn and tattered. There was a curiosity though – the first couple of measures in the opening solo looked like they had been erased and penciled in multiple times. The paper was worn from erasures. This was a red-alert for I.

In the full score, the first note of the solo appeared to be the F, top line, treble clef. However, in the printed part, I decided that there was an octave transposition error

– the part was written one octave too high, hence all the erasures and pencil marks from previous performances.

In the first rehearsal, I played the solo starting on the thumb F, down one octave to where it appeared to be written. The conductor stopped to rehearse a few other things: flutes, ‘more accent’; oboe, ‘legato’; bass clarinet, ‘that should be down one octave’. I explained that I thought it was written one octave too high in the part and had played it down the octave from written. I demonstrated the starting note as printed, then I played the starting note where he thought it should have been, down one octave. The conductor immediately said “it should be another octave lower than that”. Now, this was a conductor who wrote notes in his score, stuff he expected to happen, such as the bass clarinet part being an octave too high. This conductor often did not really listen to what actually happened compared to what he expected to happen - shocking, I know. It was clear to me that he did not listen to what I played, or even worse, could not hear that I played it in the correct octave. When he asked for it an octave lower than I played it, I said that “my instrument does not go that low”. The conductor went on with the rehearsal, obviously caught out and flummoxed, and he later told me that the part “should be played on contrabass clarinet” – possibly, the conductor did this so he could save face about the octave error. I told him that he would have a contrabass for rehearsal the next day. From that point forward, I played the solo on contrabass, one octave lower than it should have been.

The TSO took this work on a short tour to Ottawa, Montreal and Carnegie Hall. As contrabass was a double for me, I was paid a sizeable extra fee for playing the instrument on the road. Dennis Smylie, the New York bass clarinetist, was at the Carnegie Hall concert and said he never heard that solo played on contrabass. No kidding! In order to assuage my (very slight) guilt, I bought a seriously good bottle of wine for my buddies at dinner one night on the road. The moral: always check your parts with the score.

LB- Cautionary note: I once broke David’s rule. Before I joined Chicago, I played with the wonderful Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. We had Liszt’s Dante Symphony coming up. I went into the library and looked at the part. Didn’t look too bad, so I never even took it out. When James Conlon stopped conducting in rehearsal I sat there waiting. He looked at me and said, “You don’t want me to conduct your cadenza do you?” I immediately responded that “no, I just thought you were stopping to work on something else.” Of course, I had no idea it was a cadenza, since nothing was marked in the part and I hadn’t looked at the score. Years later when Conlon was our Music Director at the Ravinia Festival I told him the story and we had a good laugh.

### **Know pitch tendencies and vagaries of other wind instruments.**

DB- *Le Sacre Du Printemps* (The Rite of Spring) is a major work for orchestra and has great parts for the two bass clarinets. A notorious spot, the first *Rondes Printemps*, is a soli for E flat clarinet and bass clarinet, 2 octaves apart. It is legendary for being known as very difficult for intonation. Out of my twenty-eight seasons in the Toronto Symphony, I performed *Le Sacre* 25 or 30 times, all of those performances with now retired TSO E flat clarinet player, Raymond Luedeke. Ray and I would always try the *soli* backstage, and by the second, or at the latest, the third time through, the pitch was in excellent shape. Then we got onstage, and it was a nightmare.

Ray, wearing his hat as an excellent composer, was always aware of orchestration challenges. Since the only difference between us nailing it offstage and the crisis onstage was the addition of flute trills (from E flat to F), he thought that the problem must lie there. Bingo! The flautists often used a trill fingering that made the major 2<sup>nd</sup> small – the E flat was OK, but the F was flat with this trill fingering. So, whenever Ray and I played perfect 4<sup>ths</sup> or 5<sup>ths</sup> against the F, we, and especially Ray as the top voice, sounded very sharp. We solved the problem by asking the flautists to do what they felt was best to assist us – roll the instrument toward them when we played those perfect intervals, or use a different fingering, so the E flat and F were at the correct pitches, not some arbitrary trill fingering pitch. They were happy to help, and the problem was solved.

*(An aside: While we are always seeking perfect intonation in an orchestra wind section, I am not at all certain that this is a fix that Stravinski would have wanted. He may have known about the wonky trill pitches and had been seeking the raw, pitch-challenged version of the folk song with the E flat clarinet sounding sharp. I guess we will never know.)*

There are always a number of years that pass between the times *Le Sacre* is programmed so the flute players often forget this minor detail, one that is a major detail to Ray and I! On one occasion, we got to this spot, and the conductor, a novice to *Le Sacre* wanted to tune the E flat and bass clarinet. I suggested to him that we do it with the flutes, as the issue was the pitch in the ‘faked’ trill. He, and most conductors (with the possible exception of Pierre Boulez and some of the great veteran conductors), have absolutely no clue about this idiosyncrasy, so, he naturally looked confused, all-the-while the flute players recalled how they had helped Ray and I in the past. One of the flautists was moving a bunch of fingers up and down (playing the real fingerings for the E flat and F), rather than the simplified one-finger trill fingering. The conductor, somewhat disrespectfully and certainly very unwisely in showing his rank inexperience when speaking to an orchestral veteran, said to me: “Dave, you don’t expect the flute players to move all those fingers, do you?” to which I replied, “Maestro, they are trained professionals. I am confident that they can do this.” The orchestra roared with laughter and the conductor was musically eviscerated.

While I was privileged to have many, many wonderful musical experiences and many laughs during my time in the Toronto Symphony, this was one of the great chuckle-moments in my career, to be sure. The moral here: know your excerpts and who is playing with you – you may have an easy solution to a challenge built in, and you may get to needle the conductor – always a bonus.

## **The Big Eight Excerpts**

*(The sections “Why, What to watch for, Of note” are written by David and/or identified by “DB”. Lawrie’s comments are identified by “LB”. )*

### **For auditions in North America, you can almost always expect the following works:**

#### **Grofé – “On The Trail” from *Grand Canyon Suite***

*Why:* major American pops repertoire. Demonstrates full range of the orchestral bass clarinet.

*What to watch for:* clarity in articulation; precise rhythm (avoid the temptation to rush) - make a *crescendo*, as the line gets lower.

LB-“On the Trail” is always asked at auditions. I believe this is not for its inherent musicality, but because so much of the repertoire for orchestra bass clarinet is slow and legato. This is relatively fast, staccato, and in B major. Not the most interesting for the committee to listen to, but there for a valid reason. I have suggested to conductors who are having bass auditions to replace it with some of the staccato passages in the Hindemith Symphonic Metamorphosis.

#### **William Schuman – Third Symphony**

*Why:* major American repertoire. The *Toccata* is virtuoso playing in the altissimo register. The Fugue has a major solo for bass clarinet, accompanied only by the snare drum.

*What to watch for:* clarity in altissimo. Accurate rhythms.

*Of note:* In a performance at National Symphony back in the early 1970’s, Schuman had asked the principal percussionist (who was playing the snare drum) that the dotted 8<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> rhythm in Fugue be played more with more in a triplet feel, like the triplets following this dotted passage. Tradition has us try to make a difference in the dotted vs. the triplet rhythms, though this is very difficult to do at the brisk performance tempo – Mr. Schuman had it right.

LB- The snare starts with just rhythm. When we enter the goal is to just add pitch, not inflection in the beginning, so truly soft, and not accented. Then you can make a lot of the crescendo going across the top. I just admit that in my orchestra we very carefully delineate the difference between the dotted eight –sixteenth, and the

triplet. Sorry Mr. Schuman. Of course, that said, we've only played it once in my 34 years here.

### **Shostakovich – Violin Concerto**

*Why:* The 2<sup>nd</sup> movement – Scherzo - is technically demanding and very fast, played with the flute in octaves. Long legato solos in opening movement. Challenging and exposed parts for clarinet in the third and fourth movements.

*What to watch for:* At the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, there is an awkward chalumeau B-A# flip fingering. This same solo material repeats with the clarinet later in the movement. The tendency is to be late after the 8<sup>th</sup> rest. The accents can tend to be swallowed up – they need to be clear. In the third movement, the clarinets have exposed chords, and the third clarinet plays the passacaglia theme a couple of times.

LB- This work seems to be a “rite of passage” piece for violinists, and we play it quite often. Many violinists wish to play the Scherzo at the marked tempo, but most great conductors I have worked with want it just a little slower. Recently we played it at the marked speed and the orchestra and the soloist just sounded frantic to my ears. For an audition I would like to hear it very clean at a little slower tempo than marked, rather than at the tempo marked and sloppy.

### **Strauss – Don Quixote**

*Why:* the bass clarinet, tenor tuba and viola are the Sancho Panza character, a foil to the solo cello of Don Quixote. Major exposed solos for bass clarinet and soli with the tenor tuba.

*What to watch for:* Accurate rhythm in the theme; legato high clarion/altissimo playing in the 3<sup>rd</sup> variation; exposed high solo at Rehearsal #72 near the end of the piece – Sancho's last tribute to the Don.

*Of Note:* As there is so much playing with the tenor tuba, try sitting with the tenor tuba at the back of the violas.

LB-In most ways this is the biggest orchestral part there is for bass clarinet. Lots of solo work, a truly wonderful part to play. In the Sancho Panza theme, I suggest playing the grace notes on the slow side with a tiny accentuation, as this is the only note that the tenor tuba is not playing. This clarifies it, so it doesn't sound like someone made a mistake.

The final solo at Rehearsal #72 is a dialog. Try to clearly show the two different characters, one soft and sad, the other more demanding.

### **Strauss – Till Eulenspiegel**

*Why:* In *Till*, there are a couple of small solos/soli. The big solo is near the end of the piece in the high altissimo range. As Lawrie says below, use 'open' or overblown throat note fingerings as often as you can.

*What to watch for:* There are lots of fast notes to play, but that solo near the end of the piece can be treacherous if you start out too softly and try and make the *dim*. Ideally, you will be at almost *niente* on the last C#.

LB- There are many entrances here that start in the altissimo and downward scale passages follow. These nearly all need to be started with “fake” fingerings in order to cleanly play them at the speed required.

The passage at the very end where we answer the clarinets is marked *p* with a *diminuendo* over the four iterations of B-G-C#. I start about *mf*, so the gesture of the *dim.* is more obvious.

### **Ravel – La Valse**

*Why:* This work has some solos/soli that are rhythmically challenging.

*What to watch for:* Much of this part is for bass clarinet in A. Every bass clarinetist I know has his or her own complete part in B flat for *La Valse*. There are many little soli and exposed sections in the work. The soli with the celli are particularly difficult to play together due to the geographic separation of the celli and the bass clarinet. Play louder so they can hear you – there is little chance you will hear them.

LB-This is the only orchestral part for which I took my own part on stage at auditions. It is very chromatic, and not worth trying to transpose if you're at all insecure at transposition. There is a great Bb part on David's website.

### **Ravel – Daphnis and Chloe, second suite**

*Why:* Very fast notes in Daphnis, four sharps, across the break.

*What to watch for:* In the 5/4, the main theme is challenging to play in time. Be sure to get off the tie so you are not late to the moving 8<sup>th</sup> note triplets. There is a very exposed soli with the celli that is difficult for this reason. There is also an exposed 'hemiola soli' with the celli that can have ensemble problems.

*Of Note:* The second suite is, by far, the more commonly known and played suite, but the first suite has some treacherous moments as well. The complete ballet is not fully covered in the two suites.

LB-This will be on all auditions. If it's not, practice it anyway. I've almost never seen a clarinet audition that didn't include Daphnis.

DB- *An aside: the wise audition committee will never ask for the clarinet parts from Daphnis as the bass clarinet has a major part through this piece. If you are the bass clarinet player, you will never have to play 2<sup>nd</sup> clarinet in Daphnis. If the committee is looking to test for technique, they need to be reminded that the clarinet parts are in F major, some of them all in the chalumeau. The bass clarinet part is in E Major, all across the break, and the bass clarinetist is moving keys twice as big and twice as far*



*as the clarinet players are - all this in four sharps instead of one flat. If you can play the bass clarinet part well, you can most certainly manage the much easier 2<sup>nd</sup> clarinet part. Nonetheless, as wisdom is often in short supply, be sure to learn the 2<sup>nd</sup> clarinet excerpts to Daphnis and try them with another player playing the 1<sup>st</sup> part in advance of the audition.*

### **Mahler – Sixth Symphony**

*Why:* major solo in 1<sup>st</sup> movement.

*What to watch for:* The solo in the 1<sup>st</sup> movement should be played as softly as possible. The hairpin *dim.* to *pp* in the middle of the solo should become almost inaudible. This will also help ration the air to get through the full solo in one breath. There are other significant solos in the other movements, including major ones in the last movement. Most of the bass clarinet part is in A. Rather than play the part in A, consider playing from a transposed part in B flat.

LB-This is also a transposition nightmare. The first movement solo is easy to transpose, but major sections of the last movement are in Gb major, if played on A, or in F on Bb. Look around on the Internet. I had a student come in to my bass class at Northwestern with a part he found and it was the same part I play off.

## **The Next Eight**

**These works are often on audition lists and are works where the bass clarinet has a significant role. They are listed in no particular order:**

### **An oddity: Meyerbeer – Cadenza from Les Hugenots**

*Why:* Premiered in 1836, this is a cadenza that explores the full range of the instrument, from low E to altissimo G.

*What to watch for:* this solo must be played very musically. As with many cadenzas, it is a “show-off moment”. Intonation is key. Instead of a crescendo, try making a steep *diminuendo* to *pp* as the line climbs to the altissimo G.

LB- This is one of the most fun audition pieces to play. Really shows off the range of the instrument, and the artistry of the candidate. While nobody ever performs it, it probably should always be on bass clarinet auditions.

### **Shostakovich – Seventh Symphony, Eighth Symphony**

*Why:* Seventh Symphony – major solo in 1<sup>st</sup> movement; Eighth Symphony has a major solo in the last movement.

*What to watch for:* Where to breathe and breath control is an issue in the solo in the 7<sup>th</sup> symphony. Where does the player break the phrase? Do you breathe under the phrasings that Shostakovich has marked? Do you breathe before the ‘pickup’ note?

Whatever you choose to do, the breaths must be 'in time' and the low notes must not speak late - the result is poor ensemble with the flute players who are playing strict rhythms.

*Of Note:* The Fourth and Sixth Symphonies have some juicy parts for bass clarinet and E flat clarinet.

LB- The 7<sup>th</sup> is a massive part of a massive symphony, and includes a huge solo. The solo is very long and very low, so breathing is a major issue. I have had conductors ask for the breathing many different ways, but you can make it work a number of different ways. The important thing is to be able to make the low notes speak exactly when you want them to so that you fit with the flutes' accompaniment. I always use a relatively light reed for this symphony, to make it possible to get through the solo with maximum efficiency.

### **Stravinskii – Le Sacre Du Printemps**

*Why:* major parts for the two bass clarinets. Large scale wind writing.

*What to watch for:* bass clarinets dialogue in the *Introduction*; intonation in *Rondes Printemps*; bass clarinet dialogue and solos just before *Danse Sacrale*.

LB- The main reminder for anyone who hasn't played the *Rite* is that the opening is pretty slow. Don't try to fly through it just because you see "little" notes.

### **Stravinskii –Petrushka**

*Why:* Extended solo two octaves below the 1<sup>st</sup> clarinet.

*What to watch for:* Intonation in this passage can be touchy. In the 1947 revision, Stravinski changes the low D (playable on a low C bass clarinet) to an F#. Play the low D if you have the notes – keep the passage in octaves. There are challenging parts for 3<sup>rd</sup> clarinet in the revisions.

A special note about the music of Stravinskii: The Toronto Symphony Orchestra made early recordings of Stravinski's orchestral works with conductor and assistant to Stravinski, Robert Craft. The recordings were done under the CBC Records label. TSO players who worked with Craft and Stravinski (with whom I later worked) comment about the shortness and hard articulation that Stravinski had asked for. Of particular note is the 'organ grinder' near the beginning of the piece. The bass clarinet notes, all marked with a striche (*a.k.a. 'wedge' or 'carrot'*), are to be played extremely short and accented. This instruction comes from Stravinski himself! albeit once removed, through my TSO colleagues who recorded for Stravinski. The same goes for the repeated open G/low F# in Part Two of *Le Sacre* – very short, very pointed, and a very strong forte on the repeated Gs. If it sounds silly, it's probably right.

LB-Like David, when I first joined the orchestra I had many colleagues who actually played for Stravinsky. They always reminded us that Stravinsky wanted us to play exactly what we saw on the page, and not try to add, change or embellish anything.

### **Ravel – Concerto for the Left Hand**

*Why:* shares soli with the contrabassoon (this concerto is a major work for contra); very fast and audible arpeggios in A flat major across the break near end of the piece – this is Daphnis-like writing, and the A Flat arpeggio with the throat notes and side keys can be awkward.

*What to watch for:* much of this part is in A in treble clef, but it is an easy transposition.

### **Khatchaturian – Piano Concerto**

*Why:* Extended solo in 2<sup>nd</sup> movement

*What to watch for:* challenging phrasing-where to breathe in long solos.

LB-This is a really fun solo, with great opportunities to be colorful, soloistic and full of emotional changes.

### **Hindemith - Symphonic Metamorphosis**

*Why:* Technical passagework in octaves with the clarinets in 2<sup>nd</sup> movement.

Exposed solos in the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement and the 4<sup>th</sup> movement.

*What to watch for:* The opening of the 4<sup>th</sup> movement can tend to rush in the dotted 8<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>ths</sup>. The passage is audible and must be played dead in time.

### **Berg – Violin Concerto**

*Why:* almost all of the bass clarinet part is very exposed. There are many *Hauptstimme* and *Nebenstimme* solos and soli.

*What to watch out for:* All markings must be played with great clarity. Take special note of the hairpins, especially the *dim.* side of the hairpin. The score is in C in bass clef. Excerpts in the Drapkin excerpt book contain most of the complete orchestral part. The Violin Concerto, like most Berg, is available on rental parts only.

*Of note:* If you have an opportunity to get a copy of this part (indeed, *any* rental-only part), be sure to take advantage and add a copy of the part to your personal library for “educational use only”.

LB-This is another great part, and should really be on all auditions. The dynamic shifting, and solo writing, the beautiful chorale at the end, all make for a terrific part. As David points out, make sure you have a Bb part, starting on a C, since the score is in C.

### **All the rest...**

These bass clarinet excerpts are often on audition lists, and you will need to keep a “heads up” for them once you have the job (and want to keep it):

### **Ravel – Symphonie Espagnol**

*What to watch for:* 2<sup>nd</sup> movement – bass clarinet solo tends to start late and be slow. 4<sup>th</sup> movement – very fast notes across the break in octaves with the other woodwinds.

### **Mahler – First Symphony**

*Why:* Intonation and clarinet 'fanfare' at the opening of the 1<sup>st</sup> movement.

*What to watch for:* At the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> movement, the strings are playing a pedal tone harmonic on the A string. This natural harmonic can sound flat – the English horn, piccolo and bass clarinet need to adjust to this lower A, especially on the long B on the bass clarinet. The fanfare must be played very softly but very clearly – be sure the 'hat' accents are readily audible, but in *pp*.

*Of Note:* There is much C clarinet in this work, especially the last movement.

### **Mahler – Fourth Symphony**

*Why:* Solos in the first movement; beautiful lyric solo in the last movement.

*What to watch for:* The solo at the end of the last movement must be played as legato as possible. It is challenge due to the registers. The last gestures must not be played too softly: leave the English horn something to work with.

### **Mahler – Tenth Symphony, Derek Cooke completed edition**

*Why:* big solo in last movement

### **Gershwin – Piano Concerto in F; American In Paris; Rhapsody in Blue**

*Why:* fast triplets solo across the break in 1<sup>st</sup> movement; clarinet trio in 2<sup>nd</sup> movement

LB-Shows up quite a bit at auditions. The dotted rhythm solo that is slurred in the part is now always asked to be articulated, like the piano.

### **Franck – Symphonie in d minor**

*Why:* a number of exposed solos in the piece, either solo bass lines or solo melody. 2<sup>nd</sup> movement is particularly exposed.

### **Bartok – Second Suite for Orchestra**

*Why:* major extended solo at beginning of 3<sup>rd</sup> movement. Intonation and legato are key in this 'across the break' solo.

### **Dvorak – late tone poems including The Noon Day Witch and Scherzo**

#### **Capriccioso**

*Why:* juicy little solos

LB-Dvorak wrote very little for the bass clarinet, and always an obvious solo with no place to warm up the reed. Easier to play in audition than on the job.

### **Rachmaninov – Second Symphony**

*Why:* Technical passages in 4<sup>th</sup> movement. Readily audible moving lines in 1<sup>st</sup> movement. Solos in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> movements.

*What to watch for:* Solo at the end of the slow movement requires a large volume of air. With the exception of the second movement, this part is for bass clarinet in A, in bass clef.

#### **Stravinskii – Capriccio, op. 4**

*Why:* a rarely performed work by Stravinsky – awkward technical and exposed solos.

#### **Tchaikovsky – Nutcracker, op. 71, Complete Ballet & Suite; Manfred Symphony; Sixth Symphony**

*Why:* Major solos in the complete ballet that are not in the Suite. In addition to the well-known Fée Dragée (a.k.a. Sugar Plum Fairy) solos in Nutcracker Suite op. 71a, in the complete ballet there are big solos in the 4th Scene and in the character dances, notably Le Chocolat.

*More why:* The solo in the Pas de Deux is particularly challenging. This solo follows a lovely oboe solo, and the bass clarinet solo is in A Major and across the break. Intonation can be very challenging and is difficult to play as lyrically as the oboe, which unlike the bass clarinet, is in a very good register. Consider using a bit of vibrato to warm up the solo like the oboe. This is a nasty, thankless solo.

While the Nutcracker Suite is more common in the repertoire, do not be fooled into thinking that if you know the suite, you'd know the hard parts in the ballet. You'd be wrong.

*Of note:* In the Sixth Symphony, the four notes at the end of the first slow clarinet solo in the 1<sup>st</sup> movement are customarily played on bass clarinet instead of bassoon – this is the only bass clarinet part in this work. I find it helpful to sneak in on the last note of the clarinet solo, the concert D, so there is a seamless transition from the last note of the clarinet solo to the first note played by the bass clarinet. If a bass clarinet is used for these four notes, it is common for the bass player to play the complete 2nd part.

Manfred Symphony has an extended solo in an awkward key and across the break.

#### **Prokofiev – Romeo and Juliet (complete ballet)**

*Why:* Fantastic part for bass clarinet, fun to play. Bass clarinet has a significant role and is readily audible much of the time.

*What to watch for:* Much of the character, the “Prokofiev-ization” of the music, comes from accents in odd spots and very specific articulations. As in all Prokofiev, strict attention to these markings and clarity of performance of these marks are crucial. As with the complete Nutcracker Ballet, there is much more to play in the full ballet than in the Orchestral Suites 1 & 2. The part for both the suites and the complete ballet use the extended bass clarinet, to low C, extensively.

### **Prokofiev Fifth Symphony**

*Why:* Some exposed solos, much audible doubling of celli and bass. A very gratifying part to play.

*What to watch for:* As with Romeo and all Prokofiev, strive for clarity and detail in the markings. I try and give a bass clarinet color to the strings in many, if not most, tutti places.

*Of note:* At the end of the last movement, while orchestral pandemonium rages, the only two instruments in the orchestra not playing are the bass clarinet and the contrabassoon. I always thought this to be very funny, as if the two of us would drown out the orchestra. I'd be not at all surprised if Prokofiev had us lay out as a bit of a musical joke.

LB-Another great part, with lots of exposed playing, and some very difficult passages that aren't too exposed. Great color parts, supporting the strings.

### **Verdi – Aida, Act IV: Amneris and Radames aria**

*Why:* Bass clarinet part is very exposed- it is an obbligato part.

*What to watch for:* Make certain that the dynamics are very clear. The solo is quite dull without these changes in dynamics.

LB-Take big risks on the little “cadenza” that introduces the area. It's beautiful and can be very free, so enjoy it.

### **Wagner – Tristan und Isolde, Act II Scene 3**

*Why:* An extended duet between King Marke and the bass clarinet.

*What to watch for:* Very long lines requiring excellent breath control; intonation can be challenging as much of the solo is around long B and the throat. Of particular note: the part is in bass clef and is in A. Best advice: if you are remotely in doubt about your ability to consistently and accurately transpose A bass clarinet in bass clef, and be able to do this under pressure, copy the part out, in full, in B flat.

LB-In my experience this is a part that is always on auditions. As an orchestral player one would not necessarily expect to perform it, but I have played Act II three times, and the complete opera once in my years with the CSO. It is, in my opinion, simply the greatest writing ever done utilizing a bass clarinet. Beautiful, challenging in so many ways, it should be on all auditions. I have always transposed the part as I play it, because I'm not going to write out that long a part.

DB-As a young player, straight out of school, I played Tristan with the Canadian Opera Company. Five hours long, you feel like you have run a marathon when you are done. At the first rehearsal, I made the mistake of thinking that I could transpose the full part, including the Act II Sc. 3 solo. It did not go well. While I ended up transposing much of the A bass clarinet part in performances, for the remainder of the rehearsals and for the run, I copied out the part for Act II, Sc. 3 for B flat and I never made that mistake again.

### **Respighi – I Pini di Roma (Pines of Rome)**

*Why:* High clarion and altissimo playing in the 1st movement; solos in the last movement.

*What to watch for:* first solo in the 4th movement, I Pini Del Appia, must start exactly on time and move with the steady eighths. The tendency is to start late and not move in time. The second solo in this movement, a gesture starting with the triplet, is solo for the first two iterations. The clarinet then joins with the triplets, and the bass clarinet assumes the role of “second clarinet”. In the 1st movement, do not rush the passage that starts on altissimo E. Use an overblown throat A for this altissimo E.

### **Grofé – Grand Canyon Suite (including On The Trail)**

*Why:* While On The Trail is well known to bass clarinetists, there are other equally challenging movements in this work, especially Painted Desert and Cloudburst.

### **Clarinet Excerpts on a Bass Clarinet Audition.**

DB- Some students approach me and wish to study only bass clarinet. I advise them that they must study both bass and soprano clarinets as there will always be clarinet excerpts on a bass clarinet audition. In a 3-person section, there is much clarinet to be played by the bass clarinetist. In a 4-person section, the bass clarinetist often provides relief to the second player in addition to playing doubling parts such as in Mahler Symphonies and the orchestral music of Bartok. Although my experience has shown me that there are not very many wise audition committees, an informed bass clarinet committee will not focus on first excerpts, but rather they will ask for second excerpts to be played with the principal player at the audition as this is a role the bass clarinet player often fills.

### **About the Writers**

In 1980, Sir Georg Solti invited **J. Lawrie Bloom** to join the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on clarinet and solo bass clarinet. He previously held similar appointments with the Phoenix Symphony, the orchestra of the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Vancouver Symphony and Cincinnati Symphony.

Mr. Bloom has been heard in chamber, orchestral and concerto appearances on soprano, basset and bass clarinets. He began studying piano at the age of 4 and switched to clarinet at 9. He continued studies at the Columbus Boychoir School, and at that time came under the clarinet guidance of Roger McKinney. He later studied with Anthony Gigliotti.

Founder and artistic co-director of the Chesapeake Chamber Music Festival and the Chesapeake Chamber Music Competition, Bloom frequently performs on the Northwestern University Winter Chamber Festival and both the Chicago Symphony Orchestra chamber and *MusicNOW* series. During the 2011/12 season he presented two U.S. premieres of works of Thea Musgrave, first her *Autumn Sonata*, a bass clarinet concerto, with the CSO, with Suzanna Mälkki conducting, then at the Chesapeake Chamber Music Festival he performed her "mini clarinet concerto" *Towards the Blue*.

Bloom is a founding member of the Chicago based chamber group the Civitas Ensemble. He has performed at the Ambler, Grand Teton, Ravinia, Skaneateles, Spoleto and Mostly Mozart festivals. He toured with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and he has collaborated with the Chester, Chicago Symphony and Mendelssohn string quartets; the Chicago Chamber Musicians; and members of the Ridge, Orion and Vermeer string quartets. He often has been heard live on WFMT and the Australian Broadcasting Company.

Bloom is a senior lecturer in clarinet at Northwestern University. He has presented master classes all over the world, and he also is an artist performer for clarinet makers Buffet Group USA and the reed company RICO International.

**David Bourque** was a member of the clarinet section of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra from 1983 to 2011. Before the invitation from Sir Andrew Davis to play clarinet and bass clarinet in the TSO, David played in the orchestras of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival, the Canadian Opera Company Orchestra and the National Ballet of Canada Orchestra. He has also played regularly with the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa and has toured with *L'Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal*. David is considered to be Canada's finest bassethorn player.

David has taught classes at major U.S. music schools, including Eastman, DePaul and Northwestern Universities and he has taught and coached the wind section for the New World Symphony. He has held academic appointments at Indiana University, Mount Alison University and the University of Prince Edward Island and currently teaches studio, orchestral clarinet and bass clarinet at the University of Toronto, Faculty of Music. David has also taught bass clarinetists from all over the world.

Dave's passion for great orchestral wind playing has led him to develop a unique approach to orchestral wind section coaching. At the Jacobs School of Music-Indiana University, New World Symphony and at the University of Toronto, David has coached the orchestra wind sections in "real time" during full orchestra rehearsals, sitting in the wind section, allowing for immediate positive and constructive feedback to the players.

David has edited first editions of *Harmoniemusik* attributed to Mozart - these works are cataloged as K.V. Anh. C 17.03, 17.04, 17.05 and 17.07 in the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the



Köchel catalog. These editions are for pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons and horns plus double bass, and they are published by Northdale Music Press ([northdalemusic.ca](http://northdalemusic.ca)).

Some of the tips and tricks for bass clarinet excerpts are taken from David's annotated excerpt book *The Bass Clarinetists' Workbook* and his ongoing series of articles in *The Clarinet*.

David can be reached through his website: [www.davidbourque.ca](http://www.davidbourque.ca).

Rev May 30/14