

THE BASS CLARINETIST'S WORKBOOK

Shostakovich *Violin Concerto No. 1, Op. 99*

by David Bourque

This is one of the top five excerpts for bass clarinet. Almost always on auditions, it is technically challenging and also has a significant part for Clarinet 3 in the Scherzo, Passacaglia and Burleske movements. Complete and confident familiarity with the low fingerings on your instrument is imperative.

Nocturne

The passage before rehearsal **No. 5** is in octaves with the contrabassoon. Make a sound that takes the sound of the contra and the bass clarinet and turns it into a “new” sound. The first phrase can be a true *p* for blend and balance. Make a large crescendo in the second phrase.

In the sixth bar before rehearsal **No. 11**, the bass clarinet is doubled in octaves by the contra for three bars. In the third bar before rehearsal **No. 11**, the contra drops out and you are left with a solo accompanied by clarinets. Step out a bit more here. Direct the line to the C-sharp and do not slow down.

At rehearsal **No. 18**, you should be playing solo and *molto espressivo*. The bass clarinet doubles the low winds and the low strings, but the bass clarinet sound can dominate. The *cresc.* to the A-flat should be very large followed by a gradual *dim.* to *niente*. The hairpins should be *molto* exaggerated.

There is a tricky counting spot after rehearsal **No. 22**. Listen for the major chord in the harp on beat 3 of the third bar of rehearsal **No. 22**. The sixth measure after rehearsal **No. 22** is *molto espressivo* in *p*. Make no break between the f-sharp and f.

Scherzo

This is the excerpt that most commonly appears on auditions. The tempo varies from about dotted quarter=96 to about 116. I have never played it faster than that. The score is marked quarter=126! David Oistrach, the violinist for whom it was written, took quite a leisurely tempo, as does Maxim Vegnerov.

Da capo, the bass clarinet is doubling the flute two octaves below. The only other sound are downbeat double stops from the solo violin. Since it is a scherzo, play the line on the lighter side of *forte* allowing the accents to speak clearly. The notes need to start very clearly (with a “T” syllable), and the *staccato* should be very short. Play right on top of the time.

The sixteenth-note passage at rehearsal **No. 26** passage is a solo with the first clarinet. I count the rests between the two passages not in two bars of 3/8, but in one bar of 3/4 thereby keeping the same duple pulse as established in the 4/8 bar. This helps me to be in time for the second entry.

Passacaglia

The third movement has beautiful writing for three clarinets in close-voiced harmony. Intonation is key. Be certain that you are aware of where the pitch is on the relatively cold B-flat clarinet. The moving notes in the third clarinet in the last four bars of the passacaglia theme should be brought out. Save the *crescendo* for the actual moving notes.

About the writer...

David Bourque has played bass clarinet in the Toronto Symphony Orchestra since 1983. He has taught classes at some of the major U.S. music schools, including Eastman and DePaul, and he has held an appointment at Indiana University. David currently teaches at the University of Toronto.

His passion for great orchestral wind playing has led him to develop a unique approach to orchestra wind section coaching. At both the Jacobs School of Music Indiana University and at the University of Toronto, David coaches the orchestra wind sections in “real time” during full orchestra rehearsals thereby allowing for immediate feedback to the players.

He is the author of the popular DVD tutorial **Working The Single Reed**. His current project is writing *The Working Bass Clarinetist: An Annotated Symphonic Excerpt Book for Bass Clarinet*.

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