

## A Bassoon Lite, Please

### Gravity of Bassoon

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**Y**ou all know Isaac Newton. Well, old Newt and I were talking the other evening. Just shooting the breeze.

He calls me occasionally to run some idea or other by me. Been doing it for years now. Drives my wife absolutely crazy. The guy calls when we're eating dinner, usually. I've tried to discourage him from calling while we're enjoying a nice quiet meal, but old Newt's so excited over his latest ideas that I'm sure he's not even hearing my protests half the time.

"I should have figured it out by now," he'll say.

I know it's old Newt immediately when I hear those words. It's the only introduction he needs.

"I dropped the bassoon from the twentieth floor," he says, "...and gravity did the rest."

"You don't say," I answer.

It's usually all I have to say to keep his thoughts going. That Isaac Newton is a brilliant guy. Not someone you would want at your house during an important cocktail party, but brilliant.

"Yeah, yeah," he'll say right back, "Al. There's no doubt in my mind that the Heckel bassoon is dropping at a faster rate of speed than either the Fox 601 or the Puchner."

"You don't say," I reply.

My wife, who has prepared our favorite soup dish is giving me baleful stares from the dining room table. If you have a wife who makes soup all day, you know what I mean.

"I don't understand why these bassoons are not conforming to the general rule of gravity," he is explaining.

I'm trying to follow his explanation about exertion of forces of gravity, then something about objects falling at the same rate of speed. Newt's really excited. He's bubbling on about relative mass differences.

My wife is having a conniption fit in the dining room. I'm listening to old Newt and nodding assurances to my wife.

"Maybe it's in the complex, multi layered sound coloring" he's speculating, "I wonder if the thicker walled bassoons are crashing onto the pavement sooner than the thinner walled models because of the tonal differences? These bassoons are disproving everything I have discovered about gravity!"

"You don't say," I answer.

"I'll bet it has something to do with the bocals," he is practically screaming with enthusiasm, "the bassoon is defying nature because of the bocals...why didn't I think of it before."

My wife is pouring my soup back into the pot on the kitchen sink. That's a bad sign. If she leaves it on the table to coagulate then she isn't too angry, but soup in the pot. That's bad...real bad.

"Al I'm going to order some more pre-war bocals," old Newt is crowing with enthusiasm, "I think I am onto discovering the first law of bassoon physics!"

"You don't say," I respond.

"Yeah, yeah," old Newt is practically hysterical with the euphoria of discovery.

I can tell he's writing some formula down. He has a habit of kind of humming and grunting numbers at the same time when he's writing down formulas. If you have smart friends who think a lot, then you know what I'm talking about.

"The first law of bassoon physics!" he hollers out triumphantly, "I've got it. I've got it!! Al, listen to this. The first law:

ANYTHING CONFORMING TO THE LAWS OF PHYSICS IS NOT A BASSOON!!!!"

My stomach is growling from hunger. I can see the light is out in the dining room. The pot of soup is in the refrigerator.

Isaac Newton may be a brilliant guy, but he doesn't know a hill of beans about being married.

"You don't say," I reply. ❖

## A Bassoon Lite, Please

### The Fogoon

**M**eet the 'Fogoon'. An invention born of genius... of wit, wisdom, wonder, and most of all...necessity.

The 'Fogoon' bridges a gap that exists between the somewhat decibel deficient bassoon and the sonic profundity of the foghorn.

Do you find yourself having to turn the volume control way, way, way up whenever the bassoon solo appears during broadcast performances of your favorite symphony orchestra? Are you blowing your brains out on famous bassoon solos in order to be heard above the din of trombone, tuba, and violin?

The bassoon, a demure anachronism, has been overtaken by the hustle and bustle of modern life. In an age when every orchestral musician wears earplugs during performances as standard equipment, the bassoon is yesterday's news. It is old hat. The bassoon is ripe for a major sonic upgrade.

The foghorn, on the other hand, is an instrument that has long anticipated the demands of the modern symphony orchestra. It is indisputably loud and obnoxious. The tuning pitch of A 440 is of no consequence to the foghorn. It simply plays at whatever pitch it wants, overwhelming everything in its path. Modern composers will be drawn to its ugly vulgarity, like flies to honey.

Ugly, loud, pitchless, without musically redeeming value, the foghorn is well suited to the 20<sup>th</sup> century music scene.

The foghorn, however, lacks one important ingredient that the bassoon has in abundance ... tradition. In the symphony orchestra, tradition is everything. The bassoon has long been an established, card carrying, blueblood of the orchestral establishment.

No one may be able to hear the bassoon, but it can be seen. Appearances are important.

The uniting of the bassoon to the foghorn is a marriage of tradition to practicality, of form to function.

The Pox 'Fogoon' Company plans to manufacture 'Fogoons' as soon as a prototype can be tested under performance conditions. It is anticipated that the 'Fogoon' will be a success instantly...if not sooner.

A recital of all thirty-seven Vivaldi Fogoon Concertos will be heard on buoy number 66 in Boston Harbor this coming April... whenever the first spring fog arrives. String players who double on oars are being sought for this much anticipated debut performance.

Several models of 'Fogoons' will soon be available to fill the demand for varying tastes among Fogoonists. The Lethal Bore, '007' Fogoon will provide a shrill blast capable of instantly vaporizing threats from either brass, percussion, or podium. The Neutralize Bore '007.5', is designed for chamber musicians, and promises to deliver a modest sonic disruption with pinpoint accuracy.

The noted German bassoon manufacturer, the Fickel Company, felt compelled to make an announcement concerning the impending production of the new Fogoon by the Pox Company.

"The Fogoon is nothing new," said an unnamed spokesman for the Fickel Company, "We have been producing Fogoons since 1960. People all over the world stand in long lines simply for the privilege of purchasing our Fogoons. A pox on their house."

The Fogoon, a concept whose time has arrived. A necessity. Don't leave home without one.

Order now, before the next heavy mists roll in, obliterating your favorite orchestral solo. ❖

## A Bassoon Lite, Please

### Purple

**T**he bassoon player had purple hair. It stood straight up in small clumps. Purple corn stalks tied together in neat little rows running, front to back, across the top of her head. Gradually, it blended into the bright green of curls resting on her shoulders.

"How much would you charge me for lessons?" she asked.

I had forgotten my manners. Usually when someone addresses me I try to respond. I didn't even hear her question. My mind was visualizing her trying to eat with the ring that pierced her tongue.

"I'd really like bassoon lessons." She said.

Three earrings in each ear. One through her right nostril, and then there was the thing in her mouth...the tongue one.

She stood in the doorway to my condominium. I stood there transfixed by her appearance. She had asked the question. Actually, she had asked twice. I wasn't sure of what she had asked. I would say I must have appeared to her as a deaf mute. In fact, I was for the moment at least, just that.

"You remember our conversation, Mr. Griff? I called you yesterday about bassoon lessons?" She hesitated. "You said to come over...you wanted to hear me play before you made your decision."

The words died. They lay on the floor, limp, waiting for me to recognize them.

"Ahhh yes." My mouth remembered its good manners before my mind could. "Yes, yes. You must be Cathy Di' Lake."

"Dealoke." She corrected me. "Cathy Dealoke."

"Yes, of course. Dealoke." I echoed her pronunciation.

I extended my hand. Hers reached out, lead by five unusually long purple fingernails. I was drawn to look at the nails flecked with gold flakes. I must have shaken her hand longer than I intended. I could feel her pulling the five purple nails from my grasp.

"Please. Won't you come in?" I offered.

I stepped back to allow her into the hallway. I closed the door behind her and turned to lead the way into my study. The sound of her leather pants followed me. I don't know if you're familiar with the sound of leather, but it makes a heavy rustling sound when it brushes against itself. I had her open her bassoon case on my desktop. A death's head smiled grimly at me from the back of her 'T' shirt. The words, 'Grateful Dead' appeared under the skull.

"How long have you played the bassoon?" I thought to ask.

She stood her back to me, putting the pieces of bassoon together. Her voice had a slightly disembodied quality.

"Ooh," she thought a few seconds, "maybe three years."

"May I ask...how old you are?" I was curious to learn at what age one qualifies for purple hair, tongue earrings, and black leather pants.

"Ooh..." she had a pattern of hesitating before

answering questions. You got the feeling that she was improvising answers as she went along, "...fifteen."

"Fifteen," I repeated.

I thought back to my bassoon lessons when I was fifteen. A picture of a freshly scrubbed face peering above a clean white shirt made me feel extremely old.

Cathy Dealoke sat down in a chair in the middle of the room. She placed a reed on the bassoon and began to play. I sat in a chair besides her and listened as she warmed up on several fast runs up and down the entire range of the instrument. When she was ready, she put the bassoon down across her lap and waited.

"How did you decide to call me for bassoon lessons?" I asked her.

"Ooh...I heard you play with the Pittsburgh Symphony once."

She looked over at me and smiled. It was a friendly warm smile. I smiled back and nodded.

"You sounded really wonderful," she paused before continuing, "Then when I heard you had retired and lived close by, I decided to call and see if you would teach me."

I had her play some scales. Then some etudes. Finally, I asked her to play excerpts from a Concerto for Bassoon by Mozart. She played well. There were some things I could help her with, but she had talent. That much was obvious.

"Why did you pick the bassoon?" I asked her when she had finished playing the Concerto.

She looked over at me and shrugged, "Just liked the way it sounded, I guess."

The ring in the tongue intrigued me. I resisted the temptation to pursue my curiosity with a question. Based on her apparent talent, I thought my long-standing notion of what a classical music student should look like was about to change.

"Who is your favorite composer?" I asked the fire red bangs running across her forehead.

She smiled broadly, "Ooh... that's got to be Jerry Garcia."

"Jerry Garcia?" I sounded lost.

"Yeah...you know," she enthused, "The Grateful Dead."

I sat for a second, watching her beatific smile.

"Ooh yeah..." I hesitated, improvising my response, "...THAT Jerry Garcia!" ❖