

## A Bassoon Lite, Please

### The Doublebreasted, Singlecrested, Triple Truncated, Terwilliger Heckeloblob

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**E**xcuse me if I'm writing louder than normal. I sat in front of the Chinese Gongs all morning during orchestra rehearsal. I can't hear a thing.

Earplugs helped somewhat. I'm looking for something for tomorrow's concert, though, that is more in line with industrial strength earplugs. A large bucket stuffed with rags that fit over my head might do.

The leadpipe on my bassoon can fit through a tiny opening in the side of the bucket. I hope no further piercing of this sonic armor for, say, eyeholes will be necessary. If I paint eyes on the front of the bucket, fit it with a thinning hairpiece, and glaring eyebrows, the conductor will simply assume I'm just another aging bassoonist with moody eyebrows and an oversized ego.

There's no need to see anything. I simply play any note as loud as I can whenever the volcanic eruption of the four foot wide gong begins to move my chair.

The orchestra is playing a couple of pieces by Olivier Messiaen. This was a composer who loved birds. All his music imitates birdcalls. We have a lot in common there. I love birds too.

My wife has a birdfeeder in the back yard that she keeps full of birdseed. Together we often stand by the window looking out at the birds feeding.

"Ooohh, look," she will whisper to me, "...a Doublebreasted, Singlecrested, Tripletruncated, Terwilliger Heckeloblob."

We stand there nodding as the Heckeloblob throws birdseed to the four winds, getting to that perfect nugget of seed at the bottom of the feeder. Meanwhile, Pinched Nose Floral Ruffled Foxogabers are swooping down to dislodge the Heckeloblob. He fights them off valiantly.

"Ooohh, listen to that," my wife whispers.

We listen, amidst the squawks and cries of combat, for the music. If we are lucky, the birds take a break from argument long enough to sing a song. Invariably, it is beautiful.

I never tire of hearing the birds sing.

To date, however, no bird I have heard in the backyard, sounds anything like a Chinese Gong, four feet across, vibrating your chair across stage, down the hallway, out the rear stagedoor, into oncoming traffic.

Olivier Messiaen must have had a birdfeeder the

size of Rhode Island in his backyard to accommodate a bird musically represented by the Chinese Gong. No way am I going out there to put birdseed in the feeder for that thing. I picture it swooping quickly down from the roof, taking half the house with it, carrying me away to its nest of little hungry Chinese Gonglings.

Sometimes there are several Chinese Gongs going at one time. I can tell this without turning around. That's when my chair does the Tarantella. With only one Chinese Gong playing, the chair does something more like a tango...kind of slithers instead of bouncing across the stage.

Besides the bucket over my head, I will, I believe, be wise to hire a brakeman, someone to keep my chair from bouncing too far away from the rest of orchestra. It's the kind of perk you might think the orchestra should provide, but they have already committed a couple of bucks for a Chinese Gong Muter.

The Chinese Gong Muter is a person who throws his body around the Chinese Gong to shut it down as it is singing one of its more enthusiastic birdsongs. These specialists are more expensive to hire than you might think. It is dangerous work. The orchestra goes through at least five Chinese Gong Muters during each performance.

The best source for these brave specialists is former rodeo 'bronco' riders, who happen to be paid up members of the musicians' union.

Maybe I'll take the cheapo route and simply nail my shoes to the floor, tie my shoelaces real tight, and buckle down my pre-war seatstrap to the chair. That and my bucket of rags over the head, I think, should prepare me to give a good performance of Olivier Messiaen's bird calls tomorrow.

When I come home, hopefully I'll have enough hearing left to enjoy the Heckeloblob and Foxogaber duke it out with song by the birdfeeder in the backyard.

It's not a Chinese Gongling to be sure.

But someday my wife and I, with any luck, might be able to afford to buy the State of Rhode Island. I look forward then, to our standing with buckets over our heads facing the back window of our house, vibrating to Tarantellas and Tangos during a feeding frenzy of Chinese Gonglings

"Listen," my wife will shout inside her bucket.

"It's only the sound of the house moving off the foundation," I might shout back to reassure her. ❖