

## Nurturing the Young Bassoonist: A Holistic Approach

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I met **Terry Ewell** after a recital at the 2000 IDRS conference in Buenos Aires. He had been looking for me, he said, because he wanted to talk to me about the 2001 IDRS conference in Morgantown, the theme of which was to be pedagogy. As we discussed the need to better reach and serve middle-to-high-school-aged students, I realized that he was asking me to present my method of teaching. Immediately I thought, “you must be joking! I don’t have a magic formula.” Yet it is true that my high school students consistently arrive at their colleges of choice endowed with certain fundamental skills, practice habits and attitudes that prepare them well for further study. There are both philosophical and practical reasons that this is true.

There is much more to the training of a well-rounded musician than the hours spent in the private studio wrestling with the instrument. A “holistic” approach is one that actively engages both individuals, student and teacher, in a vibrant dialogue about life itself, with the specific instrument as the frame for that dialogue. The synthesis of performance and pedagogy in an atmosphere of collaboration and discovery are the basis of my approach to teaching.

### PERFORMANCE AND PEDAGOGY

“Them as can, do. Them as can’t, teach.” The first time I heard this old saw was as an undergraduate, in a conversation with a voice professor. He was extolling the virtues of a performance degree and positing that one should devote oneself to one’s craft at all costs lest one be forced to “fall back” on teaching. At the time, I wondered whether this *professor* saw the irony in his diatribe, but it was clear that he was *not* talking about teaching at the college level.

A significant and fundamental problem in training young musicians is that we endorse

a dichotomy of pedagogy versus performance, neglecting to recognize that with few exceptions, we ALL will do our share of teaching. We bemoan the fact that beginning band methods are inadequate for teaching double reeds, and that beginning double reed players are at the mercy of band directors who haven’t the vaguest notion of how to teach them. All too often, though, we perpetuate these conditions in training our undergraduate performance majors how to win auditions and competitions, but not how to teach.

Further, we make the assumption that those who teach young students do so because they are not qualified or equipped to teach advanced students, and a sort of class structure emerges which pigeonholes, devalues and undermines teachers. A reference to the state of public school education in the U.S. underscores the fact that the best and the brightest are not flocking to the teaching profession, in large part because “them as can, do.”

The sad result of this dichotomy is that there are too many performers who don’t teach (or don’t teach well) and too many teachers who don’t perform. Inevitably it follows that students likewise become compartmentalized in their thinking: “I’m only practicing, so it doesn’t really count. I’ll pay more attention when I’m performing.” While the flaws in this logic are many and painfully obvious, we can trace their origins to the initial assumption that there is a fundamental separation between teachers and performers. If this assumption is not challenged, the idea that learning and performing are separate functions is continually reinforced, even at the earliest stages of the student’s development.

One remedy is to work to expand the student-teacher relationship to include facets of student-performer and performer-performer. The importance of giving students musically valid experiences as early as possible cannot be overstated, because it is experience that drives motivation. I provide as many performance opportunities as I can, including membership in youth orchestra, participation in solo and ensemble contest, regional and state band and orchestra, summer music camps, etc. When possible, I arrange semi-annual recitals of all

of my students.

Most importantly, I *encourage* them to observe and participate in my own preparation process. The performance itself illustrates that we are all working *toward* various goals. The perfection of the finished product is daunting to students. As they listen, they think, "I'll never be able to do that!" While it strokes our performer's egos to present only the most polished and precise performance, it also holds our students at arm's length. They *don't* learn faster as a result!

Invite your students into *your* world as you prepare to perform. Let them observe as you use all of the tricks you recommend to them. What often is most helpful for a student is to *experience* your progress with you as you work out the technical aspects of a new piece. The most effective learning does not result from didactic discourse, but from shared experience. Your willingness to open that door is often directly proportional to your student's own development.

An atmosphere of collaboration is a critical element of my approach to training young musicians. From the very first conversation, the student is a part of a collaborative effort that starts with the parents and the band director and expands to include accompanists, youth orchestra conductors and their own peers. The playing of duets in the early lessons leads to the formation of bassoon ensembles, woodwind trios and quintets. I participate in aspects of their musical training that extend well beyond the private studio, and they participate in this collaborative atmosphere from the beginning.

The collaborative spirit includes developing relationships with composers. I am fortunate to know several gifted composers who have written works that happen to be good training pieces. In some cases the music was written with a specific awareness of the technical limitations of the student bassoonist, but in all cases the music itself is valid on its own merits.

I have found that students are eager to learn music by living composers, and they are also eager to learn music that they've heard their teachers perform. I reap the added benefit of expanding my own repertoire to include works of merit that are technically accessible enough to augment a recital program without adding a great deal of preparation stress. I consider it both a necessity and a privilege to be able to provide a balance between the standard repertoire and works by living composers.

## THE JOY OF TEACHING

I love teaching because it provides a unique opportunity to establish and develop relationships -- to *relate to others*. It is fascinating to watch a student learn who he is and what he might eventually achieve. As those of us who have benefited from counseling can attest, in order for any relationship to be effective, both parties must be willing to bring their whole selves to the process.

It is the teacher's job to facilitate this by "showing up;" by being fully present. You are not just a bassoon teacher to a middle school student. ***Like it or not***, you are a significant force in his life; a mentor, a role model, a non-parental adult. Meet the student where he is rather than expecting him to find you. Learn the relevance of your subject matter in the context of the student's world. Insistence upon more practice time will continue to fall on deaf ears until the student knows that you *understand* what other demands there are on his time. Your respect for the conditions of his world will be returned in kind.

One of the most formidable tools we have is the fact that we have already done what our students are working to accomplish. A cherished moment in the student-teacher relationship comes when the student realizes that the teacher was once a beginner, too. Of course he already knows this on some level, but the day you point out that you once struggled *just as he is now*, and ultimately succeeded, his own success begins to become a real possibility for *him*.

All that is required of you is to remember what you were thinking, wondering, hoping and fearing when you were in his shoes, and then answer him. As simple as this may seem, it requires a strong commitment to delve into the reality of your own experience with full honesty; what you think you remember and what really happened may not be the same. Be fully *present* in your students' lives! Show up with everything you have felt, learned and wondered about and share it with your students.

Be observant. Some students are verbal learners. Some relate to pictures, some respond best to kinesthetic cues. Often you will need a combination of these approaches.

If your student isn't grasping a concept, find a different way to explain it. As your relationship develops, so will your understanding of your student's particular learning style.

It is also helpful for students to observe their peers' lessons. My students' lessons

overlap intentionally. I find that this helps young learners to overcome their performance anxiety, as well as to learn how to channel their competitive energy in an appropriate and productive direction. In addition, this may be the only time the middle school student even sees another 13-year-old bassoonist!

The sense of isolation most young bassoonists experience has few benefits. A significant drawback is the absence of any sort of yardstick by which to measure one's own progress. This is often heightened by the band director's gratitude that the student is even willing to try to play the "obstreperous beast," often unintentionally setting lower musical expectations. As a result, many young bassoonists develop the misguided idea that minimal effort is sufficient and only belatedly come to realize that if they had to compete on an even playing field with the flutes or clarinets or trumpets, they would probably *not* be sitting near the top of the section.

*Teach your students how to practice.* By starting early with an obvious and repeatable structure in lessons, you will help them to develop a certain structure about their personal practice sessions as well. Unless you teach your students HOW to practice, they will revert to playing through phrases repeatedly, just to use up the required amount of practice time. It is no more productive to practice this way than it is to sit in rehearsals that are run this way, and certainly no less tedious!

Ideally, each lesson should provide a model of a productive practice session, with a warm-up, scale and technique review, "simulated performance," time to isolate and drill problem passages, and time to review the progress made during the lesson or practice period. Once students become more advanced, it is desirable to have them warm up *before* their lessons in order to allow more time to work on repertoire. Until they have learned to incorporate a structure into their practice time, it is best to guide them through each phase in lessons.

*Train students to simulate performance conditions while they practice.* Often in lessons a sort of stop-and-go pattern is established as problem sections are identified and worked out. This attention to detail is absolutely necessary, of course, but it often results in a lack of continuous, complete performance.

The equation of run-through versus stop-and-fix must be balanced in order for the student to develop the ability to concentrate and to continue to play *despite* mistakes. I refer to this capacity as "mental endurance." It should

be fostered in tandem with physical endurance, but is often neglected in favor of perfecting a particular phrase. From the very beginning, make the time in each lesson to listen to a complete performance of *whatever* the student is working on so that he learns to spend an appropriate amount of time on each side of the equation.

*Teach your students to be independent thinkers.* Ask them to research the music they are learning. Start early by insisting that they look up the musical terms found in their lesson books, study materials and solos. Explain what a minuet is, for example, and put it in a proper historical context, complete with powdered wigs and knee breeches. Your students will respond by seeking the meaning hidden in the music they are playing.

Have your students listen to various recordings, and then ask them for their responses to the recordings. Rather than telling them what to do, *ask* what they think they should do to fix a troublesome technical passage. Most importantly, be sure they leave the lesson with an understanding of how to work at home. Have them write assignments or key phrases in their lesson notebooks, in their own words. You are the teacher 1 hour a week; the other 167 it's all up to them. Help them to be effective on their own time.

### SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS.

My approach to teaching young students is a multi-layered process that starts even before the first lesson as I seek to establish an understanding with the parents and the band director. In my first conversation with the parents, I begin to learn who the student is while the parents begin to learn who I am. They need to understand the level of commitment I expect from the student and be willing to help the student fulfill that commitment. I explain practice minimums, studio policies and equipment requirements, and I ask questions about the student's background and prior musical training. The parents quiz me, and then I have a conversation with the student. I want to know what brought him to the bassoon. His reasons for wanting bassoon lessons may be very different from his parent's reasons, and it is important to establish our relationship as independent of my relationship with his parents. If I have handled this first conversation well, the student arrives with a level of enthusiasm that helps to set the tone for our adventure with the bassoon.

I have been teaching in the same geographic area for a long time, and so I have an ongoing relationship with many local band directors. It is important to establish such a relationship with the band director because this individual plays a key role in the student's development. She needs to supply a working instrument and have a means to ensure that the instrument is properly maintained. From the outset, it needs to be clearly established whether the student is financially responsible for maintenance of a school-owned instrument, whether there is a school-dictated relationship with a local music shop, whether the repair department at that shop is competent to deal with bassoons, and so on.

Often at the beginning of a relationship with a new school I will try all of the bassoons the school owns and assess the equipment. I want the band director to rely on me as a resource for all things bassoon-related -- I am the local "bassoon jock." As this relationship develops, it eases the tension, whether real or perceived, that a student faces when what the band director says and what I expect seem to conflict.

At the first lesson the student begins to learn respect for the instrument itself along with proper ways to handle and care for it. I cover this material at the first lesson of *every student*, whether or not it is the student's first experience with the bassoon. I give a very thoroughgoing explanation of the working parts and their function, proper alignment, the damage that can easily happen to bocals, tenons, keys, the definition and cause of boot rot, the proper use of swabs, cork grease or paraffin, and so on.

This is the advent of preventive maintenance and will save the student, the parents, the band director and me untold amounts of time, energy and money in emergency repairs. Obviously preventive maintenance is efficient and sensible, but my reasons for doing this go beyond the obvious. There is a relationship developing between the student and the bassoon, and there is also a connection between a student's regard for the instrument and her experience in learning to play it.

## MUSIC FUNDAMENTALS

Singing is an integral part of most lessons. The symbols on the page represent sounds, and if the student learns to hear the sound that is represented *before* he plays it, accuracy in reading skills and good intonation will naturally develop. The symbols on the page do *not*

represent fingerings. Rather, a certain fingering is required to produce the sound that is represented. As this connection is consistently reinforced, pitch memory is developed.

Throughout the study of the instrument I encourage students to sing familiar tunes and then play them by ear. Those students who haven't sung before may have trouble with this at first. I approach their reluctance by having them observe how they hear words internally as they read silently and as they think. Next they vocally match those words, saying them aloud. The process is repeated with pitches: hear the sound internally and then match it.

Those who can't accomplish this are often actually being too literal about the task of "matching" a sound and are trying to match all of the parameters of what they hear (register, range and timbre, for instance). I have them listen to the note and then listen to it internally, translating it into their own voice before they sing. It is the internalization and "translation" of the sound that is key in this process.

Test your own pitch memory: Close your eyes and **mentally** sing (without physically singing) the first phrase of the Mozart Bassoon Concerto. Return to the first note of the phrase. Listen internally, then sing it out loud and check to see if it is a Bb. Chances are that you have sung either a Bb (the first note of the phrase) or a D (the last note you sang mentally) because, as a bassoonist, you have worked on and listened to this piece enough to have internalized the pitches. This level of pitch memory is something that most people can develop. Your students can already anticipate the first note on their favorite CDs, for example. The process is a natural one that we now begin to use intentionally.

*The habit of internalizing and matching pitch must become firmly established so that it can be applied to all aspects of performing.* When the student complains that no matter how hard she tries, she still sounds bad, she is reacting to what she hears without a concept of what it is that she wants to produce. Too often the only help we offer is to be patient and keep working; good advice, but ultimately not helpful. An often-overlooked solution is to remind her to think of *how she wants it to sound*, starting with an internalized concept of her tone, or phrasing, or vibrato. This ability is instilled from the very beginning by training her to internalize and then match pitch, and is reinforced by giving her models and examples of those areas she is working to develop.

In 18 years as an instructor of sight singing,

I have rarely met an individual who couldn't eventually learn to match pitch. In fact, true "tone deafness" is statistically about as common as true color blindness, because pitch is processed in the brain in the same way that color is. It is much easier for a student to learn to match pitch at the developmentally appropriate time. Unfortunately, that is the same time that color association is developing, so by middle school we've already missed the boat. The sooner your student acquires this skill, the better her chances to advance as a musician. Don't frustrate the student with your insistence upon singing, but don't give up! Take care to establish the association of pitch with notation and fingerings, and you will be training a whole musician and not just a "button pusher."

Of course, it goes without saying that rhythmic development is of equal importance, and sadly is often equally as neglected as pitch development. **A right note at the wrong time is a wrong note**, and it is crucial to consistently address the concept of meter as well as duration. If you quiz your student as to *how* he counts, you will often discover that he is focusing on duration alone. To use the opening phrase of the Mozart Bassoon Concerto as an example, he thinks "one, one-two, one-da one, one-two, one-da one, one-two, one, one, one." Heaven help him if he gets lost in this method, as there is no metric organization to lead him back to the downbeat.

Thinking in terms of duration alone is redundant since the printed note value already

soon before advancing "over the break." Students learn to play one-octave major and chromatic scales in all keys in the range of Bb1 to open F before they play *anything* in the middle range. New notes are introduced well in advance of their incorporation into written musical examples. An important part of this process involves the use of the proper inflection for the note (when is it a C# and when a Db?), so that they are also learning the basic logic of common practice period harmony.

As new notes and finger patterns are introduced and mastered, a solid command of embouchure, support and tone production emerges. While the student has been acquiring these skills, she has also begun to develop a rudimentary understanding of the acoustics of the bassoon, which helps her to grasp the need for proper middle register technique when the time comes.

Please refer to Illustration 1. I define the fundamental range as consisting of two registers. The "low" register is from F1 to open F (or F2) and is analogous to the lowest register on other woodwind instruments. The "pedal" register extends from E1 down to low Bb, and is unique to the bassoon. In the pedal register, the fingerings are *only* used to produce fundamental pitches. Starting with F#2, low register fingerings are "recycled" or used again with various modifications to produce the notes in the "middle" register, or the range of the first overtone. The 2-to-1 ratio of the octave harmonic is fairly easy to comprehend if the fundamental pitches are well ingrained.

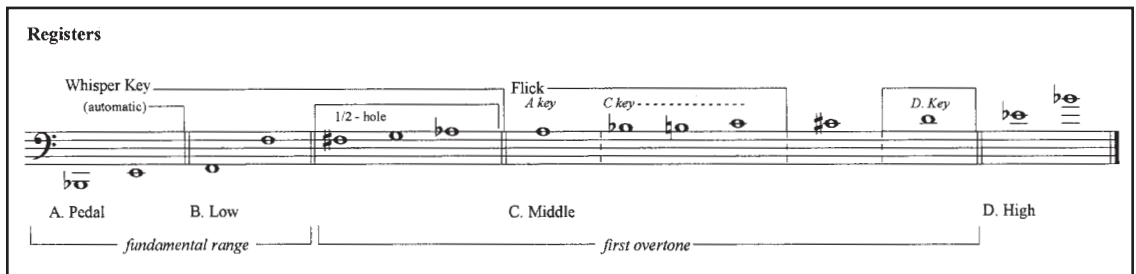


Illustration 1

expresses duration. Clapping, tapping and counting aloud, followed by "air bassoon" exercises where the notes are fingered rhythmically while being vocally counted and sung aloud are among my favorite methods of retraining poor rhythmic habits.

## "FUNDAMENTAL" APPROACH TO THE BASSOON

I teach the "fundamental" range of the bas-

Illustration 2 shows the order in which notes are introduced. While the first lesson typically includes all the notes of the F major scale and the lower pentachords of G major and Bb major, I adjust the amount of material given in each lesson to the student's level of development. With very beginners, it is often advisable to teach only the first five notes in the first lesson. Proper hand position is most easily established starting with C2 because this fingering allows

the student to feel secure about holding the bassoon. It is also the easiest note on which to work with embouchure and support because higher notes will at first tend to be very flat, and lower notes will be more cumbersome to initiate.

find that the lowest notes are headed UP the instrument physically, because in the fingering patterns of the other woodwinds, the lowest notes appear in roughly the same place as our E1. By working to achieve dexterity in the pedal register, the left hand has already become

Lesson 1 (F major, G major and Bb major - lower pentachord)

Lesson 2 (F chromatic)

Lesson 3 (C major)

Lesson 4 (C chromatic)

Lesson 5 (Bb chromatic)

Illustration 2

I teach only standard fingerings at first, except for the rare instance that a note simply can't be produced on a particular instrument without an alternate or "shade" fingering. Ideally, when I introduce "trick" fingerings, the student understands that many notes have several fingering options, and that the choice of a particular fingering is dependent upon many variables. It is important to find a balance between insistence upon "correct" fingerings and the flexibility to adapt to alternate options "on demand" or as needed. At the beginning stages, standard fingerings are easier to grasp from an acoustical standpoint.

When I teach an "inflected" fingering for the first time, I use the letter name that would correspond to the most similar "white" note. For example, forked Eb is a modification of the E2 fingering, and so I would not initially refer to it as D#. However, it is easier to remember the fingering for Eb1 as D# because a key is added to the D fingering to produce this note. I've found that this approach locks in the finger patterns quickly, and at the same time it establishes the fact that each fingering has more than one letter name.

One of the more daunting aspects of the bassoon is the amount of work that is done by the left hand. This is due partly to the requirements for the middle register, of course, but it starts in the pedal register. Most students come to the bassoon from other woodwind instruments and have learned to associate the lowest notes with the right hand, furthest DOWN the instrument. It is confusing at first to

accustomed to the independent motion of the thumb that will be crucial to the future development of clean middle register technique.

In the fundamental range it is easy to observe and conceptualize that as the tube is "lengthened" via the closing of tone holes, the pitches get progressively lower, and the idea that the tube must be entirely closed is firmly established. A leak from a misplaced finger will produce some sort of an undesirable result, as will leaks from faulty pads. The student who understands this concept is beginning to develop an ability to "troubleshoot;" approaching problem notes in a logical way rather than contorting the body to compensate for inadequate finger technique or faulty equipment.

Obviously it is fairly easy to take this approach with a very beginner, but I do this with *all* of my students; *especially* those who have more experience but have not developed clean middle register technique and facility of fingerings in the fundamental range. Here is another place where that carefully crafted relationship with the band director comes into play. Intermediate level, self-taught students arrive with untrained left hands. They've been squeezing out notes above the staff because beginning band methods are designed to work for all instruments, often to the detriment of some.

These students are put "on restriction" from all notes outside of the fundamental range. I have assured the band director that this is a necessary part of the student's development, and he trusts me (because I'm the bassoon

jock, remember?). The student now plays all the notes on the page, but those that are outside of the approved range are transposed down an octave. This practice serves multiple purposes:

1. While focusing on developing embouchure control, tone production and fingering patterns, the student is *forgetting how to play in the middle register*. It is easier to retrain habits that have not been reinforced recently.
2. The student is learning to transpose! This is the starting place for this skill, which is obviously one of great benefit, but often overlooked for bassoonists.
3. The student is becoming aware of the musical phrase, making decisions about *where* to begin the *8ve basso* and where to return to the specified octave. Illustration 3 shows this process, with phrase A as the original notation. Merely playing specific notes an octave lower (as in phrase B) would distort the musical line. Phrase C is the correct solution for the student who is "on restriction."

A.

B.

C.

## EXTENDING THE RANGE: INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS

When I introduce the middle register, I do so with exercises I have designed to reinforce the new techniques in a step-by-step manner before they are required in printed music. Articles by **Norman Herzberg**<sup>1</sup> and **Bob Williams**<sup>2</sup> discuss in detail the necessity of this approach to left-hand technique. Terry Ewell<sup>3</sup> outlines similar exercises in "Teaching the Beginning Bassoonist" in Volume 23, Number 2 of *the Double Reed*.

With beginners I teach the use of the half-

hole and speaker keys as integral components of the fingering rather than as independent techniques. With intermediate students who have been playing in the middle register without benefit of good left-hand technique, the task is more complicated and depends in large measure on training the student to listen for the cracks, grunts, growls and squeaks that result when left-hand technique is neglected. The student's reticence to apply the new techniques is mostly due to the fact that s/he has learned to filter these extraneous noises out and simply doesn't hear them. When this is the case, a tape recorder can be an effective ally.

Once the student has mastered the pedal, low and middle registers (Bb1 through d3) the higher notes are introduced in small groups of related fingerings. When her range has extended to g3, we begin vibrato exercises. I teach abdominal vibrato as outlined by Arthur Weisberg<sup>4</sup> in *The Art of Wind Playing*. Some students have trouble conceptualizing this skill, and I have found the diagrams and discussion in Fanie Jooste's<sup>5</sup> *The Technique of Bassoon Playing* to be very helpful for these students.

At this point I also use the first eight exercises of the scale supplement found in the Weissenborn *Practical Method* to expand the concept and practice of transposition, and as a preliminary step toward tenor clef. These exercises are read in the original key and up a fifth, preparing the student to be able to read the notes at the lower end of the tenor clef as well as those from C3 on up.

Tenor clef is introduced when the student has acquired a three-octave chromatic range. For the first assignment dealing with the new clef, the student transcribes an exercise from bass clef into tenor clef. The first page of Weissenborn Lesson XXV is well suited for this purpose. The exercise is mastered in bass clef before the student attempts to read it in the new clef, which is less daunting because by now the student has already been using the scale supplement section to practice transposition. Her memory of the exercises in their original notation helps to secure her association of the same pitches with their new notation. As command of the upper register advances, the Milde Scale studies provide further reinforcement of reading skills and technical facility.

## REPERTOIRE

For beginners through advanced intermediate players, I have had the most consistent results using the Weissenborn<sup>6</sup> *Practical Method*

for the Bassoon. This book supplies sufficient material for the reinforcement of both musical fundamentals and technical skills before venturing into the middle range. In addition, the duets that accompany each lesson are crafted to work in the context of that particular lesson. Duets are an integral element of each lesson and provide the perfect opportunity to work on intonation, tone production, collaborative playing, etc. I have also found that students look forward to the duet at the end of each lesson as a reward that is eagerly anticipated.

Engaging the student on a musical level must occur simultaneously with teaching technical skills, and I am always looking for supplemental material to meet that need. Etudes by Ozi and Satzenhofer, for example, provide opportunities to explore melodic constructs beyond those offered by Weissenborn. It is unfortunate that the cost of the Seltmann and Angerhofer<sup>7</sup> *Das Fagott* series is prohibitive for most students because there is a wealth of material in different styles by different composers contained therein. A good alternative is Alan Hawkins<sup>8</sup> *Melodious and Progressive Etudes*, which I frequently use with students who are burning through the Weissenborn. The scale, arpeggio and interval exercises in these two volumes are great technique builders for the highly motivated student.

I am happy to recommend Michael Curtis<sup>9</sup> *New Millennium Bassoon Method* for its fresh melodies in various styles (waltz, swing, jazz, klezmer, pop and funk), as well as terrific rhythm training exercises. Those who prefer to teach the middle register at an earlier phase in the student's development may well find that this new method can replace the Weissenborn as the primary method book. Those who are seeking supplemental materials for the approach I've outlined will find mixed meters, asymmetric structures and harmonic idioms that go well beyond the musical vocabulary of the early-to-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

There is a good amount of solo repertoire published for students at this level in many collections and single editions. Most states in the U.S. publish lists of "approved" and graded contest literature. Daryl Durran's<sup>10</sup> article "User Friendly Bassoon Tunes" is an excellent resource for solos. My choices for solos are tailored to the student's range and level of musical development, taste and sophistication. As a rule I do *not* teach K191 to high school students. They will live with this work for the rest of their lives, and for good or ill, they will also live with their earliest attempts still

ringing in their ears and directing their muscle memory!

Be creative about discovering the literature that exists *beyond* Mozart, and validate that literature for your students by performing it yourself. It is all too easy for students to infer that the pieces they are playing are not worthy to be performed on their musical merits if you won't consider playing them yourself. If that inference is correct, it is your responsibility to find accessible literature that is also musically valid. One of the most gratifying experiences I've had has been to work with composers to augment the available repertoire.

## THEORY

All along the way the student has been learning to identify key areas, harmonic patterns and formal structures. Regardless of the student's future aspirations, a basic understanding of tonal theory should be developing alongside technical facility.

Let's assume that in two to three years of continuous private study the student has progressed into Weissenborn's *Fifty Advanced Studies*. By this time she should be aware of and able to name key areas and harmonies. While chord function is probably beyond the student's grasp at this point, chord identification is not, and the ability to see and understand that certain groups and patterns comprise certain harmonies is analogous to reading words and sentences rather than sounding out individual letters. If it isn't the private teacher's job to teach this level of functional literacy, to whom does it fall? The middle school band director typically does not have time to teach theory, but you have all the time in the world. Students will learn what you teach.

If the student does aspire to a career in music, it is important to do anything you can to be certain that these fundamentals are firmly established before the college audition process begins. I often use programmed texts to supplement the information taught within the context of lessons: *Scales, Intervals, Keys and Triads* by John Clough<sup>11</sup> and *Basic Materials in Tonal Music* by Paul O. Harder<sup>12</sup> are two excellent examples of such texts. But regardless of the student's career choice, his understanding of its structure and symmetry will enhance his enjoyment of music, and his reading skills will advance in direct proportion to his grasp of theoretical concepts.

Theory is not inherently tedious! Find ways to connect theoretical constructs to real

music. YOU know it's a dominant seventh chord; why shouldn't your student? If you sing the "ice cream" call from Professor Harold Hill's THINK method in *The Music Man*, the connection between the "dry" theoretical construct and the living reality of that combination of sounds will spark his understanding and imagination.

## REEDS

Every student, at some point in the first year of lessons, observes the evolution of *arundo donax* from tube cane to finished reed. From the earliest days of study we have started every lesson with reed diagnosis and adjustment. I have explained reed nomenclature, mechanics and the adjustments being made during this part of the lesson, introducing and developing various concepts along the way.

I have several prerequisites that must be met before the formal study of reed making begins. The student will have a set, almost ritualized and firmly established practice regimen. It takes every bit as much time to practice the bassoon as it does to practice any other instrument in order to achieve mastery. Students easily fall prey to the habit of robbing reed-making time from their already limited practice time. Every effort must be made to avoid this! Also, the student (or his parents) will have demonstrated an understanding of the necessity to keep several good reeds on hand at all times. The willingness to accept the expense associated with a healthy reed box is a must for one about to invest in the necessary tools and equipment a reed maker requires.

If these criteria are met, it should follow that learning this skill will be a practical endeavor for the student. I try not to use the study of reed making as a substitute for flagging interest and commitment to practice. Adequate reeds can be purchased today more readily than ever before, whereas time invested in reed making might really be better reserved for other pursuits. That said, I begin the study of reed making from the end and work backwards, and most students do learn at least how to adjust working reeds.

From the beginning, the student collects dead reeds, saving them for later use. Now the time has come to resurrect them. The first reed making assignment is to draw the silhouettes of several reeds. Certain characteristics will become apparent during this process, and at the same time the artist will be developing a "reed maker's eye." Next she practices using

the mandrel, knife, plaque and files on these reeds, learning how to manipulate the tools to remove cane smoothly and efficiently before progressing to trimming new reeds.

As the student develops the manual dexterity to control her tools, she begins to adjust the reeds she is currently using. She keeps a notebook and records the problem, the adjustment she made, and the result so that she eventually gathers enough of her own data to make appropriate choices about what works. This personal experience of the results of her actions is more effective than any number of urgings from me about where to scrape for a sharp Eb.

Continuing the reverse order, trimming the reed begins with applying a final scrape to a reed that already has an initial scrape. This is as far as most of my high school students get with reed making. Depending upon how early this process was started, many of the more serious students learn to trim blanks, and some of them actually play on reeds they have formed from gouged, shaped and profiled cane. As with all aspects of the learning process, there is an appropriate time to introduce reed making, and this time should be adjusted to the individual student's progress, interest and development.

## NURTURING THE YOUNG BASSOONIST: NEW MUSIC FOR BASSOON SHEPHERD'S PLY (1998) ROGER ZAHAB

Shepherd's Ply was written 25 - 27 December 1998 for composer Orianna Webb as a New Year's present. Webb's instrument is the bassoon and I couldn't resist using it in this bucolic atmosphere, even though shepherds are more often known for their flute-playing. The first performance was given by Renee Dee, bassoon, and Robert Frankenberg, piano on 24 June 1999 at the College of Wooster, Ohio. -- RZ

Roger Zahab has written much chamber, vocal and orchestral music in addition to work in dance, theater and video. Recent recordings have been made of *Doubles Keening* by the Pennsylvania Quintet (Centaur), *Fall/Return* by guitarist James Marron on a CD entitled *Spring Rising*, *Personal Dances* by the composer, violin and Eric Moe, piano (label TBA) and *your offending kiss* by Solaris (Capstone). Other works have recently been performed in Rio de Janeiro, Bangkok, London, Lima (Peru) and throughout Italy and Switzerland. As a violinist he has given more than 100 premieres of works by such com-

posers as John Cage, David Macbride, Steven Mackey, Ursula Mamlok, Eric Moe, J.N. Kwabena Nketia, Dennis Riley, Tison Street, Orianna Webb and Christian Wolff and has recorded some of them for the Truemedica, Centaur and Koch International Classics labels. His version of John Cage's Thirteen Harmonies for violin and keyboard instrument is published by C.F.Peters Corporation.

Zahab was awarded the first Louis Lane Scholarship (given by the Akron Symphony Orchestra) in 1978 and received an Ohio Arts Council Individual Artist Grant in 1995. A devoted teacher, he created the Palisades Quartet project composed of students aged 12-16 to explore ways to foster creative and independent thinking and performance. He taught at Mount Union College from 1993-99 and was founder/director of the New Music Group at the University of Akron for thirteen seasons. Zahab has been Director of the Orchestra and violin instructor at the University of Pittsburgh since 1993 and in 1999 became a full-time Lecturer.

**MOSAIC: FOUR PIECES FOR BASSOON AND PIANO (2001)**  
**ORIANNA WEBB**

The four pieces that make up Mosaic were inspired by Coleman Barks' translations of the poems of the 13th century Persian mystic Rumi. The translations capture both heartbreaking beauty and playful humor, often with little boundary in between. Movement 1 relates to a poem about how each person is like a reed cut from the reedbed, singing because it longs to be reunified with its source. The second movement is inspired by a poem about identification with the noise created by the busy bustle of human life. Movement 3 evokes the intimate interior of a sheltering space. "The Turn," movement 4, is a response to the ecstatic dance of the dervishes which I was privileged to view in Cairo, Egypt. – OW

Orianna Webb's music has been hailed as "abound[ing] in urgent and mysterious detail" (Cleveland Plain Dealer) and as "work of uncompromising energy, both rhythmically athletic and sensuously lyrical" (Cleveland Free Times). Webb is a native of Akron, Ohio and has studied composition with Margaret Brouwer, John Eaton, and Roger Zahab. In 1999 she attended the Summer Composition Program at La Schola Cantorum in Paris, France, where she studied with Samuel Adler, Philip Lasser, and Narcis Bonet. Webb's piece Being and Becoming, com-

missioned by the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra, was premiered by that group in Severance Hall. Her piece Sequence Dreams for violin, marimba and glass instruments was commissioned by the Akron Art Museum and has been performed by the University of Akron New Music Group/Daedalus, the CIM New Music Ensemble, the Music2000 Festival, and the Mostly Modern Chamber Music Society. Webb has received the Victor Herbert/ASCAP Award (First Place), the Devora Nadworney Prize for Vocal Writing from the National Federation of Music Clubs, the Donald Erb Prize for Composition, and the Olga and Paul Menn Foundation Prize for Composition. Orianna teaches composition and music theory in the CIM Preparatory Division and will be going to the Yale School of Music to continue her studies this fall. Orianna studied piano with Nicolas Constantinidis and Ethel Burke, and bassoon with Georgia Peebles.

**SONATA FOR BASSOON AND PIANO, "AUTUMN" (1997)**  
**MATTHEW HERMAN**

This sonata is part of a seasonal cycle of sonatas for woodwind instruments. In these works, I have set out to describe moods and feelings that I associate with the seasons rather than concrete details. Autumn is represented as a season of reflection. The bassoon's timbre fits this mood, even as the piece alternates between plaintive and playful emotions. A twelve-tone row was created to generate all of the melodic material for this piece. However, the accompanimental material is not bound to this row. Instead, it focuses on the intervals of the minor seventh and major second. Only in the middle section are all pitches based on the row. – MH

Matthew Herman is a Philadelphia-based composer, also serving as an instructor of music theory and composition at West Chester University. He holds degrees from The College of Wooster and Bowling Green State University and is currently finishing a doctorate at Temple University. His teachers have included Jack Gallagher, Marilyn Shrude, Maurice Wright and Samuel Adler, with masterclasses by Don Freund, Claude Baker and Karel Husa. In 1996, he was featured in a "New and Emerging Composers" concert given by the Cleveland Chamber Symphony. Composing for a variety of ensembles and soloists, Mr.Herman's pieces have been performed in such cities as Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia and Dublin (Ireland).

## 4 REEDS, 8 LIPS, AND 42 1/2 FEET, THREE BASSOONS AND CONTRABASSOON (1998)

### JEROME MISKELL

After her woodwind quintet, *Tapestry*, premiered a piece of mine, I approached bassoonist Renee Dee about the possibility of writing a bassoon quartet for the coming John Miller Bassoon Symposium. Renee enthusiastically endorsed my offer. Originally, I intended to compose a much leaner and sterner work somewhat modeled on the second movement of the John Adams Chamber Symphony. Since I had been given the opportunity to write for some of the world's leading bassoonists I decided that I would be better served to write an accessible, somewhat jazzy work, with instant appeal. Hopefully, I succeeded. Nonetheless, the resultant work is somewhat removed from my usual style. This piece was made possible in part by a grant from the Ohio Arts Council. – JM

The New Jersey native, Jerome Miskell, D.M.A., University of South Carolina, currently holds an Assistant Professor of Music post at Mount Union College where he instructs musicianship courses, music technology, viola, string ensembles, and music electives. A section violist with the Akron Symphony Orchestra, and an active free-lance violist and composer, his compositions have been enthusiastically received throughout the United States with orchestral performances by the Akron Symphony, Pittsburgh University Chamber Orchestra, and the Conductor's Institute Orchestra. Miskell's growing reputation for craftsmanship and accessibility has generated an increasing demand for his acoustic and electronic works. His latest composition, a symphonic band work, was commissioned by Kappa Psi, honorary band fraternity. A long-time champion of new music, having premiered countless works, Miskell has performed with the Canton Symphony, the Erie Philharmonic, the South Carolina Chamber Philharmonic and Chamber Orchestra, the Conductor's Institute Orchestra, the Ohio Ballet Chamber Orchestra (Principal Viola), the Wildwood Festival Orchestra (Principal Viola and Guest Artist), the Daedalus String Quartet, the University of Akron New Music Ensemble, the Cleveland Composer's Guild, and two Cleveland stops of the Robert Plant/Jimmy Page tour in front of 26,000 screaming fans at Gund Arena.

Jerome Miskell is a recipient of numerous awards and commissions and his works are published by NEW MUSIC Publications and the SCI Journal. He is also working on a multimedia ear training web site.

## COMPOSERS' CONTACT INFORMATION

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## ENDNOTES

1. Norman Herzberg, "Years of Ignorance, Neglect and Denial: The Importance of Speaker Key Use on the Bassoon," *The Double Reed* 18/3 (Idaho Falls, ID: Falls Printing Co., 1995), 53-63.
2. Robert Williams, "Bassoon Basics for the Flicking Bassoonist!", *The Double Reed* 18/2 (Idaho Falls, ID: Falls Printing Co., 1995), 41-47.
3. Terry Ewell, "Teaching the Beginning Bassoonist" *The Double Reed* 23/2 (Idaho Falls, ID: Falls Printing Co., 2000), 35-43.
4. Arthur Weisberg, *The Art of Wind Playing* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1975; Minneapolis: SATCO, 1993).
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7. Werner Seltmann and Gunter Angerhofer, *Das Fagott*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1976).
8. Alan Hawkins, *Melodious and Progressive Etudes* (Lawrence, Kansas: Bocal Music).
9. Michael Curtis, *New Millennium Bassoon Method* (Oregon: MSS Publishing, 2001).
10. Daryl Durran, "User Friendly Bassoon Tunes," *The Double Reed* 22/1 (Idaho Falls, ID: Falls Printing Co., 1999), 63-65.
11. John Clough, *Scales, Intervals, Keys, Triads, Rhythm & Meter* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999).
12. Paul O. Harder, *Basic Materials in Music Theory* (Prentice Hall: 1999).

### About the author...

**Renee Anthony Dee** serves on the faculties of the University of Akron and Ashland University. She is a member of the Akron and Ashland Symphony Orchestras, and has taught at Bowling Green State University, the College of Wooster, the Cleveland Music School Settlement and Baldwin-Wallace College (Preparatory Department). She has premiered works for the bassoon by Roger Davidson, Brian Dykstra, Matthew Herman, Jerome Miskell, Orianna Webb and Roger Zahab, and has performed at conferences of the International Double Reed Society in Tallahassee, Buenos Aires and Morgantown. Renee lives in Akron with husband Richard (clarinet) and children Steven (computer) and Emily (violin).