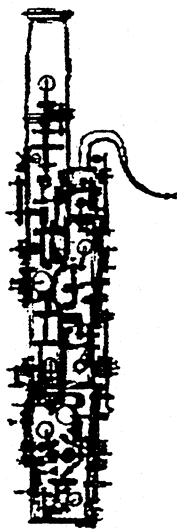


The Sixtieth Annual  
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Chicago, Illinois

## **Bring On the Beautiful Bassoon**

*A Teaching Guide for the Non-Bassoonist*



Many music educators are mystified with the bassoon and fear that their knowledge of this beautiful instrument is inadequate. As a result, student bassoonists are frequently neglected, if not ignored. By gaining a basic understanding of the instrument and adopting a confident, “can do” attitude, our young bassoonists will develop and flourish.

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## **I. Off to a Great Start: Selecting the Student Bassoonist**

- **Prefer starting on bassoon, rather than switching from another instrument at a later point**

### **Important qualities to consider:**

- **Genuine strong desire to play the bassoon**
- **Patience and willingness to deal with the many unique challenges in playing the bassoon**
- **Strong academic background**
- **Self motivation/Self confidence**
- **Physical considerations**
- **Financial commitment: Parents and students must be aware of the expenses involved in bassoon playing**

## **II. Reeds**

- **Bassoonists must be accountable for their own reeds, and understand basic reed adjusting procedures**
- **Own basic reed adjusting equipment: pliers, plaque, sandpaper, knife, holding mandrel, end cutting nippers**
- **Reed Care: Use good reed case and soaking container**
- **Eventual goal is to make their own reeds, through guidance of a private teacher**
- **No reed is perfect/No two reeds are alike/Reeds can be fickle**

### **Basic wire adjustments:**

- **Open tip by squeezing top wire from the sides: This will result in a darker sound, raised pitch, and more resistance.**
- **Close tip by squeezing top wire from top to bottom: This will result in a brighter sound, lowered pitch, and less resistance.**
- **Open tip by squeezing middle wire from top to bottom: This will result in a brighter sound, lowered pitch, and more resistance.**
- **Close tip by squeezing middle wire from the sides: This will result in a darker sound, raised pitch, and less resistance.**

### Other Basic Reed Adjustments:

**Reed too resistant: Go over entire reed lightly with 600 grit (or finer) sandpaper.**

**Reed too soft: Cut back the tip slightly (1/32") with end cutting nippers.**

- **A more extensive guide can be found in William Spencer's The Art of Bassoon Playing, Summy-Birchard Co., Evanston, Illinois, 1969**

### III. Bassoon Basics

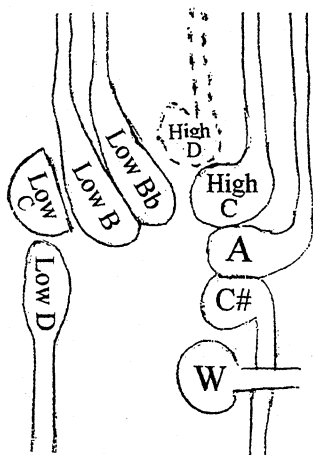
- **Assembly/Care: case on the floor, avoid handling by the keys, tenons properly fitted, seat strap, swabbing, adequate time**
- **Provide a good "bassoon chair:" flat seat, back, side, proper height**
- **Posture: bring the bassoon to the player, centered diagonally across torso**
- **Hand crutch/Reverse low E key guard**
- **Bocal care: emphasize importance, fragility, and expense**
- **Hand position: curved and relaxed fingers, close to the keys/tone holes; keep right hand thumb centered over low E key**
- **Embouchure: 1. Lips over teeth (should not see the "vermillion border")**
  2. **Take in enough reed (upper lip touching top wire)**
  3. **Increase natural overbite**
- **Increased air support for middle C, and F, above the staff**

**Balance well set embouchure with proper air support to produce a beautiful sound**

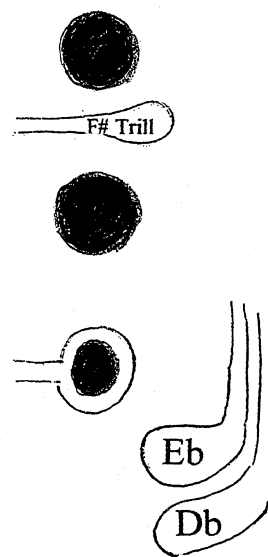
#### IV. Fingerings/Technique

- Use a good fingering chart:  
Eagle Handbook of Bassoon Fingerings: Jane Orzel
- Know the names of the keys (see below)
- Whisper key use: Bb below the staff to G# in the staff;  
also High G, G#
- Half-hole technique: F#, G, G# (top of the staff)  
G, G# (above the staff)
- Flicking: Timing, coordination and patience are critical in  
developing this important skill
- Scales, arpeggios, etudes: Weissenborn Method
- Special fingerings (see page 5)

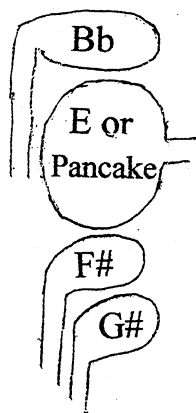
Left Thumb



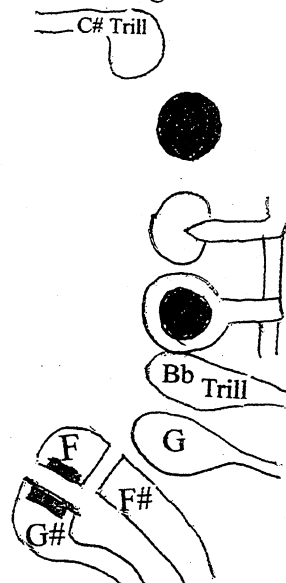
Left Hand Fingers



Right Thumb



Right Hand Fingers



# Special Fingerings

The two most problematic notes on the bassoon:

Diagram showing the fingering for G# and Bb. The G# fingering is labeled 'W' and the Bb fingering is labeled 'Bb'. Both diagrams show a vertical line with five circles representing keys, with specific circles filled to indicate finger placement.

Diagram showing the fingering for E and Eb. The E fingering is labeled 'W' and the Eb fingering is labeled 'Eb'. Both diagrams show a vertical line with five circles representing keys, with specific circles filled to indicate finger placement.

## Helpful Fingerings

Diagram showing helpful fingerings for G# and Bb. The G# fingering is labeled 'W' and the Bb fingering is labeled 'Bb'. Both diagrams show a vertical line with five circles representing keys, with specific circles filled to indicate finger placement.

Diagram showing helpful fingerings for G# and F. The G# fingering is labeled 'G#' and the F fingering is labeled 'F'. Both diagrams show a vertical line with five circles representing keys, with specific circles filled to indicate finger placement.

Diagram showing helpful fingerings for Eb and F. The Eb fingering is labeled 'Eb' and the F fingering is labeled 'F'. Both diagrams show a vertical line with five circles representing keys, with specific circles filled to indicate finger placement.

## Flicking guide

Diagram showing the flicking guide for the bassoon. It includes a staff with notes G#, Bb, E, and Eb, and five corresponding fingering diagrams below. The diagrams are labeled: Flick A Key, Flick A Key, Flick High C Key, Flick High C Key, and Flick High C Key. Arrows above the staff indicate the direction of the flick for each note.

Diagram showing the fingering for the resonance key (Eb). The diagram shows a vertical line with five circles representing keys, with the top circle filled to indicate finger placement.

Add the low Eb key from E above the staff, up to the top of the bassoon's range for added color and uniformity of timbre. This key is often referred to as the "resonance key".

## V. Suggested References

- The Art of Bassoon Playing by William Spencer, Summy-Birchard, Evanston, Illinois, 1969
- Teacher's Guide to the Bassoon by Homer Pence, Conn-Selmer Inc., order no. AV4206, 1963
- Let's Play Bassoon by Hugo Fox, Fox Products Corporation, South Whitley, Indiana
- Bassoon Reed Making: A Basic Technique by Christopher Weait, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. New York: McGinnis and Marx, 2000
- Bassoon Reed Making by Mark Popkin and Loren Glickman, Evanston, Illinois, The Instrumentalist, 1987
- Eagle Handbook of Bassoon Fingerings by Jane Orzel, Posolmi Publishing, Moss Landing, California
- Master Solos Intermediate Level edited by Leonard Sharrow, Hal Leonard Publishing
- Bassoon Solos edited by William Waterhouse, Chester Music
- International Double Reed Society, [www.idrs.colorado.edu](http://www.idrs.colorado.edu)
- [www.bassoon.org](http://www.bassoon.org)
- Bassoon Recordings: Milan Turkovic, Klauss Thunemann, Bernard Garfield, David McGill, Leonard Sharrow,

Bassoon Art on cover page, courtesy of Eric Arbiter, Associate Principal Bassoonist,  
Houston Symphony Orchestra