

## Bassoon All-State Comments, 2023-24

### Junior Bassoon: Audition Solo 1C, Moderato

This solo should sound graceful and playful. A key to achieving this character is articulation: make sure to follow all of the printed articulations — slurs, bouncy staccatos, and accents — carefully as you prepare. When tonguing after a slur, don't stop your sound with a heavy tongue, which will halt the flow of the music. For example, in the first bar, sustain the G on beat three fully into the eighth-notes that follow. Rhythm also helps establish character. Important here is bar 6: make sure these dotted-eighth / sixteenth rhythms don't sound like triplets by putting the sixteenths very close to the next beat.

You might notice that the written dynamics here generally follow the contour of the melody: passages that rise crescendo, and higher notes are often louder than lower ones. You should still shape the music this way even when crescendo and diminuendo markings are not written in your part. Notes and musical gestures are never "static," but rather are always going somewhere. Keep in mind that your tone should stay round and beautiful even when you are playing softly!

Flicking (see my general notes about this, above) for the As, Bs, and Cs at the top of the staff is vitally important to allow these pitches to speak freely and at a full dynamic without cracking. Get used to holding the flick keys down when playing these notes. This is especially important in bar 7, for the As in bar 13, and in the first measure of both "a" and "b" endings. Another fingering must here is to use your "resonance key" (the top key under your left-hand pinky, also called the low Eb key) for improved sound and intonation every time you play G at the top of the staff. In addition, make sure you play both this note and the F# in measure 6 with a proper half-hole so they speak beautifully.

You might notice that this etude falls into a regular pattern of phrases that are four-bars long. Keep this in mind when determining breaths. You probably do not need to breathe, for example, each time there is a rest! Make a breathing plan that fits the music once it is up to your goal tempo and follow that plan carefully when practicing so good, well-timed breathing becomes automatic. Too many breaths can cause you to feel uncomfortable; I'd suggest limiting yourself to one very two measures, max.

Good luck, and feel free to contact me if you have any questions!

### Clinic Bassoon: Audition Solo 2C, Allegretto / Sempre cantabile / Allegretto

This etude is a study in contrasts, between the bold, energetic *Allegretto* material in D minor at the beginning and end and the sweet, songful F major *Sempre cantabile* waltz in the middle. This makes the overall form ABA. I would advise practicing the A and B sections separately first, making sure the different tempos and characters are fully installed before putting them together.

The contrast between *mezzo piano* and *forte* dynamics in the con anima sections of this etude is important. Just as important, however, is that an animated, confident feeling is established even in the softer bits. Soft does not mean the music should lack in intensity and energy!

A number of low Ds, mostly forte, anchor the Allegretto material in this etude. This can be a difficult note to play in tune. Be sure to really drop your jaw and think of an “uh” vowel to lower the pitch and keep the sound full. The Ds above the staff, two octaves higher, can be helped by flicking the high D key, four thumb keys above the whisper key, if your bassoon has one. Certainly, proper flicking technique (see my general comments about this, above) will help all of the As, B-flats, and Cs at the top of the staff speak clearly.

The cantabile waltz, in 3/4 time, is a chance to showcase the lyrical side of your playing. Don't start this so softly that it feels or sounds uncomfortable! Sing through each phrase, and if you can, try to feel this in one beat per bar to give it a sense of motion. While the phrasing here is regular, in four-bar units, phases 3 and 4 (measures 25-28 and the pickup to 29 through 32) can be “elided.” That is to say, they can be connected musically so the end of one becomes the beginning of the next. I try to emphasize this in my recording by fully sustaining the C into the B-flat in measure 28 and not breathing from measure 27 until the end of bar 31.

Good luck, and feel free to contact me if you have any questions!

### **Senior Bassoon: Audition solo 3C, Adagio / Allegro con fuoco**

This is a demanding solo, with a large range and a chance to showcase both lyrical, sustained playing in the opening *Adagio* (marked *appassionato*, “passionately”) and dramatic passagework in the quick, fiery *Allegro con fuoco*. Start slowly and give yourself plenty of time to work out the difficult chunks in both sections of the piece. While I recorded the *Allegro* at the marked tempo, you should not feel like playing it this fast is a must. Play it at a tempo you can play it cleanly; if you give it plenty of energy, even a much slower tempo will sound quite dramatic!

Don't allow the downward leaps in measures 1 and 2 and large upward slurs in bars 3 and 5 stop the motion of these phrases. (Vibrato can help carry these phrases along too – use it if you can!) I try to connect the eighths in beat two of the first two bars as much as possible – this takes a well-timed legato tongue on the low notes – as well as really blowing through the leaps in measures 3 and 5. The A in measure 3 absolutely must be flicked to speak cleanly (see my general notes on flicking, above).

It is always crucial to plan your breathing and practice that plan regularly once the entire etude can be played at or near your goal tempos. Make sure you have enough air to make the phrase and dynamics you want, rather than simply breathing whenever you run out of air! This may necessitate, for example, a breath after measures 2, 3, and 4.

It often helps me play passagework like we find in the *Allegro* sections of this etude more cleanly to think of two things: rhythmic fingers and the idea that “fast notes should feel slow.” Feeling like your fingers are literally articulating the rhythm improves evenness and accuracy; feeling like the quick notes are moving slowly (while still playing in tempo, of course!) helps us not to rush, which is often the tendency in fast spots.

It will be absolutely vital to use a metronome to work up this piece (both slow and fast portions!). Choose your starting metronome tempo for various chunks by first learning and playing them very slowly *without* a metronome at a tempo that you can maintain without making errors and which feels easy, like you are totally on top of it. Then work upwards, keeping track of your tempos along the way. Lots of slow practice will be necessary – don’t try to go too fast, too soon!

A few fingering suggestions will complete my comments about this etude. First, always use your “resonance key” (the low E-flat key, or top key under your left-hand pinky) on half-hole G and ALL notes high E and above. Second, use your whisper key on high G (and high Ab, though none appear in this etude) to improve the sound and pitch of this note. Finally, if you find that your high As are sharp and you cannot lower them enough by keeping your embouchure round and throat open – you might think of singing an “uh” vowel as you play – try adding the B-flat key and second finger (middle finger) of your right hand.

Good luck, and feel free to contact me if you have any questions!