

*Essai sur la Musique Ancienne et moderne : Basson* / Essay on Old and Modern Music : Bassoon  
Pierre Cugnier (Paris, 1780), 323-343

Translated by Aaron Goler



Translator's Note: Cugnier's article contains many technical terms, only some of which are easily translated into the lexicon of 21<sup>st</sup>-century bassoonery. I have chosen to translate the vast majority of these according to the glossary from [historical-bassoon.ch](http://historical-bassoon.ch), which itself is largely based on that of James Kopp's *The Bassoon*.

## BASSOON

The bassoon<sup>1</sup> is a reeded musical wind instrument.

It is listed in the Encyclopedia<sup>2</sup> as the “bassoon oboe”<sup>3</sup>; presumably because this instrument was created as the bass of the oboe family after the crumhorn, which was the former bass oboe, fell out of usage.

Today in France it is known only by the name bassoon.

The Italians call it *Fagotto*, which in that language means bundle or packet, perhaps because the instrument forms a kind of bundle when disassembled and put in a bag; however, they give the same name to the serpent, another instrument, which does not look anything like a bassoon.

The bassoon serves to play bass parts, like the violoncello and contra-bass: it produces a sound which, by its reedy timbre, strengthens the sound of other instruments and melds with them. The bassoon can be used to great effect in musical pieces; it is for this reason that all orchestras employ them<sup>4</sup>.

Another essential property of the bassoon is the closeness between its sound and that of the human voice. Bassoon is very appropriate for accompanying voices, especially baritones, with which it has more rapport than with all others; bassoon also makes a very good effect in the genre of music which the Germans call Harmony Music, composed of two clarinets, two horns, and two bassoons. It can also be employed to great effect accompanying pieces arranged for the harp. Long experience has shown that this instrument carries a degree, if not of perfection, then at least propriety of use in nearly all genres of today’s music. One need only hear the virtuosos, those like Mr. Jadin<sup>5</sup>, Schubart<sup>6</sup>, Ritter<sup>7</sup>, and several others, to be persuaded that this instrument is proper for playing concertos, and other genres of music.

Here below is a drawing of this instrument in three different forms: the first shows in detail the different pieces from which the bassoon is composed and the manner in which they should be fitted one inside the other to assemble the instrument, which one must do in order to play it.

The second figure represents the inside of the bassoon cut in half to show the interior size of the instrument from one end to the other. We can also see the relationship between the bore, or internal canal, and the holes which are drilled exteriorly along its entire length to form the tones which it should produce.

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<sup>1</sup> *Basson*

<sup>2</sup> Diderot, 1772

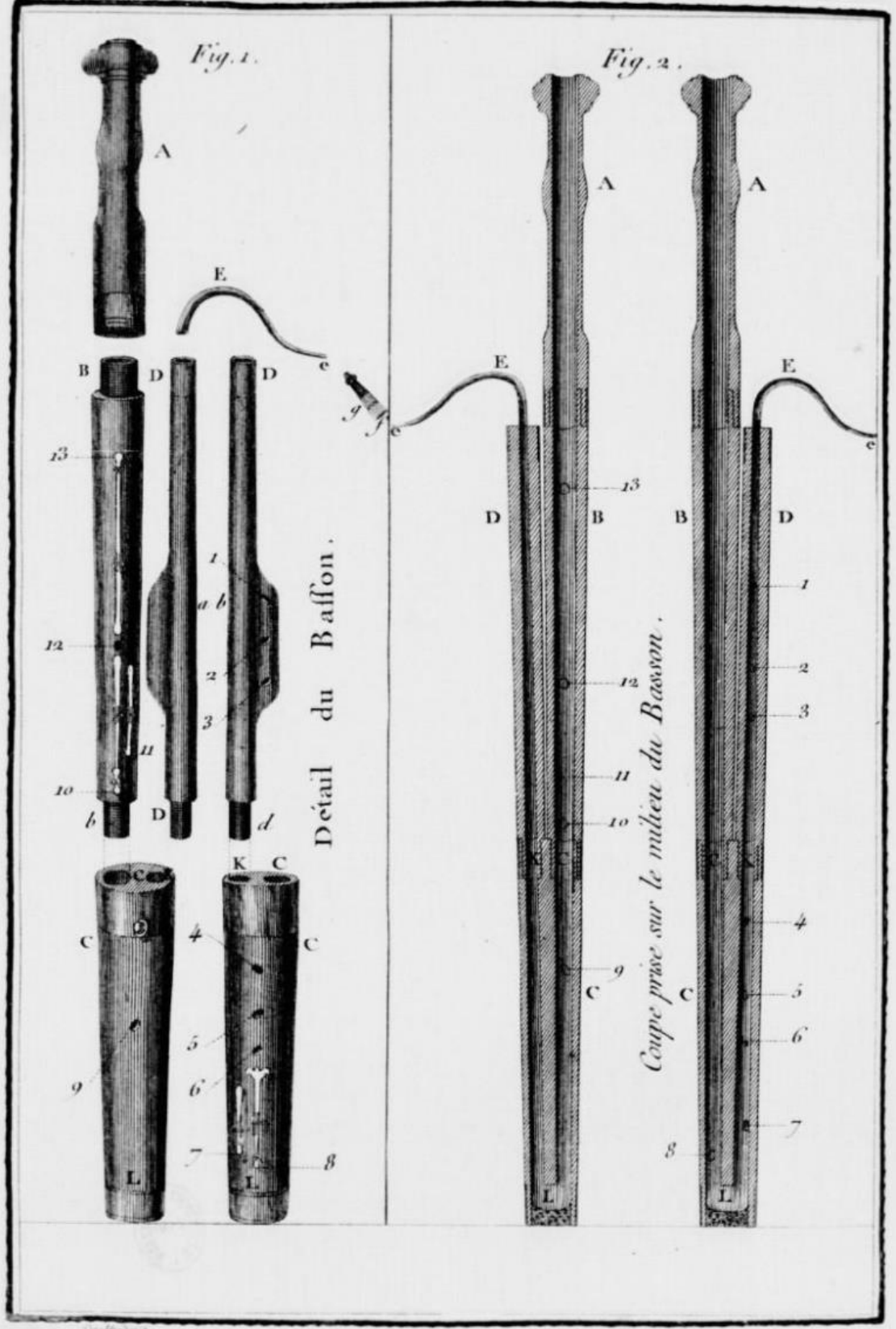
<sup>3</sup> *Basson de Hautbois*

<sup>4</sup> In both musical and economic senses.

<sup>5</sup> François Jadin, Louis XV’s bassoonist at Versailles and father of composer Hyacinthe Jadin. (Castinel, 1991)

<sup>6</sup> Possibly Christian Daniel Schubart (1739-1791), who praises the bassoon quite highly in his own writings.

<sup>7</sup> Georg Wenzel Ritter (1748-1808), a prominent bassoonist active in Mannheim.



The figure entitled *tablature du Basson*<sup>8</sup> shows [the instrument] fully assembled, as it should be for playing. It also indicates which holes one must open or close to make the scale of the bassoon through all its range—this is shown by the black or white dots marked on the lines leading to the bassoon’s holes.

### Explanation of Fig. 1

The bassoon is composed of four wooden pieces, marked in the figure as *A B C D*, which are perforated [by a bore] along their entire length.

The first, marked *D d*, is called the wing joint<sup>9</sup>; it is pierced internally by a bore which enlarges from north to south. Halfway down this piece is a shoulder, *ab*, which hugs a portion of the long joint<sup>10</sup> when the instrument is assembled. This shoulder is made so that the fingers of the left hand, which should hold this part of the bassoon, can easily cover this piece’s tone holes: 1, 2, 3. Without this shoulder, even the largest hand could not reach as far as these holes would be from each other. This can be demonstrated by observing the angle at which they communicate to the bore of this piece. The wing joint is illustrated facing two different directions; the first shows the position it should have when placed beside the long joint. When assembling the instrument, one places them both in the holes of the piece *C*, which is beneath them. The other illustration shows the angle tone holes 1, 2, 3 have to the bore. At the top end of the wing joint is the opening of the bore into which the bocal *E* is placed, as you will soon see.

The lower end of the wing joint carries a tenon, *d*, wrapped with string, to make an exact joining between this joint, which goes into bore hole *K* of piece *C*, which is called the [boot joint] or *culasse*<sup>11</sup>. The boot is pierced by two bore holes, *K C*; the first, *K*, receives the wing joint; and the second, *C*, which is larger, receives the long joint via tenon *b*.

The two bore holes of the boot span its entire length; bore *K* enlarges from north to south, and bore *C* on the contrary enlarges from south to north. These two holes communicate one to the other via *L*; such that they form a recurved tube. When the instrument is manufactured, the two bore holes *K C*, which go from one side of the boot to the other, are capped at *L* with a cork stopper to exactly close [that end of the boot]. Before resealing hole *L*, the partition separating the two bore holes is cut a little bit; *L* is sealed shut and is approximately equal to the opening of the two sides, so that the two bores *K C* form only one curved pipe in *L*. Ferrules or frets of brass or silver are added to the two ends of the boot so that it does not crack when we put the cork stopper into *L* and insert the wing and long joints into bore holes *K C*.

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<sup>8</sup> Found at the end of the treatise

<sup>9</sup> *La petite piece*

<sup>10</sup> *La grande piece B*

<sup>11</sup> *Culasse* is an archaic term for the lowest part of something, like the lower trunk of a tree or the base of a cannon. (CNRTL and [littre.org](http://littre.org))

The boot joint is pierced by six tone holes; the three marked 4, 5, 6, communicate to bore hole *K*, following the angle of the punctuated lines, which pertain to the opening of these holes. The hole marked 7 also communicates with bore *K*, and is closed by a key whose spring holds it closed over the hole, and which doesn't open until the little finger pushes on the touch<sup>12</sup> of the key. Contrarily, tone hole 8 corresponds to bore hole *C* and stays open, although it has a key. This key is composed of two principal parts, which are the shank and the flap<sup>13</sup>. The shank is hinged on a saddle<sup>14</sup>, where it is traversed by a pin or a screw, which leaves it free to move. The flap is also articulated on a saddle, by at least a screw which traverses the eyes [of the saddle]. These saddles are fixed to the body of the instrument by several screws which traverse them, and implant themselves into the body of the instrument. These saddles must be far enough removed from one another that the hook of the shank can be held in the ring of the flap. Beneath the touch of the shank is a spring that keeps it at height, so the hook of the shank is always kept down, as is the ring of the flap, whose leather is removed from the hole; but when the finger is held down on the touch of the shank, it raises the hook and ring of the flap and consequently lowers that same flap, whose leather is applied to the hole and closes it exactly.

The three keys which close holes 8, 10, and 13, are constructed in the same way; they do not differ except for the lengths of their shanks: that which closes hole 11 is the same as the one for hole 7—its spring holds [the pad] closed over the hole, and it does not open until the left thumb is applied to the touch of that key.

The long joint is pierced down its entire length by a bore hole which enlarges from south to north, and has tenons *B b* on either end. Tenon *b* which is wrapped in string and enters into boot hole *C*; the other, which is marked *B*, is also wrapped in string and receives the bell<sup>15</sup> *A* which is encircled on that end by a ferrule of brass or silver, whichever the keys and other ferrules are made from. The bell is pierced through its whole length by a bore hole which is the continuation of the one from the long joint.

This long joint is pierced by four holes, 10, 11, 12, 13, which communicate to the interior bore of the joint.

The holes marked 10 and 13 are closed with the keys we have already spoken about when pushing the thumb of the left hand on the touch of their shanks. Contrarily, hole 11 opens when that same finger is pushed on the touch of the key which covers it.

To the north end of the wing joint is added the bocal, which is a curved tube of brass or silver. The larger end of the bocal is made to enter the opening of piece *D* that is garnished with a ferrule, like all the pieces which receive other [pieces].

At end *e* of the bocal we add the reed *f*, which is composed of two blades of cane tied one over the other, [formed] on an iron rod matching the diameter of the bocal at *e*.

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<sup>12</sup> *La patte*

<sup>13</sup> *La bascule et la soupape*

<sup>14</sup> *Un tenon*

<sup>15</sup> *Le bonnet*

The end of that part *e* of the bocal is made to enter [the reed] in place of the iron rod which was used to form the reed, to the middle where another ligature of brass or wire, *g*, serves to contain the two blades of the reed, and to give it the necessary vibration.

*Figure 2* shows the interior of the bassoon: we can easily see that this instrument is a tube which is always growing from the end of the bocal *e*, until the bell *A*. We see that in *L* the curve of this tube has the spot where the two bore holes *K C* of the boot form only a single opening. The place that should be occupied by the cork stopper we put into *L* is after the line that ends the lower portion of *L* up to the lower extremity of piece *C*.

It is to make the instrument more manageable that someone decided to recurve it thus; its length from the tip of the bocal to the end of the bell measures eight feet<sup>16</sup>, divided into four because of the bend. The opening at the tip of the bocal can be at most the size of a lentil. The bell opening is the opposite end of the bore and measures 3.4 to 4 cm<sup>17</sup> in diameter. The tone holes are drilled along the length of this tube at distances and sizes corresponding with the pitches they should produce. These pitches are higher or lower, as the holes are more or less distant from the reed.

One can also see by the distance these holes have from one another inside the bassoon, that if they were to have the same distance on the exterior it would be impossible for the fingers to cover them; hence the practice of making a “shoulder” on the wing joint, so that the first three tone holes conform to ordinary hand placement and can be easily touched. The keys of the bassoon serve a similar function, as they facilitate opening and closing the holes to which they are fitted.

Although the length of the bassoon is fixed at eight feet, divided into four pieces, one should however note that a longer or shorter instrument will produce a lower or higher pitch. But because the pitch used today for all sorts of music, especially at the Concert Spirituel, is much higher than the diapason that was used when bassoons were invented [A≈392], it has been necessary for the length of the instrument to diminish proportionally to make a bassoon at the currently-used pitch; since it is not possible to play at high-pitch with a low-pitch instrument, nor to play low with a high one. One can however change the pitch of a bassoon, that is to say raise or lower it some, by means of a shorter-than-normal wing joint, a [shorter] bocal, and a shorter reed; but these equipment changes make no difference except to the notes that pertain to tone holes 1, 2, and 3 on the wing joint. As a result, these notes are susceptible to rising [sharp] and those pertaining to the rest of the instrument—which remains in an unchanged state—end up too low; such that it is nearly impossible to play in tune on such a bassoon, especially when going from one [register] to the other. To play in tune on [a bassoon], as with all other wind instruments, one hopes never to have to change pitch. Since an instrument, once adjusted to the agreed-upon pitch, is nearly

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<sup>16</sup> *Huit pieds*. The Old French *pied* (foot) was slightly longer than the British imperial measure of the same name, as were the units of the *pouce* (inch) and *ligne* (1/12 *pouce*). I have chosen to convert these latter units into their metric equivalents in the text, noting the original measure in footnotes, but retain the term “eight foot” as a useful proportional term. Note, however, that Cugnier’s eight feet are equivalent to approximately 8.5 imperial feet or 2.6 meters.

<sup>17</sup> 1 ¼ to 1 ½ *pouces*

invariable; it is for this reason that all the most famous virtuoso wind players never change their pitch when they play alone.

Bassoons that are made in eight-foot proportion and divided in four pieces, according to the old style, are suitable in Cathedrals, where—usually—the pitch of the organ is very low, as it used to be at l’Eglise des Innocents<sup>18</sup>, and as it still is at the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris and the Chapelle du Roi<sup>19</sup> at Versailles. These bassoons can also be of use at the Paris Opera, where they change the pitch when roles are lower or less high; so much so that the pitch is sometimes so low that all the wind instruments are necessarily out of tune because of the difficulty, nay the impossibility, of playing in tune with a too-high or too-low instrument.

Figure 3 shows a fully-assembled bassoon, as it would be for playing. One begins by attaching the instrument to one of the garment buttons<sup>20</sup> with a ribbon or cord, which is tied to the ring on the boot joint. The bassoon is held in front of oneself at a slight angle, so that the reed comes directly to the mouth; the left hand is then held over the middle part of the instrument where the large piece *B* is hugged [by the wing joint]; such that the thumb of this hand closes the twelfth hole, and the index, middle, and ring fingers of that hand close holes 1, 2, 3, of the swing joint. The thumb of the left hand which closes the twelfth hole, the one on the long joint, serves also to touch the two separated keys with which one closes the tenth and thirteenth holes, and the one for opening the eleventh hole, when that is necessary. This thumb must always be able to push on these two keys ten and thirteen to close them, and close the tenth hole.

As regards the right hand, which is held on the lower part of the instrument, the thumb must close the ninth hole, the right index the fourth, right middle the fifth, and ring finger of that hand on the sixth.

As for the little finger, it serves to touch the two keys of the seventh and eighth holes. Observe that when we touch that the seventh hole key, we open the hole, but conversely we close the eighth hole when we touch its key, because of the lever which precedes the valve.

After having placed the fingers thus, one blows through the reed in a manner which will be discussed below. But you should take [the reed] in your mouth several minutes before [playing] to moisten it; failure to do so risks breaking the reed, and the tone of the bassoon will not be (desirable).

By [studying] the tablature with a picture of the bassoon [found at the end of the article], one will know the greatest range of this instrument, by following the musical notes placed at the bottom.

There are three important things to examine about this instrument: 1<sup>st</sup> The wood from which it is made. 2<sup>nd</sup> The quality of the cane from which the reed is made, and the manner in which it is made. 3<sup>rd</sup> The embouchure, that is to say, how the reed is held in the mouth.

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<sup>18</sup> A cathedral in Paris, destroyed in 1786—six years after this treatise was written. Clearly the organ pitch had been raised before 1780, but I have found no record of from what pitch or to what pitch.

<sup>19</sup> The chapel organ at Versailles was originally build at *Ton de la Chambre du Roy* (~406), and was lowered to 396 in 1762. (Haynes 121, 307)

<sup>20</sup> Presumably a coat button. The illustrations do not clarify this point

As for the quality of the wood, a hard wood such as boxwood, ebony, palisander, etc will surely produce a sour, hard sound.

A different wood that is too tender will produce a soft sound and render the instrument difficult to play. Because the pores of the wood are too open, the air cannot pass easily through the instrument, similar to how it passes too quickly through one made of a hard, dry wood; therefore a middle ground between these extremities should be chosen: that is to say, a wood which is not too hard nor too tender. Maple, when well-chosen, is the only wood which has the requisite qualities, and consequently is the only proper one from which to make a bassoon with a desirably beautiful tone quality.

The intonation of the bassoon, as with all wind instruments, depends on the interior bore of its component pieces, and of the tone holes which connect to the bore.

The luthiers who make these instruments are generally few in number, and they are not all equally successful in bassoon-making. Consequently, one should favor those who are most experienced in this area.

There is one more thing about the construction of the instrument which merits attention, namely that [the walls] should have a certain thickness, especially the long joint and wing joint. When these two pieces are thin, as one too-often encounters, the quality of the sound loses a lot, because the air is passing through a tube which does not have the strength necessary to support the repercussions produced in these pieces.

The reed of the bassoon contributes at least as much as the quality of the wood in producing a desirable sound on the bassoon. The reed may appear to be the smallest and least consequential piece of the instrument, however it is one of the most essential. There are established rules which determine the proportions a reed should have in order to be of the requisite quality, which follow from those the bassoon as a whole should have; but despite all the precision with which one might try to execute everything detailed about reed-making, one cannot [only] rely on established principles; often the best-made reed, perfect in all its proportions, is absolutely bad and feeble. Since the reed is made from cane, the quality of the sound it produces also depends on that of the cane used; thus one cannot govern this area by an invariable rule. All one can do is to keep trying until you find cane which easily produces the desired sound. Make sure that the reed isn't too strong, or weak; a too-hard reed is very fatiguing to play on, requires a great volume of air, and a greater pressure between the lips; it also produces a hard sound that is rarely beautiful. The reed which is too soft will produce a meager sound, devoid of the bassoon's characteristic round sound, and will consequently be disagreeable; you must take the best between these two extremes. One should also take care that the reed is neither too long nor too short; either one will render the bassoon false; the longest should be at most 72mm<sup>21</sup> long, and the shortest should be no less than 63 or 65mm<sup>22</sup>; this is better judged by playing on the instrument than by the above measurements.

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<sup>21</sup> 32 *lignes*

<sup>22</sup> 28 or 29 *lignes*



The embouchure is the way of holding the reed in the mouth, giving the instrument a sufficient volume of air to project the sound, and forming its tone. I cannot give an exact description here of how to contain the reed in the mouth; but from there springs the perfection of sound which one can produce on bassoon; for an instrument and its reed, both of the quality required for accuracy and craftsmanship, being played by several skillful teachers, will produce different sounds in the ear of connoisseurs, one of which will be more flattering and pleasant than the other.

All one can say on the subject [of embouchure] is that the reed should be held in the mouth, from its tip up to about the middle of the space between the tip and the little wire or brass ligature which binds together the two blades of the reed. For the lowest notes like *si*, *ut*, and *re*, which are the lowest register of the bassoon, the reed should be pressed lightly between the lips, which should close in proportion as one rises, in such a way that the highest notes are played with the reed compressed between the lips with a force that forms only a sufficient opening to let the air pass through the instrument. So that the reed does not close entirely, which would occur if we held it flat between the lips, leaving the air no passage, we must instead hold it a little obliquely; so that one of the sides of the reed touches the upper lip, and the other the bottom, roughly as represented

by this oval  By using this position, the air passes freely through the instrument in sufficient quantity to produce the full range of its notes.

There are many other observations to make about bassoon embouchure, which would be too long to describe here; if you want to play this instrument you can procure the necessary knowledge by studying under an able master. It is the stronger or lesser pressure of the reed between the lips that determines the degree of characteristic mordancy of the bassoon's sound; an amateur can, for themselves, attain an agreeable sound by avoiding forcing the reed, which produces a bad sound. It is not necessary to hold the reed at the very end of the two blades; the sound would be meager and one would hear a sort of whistling, which is called a comb sound<sup>23</sup>, because it resembles the noise made by quickly running a knife blade over all the teeth of a comb; this sound is always disagreeable, and whatever talent an amateur or professional may have at playing the bassoon, they will lose much of their merit if this defect is found in the sound of their instrument. If, on the contrary, one advances the reed too far into the mouth, that is to say all the way up to the ligature of thread or brass, a different inconvenience will result: regardless of what you do it will be much harder to play, the lips will become fatigued, and the sound of the instrument will end up hard and raucous. There is, therefore, no better position for the reed than the one I have indicated. Depending, one can advance it a little more into the mouth when executing certain excerpts of music where the bassoon part requires sustained sound, as in the opera(s) of Rameau and others, where one must project from these instruments sounds which are louder and quite opposite to those which one hears when playing a concerto or other solo.

We have already said that the sound of the bassoon has much in common with the human voice, and that it is therefore appropriate for accompanying all kinds of voices. When employed for this usage, the sound of the bassoon must be managed in such a way that one does not hear any

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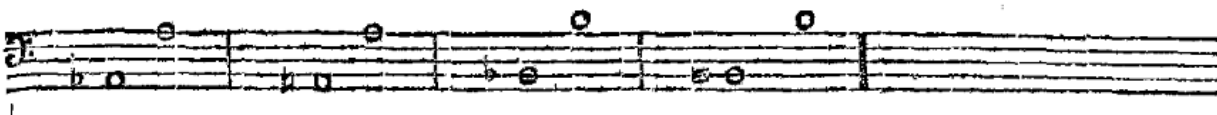
<sup>23</sup> *Un sone de peigne*

of the kind of reed whistling I spoke of earlier, and that the sound of the instrument somewhat imitates that of a large flute, if it were possible to make one which produced a sound as low as the bassoon. It is not necessary that this sound be entirely stripped of the mordant character which is proper to the bassoon, and which gives necessary timbre; for then it would resemble that of the serpent, which would be equally unpleasant.

There is another part of the bassoon which is as essential as the reed for the intonation of this instrument: the bocal. Although there are established proportions for the manufacture of [bocals], it often happens that the best-made bocals do not match a given instrument, as much for intonation as for the quality of sound; equal attention should be paid to the bocal as to the reed, that is to say, in trying them until you find a suitable one. It should not be too short nor too long: either one will render the instrument false. We pierce the bocal with a little hole about 2.7cm<sup>24</sup> above the ferrule of piece *D*, into which [the bocal] is placed; some others pierce the hole higher; but it is better placed where I indicated because it can be closed, if one wishes, by a key placed on that same piece *D*, which responds above that hole, and which one opens or closes with the right thumb<sup>25</sup>; this hole facilitates playing the notes *ut*, *re*, *mi* of the third octave, which sound through the holes numbered 1, 2, 3. Without [a bocal hole] *ut* can be played with difficulty, as can the two other tones; but the hole must not exceed the size of a small needle; otherwise the wind will be lost in too great a quantity, and it will harm the low notes, especially when they should be played softly.

Whatever pains are taken in making a bassoon, even to the most just proportions, and with equal effort in choosing the reed and bocal, it isn't realistic to have an instrument that carries all the tones and semi-tones fixedly in-tune, as they are on the monochord; there are always some notes which are a little louder or feebler; the ear should guide the embouchure, to give a little more force to the notes which tend weak, and on the contrary to diminish those which are naturally too strong.

For example, it is rare that the two octave *la*'s which are played by covering holes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 are exactly in tune, as you can see here notated when the same fingering is used instead of the ones indicated in the fingering chart that follows.



There are particular fingerings to rectify this defect; there are also many ways to make certain notes depending on the passages in which they are used. If I tried to give examples here of these different fingerings, it would multiply the chart, making it too long and causing confusion. You should choose an able Master, who knows the fingerings and can teach them, to practice them and make their use habitual.

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<sup>24</sup> *Une pouce*

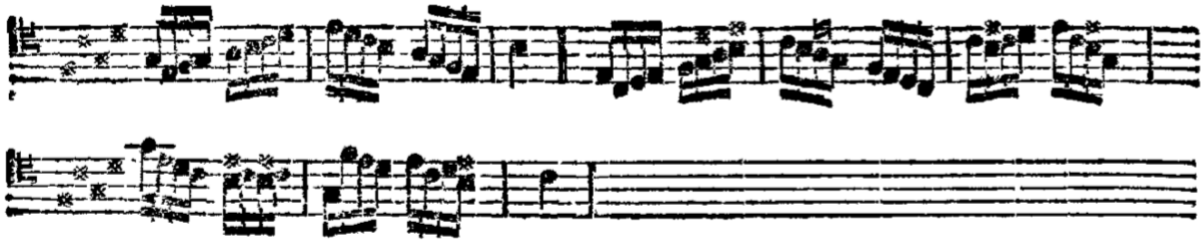
The bassoon can play in all the major and minor keys; but there are some which it favors more than others. Concertos, trios, quartets, and other pieces of music which are today executed on this instrument by the virtuosos I have spoken about, are composed in the keys of F, C, G (major and minor), B $\flat$  and E $\flat$  major, and go no higher than *la*- $\flat$ , or at the very most *la*- $\sharp$  (which is the third octave A). [The bassoon] can also be used in the keys of A and D, major and minor.

There are some passages, which in practice should not be used on the bassoon, and which are indicated here-below: but the observations we have just made about proper bassoon keys concern only accompaniments and solos. Since it can play the same part as the cello in all symphonies and other large-scale pieces in all the keys.



The passages above are very difficult and nearly impossible [to play] quickly, because of the two keys 7 and 8, which must be played alternately with the little finger of the right hand, since one opens the G $\sharp$  and the other closes for F $\sharp$ ; this creates an embarrassment in the movement of the keys and a disagreeable clicking. The same difficulty exists when playing these same passages in the octave above and the octave below where they are notated; so one should never use them when composing for this instrument.

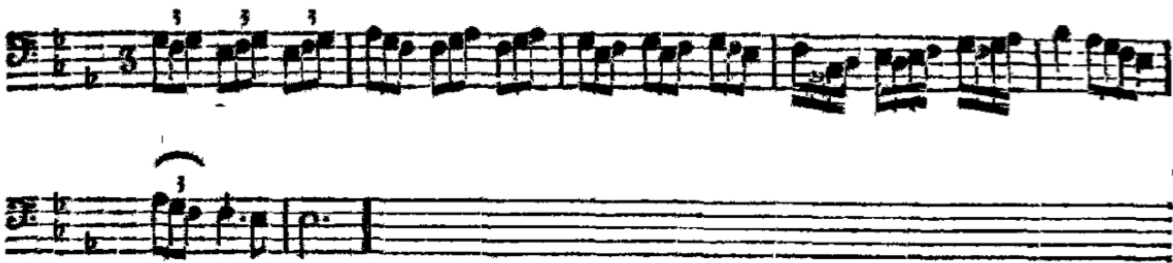
We continue by demonstrating several others which should be equally avoided in certain keys, but which can be used in others.



The above excerpt is of the greatest difficulty in the key which is notated, especially at speed; but it is playable in those keys which follow.



The passage above is very difficult in the keys of E Major as it is notated; but it is feasible in E♭ Major, as shown below.



The following passage is doable at a moderate tempo when notated in c minor; but it becomes impractical in the key of C# Major, especially at a slightly frenzied tempo.

A musical score for a passage in c minor. It consists of four staves. The first staff is a treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb) and a 3/4 time signature. It contains a complex melodic line with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The second staff is a bass clef with the same key signature and time signature, containing a simple accompaniment. The third staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature, containing a complex melodic line similar to the first staff but with different intervals. The fourth staff is a bass clef with the same key signature and time signature, containing a simple accompaniment.

The same passage in C Major, as shown below, can be played easily; it is also feasible, although a little more difficult, in the key of Bb Major

A musical score for the same passage in C Major. It consists of four staves. The first staff is a treble clef with a key signature of no sharps or flats and a 3/4 time signature. It contains a complex melodic line with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The second staff is a bass clef with the same key signature and time signature, containing a simple accompaniment. The third staff is a treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb) and a 3/4 time signature, containing a complex melodic line similar to the first staff but with different intervals. The fourth staff is a bass clef with the same key signature and time signature, containing a simple accompaniment.

This same passage would be impractical in the key of B Major, shown below.



Here again are some passages which can only be employed in the notated key.



The time has now come to talk about trills<sup>26</sup> and other ornaments<sup>27</sup> that one can do on the bassoon; those which can be done with clarity are few in number. Most of these are [performed] with a single finger, others require two. This is again the affair of the master you have chosen to teach you; it would take too long to write or show only those which one can do, or that should be avoided.

We cannot make any trill on the notes below the lowest octave F; well, technically we can but it is difficult to do.



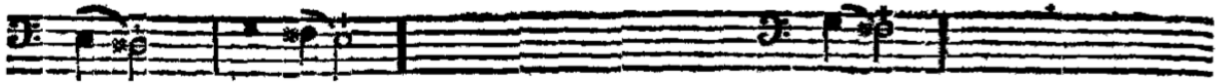
These last five trills are difficult to do well, though there are people who play them well by using particular fingerings; this is why they have been placed on a separate line.



One cannot make trills on these notes.

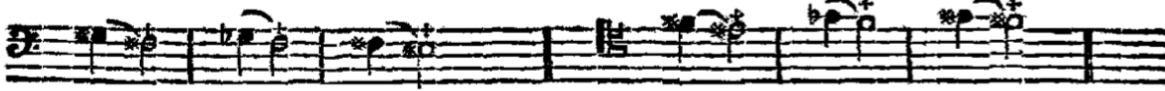
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<sup>26</sup> *Cadences*  
<sup>27</sup> *Agréments*



These two trills are not easy, and can never be cleanly executed

This one is done with the key, and is difficult to sustain



These trills can be played, but with great difficulty, using particular fingerings, and they are not good on all instruments; therefore they should be considered unusable unless you want to practice a lot.

#### On the tongue stroke

The tongue is to wind instruments what the bow is to stringed instruments; just as on the latter one articulates notes with the stroke of the bow, following their different values, one can, on wind instruments, articulate them with a stroke of the tongue.

There are many ways to employ the tongue to this usage; it is not possible to detail them here, but one can say in general that all notes which are not bound together [by slurs] should be detached by a stroke of the tongue, which must be more or less articulated according to the mood and the movement expressed by the different pieces of music that one executes. Since the bassoon is proper for accompanying the voice, when it is used for this purpose, if it is an accompaniment where the notes follow the vocal lyrics, one must work to render these notes in such a way that the articulation of the tongue on the instrument imitates, as much as possible, that of the voice, being careful to make the same long and short syllables as the voice. For this type of accompaniment, especially in expressive pieces, the sound of the instrument must be managed so that it sounds with that of the voice, and the tongue stroke should be softened in proportion to the syllables pronounced by the voice.



Here is an example where this can be put into practice.



The image shows three staves of musical notation for a bassoon accompaniment. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. Below the first staff is the French text: "Ah, que ma voix me devient chere, de - puis que mon Ber-". The second staff continues the melody and includes the text "ger se plaît à la for - mer;" followed by "&c.". The third staff continues the melody and includes the text "E- glé tient tous ses biens des mains de la na - tu - re." The notation includes various ornaments and phrasing marks such as slurs and accents.

The bassoon accompaniment in these two excerpts, from *l'acte d'Eglé*<sup>28</sup>, is note-for-note, and syllable-for-syllable with that of the song; it should by all necessity be rendered in the manner I have said, in that the accompanist also imitates the different inflections of song, as well as the *coulés*, *ports de voix*, *cadences brisées*, and other ornaments, without which these two excerpts would be nothing but a disagreeable effect. In a word, wind instruments were invented to imitate the voice, they should sing equally when they are accompanying [a voice]. This manner of accompaniment requires more art than one may think, although it appears quite simple. The embouchure should be very sure, and requires good knowledge of the fingerings to play the required ornaments. There are few masters who follow this; those who know vocal music, the taste of singing, have much more facility than others can achieve.

For that which regards all genres of Music other than accompaniment, the tongue stroke must be also proportioned to the mood and movement where they are found. It is the affair of Masters to teach how to give the different tongue strokes. Whatever genre of music one executes, one should avoid the two dangers which will result in a stroke that is too hard, or too little articulated, as both make the instrument disagreeable to hear; but just as some people depend more or less on the freedom of their tongue, there are also those to whom the best masters can never give the necessary twist to articulate certain fast excerpts well. Yet this difficulty must not discourage amateurs; they can compensate for deficiency in tongue freedom by applying themselves to playing other excerpts well, which, while not requiring great technical execution, sound no less agreeable for the amateur and the listener. Anyhow, it has always been remarked that music of the greatest difficulty is rarely rendered on the bassoon with the drive, intonation,

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<sup>28</sup>Possibly Rameau's 1753 opera *Daphnis et Eglé*, though this exact text does not appear in the manuscript held by the Bibliothèque National. Perhaps more likely, he is referring to a similar pastoral opera which has since been lost. The Bibliothèque holds a copy of Justine Favart's *La Fortune au Village*, which is subtitled *parodie de l'acte d'Églé* (Favart et al., 1761).

and precision necessary to make it pleasant—even more rarely than on other wind instruments. This stems from the fact that most who play the great difficulties; find themselves rushing, and as if in spite of themselves, are carried away by too hasty a tongue stroke, which often puts them out of measure. Is it as difficult to reduce a too-free tongue as to give lightness to one which is heavy and thick. This last defect of the tongue produces an effect contrary to the other, and necessarily slows the measure; such that if two people who had these two defects played a fast piece of music together, it would be impossible for them to meet together and their irregular movements would continually thwart even the most able Masters who might play the same part with them. Extremely technical and demanding music also has this disadvantage: regardless of the much greater fatigue it causes, the sound of the bassoon is most beautiful when it executes pieces of music requiring only a pleasant tune. Yet amateurs are encouraged not to stick only to the banal and prosaic. It is good, even necessary, to practice the hard stuff to train one's embouchure and fingers, and acquire the habit of easily doing certain difficult lines. Once one has reached that degree of mastery, one can choose the genre one likes best, be it pleasant or surprising.

The fingers serve to open or close the holes which produce the different tones of the bassoon. They should be placed on the instrument in such a manner that they can act freely and yet close the holes exactly, according to the requirements of the tones they produce. They are not susceptible to the same defects as the tongue, because great lightness of fingers is one of the best qualities one can desire. But sluggishness, heaviness, and stiffness are the essential defects which are hard to correct. The tact of one's fingers determines the pleasantness one can add to the songs we play on the instrument, like *cadences brisées et appuyées*, ports-de-voix, and others; the fingers should, consequently, have nerve without roundness, flexibility without sluggishness, and act always in concert with the tongue; these are essential for the beautiful execution of music on this instrument. With fingers of that quality, a well-directed tongue stroke, a well-formed embouchure, an instrument of good quality, and the knowledge of all the fingerings which can serve to render *agremens du chant* in all the keys which are favorable to bassoon, an amateur, who I might add knows music perfectly, has a just ear, and knows the different expressions to which song is susceptible, can render on this instrument any possible song, in imitation of a voice, so long as that song does not exceed the range of the instrument, and will execute concertos, trios, quartets, and other musical genres in a way that gives pleasure to listeners; but it is rare to find all these qualities brought together: that is why it takes obstinate work and natural dispositions to assemble them.

# TABLATURE DU BASSON.



N<sup>o</sup>. Il y a d'autres positions pour faire plusieurs tons de différentes manières. Mais maintenant les positions ou ils se trouvent employées, il seroit trop long de les démontrer icy, c'est pourquoy on s'est retraint à donner la Tablature la plus simple & la plus commune, c'est à dire. Maîtres dont on fera choix à enseigner ses différens positions.

Il faut observer aussi que le même doigt qui sert dans cette Tablature se fait les Dutes ont aussi à faire les Remis, par exemple, le 1<sup>er</sup> doigt de l'U<sup>l</sup> se fait le R<sup>eb</sup>, c'est à dire. Sol & fait le L<sup>a</sup> b comme aussi c'est de l'U<sup>l</sup> se fait le R<sup>eb</sup>, c'est à dire. Sol & fait le L<sup>a</sup> b comme aussi. On ne peut pas placer ces tons dans la Tablature pour éviter la longueur et la confusion.

Ces derniers tons ne sont point usités partout U<sup>l</sup> R<sup>eb</sup> M<sup>ib</sup> R<sup>eb</sup>. Mais cependant ils ne sont pas impossibles, on verra qu'après pour quoy on les a placés icy.

Les lignes perpendiculaires qui se trouvent au dessous de chaque Note indiquent le nombre de tons qui doivent être élevés, ou fermés, pour produire chaque Ton, ou sans tons, qui serment de. Comme du Basson, la ligne droite qui part de chaque trou, mar que que le trou doit être ouvert, ou fermé, pour rendre le ton indiqué par la Note qui est au dessous de la ligne perpendiculaire. On a marqué par des lignes pointées, les tons pour lesquels il faut ouvrir, ou fermer les trous qui se bouchent avec les Clefs, de même que ceux qui se bouchent avec le piston de chaque main. Les autres marqués par des lignes pleines, sont ceux, pour lesquels on n'a pas besoin d'employer les Clefs et qui se bouchent avec les trois premiers Doigts de chaque main.

Les deux D<sup>is</sup> et l'ont les premiers tons graves du Basson, ils se font avec le même doigt, tous les trous fermés, il n'y a que la pression de la touche qui est plus forte pour le D<sup>is</sup> le fait distinguer du D<sup>is</sup>, mais il est nécessairement joint par comparaison avec les D<sup>is</sup>, des Octaves au dessus sur tout lorsqu'on est obligé de faire un peu le ton, l'U<sup>l</sup> qui se trouve après, se fait en débouchant le trou marqué 2<sup>e</sup>. C'est pourquoy on voit qu'il se fait boucher la ligne qui répond de ce ton au D<sup>is</sup>. Pour que est fait aussi.

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