

CONTRABASSOON: An Introduction

Common Misconceptions

The contrabassoon is supposed to be loud.

The contrabassoon is supposed to be ugly.

No one can hear intonation that low.

Frequent Difficulties

Intonation

Pitches below the staff require a great deal of practice to hear and play in tune, and the lowest fundamental is one of the most crucial things to have in tune in an ensemble. Experiment with resonance keys more freely than on bassoon and make good intonation a top priority.

Practice: harmonic intervals and downward perfect interval slurs

Tone

The contrabassoon plays only a few notes lower than a string bass. You are always playing a musical instrument at all times – not a sound effect tool.

Practice: lyrical etudes in early Weissenborn or Rubank

Finesse

A larger reed, wider bore, and much longer instrument require even greater airstream and embouchure control than on the bassoon.

Practice: Herzberg long tones or Kovar slur studies at all dynamic levels

Listening

Orchestral Excerpts

Beethoven: Symphony No. 5, IV

Brahms: Variations on a Theme by Haydn

Mahler: Symphony No. 9, IV

Ravel: Mother Goose Suite, Beauty and the Beast

Ravel: Piano Concerto for the Left Hand

Shostakovich: Symphony No. 5

Opera Excerpts

Strauss: Salome, Act III Interlude

Solo Repertoire

Corina: Sonet for Contrabassoon

Dorff: Contrabassoon Concerto, In a Deep Funk

Muradian: Contrabassoon Concerto

Schulhoff: Bass Nightingale

Steinmetz: Fish Phase