

A Performer's Guide to: Weber's Bassoon Concerto in F Major Op. 75

Edition of choice: There are many editions of this concerto available, most of them should probably be avoided. The Universal Edition edited by William Waterhouse is probably the best option, the piano reduction is supposed to be easier to play than other versions. Both the manuscripts of the 1811 version and the 1822 revision are available on IMSLP.

General Notes-

This concerto was composed in 1811 for Munich Court bassoonist, Georg Friedrich Brandt. The concerto was later revised in 1822. It's very similar in style to our concerto by Hummel (also in F major, with a Bb major second movement, and a rondo third movement), both concertos straddle the divide between the Classical and Romantic periods. Written contemporaneously with Beethoven's music, the performer has license to emphasize different styles at different points in the piece.

Weber is probably best known for his operas, *Der Freischütz*, *Euryanthe*, and *Oberon*. These established the tradition of German Romantic opera, and all dealt with fantasy subjects. They were all composed in the 1820s, with *Der Freischütz* first performed in 1821. Its opus number is 77 while the bassoon concerto's is 75. So, Weber was in an operatic frame of mind when he composed this concerto, and that is reflected in its composition. The second movement in particular is written like an aria, and was the first part of the concerto that Weber composed.

Movement 1- Allegro ma non troppo

The opening is full of challenges for the bassoonist. The opening phrase is marked *risoluto* and *forte*, this combined with the stately two measure timpani introduction and the dotted-eighth-sixteenth rhythms implies a crisp, heroic style. The tendency when trying to execute this style is to over-blow, and over-articulate, creating a flat, unfocused sound. To counteract this, the bassoonist should avoid the tendency to play too loudly and strive for a focused sound instead. This comes from corner-driven, vertical embouchure, and a higher syllable, possibly an "ay" or an "ah".

The bassoonist's second entrance repeats the same material as the opening phrase, but in G minor. This choice shows how this concerto is on the edge of the Classical and Romantic eras, while the first movement technically follows sonata-allegro form, it deviates from convention often. In a classical sonata-allegro form, the second phrase would almost certainly be in the dominant, placing it in the key of the second scale degree is a surprise to the

listener. I like to play this entrance much more softly than the opening, Weber doesn't mark a dynamic in either version of the manuscript, so the decision is ultimately up to the performer.

Measure 55 presents a common difficulty for the bassoonist. Usually we would like to breathe after the C half-note, but this tends to make us late off of the sixteenth rest. To combat this, and to make sure I have enough air to comfortably get to the end of the phrase in measure 62, I shorten the C to a quarter-note, followed by a quarter rest to breathe. This way, I am set and engaged with my embouchure and support, so I can simply release the tongue for the sixteenth note passage.

The staccato markings over the sixteenths do come from Weber, but they shouldn't be shortened to the point of interrupting the airflow. They will be short enough regardless.

It also helps to practice grouping the sixteenths into sets of four. C-D-E are pick ups to the F, G-A-B-flat are pickups to the A. Practice these two groups separately with a rest in between until they are engrained, then put the gesture together. The whole group of sixteenths should lead to the A on the downbeat which is an appoggiatura which resolves downward to the G.

Also, it is beneficial to play each sixteenth note gesture as a reaction to the eighth-note figure in the piano/orchestra.

For the trills in measures 60 and 61, I like to add a B-natural and C escape tones to the C trill and because the E trill is so long, I begin it more slowly with a fortissimo accent, then accelerate the trill and crescendo into the resolution.

The new melody beginning pickup to measure 68 should embody a new, contrasting mood. It is more sparsely accompanied so the bassoonist can take a little time with some of the pickup gestures to each measure and really exaggerate the tension/release of the long suspensions (F to E in measures 68 and 69).

The sweet playfulness is interrupted abruptly in measure 78, a shift from C major to G major is occurring with many dissonant diminished chords and large leaps in the bassoon part. Weber implies a dark mood which slowly recedes until it shifts back to C major (now following traditional sonata-allegro expectations) in measure 87.

The beautiful melody that the bassoon introduces in measure 88 is a great opportunity to portray the larger meter without impulses on every beat. Take these four bars to practice, the bassoon plays a melody, the right hand of the piano plays eighth-notes, grouped to each quarter note beat, and the left hand of the piano plays a quarter-note on the downbeat of each measure.

First set a metronome to the quarter-note and play the melody, then half that tempo and let it be the half-note. Try to only have a slight emphasis every half-note. For this exercise it helps to take out the grace notes.

Now half the tempo again, so it's only clicking once per measure (now it's the left hand of the piano) and try to only have a slight emphasis every measure.

At this point, your metronome probably can't go any slower, but you can still phrase these four measures as two two measure groups. If we're in C major, it's easy to see that the Gs in measure 89 act like a half-cadence, then measure 90 picks up this harmony and resolves with the suspension in measure 91.

Finally, try to play the four-measure group as one phrase leading smoothly from the first G half-note to the C resolution in measure 90. When you can do that smoothly, add the grace notes back in as playful gestures.

Measures 92-96 should receive the same treatment.

In measure 96, the piano/orchestra takes over the same melody that the bassoon played at measure 88. From this point until beats 3 and 4 of measure 102, the bassoon should be in the background. Let the piano or the woodwinds take center stage, the sixteenth note runs should be just filigree, not the primary thing the audience perceives.

Beats 3 and 4 of measure 102 are where the bassoonist takes control back from the orchestra, these two beats should be heavily accented and lead to the downbeat of 103. From here until 118, the fireworks should be flying.

It is common to take time in measure 109, floating from the B-natural up to the high A, then accelerating down the run. The piano plays a quarter-note on beat four, so you have to be back in tempo by beat three so they know when to place their note.

In measure 111, I like to play an F half-note on beat one instead of a D. This is what the basses/left hand of the piano plays (E to F), it foreshadows when this figure returns in measures 230 and 231 (A to B-flat), and it is better voice leading to the F-sharp downbeat of measure 112. Most of all, it keeps the momentum moving forward.

Most editions put accents on all four notes in measure 113, Weber only places an accent on the high C and staccatos on the eighth-notes. Regardless, over accenting notes in that register makes them more likely to crack—not exactly climactic. Accents should be derived from the abdominals, not the tongue. For extra security you can experiment with using the high D key instead of, or in addition to the high C key for the high C. This will add security but check to see how it affects the pitch on your instrument.

Measure 118 ends the exposition of the first movement, it roughly follows the traditional sonata-allegro form, but has more themes and more liberties taken. For comparison, the exposition of the Mozart concerto is much more traditional and 70 measures long.

After an orchestral interlude, the bassoonist returns in measure 140, playing the opening melody in its relative minor, D. By the end of that phrase though, the music modulates to G minor at measure 147, marked *con fuoco*.

The figure in measure 147 repeats several times in the development, the first note is an *appoggiatura*, and it's accented so it should get a strong attack, the rest of beats one and two are just an *arpeggio* of the tonic harmony.

Measure 151 begins a triplet passage that also recurs in the development. This is a great opportunity to practice the underlying structure. If you look at measures 151-153, the bassoon is really just playing quarter notes, each with a chromatic lower neighbor that returns to the first pitch. Not only does this knowledge make it easier to play, it reveals the natural phrasing of the passage.

Without the neighbor notes, in measure 151 the bassoon plays G, B-flat, D, B-natural. The G, B-flat, and D are simply a tonic arpeggio, not terribly interesting, I decrescendo through those notes (they're also unaccompanied). The B-natural is harmonized as the third of a G dominant seven chord with a strong resolution to the C minor chord on the downbeat of measure 153, I crescendo through this beat to the resolution.

That repeats in measure 152 at a new pitch level, C minor arpeggio on beats 1-3 (again I diminuendo, these beats are consonant), C dominant seven chord on beat 4 (crescendo!) resolving to F minor. Measure 153 repeats this again in the key of F minor but beat four is a D-flat major chord (the Neapolitan) which resolves to a G dominant chord and scale which reveals we are in C minor after all until the return of the triplet figure in measure 160 which modulates us to a new area.

Each measure from 151 to 153 rises in pitch level, this naturally builds the intensity. When I perform this, I diminuendo each measure from beats 1-3, crescendo from beat 4 to the next 1. At the same time, I let each measure rise in dynamic, in this way each measure has a small hairpin to keep subtle interest, and to be able to crescendo indefinitely. At the same time, each of those smaller hairpins exist in the context of a larger crescendo.

Measure 165 is the climax of the development, we've returned to the original tonic, D minor, and appoggiatura/descending arpeggio figure returns. Each time this has occurred before, beats 1 and 2, and beats 3 and 4 have just been repeats of one another. This time, beats 3 and 4 are at a higher pitch level, building the intensity further.

The piano plays a chord on the downbeat of measure 166, then rests until beat four of 169. To play up the climax, the bassoonist can take time at the top of the scale and accelerate as the go down. Make sure to open up and get to a lower voicing so that the low D and C quarter-notes are not sharp but are round and resonant. I like to start the low B-flat more softly and crescendo, then diminuendo before the piano comes in. This is a new mood as we transition to the recapitulation, Weber marks it dolce.

From the low B-flat until the upbeat of beat three in measure 173, Weber lets us think we've settled into a comfortable B-flat major, but the development is not over yet. The C-sharp eighth on the upbeat of beat 3 in 173, should come as a surprise to the listener, perhaps sadly reminding them that we're still in a minor key.

After a brief retransition in the piano, the recapitulation begins in measure 182, the bassoonist plays almost the exact same material as the opening, but it is accompanied by quarter-notes instead of halves, so it should feel twice as energized. Note the deceptive G minor phrase is omitted this time.

The leading-tone trill in measures 193 and 194 is twice as long as it was in the exposition and is completely unaccompanied for the first measure. Trilling at a constant speed and volume unaccompanied for an entire measure, is not interesting. Attack the E firmly, drop back to nothing, and slowly begin to trill, accelerating while you crescendo. This will gather your audience's interest instead of dispersing it. The trill also resolves unexpectedly,

instead of the triumphant F quarter or half-note the listener expects, it resolves to a G and a sixteenth note scale down to a low F, then the orchestra takes over a measure late.

The second theme of the exposition doesn't return in the bassoon part, it only exists in the orchestra, when the bassoon reenters in measure 201, it's with the lyrical third theme, transposed into the tonic key.

In measures 234 and 235, the bassoon plays successively rising scale/arpeggio hybrids each one of these should drop back somewhat, not enough to lose the excitement, but enough that the bassoonist can strongly crescendo through each in the context of a larger crescendo.

In measure 239, the bassoonist begins trilling for four consecutive measures, do everything possible to keep the trills interesting, and let the piano come through, particularly on beats 3 and 4, they will drive momentum into the next measure.

Movement 2- Adagio

This movement was the first part of the concerto that Weber composed and is one of the most beautiful slow movements written for our instrument.

Recurring throughout this movement is the dotted-sixteenth-thirty-second-note rhythm. There's even a double-dotted-sixteenth-two-sixty-fourth-note rhythm. All of these should be played very precisely, they make a very effective contrast to the otherwise smooth melodies.

After a four-measure orchestral introduction, the bassoon enters. Like the third theme in the first movement, the bassoonist should avoid unnecessary bumps in the phrase, trying to make it stretch all the way until measure 12. In particular the high B-flat on the third beat of measure 5 shouldn't feel like an arrival, even though F to B-flat normally implies a dominant to tonic function, in this case both are part of a tonic harmony. Because of this, the B-flat should emerge organically from the F, as part of a gesture that continues forward to the downbeat of measure 6, then relaxes away.

I like to play from measure 5 to 12 in one breath, if this isn't possible, breathe between the two halves of the phrase after measure 8.

Measure 12 should have a lifted quality but connect to the piano's downbeat in measure 13.

The repeated gesture in measures 13, 14, and 15 rises in pitch each time and is marked to crescendo. The tenuto markings that are present in most editions are absent from the manuscript but are still expressive. They can however be easily overdone in a way that interrupts the forward momentum of the phrase. I like to ignore the first one, or only do a very slight tenuto, a little more on the second, and then the most the third time.

The ending of this phrase is up to interpretation, it isn't clearly marked in either version of the manuscript. What is clear is that the bassoonist crescendos from measure 13 to 16, and the orchestra is marked pianissimo on the third beat of measure 16 and fortissimo on the downbeat of 17. It is common for the bassoonist to diminuendo and lift the dotted-sixteenth-thirty-second-note figure on the downbeat of measure 16, but it isn't clear if the sixteenth-note A pick up or the B-flat quarter on the downbeat of 17 should be soft or loud. I like to play both quietly, part of the diminuendo from the beginning of 16, and let the orchestra come in fortissimo as if they are cutting me off. Formally, that is what happens. The end of the phrase from

13 to 17 is elided with the new phrase in the orchestra from 17 to 20. Other bassoonists choose to join the orchestra and play the B-flat fortissimo as a surprise gesture. Both have merit.

Measure 21 moves into a new, contrasting section of the piece, set in C minor. The drama of the bassoon entrance is often somewhat spoiled by the natural difference in volume between C4 and C2 on our instruments. The first C should sound the loudest, it's the strong part of the measure, but the low C is naturally much louder. To compensate for this, the bassoonist should play the first C quite loud with a firm articulation and back off the low C.

In measure 22, I crescendo from the B-natural to the F to highlight the dissonance of the interval, I continue the crescendo through the F to show its resolution (deceptively) to the E-natural.

Measure 24 is accompanied only by sustained sounds, so I take a little bit of time as I move through the thirty-second-notes to highlight my groupings. I also diminuendo somewhat to prepare a dramatic crescendo to the end of the phrase in measure 28.

Measure 29 has a common misprint, present at least in the International Edition. As confirmed in the newer Universal Edition, and both versions of the manuscript, the bassoon's rhythm should be a sixteenth rest followed by E-flat, D, E-flat in sixteenth notes, not thirty-seconds. Then the last beat of the measure remains the same.

Measure 29 should have a completely different mood from the previous section. Measures 21-28 are stormy and minor, with lots of dissonance, played at a mostly forte dynamic. Measures 29-40 are marked dolce, return to major, and are accompanied by only two horns.

Another misprint in the piano part of the International Edition, in measure 36, the upper note should be an A-flat, not an A-natural.

Measure 44 begins the low point of the movement, very soft dotted rhythms moving chromatically up to bridge into the recapitulation.

The long F in measures 47 and 48 is potentially very expressive. This one note has two functions, it is the arrival of the dotted rhythms, so it begins loud and diminuendos. Measure 48 is the actual recapitulation. In these two measures the bassoonist should diminuendo while the piano plays 47 (preferably with some rallentando), then the F changes direction when the piano resolves the cadence on the downbeat of 48 to grow through to measure 49 like in the opening.

The bassoon has a brief cadenza in measures 60 and 61, this is the only cadenza in the concerto but isn't really a chance to show off in the tradition of a classical concerto. It's more of an introspective soliloquy at the end of the movement. The bassoonist should note that the orchestra plays an F dominant seven chord on the downbeat of measure 61 with their low F, so the last sixteenth-note-triplet should be clear enough in tempo and cued so that they can come in correctly.

After they cut off their chord, the bassoonist plays the rest of the measure and resolves to the tonic in measure 62. It's marked piano on the downbeat in some editions, but not in the manuscript. Start it with enough volume that there is plenty of room for a diminuendo.

Movement 3- Rondo

The form of the final movement (and its title) is rondo. This means that there is a fairly short melody that is repeated throughout the movement with contrasting material each time. In this movement, the rondo theme is never exactly the same, sometimes the notes change, it occurs in different links, and other times the articulation is altered.

This movement works best when it's felt in one, the mood should stay light and energetic. Because the bassoon's entrance is so soon after the start of the piece, I like to breathe and cue as though I am playing the first chord to guarantee that the tempo is what I had in mind, and that I have plenty of time for a good breath and to set the embouchure.

The E lift in measure should be a surprise to the listener, convince them with your phrasing that the low C is the end of that phrase, then pop back up to the tenor register and repeat.

Measure 55 is very interesting, it doesn't exist in the original manuscript! This measure of rest for the bassoon and short gesture for the low strings was added in the 1822 version and might not be in all modern editions. Some recordings even omit this measure.

The phrase beginning in measure 72 should be full of bombast, loud and fast articulated scales, huge leaps the entire range of the instrument, and only sparsely accompanied.

That phrase is repeated in measure at fortissimo instead of forte, maintain this until the downbeat of measure 84 when we have a sudden modulation to D minor and change of character.

Measure 89 has another common misprint, in the International Edition and others, the measure only has eight sixteenth-notes. In the 1822 manuscript Weber actually rights six sixteenth-notes followed by a dotted-sixteenth-thirty-second-note rhythm. The pitches don't change.

I take time in the cadence from measure 98 to 99. 98 leads into 99 with an A dominant seven chord which resolves on the downbeat, the bassoon's E and F are unaccompanied. I play this out of time with a quick diminuendo as though they're the end of a question. Then the piano restarts the piece back to tempo on the downbeat of measure 100.

This idea of an unanswered question floating into the room is repeated and drawn out beginning in about measure 116. The rallentando is partially written out in rhythm changes so it doesn't need to be overdone. Then the rondo theme returns briefly (with new pitches!) before the orchestra takes over for an extended break.

When the bassoon returns with the pickups to measure 162, a new section of the movement begins. This section is marked scherzando in the score, meaning "joking." The bassoonist should exaggerate all of the accented notes, and release sound on the nonaccented notes. This creates an interesting back and forth with the orchestra, they only play on downbeats, so the bassoon is alone on the accented upbeats.

This section has several passages where material is repeated verbatim, each time should be varied in some way. The simplest thing to do is to play the first time loud, and the second time soft like an echo. Sometimes this could reverse to help build to the next phrase. These types of things should

always be exaggerated, they often don't sound as different in the audience as they do to the bassoonist. So sometimes someone thinks they're making a big difference, but it isn't apparent in the audience. Just another reason why it's always helpful to have someone listen to you from time to time, and to record yourself often!

Measures 202 and 203 can *rallentando*, again drifting away in a questioning way, then coming back in in time.

The bassoonist should practice the trills in 213 and 215 with a resolution on the downbeat to get the proper phrasing. Then omit the resolution note (or play the printed high G that is not the resolution note of the trill, the real resolution is in the left hand of the piano) but still pass off to the piano.

Some editions have a page turn here, there's not enough time for that, copy the last page!

The International Edition has a misprint in the bassoon part in measure 233 although it is correct in the piano score. The quarter-note on the downbeat should be a tied F, not an E.

Time can be taken in measure 237 before the pickup into the final iteration of the rondo theme. It's a good idea for dramatic effect, but also to get a good breath.

I like to add an *accelerando* in the piano from measure 257 until the bassoon entrance in 261, really pushing to an impressive final tempo and stressing a one feel.

Measure 271 should probably be an echo of 267, if so, ask the pianist to play their chord on the downbeat short to maximize the effect.

Measures 275, 276, and 277 can be tricky to phrase. Some people try to put hairpins in each measure, I don't think there's enough time to do that effectively, and it's not what the rhythms imply. Nor do I think each measure should *crescendo*. I think each measure should begin loud with an accented quality and *diminuendo* up the scale. This is supported by the eighth pickup notes in the right hand of the piano, and the blocked repeated eighth-notes on the downbeat, upbeat, and beat two.

In most editions, the bassoon part ends after the F in measure 284. In Weber's 1822 manuscript he places an F3 quarter-note in measure 285 and an F2 half-note in 286. I prefer to play a high A4 quarter-note in 285 and the low F in 286. It's up to each performer, but especially when performing with piano it can be underwhelming to not finish the piece with the pianist.

Selected Recordings-

Klaus Thunemann with Neville Marriner and the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields (plays the 1811 version)

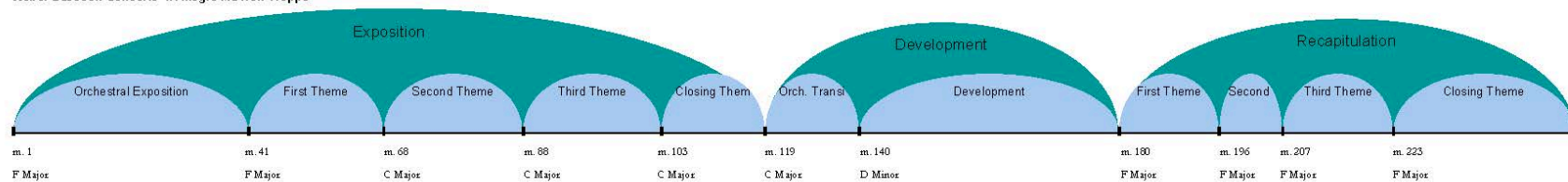
Sergio Azzolini with the Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne (1822 version)

Matthias Rác with the North West German Philharmonic Orchestra

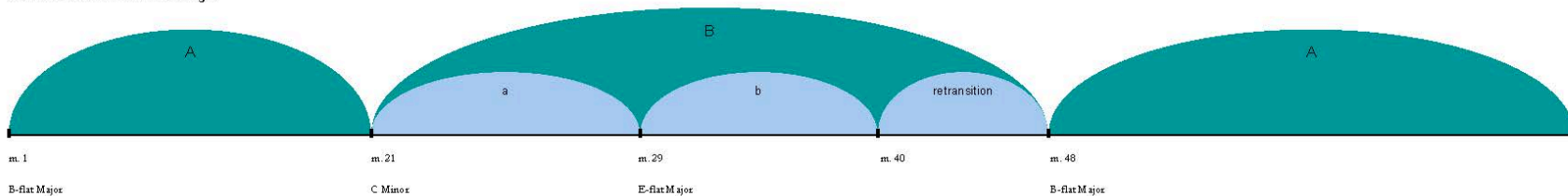
Additional Resources-

- J. Warrack: Carl Maria von Weber (Hamish Hamilton, 1968)
- A.D. Moreno: Character and Performance from 1800-1850
https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/41960/dominguez_dissertation.pdf?sequence=1
- C Rosen: The Classical Style
- Weber's Bassoon Concerto Op. 75: The Manuscript and Printed Sources Compared by William Waterhouse
<https://www.idrs.org/publications/controlled/Journal/JNL14/JNL14.Waterhouse.html#anchor73197>

Weber Bassoon Concerto - I. Allegro Ma Non Troppo



Weber Bassoon Concerto - II. Adagio



Weber Bassoon Concerto - III. Rondo

