

A Performer's Guide to: Mozart's Bassoon Concerto in B-flat Major

Edition of choice: The recently published Barenreiter edition reflects the latest musicological research and is free of the overediting that plagues earlier editions. Articulations are only marked when they were written by Mozart, the edition also includes notes by musicologist Jane Gower, as well as several cadenzas and eingänge.

Above all else, Mozart wanted to be known as a composer of opera, all of his other compositions served this goal. He was one of the first composers to attempt to make a living as a freelance composer, most others held positions in the church or served in the households of wealthy patrons. These composers composed whatever their patron wished them to compose; Mozart was able to focus his attention on his operas and worked on commission to sell the smaller works or, in the case of symphonies and piano concertos to concertize. This love of opera is imbedded in all his works and they are performed best when the performer harnesses that spirit. Look for opportunities to sing a melody like a heroic tenor, or to divide a line into multiple competing voices. Always consider the character or mood that Mozart is implying and reinforce it in your musical decisions.

Movement 1- Allegro

The overall character of the first movement should be one of polished grace, when choosing a tempo be sure that it is one at which you can maintain this character, specifically trying to make sixteenth note passages sound light and project ease. There is a wide range of possible tempi, seek to find your own balance between a tempo slow enough to make the sixteenth passages sound *effortless* and fast enough to maintain forward momentum.

The meter should be felt in 2 throughout, emphasizing beat one more than any other, and three to a lesser degree. Beats two and four should be very light except when they are specifically leading to a beat one or three.

How should I trill? When deciding how to execute trills in the concerto, it is important to consider how they were perceived in the baroque and classical periods. In the baroque period they were nearly always executed by beginning on the upper note of the trill, usually with a stress on it. This is to highlight the dissonance between the bass and the upper note of the trill, the dissonance is the interesting part of the gesture! This is largely true in the classical period as well, trills especially those at cadences should begin with a stressed upper note, the length of which is up to the performer and can vary depending on how long the trill is.

Other trills in the concerto, such as the ones in the famous trill passage from mm. 51-54 of the exposition are up for debate. Since the point of beginning a trill on the upper note is to highlight the dissonance against the bass, the bassoonist should realize that the trills in this passage are unaccompanied! There is no bass for them to reference, so the case can be made that the trills serve only to embellish the B-flat, and could therefore start on the printed note.

Whether or not to end each trill with a nachschlag (a German term for the grace notes leading out of a trill, typically the lower neighbor (diatonic or chromatic) followed by the printed note) is another consideration for the performer. In the fast movements, nachschläge (the plural of nachschlag) help to keep the phrase moving forward. In the slow movement, they can be omitted if the trill is stopped before the end of the printed note's duration.

In addition to its automatic importance in the bassoon repertoire by merit of being composed by Mozart, the first movement, especially the exposition, is asked on nearly all orchestral auditions. Sometimes the entire first movement is asked, as well as the second movement on occasion, usually without cadenzas. Because of this, the bassoonist is well served to practice this movement with the intention of laying future groundwork. Every bassoonist will play this throughout their career and old bad habits are difficult to erase.

Second Movement- Adagio ma andante

The tempo is very slow (typically about 60-69 bpm to the eighth) but the marked meter is cut time. This is to encourage the performer to emphasize the larger beats, practice each section with a metronome set to eighth notes, then quarters, and finally the half to emphasize the implied expansiveness of the phrase.

Practice opening phrase should be played as though there are no rests! Try to sustain a longer line by keeping engaged and imagine your sound continuing over into the rests. Practice the opening without the grace notes initially, the first two should be played before the beat as anticipations, the final one is an appoggiatura and should be played on the beat

The first F in the melody is an anticipation, it should sing through the F and the G grace note to the F eighth-note on the downbeat of beat 3 (which is a 4-3 suspension over the bass). Practice the phrasing by eliminating the anticipation and crescendoing smoothly from a half-note C to an F so that it feels like an arrival, then relax into the E. Add the anticipatory F and grace note G separately until they feel comfortable and don't disrupt the phrase.

The opening melody of this movement was later reused by Mozart for the Countess' aria in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, "Porgi amor." Listen to a variety of sopranos sing the aria for inspiration on how to shape the phrase.

The downbeat of measure 9 should be an F3, in some editions this is incorrectly notated as a D3.

The F quarter note on beat three of measure ten should be played shorter than the printed duration. I play it as a fairly short eighth-note, just long enough for a resonant taper. The violin begins the next phrase on the second sixteenth note of that beat, and more importantly the bass moves to an F# on the second eighth-note of the beat, creating a dissonance with the solo line in an uncharacteristic location.

Measures 15 and 16 are a duet with the first oboe, the oboe line is clearly phrased with beats 1 and 2, 3 and 4, and 1 and 2 slurred together, the bassoonist should imitate this at least with phrasing, if not with articulation (in many editions they are slurred together, but in the Barenreiter they are not). This material is repeated in measures 40 and 41 and should be similarly handled.

Measures 21 through 26 form a very brief development, beginning by presenting the opening melody in the dominant in the strings, then cycling through several keys, emphasizing minor and diminished sonorities to contrast with the mostly major material of the exposition.

Third Movement- Rondo, Tempo di Menuetto

The third movement of the concerto is actually an excellent place for an introduction to the piece and Mozart's style. It is rarely, if ever, asked for on auditions so it isn't quite as "high-stakes" as the first two movements, and it is generally less difficult technically, although still presents some challenges.

The form of the third movement is a rondo, meaning there is a theme that is repeated throughout the movement with contrasting material in between each occurrence. This rondo is particularly interesting because the solo bassoon doesn't get to play the Rondo theme until its final occurrence, instead the rondo theme occurs in between statements by the solo bassoon. In this way it is rather similar to ritornello form commonly used in baroque concerti.

It is common to add slurs to the extended sections of triplets and sixteenths in this movement. They should be added with the goal of keeping the articulation light and buoyant and inserted in places that emphasize the groupings implied by the music. Slur two tongue two is a common device, but often obscures the groupings inherent in the music. Instead of relying on a "stock" articulation pattern make those decisions with musical intention.

There are two places in this movement where the bassoonist holds a long note sustained over four measures: a C from measure 33 to the downbeat of 37, and an F from measure 126 to the downbeat of 130. In both cases the piano/violins play a melody underneath which is much more interesting than the long, sustained note. The sustained note isn't even a suspension, it is the common tone scale degree 5 between the tonic and dominant chords that alternate in the harmony. This requires the bassoonist to do *something* on the long note. The most obvious solution is to make a firm entrance and drop back to a soft dynamic or to begin softly and grow throughout the note, perhaps adding vibrato at the end to further drive forward motion. Regardless, it is an excellent location for the bassoonist to relax and let the other instruments come through the texture.

Cadenzas-

A note about cadenzas in the classical style: in the early classical period they were typically improvised or at least written by the performer and were brief fantasies on themes from the movement. Now it is common to play a cadenza written by another, examples are often included with the concerto and were written by famous bassoonists like Milan Turkovic or Walter Guetter.

An important aspect of cadenzas to keep in mind when making selections is that they should shrink as the piece progresses, so the first movement cadenza should be the longest (somewhere between 30 seconds and a minute), the second movement cadenza should be somewhat shorter, and the last movement cadenza should be very short. It is placed in measure 106 in the third movement and is typically an *eingang* rather than a cadenza, a short link between the two phrases. A turnaround on the F with a scale up to the Bb is sufficient.

Available Recordings-

Because of its importance in the bassoon repertoire, there are far too many recordings to list all of them, listed here is only a small selection.

- Dag Jensen with Werner Andreas Albert conducting the Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra (1996)
- Milan Turkovic with Martin Sieghart conducting the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra (1991)
- Klaus Thunemann with Neville Marriner conducting the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields (2014)
- Valeri Popov with Valery Polyansky conducting the Russian State Symphony Orchestra (1998)

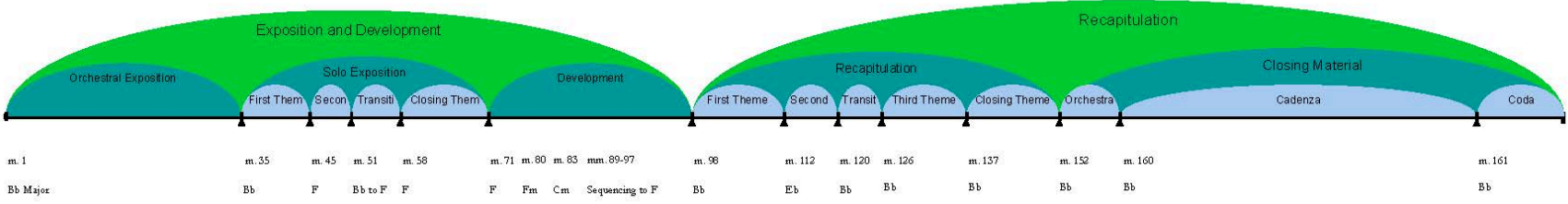
Other Works by this Composer-

- Sonata for Bassoon and Cello in B-flat major, K. 292
- Quintet in E-flat major, K. 452 (oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, piano)
- Sinfonia concertante in E-flat major, K. 297b (flute, oboe, bassoon, and horn with orchestra)

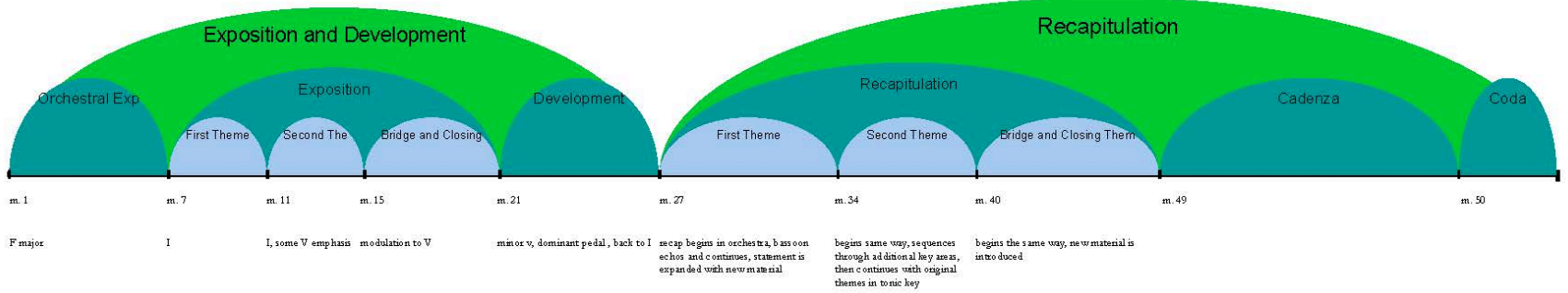
Additional Resources-

- C. Brown: Classical and Romantic Performance Practice 1750-1900 (Oxford, 1999)
- Vincent Cheung: Mozart's Transformation of the Cadenza...
- http://web.mit.edu/ckcheung/www/MusicalWritings_files/MozartCadenza_web_19971031.pdf
- Samuel Karafotis: The Composition and Performance Practice of the Cadenza in the Classical Era (<http://commons.emic.edu/mcnair>)
- Meg Griffith: Composing a Classical Cadenza www.meggriffith.com
- Mather and Lasocki: The Classical Woodwind Cadenza (McGinnis and Marx)
- F. Neumann: Ornamentation and Improvisation in Mozart (Princeton, 1986)
- F. Neumann: 'Ornamentation in the Bassoon Music of Vivaldi and Mozart', Part 2, IDRS Winter 1987
- F. Neumann: New Essays on Performance Practice (University of Rochester, 1989)
- H.C. Robbins Landon, editor: The Mozart Compendium A Guide to Mozart's Life and Music (Schirmer, 1990)
- C Rosen: The Classical Style
- B. Sherman, editor: Inside Early Music (Oxford, 1997)
- Joseph Swain: Form and Function of the Classical Cadenza (Journal of Musicology, Vol. 6. No.1 Winter 1988 - available on line)
- A.D. Moreno: Character and Performance from 1800-1850
https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/41960/dominguez_dissertation.pdf?sequence=1

Mozart Bassoon Concerto Mvt. 1



Mozart Bassoon Concerto Mvt. 2



Mozart Bassoon Concerto Mvt 3

