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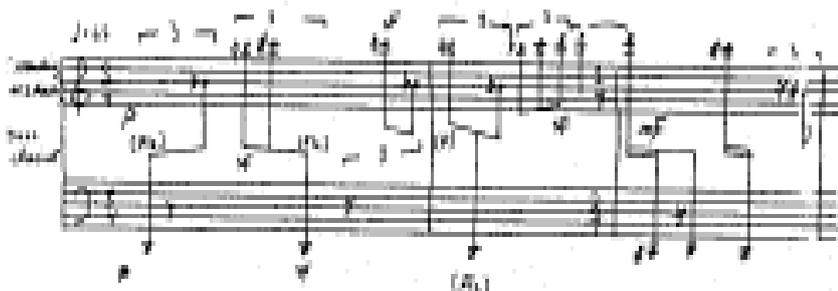
17 May 2002 - 21 Jan 2020

Altissimo register fingerings for the bass clarinet

By Thomas Aber and Terje Lerstad

In the years since the debut of the bass clarinet in Meyerbeer's *The Huguenots*, in 1832, the instrument's altissimo register has been underrated, if not completely ignored. In recent years, however, through the work of soloists such as Harry Sparnaay, Josef Horak and Eric Dolphy, attention has been drawn to the extremely wide range of the instrument. Therefore it has become necessary to codify the fingerings of the altissimo register, which differ greatly from those of the soprano clarinet. With a knowledge of the best fingerings this high range becomes very flexible and usable.

Although the compass is in theory virtually unlimited, it can safely be said that the bass clarinet can reach chromatically to a written C two octaves above the C played with the thumb and the register key. Enrique Raxach has included an A#4 in his *Chimaera* and Terje Lerstad has written up to a C5 in his *Solo*. The notes from the highest A to C are sensitive and difficult to obtain, but the notes up to G#4 are quite stable and, with practice, can be employed fluently. Notes in this range, particularly those as high as E4, occur quite frequently in the new solo literature, often in technically difficult passages. They often appear in skips from the lowest notes of the instrument, as in Adriaan van Noord's *Reggae*:



Adriaan van Noord; *Reggae*, bars 13-15.

We have therefore compiled a chart of the most useful fingerings for the notes from C#3 to C5. Where several fingerings are possible we have shown the primary one to the left and the others, with their uses or limitations described, thereafter. Where traditional soprano clarinet fingerings can be used they are included.

We have also shown the differences in fingerings of particular notes caused by differences between the two register venting systems in common use. One of these systems, used by Selmer and Buffet-Crampon, uses the hole for throat Bflat as the vent for the notes B1-Eb2 and a second hole, placed in the instrument's metal neck, for the notes E2-C3. The shift from the first to the second vent hole is currently done automatically by a bridge mechanism activated by the third finger of the right hand. The system used until recently by Leblanc and others uses one small hole, placed higher on the instrument than the B-flat hole, for venting the entire upper register. (The newest Leblanc bass clarinets also use two holes for venting the upper register.) On those instruments with double-hole venting, the changing of the hole held open by adding the third finger of the right hand is often quite useful in producing notes in the altissimo register. The use of the lower vent generally raises the pitch in this range. This phenomenon, which does not exist on bass clarinets with single-hole venting, is the primary reason for the addition of an "S" (for Selmer and Buffet-Crampon instruments) or an "L" (for older Leblanc and others) next to particular fingerings. Those fingerings with a letter are of use to those playing that type of instrument. The "S" or "L" have also been used to designate fingerings which work particularly well with one type of instrument or the other for various reasons other than the venting.

The use of overblown throat register notes is particularly useful for the notes C#3-E3. Also, the opening of the throat G# key is helpful with the notes Eb3-F3. We have found that combinations of these two methods generally produce fuller tones than the use of the standard soprano clarinet fingerings with the small hole in the first finger pad opened.

About the writers ...

Thomas Aber, born in 1954 in Kansas City, Missouri, studied bass clarinet with Joe Allard at the Juilliard School and with Harry Sparnaay at the Sweelinck Conservatorium, Amsterdam. He was a prize winner in the Gaudeamus Foundation's International Competition for Interpreters of Contemporary Music in 1979. He has worked as a free-lance musician with orchestras in The Netherlands and the United States. He is currently living in Kansas City.

Terje Lerstad, born in 1955 in Oslo, Norway, studied at the Norwegian Academy of Music. He played for two years in the East Norwegian Military Band. He is an active composer and is currently studying bass clarinet with Harry Sparnaay at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague, The Netherlands.

(The Clarinet No.2, 1982)

Trad.

Trad.

Harm. Trad. Trad.

Harm. Trad.

Trad.

Trad.

Altissimo register fingerings for the contrabass clarinet

By Terje Lerstad

When I first tried a contrabass clarinet 15 years ago, I was surprised that I could not play higher than the C played with thumb and register key, and the few pieces I had very seldom went higher. With some experimenting, I found out that overblowing the throat tones, I got the notes C#3-F3. But these notes could not be attacked. A trick is to push the register key during the attack and then releasing it quick. This is indicated in the fingering chart with parentheses around the register key. Like on the bass clarinet (See article in The Clarinet 1982 No.2), it is also helpful to open the throat G# key for the notes Eb3-F3. The usual Bb clarinet fingerings usually does not function, except in pianissimo, and the sound is quite closed.

The contra instruments (the Eb contra alto clarinet (sometimes called Eb contrabass) and Bb contra bass clarinet) have an automatic venting mechanism, and by closing the third finger of the right hand (thus changing register keys) you raise the pitch (useful for the notes D#3-A#3). On the contra alto (Eb) instruments you can also use the side trill keys, which are absent on the Bb contrabass.

The fingering chart is based on my own experience in playing new pieces. One of the first pieces to use high notes is found in Donald Martino's "Triple Concerto", going up to Bb3, and using the upper octave in several difficult passages. The concerto by Robert Rønnes takes the clarinet up to Eb5, and in my own "Toccatà" a G6 is written! The mastering of the first altissimo octave (to C4) is the most difficult, and should be done before going higher. Quite stable and useful are the notes up to C5 on the contra alto and to E5 on the contrabass. Of course wide legato skips and quick passages should be avoided, since the instrument responds more slowly than smaller clarinets.

In the fingering chart "CA" stands for only contra alto, and "CB" stands for only contrabass. The fingerings marked "L" work best on the metal Leblanc contras, and the fingerings marked "S" works best on the straight wooden ones by Selmer and Buffet-Crampon and on the Vito clarinets. Generally, the first fingering is the one preferred by me. Good luck!

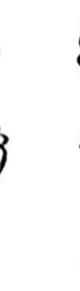
About the writer ...

Terje Lerstad is born in Oslo in 1955. Clarinet studies with Richard Kjelstrup at the Norwegian Academy of Music, and then two years as Eb clarinetist in East Norwegian Military Band. Bass clarinet studies with Harry Sparnaay in Holland; finished graduate study at Koninklijk Conservatorium, the Hague in 1982. From august 1982 bass clarinetist in the Norwegian Opera., Founder of Bozza Trio and Het Basklarinetten Colfektief. Soloist with ASKO Ensemble in Holland Festival 1982 and the Soloist Festival arranged by the Norwegian section of ISCM; Member of Oslo Sinfonietta and Cikada (ensemble of the norwegian section of ISCM) from the start and active as composer with 196 works written so far. Mainly self-taught in composition.

(The Clarinet No.3,1991)

 CB
 CB
 CA,S
 CA,L
 CA,L
 CA,L
 CA,L



 CB
 S
 CB:ord.
 CA:pp
 S

harm.

CB:ord.
CA:pp



 CB
 S
 S
 S
 S
 S
 S
 S
 S

CB

S

S

S

S

S

S



 S
 S
 S
 S

S

harm.

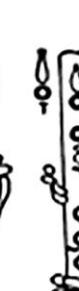
S



 S
 S
 S
 S

harm.

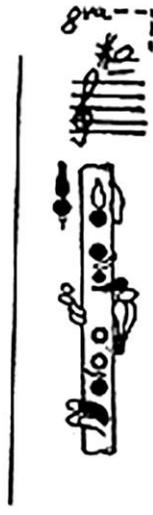
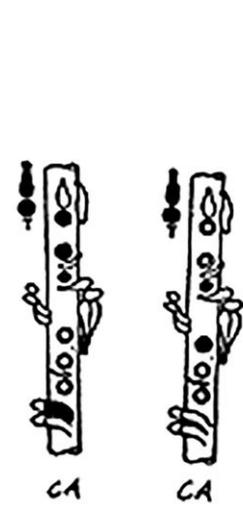
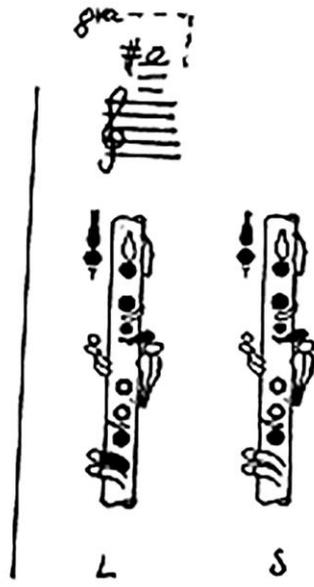
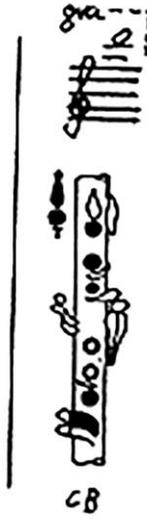
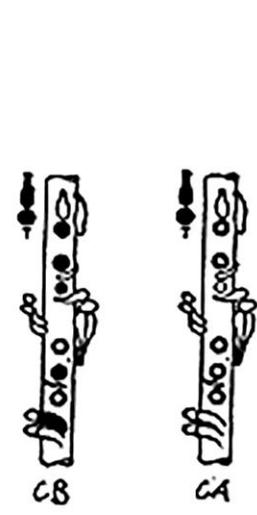
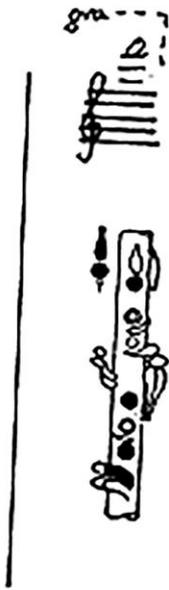
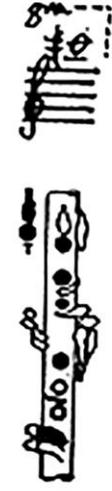


 S
 S
 S
 S
 S

harm.

S

CB



<http://test.woodwind.org/clarinet/BBoard/read.html?f=1&i=85185&t=85185>

Comments of the fingerings of the first octave:

I have tried those on my Leblanc contraalto and contrabass clarinets (And I don't use a hard reed !)

>**C#3** BBb, Eb RT-23 | 12-

slightly flat, very nice in soft dynamics, easy to attack

>**C#3** BBb, Eb R-1-- | ---

nice fingering

>**D3** Eb R---- | ---

can't attack (use "feather" register key)

>**D3** BBb --23 | 12- | can't attack

no problem to attack

>**Eb3** Eb R-G#--- | ---

nice fingering

>**Eb3** Eb RTG#123 | -2- lip down

hopelessly sharp, use my fingering (I never ever lip down)

>**Eb3** BBb TG#123 | 123F can't attack

no problem to attack

>**E4** Eb R-A--- | --- slur, lip down

hopelessly sharp, use my fingering (I never ever lip down)

>**E4** Eb RTG#123 | ---

fine, I consider this the "standard" fingering

>**E4** BBb TG#123 | ---

fine, I consider this the "standard" fingering

>**F4** Eb, BBb RT123C# | 123

fine, I consider this the "standard" fingering

>**F#4** Eb, BBb RT12- | 123

fine, I consider this the "standard" fingering

>**G4** Eb, BBb RT1-- | 123

fine, I consider this the "standard" fingering

>**G#4** Eb RT1-- | ---

fine, I consider this the "standard" fingering

>**G#4** Eb RT-- | ---G#

fine, I consider this the "standard" fingering

>**G#4** Eb, BBb RT-23 | 123F# lip down on BBb

hopelessly sharp (quarter-tone on BBb, half tone on Eb), use my fingering (I never ever lip down)

>**A4** Eb, BBb RT-23 | 123

a bit sharp on BBb

>**Bb4** Eb, BBb RTG#--- | ---

quarter-tone high on Eb, half tone high on BBb

>**B4** Eb RTG#123 | ---

fine

>**B4** BBb RTG#123C# |---

on BBb this is a C, on Eb OK but a bit sharp (OK for ff)

>**C4** Eb, BBb RT1-- | 12-

this is a C sharp!

Terje Lerstad