

## Bassoon Pedagogy: A Panel Discussion at the 2003 IDRS Conference

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Greensboro, North Carolina

The IDRS 2003 Conference in Greensboro, North Carolina had a theme of "pedagogy revisited" and one of the events consisted of a Bassoon Pedagogy Round Table in which several distinguished international panellists were asked to discuss aspects of bassoon pedagogy in front of an audience. Prior to the conference, each panellist was sent a list of questions to answer by the moderator and co-host of IDRS 2003, Michael Burns. The following are the answers to those questions sent in advance and dispersed at the round-table as a handout. Burns then asked each of the panelists to illuminate their answers more in person which led to some wonderful additional interchange amongst these bassoonists as well as question and answer sessions with the audience. I would like to once again thank my colleagues for their expertise and willingness to share their ideas.

### The panel consisted of:

- Meyrick Alexander**, principal Philharmonia Orchestra, bassoon professor, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London
- Judith Farmer**, principal Santa Barbara Chamber Orchestra, bassoon professor, University of Southern California.
- Kiyoshi Koyama**, principal Japan Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra
- Kim Walker**, bassoon professor, Indiana University, International soloist
- Liu Zhaolu**, principal Shanghai Symphony, bassoon professor, Shanghai Conservatory of Music

### MEYRICK ALEXANDER'S ANSWERS

#### How do you teach technique on the bassoon?

I provide students with a quick and simple daily routine of scales and exercises which produces a reliable, if unspectacular, finger technique.

#### How do you teach musicality?

By working on analysis of the meaning and style of the music, often with reference to period performance, and making sure the student actually listens to what is coming out of the end of the instrument.

#### How do you teach vibrato?

Assuming vibrato should oscillate in pitch, rather than dynamic, and that small muscles are easier to control

than large ones, I work on vibrato from the embouchure, working on varying speeds and intensities. If a student is vibrating successfully by other means, I leave well alone. Once a student has mastered the technique, the approach is to hardly ever use it, especially in chords or when playing with instruments that don't use it.

#### Do you teach reedmaking and if so, at what point should it be introduced?

It is vital to be able to adjust reeds and the best way of learning this is to make them, even if they end up buying them eventually. I usually start reedmaking lessons at the start of the second year (age 19) when they have established a reputation at College and the occasional disaster can be excused!

#### If not, where do students get their reeds?

Senior students sometimes sell them, or there are many free-lance reedmakers in Britain e.g. **Simon Chiswell**.

#### Are lessons taught individually or in a group?

I prefer individual tuition, but sometimes I combine with **Graham Sheen** to give a joint class for all our students. When I visit other colleges, they usually ask me to do a class.

#### What materials do you use with students, specifically: etudes, methods,

Jancourt, Milde, Oromszegi, Giampieri, Kovar, Bitsch.

#### solo repertoire (with and without accompaniment)

All the usual pieces plus others that students find for themselves. Also Sommerfeldt *Divertimento*, Woolfenden *Concerto* etc.

#### chamber literature,

This depends on what the student is required to play by the chamber music dept. Most common are: Nielsen *Quintet*, Poulenc *Trio* and *Sextet*, Danzi, Reicha etc.

#### and orchestral excerpts?

Each year has a list of excerpts to learn for an exam in February. In addition, we work on all of the standard symphonic repertoire and in the Post Diploma year (age 22) there is a list of complete works the students have to learn each term.

**GSMD BASSOON EXCERPTS****1st year:**

Brahms; *Violin Concerto* (2nd bsn)  
 Strauss; *Perpetuum Mobile*  
 Walton; *Façade*  
 Tchaikovsky; *Symphony no. 4*  
 Stravinsky; *Firebird*  
 Dukas; *Sorcerer's Apprentice*  
 Beethoven; *Violin Concerto*  
 Mozart; *Symphony no. 41*

**2nd year:**

Bach; *Suite no. 1*  
 Tchaikovsky; *Symphony no. 5*  
 Bartok; *Concerto for Orchestra*  
 Britten; *Variations and Fugue*  
 Mozart; *Figaro Overture*  
 Berg; *Violin Concerto*  
 Verdi; *Requiem*  
 Ravel; *Bolero*

**3rd year:**

Ravel; *Piano Concerto*  
 Stravinsky; *Pulcinella*  
 Tchaikovsky; *Symphony no. 6*  
 Stravinsky; *Rite of Spring*  
 Berlioz; *Symphonie Fantastique*  
 Rimsky; *Scheherazade*  
 Elgar; *Falstaff*  
 Shostakovich; *Symphony no. 9*  
 Schumann; *Symphony no. 1*

**PDOT WOODWIND SET WORKS****(1st Bassoon)**

Beethoven; *Symphony no. 5, Violin Concerto, Piano Concerto no. 5*  
 Berg; *Wozzeck*  
 Berlioz; *Roman Carnival*  
 Brahms; *Symphony no. 3, Violin Concerto*  
 Elgar; *Symphony no. 1*  
 Haydn; *Symphony no. 104*  
 Mozart; *Symphony no. 41*  
 Sibelius; *Violin Concerto, Symphony no. 5*  
 Shostakovich; *Symphony no. 10*  
 Strauss; *Also Sprach Zarathustra*  
 Tchaikovsky; *Symphony no. 6*  
 Wagner; *Tannhauser*

**(Contra Bassoon)**

Berg; *Violin Concerto*  
 Beethoven; *Symphony no. 5*  
 Brahms; *Symphony no. 1*  
 Ravel; *Piano Concerto (main gauche), Ma Mere L'Oye*

**BASSOON IN CHINA**

**Today I am very proud that I can be seated here to talk about bassoon in China. I've got the e-mail about the questions of Pedagogy Round Table Discussions from Mr. Burns, but before answering them, I wish to talk about the situation of bassoon in China.**

My orchestra – the *Shanghai Symphony* founded in 1879, is the oldest one not only in China but also in Asia. Yet before 1949, most orchestral players are western musicians from Europe. The conductors Mario Paci, Arrigo Foa and bassoonist **Albert Fortina** are from Italy. After 1949 most orchestral players are Chinese, they studied instruments from European teachers, and at the same time, the Chinese government sent young people to study music in Russia, while specialists from Russia and East Germany came to teach music in China. These Chinese students who studied music abroad during 1950-1960, became teachers who taught my teacher.

So, the history of playing bassoon in China is not very long. I think, viewing from teaching material to method, and from instrument to condition of learning, the whole situation was not very good. But in recent years it has changed greatly: following the economic development in our country, many people want their children to study music. Now in Shanghai, there are about hundred thousand children learning piano and about ten thousand children learning flute, but only a little more than one hundred children learning bassoon. It is more than before indeed, but much less than other instruments. Now in Shanghai we have a *Bassoon Society*, we have bassoon concert every three months, in hope that more people may know this instrument and begin to like it better. We also hope that the bassoon students who enrolled for amateur music test in our city, could surpass the oboe students numerically.

Now let me answer the questions

**1. About technique**

I think scale and arpeggio is the basis of all technique. We have a very fine scale etude written by my teacher **Mr. Zhao zhun**, which includes major, minor, pentatonic scales and arpeggios. I insist my students practice them with staccato and legato in different tempo and different rhythms. I am sure this method may help to improve technique to a much better level.

**2. About musicality**

Everything in your life can help to develop musicality, but it needs time. Therefore, the first important thing is: let your students have the right method, musicality from their hearts can only be the second. Musicality can grow up with their age. I agree that every person is different, but if we have bassoon

students who like piano at the same time, then I am the one to make the choice. Certainly, I would also ask my students to listen to opera, violin or piano music [CD or the like], encourage them to find help from their classmates majoring in violin or piano if they happen to play the same pieces with their instruments. I think this will help them to promote their musicality.

### 3. About vibrato

I think, the air from the lung is controlled by the lower abdominal muscles and the diaphragm. When the students begin to learn vibrato. I often ask them to play one low note and make vibrato very slowly, they must control the beat. If better, then they can play a little bit faster. I always ask my students to find help from cello playing---they can see how the cello player moves his [or her] left hand to produce vibrato, and the tone of cello is very near to that of the bassoon's.

### 4. About the reeds

Personally I don't teach reed-making. Usually my students and I buy reeds from reedmakers in Shanghai, but the quality is not very good, the size is too old.

### 5. About teaching

I am bassoon player in the *Shanghai Symphony Orchestra*, also teaching in the *Shanghai Conservatory* and its Music Middle School. These students are professional and individually, each student for about two hours every week. Some amateur students are taught individually, and some taught in a group.

### 6. About music materials

In China, music materials for bassoon are rare. Ten years ago, maybe you can find some music materials from Russia. In our country, much bassoon music is written by hand. I remember when I learned bassoon, almost all material should be copied by myself. Now the situation is still not very good: in Shanghai's bookstore, we can just find two or three books available for bassoon, but there are so many piano and violin music which we can use just as well, and I used many of them in teaching.

If the students learn bassoon from the beginning, I can let them practice:

*Scale etude for children* by **Zhao zhun**.

*Practical method for the bassoon* by J. Weissenborn.

Maybe half year or one year later, they will also practice:

*Studies in all keys* by L. Milde.

Maybe two years later, they will practice:

*Concert studies volume I* by L. Milde.

During these years, they will also practice some simple Chinese or Western pieces.

Some solo repertoire:

*Capriccio* by J. Weissenborn.

*Theme and variations* by H. Weischendorff.

*Sonata* by Georg Philipp Telemann.

*Sonata* by Benedetto Marcello.

*Concertos* by Vivaldi.

When they graduate from the Music Middle School and enter into the Conservatory. Maybe they will practice:

*Scale Etude* by **Zhao zhun**.

*24 daily exercises* by **Simon Kovar**.

*Concert Studies Volume II* by L. Milde.

*Rhythmic Studies* by Karel Pivonka.

*Technical Studies* by Karel Pivonka.

Orchestra studies

Solo repertoire:

*Concerto* by Weber

*Concerto* by Mozart

*Concerto* by Vivaldi

*Sonata* by Saint-saens

That's all my talking today. Thank you for listening!

## KIYOSHI KOYAMA'S ANSWERS TO MICHAEL BURNS' PEDAGOGY QUESTIONS

My interest is focused on the enlightenment and familiarization of French bassoon. Presently I have three professional bassoon students and about thirty amateur bassoon students. All are private students. Following expressions are mainly for the latter.

Lessons are performed individually. Students have an opportunity to play once a year in special event designed to introduce the fruits of their labors. They study scales of two-octave and easy etudes which fit their skill level. Etudes usually used are: **Maurice Allard: *Methode de Basson***, and **Fernand Oubradous: *Enseignement complet du Basson***.

Important technical elements which have to be studied are: breath support, tone production, detache and dynamics. Vibrato should be studied after students mastered breath support as introduced by **Maurice Allard**.

About musicality, I show my playing as an example and let student feel or understand what it is I wish to express.

Fundamentally, I supply reed for students. Reeds are adjusted and stabilized before I hand them over. Some students make their reeds according to given reeds as a model.

French bassoon is very attractive instrument. Nevertheless, this bassoon is thought to be obsolete within the past century. I wish to contribute to the renaissance of the FRENCH BASSOON.

**LEONARD SHARROW SUGGESTED ETUDE BOOKS:**

(Mr. Sharrow was originally to be one of the panelists but illness prevented his attendance at the conference. He had, however, already sent me this response so I felt it valuable to include it here--MJB)

Eugene Bozza: *Quinze Etudes Journalieres*--Leduc

Victor Bruns: *Fagottstudien für fortgeschrittene*--Hofmeister

Edouard Flament: *Exercices techniques*--Evette & Schaeffer

J. B. Gambaro: *18 Studies*--International

A. Giampieri: *16 Studi Giornalieri*--Ricordi

Eugene Jancourt: *Etude for Basson perfectionne*--Evette & Schaeffer

Alberto Orefici: *Studii per Fagotto*

Alberto Orefici: *Bravoura Studies*--International

Pierre Rode: *15 Caprices*--International

Julius Weissenborn: *Advanced Studies*--Peters

**JUDITH FARMER'S ANSWERS****1. How do you teach technique on the bassoon?**

I believe the most important aspect to teaching technique is choosing material that will challenge the student, but not too much so, so that one is always building a firm foundation with lots of reinforcement. Playing the bassoon should always be easy! We accomplish this by never playing a passage faster than we can play it well. To increase speed we use all the common rhythmic variations, dotted eighth and sixteenth, etcetera, always practicing with a metronome.

**2. How do you teach musicality?**

I try to emphasize phrasing in everything a student plays in his lesson: scales, etudes, excerpts and of course their solo repertoire. I encourage them to listen to recordings, especially of pieces other than bassoon music! I also urge them to attend as many concerts as possible.

**3. How do you teach vibrato?**

I recommend that they set their metronome to quarter note = 60 and begin by playing one pulse to the beat, then 2, then 3 up to about 5, a pulse being an extra push from the lower abdomen, something like blowing out a candle.

**4. Do you teach reed making and if so, at what stage should it be introduced?**

I introduce reed making during their second year of

study, if we are talking about a student who is beginning with me. For a student who comes to me with a grasp of the basics we add reed making right away.

**5. Are lessons taught individually or in a group?**

At USC each student has a weekly individual lesson and a group master class as well. When I was a student in Vienna, we all attended everyone else's lessons. I find this highly efficient and profitable for both the students and the teacher.

**6. What materials do you use with students?**

After completing Weissenborn, I have a number of intermediate etude books I like to cover with the student: Schmidt *Technical Exercises*, Hofmann *Op. 36*, (before these my teacher in Vienna, **Karl Oehlberger** would do etudes by Kopprasch and Neukirchner), Ozi *42 Caprices*, Orefici *Melodic Studies*. Only after these etudes are mastered--often we will repeat a book--will we move on to Milde *Scale Studies* and Jancourt. There are other supplemental etudes I like by Bruns, Pivonka, Uhl and Satzenhofer. With more advanced students we would do the Milde *Concert Studies* and the Giampieri. As for solo repertoire we cover the basics: *Sonatas* by Galliard, Fasch, Hindemith, Telemann and Mozart, *Concertos* by Vivaldi, Mozart and Weber (I like to introduce Vanhal or Kozeluch before we approach the Mozart.)

With the more advanced students we might do the Weber *Ongarese*, either piece by Tansman. We should get the Etlar in there somewhere! As for chamber music, I would hope that after 4 years of college the student would have played the woodwind quintet standards: Hindemith, Ibert, Barber, Ligeti, perhaps the Mozart and Beethoven *Piano Quintets*, and the Mozart and Beethoven *Octets*. It isn't possible to mention every piece here as some are selected to deal with a particular problem a student might have. At this point I would like to mention some material that might not be so widely known: **Karl Oehlberger's Studies on Orchestra Excerpts** and a large selection of works arranged for bassoon by **Mordechai Rechtman**.

**KIM WALKER'S ANSWERS****How do you teach technique on the bassoon?**

Technique is a foundation to be mastered in order to allow the performer to express their musical thought and the passion of the music. I begin a thorough review of all the basic techniques whether working with young players or graduate and professional colleagues. Many of the chapters are all branches of the same tree, and most performers find different challenges and talents in their portfolio. The differences between Apollo and Dionysus still reign in today's world of interpretation. At the same time, every player wants to assure the flexibility to approach the music in a broad range of styles.

Never at another time in history have performers been asked to master so many diverse styles; Baroque performance practice, classical ornamentation, cadenza writing and articulation all the way up to and including the 21st century techniques.

In essence I begin with tone development, citing the flute exercises of Moyses as well as the **Kovar** methods, long tones with dynamic patterns. This will require attention to postural anatomy, body and head resonance as the player learns to not only enlarge their dynamic range, but to retain their personal resonance and sonority. This usually takes 18 months. While this is evolving, we address finger patterns, and intonation.

In order to approach this methodically, I begin with slow scales focusing on fingerings designed for optimal efficiency. The best choices for certain scale patterns, technical passages, and lyrical effects are all exercised. Then we move to modal patterns, jazz patterns and back to tonal patterns with a mix of virtuoso speed and slow attentive detail.

Articulations are easily incorporated with a variety of teaching templates. The critical work is to address the placement of the tongue, and the air pressure so that the tongue is never trying to assist in the speed of the air. I have a series of exercises which can take up to two years in order to relax the throat and allow for optimal tone and freedom of articulation.

When the foundation is mastered, the auxiliary techniques are easy to champion – flutter tonguing, circular breathing, multiphonics and so forth.

### How do you teach musicality?

*Every minute of each lesson.* Whatever we are discussing has a musical context which involves recreating a musical idea of the composer. The contemporary art, history, social economic setting, fashion, literature all contribute to a sense of style. In the USA this is particularly important. When in London, Prague, Paris, Rome or Vienna, the art and architecture is part of life, and immediately accessible through life. In such a modern country like ours, and many others, it is very helpful to travel or at least read corresponding literature and research the art and architecture.

The study of phrasing as offered by Tabuteau, "Kincaidiana" and other sources of the "number" system for scaling dynamics has permeated the culture of many professional colleagues. In Europe, the discussion to avoid false accents results in much the same result. This is a wonderful beginning. However, when we approach music of different languages, such as Stockhausen, or Renaissance works, or even Vivaldi versus Shostakovich there are other differentials which paint the picture. We have all seen how differing musical ideas can be equally valid with different approaches being equally successful. The key will be the research towards the composer's intent.

When teaching, **Schoenbach** remains one of my

key musical mentors. The images would portray a windmill or similar to assist the technical mastery of any passage. As most creative writers will say: "Show it, don't tell it". Therefore a combination of unshakable attention to detailed phrasing in all etudes and excerpts is a key foundation. This must be followed by transposition, and a discovery of different styles, colors and articulations to enhance the musical contrast.

### How do you teach vibrato?

Having had the chance to perform in orchestras in Italy, Germany, Swiss-French, and English I had to move past the American training to adjust for the different priorities in the different situations. The use of vibrato in each country, the manner of playing a triplet and the tonal concept is inherently different. As a young performer in the US I was trained to have a very regular vibrato which rarely differed depending upon the repertoire. Having traveled the world, I can share that performing the Schubert *Octet* in London – the wobble free zone – and then a week later in New York was a revelation. I wondered if the bed of granite determined the speed of the vibrato. I encourage students to listen to a selection of great performers and this is incorporated into master classes.

Basically there are two approaches I discuss with students: vibrato as a string player would employ and vibrato as singers employ. International players arrive and no matter how proficient they might be, the hardest thing for them to adjust in order to audition for an orchestral position in another country will always be the vibrato. This is a complicated area and a series of different exercises can assist all players develop flexibility and control for their musical choices.

### Do you teach reed making and if so, at what point should it be introduced?

I teach a two semester approach to reed-making. The first semester shares a basic history of reed-making. Prior to gouging machines, how were the reeds made? What has changed and what does this provide the current player? The overall approach with regard to design, the options available and the basics of scraping and forming reeds is covered so that all students have at least two styles of reed-making that they understand. A second semester provides detailed attention to scraping, tuning and refining the reed to the player's innate musical choices and needs. All students take this course which provides a foundation. I am sure, and I even encourage that they continue to ask for similar ideas elsewhere. The BME students have such a heavy course load that they might not take this course until later in their studies. Everyone else takes this upon arriving in Bloomington.

I have met with reed-makers all over the world, and have a collection of some 300 historical reeds. The dimensions have changed and yet it wasn't until

I began traveling extensively that I realized how much the humidity, altitude and other climatic conditions are responsible for the performer's reed choices. For years I had suggested that the Scandinavian players lighten some of their reeds. When I went to perform in Finland for the first time, I was delighted to have a blank resembling a wind-surf board in my box. This was just what was needed. Again, flexibility is key. There are some methods to assist with travel, and I definitely take the time for this hand preparation in order to minimize the changes felt as a performer.

**If not, where do students get their reeds?**

There are many good reeds available today – Danzi and Jones are what the students seem to use most commonly.

**Are lessons taught individually or in a group?**

**Both.** I teach a private lesson each week and then we have a weekly masterclass. Additionally, we designed a group "Technique" class which assists in finding as much humour as possible when playing scales and arpeggios.

**What materials do you use with students, specifically: etudes, methods, solo repertoire (with and without accompaniment), chamber literature, and orchestral excerpts?**

**Etudes:** Moyses, Kovar, Milde, Oubradous, Bertoni etudes are a basic.

**Solo Bassoon:** I cover the Telemann *Flute Fantasias* and the Mignone *Waltzes* along with Gordon Jacob *Partita*, Osborne *Rhapsody*, Persichetti *Parable*, Alan Ridout's *Caliban and Ariel* as basic requirements. There are many wonderful works beyond this list

which include Isang Yun's *Monolog* and Stockhausen's *In Freundschaft*.

**With Piano:** We work with piano regularly, in principle every other week, beginning with a selection of baroque repertoire, several French *concours* pieces and the major concertos. This is then supplemented by some transcriptions of excellent music in order to enlarge the musical experience with a variety of styles, discussion of vibrato and tone. A comprehensive list is suggested.

**Chamber repertoire:** this is an essential ingredient for all musicians honing the fundamentals of orchestral playing and ensemble listening skills. I like to suggest basic quintets of Reicha, Ibert and then moving towards the Nielsen, Barber, Harbison quintets. The major works of Mozart, Beethoven, Dvorak and Stravinsky are all suggested as priorities. However, organizational skills and availability can determine much of how this participates in a lifetime.

**Orchestral excerpts:** I teach this in several ways – with group courses and then in private lessons. There is a basic course for the undergraduates to study the 12 most common excerpts. Learn it and play it without complication. Then I offer a very intense 3 hour course with several of these excerpts again. However we approach these through the composer, and address the style, the design, the refinement expected for orchestral auditions. This is then followed by a drill where we discuss how to prepare mentally and psychologically for an audition while preparing one excerpt to perfection each week. After this players are usually prepared for the basic skills of an audition. This is a marathon not a sprint!

