

# Difficult Bassoon Notes

By Elizabeth Rusch Fetters

The intricate construction of woodwind instruments is such that one or two notes are usually difficult to play in tune or awkward to finger. Student bassoonists improve in musicianship once they know which notes on their instrument are unstable and then learn the best alternate fingerings to use.

F3 and E3 are often out of tune for young players and may sound either flat or sharp. There is no telling what type of sound will come out of the instrument. Both notes improve by



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keeping the red of the lip rolled under and supporting the air.

E $\flat$ 3 can be another unstable note. If the student is playing an older instrument, ask him to add the first or second finger of the right hand and the B $\flat$  key to produce a stable tone. These older fingerings will be unnecessary on modern bassoons. Another way to improve E $\flat$ 3 is to add the resonance key, the top left-hand pinky key that is normally used for E $\flat$ 2, to the basic fingering. During lessons experiment with your players' instruments to find out which alternate fingerings are most in tune. Most students struggle with the forked fingering, which originated on Baroque-era instruments. Some fingering charts suggest an alternate to the forked fingering that uses the C $\sharp$  key on the back of the bassoon, just above the whisper key; however, I strongly advise against it. This is a trill fingering only for D3 to E $\flat$ 3, and it is even more unstable and out of tune than the other fingerings for E $\flat$ 3.

F $\sharp$  in any octave is sharp and bright. Using more half-hole on F $\sharp$ 3 and F $\sharp$ 4 will also bring the pitch down, as will making sure the reed is properly cushioned. Students may inadvertently tighten the lips around the reed trying to fix the pitch.

If G3 is sharp, students should put down the resonance key; this fingering has become standard. Some notes –

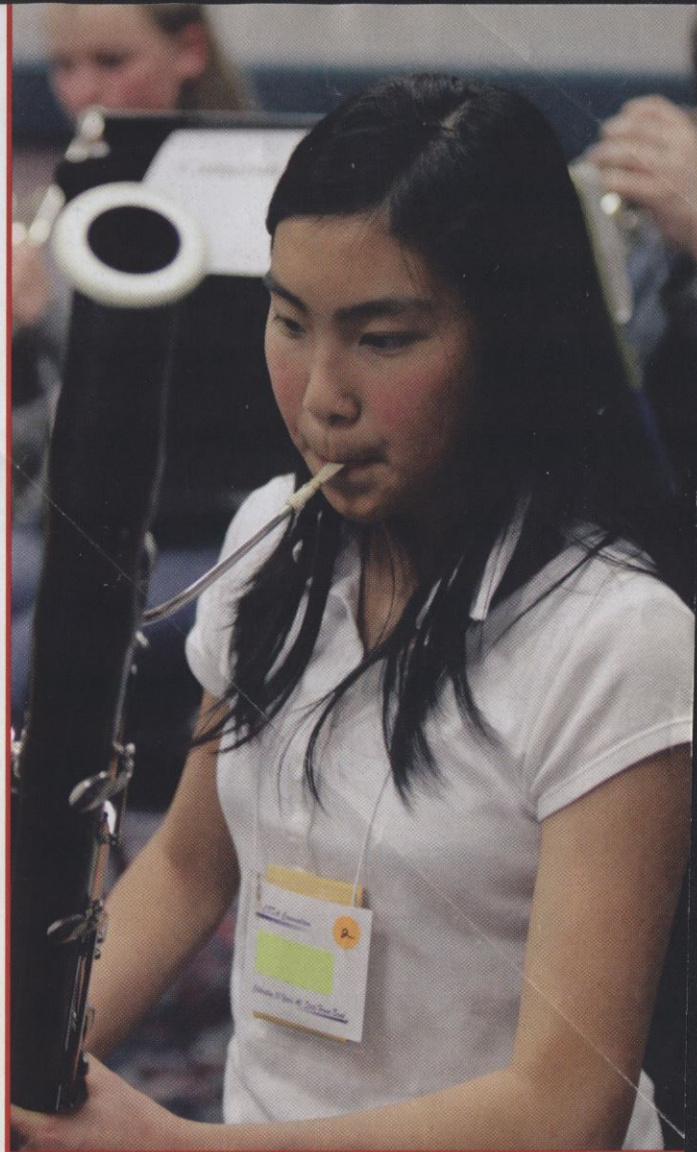


Photo by Kirby Fong

G3, F $\sharp$ 3, and A $\flat$ 3 – will produce a growling sound if the student does not open enough of the half-hole with the first finger of the left hand.

E2 and D2 are frequently sharp, especially for young players. These are difficult notes to play in tune, and because of the overtones on bassoon a sharp E or D can make everyone in an ensemble sound out of tune. To improve the pitch show students how to form an *oh* vowel with their mouth and to drop their jaw. Both techniques will get these notes down to the right pitch.

Some students have trouble sounding notes above the staff, such as A3, B3, C4, or D4, so remind them to form an *ee* vowel with their mouth and release the whisper key. If they continue to have difficulty, have them try the flicking technique: touch the small keys above the whisper key and at the same time articulate the note; this will guarantee a clean sound. □