

# SPACE BASS



**Advanced Explorations for  
Bass Clarinet**


**Andy Hudson & Roger Zare**  
*with Jason Alder*

*Foreword by Jeff Anderle*

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## Preface: “*To boldly go . . .*”

“*Bass. The final frontier.*” Wait, what?

Growing up, I loved the confidence and poise of the legendary starship captain Jean-Luc Picard. Once he had decided his crew’s next course of action through space, he would give the command to “make it so.” And right away, Commander Riker, Lieutenant Commander Data, and the whole gang would leap into action on behalf of humanity. The show? *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The ship, of course, was the USS Enterprise (NCC-1701-D), the galaxy’s preeminent vessel for exploration, reconnaissance, diplomacy, and occasionally a dazzling space battle. As a child, I remember watching *Star Trek* with Mom, reliving our favorite episodes night after night thanks to our extensive collection of VHS tapes. Each new episode brought a new exploration: a problem of cataclysmic proportions faced humanity and the fate of the galaxy hung in the balance. Only through careful problem-solving, teamwork, wide-eyed optimism, and the occasional phaser battle could humanity be saved and interstellar peace preserved. The vision for humanity was idealist and inspiring: a singular front, people united by their planetary inhabitation, working for the good of all and for exploration, learning, and growth.

Their continuing mission? “*To explore strange new worlds. To seek out new life and new civilizations. To boldly go where no one has gone before.*” As musicians, our goals are the same.

I remember the first time I touched a bass clarinet. Seeing the word “bass” next to my name for a university wind ensemble assignment brought some real danger to my freshman year of college. For many of us, being a clarinetist in middle or high school meant that we were certainly not a bass clarinetist. We were trained to silo ourselves, never to cross that grave expanse between us and our constellated low reed neighbors.

I struggled mightily to wrangle this strange and wild instrument. Do you remember the moment that Luke Skywalker gets his first lightsaber in *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*? He marvels at the device and its inherent power, and his early training sees him unable to control or effectively utilize the weapon. Thankfully, over the course of three films he masters the art of lightsaber combat, becomes one with the Force, and saves the day. The first time I laid hands on a bass clarinet, I too felt like I had found an alien artifact. Sure, I’d played the regular clarinet, but the bass? This monstrosity stared back at me from an enormous, zipper-clad case just daring me to try to put it together. (*Pro-Tip: Never ever allow your students to first put the bass together without supervision. Your repair bill will thank me!*) So many rods, shiny keys, a bizarrely complex register key system, and rumors that it was an instrument of the enemy: that Adolphe Sax himself had invented it. Wait, what?!

I confess that I underestimated the bass clarinet during my first exploration. I guess I thought that it was just a “big clarinet.” But the bass clarinet offers an exciting star-fleet of possibilities for the intrepid explorer. Here are a few things I wish I had discovered sooner that would have helped me “Make it so!” with a lot more ease:

## II. Pale Blue Dot

*“From this distant vantage point, the Earth might not seem of any particular interest. But for us, it's different. Consider again that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us.”*

*-Carl Sagan, Pale Blue Dot*

*On Valentine's Day in 1990, the Voyager 1 space probe captured a now-iconic photograph of the planet Earth. Taken from an enormous distance, the picture shows the deep blackness of space dappled with pentachrome ribbons of light. Hidden within one of those ribbons is the smallest and most significant of specks: the planet Earth, seen from a little under 4 billion miles away. The glint of light appears ever-so-slightly blue in the photograph and communicates at once the impossible scale and distance of space and the smallness of our world amidst the greater cosmos. Everything we see, everything we know is held within that infinitesimal speck. Our lives, our loved ones, our parents or children, the lives we build and the places we go. In the grand scheme of all things, we are but a speck, a “pale blue dot” as Carl Sagan calls it. But in our smallness, we are not insignificant. Rather, we shine with light and possibility, illuminating against the cosmic background, shining into the darkness. On Valentine's Day, 1990, the Voyager 1 sent a love letter to humanity about our place in the universe - and just how much we have left to discover.*

*The further we get from the most comfortable ranges of the bass clarinet, the more we have to reconsider our approach. We often have to simply throw out our standard fingerings and approaches, replacing those comfortable tropes with an exploratory and flexible spirit. “Pale Blue Dot” offers three specific avenues for exploration.*

### **1) Adopting a flexible altissimo fingering system with new (yet familiar) fingerings.**

Some of these notes are high. Like, really high. When I first took up the bass clarinet, I was playing the instrument in my college wind ensemble. In the concert band setting, my duty was to hold down the lower end of the sonic spectrum with rich, loud low notes. As I moved more into solo, chamber, and orchestral settings, I started to see the instrument moving more flexibly into all registers and came face-to-face with my own limitations. I started to realize that the “altissimo toolkit” I had used on my B $\flat$  clarinet was going to need some adjustment here in Bass World.

The first things to go were the fingerings. Rather than the soprano clarinet altissimo fingerings I'd used with a vented left hand first finger (on the bass clarinet, you typically would “half hole” these fingerings by pressing the first finger down but leaving open the tiny vent hole), I started to deploy a set of fingerings that more closely mirrored the throat tones. Sure, sometimes a passage will call for a “traditional” fingering, but the bass clarinet's altissimo register requires some reprogramming and I generally default to side keys and open fingerings in this register. A chart with my favorite core fingerings is provided before the etude and the full chart is printed for you in Appendix A. Of course, your methods may vary and every instrument is different, so I have also included a page for you to

# II. Pale Blue Dot

Roger Zare

Lento espressivo ♩ = 48

Bass Clarinet  
in B $\flat$

The musical score for Bass Clarinet in B $\flat$  consists of eight staves of music. The tempo is Lento espressivo with a quarter note equal to 48 beats. The score includes various dynamics and articulations:

- Staff 1: *n* (pianissimo), *p* (piano), *pp* (pianissimo).
- Staff 2: *n* (pianissimo), *mf* (mezzo-forte), *p* (piano).
- Staff 3: *f* (forte).
- Staff 4: *p* (piano), *mf*<sup>3</sup> (mezzo-forte triplet), *p* (piano), *mf*<sup>3</sup> sub. (mezzo-forte triplet, subtended).
- Staff 5: *f* (forte).
- Staff 6: *p* (piano), *f*<sup>3</sup> sub. (forte triplet, subtended).
- Staff 7: *p* delicately (piano, delicately), *f* (forte).
- Staff 8: *p* sub. (piano, subtended), *ff* (fortissimo).

Additional markings include slurs, accents, and articulation marks such as *mf*<sup>3</sup> and *f*<sup>3</sup> sub. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B $\flat$ ).

# X. The Golden Record

*When the Voyager space probe was launched on September 5, 1977, it contained a wealth of scientific instruments and transmitters that have allowed it to send data about the universe back to Earth. It also included a “cultural time capsule” designed to share with any extraterrestrial contacts a bit about life on Earth. Images, sounds, and even music were sent on the spacecraft, encoded onto two 12-inch phonograph records, which were gold-plated. President Jimmy Carter called it “a present from a small, distant world, a token of our sounds, our science, our images, our music, our thoughts and our feelings.” Carl Sagan eloquently said we were launching a “bottle into the cosmic ocean.”*



*Music made up a big portion of this record. From Mozart to Chuck Berry, Stravinsky to Blind Willie Johnson, the record also included folk music, jazz, spoken words, and more. Would you believe that Bach had three tracks on The Golden Record? This eclectic musical collection was a timestamped transmission, sent into the wild unknown in hopes that someone, somewhere might find it. From that day in 1977 until this moment, The Golden Record sings into the lonely abyss of space, just waiting for someone to metaphorically (and literally) “press play” and learn about humanity’s love of music. It*

*is interesting to consider which music might make the cut if we were to create a new “Golden Record” for the modern era. Would classical music still retain its primary role on the album? You have to imagine that albums by Nirvana or Michael Jackson could be included, although considering what happened with The Beatles, I guess we can’t be too sure.<sup>12</sup>*

## 1) How to sing.

The process of singing through the clarinet is not altogether dissimilar to the growling effect we discussed in Chapter 7. It just takes the effect a step further, requiring a more accurate vocalization, more flexibility, and often, greater volume. The process of singing through the clarinet feels a good bit like humming, but we can work in two directions to practice this technique.

But before we do that, let’s practice singing - only singing - some of the melodic lines in *The Golden Record*. You may notice that the last five bars require us to only sing through the instrument, with no accompaniment. This will feel remarkably similar to, well, just good old-fashioned singing.

<sup>12</sup> Legend has it that there was an attempt made to include “Here Comes the Sun” by The Beatles, but EMI wanted a large sum of money for its inclusion and the budget for The Golden Record did not allow this kind of purchase, so it was tragically left out. You have to imagine, though, that it could be alarming for an interstellar being to receive what might equate to a warning on this record: “Look out, here comes the sun!”

# X. The Golden Record

Roger Zare

Not too slow ♩ = 66

Voice (in Bb)

Bass Clarinet in Bb

*ppp* *p* *ppp* *p*

3

*ppp* *p*

4

*ppp* *p* *ppp*

6

*ppp* *p*

7

*ppp* *p* *pp*



# XIII. ...for the benefit of all mankind

*“The Congress hereby declares that it is the policy of the United States that activities in space should be devoted to peaceful purposes for the benefit of all mankind.”*

National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958

*When President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the National Aeronautics and Space Act that established NASA, he laid out a clear mission statement for the USA’s new space program. Exploration, innovation, pursuit, and above all, peace. This charter was designed to transcend national and personal borders, and to be “for the benefit of all mankind.” We have not always lived up to this mission, and as we press further into the 21st century it isn’t difficult to imagine a world where the exploration of space veers wildly away from our initial noble purpose. We may yet live to see the day when space becomes just another regulated commodity, used for the benefit of independent people, specific affluent nations, or wealthy billionaires rather than for the good of all. For this reason, we must always return to the core mission that we initially set out: peaceful exploration, for the shared benefit of all.*

*In our final etude, we synthesize the concepts and ideas that we have explored throughout this book. Motives and ideas from the early etudes are recapped here, and these concepts are layered on top of one another for a musical experience that truly feels like a capstone.*

## **1) Telling a story with “horizontal harmony.”**

The central challenge of this etude is the same challenge we face in all unaccompanied clarinet playing: we are a monophonic instrument seeking to tell enormous, nuanced musical stories with a single musical line. While this etude does deploy a true harmony at times through vocalized accompaniment and multiphonics, the vast majority of the music remains monophonic. (More on the relationship between Zare’s choices to use monophony and polyphony will be discussed later in this chapter!) This means that we must be intentional to craft our musical phrases in such a way that we reveal to the audience the harmonic structure of the piece. This isn’t unlike the way we might phrase famous orchestral solos from the music of Brahms or Respighi. We must always be attentive to the harmonic structure of our melodic lines and must do so with even more care and clarity when performing unaccompanied music that lives in an expanded or post-tonal universe.

The question emerges: how do we establish the “tonal center” of this music? This is a simple question with a complex and multi-faceted answer. Certainly, at times the music will imply a “key center” of sorts or will function “cadentially” in the traditional sense of the word. In these moments, however fleeting, we may rely on our musical instincts and the vast tonal tradition to inform our phrasing choices. We may choose to see such music in the same way we see a single line Bach invention: as propulsive music that outlines harmonic centers and meaningfully pivots into other related centers. At many points, however, the implied harmony of the music is a bit more abstract,

# XIII. ...for the benefit of all mankind

♭ = open, loud slap tongue with little or no pitch  
+ = closed, pitched slap tongue  
x = key click  
◇ or ◆ = air sound

Roger Zare

## Restless ♩ = 144

Bass Clarinet  
in B $\flat$

4 *pp* sotto voce  
key clicks

6 air sound, no pitch

9 *f* *pp* *p*

11 *ff*

14 *p* *pp*

16 *p* *pp*

18 t.s. *ff*

*“Andy and Roger have put together a compendium for the bass clarinet that I wish I had when starting off my journey into contemporary bass clarinet techniques. Now, with SPACE BASS, these two intrepid souls have indeed made a giant leap for all bass clarinet kind. When bass clarinetists return from this adventure (and beware, many won’t return bwhahahahaaa), they will be equipped for just about any adventure the galaxy holds for them. Highly recommended!”*

*-Michael Lowenstern: International Soloist and Recording Artist, [www.earspasm.com](http://www.earspasm.com)*

*“SPACE BASS is exactly what we need in the bass clarinet community... This book explores the vast timbral palette of the bass clarinet in a super fun and challenging way. I wish I had this resource when I was a young bass clarinetist! Buy this book now, you won’t regret it!”*

*-Stefanie Gardner, DMA: Égide Duo, Paradise Winds, Henri Selmer Paris Performing Artist, Chair of the ICA New Music Committee, Artistic Director of the 2023 ICA Low Clarinet Festival, Music Program Director Glendale Community College (AZ)*

*“Andy and Roger's SPACE BASS is a must-have companion for every bass clarinetist and composer looking to reinforce fundamental elements of bass clarinet playing, to discover and hone many ethereal bass clarinet techniques, or to simply take a celestial joyride through Roger's compositions. Warning: astral projection may occur while playing through this book.”*

*-Zachary Good: Eighth Blackbird, Mocrep, ZRL*

*“Andy Hudson and Roger Zare's SPACE BASS is a wonderfully crafted collection of music and masterclasses that showcases the bass clarinet as a true solo instrument. These chapters contain a wealth of invaluable information on both traditional and extended techniques, and Andy's unassuming nature and methodical teaching style makes each technique easily approachable. Whether you are an established orchestral player, a chamber musician, or a budding student, SPACE BASS has something to help take your bass clarinet playing to the next level!”*

*-M. Taylor Eiffert: Bass Clarinetist, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra*

*“This is what an etude book should be - cutting edge, groundbreaking and fun. Hudson has made contemporary techniques and practice fully accessible and the running commentary and introduction into each piece is witty and informative. The personal approach is welcoming and there is a clear practice guide for all techniques and technical difficulties covered in the pieces. The etudes (solo concert pieces) by Roger Zare are a breath of fresh air. These are etudes that players will want to study. There are no galaxies left unexplored... this is one book for every bass clarinet enthusiast.”*

*-Sarah Watts, PhD: Low Clarinet Virtuoso & International Soloist*

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