

Hey Kids, IT'S A BASSOON



The Bassoon is the largest and lowest sounding member of the woodwind family except, of course, when the contrabassoon is asked to play. This much bigger bassoon can play a whole octave lower. The sound of the bassoon is sometimes expressive like an oboe, sometimes funny, and sometimes gruff. It all depends on the music it is asked to play. Two of the most popular symphonic solos for the bassoon include the theme for grandfather in Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* and the opening solo in Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

History

The early bassoons were called Dulcians or Curtals. The main difference between the modern bassoon and the early bassoons is that these instruments were carved from a single piece of wood and they didn't have any keys. To play these instruments, the player would cover holes with his/her fingers. It was in France, in the 17th century, that instrument builders made the first bassoon with separate joints. By the middle of the 19th century, the modern 17-key bassoon was developed.

How It's Played

The bassoon is held to the side of the player because it's way too big to hold in the middle like the other woodwind instruments. Because the bassoon is somewhat heavy, it is supported by a seat strap which is hooked to the end of the bassoon and then placed over the player's chair. To make a sound, the bassoonist blows air through a double reed, causing it to vibrate. This vibration is what makes the sound. To play notes, the bassoonist covers various combinations of tone holes with fingers or keys. Each new note requires a different fingering combination allowing the air to travel through a different length of tubing before escaping out through the uncovered holes and the bell.

How It's Made

The bassoon has almost 8 feet of tubing that is bent in a "U" shape to make it easier



to play. Like the English Horn and oboe, the bassoon has a conical bore which means that the hole in the middle is shaped like an ice cream cone - growing gradually bigger from one end to the other. The bassoon is made of several joints with a distinctive curved metal tube called a bocal, which extends from the main part of the bassoon. At the end of the bocal a double reed is added. The double reed is usually made by the player from cane reed that is similar to bamboo. Student bassoons are made from plastic resin to make the instrument more affordable.

The Bassoon Family

The bassoon family includes the bassoon and the contrabassoon. The contrabassoon is able to play lower than any other instrument in the symphony orchestra.

Fun Facts

The bassoon has 7 feet of tubing, while the contrabassoon has a whopping 16 feet! If instrument builders hadn't decided to "fold" the tubing, you would have to stand on a very tall ladder to play the contrabassoon - but then how would you reach the keys?