

Bass Clarinet Orchestra Auditions

Before going into what you need to know to prepare for a bass clarinet audition, it is important that you understand the responsibility of the position for which you are auditioning for.

Most fully professional orchestras have either three or four clarinetists. If there are four players, the bass clarinet position will include the responsibilities of playing second clarinet when the section rotates, when the orchestra is dividend, or when the conductor requests the wind section to double the parts. It will also entail playing third clarinet at times. Many bass clarinet parts switch between bass clarinet and third clarinet. Occasionally it will be second and bass on one part. The position will usually be advertised as “bass clarinet and utility clarinet” or “bass clarinet and clarinet”.

If there are only three in the section, the position will either be bass clarinet and third or bass clarinet and assistant first clarinet. If it is the third clarinet position, it will require playing second clarinet when the second player, also assistant first, plays first and will also require playing third when required. If it is an assistant first and bass position, you will be required to play first clarinet in rotation with the principal, usually at youth concerts, overtures and concertos. On rare occasions the position will be advertised as Eb clarinet as well, which makes very little sense, which is why it's so rare, but it happens.

In smaller orchestras that only carry two full time clarinetists they may or may not require the second to play bass clarinet or Eb clarinet but it doesn't hurt to play one or both.

In all cases, you will be expected to audition on clarinet as well as on bass clarinet. If it is an assistant first position as well as bass clarinet, you will need to be prepared to play a principal clarinet audition as well as a full bass clarinet audition and will probably have to play both instruments in the preliminary round. For all other positions you will be expected to perform the first clarinet parts and maybe some second parts as well in the semi final round or final round with the principal or assistant principal to see how you blend. Every orchestra does not do it this way though, it could vary. You may be asked to play clarinet in the first round as well, depends on the orchestra.

All orchestras today send audition lists with the expected repertoire listed for both instruments. It will include a statement “some sight-reading may be required,” which means if they desire, they could ask you anything in the repertoire. This is usually not done until the final round. The only way to be prepared for this is to know all the standard repertoire, because if you don’t, you may be the only one “sight reading”. The committee does not really want to hear you sight-read; they want to see if you are familiar with the repertoire.

If you’re not comfortable with transposing “A” bass clarinet parts or reading bass clef, I suggest you bring your own parts with you to the audition. They usually allow you to use your own parts if you request it. These days it is expected that you have a low C bass clarinet. You can find most of excerpts in excerpt books listed below but it is advisable to try to get the parts when possible.

Here is pretty much what you can expect to have to play at a bass clarinet audition.

Very likely to be asked

Grofé, Grand Canyon Suite
Gershwin, Rhapsody in Blue
Khachaturian, Piano Concerto
Mahler, Symphony # 4 and #6
Dukas, Sorcerer’s Apprentice
Ravel, La Valse, Daphnis and Chloé Suite #2
W. Schuman, Symphony #3
Shostakovich, Symphony #6 and the Violin Concerto
Strauss, Death and Transfiguration, Till Eulenspiegel and Don Quixote
Stravinsky, Rite of Spring
Wagner, Tristan and Isolde, Die Walküre and Die Götterdämmerung

Other pieces with major bass clarinet parts to learn

Barber, Essay #2
Bartok, Miraculous Mandarin, mostly 3rd clarinet in the Suite
Copland, El Salón México and Symphony #3
Franck, Symphony in D Minor
Gershwin, American in Paris

Hindemith, Symphonic Metamorphosis
Prokofiev, Symphony #5 and Romeo and Juliet Suites
Ravel, Rhapsodie Espagnole and Concerto for the Left Hand
Schostakovich, Symphony # 4,7 and 11
Strauss, Der Rosenkavalier Suite, Ein Heldenleben, Zarathustra and
Symphony Domestica
Stravinsky, Petroushka and Symphony in Three Movements
Tchaikovsky, Nutcracker Ballet and Manfred Symphony
Wagner excerpts from Parsifal, Siegfried and Das Rheingold

Excerpt Books

Symphonic Repertoire for the Bass Clarinet Vol. 1,2 &3 by
M. Drapkin, Roncorp Inc. (vol. 4 is in the process of being completed)
Orchestral studies for Clarinet and Bass Clarinet of Wagner,
International
Orchestra Excerpts of Strauss, Book #3 for Eb,D and Bass Clarinet
International
A.Giampieri, Studi D'orchestra per clarinetto e clarinetto basso, B
Vol. 1&2.Ricordi & Co. ,