

ETUDE AND METHOD BOOKS FOR BASS CLARINET

by Jason Alder

I am often asked about which etude books are good for bass clarinet. Generally, I am a firm believer that anything you use for soprano clarinet you can use for bass clarinet as well. However, clarinet etudes don't make use of the extended range of a low C bass clarinet, and this range can become neglected and not as fluid as the rest of the instrument. Additionally, student-level instruments with only a single register vent suffer from difficulty playing in the upper range, making these etudes a frustrating experience for less-advanced players. The bass clarinet also has some of its own idiosyncrasies separate from clarinet that don't receive enough attention.

I have compiled a near-complete list of etude and method books written especially for bass clarinet. Others may exist, but these are all the ones I know about, and the low C etudes are also useful for other extended range clarinets such as the basset horn and contrabass clarinet. Each listing provides the author, title and publisher. Additionally, it lists the range needed (using transposed Scientific Pitch Notation: C3 = low C, C6 = thumb high C), the difficulty on a scale of 1 – 5 (1 = easy, 3 = moderate, 5 = difficult), and a short description detailing the focus of the book. They are listed here in order of year of publication.

METHOD BOOKS

A. Pierre Saint-Marie – *Méthode pour la Clarinette-basse* (1898, ed. 2020 Philippe Cuper)

Publisher: International Music Diffusion

Range: E3 – A♭6

Difficulty: 3

The first method ever written for bass clarinet was in 1898 by Pierre Sainte-Marie, the bass clarinetist of the Monte Carlo Symphony. This edition has been edited by Philippe Cuper and reprinted in 2020 with English translations. The fingering chart in the beginning is for a bass clarinet to low E3 and with two manual register keys rather than the modern single automatic, as was the common instrument at the time. The chart shows

fingerings all the way to A♭6, as this is necessary for Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, however it advises to generally not go past G6.

The first set of exercises focuses on varying scale patterns crossing the break from the throat tones, which necessitated using both of the manual register keys. This isn't relevant for modern instruments, but I have still found the exercises very useful with my students for achieving clean transitions when changing registers and for all the varying combinations using the little fingers. The second set of exercises are similar patterns but reaching into the altissimo register, and interestingly, primarily "open" altissimo fingerings are recommended. There are also exercises for repeated intervals into the altissimo, full chromatic scale from E3 – A♭6, and major and minor scales and triads each extending all the way down to E3 or F3 and up to F6 or G6.

H. Voxman – *Introducing the Alto or Bass Clarinet: A Transfer Method for Intermediate Instruction* (1952)

Publisher: Rubank / Hal Leonard

Range: E3 – E♭6

Difficulty: 1 – 3

The Voxman method was designed for transferring from soprano clarinet to alto or bass. It gives some advice for playing the low clarinets compared to the higher ones, but I don't see anything that fundamentally makes this a low clarinet method. Everything could also be fine to use as a soprano clarinet method, and likewise any other clarinet method at this level could be used with the low clarinets. Interestingly, however, while the method itself mostly only goes up to C6 with the very occasional optional scale pattern up to E♭6, the included fingering chart and trill chart go all the way up to C7.

Carl Baermann adapt. William Rhoads – *Baermann for the Alto and Bass Clarinet*, adapted from *Division Three Celebrated Method for Clarinet*, Op. 63 (1963)

Publisher: Southern Music
 Range: E \flat 3 – D6
 Difficulty: 3

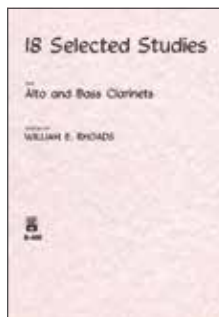
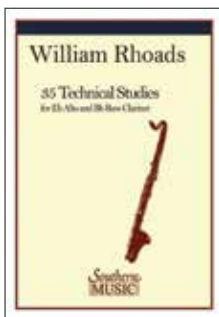
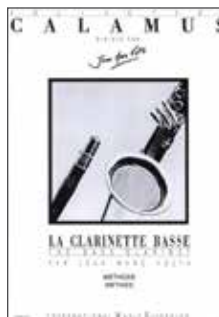
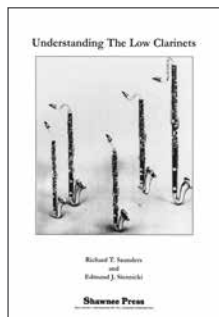
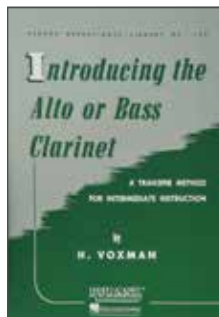
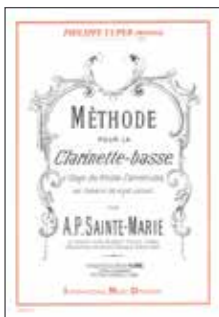
William Rhoads (who has many titles on this list) adapted the renowned Baermann clarinet method for alto and bass clarinet. The studies are organized by key, and extended to an E \flat 3 on the low end, but restricted to only D6 on the top end. The diminished chords, intervals of sixths and octaves, and staccato and trill studies were removed but an original interval study and whole-tone scales included.

Richard T. Saunders and Edmund J. Siennicki – *Understanding the Low Clarinets: Etudes, Solos, and Detailed Information About the Alto, Bass, Contralto, and Contrabass Clarinets* (1972)
 Publisher: Shawnee Press, Inc.
 Range: E \flat 3 – D6
 Difficulty: 1 – 3

Saunders and Siennicki wrote another method aimed at transitioning to the low clarinets from soprano clarinet, discussing similarities and differences among the instruments. There is information about reeds, embouchure, articulation, intonation, posture and hand position, and transposing from bass clef for the E \flat contra with a transposition etude; and exercises for tone, articulation and finger technique. There are 11 etudes and three pieces with piano, with versions transposed for alto, bass, contra-alto and contrabass. Some lower ossia are provided to avoid higher range notes.

Martin Arnold – *Bass Clarinet Scale Book* (1991, rev. 2003)
 Publisher: Aztec Press
 Range: C3 – E6
 Difficulty: 3

Arnold's scale book gives two-octave major and minor scales from low C, as well as some similar exercises to the Baermann Op. 63 Div. 3 method such as scales, thirds, arpeggios, broken chords, appoggiaturas, lower neighbors and dominant sevenths. The exercises all fit on one page, with the left page in treble clef and the right page duplicating the exercises in bass clef. There is also a two-octave chromatic scale and diminished



seventh chords and broken chords. In the back are additional pages for low E \flat basses, with scales adjusted for the lack of the extended range, technique exercises focusing on repeating intervals like the Jean-Jean *Vade Mecum*, and scale patterns.

Jean-Marc Volta – *La Clarinette Basse / The Bass Clarinet* (1996)
 Publisher: International Music Diffusion
 Range: C3 – C7
 Difficulty: 1 – 4

Volta has written a complete method book for the bass clarinet, covering all technical aspects of playing. There's a fingering chart from C3 to C7, text and exercises for breathing and air, sound and embouchure, intervals, articulation (and how it's different from clarinet) and different types of tonguing, crossing the break, placement of right hand in clarion, the extreme low register, altissimo (fingerings, voicing and reaching it from another register), large intervals (2.5-3.5 octaves), upper altissimo up to G#7, and transposition. The excerpts are in treble and bass clef. The text is written in English and French.

Michel Pellegrino – *Petit Précis de Clarinette Basse / Short Synopsis on the Bass Clarinet* (2009)
 Publisher: Editions Henry Lemoine
 Range: E \flat 3 – G#6 (altissimo fingering chart to F7)
 Difficulty: 1 – 5

Michel Pellegrino is a jazz player presenting a short method for bass clarinet. It includes an introduction to the instrument and its equipment, preparatory interval exercises, exercises focusing on the different registers, altissimo fingerings and descriptions of effects and extended techniques like slap tongue, growling, ghost notes and glissandi. Included are etudes from Bach, Piazzola, an improvisation in the style of Charlie Parker and an original etude by Pellegrino based on register changes. The text is in French and English.

Carl Baermann, adapt. by Andrew Sprung – *Complete Method for Clarinet, Part 3, Op. 63* (2018)
 Publisher: Alia Publishing

Range: C3 – G6

Difficulty: 3

This is an adaptation of the Baermann clarinet method, extended downwards for low C clarinets. The top range stays the same, up to G6. There are patterns for scales, arpeggios, interrupted scales, broken chords, returning scales, dominant seventh chords, thirds and sixths. The book is organized by key, rather than by exercise. There are additional chromatic, octatonic and whole-tone scales, and fully-diminished seventh and augmented chords starting on the lowest notes. It does not include the extra exercises found in the original clarinet method.

ETUDE BOOKS

William Rhoads – 35 Technical Studies for Alto and Bass clarinet (1962)

Publisher: Southern Music

Number of etudes: 35

Range: E \flat 3 – C6

Difficulty: 2 – 3

The Rhoads *Technical Studies* covers patterns, articulation, crossing the break, little-finger usage, diminished and augmented chords, whole-tone scales, scale variations and technical facility, and includes two Bach *Praeludiums*. The author's notes say that this book is meant to give low clarinets their own material, but it could just as well be played on soprano clarinet. High-register material was intentionally left out because it is covered in soprano clarinet methods and studies.

William Rhoads – 18 Selected Studies for Alto and Bass Clarinet (1963)

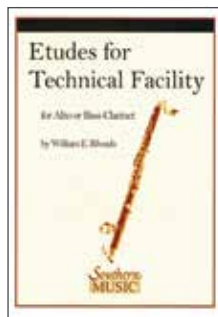
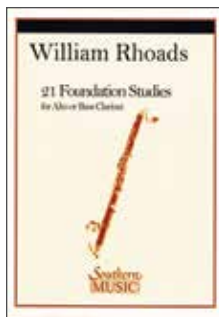
Publisher: Southern Music

Number of etudes: 18

Range: E \flat – C6

Difficulty: 3 – 4

The *Selected Studies* includes one etude in each major and relative minor key up through four sharps and flats, from the clarinet repertoire by Lazarus, Rose, Demnitz, Rode, Baermann, Kietzer, Mazas, Muller and Capelle. Some of the keys have been changed from the original etudes. Apart from three instances of a low E \flat in E \flat major and one in G minor, there is nothing that makes these particularly bass clarinet-specific etudes.



William Rhoads – 21 Foundation Studies for Alto or Bass clarinet (1965)

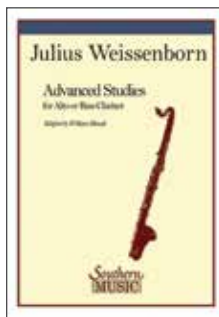
Publisher: Southern Music

Number of etudes: 21

Range: D#3 – C6

Difficulty: 3 – 4

The *Foundation Studies* are a collection of etudes taken from classical composers such as the cellists Sebastian Lee, Friedrich Dotzauer and Carl Schröder. Everything stays in the chalumeau and clarion registers.



William Rhoads – Etudes for Technical Facility for Alto or Bass clarinet (1965)

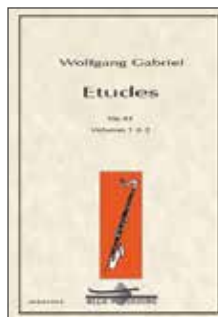
Publisher: Southern Music

Number of etudes: 20

Range: E3 – C6

Difficulty: 2 – 4

The 20 etudes here are designed for getting the fingers to move quickly. The book only uses keys of C, F and G and avoids tricky fingering problems. Some etudes are original and others are patterned after Wiedmann, Lazarus, Berr, Klose, Rode, Capagnoll, Müller, Mazas, Ferling and Gambaro. These etudes could also just be for clarinet.



Julius Weissenborn, adapt. by William Rhoads – Advanced Studies for Alto or Bass clarinet, (1973)

Publisher: Southern Music

Number of etudes: 34

Range: D#3 – D6

Difficulty: 3 – 4

Rhoads has adapted these 34 studies from the original Weissenborn *Bassoon Studies*, Op. 8, Vol. 2 for advanced pupils. The bassoon's character is suited for the bass clarinet, but these could also be played on clarinet. Rhoads reworked these for a low E \flat bass clarinet, however some passages and patterns were clearly originally written for the lowest notes on the bassoon and can be reintroduced on low C bass clarinets. The etudes focus on intervals and patterns, but there are no particularly difficult rhythms or keys.

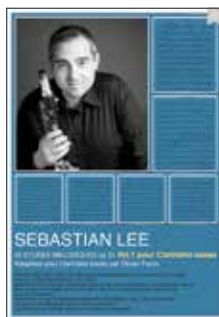


Pedro Rubio – Estudios para clarinet bajo/Studies for Bass Clarinet Book 1 (2004) & 2 (2005)

Publisher: Musica Didactica

Book 1

Number of etudes: 25



Range: C3 – G5 (C6 in last etude), ossia for extended low register passages
 Difficulty: 3 – 5

These 25 etudes are transcriptions of 18th- and 19th-century music with the same register and character as the bass clarinet, such as the cello and bassoon etudes by Lee, Weissenborn and Blatt. The etudes use the extended range of the low C bass clarinet, but ossia are always written to accommodate low E \flat instruments. All etudes are in treble clef and the text is written in Spanish and English.

Book 2

Number of etudes: 30
 Range: C3 – B6, ossia for extended low range and fingering suggestions for altissimo
 Difficulty: 3 – 5

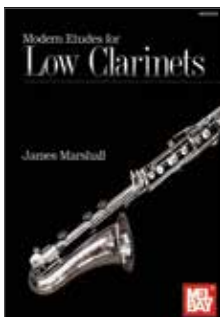
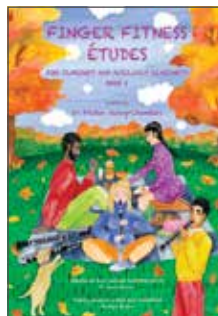
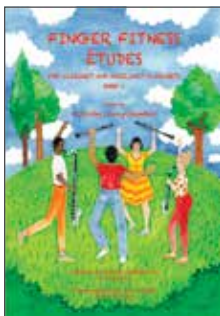
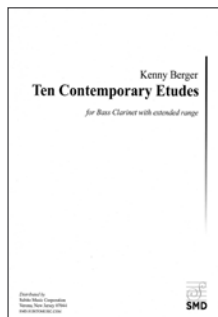
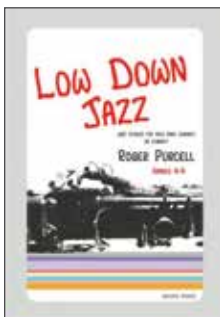
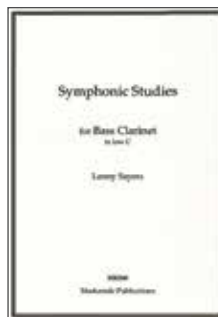
Rubio's second book continues with the transcriptions of 18th- and 19th-century cello and bassoon etudes, but the focus is on learning bass clef. There is an explanation of the French, German and Russian systems (for more information about this, please see my article at jasonalder.com/bassclarinet-clefs). The first 10 etudes are presented twice, first in French treble clef and then in German bass clef notation, and the rest are only in German notation. The initial etudes are quite easy to allow becoming familiar with reading bass clef, but they quickly become very technically demanding.

Wolfgang Gabriel – *Etudes, Op. 85, Vols. 1 & 2* (2004)

Publisher: Alea Publishing
 Number of etudes: 26
 Range: C3 – C7
 Difficulty: 2 – 5

The book begins with recommended exercises by editor Michael Davenport: major and harmonic and melodic minor scales in ninths from low C, scales in thirds and fourths, and breath support exercises through the full range. The 14 etudes in Vol. 1 focus on air, rhythm and intervals from seconds up through tenths. The 12 etudes in Vol. 2 are more challenging concert pieces.

Sauro Berti – *Venti Studi per clarinetto basso e corno di bassetto* (2007)



Publisher: Edizioni Suvini Zerboni – Milano
 Number of etudes: 20
 Range: C3 – A \flat 6
 Difficulty: 4 – 5

Berti's modern studies focus on problems specific to bass clarinet and basset horn, such as the extended low range, right-hand third finger and the register mechanism, reading bass clef, altissimo open fingerings, intonation and sound during sudden dynamic changes, air speed, wide intervals, the left hand A \flat /E \flat key and F/C key, and two specific to the Buffet basset horn with the open right-hand index finger hole. The text is in Italian and English.

Gregory Youtz – *Studies, original version for extended-range bass clarinet* (2007).

Version for low E \flat instrument also available.

Publisher: Alea Publishing
 Number of etudes: 30
 Range: C3 – C7
 Difficulty: 3 – 5

Youtz provides 20 studies and 10 concert pieces focusing on various technical aspects like runs, rhythm, slurring, sustain, articulation, intervals, and Caribbean, Turkish and Irish styles. The etudes make use of the full range of the low C bass clarinet and are challenging studies. These original etudes were written for low C bass clarinets, but a version for low E \flat bass clarinets is also available.

Sebastian Lee, adapt. by Olivier Faure – *40 Melodic Etudes, Op. 31, Vols. 1* (2008) & *2* (2009)

Publisher: Self-published <https://faureolivier.gumroad.com/>

Vol. 1
 Number of etudes: 22
 Range: D3 – F#6
 Difficulty: 3 – 4

Several of Sebastian Lee's cello etudes have appeared previously in the etude books from Rhoads and Rubio, but here Faure has transcribed the entire *40 Melodic and Progressive Studies for violincello*, Op. 31, for bass clarinet. Most etudes stay below C6 except for No. 21 that reaches F#6. Faure keeps most of the etudes in

the original sounding key, but sometimes changes the tonality and indicates the original key. However, he did not choose to transpose any to take advantage of low C, and the lowest note any of the etudes use is D3. The etudes are named for the technique they address, such as melody, legato, staccato and rhythm. The text is available in French, English, and Japanese.

Vol. 2

Number of etudes: 18

Range: C3 – A6

Difficulty: 3 – 4

Volume 2 continues with Lee's etudes Nos. 23-40. Here Faure kept some in the original written key, making use of the low C on the bass clarinet, and the top range is up to A6. Overall this volume is just a bit more challenging than the first.

Ludwig Milde, arr. Sauro Berti – *Studi da Concerto Op. 26, versione per clarinetto basso* (2011)

Publisher: Sheetmusicplus

Number of etudes: 50

Range: C3 – F6

Difficulty: 4 – 5

The Ludwig Milde studies are widely used by bassoonists, and Berti has arranged them for bass clarinet. He mostly keeps them in the original sounding keys, unless he feels there's a good pedagogical reason to change the key for the bass clarinet, and also indicates if a study is suitable for a low E \flat instrument. They are written in bass clef, transposed into B \flat . Berti has added markings to help with fingerings in many passages, particularly with using the right-hand third-finger, which activates the change in register vents, to create a smooth transition. The text is in Italian, but an English copy is available by email request to Berti.

Lenny Sayers – *Symphonic Studies for Bass Clarinet* (2012)

Publisher: Maskarade Publishers

Number of etudes: 12

Range: C3 – F6

Difficulty: 3 – 5

These 12 studies focus on issues found within and inspired by the symphonic repertoire (No. 4 is clearly from Shostakovich's violin concerto),

each identifying which technique is being developed. Tone, breath control, legato, articulation, dynamics and accents, and finger fluency are all covered. Etudes 10-12 are demanding concert studies and cover a variety of techniques. No. 10 has some particularly challenging time signatures.

Roger Purcell – *Low Down Jazz: Jazz Studies for Solo Bass Clarinet or Clarinet* (2013)

Publisher: Astute Music

Number of etudes: 35

Range: D3 – B5

Difficulty: 2 – 4

The first 24 of these fun, jazzy etudes can be played as duos. Each etude comes with a solo part and a second student/teacher accompaniment part. Both the solo and accompaniment parts are presented twice, in both the lower and upper registers, allowing for four different duo combinations for each etude. Etudes 25-35 are longer solos and become more challenging. The articulations are clearly marked to help learn the correct jazz phrasing.

Kenny Berger – *Ten Contemporary Etudes for Bass Clarinet With Extended Range* (2016)

Publisher: Subito Music

Number of etudes: 10

Range: C3 – A6

Difficulty: 4 – 5

These are lively, challenging modern etudes with jazz influences. There is a lot of advanced rhythmic material throughout the full range of a low C bass clarinet, and some use of slap tongue.

Ludwig Milde, adapt. by Olivier Fauré – *25 Concert Studies Book 2, Op. 26* (2016)

Publisher: Self-published [https://](https://faureolivier.gumroad.com/)

faureolivier.gumroad.com/

Number of etudes: 25

Range: C3 – E6

Difficulty: 3 – 4

Faure presents us with another book of etude transcriptions, this time from the Ludwig Milde *50 Concert Studies*, Op. 26 for bassoon. Curiously, Faure calls this Book 2 (and he has not published any Book 1), however these etudes are from Book 1 of

the original Milde studies. He again keeps many in the original sounding tonality, but sometimes uses the bassoon's written key, making good use of the bass clarinet's extended range. Unlike Berti's edition, the studies are written in treble clef.

Mauricio Murcia – *Estudios para clarinete bajo* (2013–2017)

Publisher: Self-published

mauriciomurciabedoya@gmail.com

Number of etudes: 10

Range: C3 – F6

Difficulty: 3 – 5

These 10 etudes are written in different Latin-American dance styles. The soloistic lines move through the full range of the low C bass clarinet and often have large leaps to make. Some are more rhythmically complex and all are good for working on the phrasing in these styles. They are also suitable as fun, short concert pieces.

Franz Wilhelm Ferling, adapt. Mark Wolbers – *Ferling 48 Etudes, for bass clarinet or basset horn or basset clarinet* (2020)

Publisher: Gérard Billaudot

Number of etudes: 48

Range: C3 – G6

Difficulty: 3 – 4

We know many of the Ferling 48 oboe etudes as the basis for the Rose 32 clarinet etudes. Mark Wolbers has taken the originals and expanded them for low C clarinets, at times changing keys if he felt it would lend to better writing in the extended low range. He also keeps Ferling's ornaments as a chance to explore 18th- and 19th-century classical ornamentation. The text is in French and English.

Kristin Denny-Chambers – *Finger Fitness Etudes, Books 1* (2020) & *2* (2021)

Publisher: Clarinet Playground

Book 1

Number of etudes: 38, 10 reworked for low C bass clarinet

Range: C3 – D \flat 6

Difficulty: 2 – 4

These are fun, lighthearted and tuneful etudes in varying styles, each with a focus

on specific finger movements and note combinations, indicated by the finger drill at the top of the page. There are also challenging rhythms and key signatures. Divided into two levels, level 1 are easier half- and whole-step combinations while level 2 are neighboring tones with more difficult fingerings and larger intervals. All the etudes are playable on the bass clarinet, but the bass clarinet-specific etudes have been reworked to make use of the extended range. Some of the etudes have melodic lines in the extended range that necessitate navigating all the alternate keys, giving a real workout not found in other books. There's an appendix with all the finger drills, chromatic exercises for the extended bass clarinet range, and scale studies with scales, thirds, arpeggios and broken chords for scales starting in the extended range.

Book 2

Number of etudes: 40, 18 reworked for low C bass clarinet

Range: C3-E6

Difficulty: 2 – 4

This is a continuation of Book 1 with level 3 and 4 finger combinations, and nearly half of them reworked for bass clarinet. The appendix has the finger drills, different chromatic and scale studies for bass clarinet, and jazz and klezmer tips for rhythm, articulation, ornamentation and improvisation.

Finger Fitness Etudes Book 3 is expected in the near future.

James Marshall – *Modern Etudes for Low Clarinets* (2022)

Publisher: Mel Bay

Number of etudes: 13

Range: D#3 – C6

Difficulty: 3 – 4

This brand-new set of etudes was written specifically to address the lower tessitura of the low clarinets, although they could also be played on soprano clarinets apart from the occasional low Eb. The etudes normally don't go above a G5, apart from a couple that reach C6 that are always written with a lower octave ossia. They are challenging though not overly difficult with lots of time signature changes.

Andy Hudson and Roger Zare with Jason Alder – *Space Bass: Advanced Explorations for Bass Clarinet* (2022)

Publisher: Conway Publications

Number of etudes: 13

Range: C3 – E7

Difficulty: 4 – 5

Bass clarinetist Andy Hudson has teamed with composer Roger Zare to create a book focusing on typical bass clarinet problems like the extended low range, altissimo and large leaps, but also contemporary bass clarinet techniques like slap tongue, key clicks and air sounds, flutter tongue, growling, timbral trills, multiphonics and singing while playing. Each etude is accompanied by a master class by Hudson who covers technical and musical topics from fundamental through extended, exploring all aspects of bass clarinet playing. The appendix includes altissimo and quarter-tone fingering charts, and a guide to understanding bass clarinet clef notation written by me. ❖

ABOUT THE WRITER



Dr. Jason Alder is an active performer and recording artist working with composers to present new music, particularly for low clarinets and underrepresented

instruments. His research interests include practice-based research and collaboration, improvisation, technology, analysis and history. As an educator he teaches students of all ages and levels and is the author of the well-known and used quarter-tone and altissimo fingering charts for clarinet, bass clarinet, and contrabass clarinet. Jason is on the ICA New Music Committee and is formerly the editor of The Clarinet [Online]. Learn more at www.jasonalder.com.

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