

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Table of contents	7
<i>1a. Acknowledgements</i>	9
2. A personal introduction	11
3. From the very beginning until now	13
4. Concise history of the bass clarinet	31
5. Notation	39
6. Range	53
<i>6a. high</i>	57
<i>6b. extremely high</i>	58
7. Playing position, tone quality and stage manners	59
8. Special techniques / effects	65
<i>8a. Slap tongue</i>	65
<i>8b. Trills, tremolos and bisbigliando</i>	68
<i>8c. Flutter tongue</i>	76
<i>8d. Double staccato</i>	81
<i>8e. Playing with air</i>	84
<i>8f. Vibrato and smorzato</i>	90
<i>8g. Teeth on the reed</i>	93
<i>8h. Circular breathing</i>	95
<i>8i. Glissandi</i>	98
<i>8j. Using the voice</i>	100
<i>8k. Key sounds</i>	103
<i>8l. Playing with tape and other media</i>	107
<i>8m. Quarter tones</i>	123
<i>8n. Multiphonics</i>	130
<i>8o. Remaining effects</i>	155
<i>8p. Grace notes</i>	159
<i>8q. Reeds</i>	161
9. Programming	165
10. Repertoire	181
11. Study repertoire	207
12. Publishers, music examples and Music Information Centres	219
13. Bass clarinetists, composers and their pieces, web sites and (study) literature	225
14. Anecdotes	239
15. Biography	247
16. Epilogue	253
Where to find the composers	255

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thrilled!

Thrilled to have such wonderful friends and I would like to hug them, kiss them on both cheeks and say:

“Thanks ever so much, you all mean so much to me”!

This applies especially to my dear wife *Silvia*, who had to endure a musician who brought it on himself to write a book. For hours on end I sat behind the computer, then went studying and returned almost immediately to the computer again. Fortunately she kept an eye on me and chased me away from the computer before I got square eyes; apart from that she has the gift of making the right remark at the right time.

She would look at me sometimes and say: “Wouldn’t it be better to put this a bit more mildly?” when I was going on a bit of a rant.

I often reached the end of my tether thinking “What in heavens did I get myself into”. This prompted her to pour me a glass of good red wine and deliver me from the monitor. I’m sure of one thing, without her this book would never have been realized.

Ru Otto, my beloved professor, who did not have an easy job at the start of my clarinet study. Ru was a never ending source of inspiration and never tried to change my love for the new music. His way of teaching has influenced significantly the way I teach myself. I sincerely hope therefore, I give my students the same feeling of freedom and happiness as Ru gave me when I was his student.

*Annelie de Man** and *Paul Roe*, who took the difficult task upon themselves to translate my Dutch into readable English and *Karin Wintels* who managed so beautifully to translate it all into Spanish. Thank you so much, all three of you.

I don’t know what I would have done without you.

Herbert Noord and *Frans van de Pieterman* have guided my written thoughts in the right direction and gave me a lot of energy. Consequently they checked the readability and spelling and posed questions about all sorts of things such as: “What do you mean when you say...with a clarinet with two necks?”

*. When this book was ready to go to press we received the tragic news that Annelie de Man had died suddenly on the 29th September 2010. She was a great colleague and a fantastic friend. She will always be in our thoughts.

A PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

The small locks of my clarinet case neatly snapped shut. It was June 1967. I stood on my toes and stowed away the black case high in the closet, knowing with certainty that I would never take it out again.

“Bass clarinet” was the magical word that had led to this definite goodbye. From this time on I would only play bass clarinet.

A decision that stirred up reactions varying from giggles to strong doubts about my sanity. “You are crazy” was said, “You will never be able to earn a living from it and you’ll never succeed”. Hearing all this I turned a deaf ear and kept on with my plan.

With the motto: Go for it! I succeeded, after a lot of studying and practicing, in becoming a solo bass clarinet performer in the world of contemporary music. Quite an achievement as at that time the bass clarinet was a relatively unknown instrument.

“It’s easy to see why you are successful as there is no one else playing the bass clarinet” I was told as a “funny” remark. As the saying goes In the Land of the Blind, the one- eyed man is king, I also heard quite often.

Till this day I never regretted the decision I took.

At this stage in my life the practice sessions have become a bit shorter and my holidays, without the instrument, a little longer. Once home, I get hold of my instrument right away and it’s immediately clear:

The bass clarinet is still the most beautiful instrument for me.

Although years ago I may have been a lonely soul calling out in the desert, now there are hundreds of bass clarinetists who share my view and also think it is the most beautiful instrument.

My wife, Silvia Castillo, is an organist and once said to me: “To Mozart the organ was the King of instruments”. “That is true”, I replied, “but that was because the bass clarinet had not been invented yet!

That is the Emperor”.

During my professorship at conservatoires and universities all over the world, I always had one wish, which became a necessity: “Please let there be someone who shares my passion for the instrument and will continue to explore the road I have taken”.

The concern that no one would be interested in the bass clarinet has completely disappeared. An encouraging number of passionate people, perhaps also against well-meant advices, still choose the bass clarinet.

FROM THE VERY BEGINNING UNTIL NOW

Mother wanted me to play the piano. Her wish to see me behind the keys was the result of her own unfulfilled wish to play the piano. I didn't think much of the idea.

The fact that my friends were in an accordion orchestra certainly contributed to that feeling. I simply wanted an accordion and not a piano.

We came to a compromise. Mother agreed to me being with my friends in that accordion orchestra, under one condition: playing should take place on an accordion with a keyboard. So in some ways she got her wish.

The accordion is a nice instrument and I played it for years with a lot of pleasure, but as a fourteen year old I didn't see a future in it for me.



(The last gig with the accordion: on the left Rien van Dorth who later became drummer in the "HP Dance Band", me on the right and way on the extremely right Peter Koenders with Wijnand Blok guitar who later would play in a lot of bands with me.)

Suddenly I fell in love (for a fourteen year old not exceptional). But the object of my adoration wasn't a girl but a golden curved instrument.

Love at first sight that is how my reaction to that wonderful instrument in the window of music store Robino in Amsterdam Old South could be described. I just had to play on that instrument. Its golden lustre enticed me.

CONCISE HISTORY OF THE BASS CLARINET

It is estimated that the bass clarinet was invented somewhere between 1730 and 1750. The only remaining instrument from that era can be admired at the Museum of Instruments of the Brussels's Royal Conservatoire. There was also a similar instrument in Berlin but it was destroyed in 1945 in a fire at the end of the WW II. According to remaining documents the Berlin instrument only had one key, which makes it plausible that this instrument stems from a period before that of the instrument from Brussels which already had three keys.

I was honoured and moved when, as a special exception to the rule, I was allowed in Brussels to hold this fragile three-keyed instrument in my hands. I felt like I had been sent back in time by this wooden plank covered in leather, with slanted drilled holes and three keys. The archetype was already there, with this precursor of the contemporary bass clarinet.

A relatively small mouthpiece was mounted on a neck in the form of a bassoon neck, but it was a bit thicker and it already had a bell.

The pointed object at the end of the bell is a nice ornament, but how one should play the instrument is not quite clear. The instrument was too small to play sitting down whilst resting it on the floor.

Unfortunately the instrument was in an unplayable state, but... it already existed!



The Museum of Instruments: Brussels's Royal Conservatoire.
Photos Harry Sparnaay

NOTATION

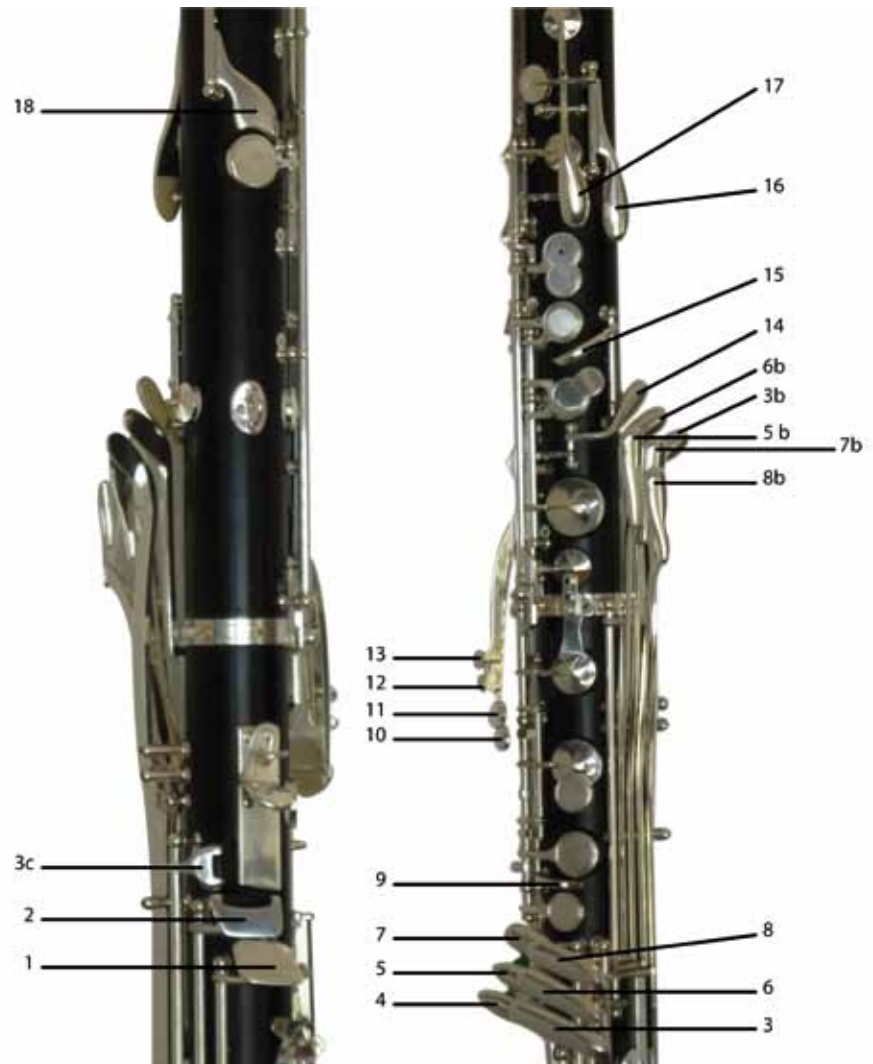
For the sake of clarity and to avoid critical mistakes:

All examples notated in this book are in “French notation”.

Everything sounds a ninth lower, the multiphonics included.

Exceptions will be mentioned clearly!

Before we start with the chapter about notation, I place here a diagram of the bass clarinet with numbered keys. The fingerings referred to in the book and the adjacent notated and numbered keys refer to this diagram.



This is a diagram of a Buffet Crampon bass clarinet


RANGE

Should a composer decide to write for a bass clarinet in any of his compositions, it is important for him/her to know on what instrument the clarinetist/bass clarinetist is playing.

Although it is almost certain the bass clarinetist will have a low C at his or her disposal, the composer should not forget there are still two models of bass clarinet.

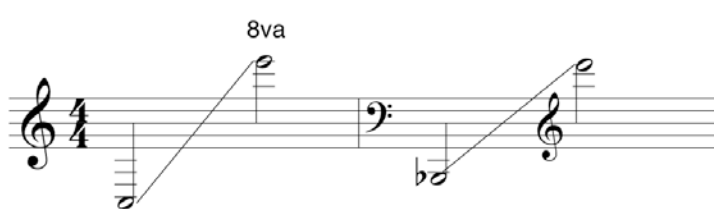
One to the low E flat:

notated **sounding**



And the more frequently used bass clarinet to low C.

notated **sounding**



Should the composer write for a clarinetist, who does not consider the bass clarinet as inconvenient and hard to play, he can expect that a range from low C to E/F4 is possible. Otherwise I would not go farther than C4.

Jos Kunst (1936-1996) wrote in his “Solo Identity 1” from 1972 (©MCN-Netherlands) already to F4, but still with the alternative to play it one octave lower.

ARE WE GOING TO STAND OR SIT DOWN? PLAYING POSITION

There are still quite a large number of clarinetists who think the bass clarinet is much less important than the B flat clarinet. Most of these people know very little about the bass clarinet and are not remotely interested in being more informed and when the bass clarinet became a major subject at the conservatory in Amsterdam, remarks were all around.

The same sceptics are of the opinion, that a bass clarinet is no more than a low “ordinary” clarinet and should sound accordingly. Such an opinion demonstrates very little by way of openness or imagination and also does a disservice to such a wonderful instrument and cannot survive just by looking at the bore of the instrument and the mouthpiece.

Another way to consider this way of looking at things would be to realise how absurd it would be if one expected the double bass to sound just like the cello on account of it being a bigger instrument!

A bass clarinet is not a “low” clarinet; a bass clarinet is a bass clarinet, an instrument in its own right, member of the clarinet family.

In the past clarinet students who appeared not to have much talent were recommended to take up the bass clarinet.

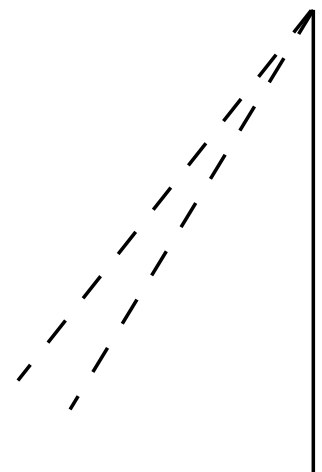
Nowadays, with the difficult contemporary scores specifically written for bass clarinet, we think quite differently. The clarinetist who plays bass clarinet as a secondary instrument and is faced with playing a contemporary piece does so with some trepidation.

The disdain for the instrument has all but disappeared, and it really is only in some orchestral auditions that one comes across ignorance and stupidity relating to the capability of the instrument. But I will get back to that extensively (see Chapter 9).

The only, but perhaps the most important similarity between the clarinet and the bass clarinet is by the angle in which the mouthpiece is to be positioned in the mouth. This relates closely to playing the Bflat clarinet.

Playing the clarinet we maintain an angle of about 40 to 45 degrees.

To maintain this angle the model of the neck is very important.



SPECIAL TECHNIQUES / EFFECTS

Slap tongue

The “slap tongue” is a very useful and particularly effective bass clarinet effect. It is an effect often asked for by composers and is an important addition to the palette of colours of the instrument.

It is a risky effect though, because it can damage the reed. It is possible that the top of the reed breaks, tears or shows another malfunction.

One of the many performances of “Harry’s Musike” dated 1972 from Hans-Joachim Hespos (1938), ©hespos eigenverlag HE 24, lasted exactly 12 seconds, because then there was a low “slap tongue” followed by a strong, shrieking “multiphonic”.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for bass clarinet, divided into four distinct sections with specific performance instructions and dynamics. The first section is marked 'von nahezu endloser ruhe' and 'ca. 5\"

Hans-Joachim Hespos – “Harry’s Musike”

The “slap” was deafeningly loud. The audience was intrigued at first but then... it was silent.

The shrieking “multiphonic” came out as a pathetic sigh and immediately I knew that the amazingly effective “slap tongue” had ruined my reed.

Why are there risks involved in playing a slap tongue?

With the muscle of the tongue, you suck to create a vacuum against the reed.

Then you draw the tongue downwards and blow.

The vacuum is created with the tongue muscle and **not** with the lungs. Slap tongue is a blowing action and **not** just a matter of suction.

PROGRAMMING

Romantic clarinet sonatas or Bach's "Cello Suites" performed on bass clarinet?

There are bass clarinetists who do this because they feel there is a gap in the repertory for bass clarinet.

This is very questionable.



Debussy – anno 1894

It is true and very disappointing that people like Debussy did not write for the bass clarinet even though (in a photo from 1894 at the time when he had completed "Prélude à l'après midi d'une faune") he is seen leaning on a bass clarinet. Musing he looks into the distance, unfortunately not thinking about a new composition for bass clarinet.

Also Paul Hindemith, who wrote compositions for nearly all instruments, composed nothing for bass clarinet. He must have been aware of the existence of the instrument.

(All bass clarinetists know the story that Hindemith, in the corridor after an orchestral rehearsal, would have given Josef Horák permission to play his "Bassoon Sonata" on bass clarinet, but an original composition for bass clarinet never materialized!)

As described in the concise history of the bass clarinet, the clarinetist Dacosta had a lot of success with his bass clarinet performances already as early as the beginning of the 19th century.

Unfortunately the composers failed to turn up and it took a long time, well into the last century, before they started writing for the bass clarinet.

That's the way it is and we'll have to live with it. I don't have any problem with it, but it is a pity.

Now more pieces have been written for the bass clarinet than for the bflat clarinet, in all musical styles of contemporary music. Also musicians who are not interested in modern music do not have to grieve, for there is enough original, more "traditional" repertory to be found.

Here is a modest and far from complete list that gives a sample of more "traditional" music written for bass clarinet:

REPERTOIRE

The concept of “parochialism” is sometimes described as a typically Dutch characteristic and it seems it is related to the Calvinist in us. But I dare say, this fault also can be seen worldwide.

A large number of musicians fall prey to it and this is often related to their instrument. From my own observation I know that for people who play the harpsichord or the harp it can be difficult to play “new music” on their instruments as their classical colleagues often look upon them disapprovingly.

The bass clarinet also had to deal with this “parochialism” and I write “had” with a good and tranquil feeling.

It used to be an instrument that had to be played “in” the orchestra and not as a soloist “in front” of it. Because the bass clarinet can be seen as belonging to classical orchestral instruments, the link to contemporary music is sometimes not automatically made.

It is however not the instrument which is connected to a certain style, but rather the vision and imagination of the musician.

I am conscious of the fact that the bass clarinet is warmly welcomed into the “Wind Orchestra” and it seems there is an encouraging amount of good repertoire available which is widely used. Many bass clarinetists feel quite at ease with this repertoire and there also is a large audience for it.

With pleasure I would like to add a list of repertoire which is worthwhile for those interested in this kind of bass clarinet music. Bass clarinet solo and “Wind Orchestra” and some works for Clarinet Quartet and “Wind Orchestra”.

I thank Jacques Dubois, Jan Wijenberg and Peter Beerkens who studied with me for their help in compiling this list as it is a repertoire I am less familiar with.

However it is never too late to learn.

The following lists the works for bass clarinet and Wind orchestra:

Bernard van Beurden (Netherlands-1933)– “Air” for bass clarinet and Wind orchestra (2010)
©MCN-Netherlands

Bernard van Beurden – “Moving”, for clarinet quartet and Wind Orchestra (2007). A very playful and well written work, in which the clarinet quartet is fully exploited. The quartet consists of: b flat clarinet (also e flat clarinet), b flat clarinet, alto clarinet and bass clarinet ©MCN-Netherlands.

STUDY REPERTOIRE

To this day, many bass clarinet professors still depend on study material written for the ordinary clarinet. Whilst some teachers are changing their approach to include newer material, this change is not widespread enough or quick enough for my taste.

In the meantime there are exercises for the beginning bass clarinetist compiled by the bass clarinetist Pedro Rubio and collected in two volumes.

Pedro Rubio - Estudios para clarinete bajo (Book 1 and 2)

www.bassusediciones.com

Below is a small example from part one, which is also suitable for bass clarinetists who own a bass clarinet to low E flat. If the beginner has a model to low C, it is particularly useful to play exercises which extend to the lower regions right away. The low notes are always a challenge in the beginning.

The image shows a musical score for a study piece. It consists of three staves of music written in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo is marked 'Moderato' and the dynamics are 'mp espressivo'. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, with some notes extending into the lower register of the staff. The first staff begins with a '6' in the margin, indicating it is study number 6. The notation includes various articulations and slurs, particularly in the lower register.

Pedro Rubio – “Estudios, part 1 – study 6”

In the second book the bass clef is used and the use of the “German notation” is prominently featured. This material is also useful to students who only have a low E flat model instrument.

PUBLISHERS, MUSIC EXAMPLES AND MUSIC INFORMATION CENTRES

By kind permission of practically all publishers, photographers and composers it has been possible to incorporate numerous musical examples and photos in the book. I am immensely grateful to all involved. Their unselfish cooperation has led to this wonderful publication.

Here follows the complete list:

MCN-Music Centre Netherlands

www.mcn.nl / www.muzyiekcentrumnederland.nl

© *By Music Centre the Netherlands (formerly Donemus)*

1. Jos Kunst (1936-1996) – “Solo identity 1”, for bass clarinet solo (1972)
2. Jos Kunst – “No Time at all”, for bass clarinet and piano (1973)
3. Jos Kunst – “No Time”, for bass clarinet, piano, 3 clarinets and 2 percussion players. (1974)
4. Enrique Raxach (1932) – “Chimaera”, for bass clarinet and tape (1974)
5. Ton de Leeuw (1926-1996) – “Mountains”, for bass clarinet and tape (1977)
6. David Porcelijn (1947) – “Polo II”, for bass clarinet solo (1973)
7. Tristan Keuris (1946-1996) – “Concertino”, for bass clarinet and string quartet (1977)
8. Theo Loevendie (1930) – “Incantations”, for bass clarinet and orchestra (1975)
9. Klas Trostensson (1951) – “Spans”, for bass clarinet solo (1981)
10. Robert Nasveld (1955) – “Preparation for Coma”, for bass clarinet and type writer (1974)
11. Roderik de Man (1941) – “Écoute,écoute!”, for bass cl. and tape (1999)
12. Roderik de Man – “Three for Two”, for (bass) clarinet and bass cl. (2003)
13. Robin de Raaff (1968) – “Equilibre”, for clarinet and bass clarinet (1994)
14. Takayuki Rai (1954) – “Sparkle”, for bass clarinet and tape (1989)
15. Ton Bruynèl (1934-1998) – “Looking Ears”, for bass clarinet, piano and tape (1972)
16. Ton Bruynèl – “Intra 1”, for bass clarinet and live electronics (1971)
17. Bernard van Beurden – “Moving”, for clarinet quartet and Wind orchestra (2007)

BASS CLARINETTISTS, COMPOSERS, WEB SITES AND (STUDY) LITERATURE

Bass clarinetists.

In order to keep the book within manageable limits in terms of size, unfortunately I had to make choices, resulting in the omission of a number of bass clarinetists. Because the future of the instrument is in the hands of the younger generation, I gave preference to them.

Michael Lowenstern (1968)

www.earspasm.com

This is a really fantastic web site, with a lot of information and videos.

His You Tube site is: www.youtube.com/earspasm and would you like to hear “Summertime” by Gershwin in a special version, please go to this You Tube link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNO4eY4TV1M>

Evan Ziporyn (1959)

www.ziporyn.com

This is a very elaborate website where you can find all his compositions and also his Cd recordings.

Fernando Dominguez

www.ensemble3.com / www.onixensamble.com

(of a.o. the Trio “Ensamble3” -flute, bass clarinet and piano and “The Onix Ensemble”)

Carl Rosman

www.facebook.com/l/a6148 / www.carlrosman.com

(of the “musikFabrik” and the “Elision” ensemble)

ANECDOTES

“It should happen to you”

“Sometimes you wake up in a sweat after a disaster that took place during your concert...”, I answer my students when they ask me if it should happen to you... “and”, I continue, “take it from me, some strange things will happen some time.”

Broken neck

As a recent winner of the Gaudeamus competition, requests for concerts slowly started to trickle in and my career started to take shape. I’ll not easily forget one of these concerts from this early period. I had been playing for only five minutes when I realised that I had to turn my head downward more and more in order to keep playing. I thought to myself “what the hell is going on” but soon discovered I had broken the neck joint of my instrument. Fortunately I realised this in time to prevent the neck from falling on the ground. Which would most likely have resulted in, irreparable, damage of my mouthpiece. Although the concert couldn’t continue I was thrilled that I hadn’t ruined my mouthpiece.

Upside down

Once during a first performance in London of a work by a British composer, I found I didn’t recognize the music that was on the third page? I knew I had really practiced everything comprehensively. While playing, my eyes searched feverishly for something familiar. It was only found at the beginning of the fourth page that I realised I had page 3 upside down!

Gymnastic exercises

Notated in the score was: “Use foot pedal to activate Product modulator”. My foot made the familiar movement, but for some reason I could not find the pedal. Where was that damned pedal? While playing I spotted the pedal out of the corner of my eye under the table with the tape recorder on it. Subsequently during a passage where I had a free hand, I walked – in the direction of the table, bent forward and succeeded in getting the pedal. Like all good professionals I realised the show must go

BIOGRAPHY



HARRY SPARNAAY bass clarinet

Harry Sparnaay studied at the Conservatory of Amsterdam with Ru Otto. After graduating with a performer's degree for clarinet he specialized in bass clarinet and won in 1972 the first prize at the International Gaudeamus Competition the first time ever a bass clarinetist had won this prestigious competition.

Today he ranks among the world's most distinguished bass clarinet performers.

He has played solo at numerous important music festivals including Warsaw, New York, Los Angeles, Zagreb, the Holland Festival, several ISCM Festivals, Madrid, Paris and Athens.

Other festivals at which Harry Sparnaay has performed include Witten, Aarhus, Como, Bolzano, Naples, Torino, Bourges, Middelburg, Graz, Århus, Salzburg, Huddersfield, Saarbrücken, Royan, Houston and many others.

EPILOGUE

Undoubtedly there will have been moments during reading that you disagreed with me wholeheartedly, gritting your teeth as you flipped the pages. Fine, that's the way it should be, because if everybody were to agree all the time music would become stuck and not develop further. Having to listen to "Für Elise" or "The Four Seasons" all day would not be pleasant. In the long run eating a hamburger is fine, but not every day.

My comments may have been controversial at times, but that is because I love my music and my instrument. If I was not so passionate I would simply shut up and leave it at that, but this is not the case.

In my view the concept of "music" in general and of "contemporary music" in particular is susceptible to merciless erosion and there is the threat of irreparable undermining. If this music is close to your heart then we all have to be on our guard and avoid complacency.

A small example of this erosion: In former years musicians were invited to make an LP. It was something to be proud of, because someone else considered your music to be important enough to be saved for posterity.

Nowadays technology enables people to produce CD's privately and very easily. Many of these people, usually mistakenly, consider that a CD of their music is a great idea and to make matters even worse one sometimes reads in the "liner notes" that the recordings took more than a week.

One week for about fifty to sixty minutes of music?

Are we going to follow the same procedure in the near future WITH an audience?

"Ladies and gentlemen, I will do this one more time, and then it will be alright"

If you cannot play the pieces, then do not record them, that's my advice, but maybe this concept is a bit old fashioned.

We have to remain watchful, or the worst could happen and musical life will become dominated by second rate people.

While typing these last sentences I hope to have given you bass clarinetists some encouragement and also that we may part as true friends of the bass clarinet.