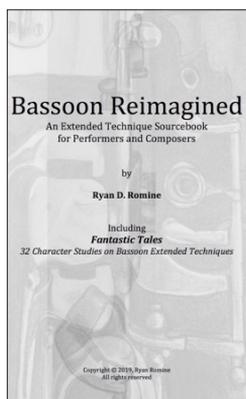




## BASSOON BOOK REVIEW

Review by **David Wells** | Sacramento, California



**Ryan D. Romine:**  
***Bassoon Reimagined: An Extended Technique Sourcebook for Performers and Composers***

Including: *Fantastic Tales: 32 Character Studies on Bassoon Extended Techniques*  
Self-published, 2019. 287pp.

Ryan Romine has done a great service in writing this volume, which gives both bassoonists and non-bassoonist composers a welcoming entry point to the wide and sometimes perplexing world of extended techniques. There of course are a number of previous works dealing with this subject, but none which include

both such a wide array of techniques and clear, practical explanations of how to produce and make musical use of them. This is really two books in one: *Bassoon Reimagined* is a reference work that details a multitude of extended techniques, while *Fantastic Tales* is a set of etudes that put them into context.

In the foreword to *Bassoon Reimagined*, Romine presents a fairly comprehensive literature review of prior publications that explain or catalog the use of extended techniques on the bassoon. This includes works by Bruno Bartolozzi, Don Christlieb, Sergio Penazzi, Alexandre Ouzounoff, Heinz Riedelbauch, Dieter Hähnchen, Pascal Gallois, Jamie Leigh Sampson, and Jon Beebe. References to these and other authors' work pepper the main text, and a "Bibliography and Suggested Reading" section lists the various references cited throughout the book.

The book's front matter also includes a guide to the bassoon finger hole and key names used throughout the book. For cases in which a modification of a "standard" fingering is desired, Romine uses easy to understand key and hole names. When it makes more sense to present the entirety of a fingering, he uses the elegant diagrams produced by Bret Pimentel's online Fingering Diagram Builder (<https://fingering.bretpimentel.com>). The very clear notation of fingerings in *Bassoon Reimagined* makes it quite user friendly and sets it apart from some earlier works that use more complex diagrams or impenetrable key numbering systems.

In the body of *Bassoon Reimagined*, Romine takes the reader through sixty-one separate techniques, some of which actually encompass multiple sub-techniques. Helpfully, Romine arranges these alphabetically, rather than trying to shoehorn them into semi-arbitrary

categories. In discussing specific techniques here, I will generally refer to them by the title of their entry (e.g. “Berio Tremolo”). For each technique presented, Romine includes a basic overview, practical advice for performers, guidance for composers on how to most effectively use and notate the technique, a list of representative works, and usually also a reference to one or more studies in *Fantastic Tales* that use the technique. He also often provides some further context: a reference to the first use or description of a given technique, the prevalence of its use, a judgement of its effectiveness, advice for composers on which techniques can reasonably be combined, etc.

The techniques presented range from those that are fairly simple in concept and execution (e.g. “Low A Extension,” “Stomping,” “Key Noises”) to those that require a great deal of explanation and practice (e.g. “Circular Breathing,” “Singing while Playing,” “Velvet Tone”). But even for those techniques which seem fairly easy to understand or produce, Romine provides helpful practical suggestions for how composers and performers can best make effective use of that technique, and pitfalls to watch out for. The entry “Instrument in Parts” exemplifies Romine’s thorough treatment of even subjects which might initially appear quite simple. Here, he discusses the sonic possibilities of each segment of the bassoon on its own, of standard and nonstandard combinations of two or more segments (e.g. bell plus reed), and even multiple sounds that can be made with just a leather seat strap.

The sections dealing with multiphonics are a good example of how effectively Romine synthesizes, clarifies, and adds practical advice to information presented in earlier publications. Multiphonics are one of the better-known extended bassoon techniques, yet they are often a source of frustration for both performers and composers. In the main “Multiphonics” entry, Romine does an admirable job of helping the reader sort things out. He gives a thorough accounting of eleven different ways composers have notated multiphonics, along with suggestions for composers about which systems are best suited to different contexts. He also provides tables of markings relating to embouchure and air modifications popularized by Bartolozzi, Penazzi, and Gallois, which performers may encounter in existing works. Having all of these in one place is very useful, especially since Bartolozzi’s book is long out of print. Romine does not provide an actual listing of basic multiphonics. For these, he very sensibly directs the reader to Jamie Sampson’s extensive book *Contemporary Techniques for the Bassoon: Multiphonics* (ADJ•ective New Music, 2014). He does, though, include tables or lists in some of the entries devoted to other multiphonic types and techniques: “Multiphonic Glissandi,” “Multiphonic Harmonies” (those which imply recognizable chords), “Multiphonic Rolling Sounds,” “Multiphonic Smorzato,” and “Multiphonic Tremolos.”

I tried every technique discussed in *Bassoon Reimagined*. While many were already familiar to me, I often found helpful hints, facets I hadn’t explored, and new ways to teach the concepts. Of those which I hadn’t tried previously, Romine’s instructions nearly always led me to a positive result in a short period of time. This included some techniques at which I had previously been unsuccessful, such as “Singing while Playing.” I also had good experiences using various entries in *Bassoon Reimagined* to help introduce techniques to some of my students, including “Singing while Playing,” “Timbre Fingerings,” and “Multiple Tonguing.”

My complaints about *Bassoon Reimagined* are few and minor. It would help to have somewhere an explicit explanation of the pitch reference system used in the book. It becomes clear after reading a few entries (or looking at the note table in the “Bisbigliando/

Timbral Trill” entry), but given the multiple similar systems out there, a diagram right up front would be welcome. A few entries might benefit from additional diagrams or musical examples, such as samples of the eleven different existing notational practices for multiphonics that Romine discusses. I also found myself occasionally wishing for audio or perhaps even video examples of some of the techniques—prose explanations, no matter how clear, can sometimes leave the reader with questions. But as I suggested, none of these rise above the level of quibbles, and could perhaps be addressed in a future edition or supplement.

For *Fantastic Tales*, the practical companion to *Bassoon Reimagined*, Romine wrote thirty-two etudes which, as he says in the foreword, “help bridge the current gap between extended techniques and the younger learner.” And they are certainly well within the reach of a talented high school student. But they are also of value to undergraduate, graduate, and professional bassoonists, and provide examples for composers of how the various techniques look and work in context. These etudes are short—most take no longer than two or three minutes to play at the indicated tempi. This provides small bites of music in which to work on the various techniques outlined in *Bassoon Reimagined*, without having to go straight to tackling a piece such as Luciano Berio’s *Sequenza XII*. Each etude includes a helpful page of instructions, which comprise references to the relevant technique section(s) in *Bassoon Reimagined*, clarifications about notation, tips on technique, and suggestions for interpretation.

The etudes are also just fun to play! Advanced players will appreciate their sly allusions to bits of well-known bassoon repertoire and other music. The etudes use the various extended techniques both musically and idiomatically, and they bear descriptive titles that often help to further contextualize the techniques they contain (e.g. “The Marionette,” which includes choreographed movement for the player, and “Bumblebee,” which explores double trills). I suspect that these etudes would work well to introduce *listeners* of all ages to extended bassoon techniques, as well.

*Bassoon Reimagined* and its companion *Fantastic Tales* are thorough, if not entirely comprehensive—Romine lists a number of techniques that deserve further exploration, such as amplification, other electronic sound modification, and beatboxing. The text is written in clear, detailed, and engaging prose, and the spiral binding makes it very easy to use on a music stand. This volume is an essential resource for teachers, performers of solo and chamber music from the last fifty-plus years, and composers who are interested in exploring the myriad sounds a bassoon can produce.



*Dr. David A. Wells teaches bassoon and music history at California State University, Sacramento. For his biography and more of his writing, see [davidawells.com](http://davidawells.com).*