

# Creep

## performance notes

composition by Radiohead (1992)  
arrangement for four bass clarinets by Cornelius Boots (1997)

**NOTE:** proper **throat harmonics**, **slap-tonguing** and **extreme altissimo** are all **essential** for an effective performance of this piece. Also, two of the four players in your group need to have bass clarinets that go down to low C. Please read these pages for a thorough understanding of how and why this arrangement is simple yet effective.

### IMPORTANT INTRODUCTION ABOUT EXPANDED TECHNIQUES AND LEAD VOCALS

I have worked with some of the best bass clarinetists I know, and if they couldn't do the throat harmonics properly (done mostly correctly in 2007 Edmund Welles performance on YouTube) or the slap-tonguing correctly (done about 60% correctly in the YouTube version) then this arrangement was pretty worthless: it relies on these two things, plus an absolutely-faithful-to-the-original rendering of the vocal part. My pet peeves of instrumental arrangements of rock tunes are a) the inappropriate liberties taken by the lead players out of boredom or lack of integrity to represent the singer as well as possible on the instrument and b) wind players over-articulating vocal parts: it can sound so bad, and clarinetists especially like to over-articulate: this vocal part, especially the 16<sup>th</sup>-notes, really need a sweet *tenuto* approach---but I'm sure you can hear that. My suggestion is that the lead vocal player (bass clarinet I) pay great attention to their sound in the throat tones and they should know all of the lyrics and inflections from the original Pablo Honey version (not live versions) very well, and have the lyrics going in their head as the line is performed, and not add their own "clarinet-y" inflections of any kind: just imitate the vocals as closely as possible, very tenuto almost always, some vibrato, etc.

### BACKGROUND

Thank you for your interest in the four bass clarinet arrangement of Radiohead's "Creep." As a Masters of Jazz Studies student at Indiana University in the late 90's, I began to explore composing for four bass clarinets. It was my opinion that the instrument had so much musical and expressive potential, that by simply having four of them (without bringing in Bb clarinets) many compositions and arrangements could be brought to life extremely satisfyingly. I had three things working to my advantage: 1) the enthusiasm of being a young and adventurous composer 2) 15 years of performance and training on clarinets and saxophones, and 3) an expanded yet discerning radar for finding and selecting pre-existing songs that would survive and thrive after being re-formed (arranged) as bass clarinet quartets.

As the online video of the Edmund Welles' performance of this particular arrangement became more and more popular, there has grown a demand for the "sheet music" or

notation of this arrangement. Thinking to myself that this arrangement is the Edmund Welles equivalent of Kronos Quartet's famous arrangement of "Purple Haze," I have endeavored to keep this notation largely secret with a few exceptions (which has been the approach Kronos has taken, to my knowledge, with their Hendrix arrangement).

Ultimately, however, clarinetists, and especially bass clarinetists, deserve better (as students and professionals) than string players do: therefore I am now releasing the notation. I do not intend for this comparison to offend string players, it is just fact that there is a long historic imbalance in the world of orchestral and chamber music leaning HEAVILY in favor of string players, and it is time for the world to wake up to the incredible possibilities that wind instruments offer within these same realms. Hence, the birth of "**heavy chamber music**," which is my own genre designation for the style in which I compose and arrange: it is primarily a single-reed conspiracy, but all flutes, double-reeds and brass also have a strong foothold here.

### MUSICAL TECHNIQUES REQUIRED

After composing my first bass clarinet quartets, I turned to arranging in order to explore the inner possibilities of the four voices. The materials used as experiments included boogie woogie piano, hard gospel (vocal a cappella), Baroque organ and Renaissance motet compositions. The other two areas explored were pop/rock/metal and theme music. Three main compositions were selected to test out how the four bass clarinets could replace and emulate the standard vocals/guitar/bass/drums line-up of rock bands: "Is She Weird" by The Pixies, "Frizzle Fry" by Primus, and "Creep" by Radiohead.

These three arrangements turned out to work very well with the four bass clarinets, partly due to the superior nature of the compositions themselves, in terms of their intrinsic musical construction, and partly due to the possibilities that lie within some vital "expanded techniques" on the bass clarinet. I use the term "expanded techniques" because my conservatory training did not extend to much training in what is called "extended techniques" and therefore I have crafted my own methods, designations and descriptions of these techniques, some of which are standard and common, and others that are more rare.

**I am going to such lengths to explain where this arrangement comes from because without 3 of these expanded techniques, this arrangement is not effective and should not be performed,** although you could still practice individual parts for fun.

**These techniques are:**

- 1) **slap-tonguing**
- 2) **throat harmonics**
- 3) **extreme altissimo**

[an optional 4<sup>th</sup> technique required for many Edmund Welles pieces that is useful, but not essential, for the bass line in this piece is **circular breathing**]

I encourage you to spend time working on these techniques if you desire to perform this arrangement. There are 3 ways you can work on these techniques

- 1) buy the Tooth & Claw Companion CD-ROM which contains instructional videos for these techniques as well as all of the notation for 12 original Edmund Welles compositions and drum machine click tracks to practice with
- 2) contact me to schedule internet or in-person lessons
- 3) study these techniques with your current clarinet or bass clarinet teacher if they can do them. If they cannot do them, suggest the above two options to them

The rest of these performance notes will give you the broad strokes of how to approach this arrangement and these techniques. Above all, you must perform these parts with absolute tone and full breath support:

## † Breathe deep: breathe from the heels †

### MUSICAL TECHNIQUES EXPLAINED

**Slap-tonguing** refers to a loud “popping” sound at the front of an articulated note. When the note is extremely staccato or marcato, I refer to this technique as “pop-tonguing” and when there is some amount of sustain after the initial attack on the note, I call that slap-tonguing. It is not just tonguing really hard, unfortunately. It requires a surface tension suction that is created between the center surface of the tongue and the large surface area of the reed. When I use the word “suction” here, it does not mean inhaling or sucking in air, and this is what is often confusing about slap-tonguing explanations: it is a suction caused by surface tension. You release this tension with a pop and then exhale into the instrument and the reed shifts quickly from the pop to a real tone. Also, the sound of the pop is influenced by the note you are fingering at the time, although you can practice this on just the mouthpiece and neck of the bass clarinet. Note: all pop- and slap-tonguing is easier to achieve at first on the larger single-reed instruments (i.e. bari sax, bass clarinet, tenor sax, etc.).

**Throat Harmonics** is the term that I invented to describe the loud, multiphonic effect created when the clarinetist’s oral cavity is manipulated in such a way that the reed vibrates at many of the harmonics simultaneously above the note being played. In brief: it is how you play full chords on the bass clarinet or other single-reed instruments. In general, these should come out sounding full and even, like a distorted guitar power chord, and you should attempt them on the lowest notes of the instrument; you can control the volume and pitch of the higher notes only, and the rest of them stack up as the reed desires. These are NOT the same as multiphonics that require special fingerings and sound like weak air leaks and achieve really creative chords: these throat harmonics are just loud harmonics exploiting the physics of the instrument.

The **extreme altissimo** range of the bass clarinet is very accessible to most players of intermediate or higher level. As with all upper range notes on reed instruments, the mouthpiece, reed, ligature and embouchure of the player all play a big factor. The biggest factor in desirable tone quality, however, is always the full air support coming from the abdomen/diaphragm, and beautiful sounding altissimo notes are no exception to this. I have encountered many different fingerings for the notes above high F# on the bass clarinet, and the fingerings that I use are not the same as the ones used by Jeff in the youtube version. You can experiment and create your own fingerings or contact me for lessons and I will explain my very intuitive and quickly implementable high-note fingering system.

## SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIONS

### BASS CLARINET I

This is the lead vocal part. Respect and represent the singer, and feel the intention of this part in your heart/chest. Do not over-articulate: especially the 16<sup>th</sup>-notes, as they really need a sweet *tenuto* approach. You need to pay great attention to your sound in the throat tones. You should know all of the lyrics and inflections from the original Pablo Honey (Radiohead) version (not live versions) very well, and have the lyrics going in your head as the line is performed. DO NOT add your own "clarinet-y" inflections of any kind: just imitate the vocals as closely as possible, very tenuto almost always, some vibrato, etc. There are few dynamics in this part: it is always the lead so respond to the group dynamics accordingly.

### BASS CLARINET II

The main arpeggiation pattern in this part can work better, in fact, if you do **not** ad lib but rather use the suggested pattern each time this section occurs. As you develop the arrangement with your group, however, you might decide to take some more freedom with these sections to play higher notes later in the song, use certain intervals more or less, etc. Things in parentheses means optional: try it and play or don't play it.

### BASS CLARINET III

Knowing how to do the throat harmonics and the slap-tonguing correctly, loudly and effectively is essential to the success of this part. If the throat harmonics are not coming out right due to the reed or whatever, **just sustain the root**, the main pitch in your part, DO NOT go for strangulated squeaky sounds in an attempt to achieve the technique. Fat, sustained bass notes are okay here instead of the throat harmonics, it will be less rock/distorted guitar sounding but it will still be musically effective.

### BASS CLARINET IV

As mentioned above, this part is most effective if you utilize **circular breathing** to keep the bass line continuous. This means breathing in through your nose to replenish your air supply as you continue to exhale and create constant sound on the instrument. It is not as difficult as many people believe, but it does require steady practice and appropriate guidance in most cases. Above all, your part needs to be very full, very in-tune and you must maintain a steady tempo. Your part may look simple but you are performing the roles of both bass and drums from the original composition so it is literally the foundation on which the arrangement is built.