

# How's Your Double Tongue?

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Gabriel Beavers  
Associate Professor of Bassoon  
Frost School of Music  
University of Miami

## NOTES ON DOUBLE TONGUING IN GENERAL

For me the single most important qualification of a good double tongue is how closely it matches one's best single tongue. In order for double tonguing technique to be effective the internal syllable (Ki) must sound like a single tongued note. Isolation of the Ki and finding the best combination of air, tongue placement and reed strength/tuning will help give the illusion of a very fast single tongue. (see double tongue exercise handout)

Responsive reeds are key to a good double tongue. Responsive does not necessarily mean free blowing or easy to play (although in my case I think it does) to me when I say a reed should be responsive it means that a reed should respond in a predictable way that you can control and anticipate. Some people like reeds that are free blowing and others like reeds with more back pressure. I find that a free blowing reed helps the Ki syllable to sound more like the Ti syllable. For double tonguing I like reeds with an abundance of lows in the sound with an immediate low crow. (see reed recipe #1)

Careful planning in a given work can also lead to speedier progress. Instead of jumping right to one's fastest speed I think time spend with a pencil and music **away from the bassoon** can set one up to succeed. Take a given piece a music and indicate in writing where you plan to single or double tongue. Mark places where you want to start with Ki rather than Ti. Sometimes even downbeats can benefit from starting on the internal articulation rather than have the tongue on the reed. Also mark where you will transition from single to double tongue. Pay special attention to expressive markings when double tonguing and underline/highlight/mark expressive markings in order to draw your attention to them. It is easy to simply focus on the speed of the tongue at the cost of everything else in the music.

### 1. Mozart 35 last movement

debate about tempo? audition vs. performance: PRESTO!  
Personally I don't feel like there is as much leeway in this excerpt as in the others. Rarely have I performed this work that it was not fairly fast. I believe that between quarter note = 148-152 is ideal

**Issues** (Besides the obvious technical difficulty )

A. Many of us tend to go flat in the tenor register when double tonguing. Be mindful of the tenor D to C#. Some bassoonists use a sharp fingering for the C# but neglect to match the C# with the D. Depending on the pitch tendencies of your instrument this can work. However on some bassoons the short C# is more closely matched to the D and thus one is forced to support more in preparation for the D if one uses the short C#. Depending on reeds and how in shape I am I go back and forth as to which C# I prefer.

**Practice suggestions for intonation.** Play passages against a D drone, first slurred slowly then progress to single tonguing slowly, then double tonguing slowly and finally begin to increase tempo in small increments with a metronome, always being mindful of the pitch of the tenor register. (it is also worth mentioning that if one begins the various passages on the high side one can perceive the tenor register as being flat when in fact the octave is compressed from the bottom side. Keep the pitch down to start in the bottom octave)

**Technical help** first and foremost make sure you can slur the entire excerpt smoothly. There is little point in attempting to double tongue the passage if you can't play it slurred. secondly, independent of the actual scale patterns make sure you can articulate all of the rhythms on a single note. At first play the passage slowly, then gradually work your way up to full speed. I find that it works best to get the tongue and fingers in good shape independently and then merge the two. I like to think of the fingers as following the tongue not the other way around. I feel double tonguing works best when it rides on a constant stream of air. If the air and tongue feel like they are an autonomic process then I can give most of my attention to the fingers.

**Special problem measures** (measures 172 - 175): The rapid lower octave leaps in the measures can be REALLY tricky. Of course the all around advice provided above is applicable here but I don't always find that my slow practice speeds up dependably in these measures. Instead I find the biggest factor in whether or not I will be a success is the responsiveness of the reed. Having said that when practicing these measures slowly it is important to make a conscious choice for the voicing of the sudden downward octave leap and the subsequent return to the prevailing upper note. Another option that may work is to play these particular passages by starting the downbeats on Ki (Ki-Ti-Ki-Ti) This arrangement puts the tongue on the reed during the attack of the lowest note.

(measures 27 - 29, 165-167, and 201-202) the C - D#-C on the staff can be a problem if the reed is too weak causing the C# to be unstable. Bassoonists tend to fix issues with C# when we play moderate to slow passages but given the rapid movement of this passage problems with one's reed are more readily apparent. It is very important to have a reed that will allow you to make a nice sound on the Ki syllable but that is still stable on problem notes like C# and E)

## 2. Beethoven 4 last movement

**Tempo** (Allegro Ma non troppo) : I feel that a speed of quarter = 144 is ideal for both auditions and performance. Although Beethoven marks a tempo of half note = 80 many performances of this work hover in the 140's. The conventional wisdom is that if one practices this excerpt at quarter = 144 that nerves will add the last bit of speed in an audition. If one practices faster than 144 then nerves could result in a blazingly fast tempo that has little

connection to the music and thus give a bad impression in an audition. In the end the tempo marking is Allegro **Ma non troppo** not presto.

**Intonation issues:** the solo in measure 144 - 187 also suffers from a tendency to go flat in the tenor register when double tongued (specifically the C, B, Eb and G after the grace note on the first beat of measure 186). My solution is to single tongue some or all of this beat and then resume double tonguing on the descending scale starting on the high G on the 2nd beat. Most people, with practice, can single tongue rapidly for at least one beat. It takes some work but with carefully planned syllables implemented slowly at first one can work up to full tempo with this combination tonguing.

**Mental preparation:** Whether playing the solo from the fourth movement in an audition or in an orchestral performance one must play the solo with no rhythmic warm up in the bars beforehand. The two bars rest and relatively inactive rhythmic patterns in the prior bars can make picking the solo out of thin air very difficult. I find that I must have incredible focus when listening, counting and watching in the bars leading up to the solo. Having the solo memorized and **not being dependent on the written music** is, in my mind, the best defense against nerves in this case. If the solo becomes a reflex that one can summon up as easy as tying one's shoes then it causes far less stress in the performance.

**Technical prep:** The same advice as the Mozart above goes for the fourth movement of Beethoven 4. Learn everything slurred, be able to tongue passages on a single note and then merge.

Sometimes the long tutti passage at the beginning of the last movement can be asked on auditions as well. I find that along with the advice above, using and alternate Eb fingering in measure 22 helps avoid the awkward Eb fork and makes my finger technique more fluid.

measure 300 entrance (listen to clarinet to finish the solo) (this is another place that benefits from getting one's eyes away from the music, listening and playing from memory. By knowing the clarinet part playing along in one's mind one can seamlessly join in at the right moment to finish the solo)

### **3. Bartered Bride Overture:**

**Rhythm:** The rhythm in the overture is tricky with accents and sforzandos on varying parts of the beat. Spend some time with slow practice with a metronome in order to focus on the syncopations and accents. In order to best play the rhythms in unison with the orchestra it is important to feel the empty syncopated tied downbeats.

Low double tonguing in the 2nd bassoon part: for the richest sound I prefer a reed with heavy rails and a relatively thin back. This allows me to keep more reed in my mouth rather than having to roll my lips out to play the lowest notes. Sometimes the technique of rolling out one's lips is necessary given the state of one's reeds on a given day

Starting phrases on Ki after tied down beats: Sometimes it is helpful for the organization of the double tonguing to start passages on Ki in order to have the Ti's land on beats.

Make sure to one bring out accents and articulations. (See advice about pencil and part without bassoon above)

Note the exposed passages vs. Tutti  
two after A exposed woodwind tutti

measure 235 1st bassoon (with viola)  
measure 253 1st bassoon with oboe  
measure 259 2nd bassoon with cellos and bass  
measure 265 1st bassoon joins 2nd (with oboes)  
measure 269 2nd bassoon finishes with cellos and bass (difficult low tonguing)

#### **4. Mozart Symphony no. 41 last movement (Molto Allegro)**

Rhythm (precise subdivision)

Also many times one must begin a series of articulations on the 2nd eighth note of a strong big beat (measure 109) either ti-ti-ki OR ki-ti-ki

examples of solo/soli passages:

measure 76 (two bassoons)  
measure 87 bassoon 1  
measure 136 independent bassoon lines (also need ti-ti-ki or ki-ki-ti)  
importance of rhythm in 142 (only bassoons on 2nd eighth of 2nd big beat)  
measure 150 1st bassoon SOLO repeat 161 is with oboe  
measure 169 1st bassoon with flute (legato concept)  
measure 281 1st bassoon solo  
measure 350 1st bassoon solo (note constant quarters in bass)

What about the contrapuntal nature of this movement? (Vs 35): I personally don't find 41 as technically challenging as the other excerpts mentioned above but given the contrapuntal nature of this music and the rhythmic interchange between the various statements of the theme it is very important that one have control of one's double tongue to avoid rhythmic issues that can arise from imprecise entrances. In Mozart 35 the bassoons are simply mirroring the cello parts. However in Mozart 41 the bassoons (especially the 1st) have solo/soli parts as well as parts in unison with the cellos.

High G fingering (try various fingerings to find the optimal tuning and attack)