



BASS

“Dear Orchestra Teacher” A Young Bass Player’s Plea

by Nancy Bjork

This little piece is directed toward orchestra teachers, rather than only bassists, a result of years and years and years of being an ear for private students who talked about their orchestra experiences! Fortunately some of these requests, such as a tuning note just for the bassists, are becoming common, especially in festival situations. As for sharing stands, because of the size of basses between us, most bassists can hardly manage to get closer than 6 feet apart! But covid considerations do change many traditions and we all have to adjust, of course.

1. Please, Teacher, see me.
2. Please, Teacher, hear me.
3. Please, Teacher, place me where I can see you.
4. Dear, dear Teacher, I ask for a tuning note just for the basses—you will not be sorry!
5. I will thank you to place me with a stand partner: may our bass line continue while the page gets turned!
6. How about a sectional alone, just for the basses? (We do play with cellos a lot, and we like them, but they are tuned in fifths. We are tuned in fourths, and have to shift and cross strings many more times than they do, just to play the same passage.)
7. Help me to keep my instrument safe! A simple word from you might prevent other players from plowing through our section just to get to theirs.
8. Hint: I love every word of praise! Help the whole orchestra appreciate my role! (And I will then want to work harder for both you and the group!)
9. Please, dear Teacher, let me know about bass concerts and other bass events—I love this cool instrument and want to see and hear others play it.
10. Finally, Teacher, please guide me to a really good private bass teacher. There is so much I want to do better. We will both benefit!

I love orchestra, and I love playing the bass! Help me out, and I will be yours!

*Respectfully,
your bass player*

Notes:

1. I highly recommend an excellent article by Christopher Horner, *Double Bass Parts: Challenges and Opportunities* (*American String Teacher*, November 2019, pp. 33-39). In this well-written analysis, bassist and orchestra director Horner skillfully and acutely examines the difficulties in choosing music for the student orchestra, acknowledging the inherent challenges for the bassist as well as the need to keep the bassist stimulated.

2. A more recent article has appeared in the May 2021 edition of *American String Teacher*, by orchestra director Kathryn Crask: *It’s All About That Bass — REALLY!* (*American String Teacher*, May 2021, pp.165-167.) In this article, the writer discusses not only the reasons for developing a strong bass section for the school orchestra, but explores in detail the many methods she has utilized to build and maintain a “strong school orchestra string bass culture.” Well worth a read!

Bassist Nancy Bjork has enjoyed nurturing a vibrant studio of pre-college bassists for 45+ years, both in her home studio and at MacPhail; many of these students have joined the ranks of professional orchestra members, teachers, and enthusiastic amateurs around the world. She has organized 14 master classes with internationally-renowned bassists, and served as both presenter and panelist for ISB, ASTA, and MNSOTA events. She holds the 1999 MNSOTA Master Teacher: Studio Award. Nancy has performed widely around the Twin Cities, and is Principal Bass with the Minneapolis Pops Orchestra. †