



# The United States Army Field Band

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The Musical Ambassadors of the Army  
*Washington, DC*

## Bass Clarinet Basics

*by*  
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## HISTORY

The bass clarinet was invented in the second half of the Eighteenth Century, and was originally used only in orchestras. By the 1920s, the bass clarinet was being used in bands, but usually doubled other parts or substituted when other bass-voiced instruments were unavailable. Since the 1950s, the bass clarinet has been treated more as a solo instrument, and in today's band literature often has a prominent role.

## THE INSTRUMENT

Using proper equipment is very important when playing any musical instrument. Selmer and Yamaha are probably the most common brands of bass clarinet. It is imperative that the instrument be given proper care. It should be swabbed out after each use and cork grease should be applied to the joints regularly. Whenever the instrument is not being used, it should be stored in its case.

## MOUTHPIECES

The bass clarinet mouthpiece plays an important role in the production of sound. The mouthpiece should fit securely in the neck of the instrument and should not be used if chipped, warped, or cracked. About once a week the mouthpiece should be cleaned in warm, soapy water. Never swab a mouthpiece or put anything with a sharp edge inside. Some brands of mouthpieces that are good choices for high school musicians include Selmer, Vandoren, and Bay.

## REEDS

Players should use the type of reed best suited to their playing levels. When not being used, reeds should be stored in a reed guard or secured on a piece of plexiglass with rubber bands. Reeds should not be stored on the mouthpiece. Beginning students should use a softer reed (strength 2 to 3), which will allow easy sound production in the lower register; however, these are not stiff enough to be consistent in the upper register. One should consider a strength of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 for this purpose. Brands

of reeds that are good choices for the developing bass clarinetist include Rico Royal, La Voz, Olivieri, and Vandoren. If bass clarinet reeds are not available, tenor sax reeds will fit the mouthpiece. However, they do not function as well as reeds made specifically for the bass clarinet.

## WARM-UP AND PRACTICE

Warming up properly is one of the most important aspects of a daily practice routine. Since instrumental music is composed along scale and chord lines, it makes sense to use scales and chords as an integral part of one's warm-up. Major and melodic minor scales are a good place to start (see *Example 1 and Scale Supplement*). Scales should be practiced slowly at first, using different articulations to develop legato and staccato tonguing. Broken chords (see *Example 2*) may also be practiced using different articulations as well.

Standard study books for the Bb soprano clarinet may also be used for the bass clarinet. Some recommended titles include *Rose 30 Etudes*, *Rose 40 Studies*, and any of the etude books by Klosé or Baermann.

Long tones (see *Example 3*) are also effective as they help the player develop good control of each note throughout the entire dynamic spectrum. Playing each note of a scale as a long tone is another way to improve the sound (see *Example 4*).

Producing an acceptable sound in the low register is usually achieved in a short time by most people who play the bass clarinet. However, because of the physics of the instrument, producing an appropriate sound in the upper register is more challenging. The purpose of the following exercise is to teach the player to keep a constant stream of air entering the horn by supporting the air with the abdominal muscles. The notes should all sound the same; no one note should sound louder than any other. Start in the second octave of any scale with the tonic note and ascend for one octave. Remember to keep the lower jaw relaxed and the throat open (see *Example 5*).

# Bass Clarinet Basics

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## BASS CLARINET EXAMPLES

Example 1

G Major

A musical staff in G Major, common time (C). The melody starts with a G4 quarter note, followed by a half-note scale ascending: A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5. This is followed by a half-note scale descending: G5, F#5, E5, D5, C5, B4, A4. The piece concludes with a G4 quarter note.

E minor (melodic)

A musical staff in E minor, common time (C). The melody starts with an E4 quarter note, followed by a half-note scale ascending: F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5. This is followed by a half-note scale descending: E5, D5, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4. The piece concludes with an E4 quarter note.

Example 2

G Major

A musical staff in G Major, common time (C). The melody consists of a half-note scale ascending: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, followed by a half-note scale descending: G5, F#5, E5, D5, C5, B4, A4, G4.

E minor

A musical staff in E minor, common time (C). The melody consists of a half-note scale ascending: E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, followed by a half-note scale descending: E5, D5, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4.

Example 3

A musical staff in G Major, common time (C). The piece features three measures of dynamics exercises. The first measure has notes G4, A4, B4 with dynamics *pp*, *ff*, *pp*. The second measure has notes C5, D5, E5 with dynamics *pp*, *ff*, *pp*. The third measure has notes F#5, G5, F#5 with dynamics *pp*, *ff*, *pp*.

Example 4

Two musical staves in G Major, common time (C), illustrating articulation exercises. The top staff shows a half-note scale ascending: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5. The bottom staff shows a half-note scale descending: G5, F#5, E5, D5, C5, B4, A4, G4. Both staves have a series of slurs and accents (< >) under each note.

Example 5

A musical staff in G Major, common time (C), showing a single melodic line with a slur over a half-note scale ascending: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5.


# Scale Supplement

The fifteen major and minor scales make up our musical “ABCs.” Just as a person wishing to read learns the alphabet first, a musician cannot expect to master an instrument without first learning the basic set of scales. By diligently practicing the major scales and all three forms of the minor scales, they will become automatic, just like reading the alphabet. This will make playing, especially sight reading, much easier so that the musician can concentrate towards the ultimate goal—making music!


Each scale below should be played slowly at first, ensuring that each note is played correctly. Gradually work for speed, but do not rush. Use a metronome whenever possible to guarantee evenness and a steady tempo. The player should practice difficult scales twice as often as easy ones to develop competence in all keys. As skills increase, change rhythmic patterns and increase tempos. Advanced players can still use scales to work on intonation, technique, range, and dynamics.

*Use the following patterns one at a time or in combination to get even more benefit from scale practice:*


**A**



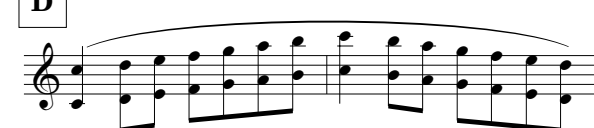
**B**




**C**




**D**



**E**

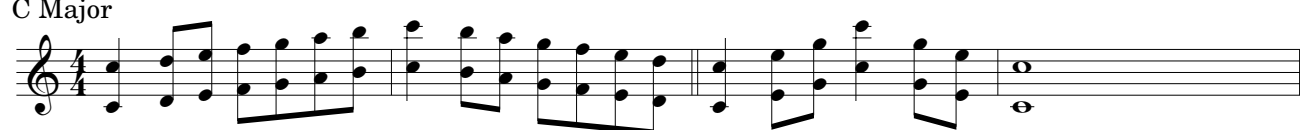


**F**



*pp*     *ff*     *pp*

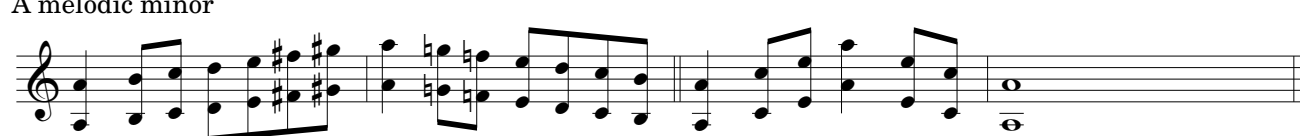
C Major



A natural minor     A harmonic minor



A melodic minor



# Scale Supplement

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G Major



E natural minor

E harmonic minor



E melodic minor



F Major

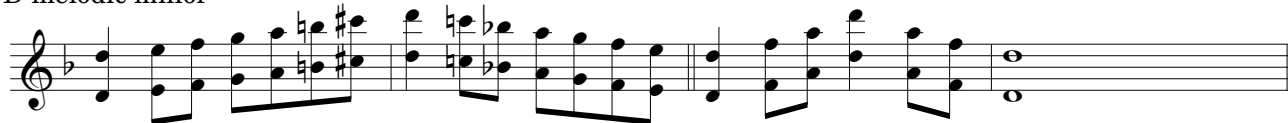


D natural minor

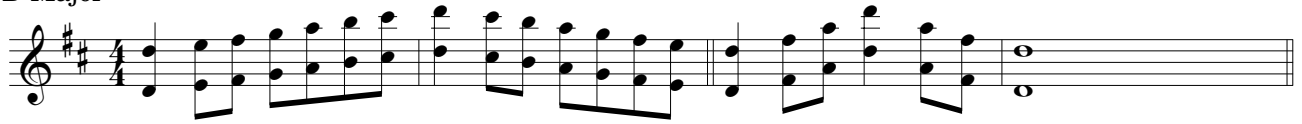
D harmonic minor



D melodic minor



D Major

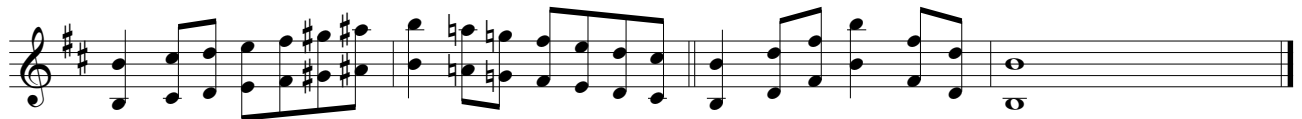


B natural minor

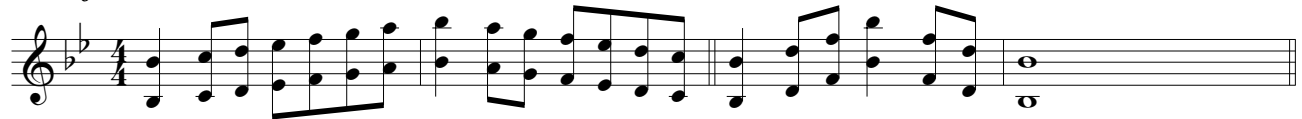
B harmonic minor



B melodic minor



Bb Major

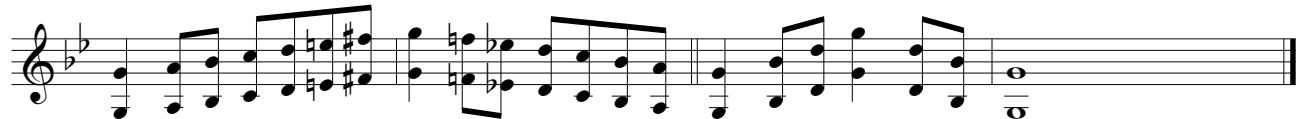


G natural minor

G harmonic minor



G melodic minor



# Scale Supplement

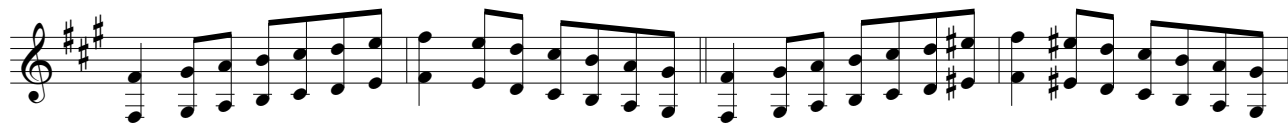
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A Major



F# natural minor

F# harmonic minor



F# melodic minor

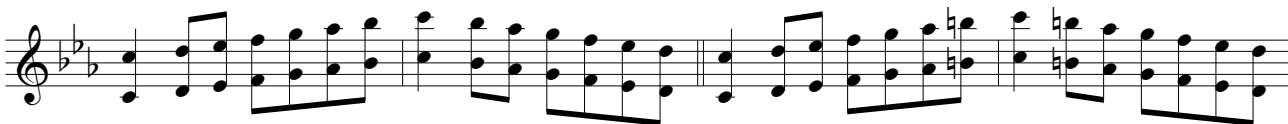


Eb Major

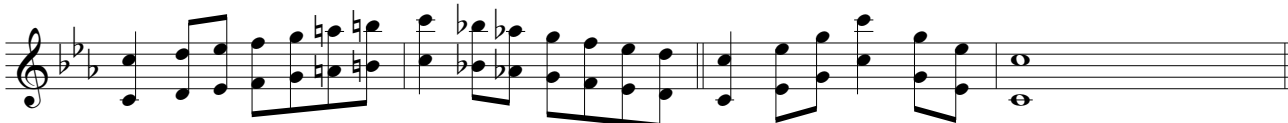


C natural minor

C harmonic minor

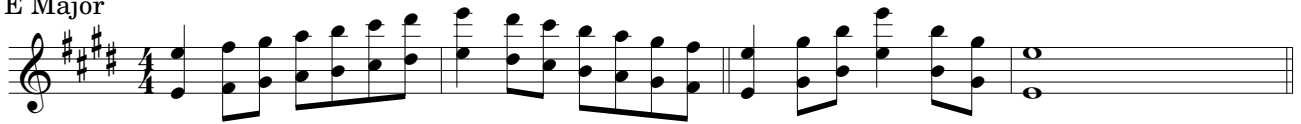


C melodic minor



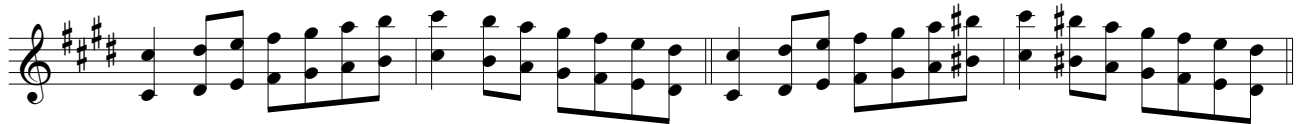


E Major

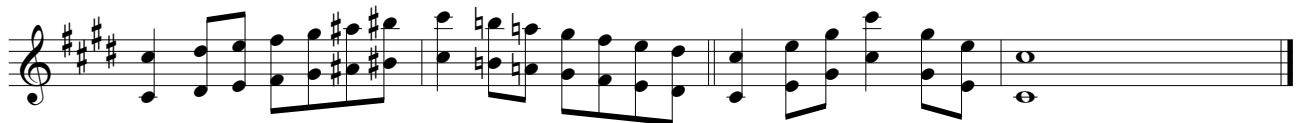


C# natural minor

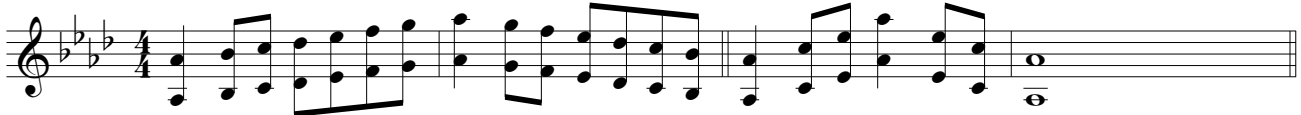
C# harmonic minor



C# melodic minor

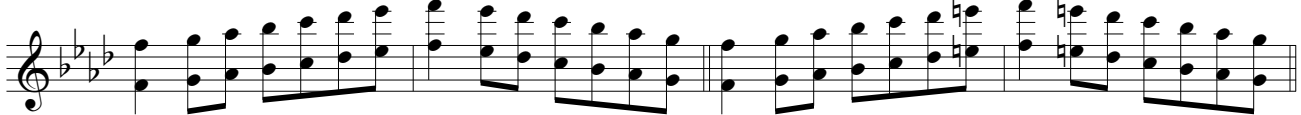


Ab Major



F natural minor

F harmonic minor



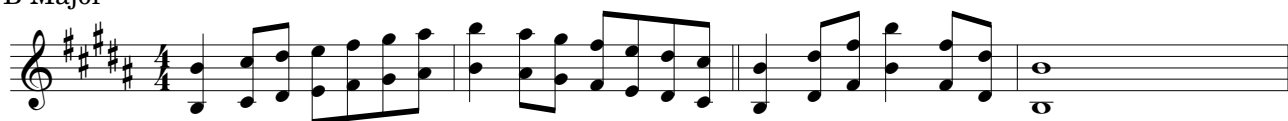
F melodic minor



# Scale Supplement

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B Major



Musical notation for the B Major scale in 4/4 time. The scale is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The notation shows the ascending and descending scales, with a double bar line in the middle. The piece concludes with a whole note chord on the tonic B.

G# natural minor

G# harmonic minor



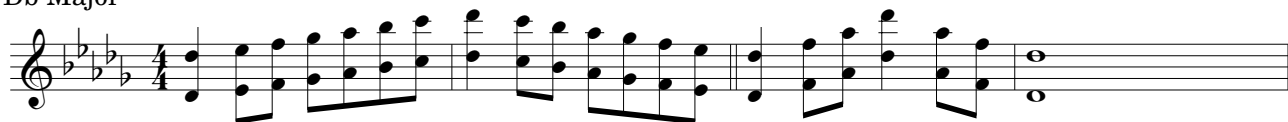
Musical notation for the G# natural minor and G# harmonic minor scales in 4/4 time. The scales are written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The notation shows the ascending and descending scales, with a double bar line in the middle. The piece concludes with a whole note chord on the tonic G#.

G# melodic minor



Musical notation for the G# melodic minor scale in 4/4 time. The scale is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The notation shows the ascending and descending scales, with a double bar line in the middle. The piece concludes with a whole note chord on the tonic G#.

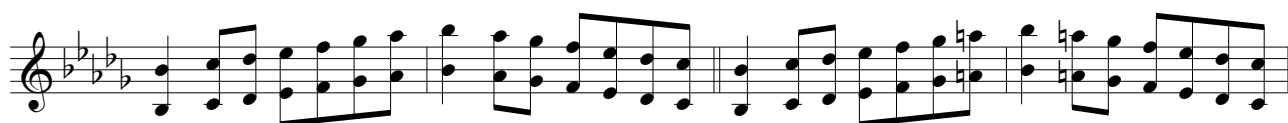
Db Major



Musical notation for the Db Major scale in 4/4 time. The scale is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of five flats (Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb). The notation shows the ascending and descending scales, with a double bar line in the middle. The piece concludes with a whole note chord on the tonic Db.

Bb natural minor

Bb harmonic minor



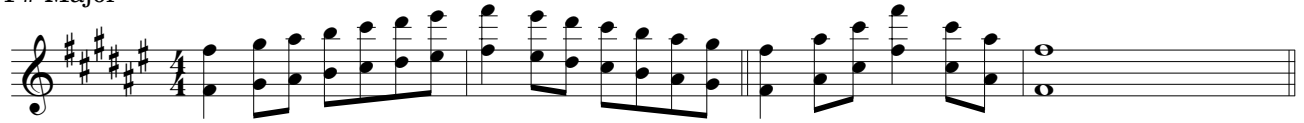
Musical notation for the Bb natural minor and Bb harmonic minor scales in 4/4 time. The scales are written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of five flats (Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb). The notation shows the ascending and descending scales, with a double bar line in the middle. The piece concludes with a whole note chord on the tonic Bb.

Bb melodic minor



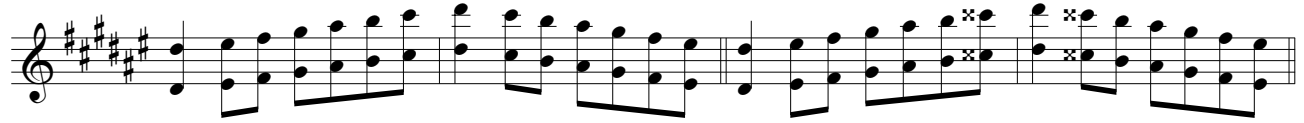
Musical notation for the Bb melodic minor scale in 4/4 time. The scale is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of five flats (Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb). The notation shows the ascending and descending scales, with a double bar line in the middle. The piece concludes with a whole note chord on the tonic Bb.

F# Major

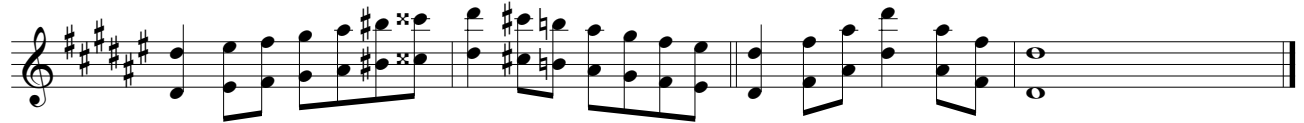


D# natural minor

D# harmonic minor



D# melodic minor

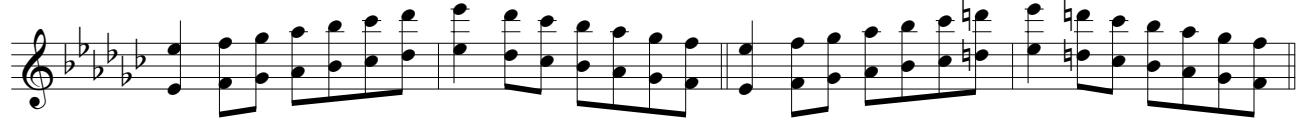


Gb Major

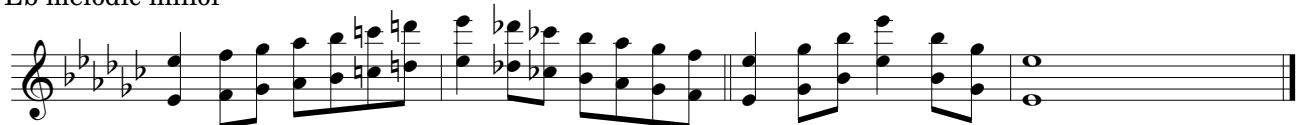


Eb natural minor

Eb harmonic minor



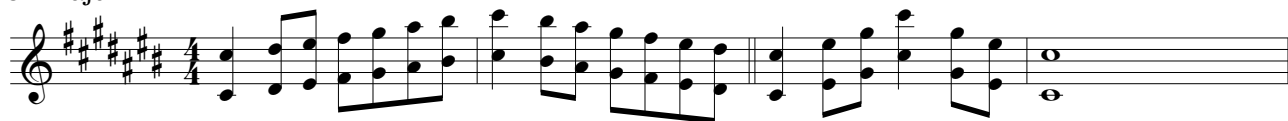
Eb melodic minor



# Scale Supplement

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C# Major

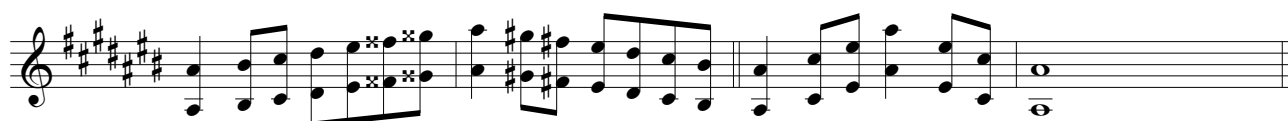


A# natural minor

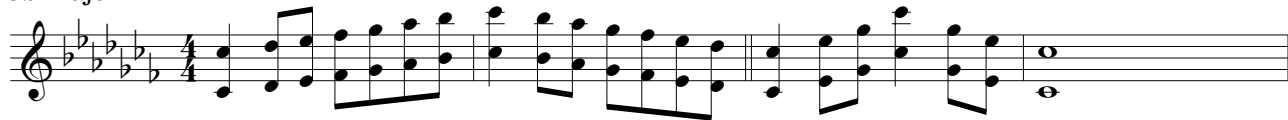
A# harmonic minor



A# melodic minor



Cb Major



Ab natural minor

Ab harmonic minor



Ab melodic minor

