

Beyond Limits: The Return of a Bassoonist After Losing a Finger

Hary Schweizer | Brasília, Brazil

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If you only had four fingers on your hand, would you still want to or be able to play the bassoon? Well, that's what happened to bassoonist GPS (a fictitious name to protect his privacy). By a twist of fate, the ring on his left ring finger got caught in a grate, and the weight of his body caused him to have that finger amputated.

Not wanting to give up the bassoon, an instrument to which he had a special fondness, GPS consulted me at my bassoon workshop about the possibility of a solution.



Two solutions were possible:

a) Surgeons could implant an orthopedic finger prosthesis into his hand, a procedure that was unfeasible in his case.

or

b) With the right keywork, his middle finger could do double duty, acting as both the middle and ring finger simultaneously. So that's what we have done.



With the adapted mechanism, the middle E can be played without altering the usual fingering.



The middle D becomes relatively easy to play with this adaptation. Instead of closing the open second tone hole with the finger, it is closed through a spatula/platform.



The middle C requires an additional effort from the middle finger, which has the task of simultaneously activating the two spatulas—the upper one, which covers the second tone hole, and the lower one, which covers the third.



With this technical solution, GPS is now able to restart his bassoon studies, meaning rebuilding his muscle memory and, above all, relearning his fingerings to play the many passages in the bassoon literature that must now be approached in a different manner.

But now, GPS no longer has to give up his instrument.

Testimony from GPS

"As a bassoonist for 11 years, I dedicated a good part of my time to studying the bassoon. On June 1, 2025, I suffered a serious accident to my left hand, to the point that my ring finger had to be amputated. Even on the day of the accident, I thought: 'Would it be possible to play again?' And my answer at that moment was no.

"Upon contacting professor and instrument maker Hary Schweizer, explaining the situation I was in and the fact that I still wanted to continue playing, I had the hope of finding a possible solution for my new condition. I sent the bassoon to Brasília without hesitation. I was sure that an adaptation of the instrument would be invented and installed.

"During the process, Professor Hary kept me informed of every step and, at a certain point, told me that the adaptation could really work. On July 18, 2025, I received a photo and an audio recording of Hary demonstrating the already adapted instrument, along with a message that filled my heart with joy and answered that initial question: 'Yes, it is possible to play again.'

"I received my bassoon back on July 24, 2025 adapted for me to play again. The first contact with the new instrument was very special—I managed to play a few notes. It is true that it will require effort to relearn how to play, since with the adaptation my middle finger must take on functions that it never had before.

"I would like to specially express my gratitude and admiration to Professor Hary Schweizer for giving me the chance to study the bassoon again."

Sincerely,
GPS



Hary Schweizer is Brazilian, originally from the city of Mafra, Santa Catarina. After studying music in Curitiba, Paraná, and in Munich, Germany, he joined the University of Brasília (UnB) in 1977 as a bassoon professor, also working in chamber music and music history. In the area of chamber music (wind quintet, reed trio, recitals with piano and other combinations), he coordinated and actively participated in the "UnB Weekly Concert" series, resulting in several recordings (Marlos Nobre, Cláudio Santoro, Emílio Terraza). He is a founding musician of the Cláudio Santoro National Theatre

Symphony Orchestra, where he was its first bassoonist until his retirement in 2016; with this same orchestra and under the baton of various conductors, he performed the main concertos for bassoon and orchestra (Mozart, Weber, Villa-Lobos, Vivaldi, Françaix).

Due to a national shortage of instruments, he ventured into an area that was unknown to him—that of bassoon making, and has since achieved significant accomplishments, also recognized by the international specialized press. He expanded this activity to bassoon repair, becoming a highly sought-after expert in maintenance and repair nationwide. He proudly sees the fruits of his labor, both in the bassoons he has built and in his students, who are active as musicians in orchestras and as bassoon teachers, both in Brazil and abroad. In 2005, he documented aspects of his professional activity as a performer, teacher, and bassoon maker on a CD entitled Com licença!... (Excuse me!...).

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