

## Alternate Vent Keys for Contrabassoon

The normal layout of vent keys for the left thumb does not provide good access to each other. In particular, the upper vent spatula and the C# spatula are at opposite ends of the group, with the lower vent spatula in between. This makes it difficult to transition between the upper vent and C# keys smoothly. It makes it impossible to use them simultaneously.

### Simultaneous use of Upper Vent and C# Keys

Opening both the upper vent key and the C# key at the same time can make a desirable difference in the performance of certain notes. The most important of these are the E and F, above the written middle C. Contrabassoonists have a history of searching for fingerings that allow these notes to play well. The best solution and simplest solution can be to use the upper vent and C# keys together when playing these keys.

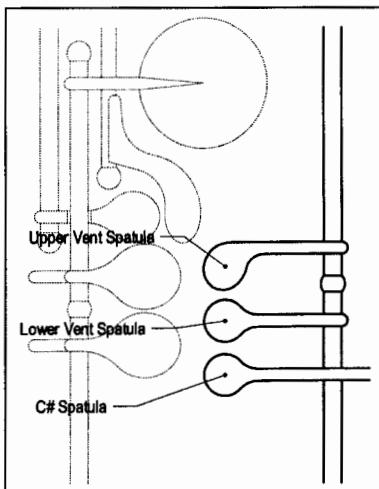
For playing the E or F, begin with the simple fingerings as used an octave lower, and add both the upper vent and the C# key. Using only the upper vent key produces a weak and poorly centered note. Including the C# key gives these notes a full and robust sound.

Players currently using instruments with only the conventional keys can experience the difference experimentally by playing the basic fingerings with the upper vent and reaching up with the right hand to open the C# key. This experience will tell you that a better way to play these notes is readily available. It will also tell you that it is not practical without making some keywork alterations.

Depending on the fingerings being used, this combination of the upper vent and the C# key can also be used on the C#, D and Eb just above written middle C. For the D, only use the combination with the full fingering—it will not work with the simple fingering.

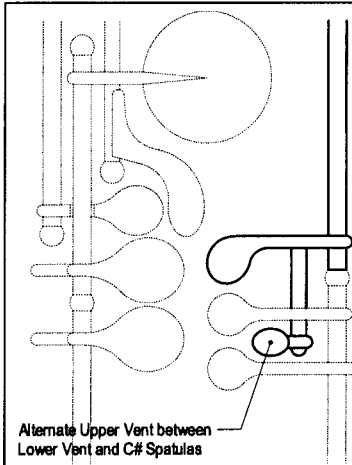
### Keyword Solutions

Two basic methods of adding alternate keys are available. An alternate upper vent touch can be added one of two places, or an alternate C# can be added. The following line drawings illustrate the possibilities. A drawing of the standard arrangement is included for comparison.



### Standard keyword

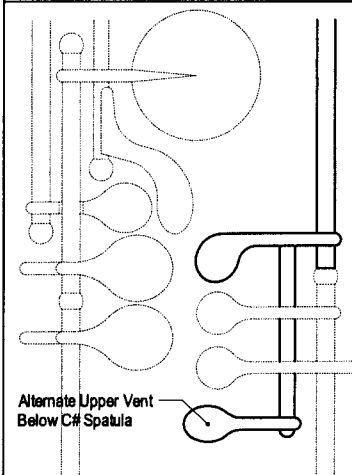
There are various names in use for the upper and lower vent spatulas. The descriptive names used here describe both the position of the vent keys and their use.



### Alternate Upper Vent between Lower Vent and C# Spatulas

This is the simplest alternate vent key. It is not necessarily the best. The touch rises above the level of the two adjacent keys.

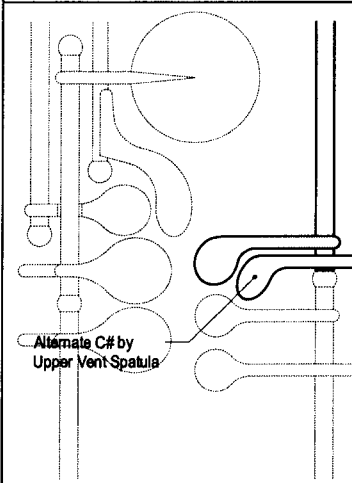
For practical purposes, this key is the most limited. It can get in the way for passing between the C# and lower vent key. Yet, it can also be hard to reach when it is needed. It tends to be preferred by players who will don't expect to use it in combination with the C#.



### Alternate Upper Vent Below C# Spatula

This is the most frequently ordered alternate vent key. It is easily used and easily ignored.

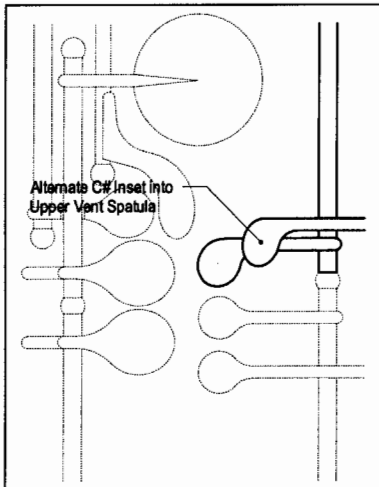
The position of the touch is analogous to the position of the whisper key on a bassoon relative to the C# key. This can present a problem to infrequent players of contrabassoons, as it can be inadvertently depressed as though it were a whisper key.



### Alternate C# by Upper Vent

The position of the alternate C# enables easy use of the upper vent and the C# together, without interfering with using the upper vent alone.

This position makes the best use of the natural movement of the player's thumb. The notes that make use of the combination of keys normally require upward movement of the thumb to the upper vent key. Adding the C# in this position enables a natural use of the combination.



### **Alternate C# Inset into Upper Vent Spatula**

This key is only desirable under special conditions. It provides no benefit over the preceding alternate C# key. It also requires a longer reach by the player's thumb.

A need for this version only occurs when some other touch needs to be placed between the upper vent and lower vent keys.

### **Combining Alternate Vent Keys**

It is possible to have more than one alternate vent key. With the exception of the inset version of the alternate C#, all of them can exist together.

It is not usually recommended that more than one alternate vent key be included on a single instrument. Too many keys will just get confusing.