PERFORMANCE PRACTICE CONCERNS IN KERRY TURNER’S
“THE CASBAH OF TETOUAN” FOR HORN ENSEMBLE

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As a horn player, a horn ensemble is a very exciting group in which to play. When properly rehearsed, a horn ensemble can perform many types of music and touch many types of listeners. Although this is no different from any other type of ensemble, there is something special about hearing a group of horns soar in harmony. The horn ensemble, just as any other type of ensemble, requires adequate rehearsal and preparation to properly perform a piece. The amount that is required varies on the difficulty level and complexity of a given work, but there are some universal steps that need to be taken to prepare for any piece. This paper will address both general issues and specific points related to “The Casbah of Tetouan” by Kerry Turner.

Kerry Turner is a horn player and composer. The following excerpt is from his bio which is posted on his website:

Kerry Turner has become one of the most recognized names, not only in the horn world, but in brass playing in general. Whether as a composer or a performing artist on the horn, he appears regularly on the great concert stages of the world. Major ensembles with whom he performs include the world-famous American Horn Quartet, the stunning Virtuoso Horn Duo, and the Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra. As a member of these prestigious organizations, he has concertized on four continents. He is also a frequently invited soloist and clinician, having performed and
taught in Germany, France, Portugal, Switzerland, Japan, the United States and the Czech Republic.¹

The horn is often reserved for “heroic” or “emotional” and/or “climactic” moments in many other types of music, while a horn ensemble allows the listener to enjoy the horn for an entire performance. Some horn ensemble pieces show off the instrument better than others and, Turner’s “The Casbah of Tetouan” for five horns produces a variety of colors and textures for horn ensemble. The following anecdote on Turner’s inspiration for “The Casbah of Tetouan” is from the beginning of the score and illuminates the picture the composer was trying to portray:

“As we crossed the Straits of Gibraltar and first laid eyes on the North African coast, I knew we were in store for an adventure! The city of Tetouan was our destination; we were soon standing before its main gates. As we entered the city, our senses were overrun by the many exotic new sights, complementing the wild sounds and smells of the bustling ancient city. After proceeding only a few feet past hobbled live chickens, we found ourselves immersed completely in the endless, tiny alleys of the Casbah. It was a labyrinth of tunnels and passageways, lined with vendors and shops the size of walk-in closets. Anything could be had, including copperware, sacks of spices and grains, and silk. Street butchers displayed slaughtered lambs, goats and pigs, and a snake

charmer with his cobra unnerved the unwary passerby. [*sic*]

Somewhere around the urine-treated leather goods things began to swim before my eyes. After I informed the guide that I was ill, a young boy was sent to escort me to a quiet place. The boy knew every secret passage and shortcut in the Casbah. He led me through even tinier streets and tunnels, across nomad camps, and even through a kitchen! We sailed through the back door of a mosque, and out the other side. Finally we entered a large, dark and cool house, which seemed to be some sort of palace. The boy led me to a back room and laid me down upon a bed of large pillows. I passed out. I awoke thoroughly disoriented. The first things I saw were six elaborately cloaked elderly men, wildly discussing in Arabic what could possibly be wrong with me. I heard exotic music and aromatic food assailed my senses. After closer observation I discovered I was in a fancy restaurant, being entertained by a belly dancer. Somehow my wife and brother found me and we resumed our inspection of Tetouan. I still felt lightheaded and rather doped by the “therapeutic” tea; my impressions of the city were somewhat hallucinogenic.”

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The excellent writing in the tone poem “The Casbah of Tetouan” is due to Turner’s tremendous experience as a horn player. “The Casbah of Tetouan” for horn quintet was composed in 1990, and after its success it was later reworked into a brass quintet in 1993. The horn quintet sounds very technically impressive to the audience. However, the way Turner divided up the work among the five horn parts makes it very playable. Fast technical passages are divided up among two horns sharing one line. This not only prevents unnecessary fatigue of one single player, but also allows each horn a time in the spotlight.

While listening to “The Casbah of Tetouan,” the listener hears sections of the piece that are sometimes larger than life. The impression listeners receive is similar to when one arrives in a new city and the buildings sprawl out before them into the distance. The hallucinogenic qualities of Turner’s visit are also apparent, especially in the cadenza section. Just as a hallucination is a break from real life, the cadenza in “The Casbah of Tetouan” is a break from the sounds of the horns. Bells, whistles, and or chimes are all new “sensations” for the piece just like the warped perception one experiences while in a hallucinogenic state. The “mist” created by the cadenza suddenly dissolves and the listener is thrust back into the rhythmic drive produced by the horn ensemble as it pushes forward until the last chord, a nice solid fortissimo.

“The Casbah of Tetouan” is an impressive piece in the horn ensemble literature. But the effect on the listener will be most impressive when it is properly prepared. There are many facets to preparing a piece properly, including attention to tempi, dynamics, phrasing, articulations, and even the physical set up of the performers. Before a piece has even been selected, and even before a horn ensemble has been formed, the advanced horn players have each spent a significant amount of time increasing range and flexibility and upgrading and developing their equipment. No matter what decisions they have made on their individual horn-playing
journeys, when a group of horn players comes together to form a horn ensemble, member’s styles must become compatible with each other and blend. An effective horn ensemble should be sonorous, not a cacophony of musicians imposing their radically different styles upon one another.

An interesting aspect in any music is that there often is room for the performer’s own interpretations. Performers can phrase differently and follow the composer’s directions in different ways. A simple marking such as “ritard” offers a general direction to “slow down,” but depending on that marking’s placement and context of the surrounding music, different musicians will perform this direction in different ways. It is important to have one person in charge while playing, and this is an interesting dynamic when there is no conductor. In different sections, different musicians are playing, and the musicians should practice the transitions to determine who is going to be leading each section. The ensemble musicians should all discuss and agree upon one style and plan of attack.

Sometimes there may be mistakes or misprints in the published parts. A musician should never assume that what is in the part is exactly what the composer wanted. While a composer can make mistakes, the editors, transcribers, and arrangers can miss things or even make errors. Score study by each ensemble member helps to catch these potential problems.

Another factor that plays a part in the performance of a piece is the type of ensemble that is performing. Most often solo recitals are presented by either one instrument unaccompanied or that solo instrument with piano. Special considerations need to be taken when a group of similar instruments plays together, like a horn ensemble. Tuning should always be a top priority to a performer, but when you are playing together with the same instrument, any discrepancies in the
tuning will be amplified. It is easier to “forgive” questionable tuning between a horn and piano than between two, three, four, or even five horns. In the same regards as tuning, articulations and phrasings must also match between the players. If one player plays a certain passage differently, it will not match with the rest of the ensemble. To the listener, this diversity could potentially make the ensemble’s preparation seem unorganized and inefficient.

A problem unique to the horn as an instrument presents itself while playing in a horn ensemble. The instrument’s rearward projecting bell calls for attention to the physical placement of players on the stage/performing venue. “Stacking” the horns, or placing some in front of the others, will leave the front horns projecting into the players behind them and the players in the rear projecting into whatever is behind them. The rear players are often not projecting into the same type of environment, simply because there are no horn players sitting behind them. When dealing with a more common “U” setup, the horn player on stage right will have their bell to the audience while the horn player on the opposite end will have their bell to the back of the stage. This creates an imbalance in the projection of sound. This is why it is very important for a horn ensemble to rehearse in the performing space, if possible. This will allow for the necessary time of finding the right setup. This often involves compromise and some trial and error. Sometimes even moving a chair a foot or two in any direction can make a huge difference in the balance and clarity.

The performance venue must be taken into account as well. If the musicians will be performing in a space that can be acoustically altered, for example through addition/subtraction of sound panels and/or curtain adjustments, the musicians must take full advantage of this situation. Five horn players performing “The Casbah of Tetouan” in a small highly resonant
room is going to sound completely different than the same group performing in a large “dead” space.

It is helpful when a performer has the ability to speak with the composer to find out exactly how they would like their piece performed, or to offer suggestions based on how the composer heard it in his/her head while composing it. Kerry Turner was available to answer questions that arose through the study of “The Casbah of Tetouan” score. It is worth noting that there still remains a level of interpretation of the music left to the performers, even after having interviewed the man who composed the piece.

Many questions that might arise for musicians who decide to perform this piece are presented below, and all of them were thoughtfully addressed by Turner. Each question and answer is followed by the appropriate excerpt from the score. The excerpts themselves contain boxes around the material or area of the music in question, and are followed by a brief discussion.

Question: In bar 6, horn 3, should the glissando take the whole duration of the bar, or occur more towards the end of the bar? (as shown in figure 1)

K.T.: This glissando should start towards the end of the bar, most of it happening on beat 4.³

³ Kerry Turner. Interview by author. Email. Muncie, February 26, 2013. All subsequent answers are taken from the same source.
The confusion for the performer is because of the visual representation of the glissando. The marking takes up nearly the entire measure. Although the glissando is marked on a whole note, it would not sound very characteristic for a horn glissando to take up a duration of four beats; placing the glissando towards the end of the bar helps accentuate the arrival of the ensemble in the next bar.

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4 Kerry Turner, *The Casbah of Tetouan*. Phoenix Music Publications, 1992. All subsequent musical excerpts have been taken from this source.
Question: Should bar 13 contain rubato, especially when considering the melody? (as shown in figure 2)

K.T.: Bar 13 should be played in tempo. The players traditionally take a little time in bars 16 and 22. But the rest should be in tempo.

The question raised in this example is because of the sudden change of both dynamic (ff) and texture as well. The ensemble has dropped out, and the low horn and third are left. The tendency here would be to slow down and let the low horn drag but it is important to keep the line moving. The marking “Andante con Moto” also helps to clarify this. The spots Turner discusses (bars 16 and 22) are places where the melody is present, it is more up to the soloists at that point to manipulate the time, not the accompanying players.
Question: Should the quintuplet in bar 28 be tenuto, legato, marcato, or staccato? (as shown in figure 3)

K.T.: Tenuto.

Since the marking in bar 28 is “freely,” the first and second horns are left to determine how to play this quintuplet together. The first horn would obviously lead at this point, but “freely” is clearly referring to the articulation quality because the tempo is marked “slowly” underneath each part.
Question: For bar 33 into 34 and bar 34 into 35, are the breaths for clarity of sound or for more time in between bars? (as shown in figure 4)

K.T.: In the early days of the American Horn Quartet, we used to play this piece from the original manuscript. And we noticed that we always breathed at these two places. And the breath was always just about an 8th note. So when the publication came out, we decided to make it official. It lends clarity to the passage and allows the players to reset.
This marking was put into the score based on the composer’s own phrasing desires from performance experience. Some of the “executive decision making” has been alleviated from future ensembles by choosing to include these markings.
Question: What metronomic marking would you assign to the “allegro con brio” in bar 44? (as shown in figure 5)

K.T.: Over the years, the tempo of the Allegro con brio has gotten increasingly faster. There is a recording of a brass quintet in Paris which beats all records! It's actually not supposed to be that fast. The correct tempo is quarter note = 144. Otherwise it sounds like a hectic mess. The excitement is already written into the music. The artists do not need to up the level of excitement by increasing the tempo.

![Figure 5](image)

The nature of the confusion in this example stems from the repeated eighth notes. Players may be tempted to play this faster because it is “easy.” Kerry Turner was able to dispel this common misconception.
Question: In bar 88 in the 5th horn, is the 8th/16th rhythm on beat 1 supposed to be reversed to match the other parts with similar rhythms? (Should it be one eighth note followed by two 16th notes on beat one?) (as shown in figure 6)

K.T.: This is indeed a misprint. It should be one 8th note and two 16ths.

Figure 6
Question: At the double bar at “G,” would you like space in between the two sections? (as shown in figure 7)


There are many ways to treat fermatas. There can be a space of silence after the fermata, often referred to as a “luftpause” or breath. A more extreme version of this is a “grand pause.” This common knowledge contributes to decision making at every fermata. Turner’s ideal of about 3 seconds is justified by the marking because any longer and it would be considered a grand pause, and there would need to be “G.P.” or a “cesura” marked in the part.
Question: For the breath into bar 128, how much time should be allotted? (as shown in figure 8 and 9)

K.T.: It is also a clean break. About 2 seconds.
The breath mark is appropriate in this situation because every member other than the third horn has already stopped playing. This helps to remind the other members that the third horn will keep going and to phrase the breath together to avoid confusion when coming back in with four of the five horns in the next measure.

Question: In bar 129, should the solo line breathe with horns 3, 4, and 5? (as shown in figure 10)

K.T.: Yes
This is a legitimate question because all three bottom parts are clearly marked with a breath mark. This follows the evident phrase structure of the solo line. However, the solo line does not include these breath marks. It is more like horns 3, 4, and 5 are breathing with the solo line, not the other way around.
Question: For the cadenza, which do you prefer, whistle or bell tree? If using the bell tree, should the glissando be slow or fast? (as shown in figure 11)

K.T.: I prefer the whistle. Have you heard the American Horn Quartet recording of this? I whistle on the first one, strum the bell tree slowly on the second, and whistle again on the third.

![Figure 11](image)

While there are explicit directions written here, it is always nice to know exactly what the composer had in mind. The directions could have included “whistle” only because of the possibility for the absence of percussion instruments. Contrastingly, the directions could have included “bell tree” if the performer was unable to whistle.
Question: Similarly, within the cadenza, would you prefer castanets or fingernails for horn 2? (as shown in figure 11)

K.T.: I prefer castanets or the tambourine. Finger nails are only if there is no percussion equipment available.

This was another simple clarification. “Finger nails” were put into the direction should there be no percussion equipment.

Question: In bar 142, should there be an accelerando, or a slight accelerando? In horns 1 and 3, should the gliss go over the whole bar? Is this glissando possibly a trilling glissando up to the next note? (as shown in figure 12)

K.T.: There should be an accelerando into bar 143. The glissando is only in horn 1. Horn 3 is a clean slur. The glissando in horn 1 should be over beats 3 and 4. There is no need to continue trilling when the glissando begins.
Although the accelerando is not explicitly marked, it is often implied through many interpretations. The exciting color produced by the flutter tongue, along with the glissando and slurs, all topped with a crescendo help point to an accelerando. In context one might assume the third horn was supposed to have a glissando as well. Turner has clarified this situation, and the dual trill and glissando markings over the first part have been clarified as well.

Question: Finally, your thoughts on set up for the horn ensemble performing this piece.

K.T.: The American Horn Quartet sets up with 3 in front and 2 in back. Like this:

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1  2  4
3  5
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This is also how I prefer it. But that's because I play horn 2 on “Casbah,” and, sitting in the middle of the group, I can kind of “steer” the ensemble. It could also work with horns 3 and 4 switching places. In a traditional semi-circle set up, I think it is important that the 5th horn have his bell facing the audience so that he doesn't have to blast in order to be heard. Thus:

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1  5
2  4
3
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Having performed the 5th horn part in the traditional semi circle, this is truly beneficial to that player. The stacked set up the American Horn Quartet used was extremely beneficial for Turner, since he was playing 2nd horn and was able to “steer” the ensemble. There are benefits to each set up. The traditional semi circle undoubtedly lends itself to more facilitated eye contact between members of the ensemble. The stacked setup, however, loses this eye contact but gains the rear two horns being able to hear the front horns with clarity. It is always up to the individual performing ensembles to find a setup that works best for them and the space in which they are performing.

It is very interesting how Turner mentions “tradition” in his response. Modern musical notation is generally assumed to be thorough, yet it still proves to be incomplete in a certain sense. Modern day musicians will still interpret the same piece differently. This will most likely happen with new pieces, older and more performed pieces have “tradition” attached to them. These are pieces that the musician’s teachers have played, their teachers have played, and their
teacher’s teachers have played. “Tradition” has already been developed for “The Casbah of Tetouan.” In multiple instances Turner mentions what he has already heard or what musicians typically do in a certain spot. This “tradition” can develop quickly and is quite contagious, especially when a performer is first exposed to a piece by listening to another musician perform it. The first listening creates a lasting impression. But there is still room for interpretation. In *The Art of Horn Playing* by Philip Farkas, Farkas describes phrasing with a wonderful analogy:

“Phrasing might be termed the sum total of many little nuances which make up a musical sentence. For a musical phrase can be compared to a spoken sentence, with the individual notes paralleling the words in the sentence. Although there is no written expression mark in either the printed sentence or musical notation, there is an *implied* expression which is inherent in the group of words or notes which enables them to convey any meaning. Have you ever heard someone read a sentence in a language not completely familiar to him? There is a peculiar lack of inflection in the reading which reveals that, although the individual words are understood, the speaker does not quite understand the thought which the sentence is trying to convey. So it is with a musical phrase. The composer has a musical thought which he can only approximate with a string of individual notes. If the performer plays only these notes, no matter how correctly, without grasping in his own mind the musical idea which the composer had, the
In summary, a musician performing any piece of music should do more than just “play notes.” There are many facets to a performance, from the physical logistics of setup and equipment choices, to the more musical tasks such as phrasing and intonation. When this is applied to the horn ensemble setting, it is important for the musicians to make these decisions together and work towards consistency when performing. This interview hopefully can aid the horn ensemble ready to begin rehearsing “The Casbah of Tetouan.” Although Turner has answered specific questions and offered his view on the piece, there is always room for different interpretations. This paper should be utilized as a basic foundation for a horn ensemble to get a “head start” on the rehearsal process. By no means would any ensemble be ready to perform this exciting piece without adequate rehearsal just having read a paper. What this paper aims to accomplish is to become a way for a horn ensemble to cut down on some of the time spent on initially interpreting the piece. There will always be different interpretations, and even if every group performed it exactly in the same manner, the piece can still be interpreted differently by the listeners. This is part of the beauty of music.

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Works Cited


