ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE PRACTICE IN MIKHAIL GLINKA’S

TRIO PATHÉTIQUE

A CREATIVE PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF MUSIC
BY
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Introduction

I performed my Master of Music degree recital on Sunday, April 2, 2017, in Choral Hall at Ball State University. The program consisted of Saint-Saens’s Bassoon Sonata op. 168, Gordon Jacob’s Partita for Solo Bassoon, Carl Maria von Weber’s Bassoon Concerto in F major, op. 75, and Glinka’s *Trio Pathétique* in D Minor. The repertoire that my teacher and I chose for this recital was challenging in various ways, including: demanding technical passages, endurance of performing a large work, and musical expression. However, my instructor at Ball State University, Dr. Sweger, taught me techniques and methods that allowed me to further improve my capabilities as a bassoonist and deliver a successful recital. The purpose of this creative project is to discuss and analyze one of the most challenging pieces from my recital, Glinka’s *Trio Pathétique*.

There are many possible combinations of instruments in chamber music, ranging from small duos to large ensembles. *Trio Pathétique* is a standard in the repertoire for a trio consisting of bassoon, clarinet, and piano, in part because of the lack of works that are available for this instrumentation. The challenges of *Trio Pathétique* include difficulties related to phrasing, articulations, breathing, ensemble coordination, tone color, and technically demanding figuration. This creative project first begins with historical background of Glinka and his influence in the musical world. Second, I will discuss Glinka’s musical style and influence on nineteenth-century Russian nationalistic music. Third, I will provide a brief analysis of performance-practice elements for *Trio Pathétique*. The analysis will focus on 1. addressing technical and musical challenges unique to the bassoon part, and 2. learning and coordinating the work together as a trio ensemble.
Mikhail Glinka

Mikhail Glinka (1804-57) was born in the village of Novospasskoye of the Russian Empire. Glinka came from a noble, upper-class family, and his father was a captain in the Russian military. His other family members were prominent in scholarship, poetry, and other services related to interacting with the Tsar. Starting from a young age, Glinka heard servants sing traditional Russian folksongs. Furthermore, during his church visits, Glinka heard the music of peasants, choirs, and bells. These experiences exposed him to the world of music and to the vast lore of the Russian traditions.

Glinka’s musical studies began with learning piano, violin, and piccolo. In addition to playing these instruments in small-scale domestic settings, Glinka also conducted in his uncle’s serf orchestra. Ongoing interactions with these ensembles exposed Glinka to various genres of music, including overtures, accompaniments, and folk tunes.¹

Glinka went to the boarding school at St. Petersburg in 1818. During this time, he also pursued piano and violin lessons outside of school activities. He studied piano with John Field after Field moved to Moscow, and Glinka studied with Charles Mayer who helped polish and refine his musical talents.² In 1824, Glinka began working on the Board of Communications. Through this opportunity, Glinka was able to meet and associate with many important figures in the government and musical world, and became accepted in and involved with literary and musical circles. In 1828, Glinka suffered health problems and traveled to Italy to seek medical attention. While in Italy, Glinka met prominent musical figures such as Vincenzo Bellini,


² Campbell, “Glinka.”
Gaetano Donizetti, and Felice Romani. Through these relationships, Glinka learned and experienced the opera scene in Italy.³

Glinka’s fondness of Italy slowly waned over time. In 1833, he moved to Berlin with his sister and her husband. While in Germany, Glinka explored the orchestras and music of Strauss and Lanner. Glinka began composing his own work using influences that he heard during his travel away from Russia. He composed works encompassing various styles of outside music such as folk tunes, however maintaining the Russian sound.

Around this time, Glinka completed one of his most famous operas, *A Life for the Tsar*. This opera was Russia’s first serious all-sung opera, in contrast with other Russian operas that used spoken text. In this opera, the story contained Polish and Russian characters with the music that also portrayed their nationality. For example, the Polish influences included mazurka and polonaise, dance forms that typically were in triple meter.⁴ This opera was premiered in 1836 at St. Petersburg.

*A Life for the Tsar* was one of Glinka’s first major successes. The success of the opera brought Glinka opportunities at the Court Chapel Choir and institution. Also, Glinka composed church music, most notably *A Collection of Musical Pieces.*” During 1842, Glinka composed his second successful opera, *Ruslan i Lyudmila*.

As Glinka’s compositional style evolved, the composer notably experimented with two techniques: 1. whole-tone scales, and 2. two unrelated dominant-seventh chords connected by common pitches.⁵ His new musical ideas influenced the next generation of Russian composers such as Mily Balakirev, Alexander Borodin, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, and Nikolai

³ Campbell, “Glinka.”
⁴ Campbell, “Glinka.”
⁵ Campbell, “Glinka.”
Rimsky-Korsakov. Glinka completed most of his compositions early in life. In old age, Glinka significantly reduced composing activities and traveled around Europe. In 1857, Glinka was plagued with illness and caught a cold. His health continued to deteriorate, leading to his eventual death.
Literature Review

A survey of current literature reveals that although a number of articles have been written about Glinka and his works (especially *A Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Ludmila*), scholarly research is nearly non-existent for *Trio Pathétique*. Paula Brusky is among the few scholars who wrote about this work. Glinka composed *Trio Pathétique* for clarinet, bassoon, and piano during his time in Italy in 1832, and it was composed before Glinka took formal composition lessons. Glinka publically premiered the work with clarinetist Pietro Tassistro, bassoonist Antonio Cantu, and Glinka himself at the piano. After composing *Trio Pathétique*, Glinka found Italian music artistically unfulfilling. Thus, he left for Berlin, Germany.  

Rose Marie French wrote a dissertation on *Trio Pathétique*. French stated that Glinka suffered from health issues throughout his entire life, and in 1830 Glinka sought medical treatment in Italy. This time in Italy exposed Glinka to Italian opera, for which he developed a strong passion and interest. Inspired, he paid homage to Italian opera in his compositions, particularly his operas. Glinka’s operas that demonstrate Italian influence include *La Sonnambula* and *Serenata*. During his time in Italy, he received treatments of camphor and diachylon on his chest, which caused him much anguish and led to significant changes in his daily routine. Because of Glinka’s chronic sickness, he fell into a state of depression, but he used this sense of depression to compose *Trio Pathétique* in 1832.

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**Analysis of Trio Pathétique**

*Trio Pathétique* was originally written for piano, bassoon, and clarinet. However, this work is also commonly played by violin, cello, and piano. This composition is in D minor and includes four movements, each with significant contrast in character from one movement to another. The first three movements are played straight through without pause, and the piece ends with a short fourth movement. The first movement opens with a bold, dramatic gesture. The lyrical main theme is often passed between the three instruments. The second movement is playful with a trio in the middle. The third movement contains large solo sections for the clarinet and bassoon. The contrast between the clarinet solo and bassoon solo is dramatic. The fourth movement is a short dramatic section, which contains passages that sound like an agitated conversation between the winds. This section also recalls the dramatic gesture that opened the work and ends with a coda that has a feeling of troubling emotions.  

The first movement of the piece starts in D minor with the three instruments playing the opening motive in unison. The motive ends with the bassoon and piano together (Example 1). The clarinet starts with the first main theme of this movement (Example 2), and then the main theme is passed between the piano and bassoon parts. The second theme starts in measure 32 with bassoon, and the theme is passed between the three instruments (Example 3). The two themes recur throughout the piece, such as in mm. 72 and 99. In this movement, there are many dynamic contrasts and character changes. For example, the dramatic beginning of the piece is immediately followed by a lyrical character in m. 4.

The ending of the movement notably does not end in the tonic key. Glinka ends this movement in the C major. The cadence on C major is structurally significant; this cadence of the

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8 Brusky, “Glinka Trio.”
first movement functions as a bridge to the second movement’s starting key of C major. This seamless connection in key structures allows the first and second movements to be performed attacca.⁹

**Example 1** Mikhail Glinka, *Trio Pathétique*, first movement, mm. 1-4.

![Example 1](image1.png)

**Example 2** Mikhail Glinka, *Trio Pathétique*, first movement, clarinet part, mm. 5-6.

![Example 2](image2.png)

Example 3 Mikhail Glinka, *Trio Pathétique*, first movement, bassoon part, mm. 32-36.

The second movement of this piece starts in C major and assumes the character of a 3/4 scherzo. The scherzo is playful and fast and is followed by an expressive trio. The piano part has an introductory hemiola pattern that is executed in tandem with long held clarinet and bassoon notes. The bassoon and clarinet have two-note slur figures that recur many times throughout the piece (Example 4). The trio starts in F major with a slower tempo. The bassoon starts with a long lyrical melodic line in the trio section while accompanied by an arpeggiated accompaniment in the piano. The clarinet repeats the same melodic line in the following passage. The scherzo starts again in the original tempo in mm. 266. Glinka ends this movement dramatically in a different meter and tempo marking. In the last four measures of this movement, the tempo marking changes from Vivacissimo to Lento, and the time signature changes from 3/4 to 4/4. The character immediately changes to an expressive and lyrical quality that connects to the third movement. All three instruments proceed to play in low pitch ranges to create a dark timbre, which contrasts greatly from the tone of previous sections.

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Example 4 Mikhail Glinka, *Trio Pathétique*, second movement, bassoon and clarinet parts, two-notes slur figure.

The third movement is filled with many dramatic moments, which according to French, contains influences from Italian opera. These influences are particularly evident in the bassoon and clarinet parts. The writing of this section is lyrical and virtuosic. The passages cover a large pitch range and prominently feature melismatic runs for expressive purposes. The movement has several key changes, starting in F major and moving to D minor at the introduction of the bassoon’s melodic line. The key changes to D-flat major in m. 37. From m. 41, the key changes to E major, and returns to the home key in m. 54. The clarinet begins a long solo lyrical passage over the piano’s ostinato accompaniment (Example 5). From m. 21, the bassoon begins a melodic solo line in D minor in mm. 21 with dramatic, passionate figuration (Example 6). In this movement, the melodic line in both the clarinet and bassoon are expressive and operatic in nature, containing wide register and dynamic contrasts in each instrument.

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Example 5 Mikhail Glinka, *Trio Pathétique*, third movement, piano accompaniment and clarinet melodic line, mm.1-2.

![Example 5](image)

Example 6 Mikhail Glinka, *Trio Pathétique*, third movement, piano and bassoon parts, mm. 21-23.

![Example 6](image)

The last movement of *Trio Pathétique* begins in D minor and recalls two motives from the first movement but with tempo and rhythm modified (Examples 7 and 8). This movement contains many running triplet passages, creating musical tension and excitement.
Example 7 Mikhail Glinka, *Trio Pathétique*, fourth movement, return motive, mm. 1-4.

Example 8 Mikhail Glinka, *Trio Pathétique* fourth movement, return motive 2, mm. 36-39.

Throughout the piece, a buildup in musical tension is felt starting from the first movement and ending all the way until the last note of the final movement. The triplet rhythmic figurations throughout the final movement evoke musical tension leading into the climactic ending in the final measures of the piece.
Performance Practice in *Trio Pathétique*

A performer needs to focus on carefully following what is written in the score. The performer also should concentrate on creating the desired sound; this can be accomplished through consistent, dedicated, and focused hours of daily practice. Focal points for practice sessions may include refining dynamic ranges, musicality, breathing, and tone quality. All of these qualities are relevant and important for both solo and ensemble performance, however, ensemble performance differs significantly in certain aspects from playing solo pieces. For instance, the ensemble must overcome the challenge of matching fellow ensemble players in a variety of ways, including discerning the appropriate blend of sound between instruments.

*Trio Pathétique* is a prime example of a piece that offers each ensemble member a wide array of musical and technical challenges and demands from the ensemble critical listening skills and coordination as an ensemble. Ensemble difficulties found in the piece include:

- Phrasing together
- Breathing together
- Matching the articulations
- Matching the pitch
- Accuracy of the rhythm and tempo agreement
- Effectively performing long and expansive dynamics
- Voicing the melodic line within a multi-layered texture
- Matching the tone quality of fellow ensemble members

One significant challenge of chamber music is discovering, establishing, and refining methods of non-verbal communication between performers. Certainly, musicians cannot speak to
each other mid-performance. Therefore, ensemble members must seek other methods of communication. These methods may include the use of eye contact and physical gestures to ensure that each member is aware of the timings and nuances of musical events in the ensemble.

Breathing is a major challenge in ensemble settings. One vital method of communication is coordinated breathing. Although this is especially true for wind players, all ensemble members regardless of instrument should incorporate coordinated breathing in order to develop a strong ensemble and ensure accurate timings. For example, it is extremely important to breathe together in the beginning because everyone starts in unison on an off beat (Example 1). The musicians must have clear eye contact to cue effectively to start the piece.

Another challenge would be phrasing together as an ensemble. Each member is important to the ensemble; each member needs to study and understand the phrasing, character, and musical events of his/her part and those of the other members. Furthermore, each ensemble member should study the work at the macro level in order to comprehend how the piece sounds and is constructed structurally and harmonically with all parts together. When each member has diligently studied the parts of fellow members and the trio as a whole, ensemble coordination, interpretation, and understanding of the musical structure will come more naturally. Furthermore, this understanding will help the ensemble craft a mature, artistic vision for the piece over time.

Matching articulations amongst the ensemble is another major challenge. Notably, the inherent differences in each member’s respective instrument can complicate the ensemble’s ability to match in sound quality and timings of articulation. Each instrument has its own means of sound production. Musicians need to adjust their sound and technique sympathetically with the sound of other ensemble members. For example, the bassoon has a drier sound in comparison to that of the clarinet and piano because of the embouchure and differing construction of the
reeds. On the other hand, the piano possesses much larger resonances compared to bassoon and clarinet because of the percussive nature of the hammers hitting the strings, the grand solid frame of the instrument, expansive dynamic range, and the ability to play many notes simultaneously in a vast pitch range. The fundamental sound production of the piano’s hammers hitting and vibrating the strings contrasts greatly with the wind vibration resonances of the bassoon and the clarinet.

Matching pitch is among the most challenging ensemble aspects of this piece. For instance, sections of multiple unisons across instruments can lead the ensemble to go sharp or flat. Ensemble members must adjust their pitch accordingly to match each other’s intonation. Additionally, as the piano’s pitch is not modifiable mid-performance, the clarinet and bassoon should tune to the piano.

I will detail scenarios posing significant challenges to ensemble intonation. For example, the unison Ds in the ending of the last movement are low in the bassoon’s pitch range. Pitches falling within the lower register of the bassoon have a tendency to go sharp, making matching the ensemble’s intonation a difficult task for the bassoonist. In another instance, for both bassoon and clarinet, the final F-major chord in the last movement has a tendency to go sharp. The bassoonist and clarinetist must exercise critical listening skills and adjust accordingly to counteract any tendencies of deviating from the ensemble’s intonation.

The piano is an entirely different instrument from bassoon and clarinet. However, the bassoon and clarinet also differ in a few noteworthy ways despite the classification of both instruments in the woodwind family. The two reeds are completely different in structure; the bassoon is a double-reed instrument, and the clarinet is a single reed. The way the two reeds react when having wind blown through them can change the sound and response drastically.
Also the articulations of the two instruments differ, complicating coordination of timings and blending of sound between the instruments. Given all of these fundamental differences between the instruments, all ensemble members must use critical listening skills and cooperate together for the sake of successful ensemble performance.

The next challenge involves accuracy of the rhythms and the maintenance of the tempo throughout the piece. *Trio Pathétique* is challenging in part because of the emotionally charged and heavy expressiveness required for musical performance. These characteristics may lead performers to inadvertently drag the tempo in performance, thus causing the piece to slow down. Furthermore, this piece contains *rubato* in many sections, exacerbating the difficulties for performers to maintain the proper tempo. Upon arriving at *rubato* sections, performers typically will relax and slow the tempo for expressive purposes. However, the performers need to return to the original tempo following the *rubato* to keep the appropriate musical character. The use of *rubato* adds color and dramatic character to the piece, which is important for Russian Romantic pieces.

This piece contains many sections of dynamic contrast, which can cause problems for many performers in pacing the rate of a crescendo/decrescendo. Bassoonists should carefully select the appropriate reed for each situation. For example, music that requires a light, soft sound is best suited to playing with a reed that is made from a softer cane. On the other hand, pieces demanding large dynamics or more projection in sound would be suitable to thicker reeds.

Creating a soft sound is challenging as a bassoon player, especially in the lower register; while playing in the lower register it is difficult to control or even produce the sound because of the lack of airflow and the bassoonist’s physical change to a closed throat when creating softer sounds. In order to have a more controlled and open sound, the bassoonist needs to open the
throat as much as possible without creating excess tension and blow the air consistently even if the dynamic marking is soft. Dynamic contrast is also an important consideration that the ensemble should plan strategically and carefully; when all three members play together, the perceived sound output is much larger than playing any of the instruments in isolation. Therefore, if even one member plays at a dynamic level differing from the other members, the musical intention of the section is diminished or misinterpreted.

In chamber music there is not one instrument that contains the melody the whole way through the piece; the melody is constantly being passed from one member to another. Thus, each member must understand the role of each part throughout the work. Fully understanding the roles also means that the ensemble should know how the roles are changing as lines are passed from one member to another. Ensemble members should exercise care to craft a balance that allows the main melody to be heard at all times, even within complicated multi-texture passages. For example, if the bassoonist has the melodic line, the clarinetist should play softer in order to not cover the melody.

The inherent differences of the instruments make matching tone quality difficult; the clarinet naturally has a brighter sound than the bassoon. The higher pitch range of the clarinet in combination with its bright tone cuts through textures and further complicates matching tone quality with the low pitch range and darker timbre of the bassoon. Additionally, another issue that occurs with this clarinet-bassoon ensemble combination is that the clarinet traditionally should not use vibrato in this piece even though the clarinet has the ability to do so. Unlike the clarinet, the bassoon is capable of vibrato. Vibrato is a valuable asset in creation of colors and musical expression for bassoonists. In an ensemble setting, musicians need to match sounds
smoothly. This includes vibrato; the bassoonists need to make sure not to use excess vibrato, which may clash with and cover the clarinet.
Conclusion

Preparing *Trio Pathétique* for my bassoon recital was an enriching experience, and I faced many challenges. However, one of the most significant issues that arose when preparing was the physical endurance of playing all of the bassoon repertoire in succession for the duration of a one-hour recital program. Since bassoon is not a string instrument, the physical demands and endurance of sustained performance not only comes from the arms and hands but also the embouchure and lungs. Therefore, I tasked myself with the challenge of building up my endurance in the practice room. To make this possible, I began playing through multiple pieces consecutively in order to build the endurance in my mouth and lungs. In addition to endurance, one significant challenge surfaced in the form of maintaining performance-grade quality across all repertoire prior to the recital program. In order to craft this recital program to performance-level quality, I required daily productive practice and regular rehearsals with ensemble members. With the guidance of Dr. Sweger, hours of diligent daily practice, and mitigating old habits my recital was delivered successfully.
Bibliography


