Le Saxophone: La Voix de La Musique Moderne

An Honors Thesis

by

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Abstract

This project was designed to display the versatility of the concert saxophone. In order to accomplish this lofty goal, a very diverse selection of repertoire was chosen to reflect the capability of the saxophone to adapt to music of all different styles and time periods. The compositions ranged from the Baroque period to even a new composition written specifically for this occasion (written by BSU School of Music professor Jody Nagel). The recital was given on February 21, 2008 in Sursa Hall on the Ball State University campus. This project includes a recording of the performance; both original and compiled program notes, and an in-depth look into the preparation that went into this project from start to finish.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. George Wolfe for his continued support of my studies and his expert guidance. Dr. Wolfe has been an incredible mentor and has continued his legacy as a teacher of the highest caliber. I owe a great deal of my success to Dr. Wolfe as he has truly made countless indelible impressions on my individual artistry.

I would like to thank Dr. James Ruebel of the Ball State Honors College for his dedication to Ball State University. His knowledge and teaching are invaluable, and his dedication to his students are tings that make him the outstanding educator that he is.

I would like to thank the Ball State School of Music faculty for providing me with so many musical opportunities during my time at Ball State University. Their emphasis on individual development has provided me with a unique and overwhelmingly productive undergraduate career that I am incredibly thankful for.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their unending support of my career. Their support has enabled me to pursue my dreams, and I am eternally indebted to the love and support that they have always given me. I am truly blessed to have such a wonderful family, and I only hope that my efforts will reflect the loving support they have shown me my whole life.
As I began to think about possibilities for my senior honor's project, I knew from the beginning that I wanted to design a project that would prove to be both creative and informative. I then began to think about projects that would involve both the work that I have done over the past four years and the work that I hope to do in the future. Given that I am a musician, I thought it would be fitting to exhibit both my performance ability and my knowledge of the saxophone repertoire through both performance and some sort of literary device that would be available to members of the audience at my performance. After I had begun to think about what repertoire I would perform, I decided to arrange the program in a quasi-thematic sort of way. It was from this thematic approach that I finalized the overall idea of my project: "Le saxophone: La Voix de la Musique Moderne."

While it may seem strange that this title was displayed in French, it is a foreshadowing of the pedagogical work that I hope to accomplish in the future. In English this means "the saxophone: the voice of modern music." To expound upon my previous allusion to foreshadow, I would like to study the French culture and how it had sustained such a high regard for the concert saxophone since it's creation (mid 19th century). The idea behind this theme was to display how it is that the saxophone has adapted to the world of music given its relatively young age in comparison to other moments. Included in the program for this performance are compositions that range from the Baroque period to even a composition that was composed specifically for me late in 2007 by Ball State professor Jody Nagel.

After I had finalized my project, I then began the process of preparing all of the music that I had amen to perform. This process meted the bulk of the difficulty associated with this creative endeavor, as was expected considering that I wanted my representation of the repertoire to display just how challenging music for the saxophone has become. One of the most
challenging aspects of preparing this music was that I had to do a great deal of research (particularly on the Baroque composition) in order to develop accurate interpretations of the pieces I had chosen. It turns out that the Baroque piece I had chosen has been a very controversial composition for two centuries. Johann Sebastain Bach’s Partita in A minor for solo flute contains a vast array of challenging performance techniques. I spent a great deal of time listening to various interpretations of this piece, studying the stylistic approach, and developing my own individual interpretation.

The next challenge I faced was working with Ball State professor of music theory and composition, Dr. Jody Nagel. After agreeing to write a piece for me, Dr. Nagel and I discussed several possibilities for this new piece. I told Dr. Nagel that I wanted him to write a piece for two saxophones, and fortunately he went along with my idea and proceeded to develop this idea into something very unique. A few weeks after our first meeting, Dr. Nagel came to me and explained the idea he had developed for writing this new composition. The idea behind the piece was the geometrical spiral. The piece was later to be named “Spirals Out of Control,” in light of the wild nature of the piece. In this piece, the saxophones are found answering one another in a continuous moving line. The harmonic structure of the piece moves through many different modes, some of which are even original developments of Dr. Nagel. The challenges associated with this piece were mostly involved with the practice it took to accurately execute the intricate interplay between the two saxophones, which will be discussed in more detail later.

The next group of issues that I encountered when preparing these pieces was once again related to delving into a very in-depth study of this literature. Through both my applied lessons my A. clt Dr. George Wolfe and my own individual studies I began to learn more and
more about the history of these other compositions. One piece that stands out particularly in this regard is Alfred Desenclos’ *Prelude, Cadence, et Finale*. This composition is a hallmark in the saxophone repertoire, and possesses a great history within the lineage of the saxophone repertoire. When learning such pieces, it is essential that young saxophonists like myself take every opportunity to learn as much about these compositions as possible. With this in mind, I decided to enroll in Dr. Eugene Rousseau’s annual saxophone master class at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, MN, with the intention of performing this piece for him and garnering as much information as possible.

Dr. Eugene Rousseau is arguably the most renowned saxophone pedagogue in the world. At the age of 75 Dr. Rousseau has been around to see the shaping of nearly half of the saxophone’s entire history first hand. Given that he studied with the man for whom *Prelude, Cadence, et Finale* was written, I thought that it would be most helpful to not only discuss this piece with him, but to perform it for him and take into serious consideration the feedback he provided. Fortunately for me, this experience was one of the most informative musical experiences I have ever had. Dr. Rousseau helped me with this piece from both a contextual and performance standpoint, and contributed greatly to the wealth of information I now have about this piece.

The next composition that required a great deal of time to prepare was Christian Lauba’s contemporary saxophone etude *Balafon*. Christian Lauba is a younger French composer who has spent a great deal of his time creating new and unique compositions for the saxophone. In doing this, Lauba has made it a point to incorporate the extended techniques of the saxophone into nearly all of his saxophone pieces. In *Bal afon*, the extended technique that is most obvious is circular breathing. This piece is nearly five minutes long, and there are only three or four places
to breathe throughout the entire piece. The process of circular breathing involves using the muscles in the cheeks to expel stored air while inhaling simultaneously, all the while main a constant stream of air that produces a continuous tone.

The reasoning behind the inclusion of this technique has to do with the context of this piece. A balafon is actually a west-African instrument that resembles the marimba; however, rather than use metal or wood tubes to create different pitches, the balafon uses different sized gourds to accomplish this same thing. This piece was possibly the most difficult for me to prepare given that I had to learn how to circular breathe in order to perform this piece. Initially, this technique was a great barrier for me, but with a great deal of practice and a healthy dose of persistence, I was eventually able to circular breathe, which enabled me to properly prepare Lauba’s etude Balaton.

While there were other compositions on my program, the aforementioned compositions were of particular relevance to demonstrating the saxophone as "la voix de la musique modern." In the midst of preparing all of this music for my program, there were a few other key issues that I had to address in order to make this project an overall success. The most important issue that I had left to address aside from individual prepamfion was choosing other artists to collaborate with. Given that several of the compositions I chose were accompanied by the piano, and that the piece Dr. Nagel wrote for me was scored for two saxophones, there were many things to consider when thinking of people to work with on these pieces. It is common that one accompanist performs an entire program with a soloist, but given the extreme difficulty of this music, I knew it would be impossible to find an affordable accompanist in Muncie.

Knowing this led me to search for multiple accompanists who would be capable of performing this very difficult music. I turned to a good friend who I had worked with before, Dr.
Liz Seidel. Dr. Seidel received a doctorate in piano from Ball State University, and has long been known as one of the finest performers and accompanists in the Muncie community. After she agreed to take on a few of the compositions I had chosen, there was one piece left that I needed an accompanist for. In light of the fact that my recital was a student project, I thought that it would be appropriate to collaborate with one of my BSU School of Music colleagues. I then asked Mr. Mijail Tumanov if he would like to accompany me on Desenclos’ "Prelude, Cadence, et Finale. Mijail is a Master's student in piano performance that is originally from the Ukraine, and has received degrees in piano performance from universities in Costa Rica, and this spring will complete his Master's degree at Ball State. After Mijail agreed to take on this project, I had one more artist to contact in order to complete this aspect of my project.

I contacted my esteemed colleague and long time friend Stephen Page, who I met in 2003 at Dr. Rousseau's master class. Stephen is an amazing young saxophonist who will receive a Master's degree in saxophone performance from Indiana University in the spring of 2008. After offering him the opportunity to participate in a premiere performance, Stephen immediately agreed to take on this task, which I could not have been happier about. It was after I had finalized whom I would work with that a very important stage of this project began. It was in December that I began to make regular trips to Bloomington in order to rehearse with Stephen. These trips were of the utmost importance, given that we both took the premiere of Dr. Nagel's composition very seriously. I began working with Dr. Seidel and Mijail in early January before I left the country for nearly three weeks to compete in an international saxophone competition. I began our rehearsals at this early time due to my knowledge of the short time frame I would have to prepare after returning from the competition.
These rehearsals proved to be key in the success of the project. After returning from Thailand, the rehearsals leading up to the performance went much smoother than they would have if we had not done some preliminary work together to become familiar with one another as individual performers. Dr. George Wolfe supervised the majority of the rehearsals leading up to the performance, which proved to be very helpful. Dr Wolfe's great knowledge of these pieces proved to be a great service to me in that he helped me put the finishing touches on combining my individual playing with my accompanists.

The final stage of preparation involved both writing and compiling the program notes for the recital. I did a great deal of searching for scholarly writing about these compositions, and luckily I was able to come up with a great deal of resources. Writing original program notes proved to be a very challenging task. Writing in a more pedagogical style was very new to me, and I was fortunate enough to have Dr. Wolfe supervising my efforts. After compiling program notes (that came mostly from renowned saxophonists) and finishing my own program notes, the only thing left to do was give the performance. On February 21 in Sursa Hall, I played what thought to be my best live performance to date. The faculty jury that attended my recital was very receptive to the program, and had many good things to say. My teacher Dr. Wolfe also responded very well, and indicated that this program was in many ways a great reflection of the work I have done over the past four years. Dr. Wolfe indicated to me that the lack of excessive mistakes, and my stage presence were personal improvements, and that the level of difficulty of my program was very impressive. I was delighted to have garnered such a positive response from these esteemed faculty members, and these comments and reactions reinforced my positive feelings about this project.
Given that this project was both a creative honors project and a senior recital, there was a great deal at stake. The woodwind faculty in attendance gave the unanimous decision that I had indeed passed this final examination of my performance ability. I am excited that I achieved my goals, and that I learned so much throughout this process. I am hopeful that the future will bring many more opportunities for me to learn a great deal and strive for new goals in my field. I am incredibly thankful that I have received such wonderful guidance from Dr. Wolfe, the School of Music faculty, and my Honors College teachers over the past four years. I can truly say that I could not have had a better undergraduate experience, and I am very pleased to have concluded my time at Ball State with such a successful endeavor.
The Baroque composer Johann Sebastian Bach spent his entire life in Germany. He was born in the year 1685 in Eisenach and died in 1750 in Leipzig. Thought by many to be the epitome of Baroque music, the end of the Baroque era coincides with his death.

This partita for solo flute has become one of the most well known pieces for solo flute within the flute repertoire. Given the age and establishment of this piece, there are many different issues to address when performing this work that include: ornamentation, dynamics, and issues concerning period instruments. These same issues are also a source for great controversy.

*Etudes 1 and 2 for Saxophone and Piano*  
*Charles Koechlin (1867-1950)*

"In his own compositions he created a style that is unmistakably French in its clarity and subtlety of nuance and dynamics; although highly sympathetic to all innovation, he stopped short of crossing the borders of perceptible tonality and coherent rhythmic patterns; he was a master of orchestration. If Koechlin's music can be said to show any influence at all, that of Faure would no doubt be the most easily discernible; but what most distinguishes him from his contemporaries is the very individual and personal idiom in which he always expressed himself. He never adhered to any 'system' or school; each of his works is composed in the idiom it seemed to him to demand. This eclecticism led him to experiment in a great variety of styles as well as forms and media, and his works cover an immense field." (Londeix, 205)

These etudes for saxophone and piano arranged by legendary French saxophonist and pedagogue Jean-Marie Londeix have become a staple within the saxophone repertoire. These etudes are quite unique in that they are etudes that include piano accompaniment. This collection of 15 etudes includes studies in dynamics, rhythm, arpeggios, scales, and several other techniques that cover a wide range of saxophone performing.

*Legende, Op.66*  
*Florent Schmitt (1870-1958)*

"His formative years were spent in the ambient of French symbolism in poetry and Impressionism in music, and he followed these directions in his programmatically conceived orchestral music; but he developed a strong, distinctive style of his own, mainly by elaborating the contrapuntal fabric of his works and extending the rhythmic design to unprecedented asymmetrical combinations; he also exploited effects of primitive percussion, in many respects anticipating the developments of modern Russian music. He was not averse to humor; several of his works have topical allusions. His invention is not particularly memorable, and it may be doubted whether much of his music will often be revisited except by way of curiosity; but the interest of connoisseurs in it will continue to be justified, not only because Schmitt's music differs from that of other French masters, but also because it has many positive qualities to recommend it; vigour, eloquence, passion, understanding of various media and mastery if at times too lavish orchestration to mention only some of the most immediately striking." (Londeix, 337)

"Florent Schmitt was commissioned to write a work for saxophone by the wealthy Boston socialite Elise Hall. Mrs. Hall, under doctor's orders to take up a wind instrument for health reasons, began studying the saxophone. After studying for some time with renowned Boston Symphony oboist George Longy, Mrs. Hall began commissioning works for her chosen instrument, and turned some of Europe's leading composers, including Claude Debussy, Andre Caplet, Vincent D'Indy, and Schmitt. Legende, Op. 66 for saxophone and orchestra resulted from this commission, and is heard here in the composer's piano version. The work dates from the summer of 1918 and clearly reflects many of the dominant musical and aesthetic preoccupations of the day. The piece is marked by modal, whole tone and synthetic scales as well as parallel harmonies, all in the service of a strong extra-musical impression of some unknown, exotic oriental 'other'. The title itself implies a fantastic, enchanting tale with references far beyond the composer's France of 1918. A brief introduction leads into the body of the work. The entire piece is derived from the development of two prominent melodic ideas. These lyrical phrases are periodically interrupted by dramatically expressive moments. The virtuosity inherent in this work is far more a virtuosity of expression than of technique. The Dionysian aesthetic is firmly in place here in the sensual expression of the 'fantastic'." Note by Jim Umble
"From his earliest works, Benson assimilated a neo-classical idiom, distinguished by compact contrapuntal writing and harmonic clarity without avoidance of justifiable dissonance. His music is varied and selective in technique, giving prominence to lyricism and to colorful instrumentation." (Londeix, 31)

"Aeolian Song is the second movement of the Concertino for Alto Saxophone and Wind Ensemble, composed in 1971. The original instrumentation calls for percussion accompaniment only in the second movement (with woodwinds in the first and brass in the third) with this piano reduction by the composer. The song is slow and peaceful, taking its own time to lay out a simple minor mode melody. Harmonic and rhythmic elements are minimal but highly effective as the saxophone explores all registers in an expressive display. The form consists of two themes, which alternate between saxophone and piano over a simple accompaniment and Eb pedal. A gradual buildup of intensity leads to a climactic point and the movement dies away in Eb minor.

Note by Kenneth Tse

Spirals out of Control for two Saxophones

Jody Nagel (b. 1960) joined the Ball State University School of Music faculty in 1992 and is now associate professor of theory and composition. His compositions have been performed in many American cities and also in Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, Korea, Cyprus, Germany, France, Austria, Russia, and England. He won an ASCAP Young Composers Award in 1988 for a chamber orchestral work, and in 1993 he was a Fulbright Fellow in Sydney, Australia. Performances of Nagel's works have been given at conferences of the Society of Composers, Inc. (SCI) and the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States (SEAMUS). Nagel was born and raised near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and attended North Allegheny High School in Wexford. He received his D.M.A. degree in composition from the University of Texas as Austin in 1992 where he had been the recipient of a doctoral fellowship. He received the M.A. degree in theory and composition from the University of Pittsburgh (1985) and the B.A. degree from Marietta College (1982). His principal composition teachers have included Eugene Kurtz, Dan Welcher, Donald Grantham, Russell Pinkston, Karl Korte, Morton Subotnick, Peter Sculthorpe, Stephen Montague, Wayne Slawson, John Peel, William Buelow, and David Berlin. Nagel is a member of Phi Beta Kappa. He is married to EunHee Yoon Nagel, and has two daughters: Ashley Gaia SeoHyon (b.1990) and Athena Gretchen SeoJong (b.1997).

Balafon

Christian Lauba was born in Sfax, Tunisia, in 1952. After studying music at the Conservatory of Bordeaux where he was awarded a First Prize for composition in the class of Michel Fusté-Lambezat, he obtained the SACEM prize in 1983, the Medal of Honour of the city of Bordeaux in 1984 and in 1994 won first prize in the Berlin International Composition Competition (Institut fur Neue Musik). At the same time he led master classes in composition and lectured at the Universities of Maryland, Bowling-Green (USA) and Winnipeg (Canada). Christian Lauba has received numerous commissions from the French state, various orchestras and several contemporary ensembles. His works have been performed throughout the world, in Europe, the USA, Canada and Japan.

Christian Lauba's Balafon is an etude that is meant to master the circular breathing technique and the execution of subtle dynamics, all while imitating the West African idiophone instrument called the balafon. The balafon is a wooden keyed instrument that can contain pitch sets of 6 to 21 notes. This instrument is similar to a modern marimba; however the balafon uses calabash gourds covered with spider's egg case filament for tuning, rather than the modern system that uses either metal or wood for producing tuned notes. Lauba incorporates several different extended techniques into this composition in order to accurately imitate the balafon. The use of multiphonics (multiple notes played simultaneously) is used very effectively to produce multiple notes simultaneously like a marimba. The circular breathing technique is used to give an uninterrupted flow to the piece, similar to much percussion music that is unhindered by the need for breathing. The subtle dynamics make Balafon a very effectual piece, and add to the overall effectiveness of Lauba's concept.
"In 1942, the year in which the saxophone class at the Paris Conservatoire began, Alfred Desenclos was awarded the Premier Grand Prix de Rome. Desenclos, who also wrote a symphony, a magnificent Requiem and a saxophone quartet (1964), composed the present Prelude, Cadence et Finale in 1956 for a competition held by the class at the Conservatoire; the work thus forms part of this illustrious institution's great tradition of competition piece. Desenclos' work bears witness to a mastery of style placed at the service of the instrument – in the quality of the piano accompaniment (which maintains a dialogue with the soloist), in its harmonic richness and in the care taken with accentuation."

Note by Claude Delangle

Stephen Page has earned a Bachelor degree in Saxophone Performance from the University of Minnesota studying with renowned teacher and pedagogue Eugene Rousseau. After receiving the prestigious Marcel Mule scholarship, he is pursuing the Master of Music degree studying with Otis Murphy at Indiana University where he is an Associate Instructor of Saxophone.

In 2004, Stephen won the Yamaha Young Performing Artist Competition, and was featured in a concert for over 2,000 people. An avid chamber musician, Stephen has been successful at several of the nations top chamber music competitions. The Four Corners Saxophone Quartet was a finalist in the Coleman Chamber Music Competition in 2005, and a semi-finalist in the Fischoff National Chamber Music Competition in 2006. He was also invited to participate in the Adolphe Sax International Concours in Dinant, Belgium. In 2007 Stephen won the IU Saxophone Concerto Competition, and was runner up in the IU Woodwind Concerto competition performing Villa-Lobos Fantasia. Most recently, Mr. Page was a semi-finalist in the 2nd Jean-Marie Londeix International Saxophone Competition in Bangkok, Thailand.

As winner of the Arizona University Recording Competition, Stephen is featured on the eleventh disc of the Millennium Tribute to Adolphe Sax performing Libby Larsen's Holy Roller. In continuing collaboration with AUREC he will be featured on the thirteenth volume of the series performing Gavambodi 2 by Jaques Charpentier. His first solo album entitled Holy Roller, is scheduled for release in late 2007, featuring works by Decruck, Larson, Feld, Charpentier, and Brandon.
Citations


Personal correspondence with Dr. Kenneth Tse, Professor of Saxophone at the University of Iowa.

Personal correspondence with Dr. Eugene Rousseau, Professor of Saxophone at the University of Minnesota.

Individual saxophone lessons with both Dr. George Wolfe and Dr. Eugene Rousseau.