An Exploration of Flute Repertoire from Baroque through Contemporary Music

An Honors Thesis/Recital (HONRS499) performed on March 3, 2003 by Bryan Arthur Guarnuccio

Thesis Advisor Dr. Julia Mattern

Ball State University Muncie, Indiana

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Abstract

Recitals and CDs are essential parts of a professional flutist's career. Six complete works of various genres have been performed. In addition to having been performed in front of a live audience, a CD has been included for the record. Accompanying the CD is a set of program notes. As most CDs have liner notes that elaborate on the chosen repertoire, additional research was done to enlighten the performer and the listener. Changes to the flute have also been included in regards to performance practice and the instrument itself from early music to the present.

Acknowledgements

To begin, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for attending my Bachelor of Music Recital. Hopefully, the time I've spend during the last four years in a practice room was evident in today's performance.

In addition, I'd like to thank all of the performers in my recital. Holly Hanauer has performed on all of my recitals and I would have been unable to make it through without her pleasant attitude, musicality, and perceptive ability to follow. Susan Robison pulled double duty in the Vivaldi - trying to imitate the sound of a "drier" 'cello of the day, as well as the Mozart - an integral member of the quartet. This brings us of Katie Meyer and Sean Diller. Thank you for your time and patience with the learning process of Mozart and chamber music. (Also, an extra thanks to Katie, who has wonderfully performed her part after breaking her wrist not long ago.) Rachel Browne - it's always a pleasure to have a harp on a recital.

Most of all, I'd like to thank Dr. Mattern for all of her hard work and efforts into making this recital possible. Obviously, I would not be the player I am today without her instruction. From building my low register, to repertoire selections, she is largely responsible for the presented recital.
Antonio Vivaldi - Concerto No. 3, Op. 10 in D Major, RV 428 "Il Gardellino"

The title of this work appears as "Il Gardellino" and may be translated as the Goldfinch (figure 1) or the Bullfinch (figure 2). The trills and frequent oscillations of the pitches A and D found throughout represent birdcalls. For this reason, "Il Gardellino" is known as a programmatic work - one in which the title of the piece is the object of musical portrayal. This is in opposition to absolute music, which has no direct muse for composition other than the composer's own free will.

Figure 1. Figure 2.

Two other works within Opus ten also have programmatic titles. Concerto No.1 in F major is subtitled "La Tempesta di Mare" ("The Storm of the Sea"), while Concerto No. 2 in G minor is known as "La Notte" ("The Night"). In addition to the Opus ten works, Vivaldi wrote a number of other concerti and sonatas for the flute, making an enormous contribution to the instrument's repertoire.

One compositional element that makes Vivaldi's music easily identifiable is his use of short, repeated segments of music. Beyond the sequential repetition, which is common to baroque music in general, Vivaldi's works often have the soloist repeating a series of arpeggiations that outline the underlying harmonies. This characteristic appears not only in Vivaldi's flute music, but also his music for other instruments as well.

It was during the completion of the Opus ten works in 1728 that the flute first became used as a solo instrument in concerti. Previously, the recorder had been the orchestral instrument of choice, but around this time the flute was just being introduced to the orchestral repertoire and pieces could have been performed on either instrument. Flutist Johann Joachim Quantz pioneered some of the mechanical changes being made to the flute at this time. In 1726, he added a second key to the foot-joint, which distinguished D-sharp from E-flat, necessary in the just temperament of Quantz’s Day, but no longer relevant to our modern tuning system.

Baroque flutes came in four sections, the second of which was available in different sizes for adjusting pitch so that the instrument could be played at different pitch levels (figure 3). Some forty years after Quantz’s work, additional tone holes were added and covered with keys.¹

This modern performance of the concerto does preserve some baroque elements. The choice of accompaniment (harpsichord and violoncello) follows

Figure 3.

the practice of that era, although a complete orchestra is not being used, as Vivaldi intended. It is not uncommon for modern performances to use only continuo accompaniment, which preserves the basic style and sound without the additional orchestra members. Additionally, conductors of baroque performance often played the continuo while leading the orchestra. The basso continuo sets the harmonic foundation for the piece; in a modern performance, the basso continuo serves the same function.

Theobald Boehm – Élégie, Op. 47

Theobald Boehm, "the father of our modern flute" made significant changes to the instrument. He was born in Munich, Germany in 1794. While in his teens he worked with his father as a jeweler and at the age of sixteen, opened a flute shop. Boehm’s greatest achievement occurred in 1847: he changed the shape of the instrument from conical to cylindrical. In addition to building flutes, Boehm was also a virtuosic performer and was active as a composer and inventor. He worked on the piano, combustion of blast furnace gases, and steel production during his multi-faceted career.


Many of his pieces are in a theme and variation format. This entails stating a lyrical melody and following it with altered forms of the theme, which may include highly technical aspects.

Ironically, Élégie, Op. 47 was the last piece Boehm was to write. The form of this piece allows for lament as well as angst. When recapitulation begins, the listener is reminded that death is not forever tragic and those for whom one has grieved have moved forward in the cycle of life.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – Quartet in D Major, K. 285

The flute is capable of playing in a wide variety of chamber ensembles, from groupings of flutes and other woodwinds, to woodwind quintets, baroque sonatas and combinations with strings. Quartet in D Major allows flutists to experience the style of Mozart, without the length of a concerto.

The flute quartet itself is a rather interesting innovation. In the early classical period of music, Haydn was deemed "The Father of the String Quartet." This popular genre of music featured two violins, viola and 'cello. In the early stages of the quartet, most of the virtuosity was contained in the first violin part, while the other voices served mainly as accompaniment. As Haydn and other composers became more familiar with writing for this ensemble, difficulty was more evenly distributed amongst the members. Because the flute and the violin have similar ranges, the idea of having the replace the upper voice in the quartet originated.

Mozart used this instrumentation to write four quartets that have remained popular through modern times. In Mozart quartets, the flute is the predominant voice for the most

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part, although there are instances where the other instruments emerge through counterpoint and melodic lines. An example is the viola part in the D Major Quartet, which is prominent both in technical difficulty and for its role in passing melodies to other members of the ensemble. This piece, and others like it add an exciting dimension to the flute repertoire.

Quartet in D Major, along with the two other quartets in K. 285 were composed in 1777 for flutist Johann Baptist Wendling. These quartets “offer a unique insight into Mozart’s evolving quartet style — a sort of transitional link between in juvenile efforts, which (like the early Haydn quartets) are essentially for solo instrument accompanied by the three lower voices, and the mature masterpieces, in which all the protagonists converse as equals.”

Jacques Ibert — Entr’acte

Jacques Ibert wrote a number of works for the flute including Concerto, Trois Pieces Breus for woodwind quintet, Jeux and Aria for flute and piano, and Entr’acte — which has a number of possible permutations. According to scholar Matthias Henke, “[His] best known piece of chamber music [is] the Entr’acte of 1953, which is often heard set for violin and guitar. Hispanic rhythms and rousing melodies lead into a furious finale, which is preceded by an intimate harp interlude that increases the level of tension.”

This piece was included on the program for a number of reasons: it is enjoyable to perform and it also serves its purpose well as a piece between two acts. In addition, it provides a bit of music by a French composer, or one that composes in a French style, of which there are many who have written for the flute: Büsser, Chaminade, Duvernoy, Enesco, Fauré, Ganne, Gaubert, Péralh and Taffanel to name a few.

Ibert was born on August 15, 1890 in Paris, France. His father was a violinist and his mother a pianist. He studied at the Paris Conservatory from 1910 to 1914. As pictured to the right, he was a naval officer in World War I.

Compositionally, Ibert is known for a variety of styles including nineteenth-century romanticism, impressionism, neo-Classicism, and “touches of expressionism.” His use of many musical styles led to a blending of compositional techniques coupled with an intense love for drama and a fondness for sudden shifts of character to yield a distinctive style uniquely his own.

A few instances of character changes occur in this piece as well. The fiery opening is followed by a lyric melody, which relaxes the nervous mood of the opening. As soon as one settles into this melody, Ibert brings back an embellished version of the opening with constant triplets. The harp then states a completely different melody and the flute makes some interjections, before returning to its previous statement of triplets. One can envision a rapid Spanish dancer increasing her tempo to the limit before the work ends with a flourish.

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Robert Dick describes himself as "a musician with 21st-century skills and 18th-century attitudes, being totally at home as a performer, composer and improvisor." With equally deep roots in classical music old and new and in free improvisation and new jazz, he has established himself as a legitimate heir to virtuoso composer/performers like Chopin, Paganini and Jimi Hendrix. Robert Dick has often been referred to as "the Hendrix of the flute" because of his revolutionary musical approach and the ultra-high intensity level of his performances.  

Robert Dick

"Etude five is based on the oldest known double stop: the joke of just 'oom pah pah.' At some point in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century some flutist played F natural and hit both trill keys, probably by accident, and out came this D and F... It wasn't until the late fifties and early sixties that experimentation began to try even a few simple variations on that fingering. This etude, which is kind of ragtime-ish in nature – little mini episodes, is based on that fingering and ones that are closely related."

As with traditional etudes, these exercises are meant to teach a particular aspect of flute technique. The difficulty in this type of music lies in the fact that the techniques present are not those found in the bulk of music literature. New fingering patterns must be learned. The so-called "first" multiphonic uses a fingering that is not present when playing scales, arpeggios, or even alternate trill fingerings. By opening the trill keys, the air column becomes split and two tones are produced. Another example of a multiphonic fingering is playing a low B while half-holeing the D key (the right ring finger). Not only is this non-standard, but it is frankly uncomfortable. However, if this is done correctly, second octave D and the B an octave will sound simultaneously.

In addition to learning new fingerings, one must learn increased air control. As with any fingering, the correct amount of air speed and focus must be used to produce the desired pitch. In this case, the fingering includes a split in the air column, it is then up to the player to diffuse the air such that both pitches will be heard. In this process of directing and redirecting the air stream, the overall tone quality will often improve. Aside from providing contrast in repertoire, refinement of tone production skills may be influential when choosing to learn "extended techniques."

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8 Robert Dick, Flying Lessons (Cassette recording), 1984.
Bohuslav Martinu – First Sonata

Like Ibert, Martinu was born in 1890. A small town in eastern Bohemia, Policka, marks his birthplace. At the age of seven, he began studies on the violin; by age ten, he was composing. Martinu attended the Prague Conservatory and followed this with the Czech Philharmonic until 1923. The state granted him a scholarship, which allowed him to go to Paris for three months. However, he remained there for seventeen years, until wartime issues caused him to flee to the United States in March of 1941. Shortly thereafter, in a house at South Orleans on Cape Cod, the “First Sonata” was completed. However, a second work never followed. 9

“Bohuslav Martinu’s Flute Sonata is also immediately striking in its sheer rightness for the instrument. It was the last work Martinu composed during his wartime exile in the United States. As his wife Charlotte recounted:

In the spring of 1945 we went to the ocean, to South Orleans at Cape Cod, upon Nadia Boulanger’s recommendation. We lived in a small house that belonged to the two Smith sisters, one of whom was a pupil of Nadia’s. Bohuslav worked at their house because they had a piano, and, as for me, I had my garden which the deer came to visit often, in spite of the fence. One day we found a small, injured bird which was black with a bluish belly. We took care of it, and when it had recovered, Bohuslav taught it to fly. It sang under our window, which is why in Bohuslav’s Sonata for flute and piano the theme of this song by the bird, called the whippoorwill, has been repeated.” 10

Interestingly, this program began and ended with pieces about birds – this was pure coincidence. The program liner to Susan Milan’s CD was the main source for this information. The image at right is of the whippoorwill (figure 4).

As with all of Martinu’s works, there are a number of rhythmic complexities, which make the piece interesting, and at times, difficult to put together. An example of this includes the asymmetrical 7/8 meters that occur in the first movement. The latter half of the “B” section, in the second movement, provides another level of complexity. For a few measures, Martinu obscures down beats through the use of ties. After the flute finishes this series of syncopations, the piano takes over this idea up until the recapitulation begins. In the last movement (which is primarily in 2/4) a few phrases end with a measure of 3/8. This creates an uneven feeling at the end of the melodic statement. All three movements in this piece, as well as the movements Trio for Flute, Cello, and Piano, are in A-B-A-Coda form. Without having the time to further pursue his compositional habits, this form is popular throughout his literature.

In addition to this piece, and Trio for Flute, Cello, and Piano, Martinu wrote several other chamber works for the flute including Madrigal Sonata for Flute, Violin and Piano and Promenade for Flute, Violin and Harpsichord (or Piano).

Bibliography


