

Nordic Trombone Music

An Honors Creative Project (HONRS 499)

by

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Thesis Advisor
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Seidel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" and last name "Seidel" clearly distinguishable.

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Abstract

From early in the 20th century to present day, the Nordic region has served as a strong source of trombone music. This is due, in part, to the fact that the region has served as a home to some of the world's preeminent trombonists including, but not limited to, Carsten Svanberg and Christian Lindberg. By far, the best mean by which to explore and understand this music is to take the time to develop and perform a selection of those very pieces. Consequently, I have compiled a group of pieces by the Nordic composers Vagn Holmboe, Axel Jørgensen, Lars-Erik Larssen, Stig Rybrant, and Georg Wilkenschildt. I will perform these pieces in a recital and accompany them with program notes that provide the audience with historical and biographical information on the composers as well as analytical notes on the pieces.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. John Seidel for his help in developing me as a trombonist, helping me to discover and explore these pieces, and serving as my advisor for this project.

I would also like to thank Sophia Kim-Tetel, Stephanie Genet, Michael Thom, Kyle Schaefer, and Chris Woody for accompanying me in the recital.

Process

I began preparation for this recital in March of 2007. The first two pieces I chose were the *Concertino, Op. 45, No. 7* by Lars-Erik Larssen and *Suite for Trombone and Piano, Op. 22*. The reason for this is because these two pieces have already become widely recognized by trombonists as standard pieces of repertoire for the developing trombonist. Both pieces proved to be challenging in that I have found my strength in playing connected, lyrical works while both of these pieces contain sections requiring quick facility on the slide and flexibility of the embouchure. Initially, this preparation began as supplemental to my weekly routine of practice and private instruction.

Over the course of the proceeding summer the intensity of preparation increased greatly. I increased private lesson time from one hour per week to two lessons per week each lasting an hour and a half. I also found and added the remaining three pieces of the recital. The *Five Pieces* by Georg Wilkenschildt is actually a collection of pieces he wrote as an exploration of his own development as a trombonist, so I found them only appropriate to be included on the recital to see the approach a composer took to understanding how to play and write for his own instrument. Although these pieces are studies he composed, which are not published, he has published other widely performed pieces including *Impromptu* and *Caprice*. As for the other two pieces, prior to this recital preparation, my trombone professor and I were unaware of their existence. The first of these two composers, Vagn Holmboe, is an acclaimed composer who has been a very prolific composer. Upon working through and performing the piece, I feel that it is less widely known because, alone, the trombone part seems unusual and anti-climactic.

However, when performed with piano, an entirely new perspective is given to the piece making it much more interesting to the audience and performer. The *Deep Brass Joke*, by Stig Rybrant, is a very interesting piece originally written for four trombones and a tuba. It was only appropriate to include ensemble music to fully represent music for trombone, and I found a recording of this piece that caused me to form an immediate liking for it. For the recital the tuba part will be performed by a bass trombonist, which is common practice.

This is the largest amount of music I have tried to prepare at any one time, which required an unexpected amount of effort on my part. I was more than willing to put forth this effort from sheer intrigue toward and enjoyment of the pieces. On average, I spent an hour and a half per day devoted solely to this music. I feel that the amount of time allotted from the initial preparation to the final product was appropriate in order to give me ample time to prepare yet still challenge myself to increase my skills at a rapid pace in order to meet the physical requirements of the music.

Johnathan L. Miller
Trombone
In a
Senior Honors Recital

Program Notes

Georg Wilkenschildt – Five Pieces

Georg Wilkenschildt was born May 10, 1918, in Denmark and died May 10, 1996. A trombonist, Wilkenschildt is not widely known as a composer. In fact, these five pieces are difficult to find under a publishing name. He does, however, have two better-known works for trombone with the titles of “Impromptu” and “Caprice.” As for the five pieces, each is distinctly separated from the others. Each piece is in a different key and style, which help to create stark contrasts among them.

The first piece features contrasting ideas within itself. The introduction of the piece is very declamatory, the middle section is gentler in nature and lightens up, and the piece concludes with a repeat of the opening section. All of the sections travel through various modes and the conclusion is a triumphant coda in C major.

The second piece is a smooth, melodic work in the key of D minor. As is implied by the style marking, *allegretto flessibile*, this work lends itself to the utilization of rubato to best convey the written music. Each section tends to start with a soft dynamic and build to a climatic conclusion, which is then proceeded by another soft entrance to a new phrase or section.

The third piece is a very lyrical piece in a melancholy mood. The piece concludes with a very strong sense of Gb major but is preceded by modal sections in parallel key relation including the opening phrase in Bb Lydian and the second phrase in Db

Myxolydian. The overall contour of the piece leads to the Gb major conclusion in range, dynamic, and melodic structure.

The fourth piece is a lament in the time signature of 3/8 and a key of C# minor. Initially, the piece has a firm pulse with distinct articulations and is contrasted by a section that has a more flowing melody, which still elicits the feeling of 3/8 but creates a hemiola with dotted eighth notes in the piano. Following this section, the beginning repeats and is concluded by a very brief coda.

The fifth, and final, piece follows a similar formal design to the first four pieces in which there is an opening section, a contrasting section, a repeat of the opening section and a brief coda to conclude. This format is defined as a rounded ternary. In this piece, the opening section is very stately. The style marking is *allegretto maestoso*, eliciting a majestic mood. However, with a syncopated triplet motif, the piece will most likely be likened to folk music in a declamatory style.

Axel Jørgensen – Suite pour trombone avec piano

Axel Jørgensen was born in Denmark in 1881 and died in 1947. His studies began at the Royal Danish Academy of Music. He attended the academy as a violinist. After his studies there, he served as a violinist in the Copenhagen Philharmonic Orchestra and then with the Royal Danish Orchestra. Here he became friends with Anton Hansen, to whom this piece is dedicated. At the time, Anton Hansen was a trombonist with the Royal Danish Orchestra.

The first movement of the suite is very lively. It has three major themes that appear and reappear throughout the piece. The opening motif is designed with adjacent leaps in opposing directions. The second motif is more scalar in nature and considerably

more flowing. These motifs serve as the two predominant ideas in the first movement but the third motif is still able to stand alone and add depth to the movement.

With the second movement being titled as a “menuet giocoso,” the mood is lighter and more jovial in nature. To portray such an idea, the movement has abrupt changes in dynamics, style, tonality, and phrase structure. This format provides an interesting perspective for the listener, and requires a deep level of preparation by the performer in order to accurately reflect the composer’s intentions.

The third movement, as is stated in the title, is a theme and variations movement. In addition, it is written as both a ballade and a polonaise. As a result, it sounds to the listener as two separate movements. The ballade is comprised of the main theme as stated in a sweet, dramatic melody. As it reaches the polonaise, although it may sound like a separate movement, the main theme can still be found within the new style. It becomes ornamented and takes an abrupt change in tempo, but it still very obvious, especially after a scrutinizing study of the score. Following this, there is a second variation that returns back to a flowing melodic structure in a soft dynamic. This then returns back to the rapid variation, which is again repeated in major through to the conclusion of the piece.

Vagn Holmboe – Sonate, Op. 172

Vagn Holmboe was born in Horsens, Denmark on December 20, 1909 and died on September 1, 1996. At the age of seventeen, he entered the Kongelige danske musikkonservatorium in Copenhagen. He actually entered under the recommendation of Carl Nielsen, another major composer of Nordic instrumental music. For a period of time, he taught privately and became somewhat of an ethnomusicologist through

collecting, studying, and authoring books and articles on topics such as Balkan and Arabic music. He taught at the Blindeinstituttet in Copenhagen during the 1940's and at the Royal Conservatory from 1950 to 1965. During this time, he also served as a music critic for a newspaper in Copenhagen. In 1965, he was able to retire from teaching and devote all of his time to composing music after receiving a lifelong grant from Denmark.

Holmboe's volume of compositions neared 400 works. Most of his compositions were orchestral, (14 symphonies), chamber (21 string quartets), and choral music. Many of these works were written on his own accord, though he also received numerous commissions from various people and organizations. Much of his fame came from winning first prize in a competition held by the Danish Royal Orchestra in 1939 for his Second Symphony. Holmboe wrote sonatas like this one for all of the major orchestral instruments except bassoon, French horn, and percussion.

According to a Grove Music Online article by Paul Rapoport, Holmboe's "music owes much to the balance and subtlety of Haydn, the clarity, colour, and immediacy of Nielsen, the developmental strength of Sibelius, the restraint and mastery of Stravinsky and the spontaneous and straightforward qualities of the folk music he so admired." These characteristics are evident in this sonata. The melodic structure is simple and follows basic contours. It does, however, have abrupt changes in style, dynamics, and thematic material.

Vagn Holmboe serves as an idyllic example of Nordic music in general. Although his focus may not be on writing for the trombone, his versatility provides this selection as a foundation upon which one may gain a perspective of Nordic compositional techniques.

Lars-Erik Larsson – Concertino for trombone and string orchestra, Op. 45, Nr. 7

Lars-Erik Larsson was born in Akarp, Sweden on May 15, 1908 and died on December 26, 1986. He began his studies at the Stockholm Conservatory in 1925. Some of his works gained interest while he was still a student at Stockholm, and his studies culminated in a state grant for composition in 1929. From this point, he continued his studies, did some brief teaching, and continued composing until he became involved with Swedish radio in 1937. His work with the radio began as a conductor, composer, and producer but eventually condensed to being conductor of the radio chamber orchestra until 1953. Once his obligations subsided with the radio, he took a position as a professor of composition at the Stockholm Conservatory, where he began his studies. He held this position until 1959, and, in 1961, became the director of music at Uppsala University.

This concertino is number 7 from a collection of 12 he wrote for various instruments and string orchestra. Larsson composed these while serving as professor of composition at the Stockholm Conservatory. It can be seen upon studying the piece that he utilized the tendencies of the instrument during the compositional process. Although much of the work is written in a cadenza-like fashion, many of the motives lie within the harmonic series of the trombone or entail similar movements among partials creating relative facility for the performer. This compositional approach marks this piece as standard example of Nordic composition as applied directly to trombone.

Stig Rybrant – Deep Brass Joke

Stig Rybrant was born on August 1, 1916 in Norrköping, Sweden and died on August 9, 1985. He studied composition at the State Academy of Music in Stockholm, the city in which he spent the remainder of his life. Upon graduation from the State Academy, he became a conductor and teacher with the Stockholm Opera. After this, he began his affiliation with the Swedish Broadcasting Company. While Rybrant was with the broadcasting company, he was in charge of programming and organizing broadcasts for the orchestras in the province. He later focused his efforts on chamber music and became known as an authority of Swedish music from the 19th and early 20th centuries.

This piece is written for four trombones and tuba but will be performed with four trombones and a bass trombone for the purpose of the recital. It has a simple melody that is developed well throughout the piece. The work, itself, has stark contrast in dynamics at which points the accompanying material usually assists in creating contrast. In music, a scherzo alone has come to be known as a joke. Oftentimes, there is something within the music that the composer finds humorous in his or her method of composition. In the quintet, we have decided that the last eight measures of the piece serve as the joke for this piece.

Consulted References

Barnö, Anders: 'Stig Rybrant,' *Svensk Musik: Swedish Music Information Centre* (Accessed May 16, 2007) <http://www.mic.stim.se>

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Reflection

After performing the recital, it is my opinion that the recital went relatively well. I must say that my level of endurance was not where I would have hoped. I had a rather lengthy sound check prior to the recital, and, consequently, felt very fatigued partway through the performance. With this being my first full-length, solo recital, I had not anticipated the amount of effort the sound check would take. This is something for which I will be prepared in the future and encourage future performers to consider. Keep in mind that the recital still went fairly well. The fatigue was nothing that prevented me from performing the pieces. It simply required more energy and effort than anticipated. If there is any advice I can give to anyone planning a recital, it would be to try to play completely through the recital twice in one sitting with his or her accompanist if the opportunity presents itself. This will check for fatigue and provide a very direct goal for the rehearsal.

The recital definitely had its musical moments. The amount of time spent with the pieces showed through in being able to convey that which the composer intended. These are pieces to which I will be returning time and time again. Having chosen Nordic music as a topic was a good choice because it allowed for several different types of music. If I had chosen to play cello transcriptions, pieces by a single composer, or pieces from a specific time period, there would have been much less variation among the pieces.