

THE SAXOPHONE MUSIC OF ALAIN CREPIN

A CREATIVE PROJECT (3 HRS)

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF MUSIC

BY

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**Introduction**

A variety of quality repertoire creates a musical framework that provides saxophone students with the skills to be well-rounded musicians. For over 150 years, the saxophone community has developed enough literature to challenge and develop saxophone performers. Belgian saxophonist and composer Alain Crepin has contributed prolifically to the saxophone repertoire. Unfortunately, his compositions and arrangements are known more in Europe than in the United States. The purpose of this paper is to familiarize the reader with Crepin's saxophone works so that musicians in the United States can become aware of his compositions. The information on Crepin was gathered from compact disc liner notes, Crepin's professional webpage, and personal interviews. This paper will highlight several of his significant saxophone compositions, his biography and background, his impressive career as a performer and teacher, and his approach to music composition.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Alain Crepin was born in Mettet, Belgium, on February 28, 1954. As a young boy he was first inspired to take up the saxophone when his grandfather suggested he join the local band. At age eleven he complied with his grandfather's wishes and joined the fanfare band (A. Crepin, personal communication, March 2010). As he grew older Crepin studied saxophone, cello, and piano in Dinant, Belgium. As Crepin recalls: "I wanted to educate my musical ear in the key of C, so I studied the cello, and I wanted to read music in both treble and bass clef, so I studied piano" (A. Crepin, 2010). During his studies in Dinant, the school did not have a saxophone teacher, so Crepin studied with the clarinet professor.

Crepin eventually went on to study saxophone at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Brussels under the guidance of François Daneels, who is recognized as the founder of the Belgian school of saxophone playing. As a scholar, Crepin received superior diplomas in saxophone and chamber music and won first prize in harmony and counterpoint. He also excelled at the study of fugue, orchestration, and conducting (Alain Crepin, n.d.).

After completing his studies Crepin came across many teaching opportunities. The director of the music school in Dinant immediately asked Crepin to become their first saxophone teacher once he was eligible. Since 1981, Crepin has taught at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Brussels. As he recalls:

In Brussels, I had a fascination for Sir Daneels. He had such a great reputation. I was very surprised when he asked me to become his assistant.

Later, he had to leave the conservatory. There were 23 candidates and I had the chance to have his position (A Crepin, 2010).

Besides teaching at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Brussels, Crepin also teaches orchestration and conducting at the Conservatory of Music of Esch-sur-Alzette in the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg (Alain Crepin, n.d.).

Since 1983, Crepin has been the military bandmaster of the Royal Band of the Belgian Air Force. For the past 21 years he has served as musical director and was recently appointed artistic director for all of the Belgian Army bands (Alain Crepin, n.d.).

When talking about his entrance into the military band, Crepin stated:

I didn't want to do military service. The only other solution was to try to play in a military band. I did the examinations, and after 6 years in the

band of the Gendarmerie, I became bandmaster in the Air Force and artistic director of the bands of Belgian Defense (A Crepin, 2010).

Crepin's experience with the military provided him with numerous opportunities in the music field.

### **Compositions for saxophone**

#### *Philosophy of composition*

As a composer, Crepin has composed many works for solo instrument and symphonic band and also solo instrument with piano accompaniment. Although he has written works for several orchestral instruments, the bulk of his music is for saxophone (see Appendix A). As with many other composers, questions arise concerning the origins of their music. What inspired them to write a certain piece? What type of pedagogical aspects do they focus on when composing?

In contrast to many modern-day composers, Crepin tends to write music that caters to the needs of the musicians and their listeners. While he does not mention any particular composer who inspired his works, Crepin has made it clear that his inspiration for writing saxophone music simply comes from the fact that he is a "saxophone teacher and knows the instrument very well!" (A Crepin, 2010).

Crepin truly is a selfless composer. He prefers to write music for less advanced players and he tries to compose music based on what a teacher requests. Many publishers have asked that he write music for saxophone, and because his compositions have been well received, he continues to write more for this genre.

Crepin's main goal for composing music is to write something interesting for the

musician to play and for the people to hear. This, however, is all within a tonal center. Crepin has not written any pieces that would be considered atonal, nor does he delve into styles labeled as serial, new age, minimalist, or electronic. As he says, that type of music is for the “elite and special” (A Crepin, March, 2010). As of now, the bulk of saxophone music written by Crepin consists of works for saxophone and piano, saxophone and concert band, saxophone quartet, and saxophone ensemble.

### **A Tribute to Sax**

#### *Significance of Composition*

The most significant saxophone work that Alain Crepin has written is *A Tribute to Sax*. This piece, finished in 1993, is special to Crepin “because of the title, the virtuosity, and the orchestration. I am very proud of that work!” (A Crepin, March 2010).

The title itself indicates that Crepin wrote the work as a commemoration of the death of Adolphe Sax, the inventor of the saxophone. While the piece was primarily written for Sax, Crepin also dedicated it to his professor and predecessor, François Daneels. The piece was originally scored for alto saxophone and concert band. However, there is also an arrangement for alto saxophone with piano reduction (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 1).

*A Tribute to Sax* is written in three movements. Crepin wasted no time showcasing the virtuosity of the saxophone. Within the first minute, aggression is exhibited in both the saxophone and the accompaniment. After this sudden energetic opening, the tension is released when the saxophone introduces a lyrical theme. At this point, the soloist is able to perform an expressive, legato line throughout the normal range

of the instrument, while at the same time adding a hint of sarcasm and technical display. As the first movement concludes, the orchestration fades out and the saxophone is featured in a cadenza that also serves as a transition into the second movement.

The second movement conveys a mood that speaks of peace and tranquility. In the concert band version, the vibraphone-sounding electronic keyboard takes the lead, introducing a serene melody that is eventually accompanied by the entire ensemble. Once the saxophone enters, the accompaniment does its part to remain subtle and reserved, allowing the soloist to play a flowing line of arabesques (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 1).

The third movement introduces a new rhythmically intricate pattern in 7/8 time that displays an energetic and virtuosic melodic line. In contrast to the opening of the first movement, the accompaniment is now very sparse. Early in the third movement, the saxophone is featured with a second short cadenza (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 1).

Differing from anything yet heard, the ensemble next launches into an energetic march. The march bridges back into a section that is similar to the beginning of the third movement, accelerating back to the familiar opening statement. While it might seem like Crepin would decide to have the soloist reach the end of the piece with the same energetic intensity, he surprisingly chooses to incorporate a gentle, lyrical line. It is only in the final statement that the saxophone pronounces an exclamatory conclusion (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 1).

One week after Crepin completed this work, the Royal Band of the Belgian Air Force began a recording session with the composer as the saxophone soloist. The first performance of *A Tribute to Sax* was completed for that compact disc in January of 1994 (A Crepin, March, 2010).

### *Modifications of Cadenza*

While Crepin's recording of *A Tribute to Sax* was the first ever, there are other recordings available. Ball State University saxophone professor George Wolfe has also recorded *A Tribute to Sax* with the Ball State University Wind Ensemble, Joseph Scagnoli, conductor. On his compact disc recording *Le Saxophone Melodieux*, Wolfe uses a method called motivic improvisation to extend several sections of Crepin's cadenzas. Wolfe explains his use of motivic improvisation as follows:

[Motivic improvisation] is a contemporary approach to improvisation where one takes motives designated by the composer and develops the motives to create an improvisation or "realization" that respects the mood, motivic material, and character of the composition within which the improvisation is occurring. In the classical period of Western art music, it was customary for performers to write their own cadenzas. I applied my strategy of motivic improvisation to Alain Crepin's cadenza in his composition *A Tribute to Sax*. Twice in the cadenza, I extended the composer's motivic pattern into the altissimo range. A third time, which actually occurs earlier in the cadenza, I repeat a melodic line from an earlier theme in the first movement, then extend it using large interval leaps to reach an altissimo D4 four times. There is also a cadenza in the third movement that I extend by returning to a modified version of the beautiful melody that opens the second movement (G. Wolfe, personal communication, March 2010).

Wolfe has stated that he felt comfortable taking liberties with Crepin's cadenzas

because the piece is virtuosic, and he believes that his additions sound like what the composer might have written (G. Wolfe, March 2010). Crepin confirmed Wolfe's treatment after he performed the composition in Belgium. Additionally, Wolfe has also performed *Concerto No. 2 for Alto Saxophone and Band* by Robert Jager under Crepin's baton with the Royal Band of the Belgian Air Force in Minneapolis. The Minneapolis performance was recorded live and is available on Arizona University Recordings compact disc series *America's Millennium tribute to Adolphe Sax*, Volume 12.

### **Other works for saxophone**

#### *Saxophone and concert band*

While *A Tribute to Sax* may be Crepin's most significant piece for saxophone, he has written several other pieces for saxophone and concert band. One of these is the composition *Saxflight* which is also available for saxophone and piano reduction.

This work is comprised of four parts alternating slow-fast-slow-fast. The accompaniment begins the work with an eerie and foreboding introduction as if there is some kind of flight coming from out of the depths of the earth. After the band introduction, the soloist appears for the first time, echoing a similar, somber melody. The saxophonist begins to take control while still keeping in constant dialogue with the accompaniment. The intensity increases as the saxophone "takes flight." Shortly after, the somber melody returns. Unlike *A Tribute to Sax*, this piece does not use a cadenza to transition to a contrasting section; rather the fermata creates a tension that ultimately resolves to a new section. The final section, the tempo of which happens to be marked *allegro piu vivo*, is supported by a repetitive rhythm in the orchestration and a technically

demanding line for the soloist that eventually peaks into the altissimo register (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 1).

To provide another piece for saxophone and concert band that is much different than both *A Tribute to Sax* and *Saxflight*, Crepin wrote *Silhouette*, a piece for either tenor or baritone saxophone. It is possible to play the piece with a small band, large band, or with piano. Crepin wrote *Silhouette* based on the actual silhouette of the tenor saxophone and at the request of his dear friend, Edmond Moreau. The two-part work uses three separate themes that are held together by a motif played by the soloist. The first recording of this piece featured Michel Mergny and Dominique Duhon performing the arrangement for saxophone and piano (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 1).

#### *Works for saxophone and piano*

Writing music for the beginning saxophonist is one of Crepin's passions. As an example, Crepin wrote *Les Jeux de Panda* as a pedagogical way of introducing staccato and 3/8 time to beginning students. This piece, written for alto saxophone and piano, depicts a playful panda with a melody that is quite memorable (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 1).

Another piece Crepin wrote for saxophone and piano was based on the idea of insomnia. The piece, *Nuits blanches*, translates to "sleepless nights." It is not clear as to whether Crepin wrote it during the middle of a sleepless night or if he merely wanted to convey how composers come up with interesting ideas during the night hours. However, it is clear that this composition has a jazz-like theme at the beginning that is displayed in several variations throughout. The piece also features the solo saxophonist through small cadenzas and lyrical lines (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 1).

While Crepin has written several pieces as pedagogical aids for less developed saxophonists, he has composed many pieces that are quite unusual. Crepin was commissioned to write *Conferences* in 2005 for the Axion Classics Contest in Belgium. The piece is scored for alto saxophone and piano, and is technically difficult and often uses the augmented fifth. While *Conference* is in ABA form, the “B” section is rather fast. Instead of writing a slower line, Crepin utilized timbre to create a novel variation. The piece is quite impressive and challenging due to the numerous meter changes encountered (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 2).

#### *Works for saxophone quartet*

Another of Crepin’s challenging compositions was written for the Dinant Saxophone Quartet. This work, entitled *Quatmospheres*, is in three parts. At the beginning, all four saxophones play a unison line that conveys tension that ultimately leaves the listener perplexed. Shortly thereafter, the music settles during a slower, middle section. Crepin composes tight chords that later develop into a passacaglia which displays expression that has not been heard up until that point. The third part brings the listener back to the mysterious beginning before starting a chromatic chase involving all four saxophones. The piece concludes by recalling the different “atmospheres” from the entire composition (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 2).

In 2002, Crepin was commissioned by the Selmer company in Paris to write a piece for saxophone quartet and concert band. The composition, entitled *Diversions*, is constructed using traits of the concerto grosso. While the structure of the three movements is continuous, each section is clearly delineated. Although classical elements

are present in this piece, Crepin uses the quartet to create a “diversion” by employing contemporary techniques such as dissonance, tone clusters, and even vocal sounds (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 2).

### *Saxophone Ensemble*

Crepin has written five pieces for saxophone ensemble and has arranged seven more. Many of his original pieces have been written for the International Adolphe Sax Association. As an example, Crepin wrote *Mise a Sax* for the opening of the 2006 IASA concert. Since saxophonists overtake the city of Dinant during the event, Crepin made sure to write the piece so that each saxophonist may celebrate the remembrance of the city’s “most illustrious child,” referring to saxophone inventor, Adolphe Sax (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 2). Similarly, Crepin wrote *From 3 to 1000* with the idea that any number of saxophonists could participate in the performance of the piece. Crepin conducted this composition in Dinant for the IASA competition in 1994 and 1998, with over 1000 saxophonists playing both times (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 2).

### *Arrangements for saxophone*

While Crepin has written many of his own works, he also has taken other compositions by other composers and arranged them for saxophone. Crepin wrote an arrangement of *Historiette* by his close friend, professional saxophonist Benny Couroyer, after convincing the music publisher “Editions Robert Martin” to promote Couroyer’s music. Crepin was able to showcase the warm sonorities of the melody through the

saxophone and relate to Couroyer's idea that the music was that of a salon or drawing room where visitors could be entertained (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 2).

Another famous saxophonist, Rudy Wiedoeft, wrote many compositions for saxophone and piano. Crepin has arranged many of his pieces, including one of his Wiedoeft's classic ragtime works entitled *Saxema*. The most well-known recording of this piece is on the second volume of *The Saxophone Music of Alain Crepin*, performed by world-renown saxophonist and pedagogue Eugene Rousseau (Crepin, 2006, Vol. 2).

### **Performance**

As a musician, Crepin has performed for many events all over the world. Some of his more notable appearances occurred at the European Saxophone Days at Dinant in 1990, and at the World Saxophone Congress in 2003 (Alain Crepin, n.d). Crepin has been involved with the recording of almost 60 compact discs. In all of these recordings, he participated as a soloist, quartet member, or conductor. Crepin's most well known recordings are Volumes One and Two of *The saxophone music of Alain Crepin* (A Crepin, 2010). These two volumes feature many of his saxophone compositions and arrangements. Crepin performs on several of the tracks, the most notable being the recording of *Quatmospheres* with the Dinant Saxophone Quartet, which includes Christian Debecq, Michel Mergny, and Joseph Mazzucco, and *A Tribute to Sax* with Crepin as the soloist. Other significant compact discs that feature Crepin as conductor or performer include "*Works for Saxophone, Concertino de Dinant* and *A Tribute to Sax*" (Alain Crepin, n.d).

While Crepin is a gifted saxophonist and pedagogue, he is also involved with the

International Adolphe Sax Association Competition. As the founder of the competition, Crepin has held secretarial duties and is currently the president of the jury (A Crepin, 2010). Every four years Crepin conducts the gathering of this event, which assembles some of the greatest saxophonists from all over the world. He is currently writing a piece for the last day of the next international competition, which is expected to have more than 1000 saxophonists (A Crepin, March, 2010).

### **Conclusions**

Alain Crepin has had a significant impact on the saxophone community. He has made contributions to the repertoire for saxophone and piano, saxophone and concert band, saxophone quartet, and saxophone ensemble. He has also arranged compositions of other composers for saxophone. Being a saxophonist, Crepin has a way of writing music that highlights the instrument's best qualities and versatility. While he is still quite unknown in the United States, it will not be long until his music gains the recognition that it truly deserves.

Crepin will not just be remembered as a composer, but also as a bandmaster, teacher, and soloist. His contribution to the Royal Band of the Belgian Air Force and the International Adolphe Sax Association is most admirable. Crepin's versatility as a musician will garner him well-earned respect so that one day his saxophone works could be as familiar as those of Creston, Glazunov, and Ibert.

## References

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## Appendix A:

### *Saxophone Compositions and Arrangements by Alain Crepin*

#### Saxophone and Concert Band:

Diversions (quartet)  
 Sax for Two (2 altos)  
 Sax en parallele (saxophone section)  
 A Tribute to Sax (alto)  
 Green Apple (alto)  
 Saxflight (alto)  
 Silhouette (tenor, baritone)

#### Saxophone and Piano:

Celine Mandarine (alto)  
 Les jeux de panda (alto)  
 Marees (alto, tenor)  
 Progressions (alto)  
 Strong Breeze (alto, tenor)  
 Le gateau de Marie (tenor)  
 L'elephant et la poupe (alto, tenor)  
 Nuit Blanches (soprano, alto, tenor)  
 Sicilienne (soprano)  
 Un petit Chinois a Dinant (alto)

#### Saxophone Quartet:

Miniature Idyllique  
 Quatmospheres

#### Saxophone Ensemble:

All by myself  
 Dinant, la voix cuivree  
 Mise a Sax  
 Con te partiro  
 From 3 to 1000

#### Saxophone Arrangements:

Csardas (alto)  
 Greensleeves (saxophone ensemble)  
 Petite fleur (quartet)  
 Polichinelle (alto and piano)

Saxema (alto and concert band)  
The Entertainer (saxophone ensemble)  
Historiette (soprano, alto)  
Le gendarme de Saint-Tropez (saxophone ensemble)  
The pink panther (sax ensemble)  
Prince Igor (saxophone ensemble)  
When the saints go marching in (saxophone ensemble)

## Appendix B

### *Creative Project Recital Program and Program Notes*

*Ball State University — College of Fine Arts — School of Music*

**LAURA BUKOSKY**  
soprano and alto saxophone

#### **GRADUATE RECITAL**

assisted by

Damion Mead, piano

Om Srivastava, alto saxophone

Tucker Day, tenor saxophone

Jeremy Castaneda, baritone saxophone

Concerto in C Minor for Soprano Saxophone ..... Benedetto Marcello  
I. Allegro Moderato (1686-1739)  
II. Adagio  
III. Allegro

Gavambodi II ..... Jacques Charpentier  
(b.1933)

Fuzzy Bird Sonata ..... Takashi Yoshimatsu  
I. Run. Bird (b.1953)

... Intermission ...

Histoirette ..... Alain Crepin  
(b.1954)

A Tribute to Sax ..... Alain Crepin  
1. Allegro  
2. Largo  
3. Allegro Vivace

Quatmospheres ..... Alain Crepin

Laura Bukosky, soprano saxophone  
Om Srivastava, alto saxophone  
Tucker Day, tenor saxophone  
Jeremy Castaneda, baritone saxophone

Laura Bukosky is a student of George Wolfe.

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree Master of Music with a major in performance.

SURSA HALL  
Sunday, November 8, 2009  
5:30 p.m.

Series LXIV  
Number 48

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*Laura Bukosky - Program Notes from Recital 11/08/2010*

**Concerto in C Minor — Benedetto Marcello (1686-1739)**

As a child, Marcello studied the violin with his father and later studied counterpoint and composition under Francesco Gasparini. In 1707 Marcello held several important positions as a respected lawyer in the government of the Venetian Republic.

The *Concerto in C minor* is an adaptation of an oboe concerto in D minor which was long believed to have been composed by Benedetto Marcello, but is now known to have been written by his brother, Alessandro (1684-1750). Benedetto later transcribed the piece and added embellishments to the solo part. The piece is comprised of three movements: a moderately paced opening movement, a slow central movement, and a faster finale.

**Gavambodi 2 — Jacques Charpentier (b. 1933)**

Jacques Charpentier traveled extensively in India where he studied music in his youth. *Gavambodi 2* exhibits the mystical and spiritual impressions of his travels to India and also the influences of his teacher, Olivier Messiaen. The piece is in three parts. The first section is mysteriously poetic and contemplative. The second section showcases vocal-like monody, rhythmic intensity and drive. The third section explores the pitches of the South Indian karnatic mode on which the entire piece is based. The illusion of suspended time is created at first in the piano and saxophone separately, and then finally together.

**Fuzzy Bird Sonata, Mvt. 1; Run, Bird— Takashi Yoshimatsu (b. 1953)**

Takashi Yoshimatsu was born in Tokyo in 1953. Yoshimatsu joined a jazz/rock group after attending Keio University, being interested in the opportunities that popular electronic music offered. From his experiences, he began to turn against “unmusical” modern music and instilled a type of new lyricism into his pieces. Yoshimatsu is generally considered to be one Japan's greatest composers in the western classical style; his compositions are melodious and sensitive to the capacities of each individual instrument.

*Fuzzy Bird Sonata* was written for renowned saxophone virtuoso Nobuya Sugawa in 1991 as a continuation of Yoshimatsu's ‘Bird’ series. Run, Bird is a very adventurous movement that provides the saxophone soloist and pianist with many enjoyable challenges. The character of the piece is influenced by bird song, folk melodies and jazz. These all can be heard as the saxophone uses contemporary techniques such as glissandi and the altissimo register, and by the jazz baseline that is at times heard in the piano.

**Histoirette — Benny Cournoyer/ arr. by Alain Crepin (b. 1954)**

Alain Crepin was born on February 28<sup>th</sup> 1954 at Mettet, Belgium. He first studied saxophone, violoncello and piano at Dinant and later became a saxophone student of François Daneels at the Royal Brussels Conservatory of Music. He graduated with a Higher Degree for saxophone and chamber music and received first prizes in harmony and counterpoint. He is currently professor of saxophone at the Royal Brussels

Conservatory of Music and professor of orchestration and conducting at the Conservatory of Music in the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg. He has been a military bandmaster officer since 1983 and for 21 years was musical director of the Royal Symphonic Band of the Belgian Air Force. As a composer, Alain Crepin has written numerous works for symphonic band, and his many solo instrumental pieces with piano accompaniment. *Histoirette* demonstrates how Crepin is not only an excellent composer, but an accomplished arranger as well.

#### **A Tribute to Sax — Alain Crepin (b. 1954)**

*A Tribute to Sax*, completed in December 1993, was written to commemorate the anniversary of Adolphe Sax's death. It can be thought of as a musical homage offered by a saxophonist from Dinant to Dinant's greatest son (Adolphe Sax was born in Dinant, Belgium). The piece is dedicated to François Daneels, founder of the Belgian school of saxophone playing, who was professor and predecessor of Alain Crepin at the Royal Brussels Conservatory of Music.

From the beginning, the solo saxophone imposes its virtuosity and aggressiveness, exhibiting expression and sarcasm as well as virtuosity. The second movement is calm and serene, giving the soloist an opportunity to sing a melodic line full of arabesques. The third movement begins with a rhythmic pattern in 7/8 time. As in the first movement, the saxophone displays a sudden virtuosity. After a short cadenza, the duo presents their final conclusion in an energetic march.

#### **Quatmospheres — Alain Crepin (b. 1954)**

*Quatmospheres* is a difficult work in three parts written for the Dinant Saxophone Quartet. The first section of the piece conveys tension: the introduction leaves the listener perplexed. Afterward, calmness returns during a slower, middle section. Tight chords later develop an expressive chorale-like passacaglia. The third section brings us back to the mysterious beginning before starting a playful chase between all four saxophones. The piece concludes by recalling the different “atmospheres” from the whole composition.