

A SOLO BASSOON RECITAL:
TELEMANN, MOZART, SAINT-SAËNS, AND PIAZZOLLA

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There are many correct ways to interpret music, but there are also just as many incorrect ways. More than just an accurate execution of the right pitches in the right order at the right times, artistic expression uses knowledge of history and theory to make a performance more stylistically appropriate and pleasing to listen to. This paper will explain how to interpret music from the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic styles. It will also include a section on how to arrange music written for a similar instrument, in this case, from flute to bassoon. The examples used to support this paper will be taken from my interpretations of music that I played in a recital on March 29th, 2013. The repertoire included Telemann's Sonata for Bassoon in F Minor, TWV 41:f1; Mozart's Concerto for Bassoon in B-flat Major, K.191/186e; Saint-Saëns' Sonata for Bassoon, op.168; and two movements from Piazzolla's *Histoire du Tango* for flute and guitar: the second movement entitled *Café 1930*, and the fourth, *Concert d'aujourd'hui*. In addition to the music itself, information will be taken from concurrent treatises, a recording by a professional, and an inspection of which version of the bassoon was available to the composer to support these assertions. The order in which I discuss the pieces will be the same as performed in the recital, which was chronologically.

The earliest piece I played was by Telemann, and is from the late Baroque Period. The sonata originally appeared in a periodical called *Der getreue Music-Meister* in 1728. As is typical of Baroque music, it features a melody line for the solo instrument, a bassoon, and a figured bass line. The music, especially in the slow movements, was intended by Baroque composers to be embellished. The Arabic numerals imply that the figured bass line has missing intervals above the given pitches, but there is also evidence that all lines of Baroque music should include embellishments in the many treatises written by composers, theorists, and instrumentalists at the time.

Johann Joachim Quantz, a performer, composer, and instrument maker, wrote a treatise about all aspects of transverse flute playing called *On Playing the Flute*. The text is not only relevant to flutists, but to any musician regardless of their instrument because of the general information on performance practice it contains. The thirteenth chapter describes what Quantz calls “Of Extempore Variations on Simple Intervals,” which is a fancy way of saying improvisation. The title of the chapter alone insinuates that improvisation was customary. In the first page of the chapter, he writes about music in which “further additions and improvements are possible,” and that “[a]lmost no one who devotes himself to the study of music... is content to perform only the essential graces.” (136) Clearly, this is evidence of the expectation of adding notes to performances. Quantz also points out the available freedom of embellishment and its personal nature.

As I am still a student myself, in order to develop good taste, I followed some of the embellishments found in the Ojeda publication of Telemann’s sonata, edited by John Miller, an American bassoonist who frequently performs as a soloist. The first type of embellishment he added in this edition is a passing tone (see example 1a), which is a very simple way to tastefully add notes. A passing tone is a note added in between a leap of a third, which usually adds a momentary dissonance between two chord tones, creating a small moment of tension and release when there was presumably none before. It also makes a leap smoother sounding if it happens to be found in the midst of a phrase that is entirely conjunct otherwise. Or, in the case of the third measure of the first movement of the Telemann Sonata, they can serve to take emphasis away from less important notes and add it to the important ones. The line without embellishment outlines a dominant quality seventh chord and reveals the harmony, but adding passing tones to all leaps of a third except the last takes nothing away from the harmony while drawing more

attention to the shape of the line. The last tertial leap was omitted by Miller; now the absence of the embellishment brings out the B-flat. Adding passing tones makes the line smoother, so the absence of one adds a different contour, calling attention to the note following the hesitation. It also leans more towards what the composer would have wanted the piece to sound like, in that it is decorating the melody but also highlighting the seventh of a chord, a recent innovation in music theory at the time. The seventh of a chord most often resolves downwards, and the motion could be called a baroque sigh. To make the sigh more powerful, the dissonant seventh is the longest note in the solo voice so far in the piece and it is being held across the barline. Because the purpose of embellishment is to emphasize what the composer has written without obscuring it, a close inspection of these types of details allows a more coherent and stylistically appropriate approach. Adding passing tones expands the ratio of the length of the B-flat to the notes immediately preceding it by double.

If a piece is slow enough, which the opening movement of this sonata is, then passing tones may be doubled, meaning after playing the note that fills in the interval of a third, returning to the original note and repeating the pattern. There is an opportunity to use one of these embellishments just four bars later in the seventh measure (see example 1b). The pattern of notes and rhythms is the same as four bars prior, but the unit is transposed up a third and therefore has more intensity. Adding double passing tones demonstrates the hierarchy of harmony and structure as well as saying that one (the second) is more important than the first. On the other hand, it is also acceptable to embellish both measures the same because they are the same pattern and the reasons that apply to the first can apply equally to the second. A little harmonic stratification might make the performance more interesting to the audience, however.

There are also embellishments possible when the pitch is static. If the note does not change, a neighbor tone can be added, dividing the rhythmic space however the performer deems the most appropriate judging by the context of the music. Such a tone can be added above or below the note, and the combination of both added notes is called a turn, which is one of the embellishments retained through the Classical Period and beyond. More specifically, a turn begins on the note a whole step above the pitch to be embellished, then plays the embellished note, dips a half step below, and finally can play the main note again before playing the next pitch, which is frequently the final resting place in a cadence; the last note in a phrase. I added a turn in the penultimate note of the entire piece, and it was the only place I added one, drawing much attention to the last cadence, which in this case is strong. The reason for adding embellishment must always support the composers' ideas and overall structure of the music and never be added simply because it is possible. If a logical argument can be made, then it is probably an acceptable way of embellishing.

In the Classical Period, composers were beginning to achieve celebrity status that had not existed before, especially with the child prodigy Mozart being paraded around Europe by his father to show off for royalty. Along with the fame came bigger egos and more need for control over their art. While composers can never be directly in control of their music unless they perform it themselves, their directions can improve. Dynamics and other between the lines instructions were beginning to show up more frequently, although they were still sparse compared to the Romantic Period's amount of notation. The focus also shifted from the capabilities of the instruments in the Baroque Period to the beauty and singing quality of a single melody in the Classical Period, and the embellishments of the past were beginning to look gaudy and unintelligibly cluttered.

With that aesthetic in mind, in 1774 Mozart wrote the bassoon concerto that is very popular today. It is one of three or four bassoon concerti that he wrote, but it is the only one that survived. The original autograph of the concerto is also missing; the remnants we have now have gone through the hands of Mozart's printer and editor at the very least.

He wrote the concerto when he was eighteen, half-way through his short life and a year into his career composing for the Salzburg royalty. By that time, he had written at least twenty-six symphonies but no concerti with the exception of a few transcriptions of piano concerti written by other composers, making the bassoon concerto his first for any wind or bowed string instrument. It is one of the most widely recognized Mozart concerti; however, its simple elegance makes it a challenge to perform.

Seventeen years after Mozart wrote the bassoon concerto, Johann George Tromlitz, who had the same qualifications as Quantz, wrote a treatise called *The Virtuoso Flute Player* in 1791. In the book, he includes a chapter on ornaments and mentions that “[i]f the composer has not expressed them, then it is left to the judgment of the performer to put them in.” (212) It is interesting that he talks about unwritten embellishment in a treatise written during the Classical Period. Some bassoonists active now ignorantly profess that embellishment was done away with in this phase in history and that everything the composer intended for the performer to do is written on the paper or implied. There was certainly less of a performer's influence on the notes in the Classical Period than in the Baroque Period, but it was evidently still present. Tromlitz also brings to light the subjective nature of embellishing, which “requires a knowledge which can only be attained by long experience” (212). Good embellishment of a piece is often the difference between knowing when it is appropriate or not by stressing the important points the

composer has made. Having this discretionary knowledge can come with experience, as Tromlitz said, but it can also be explained formulaically.

There are many musical characteristics which must be considered when interpreting, but I wish to speak about two in particular: how to execute trills and which articulations should be used where. As the original manuscript is missing, it is impossible to know which markings are authentically Mozart's; therefore, they are left to the performer. Furthermore, there is no notation that specifies whether a trill begins from the note being embellished or from the note above it. Because of this, some active bassoonists make a blanket statement for all trills in classical music, saying that they all start from above the note, on the beat, and end with a nachschlag. However, there is evidence contrary to this claim aside from Tromlitz's treatise. In Leopold Mozart's *Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing*, he includes a chapter on the execution of trills. He says in parenthesis before a chart of trills in various keys that "one closes, however, very rarely with a turn of two notes" (199), meaning that most of the time the use of a nachschlag is inappropriate.

There are examples of trills starting from the main note and the note above in the exposition of the first movement of this concerto. The first trill is in the fourth measure of the solo (see example 2a). It highlights an E-flat moving to a D. The D is the third of the chord in this bar, making the E-flat a suspension from the previous harmony. A suspension is a dramatic, tension building gesture, so not to distract from the tension, the trill should start on the E-flat and not on the F above. The F is in the chord, and to play it first would downplay the dissonance and therefore the excitement from the suspension. With knowledge that the E-flat is a 4-3 suspension and noticing that it comes on the strongest beat of the measure, a musician should notice that

there a few cues that this is a somewhat important event and use other musical effects to emphasize it. A growing intensity of phrase motion into the downbeat achieves this nicely.

Dissonance is not always the thing that is desirable to emphasize. It is important to remember that an ornament is meant to emphasize the idea the composer has written. It is up to the performer to decide what the crux of that idea is. To illustrate a few different possible explanations that have the same result, I will point out a passage with many ornaments that have different ideas behind them. In measure 50, there begins a series of trills, all of which start from the main note but each of the first three have different reasons for doing so (see example 2b). On the downbeat, the B-flat trill has the same reasoning as the aforementioned E-flat: it is a 4-3 suspension. The second trill on a C on the third beat of the same bar, the main note is chosen first because the overall line's direction would be blurred. Sometimes to see the larger structure of a section of music, the ancillary pitches can be taken away temporarily. If those pitches are taken away here, there is a simple stepwise motion from B-flat to C, landing on D on the downbeat of the next measure. To start the trill on the C on the note above would be playing a D on a strong beat before arriving to the same note, giving itself away before it happens. Starting the trill on a C makes the stepwise line clearer and embodies Mozart's philosophy of clear melody. The reason for the next series of trills is different; it is to emphasize the pedal notes surrounding the trills. From measure 51 to measure 54, the energy is propelled by the motor rhythm and not the chord progression. There is an interesting modulation in the middle of these four bars, but again the rhythm propels the melody for the most part. In order not to disturb the tonality with unnecessary dissonance and to give more attention to the ubiquitous pedal note, the main note is chosen on each of the trills.

The trills in these four bars also bring up another important decision to be made: whether to add a nachschlag or not. There are a few trills that the editor of the most original version included, but since it is not Mozart's autograph, these markings can be taken as strong suggestions rather than being set in stone. And according to Mozart's father Leopold, the nachschlags must be used sparingly, so only the most structurally important trills should have them. These trills that last for one beat each and resolve to the same note represent continuity, not finality. Adding a nachschlag to each trill would sound like a miniature attempt at a cadence mid phrase and it would interrupt the flurry of pedal tones. Also, a nachschlag would add the note A-natural, the leading tone, which would add tension to a passage that is supposed to be playful and light. So for these four bars, I added no nachschlags.

In direct contrast to this passage, measure 70 would sound incredibly wrong without a nachschlag (see example 2d). There are many reasons why, but one is more important to the structure of the overall piece: it is the penultimate note in the final cadence of the exposition. Making this cadence sound as final as possible makes the listener aware that it is the end of a major section. The orchestra takes over in their ritornello like transitional passage to the next section. Without the added decoration of a nachschlag here, the audience might expect the solo to continue when it does not. Another reason why this trill deserves the extra embellishment is because it is the longest trill so far. No doubt Mozart made this trill last an entire measure because he wanted it to be obvious that the solo was coming to a close in this section. Adding length to an important pitch is one of the most obvious ways a composer can call attention to a note. There is even a whole note the measure before this trill, which is curious because it happens after a long string of fast sixteenth notes. But when a little thought is put into it, one can see that Mozart is now saying that the harmony is important at this spot by holding one pitch for

so long. As an exercise, playing just the two whole notes without any added embellishment, even the written trill, shows the need to add notes to make this cadence stand out.

Trills and nachschlags are not the only details to consider; which notes are slurred and which are tongued also brings up an interesting discussion. There are a few generalities to keep in mind with slurs in classical music. First, in a fast movement, the slurs rarely last longer than one beat. An exception might include a scalar passage, but if the slur takes away from the desired effect, then it should not be used. For example, measure 40 (see example 2a) contains an upwards moving scale and could be slurred, but tonguing each note adds to the lighthearted feel of the concerto. Knowing this is a matter of understanding the character or style of the composer.

Sometimes when a composer elides two different ideas into one phrase, the decision to slur or not can be difficult. In measure 59, there starts an idea including an appoggiatura (see example 2c), and these figures traditionally receive the articulation pattern of slurring the first two, tonguing the second two. After the appoggiatura, there is a triad ascending in eighth notes. Since the arpeggio is not stepwise, I tongue it. Then measure 61 is a repeat of measure 60, with a very important addition of an E-flat which provides the impetus to move into the next idea. This chordal seventh must resolve down, so Mozart does so and echoes the motion in another register of the bassoon imitating a two-voice melody on a monophonic instrument. Every time there is a downward sighing motion, I try to slur the two notes to bring out the sigh, but this would conflict with tonguing the D on the downbeat of measure 63 because of reasons of continuity from the previous measures when every downbeat was tongued. There are two options to maintain a consistent interpretation: either tongue every note in the upper voice in the following measures and slur the notes in the bottom voice, or forget about tonguing the downbeat and slur the eighth notes logically in pairs. I chose to slur the pairs of notes to make the two voices more similar.

One voice tongued and the other slurred while they are both playing the same figure does not sit well with me. The point is that articulations must be chosen consistently and tastefully in order to bring out the composer's ideas.

One more detail about Mozart's writing is that it frequently includes notes that look like grace notes but are not. They are usually appoggiaturas, which are often meant to sound at least half the value of the note they precede regardless of their printed value. Because they are accented dissonances, lingering on the note can be tasteful. Not so much that the rhythm becomes noticeably uneven, but just a slight lengthening is appropriate. The earliest example of one in the bassoon concerto is in the fourth beat of the fourth bar of the opening solo. The next downbeat also has one. Now, even though both appoggiaturas are written with the same number of flags, the first one comes before an eighth note so it lasts half that, which is a sixteenth. The next one comes before a quarter note, so its length is an eighth. They are in no way meant to be played as quick, unsubstantial notes before the beat. If anything, they are the more substantial notes and should be relished.

Indicated dynamics are few and far between in Mozart's concerto. The only dynamics marked are forte, piano, and sometimes a fortepiano, but that is more of an articulation marking like a sforzando than a dynamic. The opening solo is not marked with any dynamic. However, that does not mean that there is not a diverse palette of dynamic options to choose from. There are a large number of places to add echoes, crescendos, and other sudden or gradual changes depending on the shape of the line or what is happening harmonically. Just about any time the same material repeats itself exactly, there is an opportunity for an echo. For example, in the recapitulation of the first movement, measure 132 and the next measure are exactly the same. The first one could be played loudly and the second quietly to add some interesting contrast. If

this is the desired dynamic scheme, it is important to remember where the figure really ends, which is after the B-flat on the downbeat of measure 133, not before on the barline.

A small amount of instruction can make performing classical music difficult to make interesting, but a great deal of instruction makes the music no easier. In the Romantic Period, composers immensely expanded both the amount and specificity of notation between the lines. In the Classical Period, the inclusion of double forte was usually reserved for the grand finale of a symphony or the like; whereas in the Romantic Period, extremes were tested and anywhere from four p's to four f's were not commonplace, but not unusual either. Saint-Saëns was more on the conservative side of romanticism when it came to the extremities of performance forces and dynamics, staying neoclassical to a degree in form as well, but not on the side of harmony and the amount of instruction written on the music. Perhaps the complex relationships in the chromatic voice leading require the rigid control of a composer; allowing the performer to influence the music would risk too much. Nonetheless, despite the fact that there is no possibility for added notes, there is still ample room for interpretive discussion.

When it is impossible to add notes, it is important to do everything possible to reveal the function of the notes and the overall form to the audience. Although Saint-Saëns left many clues as to their functions, it is impossible to micromanage every nuance of every phrase. For instance, the final cadence in measure 44 of the first movement of his sonata, there is a clear phrase model with motion from predominance to dominance to tonic (see example 3). The dynamic last marked simply said piano, two bars before this event. However, recognizing the gravity of this cadence, growing through the dominance and relaxing into the tonic is appropriate. It is also acceptable to taper from the last place the piano marking was found. The tapering method is appropriate because this phrase concludes the majority of the entire first

movement; everything that follows is an afterthought, getting softer and softer. Tapering provides a more fluid transition with less rises and falls in the intensity, rounding out the form of the movement. When two or more interpretations seem correct, I tend to let the function of the notes dictate the way I play them unless the composer has indicated something opposite to my instinct. In this case, I feel the strong cadence trumps the piano marking a bar earlier and a crescendo is necessary. To support an interpretive decision such as this, I compared what a professional has done on a recording with what I want to do. Maurice Allard, one of the most famous French bassoonists of the early twentieth century, makes use of a crescendo in this spot. Therefore, it must be acceptable. This example entails only two measures in a lengthy piece, but any time somebody is playing music of any kind, there is always an interpretive decision to make concerning dynamics, tempo, rubato if there is any, articulation, phrasing, timbre, and any other detail that can be thought of to pay attention to. As long as the music is tastefully done and follows everything the composer wrote, a performer can do little wrong.

Maurice Allard is also playing the sonata on the correct version of the instrument, which is the French bassoon. There are a few differences between the French and German bassoons, notably the ease of which the French bassoon plays fast notes in the high register and the lightness of tone and articulation. To imitate a French bassoon on a German one, which is heavier in tone and more difficult to articulate quickly, a couple things can be done. A lighter reed can be made, or the performer can simply think about what the intended instrument might sound like. Oddly enough, if someone thinks about music that s/he is playing in a certain way as s/he plays it, it will come out that way. The same concept applies for imitating any other instrument, be they older or foreign versions of the instrument you are used to, or different instruments entirely.

Musicians are not confined entirely to the repertoire of their own instrument. Players of instruments that receive less attention in the solo realm frequently perform music that is originally intended for others. There is not as much music written for the bassoon as there is for the flute, for instance, which is my favorite instrument to borrow music from. As previously mentioned, Piazzolla's *Histoire du Tango* is originally composed for flute. The only problem with this practice is that the part needs to be arranged so the new instrumentalist can read it, especially if the instruments are in different transpositions. Luckily, the flute and bassoon are both non-transposing instruments, so the only transposition necessary was at the octave. Concerning the notes, the only decision to change any was whether to take the flute line down one or two octaves. For *Café 1930*, the range of the movement completely fits the bassoon's range if taken down one octave. There is one measure which would contain a high E, the highest note in the bassoon's range, if only taken down one octave. Taking the entire measure down two octaves instead of just the E is the proper solution. Changing only the E would change the shape of the line and skew the composer's intention. *Concert d'aujourd'hui* contains higher notes more prevalently, so taking this movement down two octaves avoids the problem of instrument range in this case. Also, taking one movement down one octave and the second two octaves provides contrast.

The purpose of all this consideration is to make music more interesting than it already is. Different eras of music have different ways of doing so. Even if two pieces are from the same era, they can be interpreted in very different ways. Careful analysis of the music and the composer's life allows a performer to provide interest in a way that is pleasing to the ear and the mind.

Musical Examples

Example 1a, G. F. Telemann, sonata for bassoon, movement 1, mm 3-4.

Example 1b, G. F. Telemann, sonata for bassoon, movement 1, mm 7-8.

Example 2a, W. A. Mozart, concerto for bassoon, movement 1, mm 34-45.

Example 2b, W. A. Mozart, concerto for bassoon, movement 1, mm 46-58.

Example 2c, W. A. Mozart, concerto for bassoon, movement 1, mm 59-63.

This musical score consists of three staves of music in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first staff (measures 46-50) features a melodic line with slurs and trills. The second staff (measures 51-53) contains a dense, rhythmic passage with many sixteenth notes and trills, marked with a 'B' above the staff. The third staff (measures 54-56) continues the melodic line with slurs and trills.

Example 2c, W. A. Mozart, concerto for bassoon, movement 1, mm 59-63.

Example 2d, W. A. Mozart, concerto for bassoon, movement 1, mm 67-70.

This musical score consists of a single staff of music in bass clef with a key signature of one flat. It shows a melodic line with slurs and a key signature change to two flats (B-flat and E-flat) in the final measure.

Example 2d, W. A. Mozart, concerto for bassoon, movement 1, mm 67-70.

Example 3, Camille Saint-Saëns, sonata for bassoon, movement 1, mm 40-47.

This musical score consists of a single staff of music in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features a dense, rhythmic passage with many sixteenth notes. The score ends with a double bar line, a fermata, and the instruction 'Tutti'.

Example 3, Camille Saint-Saëns, sonata for bassoon, movement 1, mm 40-47.

This musical score consists of two staves of music. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#), and the bottom staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Both staves feature melodic lines with slurs. The bottom staff begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic marking.

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