

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: *L'Instrument du Rêve: An Analysis and Performance Guide to Selected Works for Flute by Nicolas Bacri*

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This study presents a historical overview, analysis, and performance guide for four works for flute by French composer Nicolas Bacri (b. 1961), specifically, his *Concerto pour flûte*, *Trois impromptus pour flûte et piano*, *Douze monologues pascaliens*, and *Trois nocturnes pour flûte et trio à cordes*. Bacri is among the most important French composers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. His music is widely circulated in Europe, particularly in France, but he has not yet gained widespread recognition in the United States. His music is divisible in two compositional eras, an early era marked by an atonal aesthetic, often employing serial techniques, and, since the 1990s, an era marked by a reconciliation in his music between atonality and tonality and often referred to as “neo-tonal.”

The historical overviews of each of the four pieces in this study rely heavily on interviews I conducted with Nicolas Bacri and with the dedicatees of his music. The historical discussion for each piece aims to provide background information regarding the commissioning of the work, the reasons for its dedication, and the composer’s inspirations and compositional processes. This background information allows flutists to better understand this repertoire and enables easier interpretation of the music.

In my analyses of Bacri's music, I observed his treatment of melody, harmony, and form, in order to discover whether commonalities existed across his music. I found that Bacri uses both tonality and atonality very freely, and dissonant harmonies seem to be the norm in his music. He avoids outright declarations of tonality, rather, his music often exhibits a "tonal sentiment" through his use of pedal points and melodic pitch centers. Melody is of the utmost importance in Bacri's music. In his melodic construction, he favors long, *legato* phrases. Intervallic content in his melodies tends toward large intervals; major sevenths and minor ninths are particularly prominent. Bacri borrows forms from the Classical tradition and is highly concerned with cohesion, which he often achieves through cyclical treatment of melodies. Furthermore, all four pieces reviewed in this study exhibit significant use of a melodic motive consisting of a descending minor second followed by a descending minor third. I call this Bacri's "signature motive."

In terms of aesthetics, Bacri considers the flute to be "the instrument of dreams." Therefore, his music for flute tends to exhibit dark, melancholic, and nocturnal qualities. This has ramifications for performance, as performers must seek darker and dreamier tone colors for these pieces. In the performance guide sections for each piece, I offer my suggestions for effective performance of Bacri's music, including discussion of the pitfalls flutists face and useful practice exercises and techniques, drawn from my own experiences and from interviews with other performers of his music.

Nicolas Bacri is a significant contemporary composer whose work is a continuation of grand lineage of French flute music, and the research presented in this dissertation aims make this work more accessible to performers and audiences alike.