

*Tristan Migoski's Senior Honors Bassoon Recital*

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

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## Abstract and Acknowledgements

### Abstract

With the help of Dr. Keith Sweger, Professor of Bassoon at Ball State University, I put together a bassoon recital featuring works by Carl Maria von Weber, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Malcolm Arnold. The program included a bassoon concerto with a pianist playing a reduction of the orchestra part, a duet for bassoon and clarinet, and a piece for woodwind quintet. Audience members were able to read program notes providing background information on each of the pieces featured on the program. Here I detail the challenges I faced over the course of preparing each piece and how changing historical musical styles and the development of the bassoon shaped each of the pieces I performed.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Keith Sweger for advising me through this project. He has challenged me to become a better bassoonist and given me all the tools and skills I need to continue to better myself as a musician and music educator. Performing my own bassoon recital was a challenging yet rewarding experience and I will be forever grateful for his guidance, patience, and belief in my ability.

I would like to thank my parents Jim and Mandi for instilling within me a love of music.

## Tristan Migoski's Senior Honors Bassoon Recital

**Link to recording of recital:** <https://sites.bsu.edu/musiclive/2020/10/30/tristan-migoski-bassoon/>

**Link to recital program:** [https://www.bsu.edu/-/media/www/images/events/academics/schoolofmusic/2020\\_21/program%20pdfs/30%20tristan%20migoski%20str.pdf](https://www.bsu.edu/-/media/www/images/events/academics/schoolofmusic/2020_21/program%20pdfs/30%20tristan%20migoski%20str.pdf)

### **Process Analysis Statement**

The recital around which this thesis project is based began as nothing more than a suggestion (a rather insistent one) from my eventual thesis advisor Dr. Keith Sweger, my bassoon professor. As a freshman bassoonist studying music education, I was grappling with adjusting to college life and becoming accustomed to being a part of a bassoon studio with so many other great performers, many of them more advanced in their ability to play than me at the time. For the first time in my life as a musician I felt inadequate; it was the first time that I was definitively not the best performer in the room and that was a stark, if expected, realization. In spite of my apparent lack of performance ability in comparison to my older peers in the bassoon studio, Dr. Sweger was determined that I perform a recital before I graduated. His determination to have me perform a recital was puzzling at the time. I knew from looking the courses I would take during my four years at Ball State I was not required to perform a recital as a music education major. The music education degree already looked like a lot of work on the four-year plan. I was going to be taking 17 or 18 credit hours every semester and I had heard from my mom, who was herself a music education major, that the work associated with the degree was

already difficult and arduous at times with having to put in even more work in the form of a recital.

I told Dr. Sweger that I wasn't interested in a recital, that I already had enough on my plate and besides, I would have plenty of opportunities to perform in the excellent large ensembles and chamber groups that were available. In spite of my apparent lack of interest in a recital, Dr. Sweger held firm in his assertion that I should perform one. Semester after semester he kept the thought of a recital in the back of my mind and as I grew as a person, performer, and musician, I slowly began to see the appeal of a recital. I began to see how this would be a chance to showcase what I had learned during my time at Ball State. It would give me a chance to prove to myself and those around me that my time and dedication in the bassoon studio under the guiding influence of Dr. Sweger had changed me from a struggling freshman bassoonist who barely made it into an auditioned large ensemble, to a senior who was playing with the highest band on campus, the Ball State Wind Ensemble.

The first piece of repertoire that I began practicing in preparation for my recital was the third movement of Carl Maria von Weber's *Concerto for Bassoon in F Major, Op. 75*. The movement is an energetic rondo with frequent upbeat entrances lending a comical, off-balance feeling to the main theme of the rondo. These off-balance entrances in the rondo theme are contrasted with expressive, legato melodic lines that call to mind the style of the second movement. In turn, these give way to sweeping scalar passages before again coming back around to the rondo theme. The movement concludes with virtuosic scalar and arpeggiated passages meant to showcase the technique of the performer and give the movement a memorable ending. This movement was meant to be the highlight of my recital as it is bold, up-tempo, and very difficult from both a lyrical perspective and a technical perspective. Written over the course of 2

weeks in November 1811, the Weber bassoon concerto has since become one of the most recognizable and important pieces in the bassoonist's repertoire second only to the Mozart bassoon concerto written about 35 years prior. The concerto was written at a pivotal time in the history of Western music. With the end of the Classical period and the beginning of the Romantic period, the style and technical aspects of music as well as the function and design of the bassoon were about to undergo significant changes and the beginnings of these changes are evident in the compositional style of the piece. The concerto is structured in the double exposition style common in the Classical period in which the orchestra plays the thematic material first and then the soloist plays that same material directly afterwards. The Weber concerto is still fairly harmonically conservative, again in keeping with the Classical style, never venturing too far from the home key of F major and certainly not as harmonically adventurous as the works of the later Romantic composers like Chopin and Wagner.

The melodic range of the piece begins to depart from the Classical style. Whereas the Mozart bassoon concerto has a range of Bb1-Bb4, the Weber concerto has a range of Bb1-D5, extending the range of the piece upward by a major third in comparison to the Mozart concerto. This expansion in range was possible due to the changing nature of the bassoon. The baroque bassoon, primarily used in the classical era, lacked the keywork to extend the range of the instrument up to D5. In addition, the baroque bassoon was constructed with a larger bore to facilitate its traditional role as a *basso continuo* instrument rather than a melodic one. The smaller bore, more extensive keywork, and larger range of the new classical bassoon gave the instrument a new role both in orchestral and solo repertoire as these changes made it easier for the Romantic bassoonist to better project the sound of the instrument. This was an important consideration for a couple of reasons. The size of concert halls was steadily growing at the

beginning of the nineteenth century and the construction of the bassoon needed to change in order to allow performers to better project the sound of the instrument to the back of these growing concert halls. The size of the orchestra was also changing. While a typical Classical orchestra might have included flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, French horn, and strings, the Romantic period saw the inclusion of modern brass instruments such as trumpets, trombones, and tubas as well as an expanded percussion section. The addition of these louder brass instruments meant that the sound of the bassoon had to change to keep up. With better projection and more versatile keywork, composers began to view the bassoon as a melodic instrument and began writing pieces that featured the bassoon playing more complex parts other than the bassline.

It was against the backdrop of this changing role of the bassoon that Weber wrote the concerto with accompanying changes in the style of music at the beginning of the Romantic period. Composers at the beginning the Romantic period began to experiment with breaking away from the rigid musical forms, emphasis on balance, and harmonies that had dominated the Classical period. While the Weber concerto does adhere to the common double exposition form, the development section of the piece goes on for much longer than that of the Mozart concerto. This is because Romantic composers realized that they could use the development sections of pieces as a place to write in novel and adventurous ways, a place where they could flex their muscles as composers and really show how creative they could be in their compositional style. Another change in traditional form can be seen in the use of a cadenza. The Mozart concerto features an open-ended cadenza, one that encourages the performer to take a lot of creative, improvisatory liberty in how they choose to play it. The third movement of the Weber concerto on the other hand doesn't feature a cadenza at all. This reflects a growing trend at the beginning

of the Romantic period of composers wanting to maintain tighter control over how their music was performed. The notion of the Classical cadenza, a place where the performer had a great deal of freedom to choose what and how they would play, did not align well with this new trend. The move away from cadenzas is shown by the fact that the first and third movements of the Weber concerto lack cadenzas entirely and the second movement features only a brief cadenza written by Weber himself.

I began preparing the third movement in the fall of 2019 and was able to freely pick it myself. Dr. Sweger took a very hands-off approach and left the decision up to me as to what I would perform on my recital. My decision to pick this movement was strongly influenced by one of the bassoon performance majors in the studio, Sierra Watson. Sierra loved listening to and performing the third movement of the concerto, and her drive to master it inspired me to push myself as a bassoonist. It emboldened me to think that I could perform this piece of difficult, but historically significant and rewarding repertoire if I applied myself to the extent that Dr. Sweger (and ultimately I) knew I was capable of.

Preparing the third movement of the Weber concerto proved to be an extremely challenging endeavor. Within the first measure of the piece, I began to run into problems. The movement begins with a very awkward interval to play on a bassoon, a slurred descending minor 7<sup>th</sup> from F4 to G3. Playing this interval slurred on bassoon is difficult for a few reasons including the awkward change of fingering, particularly the need to execute a half-hole fingering on the G3, and the need to change the shape of the embouchure and oral cavity in order to make the G3 to speak correctly. This difficulty forced me to slow down and really consider how to play these two notes slurred and cleanly, putting slightly more weight or emphasis on the first note in order to keep the G from jumping out in volume and sounding uncharacteristically harsh. The next,

and recurring, significant challenge came a few measures later with a descending series of quick, tongued sixteenth notes. When I first started practicing, my tongue was always too sluggish, and I just couldn't play the sixteenth note figure at the tempo that I wanted to. I tried to tackle this problem in the way that I had usually tackled musical problems: by slowing the figure down to an almost unbearably slow tempo and striving for accuracy before gradually increasing the tempo rather than trying to fake my way through the figure just by blowing, wiggling my fingers, and hoping for the best.

After a few weeks it was clear that this approach was just not going to work. I would seem to make progress on playing the figure up to tempo only to come back the next day to find that my articulation was clipped with too much tongue and not enough tone, forcing me to start all over again and work my way back up to the tempo I had achieved the previous day. I came to realize that something must be wrong with my underlying performance technique and I went to Dr. Sweger for help. Together in my lessons we worked out that I had been using a syllable closer to "tut" and that its use was negatively impacting my tone, as well as the speed and clarity of my articulation. He suggested that I focus on producing a clear, lifted articulation using the syllable "tah" coupled with a strong, supported stream of air. Immediately after making these changes, I saw an improvement in my playing. After a little more practice, I could play the sixteenth note figure much closer to performance tempo, my articulation was much clearer, and I could perceive tone on each of the notes even though they went by so quickly. The knowledge I gained from working on the third movement of the concerto regarding how to articulate at a fast tempo and how to smoothly connect awkward intervals undoubtedly made me a better bassoonist and helped me with other pieces while preparing for my recital, but the second movement of the concerto would challenge me in a very different way.

I began working on the second movement of the Weber concerto in the fall of 2020, only about 6 weeks before my recital. When Dr. Sweger suggested that I play the second movement, I was initially very weary. I had already been working hard on the other pieces that I planned to perform and based on my experiences with the third movement of the concerto, I was worried that the second movement would simply take too long to prepare with only a few weeks left until the performance. Nevertheless, Dr. Sweger insisted that I learn the second movement, saying that it would be a nice opener to my recital and would present the third movement in a better light. I found the second movement to be much easier than I expected. The movement was not technically challenging in nearly the same way as the third and I found myself thinking that this movement might not be so bad after all. The second movement is in the style of an operatic aria with long, lyrical, emotional phrases strongly reminiscent of Italian opera that showcases one of the most beautiful melodies written for solo bassoon. The main theme of the movement could easily be sung and is comparable to the slow soprano arias of Weber's operas. It was the emphasis on slow, lyrical playing that challenged me while learning this movement.

The movement begins with an entrance on a soft, sustained F4, a difficult note to play quietly and with good tone on bassoon. This is due to the resistant nature of notes in this range of the bassoon and the fact that F4 rests higher in the harmonic series on the bassoon, necessitating the use of a more complex fingering and making it more difficult to get the note to respond properly and in tune. I spent quite a bit of time just on this single note, experimenting with what combination of air speed, air support, and embouchure formation helped that one note respond well without pinching my embouchure and hurting the tone quality. Since this was the very first note that I would play on my recital, I felt that it was well worth it to take the time to make this one note sound exactly the way I wanted it to. Part of this experimentation involved taking a

critical look at the way I constructed bassoon reeds. I eventually came to the conclusion that my reeds were just too heavy in general and that I should scrape more cane off my reeds in order to make them respond more readily. Playing on a heavy reed means that the player has to grasp the reed more with their embouchure muscles, in effect making the facial muscles work harder to achieve a desirable tone. In a lyrical movement such as this one with many long-held notes and few rests, this became a problem for me as the muscles in my embouchure would give out before I could get through the whole movement. Lightening my reeds also helped with the response on that first note. Less cane on the reed meant that it could vibrate more freely and that I could use better air speed and support in order to make the note sound the way I wanted it to rather than grabbing at it with my embouchure and tiring myself out too soon.

Moving past the first note of the second movement, I began to grapple with how to play lyrically and shape each line so it sounded tasteful and characteristic. I began identifying specific figures and places where I would grow to or place special emphasis on certain notes in order to bring out the phrase structure. This often involved emphasizing notes that fell on the downbeats of measures but also involved planning out my crescendos and decrescendos and deciding how much rubato to apply at important dramatic moments, especially in the cadenza at the end of the movement. I was, ultimately, creating my own interpretation of the piece. Dr. Sweger made a notable contribution to my learning process when he introduced me to the concept of using certain notes as “springboards” to help place emphasis on certain notes at logical places in the music. Especially when there was a large leap between two notes, I had a tendency to heavily emphasize the second note, making the figure sound off balance and not very elegant or refined which was not the aesthetic I was working toward in this slow, lyrical, beautiful movement. He suggested that I place more emphasis on the first note by using a greater volume of air, using that

air to “springboard” me up to the higher note. This helped my large leaps sound more elegant and characteristic. The second and third movements of the Weber concerto taught me so much about both fast technical playing and slow lyrical playing and my next piece gave me the opportunity to apply those skills in a collaborative setting.

The next piece on my recital was Ludwig van Beethoven’s *Duet No. 1 in C Major for Clarinet and Bassoon*. The duets for clarinet and bassoon in C major were published sometime between 1810 and 1815 and consist of three movements. The first duet begins with an animated *Allegro comodo* in a simple sonata form movement. The movement’s two main themes are played by the clarinet while the bassoon takes on a secondary role, providing harmonic support and facilitating the required modulations through flowing, classical lines. The middle movement, *Larghetto sostenuto*, shifts to the key of C minor. A lyrical movement, it serves mainly as an introduction to the finale, closing back in C minor after a brief episode in E-flat major. The finale is a lively rondo in the key of C major. The movement is full of classical refinement and grace, with the first episode characterized by a bouncing triplet figure. Interestingly, the second episode shifts back to a dramatic C minor giving a small glimpse of the future, more Romantic style of Beethoven. Written within just a couple years of the Weber concerto, this piece was influenced by many of the same musical and historical changes that influenced Weber. However, the Beethoven duet is noticeably more conservative in its structure and harmonies; much more in line with the style of the Classical period than the approaching Romantic period.

For this piece I was fortunate to work with my mom, Mandi Migoski, a great clarinetist who earned her bachelor’s degree in music education from Ball State. From the time I started taking piano lessons at the age of four, my mom always encouraged me to stick with music and pursue a degree in music education and I thought that it would be a great idea to work on a piece

with her as part of a recital meant to showcase how much I had grown as a person and a musician. We started to work on the piece together in the spring of 2020 and immediately ran into a problem. She was an hour and a half drive away from campus and it wasn't practical for one of us to make the drive every time we wanted to rehearse together. We experimented with playing the duet together over video conferencing software but that quickly proved to be impractical. The audio lag inherent to using such software meant that we could never line up our parts in way that we needed to. In light of this, we decided to dedicate our time to rehearsing our individual parts so that they would be ready to put together over the summer when I was home. Our summer rehearsals were very productive. Dr. Sweger and I decided that I should take the lead on aspects of style, dynamics, articulation, phrasing, and other musical elements. Despite being the less experienced player in the duet, we came to this conclusion because we were preparing for my recital and it was my responsibility to shape the pieces that we would perform.

Once I was home, the real work of putting the piece together began. All of the movements of the piece primarily feature the clarinet playing the melody and that was something I had to keep in mind while rehearsing. My part wasn't always the most important part and I had to figure out and discuss with my mom when to take on a softer, supporting role and when to bring my part out and let her support me in the places where I had the melody. We also had to be on the same page with regard to dynamics. The piece has many spots where dynamic contrast in the form of terrace dynamics is critical, so my mom and I had to make sure we agreed on where to play out and where to back off for the sake of creating musical interest in sections where the melodic material did not change. We also had to grapple with the differences inherent to our individual instruments, particularly in the areas of response and articulation. The clarinet by nature is slightly slower to speak due to its construction and use of a single reed to generate

sound. This also means that articulation on the clarinet is slightly more sluggish. The bassoon on the other hand speaks almost immediately when blowing through the instrument because the double reed that the player blows through to generate sound makes up the entirety of the mouthpiece. This immediate response also makes articulation naturally crisper and clearer in comparison to the clarinet. In light of these differences, my mom and I had to listen closely to each other to ensure that we were matching articulations and starting and ending our notes together. Collaborating with my mom on a duet was a uniquely rewarding and challenging endeavor, but the last piece on my recital would test both my musical ability and my capacity to work with other musicians in the Ball State School of Music.

The last piece on my recital was Malcolm Arnold's *Three Shanties for Wind Quintet*. Composed in 1943, each of the three movements of the piece showcases a different sea shanty; reimagined with the compositional techniques and prevailing post tonal harmony of the twentieth century. The first movement takes its source material from the shanty "What Should We Do with a Drunken Sailor". In this brisk movement, Arnold takes the melody of the shanty and fragments it, scattering portions of it across the ensemble with frequent interjections and staggered entrances of the main melody in variety of keys. This dissonant layering and interjecting contrasts with a discordant, yet sultry tango section later in the movement leading to an up-tempo restatement of the shanty's main theme and closing with chaotic, descending arpeggios. The second movement derives its material from the shanty "Boney Was a Warrior" and is calmer than the first movement. Each member of the ensemble gets a chance to play the gently bouncing melody that contrasts with the descending "laughing" motif heard in the bassoon and clarinet. The third movement is based on the shanty "Johnny Come Down to Hilo" and mimics the intensity of the first movement but this time with extreme dynamic contrasts and changing

meters. Like the first movement, the melody is fragmented but instead of staggered entrances, the different instruments are often nearly on top of each other interjecting between and finishing each other's phrases. The movement concludes gently, with the bassoon and flute seeming to almost whisper the last notes as they disappear into the air.

This piece brought together the technical and lyrical demands of the Weber concerto and the collaborative music making skills of the Beethoven duet. I was grateful to work with some wonderful musicians across four studios of the School of Music including RyAnne Mikos, flute; Alice Kussow, oboe; Joel Garcia, clarinet; and Tristan Bell, horn. We were also fortunate to have Paola Cubillos, our quintet coach, who always worked to help us play as musically as possible. We began rehearsing this piece in fall of 2019 and it was big departure from what we had all been used to playing. Up to this point, we had primarily performed works from the late Classical and early Romantic periods with predictable, but still challenging, form and harmonies. This was something new. We found that we could not rely on each other in quite the same way to know where our entrances were. The chaotic nature and unpredictable harmonies of this new piece forced us to rely more heavily on our internal sense of rhythm and trust our ability to count rests in the midst of entrances that always seemed just slightly off but were actually what the music called for.

We also encountered a problem similar to the one that I had faced when performing the Beethoven duet: the differences in the speed of response and articulation between instruments. The flute, oboe, and bassoon all tend to respond rather quickly, with little delay between blowing into the instrument and the sound being generated. The clarinet and especially the horn on the other hand, are slower to speak and this makes lining up articulations and note releases very difficult, with the musicians having to listen closely to each other and reach a compromise.

Another consideration is the very different tone produced by each of the instruments in a woodwind quintet. In comparison to a brass quintet for example consisting of two trumpets, one horn, one trombone and one tuba, the different tones of a woodwind quintet make achieving good balance and blend a constant struggle. The players need to be very aware of their role in the music at any given time in order to balance to the instrument(s) that has the melody. Most our rehearsal time was in fact spent trying to get all the members of the quintet to keep their ears open while simultaneously focusing on their own music in order to achieve that sense of balance between the different parts.

My recital was the culmination of hours upon hours of practice and it's still amazing to me that it was all over within the space of a single hour. It was a long journey from the time that I picked and began to practice the first piece of repertoire to stepping on stage the night of my very own bassoon recital, but it was a journey that I will always value for what it taught me about performing, music history, how to explain and execute musical ideas, and simply how to be a good musician.

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