

ELEMENTS OF JAZZ IN BASSOON  
SOLO REPERTOIRE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an exploration of music for the bassoon that incorporates elements of jazz. A description the musical features of jazz including rhythm, improvisation or implied improvisation, harmony, and melodic characteristics is presented and used as an analytical device. Five works for the bassoon are analyzed: Alec Wilder's *Sonata No. 2 for bassoon and piano*, André Previn's *Sonata for bassoon and piano*, Bill Douglas' *Partita*, Henry Mancini's *Piece for Jazz Bassoon and Orchestra*, and a new work commissioned for this project by Robert Branch entitled *Guided Awakenings*. The analyses are intended as a practical analysis exploring the characteristics of jazz in each of the works in order to allow the performer to form a better position for interpretation. In addition to analysis of works bassoonists who have earned a reputation as jazz performers: Paul Hanson, Ray Pizzi, Michael Rabinowitz, and Phoebe Ray were interviewed for further insight into the bassoon as a jazz instrument. Based on these interviews solutions to several issues a classically trained bassoonist faces when approaching works with jazz elements are examined. Because the context of jazz and these new works often requires it, methods of bassoon amplification and the use of effects are examined in-depth. As an ultimate goal it is hoped that understanding the bassoon's potential role in jazz can aid in the bassoonist performing works with jazz elements and that the methods described in this thesis will encourage performers and composers to utilize the bassoon in jazz, improvised music, and groove oriented music.

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“Jazz, pfft. They just make it up as they go along. I could do that: dee dee-dee dee dee dee dee ...”

Homer Simpson

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## Introduction

“And of course we all do this kind of stuff in classical music, we get analytical like this, but it’s really a whole new language”

Phoebe Ray

For centuries composers of art music have been inspired and influenced by vernacular music styles. In the Baroque period the dance styles of the commoner became the art music of the royal court. In the 19th century an obsession with the exotic led to Middle Eastern and Mediterranean sounds in the orchestra and opera. From the beginning of the 20th century to the current day jazz has been a source of inspiration for composers. There are many ways in which a composer may utilize elements of the jazz idiom in a composition that is not jazz. Some of those methods became full sub-genres in and of themselves, such as Gunther Schuller’s coined style “Third Stream”, while others have been used by only a single composer. There have also been composers of primarily jazz music that have written styles of jazz that have more academic or European traits, an early example being Duke Ellington’s “Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue.” Because the bassoon is not very often considered a jazz instrument the influence of jazz on bassoon solo literature has not been as strong as with other instruments. Within the last several decades a trend has emerged in which that seems to be changing. This thesis will explore some of the material for solo bassoon that incorporates elements of jazz in some way. First, I will determine what kinds of things might constitute jazz or an evocation of jazz. Second, I will explore several pieces in detail that include these elements in some way and on a case by case basis examine how these elements fit into a jazz context. Finally I will look to bassoonists that have successfully made a transition into jazz in order to gain insight into a possible way to approach this music. In addition to a basic analysis of several works I will provide some practical suggestions and strategies to aid

in drawing out the jazz elements of the pieces. These strategies are based on articles and interviews with composers and performers that span the “gap” of jazz and classical genres. To aid in the practical application of these strategies I will briefly show how they can be used in several other works of the repertoire that strongly feature jazz elements.

I believe this discussion is timely and relevant to a musical trend that seems to be growing. Bassoonists face a challenge in interpreting jazz rhythm and nuance authentically because most bassoonists do not get jazz training like some of their other woodwind counterparts. When a composer is influenced by jazz in a significant enough way it effects the performance style and interpretation needed for the piece. In order to meet the challenges of this growing trend the performer needs to be aware of these elements and have an appropriate knowledge and experience with them. This will aid in providing a well-informed interpretation.

A note about vocabulary use: A problem may arise when using some vocabulary that has multiple meanings. While it is not particularly accurate, for the purpose of this writing the term “classical” (with a lowercase “c”) will be used in the “record label” sense of the term to mean most of common practice Western European art music including the Baroque, Classical, Romantic and post-Romantic periods. For the term “jazz” we encounter a more difficult problem that is addressed below.

## **Approaching “Jazz”**

“Jazz is so many things these days that I’d be hard pressed to say what is or isn’t jazz!”

John Steinmetz

### **Definitions and Method**

The purpose of this thesis is not to define jazz. The topic of defining jazz has been approached in a number of scholarly works, many coming to an agreement on some factors that are possible to qualify as traits of jazz, but no consensus on a definition has been made. To complicate matters further there are many sub-genres under the larger blanket of “jazz.” To further examine works within the bassoon solo repertoire, and discuss ways in which to appropriately approach and interpret influences and elements of jazz in those works, a set of criteria commonly associated with jazz must be selected. In their essay “Three Approaches to Defining Jazz,” Gridley, Maxwell, and Hoff use these elements to balance the quantifiable characteristics of a piece of music with the listener's general impression of it to determine if a piece qualifies as “jazz” or not. I have based my analysis on these elements have been chosen because of their prevalence in this and other scholarly works that discuss definitions of jazz or sub-genres of jazz. Those essential elements are: certain rhythmic devices, harmonic devices, improvisation, form (either micro or macro), and melodic style. Depending on which scholarly source one consults, not all of these characteristics are required for a piece to be jazz. To make things more difficult a piece of music may have all of these elements and yet not be considered jazz depending on how those devices are used. While it is not a particularly scholarly method of analysis, the proverbial “I know it when I see it” is often the best indicator of identifying a piece of jazz music. As Louis Armstrong is attributed with

saying: “If you have to ask what jazz is, you’ll never know.” With that having been said, the above characteristics should be more clearly defined.

Rhythm is often the first cited element when attempting to define jazz. Specifically three rhythmic devices are common in jazz. “Swing” is one of the most obvious rhythmic devices found in much jazz music. Swing involves a subtle shift from evenness of eighth notes to an imbalance where the first eighth note is slightly longer than the second. Often this is described as a triplet feel, but as pianist and composer Bill Douglas has said “it’s more like a group of 7 with the first 4 tied together and the next 3 tied together.”<sup>1</sup> David Joyner says “swing is best defined as the superimposition of relaxation over tension.”<sup>2</sup> Patrick Gowers asserts that swing is “impossible to describe in words or analyze technically.”<sup>3</sup> To complicate the issue of swing it has evolved in the last 100 years, and many different styles now persist. Syncopation and polyrhythm are more clearly analyzed rhythmic devices used in jazz. Finally, jazz musicians often “lay back” on the beat, so that the melody creates a rhythmic tension or friction against the accompanying groove.<sup>4</sup> In duple meters the strong emphasis on the second and fourth beats, known as the “backbeat”, plays a prominent part of the groove in jazz and related genres such as blues and some rock styles.

Improvisation has long been a hallmark of jazz. The most common modern performance practice is for a jazz ensemble to play a tune (or “head”), repeat the chord progression and structure of the tune (the “changes”) while one member improvises a melody over that chord progression. The various members of the group pass the soloing

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<sup>1</sup>Bill Douglas, Personal interview, 26 June 2010.

<sup>2</sup>David Joyner, “Analyzing Third Stream,” Contemporary Music Review 19:1 2000: 81.

<sup>3</sup>Patrick Gowers, “Modern Jazz,” The Musical Times 103:1432 Jun. 1962: 389.

<sup>4</sup>Phoebe Ray, Personal interview, 25 July 2008.



responsibility “in turn until everyone is either satisfied or exasperated”<sup>5</sup>, then return to the written melody to finish the tune. Many ensembles will improvise over sections that do not conform to this structure<sup>6</sup>, and many larger groups, such as big bands, will play pieces that contain no improvisation at all. For some, improvisation is essential to jazz<sup>7</sup> while for others it is not a necessary component.

Specific harmonies and voicings of those harmonies are another feature that can make a work sound more like jazz, or may even define the piece as jazz. Most commonly those harmonies are triadic extensions, especially to the 7th, 9th and 13th, usually voiced without the fifth and in relatively close position. Further, chromatic alterations of those chords, such as a flatted 5th or 9th, are commonly associated with jazz harmonies. Chromatic substitutions of typical classical chord progressions, especially at the tritone such as replacing the dominant V7 with a  $\flat$ II7, are also common in jazz.

The way a piece is structured in either the micro or macro level is a subtle, yet important, quality in much jazz. The procedure described above, in which the improvised solos are bookended with presentations of the “head”, is a common macro level form for jazz. On a smaller scale there are some conventional structures that show themselves in many pieces. The 12-bar blues form and the “Rhythm Changes” are two such examples of these micro level forms. More broadly jazz standards tend to gravitate towards relatively short and even numbered phrases that repeat rather than individualized phrases that may overlap or be in uneven groupings like in much of classical music. A composer may use these devices with a specific intent of creating a

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<sup>5</sup>Gowers 389.

<sup>6</sup>Ray.

<sup>7</sup>Michael Rabinowitz, Personal interview, 25 June 2010.

connection to jazz. As an example, George Gershwin famously employed these conventions including 12-bar blues patterns in his *Rhapsody in Blue*.

The construction of a melody commonly goes hand-in-hand with the harmonic and rhythmic components. Jazz melodies highlight the altered chord tones and syncopation in some way. Additionally, jazz pieces have a texture that is most often a single melody with an underlying chord structure. This creates a texture that is immediately recognizable as song-like, even in sub-genres of jazz with difficult to sing melodies such as be-bop. Some early jazz styles such as Dixieland did not employ this texture, as the group-improvisation texture obscured any single melody. The articulation within the melody can also effect how strongly a listener will relate a melody to jazz. Most often jazz melodies are slurred with articulations occurring only to emphasize the rhythmic attributes or to denote phrases. When notes are articulated, “legato” is the general rule of thumb.

A final, and most difficult to quantify, characteristic is the composer’s intent. A composer may include improvisation without intending to evoke jazz. Also, a composer may include only harmonic devices and voicings intending the end result to be identified by a listener as jazz, even without any of the other elements present. This “composer’s intent” characteristic is sometimes difficult to glean only from the printed music and more clearly should come from a study of the composer’s other writings or by asking the composer directly.

This means that there are many features that can be used to determine how overtly influenced by jazz a piece of music is, and “the more [elements] that are present and the

more clearly they can be heard, the more a particular performance qualifies as jazz.”<sup>8</sup>

Gridley, Maxham and Hoff propose an idea of this idea in depth:

This approach acknowledges that different weights are attached to various elements by the listener who is trying to determine whether a given performance is jazz. However, this does not necessarily imply a hierarchy of elements, although many listeners attach considerable weight to improvisation and swing feeling and less weight to instrumentation.

They continue:

We suggest that, in the mind of the listener who is trying to categorize a performance, the jazzness approach derives from: 1) taking each element that has, in the past, been associated with jazz and accepting it as a dimension of its own; 2) weighing the relative representation of each element; and, finally 3) taking the number of elements together to lead to a decision of whether to call a given performance jazz.<sup>9</sup>

Gridley uses this strategy to determine where in a jazz “dimension”<sup>10</sup> a work can be placed. While I am not interested in defining any of these works as jazz, this approach helps us eliminate characteristics that fit into any pre-determined definition but in no way relate to jazz. Any of these aspects may be used in other forms of art music that are not in any way related to jazz, but the way in which these particular characteristics are used plays a more integral role in determining if it is meant to be jazz. For example when a piece includes a particular use of, say, an 11th chord the context of other elements determine if this is meant to be evocative of jazz or simply part of the turn of the century “breakdown of tonality.”<sup>11</sup> It is reasonable to assume, as well, that if one

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<sup>8</sup>Gridley, et al. 527.

<sup>9</sup>Gridley, et al. 528.

<sup>10</sup>Gridley, et al. 527.

<sup>11</sup>Gowers 389.

chooses to judge a piece based on the composer's intent, one may ask him or her if they indeed intended to evoke jazz or were influenced by jazz in the writing of it.

### **Scope of This Project**

The list of works for bassoon that include some element derived from jazz is on the rise so no comprehensive list will ever be possible. I have selected five works to analyze in some detail to show my own perceived intent of the composer and ways in which jazz influences either the composition or performance (or more commonly, both) of the piece. I have selected these works from different composers to show a variety of ways in which jazz has been used in the solo works for the bassoon, from the quite subtle to the very overt. I also selected these works because of the background of the composers. Each of the five selected composers has spent part of their composing and/or performing careers in both jazz and classical genres; the extent of which will be described in detail as appropriate. This is a contrast to many composers that have had careers in the classical world almost exclusively but have attempted to draw jazz elements into their classical compositions. Works like Milhaud's *La Creation du Monde* and Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G*<sup>12</sup> fit into this category. The works below are more significantly rooted in a jazz language.

Some of these works pose a unique problem in placing the bassoon in a context where it could never be heard without sound reinforcement or without special effects used on the instrument. As an example, the work *Axeman* by composer Anna Meredith specifically calls upon the bassoon to be amplified with a distortion effect applied so that the bassoon sounds like an electric guitar. The future of bassoon repertoire may include

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<sup>12</sup>Frank A Salamone, "jazz and Its Impact on European Classical Music," Journal of Popular Culture 38:4 May 2005: 735.

more of this application of pickups, microphones, and effects, and as such I will discuss, at length, methods that are currently available that can be used to this end. It is also difficult to discuss the use of bassoon as an instrument in a pure jazz context without broaching this topic.

Many of the composers and works to be discussed are influenced by other folk music of the world beyond jazz including traditions from various regions of Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. There is an increasing prominence of these musical influences in much of the contemporary repertoire for the bassoon. Much of this music intersects with the jazz-influenced works focused on here. While it is beyond the scope of this writing to determine if this is a part of a larger trend of cross-pollination in the classical repertoire, the strategies to approach the works that do feature these influences are essentially the same as those that are influenced by other musical traditions. John Steinmetz is one example of a composer who has studied, played, and composed music for the bassoon that is influenced by the Western European tradition, jazz, African,<sup>13</sup> and Japanese music. His bassoon sonata incorporates elements of Japanese Shakuhachi music<sup>14</sup> and the third movement of his concerto is heavily influenced by traditional African music.

Another new performance practice that merits consideration on this topic is amplification and effects. Thanks to recent technological advances the bassoon can now be directly amplified by way of several bocal mounted pickup systems. These systems allow the bassoonist to run effects commonly used on guitar that change the sound dramatically and open up new possibilities for the composer and performer. Already composers are requesting effects to be placed on the bassoon in their composed works,

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<sup>13</sup>Douglas, interview.

<sup>14</sup>Heather Wagner, "The Shakuhachi in John Steinmetz's *Sonata for Bassoon and Piano*," The Double Reed 33:3 2010: 85-91.

as seen in Anna Meredith's unaccompanied bassoon piece *Axeman*, which calls for effects specifically designed to make the bassoon sound like an electric guitar. The bassoonist can also accompany himself through sampling devices such as floor based loopers or computer software.

## **Analysis of Selected Works**

"I mean, as far as I'm concerned, there's just forms of music; people have different conceptions and different ways of presenting things. Personally, I just like to call it music, and music is what I like"

Will Friedwald

The following analyses are intended to provide context and pedagogical perspectives in teaching pieces in the bassoon repertoire that contain aspects of jazz. These five particular pieces demonstrate various ways and intensities jazz characteristics are used in the repertoire. Each composer has a unique method of incorporating these characteristics, and the concepts that may be learned from preparing these works can be applied to other works influenced by jazz. These analyses are not intended to be a complete harmonic and structural breakdown, but rather a general overview of style and construction so as to describe what elements of jazz influence these works. I will only include more detailed harmonic or structural analysis when they are relevant from an interpretive point of view or when they are needed to describe the influence of jazz on the work as a whole. This list also serves as a suggested program for a recital or studio recording.

### **Alec Wilder - Sonata No. 2 for Bassoon and Piano**

Alec Wilder was born in Rochester, New York in 1907 and studied composition at the Eastman school in the 1930's. There he developed a style that was a unique blend of traditional Western classical techniques, American popular song, and jazz. By the 1950's

Wilder had developed a close working relationship with some rather big names in the jazz, pop and classical worlds, including Frank Sinatra, Gunther Schuller, and bassoonist Bernard Garfield. His compositional output was substantial, including many solo and chamber works, large scale pieces for the stage and film and a large collection of art and popular songs.<sup>15</sup>

Wilder composed in the same time period and under the same cultural circumstances that led to Schuller's "Third Stream" movement. Wilder was writing works that manage an infusion of American popular song and jazz with classical music well before Schuller's invention of "Third Stream." The confluence of jazz and classical music was not an uncommon thread but Wilder's approach to this confluence is different than Schuller's. While Schuller's works juxtapose the classical and jazz elements, Wilder infuses them in a more seamless fashion: jazz is not an opposing element to some other style, it is simply there.

The ways in which Wilder incorporates non-classical elements varies from work to work. In his octets he incorporates a jazz rhythm section, while in other works the melodies are highly jazz and pop derived, sometimes with written "swing."<sup>16</sup> One curious feature of Wilder's music is a distinct lack of specific musical instruction that guide a performer for articulation, phrasing, and general direction. Wilder was highly inspired by the individuals that he worked with and wrote for,<sup>17</sup> and this inspiration makes the written page often lacking for formal direction. It is up to the performer to understand

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<sup>15</sup>Gunther Schuller, et al., "Alec Wilder Biography," Alec Wilder Centennial, Nov. 2010 <<http://alecwildercentennial.com/Biography.html>>.

<sup>16</sup>Schuller, et al.

<sup>17</sup>Robert Levy, "On Performing Wilder's Music - A Personal View," Alec Wilder Centennial, Nov. 2006, Nov. 2010 <<http://alecwildercentennial.com/WildersMusic.html>>.

the underlying elements and draw out the unique qualities of harmony and counterpoint in his writing.

Alec Wilder composed three sonatas for bassoon and piano. While much of Wilder's other work contains stronger influences or more obvious use of jazz the first and third were written for Bernard Garfield, a bassoonist that appears to have no direct connection to any jazz performance practice or tradition, and subsequently contain less jazz influence than many of his other works. The second of the bassoon sonatas, commissioned by the National Association of College Wind and Percussion Instructors<sup>18</sup> and written in 1969, contains the most prominent use of jazz characteristics of the three sonatas. Only the first of the sonatas is written in the traditional four movement structure of fast, slow, fast (scherzo), fast. The second and third are both structured with four movements of alternating style and tempo in the unusual order of fast, slow, fast, slow. While not uncommon for a four movement structure to alternate styles, more typically the structure would be slow, fast, slow fast (as in the Saint-Saëns *Sonata*). This unusual treatment of styles likely stems from Wilder's unconventional approach coming from being largely self-taught.<sup>19</sup>

The first movement incorporates the least amount of jazz elements of the four, with textures and writing styles more similar to the Baroque than to jazz. In it Wilder emphasizes fugal and contrapuntal lines rather than a single melody with accompaniment. The articulation of the melodic figures resembles jazz by utilizing slurred passages that have strategically placed articulations that emphasize syncopation and polyrhythm.

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<sup>18</sup>This is mentioned under the title in the publication.

<sup>19</sup>Schuller, et al.



72

The musical score shows measures 72-75. The Bassoon (Bsn) part is in the upper staff, and the Piano (Pno) part is in the lower staff. Both parts are in 6/8 time. The Bsn part has a melodic line with slurs and dynamic markings of *mf* and *f*. The Pno part has a chordal accompaniment with slurs and dynamic markings of *mf* and *f*.

*Illustration 1: Wilder Sonata No. 2, Movement 1. Measures 72-75.*

There is no implication of swing. Harmonically there is only a passing resemblance to jazz in the use of extended triads but in this movement the way harmony is used is no different than other 20th century composers that utilized extended triadic harmonies such as in the bassoon works of Paul Hindemith or Gordon Jacob. The structure is loosely based on sonata form, with an initial theme, developments of that theme, and a return of the original theme at the end. There is no traditional exposition structure.

The third movement incorporates more jazz elements than the two fast movements. Texturally this movement is much more typical for jazz with a clearly defined melody part in the bassoon and a chordal accompaniment in the piano. The piano part begins with a syncopated ostinato pattern in block chords in 4/4 time. The melody is built of short fragments in the upper register of the bassoon. Contrasting that fragmented melody are two sustained melodies, one of which is accompanied by the ostinato and the other of which is accompanied by whole or half note chords in alternating sections. After several alternations of these two styles Wilder returns to the fugal writing from the first movement using that first melody as a basis. The end goes back and forth between the two melodic ideas and the fugal idea very quickly before the movement finally ends with the ostinato pattern in the piano. There is a great deal of jazz influenced harmony to be

found in this movement. Almost without exception every chord is an extended triad, usually with some kind of altered tone added. The melody often highlights these extended or altered tones rather than highlighting the main triadic notes. The end of the movement provides more harmonic stability by stripping away most of the “outside” pitches and ends on a G 6/9 chord.

The melodic writing of the slow movements is one of the clearest examples of jazz influence in the *Sonata*. The second movement begins with extended passages of minor seventh harmonies and a melody in the Dorian mode. The resultant sound is similar to the second of Gershwin’s famous three preludes for piano. The texture shifts from primarily chordal accompaniment to canonic imitation in the piano of the bassoon part through the first portion of the movement. The through-composed movement ends with a return of the opening ostinato under the bassoon line in the highest register. The harmony throughout the movement stays almost exclusively on minor seventh chords accompanying a Dorian melody, giving this movement an art song form with a modal jazz flavor.

The final movement is a ballad that could have been written for one of Wilder’s vocal collaborators. Wilder consistently uses extensions of the triad in the harmony and the melody in a context that implies jazz, especially the 6th, 7th and 9th. With this movement he manages to incorporate the jazz harmonies with motive-based counterpoint. Despite its odd placement as a slow final movement this is the most conventional movement from a structural standpoint. Where the second movement is through-composed, this movement is in an only slightly modified sonata-allegro form. The bassoon begins immediately with the melody over a four voice accompaniment in the piano. The melody repeats in the bassoon down one octave with an altered form of

the accompaniment that explores new harmonies in only three voices. There is an implication of a first and second ending in the melody, which ends on a more clear cadence the second time than the first. There is a development of themes from the melody and accompaniment parts. The piano returns to the exact same material as the beginning of the movement but without the bassoon for the first three bars. The bassoon enters to complete the melody and a short coda ends the movement. The way the melody plays on non-chord tones, especially the 6th and major 7th is consistent with melodic writing in jazz. The slow syncopation and triplets that build in a sense of rubato also add to the jazz feel of the movement.

### **André Previn - Sonata for Bassoon and Piano**

André Previn (b. 1929) is a pianist, composer, and conductor that has led successful careers in the jazz and classical worlds. His early career is noted by his numerous recordings as pianist performing jazz standards with other jazz icons like Ray Brown and Joe Pass. As a classical pianist he has recorded the works of Mozart, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn with collaborators Anne-Sophie Mutter, René Fleming, and Gil Shaham. As conductor he has worked with many of the major orchestras in the world, frequently with the Boston Symphony and London Symphony orchestras.<sup>20</sup> In 2005 he won a Grammy for conducting those orchestras with Anne-Sophie Mutter performing works for solo violin. His compositions have a wide range of characteristics making it difficult to pigeon-hole all of his works into a single genre. Previn features elements of jazz and Broadway song style in works for everything from solo sonatas to film scores and opera. Previn has worked extensively in both genres and this gives him a unique perspective

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<sup>20</sup>"Biography," Andre Previn - the official website, Mar. 2010, Nov. 2010 <[http://www.andre-previn.com/e\\_artist\\_biography.html](http://www.andre-previn.com/e_artist_biography.html)>.

when composing and performing. His bassoon *Sonata* incorporates many elements of jazz for both the pianist and the bassoonist.

The first movement does not prominently feature jazz characteristics compared to the other movements, but Previn uses syncopation, polyrhythm and hockets that give the movement a strong driving force (with the obvious exception a section marked “Slower”). The rhythm frequently emphasizes strong syncopation and polyrhythm in a way that is quite jazz-like. They are not paired with harmonies or melodic material in a way that necessarily evoke jazz. Likewise the harmonic language is nothing outside of the range of any other turn of the 21st century composer.

The musical score for measures 33-37 of Previn's *Sonata*, Movement 1, features a Bassoon (Bsn) and Piano (Pno) duo. The piece is characterized by its complex polyrhythmic structure, with time signatures changing from 3/8 to 2/4 to 4/4. The Bassoon part begins with a melodic line in 3/8 time, while the Piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex, syncopated bass line in the left hand. As the measures progress, the time signatures shift, and the piano part introduces more complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth-note runs and syncopated chords, creating a driving, jazz-influenced feel.

*Illustration 2: Previn Sonata, Movement 1. Measures 33-37.*

The second movement expresses more jazz characteristics in the styling of the melody and in the way the harmonies are used. The first eight measures are in the same language as more traditional sounding pianists like Marian McPartland or Bill Evans. Counterpoint is a strong feature of this passage with only occasional chords, but the harmonies are always implied triads with altered chord tones. The waltz theme it not particularly related to jazz, although there are subtle implications in the syncopation of the melody and in the consonant nature of the major seventh chord. The movement

progresses through several short themes before an interlude in a slightly slower tempo. There is a moment of return to rhythmic stability before the piano has its own brief moment of implied improvisation before the return of the waltz theme.

The third movement is the most clearly jazz influenced of the three movements. There are sections where blues, big band, and free jazz styles are prominent. The form follows the loose structure of the first movement with a slow portion interrupting the fast and “very rhythmic”<sup>21</sup> material. The movement utilizes the blues scale for the melodic material from the very beginning, outlining a G7 chord while the chromatic passing in the bass highlights the flatted fifth scale degree. The mixed meters enhance the consistently syncopated rhythms, further adding to the jazz feel. The opening section ends with a blues scale followed by a series of ii-V progressions implied by the bass but alternating IV-I progressions in the pianists right hand and the bassoon part. The consistent off-beat accents with these harmonies are highly evocative of big band writing. One could easily imagine the bassoonist as the lead voice in a larger jazz ensemble reminiscent of the Glenn Miller orchestra.

30

Bsn

Pno

*f*

*Illustration 3: Previn Sonata, Movement 3. Measures 30-33.*

<sup>21</sup>This is Previn's indication in the score.

Immediately following this the style breaks into Previn's version of the Second Theme Group from sonata form. The lyrical bassoon line is harmonized by conventional triadic harmonies. The melody begins conventionally, but eventually becomes more improvisatory sounding and before the end of the section becomes evocative of free jazz, with highly syncopated clashing rhythmic ideas and unclassifiable harmonies.

56

58

*Illustration 4: Previn Sonata, Movement 3. Measures 56-59.*

A rhythmic modulation transforms the 4/4 time to a 3/4 "Slow waltz tempo." This departure from the outer portions of the movement returns to the opening material in its entirety with the addition of a coda.

This work balances a clear and strong influence of jazz with classical compositional techniques. The strong elements of syncopation and a rhythmic driving force clearly indicate the intent to evoke jazz. Song-style writing in the slow movement evokes a jazz ballad, and the high-energy big band writing of the third movement show the intent

clearly. A performer's interpretation of this work can clearly benefit from an experience in playing jazz.

### **Bill Douglas - Partita for Bassoon and Piano**

A prodigious youth, Bill Douglas (b. 1944) began playing bassoon at age 13 and began composing at 14. He received a diploma (not a bachelor's degree) in piano from The Royal Conservatory of Toronto at the age of 17 and received graduate degrees in bassoon performance and in composition from Yale. Douglas has always had an interest in jazz as well as classical music. While a college student he played bassoon with the Toronto Symphony and after hours played gigs as a jazz pianist. His student compositions often featured an atonal aesthetic sometimes utilizing serial techniques in the style of Schoenberg and Webern.<sup>22</sup> His diverse experiences as a student has certainly influenced his current compositions which are a fusion of jazz and classical music. As his former student John Steinmetz puts it, Douglas "is a musical omnivore."<sup>23</sup> Douglas has also written pieces and movements based on African rhythms, Indian scale systems, or incorporating atonal passages.<sup>24</sup>

In his chamber music Douglas commonly structures a movement around on a jazz standard tune. He will utilize the chord structure from that standard and write a new melody based on that chord progression, a procedure called contrafact. This is a common practice in jazz . He arrives at his new melodies by improvising over the chord progression at the piano and takes ideas from his improvisation and builds them into the

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<sup>22</sup>"Bill Douglas, A Musical Autobiography." Nov. 2010 <<http://www.billdouglas.cc/bio.html>>.

<sup>23</sup>John Steinmetz, Email interview, 26 Sept. 2008.

<sup>24</sup>Douglas, interview.

new melody.<sup>25</sup> Douglas then writes out a series of “solos” by individuals in the ensemble. These solos are composed rather than improvised, but are written in a way that Douglas hopes will sound as if they are truly improvised.<sup>26</sup> Again, Douglas writes these solos based on his own improvisations on the chord changes. After the solos the original tune is played again, with some variation, and the movement ends. The texture of a jazz combo: a “walking” bass line, chordal accompaniment, and a solo line, is another feature prominent in his compositions. Douglas’ extensive experience as a jazz pianist naturally influence the way he builds harmonies, especially in the piano part. Often the chord voicing choices reflect the piano playing of Bill Evans, who Douglas says is one of his primary inspirations.<sup>27</sup> Stylistically Douglas understands that many bassoonists, and classical musicians in general, do not “swing” in an authentic way, so he always indicates in the performance notes to play expressively as if playing Brahms or Mozart, without any swing. The movements not based on standards draw on an atonal language or elements from other musical traditions. In these movements Douglas still uses improvisational methods to develop his works the note to note material.

The *Partita for Bassoon and Piano* was one of many recent commissions spearheaded by bassoonist Richard Ramey. The five movements alternate between the structure of head-improvisation-head jazz performance practice and other forms. The first movement, *Bebop Cantando*, is based on the changes to the standard *There Will Never Be Another You*, by Harry Warren, in the more bassoon friendly key of B $\flat$  instead of the usual E $\flat$ . The first time through the changes the bassoon and piano play the new melody in unison. Douglas’ treatment of the tune is quite intricate compared to the original tune,

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<sup>25</sup>Douglas, interview.

<sup>26</sup>Bill Douglas, “Program Notes,” *Partita: Bassoon and Piano*, Tallevast, Florida: TrevCo, 2005.

<sup>27</sup>Douglas, interview.



with much greater note density over a much wider range and extensive syncopation. The left hand of the piano plays a walking bass line, which is the only other voice in the texture. The combination of the melody and walking bass are the only voices that outline the harmony. The second time through the changes the walking bass continues in the left hand, but Douglas writes a sparse chordal accompaniment not unlike what a jazz pianist might play on the changes when accompanying a soloist.

33 **B**

Bsn.

*f*

Pno.

*mp*

**B**

*Illustration 5: Illustration 5: Douglas Partita, Movement 1. Measures 33-36.*

The bassoon part is intended to sound improvised, starting with small fragments that get progressively more connected and long. The tessitura gradually builds from the middle register of the instrument to the upper-most register. In the next section Douglas abandons the strict structure of the original tune. The pianist and bassoonist alternate eight bar phrases, then 16 bar phrases playing the improvised style writing in what is a substitute for a formal development section. Through this section the walking bass line of the piano is replaced by more chordal comping in the left hand while the right hand is freed to play solo lines, counterpoint, or accentuation of the harmonies. The final pass through the changes is a slightly modified version of Douglas' tune, again played by the piano and bassoon in unison with a walking bass line.

The small change in the third time through the changes is significant. The nature of the “development” section breaking away from the strict 32 bar form makes the movement a bit of a hybrid between a standard jazz form and a sonata form. By making an alteration in the changes Douglas creates distance between this piece and a jazz structure while closing the distance between it and classical structures. The sonata allegro inspired structure also shows itself in other ways in the movement. For example, the repeat of the exposition is the first bassoon “solo”, and the recapitulation is the return of the tune. Douglas completes the form with a turnaround<sup>28</sup> which serves as a coda. This combination of structural elements from both the jazz and classical traditions creates a sense of cohesion between the two genres.

The second movement, entitled *Mirage*, is lacking any real features of jazz in an aural sense, although the form loosely follows the head-improvisation-head performance structure. This movement is described by Douglas as being atonal.<sup>29</sup> In this case, the vertical harmonies at any given moment can be easily described using traditional harmonic notation. Their relationships, however, are not appropriately described in terms of functional harmony. The resulting sound is one of consonant moments with sometimes jarring harmonic motion. This movement is constructed the same way as the previous movement: there is an initial presentation of the melody (16 bars long) followed by “improvisations,” although in this case those improvisations are not based on the same harmonies as the initial presentation (two units 16 bars long). After the improvisation section the original theme is presented in slight variation and the movement ends.

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<sup>28</sup>A term commonly used to describe playing the last 4 or 8 bars of a tune one or several extra times after the last iteration of the original melody.

<sup>29</sup>Douglas, interview.

The third movement, *Raga Todi Blues* is influenced by two primary ideas as evidenced by the title: a blues, and a *Raga* in *Todi*. A *Raga* is a form in Indian classical music. *Todi* is a mode used in that form that contains the following primary pitches (*That*):<sup>30</sup>



Illustration 6: Example *Todi* scale.

Douglas' initial idea with this movement was to present a *Todi* in a more traditional or pure form as a kind of drone-based piece, but as he wrote using his improvisation-based compositional method the movement became a modified blues.<sup>31</sup> The pitches, with a strong emphasis on the “blue” note in the *Todi* scale (*Ma*) and the existence of the lowered third, resemble the blues scale. In this movement “D” is the *Sa*, or tonic, of the *Todi* scale. A *Todi* does not contain a IV or V, and Douglas chooses not to disturb the *Todi* by introducing pitches or harmonies, so the usual chord progression of the 12-bar blues is not possible. Instead, Douglas substitutes harmonies based on the *Sa*, *Re*, and *Ni* pitches. Because there is no pure fifth on the *Sa* tonic, he often substitutes *Dha* as the tonic of a chord, which looks like a B $\flat$  major chord in first inversion in western notation. This causes a harmonic conflict by the end of the progression which starts in D minor but sometimes ends on B $\flat$  (with a strong A $\flat$  seventh). The movement ends on this B $\flat$ 7 harmony. *Raga Todi Blues* is structured in 6 bar units organized in the same way as the previous movements of the *Partita*: an introductory theme, solos, repeat of the theme.

<sup>30</sup>David and Chandrakanth Courtney, “Rag Gujar Todi,” *Indian Music*, 27 Jan. 2010, Nov. 2010 <[http://chandrakantha.com/raga\\_raag/gujari\\_todi/goojari\\_todi.html](http://chandrakantha.com/raga_raag/gujari_todi/goojari_todi.html)>.

<sup>31</sup>Douglas, “Program Notes.”

The next movement, *Jewel Lake*, is melodically and harmonically less influenced by jazz or blues and more rooted in contemporary popular song. The structure is a simple art song form with one verse, a brief interlude and a repeat of the verse. It is more useful to think of this work as a pop ballad or even a hymn tune than to try to impose any jazz nature on it.

The final movement, *Caribbean Jig*, is Douglas' contrafact use of Chick Corea's tune *Armando's Rhumba*. The movement is structured in the same basic way as the first and third movements with a few exceptions. There is an introduction that outlines a i-iv-V-i progression over a tonic pedal followed by a presentation of Douglas' new melody over the changes. The bassoon solos over the chord changes twice, with the second time having a penultimate chord in rhythmic augmentation that foreshadows a change to the form. Douglas repeats the introductory material but rather than continue with the changes to *Armando's Rhumba* he uses a minor 12-bar blues. He also changes the texture from a punctuated and staccato accompaniment pattern to a *dolce cantabile* sustained chordal accompaniment under the continuing bassoon "improvisation." The bassoon and piano take turns playing written out improvisations for several iterations of the minor blues. The final solo section is a pivot section that starts with the blues chord progression but ends with the sequence progression from the second half of the changes to *Armando's Rhumba*. This transitions into the final iteration of the original melody with a short tag at the end to finish the work.

Douglas has a clear intention to fuse classical and jazz genres in a natural way. Because of his background in classical music he anticipates a limitation with bassoonists and most classical musicians in their ability to properly interpret an authentic jazz style. The result is music like the *Partita*, which allows those musicians to play a written out

composition that implies jazz. Swing and improvisation, two important and primary elements of jazz, are missing in this piece. However, the often highly syncopated melodies over jazz chord progressions, the written out “improvisational” sections, combined with a typical jazz texture give this music a distinct and strong jazz aesthetic.

### **Henry Mancini - Piece for Jazz Bassoon and Orchestra**

Henry Mancini was a prolific composer of jazz and big band music, but is best known for his film score music, out of which came a number of popular songs. He was the recipient of numerous awards including 20 Grammys and four Academy Awards. His professional career began as an arranger for the Glenn Miller Big Band in 1946.<sup>32</sup> His writing is easily recognizable, utilizing a particular sound from his orchestration techniques which he literally “wrote the book” on. His skills in orchestration stemmed from a deep understanding of the individual instruments he wrote for. This is evident in the *Piece for Jazz Bassoon and Orchestra*.

Mancini’s most famous works fall into two categories: high energy big band pieces and lyrical pieces like songs and ballads. Characteristic traits of Mancini’s high energy big band style writing include blues oriented melodies, swing rhythm, tightly voiced parallel harmonies, and a dialog between a soloist and orchestra. The theme to *The Pink Panther* is one example of this style. *Days of Wine and Roses* is a well-known ballad that exemplifies Mancini’s style of song writing: Thick, multi-part harmonies for the strings accompany a melody of long lines. The *Piece for Jazz Bassoon and Orchestra*, written for bassoonist Ray Pizzi, is a multi-section work that contains both types of writing styles.

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<sup>32</sup>Roger Hall, “Memories of Henry Mancini,” American Music Preservation, 2009, Pine Tree Productions, Nov. 2010, <<http://www.americanmusicpreservation.com/MemoriesHenryMancini.htm>>.

Ray Pizzi is a California based woodwind player known as one of the few jazz bassoonists and certainly one of the first to truly specialize in the instrument.<sup>33</sup> Mancini approached Pizzi about writing a piece for jazz bassoon as part of a commissioning project by band leader Jack Elliot.<sup>34</sup> The two had worked together in Hollywood for a number of projects, and Mancini knew of Pizzi's playing. Mancini took several lessons on the bassoon from Pizzi in order to understand the instrument as a solo voice.<sup>35</sup>



*Illustration 7: Left to right: Ray Pizzi, Henry Mancini, Jack Elliot.*

Mancini's *Piece* is a large-scale jazz work in a modified traditional concerto format. The piece can be broken down into three movements but they are played *attacca* with transitional material between them. The first movement is in a tempo comparable to an Allegro first movement from the Classical era. The second movement is slow, in a

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<sup>33</sup>Barry McRae, "Sound Investment: The Loose Cannons," Jazz Journal International 56:5 May 2003: 10.

<sup>34</sup>Ray Pizzi, Email interview, 23 Sept. 2006.

<sup>35</sup>Ray Pizzi, Email Interview, 8 Mar. 2009.

contrasting key and not as long. The final movement is again fast and high energy, but departs slightly from a Classical form in that most of the composed material within it is played without the soloist until the end, when the orchestra gives way to an extended cadenza for the soloist before ending on a single tonic note, the same note as the beginning of the entire work. The work calls for a large orchestra, with three members per section in the woodwinds, a full horn, and low brass section, four flugelhorns substituting for the trumpets, and strings (including “legit basses”<sup>36</sup>). In addition to the full orchestra a rhythm section of drum set, electric bass and Fender Rhodes piano (“could be acoustic piano or synth piano”<sup>37</sup>) provides an authentic big band or jazz combo sound.

The first movement begins with an ominous chime and pedal low C in the basses with the soloist playing a syncopated pattern in 6/8 time. There is no classical exposition or other introduction by the ensemble. The first phrase outlines a chromatic descending pattern over eight bars and ends with a blues scale based “lick.” The syncopated pattern is initially very sparse, with just enough notes per bar to provide a sense of rhythm. As the pattern repeats each reiteration becomes more and more dense.

The musical score for measures 1-11 is presented in four staves. The top staff is for the SOLO Bassoon, showing a syncopated pattern in 6/8 time, starting with a dynamic marking of *p* and a tempo marking of *♩ = 80*. The second staff is for Chimes, featuring a descending chromatic pattern with a dynamic marking of *p* and a tempo marking of *♩ = 80*. The third staff is for Violoncello, showing a descending chromatic pattern with a dynamic marking of *p* and a tempo marking of *♩ = 80*. The bottom staff is for Legit Basses, showing a descending chromatic pattern with a dynamic marking of *p* and a tempo marking of *♩ = 80*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

*Illustration 8: Mancini Piece for Jazz Bassoon and Orchestra. Measures 1-11.*

<sup>36</sup>Mancini's term in the score.

<sup>37</sup>Mancini's term in the score.

The woodwinds provide a repetitive and simple harmonic pattern of descending chromatic diads as the written bassoon part evolves into a more rhythmically driving voice. The solo part shifts from emphasizing the second and fourth eighth-note of the bar to the downbeat and fourth eighth-note. The extra emphasis on the “big beats” of the bar, especially the second (backbeat), and the increased note density drives the orchestra. The bassoon, in this way, is able to provide the groove of the piece while the orchestra has sustained chords.

The musical score for measures 12-18 of Mancini's Piece for Jazz Bassoon and Orchestra is shown. The woodwinds (Cl. 1, 2; B. Cl.; Bsn. 1, 2; Bsn. 3) play sustained chords with a descending chromatic diad pattern. The solo bassoon part is marked 'sempre poco a poco cresc.' and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The strings (Vla.; Vc.; Db.) provide a harmonic foundation with sustained chords.

Illustration 9: Mancini Piece for Jazz Bassoon and Orchestra. Measures 12-18.

The tempo and groove feels like a fast swing waltz, with a subtle swing at the 16th note level. The bassoon part eventually becomes a rhythmic pattern on just the pitch of C in multiple octaves, frequently jumping between the lowest and highest C of the bassoon's range. In practice, Pizzi considers the exact written material as only a rough guideline for how to build rhythmic tension in the opening section. Pizzi also continues to outline the chromatically descending harmonic movement by way of the pitches B $\flat$ -A-A $\flat$ -G after the written line changes to just the octave Cs. So while this section is written out, the overall style allows for the freedom of the soloist to improvise in this section. The



harmonic ostinato is treated in diminution and the brass voices enter to provide support for the gradual crescendo. The harmonies also increase in density, growing from the simple diads to thick clusters moving in parallel motion.

After the opening the full orchestra drops out of the texture leaving just the rhythm section complete finally with drum set. This sets up the first real jazz groove. The rhythm section plays a four bar segment repeated to set up this groove, following the same chord structure as the introduction. The soloist plays the first real melody, in F Dorian minor, in a simple 8 bar passage. The clarinets and bassoons of the orchestra provide commentary on a repeat of the melody. The following section provides a contrasting melody in the brass section. Here we hear a typical Mancini sound, with compact voicings of fully extended triadic harmonies in parallel motion to the melody (which can only be inferred by being the topmost voice).

*Illustration 10: Mancini Piece for Jazz Bassoon and Orchestra. Measures 48-52. (reduction, non-transposing score)*

This second melody is not in a different tonal center than the previous one, as would be normal in a classical concerto form, but it does move further away from the tonic within the phrase. The first melody returns played in unison by the full woodwind section. This concludes a straight forward AABA structure, common in classical practice, but also almost a matter of course for jazz and popular song. As the last “A” finishes the score calls for the bassoonist to play a two bar solo break over an Fmaj7 chord. A solo break is commonly used in the standard jazz practice to set up an improvised solo section, and this piece is no exception. The bassoonist improvises over a short chord progression that does not follow any classical conventions. By including an improvised section Mancini establishes this as a true jazz piece. While the score indicates to play this section four times (with the strings adding harmonic support the last time) it would not be out of line, given the context, to repeat the section as many times as the soloist feels like it. After the improvised solo section is finished the second melody returns and becomes the beginning of the transition into the next movement.

The transition material is performed without the soloist in a section similar to a *segue* between numbers in a musical. The material transitions out of the 6/8 groove into 3/4, then eventually 4/4 time, all the while passing brief motives from the second melody around the winds and brass sections. The strings then provide a slow, expressive and harmonically complex passage that eventually provides a cadence to F major. The second movement proper then begins with two alternating chords; Fmaj9 and Fmin9, provided in arpeggiated form by the pianist and supported by the electric bass and strings. This pattern repeats once, but is derived from a “vamp” common in popular song, show tunes and jazz pieces. The soloist is given a lyrical melody in the highest register of the instrument, all written in treble clef. Mancini seems to deliberately choose

treble clef here as a musical indication. Mancini could have easily written the line in a combination of tenor (or bass) and treble clefs, but chooses to remain in treble even when the melody dips below the staff.

Illustration 11: Mancini *Piece for Jazz Bassoon and Orchestra*. Measures 110-113. (reduction, non-transposing score)

While it does not sound just like *Days of Wine and Roses* many of the nuance and subtleties from classic performances of that ballad can be applied to the melody here. Conventionally a jazz ballad gives the performer an opportunity to play with the time and adjust the rhythm more so than a traditional *rubato*. Even though it may not call for a swing rhythm this freedom removes any feeling of being “square.” This is the case for this movement, which has space for the bassoonist to improvise and embellish the melody, rhythm, or articulation. This is similar to the way one would embellish the slow movement of a Vivaldi concerto, although there are obvious stylistic differences. The melody repeats in the entire string section (except for the basses, who continue with the harmonic fundamental pitches) while the winds and brass take the place of the piano in providing the harmonic content. The soloist interrupts the string melody and the structure to play a written out “improvisation” in which the orchestra leaves the soloist to play a small cadenza. The cadenza ends in a way that brings about a return of the



comes together at a “big brass hit” and a return of the 6/8 groove from the opening and the bassoon improvised solo over the same chord progression as in the first movement. This time Mancini gives instructions to play the 8 bar solo section three times. The improvisation ends and the material from the beginning of the entire piece, with the sparse texture and rhythmic pattern on octave Cs in the solo, returns. Instead of a repeat of the first movement, Mancini creates a whole new section following that introductory material. For the next several minutes of music the orchestra is transformed into a Big Band. The melody of the first movement is used in its entirety, but it gives way to dramatic new material in the movie music style Mancini is well-known for. This new material reaches a climax in a way similar to the cadenza moment in a classical concerto, ending on a perceived dominant (it is not, if one considers the tonic key of F minor) that does indeed introduce a cadenza by the soloist.

The cadenza is unlike a traditional Classical era cadenza in that the composer has given some rudimentary instructions for what to do, providing a loose structure. Mancini indicates a pacing to ultimately approach a low G, which acts as a pivot to a “moody bluesy based on C7 chord” improvisation. When the soloist is finished the C becomes the final tonic along with the chimes and lowest strings, creating a bookend with the beginning. In the few recorded versions of Pizzi’s performance he mostly ignores the instructions in the cadenza, and instead plays his own compositional material; in at least once recorded instance he includes the entirety of his piece for unaccompanied bassoon entitled *Ode to a Toad*. In order to balance the length of the third movement the cadenza can be several minutes long. In true keeping with the classical tradition the cadenza can include material from the previous movements. Pizzi chooses to keep with the jazz tradition and goes in a completely different direction.

The title is only one indication that this work can be classified as jazz based on the dimensional characteristics of the work. Improvisation over chord changes, a swing rhythm, blues patterns, and extended triadic harmonies are prominent throughout the entire work. This work exists in a structure that film composer Patrick Gowers hoped for when he said “the most urgent need is to extend jazz formally.” Gowers bemoans the birth of Third Stream in his time, and hoped for both contrast forms such as the Baroque *ritornello* structure and for classical techniques to be applied to jazz: “The language of jazz does not need to be watered down and debilitated ... but its form ... needs to be radically strengthened, and this is where classical techniques ought to be applied.”<sup>39</sup> The *Piece for Jazz Bassoon and Orchestra* exemplifies these qualities.

### **Robert Branch - Guided Awakenings**

Robert Branch (b. 1978) is a Minneapolis based guitarist, pianist and composer. His style is reflective of the current trend of guitarists using jazz with a rock and roll or funk edge. He is often compared to Jeff Beck, Pat Metheny, and Joe Satriani. His 2010 album, *Courage to Be*, has been critically well received, lauding the subtlety of his writing and the “ability to write extended forms that hold attention.”<sup>40</sup> His compositions frequently feature straight-eighth grooves rather than swing, multiple meter changes, and motive-based melodic writing. I approached Robert to compose a piece for amplified bassoon with jazz combo because of his familiarity with guitar effects that could be applied to the bassoon and because I felt his writing style would fit the bassoon well. The piece is for bassoon with a jazz trio of piano, bass, and drums. An alternate piano version will be made prior to publication that combines the bass and piano parts to allow for other

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<sup>39</sup>Gowers 391.

<sup>40</sup>Pico, “Robert Branch - *Courage to Be* (2010),” *Something Else!*, 6 Oct. 2010, Nov. 2010 <<http://www.somethingelsereviews.com/2010/10/robert-branch-courage-to-be-2010.html>>.

bassoonists to perform this with just a piano. This will aid in its adoption with bassoonists for whom amplification is not possible or when other performers are not desired.

*Guided Awakenings* is written in a modified form of a jazz standard with one additional section after the solos. Unlike most standards the “head” in this case is an extended, three-part exposition that shows his formal composition background. A short introduction of parallel minor 7th chords establishes both the F minor key and a modal based tonal language. Branch shows a strong tendency to use 4ths in melodies and in vertical harmonies. He also establishes a similar orchestration aesthetic as Bill Douglas, with the right hand of the piano playing in unison (with some octave adjustments) with the bassoon on the melody while the bass voice plays in counterpoint. Because the piece is written for a jazz trio the bassist can play what Douglas would have had in the left hand of the piano, so the pianist is free to provide harmonic support with chord voicings in the left hand. The printed voicings are suggestions of the composer, and a competent jazz pianist may improvise his own voicings and rhythms based on the provided chord symbols as appropriate. The rhythm, especially when considering the clave rhythm of the bass, is Latin-jazz, with no swing, yet completely groove oriented.

The head is written in such a way that the harmonic movement starts slow and increases in pace with the introduction of new material. The first part, indicated with rehearsal letter “A” in the score, begins with a full four bars of Fm7 (voiced with the 9th in Branch’s suggested piano part). The harmonies shift key centers abruptly in keeping with the modal traditions established by Miles Davis in the album *Kind of Blue* and continued with John Coltrane in *Giant Steps*. At measure 15 there is an interesting counterpoint between the melody and harmony: while the sequence of the melody goes

up in pitch level the actual harmonies shift down chromatically towards the dominant of the opposing key of C# minor. The second major section (conveniently marked letter “B”) is solidly in C# minor followed by an abrupt transition back to F minor. The final section is the most stable harmonically, alternating between A $\flat$  major and F minor chords every two beats until the final chord, the dominant, which sets up the indicated repeat.

Branch increases the density of the melody as the exposition progresses. The beginning phrase is two bars long, with the second bar being a held note. This phrase repeats. The motive is then fragmented but still there is “space” and longer note values (quarter-note length or more) almost every bar. The whole section is 12 bars long.

The musical score for the bassoon part consists of four staves of music. The first staff (measures 7-10) begins with a circled 'A' and a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. It features a melodic phrase with eighth and quarter notes. The second staff (measures 11-13) continues the melody, marked with a crescendo (*CRESC.*). The third staff (measures 14-15) shows a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic and includes some slurs. The fourth staff (measures 16-17) begins with a '(h)' marking and continues the melodic development. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is not explicitly shown but appears to be common time.

Illustration 13: Branch: Guided Awakenings. Measures 7-17 (bassoon part).

The second part of the exposition continues on two bar phrase lengths, but the note density is greater, with more 16th notes and embellishments halfway through the second bar of each pair. This section is shorter, only 8 bars long. The final section is the most dense, with an almost constant stream of 16th notes until the final bar of the exposition.



The combination of the increased harmonic movement, shortening of phrase lengths, and melodic density replace the Western Classical harmonic tension building devices, i.e. modulation to the key of the dominant, with a rhythmic one.<sup>41</sup> Like a Classical sonata form Branch calls for a repeat of this exposition.

Rather than write a sonata form development section, Branch allows for improvised solos. Prior to publication, a version will be provided that includes a written out solo for the bassoonist who is uncomfortable improvising. Unlike the tradition of playing the same progression as the head, Branch has written a more conventional structure for the solos based on the harmonic devices of the head. The same harmonies are used, and in many cases in the same essential order, but with a steady progression of one chord per bar. The phrase lengths are also evened out, so the solo section is built out of three eight bar groups, in A A B form.

Following the solo section there is an 8 bar interlude that does resemble a sonata form development section where the primary motive is treated in a descending sequence before a return of the exposition material. The head is repeated in its entirety and a coda brings back the material from the introduction to finish the piece.

Due to the instrumentation and style of the piece some method of sound reinforcement is likely needed for this piece. Particularly the presence of a drum set in the instrumentation poses a problem for the bassoonist to be heard.<sup>42</sup> Further, the work was intended to also be used with effects to color the sound of the bassoon, which necessitates the use of microphones or pickups.

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<sup>41</sup>Gowers 391.

<sup>42</sup>Paul Hanson, Telephone interview, 19 Feb. 2008.

There is no doubt that even without a swing rhythm this work fits strongly into the category of jazz in the dimensional construct described by Gridley, et al. Even without that construct there is little question that a listener will understand the work as being jazz. The harmonies are consistent with modal jazz stemming from the 1960's, there is improvisation in a traditional jazz format, the instrumentation is typical of jazz, and the intent of the composer is very clear.

### Problems Faced Within Selected Works

There are a number of specific ideas within each of these works that are related. While there are obvious requirements of improvisation or groove based playing in the Mancini *Piece* or Branch's *Guided Awakenings*, some of the other works have problematic areas that should be looked at as they relate to each other and to the jazz idiom as a whole.

The melody in the beginning of the second movement of Wilder's *Sonata No. 2* has a curious notation at the end of the first and third of the initial phrases: a dotted quarter tied to an eighth of the same pitch. Wilder could have written this as a simple half note as he did in the alternating phrases, but the natural inclination of a classical player, without being given any other indication, is to diminuendo on a half note in that context in order to round the phrase ending. By writing the phrase ending as he did, the indication is for the performer to give a subtle rhythmic emphasis on the end of the note, which coincides in every instance with the syncopated chord from the piano.



Illustration 14: Wilder Sonata No. 2, Movement 3. Measures 2-7.

In the return of this material down one octave later in the movement the tied C and B pitches are notated first as a half tied to an eighth, then as a quarter tied to an eighth. Because Wilder seems to establish his own notational method here, the performer should emphasize the tied note in the same way both times. This further emphasizes the syncopated nature of the melody.

The third movement of Previn's *Sonata* stands out for not only the rhythmic drive and the harmonies used, but the clear intent of the composer to write in a bluesy and bebop influenced style. The straight eighth notes in no way impinge on that style. The regular use of syncopation and different kinds of polyrhythm give the movement forward propulsion and groove. The performer's articulation of these rhythms can more clearly convey the jazz rhythm inspiration behind them. The material used in the opening bar can be played legato to emphasize the relationship to jazz. In other sections that are intended to be more punctuated a crisp front and end to the notes bring out the big band style articulation. That method of articulation is also appropriate in passages such as the syncopated pattern seen in bars 8-10 and 141-143. Further, Previn has clearly marked a hyper syncopation in the passage immediately following that, which should be brought out.

141

Bsn. *f*

Pno. *f*

144 *mf* *pp sub.*

8<sup>va</sup>

Illustration 15: Previn Sonata, Movement 3. Measures 141-149.

Overall it is the rhythm and the articulation of that rhythm that can make a listener relate this movement to jazz. Likewise, in the first movement of Wilder's *Sonata* the bassoonist should direct the phrases to highlight the extended harmonies and emphasize the polyrhythm in order to draw out any jazz qualities of the movement.

Branch, Previn, and Douglas all make demands on the player to continue the forward motion and groove, even over complex syncopations and sometimes mixed meters. In the same way as the third movement, the first movement of Previn's *Sonata* contains passages where the syncopation is at odds with the piano part, but must flow smoothly into the following slurred portion of the phrase.



Illustration 16: Previn Sonata, Movement 1. Measures 47-50.

Douglas and Branch have written melodies that have continuous syncopations that drive the rhythm forward in much the same way.<sup>43</sup> I will provide a more detailed discussion of issues of jazz rhythm and groove later.

Improvisation is a clear feature in both *Guided Awakenings* and in the *Piece for Jazz Bassoon and Orchestra* by the inclusion of passages with soloing over chord changes. Bill Douglas' works all feature extended sections where the writing is meant to sound like a jazz player improvising. Beyond these most obvious examples there are improvisational features in the other two works by Previn and Wilder.

In the second movement of the Wilder sonata the bassoon part is written in such a vocal way it implies improvisatory freedom. The phrases of the bassoon melody are separated by continuing piano accompaniment that never plays the melody itself. The bassoonist needs to be aware that texturally Wilder is treating the bassoon as a real solo voice throughout the entire movement. Previn's sonata has a passage with a similar idea of improvisatory freedom in the second movement. After the initial statement of the melody the bassoon has a moment of implied improvisation, with sweeps of 11 and 12 note tuplets and trills over a static piano rhythm.

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<sup>43</sup>See Illustrations 5 and 13 above.

44

Bsn

pp

12

tr

Pno

pp

12

tr

Illustration 17: Previn Sonata, Movement 2. Measures 44-45.

Prior to the return of the opening material at the end there is another “improvisation” section with the tempo marking of “A little slower” with similar sweeping tuplets over a mostly static piano part. The bassoon part is varied in rhythm and does not fit into functional harmony. The performer should be aware of moments that have true improvisatory freedom, like the second movement of Mancini's *Piece*, or that imply this freedom in contexts such as in the Wilder and Previn *Sonatas*.

The most perplexing moment of Wilder's *Sonata* is the very end of it. The harmonies are at odds with what one would expect from the end of the piece, the penultimate chord is consonant D $\flat$  major, but the final chord is highly dissonant: A B $\flat$  sonority is implied by the root and fifth, but a simultaneously sounding F, G $\sharp$ , D $\flat$ , and E natural, while the bassoon plays a C; this makes for a disturbing ending. Wilder almost provides a major 9<sup>th</sup> chord, common in jazz, but the change of two voices to the G $\sharp$  and E make this chord unclassifiable. This is not to say for certain that these harmonies are derived from jazz but these are things to consider when forming an interpretation of the ending.



Illustration 18: Wilder Sonata No. 2, Movement 4. Final 4 measures.

## Performance and Pedagogical Methods

“A ‘square’ is someone with no goals, sense of adventure or fun.”

Ray Pizzi

### Exploration of Jazz Bassoonists

In an attempt to completely bridge the gap between classical music and jazz, any musician must immerse themselves in their unfamiliar genre to fully embrace the vocabulary and nuance of that other language. In the case of bassoonists, the direction is always to cross over from classical to jazz. While there are a handful of woodwind players that have played the bassoon on occasion (Illinois Jacquet and Yusef Lateef are two examples)<sup>44</sup> there are others that have taken the bassoon as their primary instrument in several sub-genres of the jazz idiom. There are a few notable bassoonists in particular who have made their careers playing jazz or some form of cross-over music at a level that has earned them respect in both the jazz and classical communities. Bassoonists interested in performing in this context, or music related to it, would be encouraged to listen to these players and heed their advice. I have selected the following

<sup>44</sup>McRae.

particular players for their prominence in the genre and because they each represent the bassoon in a different sub-genre of jazz.

Ray Pizzi was one of the first musicians to take the bassoon into the jazz idiom as a primary instrument. Pizzi studied bassoon with Simon Kovar and earned degrees from the Boston Conservatory and the Berkeley School of Music.<sup>45</sup> Pizzi began playing jazz saxophone in high school and his regular work as a jazz saxophonist certainly helped formulate his jazz bassoon playing. Pizzi is featured on numerous recordings as soloist or as a guest artist with Dizzy Gillespie, Dinah Shore, and others. His influences have also spread as an educator, having taught in the public school system and at the Mancini Institute until its closure in 2006.<sup>46</sup> Most recently Pizzi is known as a composer of many short pieces for jazz bassoon which he publishes himself. In his writing he especially utilizes the bassoon's ability to make large leaps.<sup>47</sup> The pieces are typically based on AABA song form or 12-bar blues although there are, of course, exceptions. The pieces highlight a quirky aesthetic (with titles such as *Funky Fagotto* and *Ode to a Toad*) towards the bassoon and are often blues oriented in style. Pizzi is a "purist" of the bassoon tone, in his own words: "I strive to present the personality, texture and timbre of the bassoon both in my playing and my writing."<sup>48</sup> His intent seems to be to maintain the bassoon character, rather than treating the bassoon like a saxophone in a jazz context. He is quite adamantly against use of amplification tools and effects on the bassoon, saying that he "would rather spend [his] time studying music rather than electronics."<sup>49</sup> When faced

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<sup>45</sup>Ray Pizzi, Nov 2010 <<http://www.raypizzi.com>>.

<sup>46</sup>[www.raypizzi.com](http://www.raypizzi.com).

<sup>47</sup>Pizzi, Mar. 8 2009.

<sup>48</sup>Pizzi, Sept. 23 2006.

<sup>49</sup>Pizzi, Mar. 8 2009.



with an issue of balance with an ensemble, Pizzi makes sure his rhythm section is aware of the dynamics they need to play in order for him to be heard. In the instances where he absolutely needs to have a microphone in order to be heard he will use a single traditional instrument microphone placed near the low C key.<sup>50</sup>

Michael Rabinowitz is a New York area bassoonist that plays with the Charles Mingus Orchestra and his own quartet “Bassoon in the Wild.” Rabinowitz has recorded five albums as the leader of his quintet since 1995 and has regularly appeared as soloist or collaborator in jazz settings across the world.<sup>51</sup> Unlike Pizzi, Rabinowitz has always been primarily a bassoonist and his jazz background is not based on experience on a saxophone. Rabinowitz’s style can be described as a straight ahead, traditional bebop or hard-bop style jazz instrumentalist.<sup>52</sup> His recordings and performances with Bassoon in the Wild are similar in style to many jazz saxophonists, trumpeters, or guitar players. Rabinowitz believes that improvisation is an integral part of jazz and gravitates towards projects where improvisation is a feature. In the contexts and venues that Rabinowitz plays, in big bands or with his combo, projection and sound reinforcement is an issue. Depending on the situation Rabinowitz uses different methods of capturing the bassoon sound in order to be heard. These methods often include a bocal mounted pickup microphone and one or two condenser microphones placed in strategic locations around the instrument. Until recently Rabinowitz was using the Telex bocal mounted pickup microphone, but has switched to the “Little-Jake.”<sup>53</sup> Rabinowitz also uses the bocal pickup to occasionally put effects on the bassoon sound. He especially likes envelope filter

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<sup>50</sup>Pizzi, Mar. 8 2009.

<sup>51</sup>“Biography,” Michael Rabinowitz - Jazz Bassoonist, Nov. 2010 <<http://jazzbassoonist.com/>>.

<sup>52</sup>Hanson, Interview.

<sup>53</sup>Michael Rabinowitz, Personal interview, 25 June 2010.

effects like the Mutron<sup>54</sup> because it allows him to sculpt and shape notes in ways that are not possible otherwise.<sup>55</sup>

Paul Hanson is a winner of multiple awards for jazz, and in many cases is the first or only bassoonist to win those awards.<sup>56</sup> In the late 1970's Hanson began his career as a jazz saxophonist, paying his way through college playing in funk bands while studying classical bassoon at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Hanson's playing incorporates elements of world music (especially Bulgarian folk music), the modal jazz styles of Miles Davis and John Coltrane, and the electric guitar playing of Jimi Hendrix.<sup>57</sup> Hanson is especially known for playing the bassoon with a pickup microphone attached to the bocal. His earliest experiments were with a microphone dropped down the bell of the bassoon. The microphone was then plugged into a reel to reel tape deck with a built in speaker. The results were an over-driven sound similar to those used by electric guitarists.<sup>58</sup> By the 1990's Hanson had shifted almost completely from a saxophone player to bassoonist, heavily incorporating amplification using the FRAP (Flat Response Audio Pickup) attached to his bocal and utilizing many guitar effects units. He has also been involved in a number of world music ensembles, most notably the Middle-Eastern crossover ensemble DAVKA.<sup>59</sup> His 2008 album *Frolic in the Land of Plenty* incorporates large amounts of effects on the bassoon, done both live in the studio and in post processing. In particular, the title track of the album has many overdubs and harmonizer

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<sup>54</sup>Michael Rabinowitz, "Bassoon Amplification in Jazz and Popular Music," A Bundle of Joy: A Practical Handbook for the Bassoon, ed. Maarten Vonk (FagotAtelier Maarten Vonk 2007) 110.

<sup>55</sup>Rabinowitz, Interview.

<sup>56</sup>PaulHansonMusic, Manzanita Ranch Music, Nov 2010 <<http://www.paulhansonmusic.com>>.

<sup>57</sup>"Paul Hanson: 'I'm an Improviser,'" The Double Reed 23:3 2000: 91.

<sup>58</sup>"Paul Hanson: 'I'm an Improviser.'"

<sup>59</sup>Paul Hanson, "My Life as a Bassoonist and Improviser," The Double Reed 28:3 2005: 105.

effects to create a virtual bassoon ensemble that is even further transformed by envelope filters, delay effects and splicing. The result is something that is quite common in the Electronica genre where samples of sounds are cut and pasted in the studio to create sounds not possible live, and in many cases changes to the sound are made so that it is not immediately recognizable as a bassoon. In his more recent work with The Flecktones and Cirque du Soleil effects were not a primary component of his playing, but he still utilized the FRAP in order to be heard in those venues.<sup>60</sup> Like Rabinowitz, improvisation is a critical component in jazz for Hanson. In interviews, emails and in articles he has written Hanson frequently mentions a gravitation towards any groove based music, whether jazz, electronica, world music, funk, or pop.

Karen Borca is a New York area free-jazz bassoonist. Her jazz career is notably influenced by saxophonist Jimmy Lyons, having played in Cecil Taylor's band and subsequent bands derived of members from that original ensemble.<sup>61</sup> Her playing is very similar to that of Lyons', with light technical facility and a bright, reedy sound. She is able to match the volume of her band mates with a combination of microphones either attached to her instrument or mounted to it, or a combination of both. The close proximity of the microphones to her instrument bring out the brighter qualities of the bassoon tone color.

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<sup>60</sup>Hanson, Interview.

<sup>61</sup>Chris Kelsey, "Karen Boca," AllMusic, Nov. 2010 <<http://www.allmusic.com/artist/karen-borca-p360709>>.



*Illustration 19: Karen Borca with a dual microphone setup.*

From a stylistic perspective her playing is highly unconventional for a bassoonist. The nature of the free jazz style necessitates a looseness in both rhythm and technique that would be inappropriate in classical playing. This looseness is not to imply Borca's technique is not refined or that it is "sloppy" but rather that the nuance is quite different from the technique applied in similarly rapid passages in, say, Ravel's *Piano Concerto in*

G. Of course, the nature of “free” in free jazz implies a great deal of improvisation, although playing “inside” the key is less of a concern than with the styles of Rabinowitz and Hanson.

Phoebe Ray studied bassoon with David Van Hoesen at the Eastman School and had a relatively typical classical bassoon playing career. She had some background in jazz piano, and after some piano lessons with jazz pianist Bill Cunliffe she began to apply those concepts to her bassoon playing. Cunliffe then founded the jazz chamber ensemble Trimotif with Ray and two other Los Angeles area musicians; flutist David Shostac and oboist Chris Bleth.<sup>62</sup> The style of the group is similar to the music of Bill Douglas, with much of the music being formally written out, but unlike in the music of Douglas, Trimotif is an improvising ensemble. Much of the music Cunliffe writes for Trimotif is meant to be played in a real jazz style, including swing rhythms and improvising over chord changes. Due to the nature of the group and of the requirements of the bassoon in that ensemble, Ray does not amplify the bassoon or attempt to adjust her sound for a jazz setting. She utilizes the same “dark, full, rich” orchestral sound when playing jazz: “I don’t find that thin bright sound very flexible, nor do I find a big dark sound a limitation.”<sup>63</sup> In the ensemble Trimotif, Ray’s difficulties with balance and projection are no different than what a bassoonist would encounter in any other ensemble with piano, so her sound concept is appropriate in this situation. Paul Hanson collaborated for a project with guitarist Steve Erquiaga where the bassoon did not need any amplification and the sound of the bassoon could be the dark, more orchestral sound and still be heard.<sup>64</sup> This more standard approach to the bassoon in a jazz context, especially in the

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<sup>62</sup>Trimotif. Nov 2010 <<http://www.trimotif.com/index.htm>>.

<sup>63</sup>Ray.

<sup>64</sup>Hanson, Interview.

more typical instrumentation of Trimotif, is especially appropriate for other bassoonists beginning to play jazz. Ray's influences for jazz are mostly saxophone players, especially her mentor Bob Shepherd.<sup>65</sup>

All of these bassoonists share similar influential backgrounds as other jazz musicians and other bassoonists. Every one is a classically trained (to one degree or another) bassoonist first and has a strong basis in classical playing. Hanson even specifically advocates for a strong classical foundation from which to draw upon for playing jazz.<sup>66</sup> Their jazz styles are drawn from other jazz wind players, singers, and pianists. Their sound concepts are highly based on the style of jazz they play. Ultimately this is no different from any other jazz musician, so the strategies of making the transition are not unique to the bassoon. By following their examples of embracing jazz and other musical traditions on the bassoon, other bassoonists can apply the knowledge they gain from their own experience to works influenced by those traditions.

### **Problems for the Classically Trained**

These five bassoonists bring to light many issues that face the classical player when the context of jazz arises. The majority of bassoonists are classically trained, and seldom receive any training in the jazz idiom. These players set an example of how the bassoon can be utilized in a jazz context, and by extension, how pieces for the bassoon involving jazz elements may be interpreted with an honest and authentic jazz perspective. The lack of experience in jazz and other musical styles (funk, African music, Middle-Eastern music, etc.) make forming an educated interpretation difficult in many situations. While phrasing choices can highlight jazz harmonic and melodic attributes, composed elements

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<sup>65</sup>Ray.

<sup>66</sup>Hanson, "My Life as a Bassoonist and Improviser" 98.

of harmony, voicing, and melodies are not something the performer has control over, so the issues most directly effecting the performer are those related to rhythm and improvisation.

Bassoonists that only have experience in classical music often have difficulty with rhythmic issues in jazz that result in the bassoonist being “square.” Primarily this means that the player is unable to authentically swing, but it also means that the subtlety and nuance of phrasing found in jazz is weak or non-existent. According to Bill Douglas, two things often happen when this kind of musician attempts to play swing: the players overdo the triplets and they lose expressiveness.<sup>67</sup> This is why he specifically does not want musicians to attempt to swing his music. In the more detailed cases above only the Mancini piece shows any requirement of swing, and that piece is so steeped in the jazz idiom that a bassoonist unable to swing is likely unable to improvise over changes as needed as well. For the few more classically oriented works that involve swing the biggest issue that occurs is the over-exaggeration of the swing rhythm.

Another issue a classical musician might face is dealing with “groove.” When a work does not call for swinging rhythm, but has other examples of jazz influenced rhythm as in the Bill Douglas *Partita*, the groove-based nature of the music is still an integral part. The consistent syncopation within that groove can be difficult for classically trained musicians if they have little experience playing music that features those rhythmic concepts.<sup>68</sup> If, as David Joyner says, maintaining the groove is “paramount to the jazz aesthetic”<sup>69</sup> a bassoonist performing groove oriented music had better learn to do so!

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<sup>67</sup>Douglas, interview.

<sup>68</sup>Hanson, Interview.

<sup>69</sup>Joyner 81.

Beyond maintaining the groove with repeated syncopated rhythms, another difficult issue is the nuance within the phrases. Within the jazz idiom “the nuance is locked into the time and the feel ... and of course we all do this kind of stuff in classical music ... but [with jazz] it’s really a whole new language.”<sup>70</sup> To continue the linguistic analogy, learning this language without a thick accent is a challenge for bassoonists. For Phoebe Ray and Paul Hanson the most integral part of removing that accent is playing the rhythm (including aspects of swing and syncopation) accurately with the appropriate nuance.

Bassoonists do not often encounter situations where improvisation is required,<sup>71</sup> so accurately presenting the sound of improvisation can be difficult. The strong connection of jazz and improvisation is an important one to consider when performing works that involve writing that is intended to sound improvisatory. Furthermore, some pieces in the literature require actual improvisation, as is the case with Mancini’s *Piece*. This lack of experience and a subsequent lack of confidence can be problematic when dealing with this component. For some bassoonists composing the improvisatory sections, as many often do for classical *cadenzas*, is a possible solution, but is ultimately a stop-gap measure towards greater understanding of the technique and of the idiom.

### **Solutions for the Bassoonist**

The aspects of swing can be analyzed but that analysis is not particularly useful to the performer. Phoebe Ray suggests a traditional approach to learning the nuance of swing by transcribing solos by past great players: “put the CD on Charlie Parker. He’ll play the phrase, you turn it off and then you play the phrase. And you just go phrase by

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<sup>70</sup>Ray.

<sup>71</sup>Hanson, “My Life as a Bassoonist and Improviser” 99.



phrase trying to pick up all of the nuance you can.”<sup>72</sup> Paul Hanson offers a variation on that idea: “There’s one thing in listening to all this great music, and another thing is to have some experience *having* to *do* it.”<sup>73</sup> He suggests playing with other jazz musicians and attempting to play back a line that another musician has just played. Using these strategies the bassoonist learns to pick up the language by a method of immersion, which helps reduce the analogical accent.

In order to tackle the issue of groove Gernot Wolfgang suggests practicing rhythms within jazz-based grooves vocally at first to get the proper “in the pocket” feel before applying them to the instrument. Additionally, practicing with the metronome set to the backbeat (beats two and four in a 4/4 meter) can aid in getting the proper feeling for the groove.<sup>74</sup> As with learning the subtleties of swing Wolfgang and many others suggest that listening and copying is the best way to learn how to interpret groove. “Listening to the kind of music that served as the source of inspiration to the composer”<sup>75</sup> such as Coltrane, Weather Report, or Hendrix (whatever is applicable) is the most helpful. This technique is not much different than Frank Morelli’s suggestions to listen to Bizet and Dukas while studying Saint-Saens.<sup>76</sup> A final step is playing the grooves in their original context with players already comfortable with the idiom. Hanson suggests starting with playing simple rhythms in a “funky” context:

Bopping around on the bassoon playing funk in E is so much like playing funky bass lines and grooves on guitar or bass. The art to playing funk: you have to have great rhythm and be able to make people dance with just a few notes. It doesn’t have to be complex if it feels right but you can

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<sup>72</sup>Ray.

<sup>73</sup>Hanson, Interview. (Emphasis his)

<sup>74</sup>Gernot Wolfgang, “The Power of Groove,” The Double Reed 27:4 2005: 94.

<sup>75</sup>Wolfgang 94.

<sup>76</sup>Monica Ellis, Personal interview, 25 July 2010.

always throw in a few jazz licks when you feel like it. It's a great place for bassoonists to start; what is demanded is not a lot of technique in terms of scales and patterns (although they help) but feeling the groove enough to be able to get people off their butts and moving.<sup>77</sup>

Hanson, Ray, and Wolfgang all bring up the concept of “feel” when working with groove-based music. The “feel” is a difficult concept to describe in words without circular definition: A groove feels good when you are in the groove; you are in the groove when it feels good. A metronome, while in “time” does not “groove.” Playing with other musicians, not only recordings, is an integral part of this immersion process. “Feel” and “groove,” like “swing,” must be experienced first hand, first by listening, then by playing with a human element.

When pieces contain sections that imply improvisation the performer can more effectively create the illusion if he is capable of improvising. Also, a number of pieces call for real improvisation, in which case the performer must know how to do so effectively. The most effective way to make improvisation more natural for bassoonists is a traditional jazz pedagogy approach. Again, transcription and copying of past players is the most common suggestion by Hanson, Rabinowitz, and Ray. Ray notes that good improvisers, like good composers, borrow and steal material from others: “You have to steal a lot. ... I played a lick ... that I stole from Bob Shepherd ... and I realized that Bob Shepherd stole it from Chick Corea!”<sup>78</sup> Hanson suggests an approach for bassoonists to improvise in a modal jazz context. This sub-genre features slow harmonic movement in which the player improvises over one chord for two or more measures.<sup>79</sup> This allows for more time to create melodies, rather than needing to continuously keep up with the quick chord changes of other styles like bebop. Again, playing with other musicians is the

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<sup>77</sup>Hanson, “My Life as a Bassoonist and Improviser” 103.

<sup>78</sup>Ray.

<sup>79</sup>Hanson, “My Life as a Bassoonist and Improviser” 105.

next key step because human interaction in the improvisation process is pivotal in developing a jazz vocabulary.

Jazz pedagogy is a study all unto its own, and it is wildly out of the range of this thesis to examine a comprehensive approach to learning how to play jazz. These basic suggestions are meant only as an initial step into what is likely a new genre for bassoonists. These topics are covered extensively in other texts and can be applied to any instrument. Teaching concepts on what scales and chords to play over what harmonies and how to apply those concepts in context are best left to other authorities, of which there are many. Paul Berliner's book Thinking in Jazz (University of Chicago Press, 1994) is the foremost study on jazz performance practice including concepts of feel and groove and methods of improvisation. For a more broad view on improvisation inclusive of many traditions as well as jazz see Bruno Nettl and Melinda Russell's book In the Course of Performance (University of Chicago Press, 1998).

### **Putting it All Together**

Monica Ellis is a bassoonist who does not play in the jazz idiom, but her work with the Imani Winds frequently incorporates elements of jazz and world music. Ellis is an example of a bassoonist who appropriately embraces styles outside of her formal classical training to provide an informed performance of music that incorporates those styles. While the literature performed by Imani Winds, by definition, fits outside the scope of this paper's focus, the way they approach the music in an attempt to "be respectful of the music"<sup>80</sup> can be applied to the topic at hand. Ellis, like Hanson and Ray, advocates a strong classical foundation when approaching music outside of one's comfort zone. For the Imani Winds, the approach is always from their classical basis,

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<sup>80</sup>Ellis.

“and then when we really feel like we have that appreciation [of the piece] we can shape it and play with it and use ... outside influences to develop and shape the music.”<sup>81</sup> The Imani Winds play a number of transcriptions of tangos by Astor Piazzolla. Ellis explains her experience working with Daniel Binelli, a former member of several of Piazzolla’s ensembles, where they “got a chance to really be schooled by him.” In working and performing with Binelli the Imani Winds gained experience in the true performance style and practice of the tango. This experience helped provide them with a more authentic understanding of the genre when performing Jeff Scott’s arrangements of those tangos in the quintet setting. “It’s hard, too, because Jeff’s arrangements have kind of allowed us to open up and be really expressive but we have to restrain ourselves and remember all the time to make sure we’re being respectful to the music and just making sure it’s authentic.”<sup>82</sup> More recently the Imani Winds worked with jazz saxophonist and composer Wayne Shorter on a project entitled *Terra Incognita*. This original work is “a merging of classical and jazz music but the seams are very invisible.” Working closely and performing with the composer, the Imani Winds were able to absorb the new idiom appropriately and their collaboration with him helped form their interpretation.

Bassoonists are naturally seated in the classical genre, and can use that classical basis as a position from which to form a framework to approach pieces influenced by forces outside of their comfort zone. In the case of jazz influenced works, listening, transcribing and playing along with classics can help a bassoonist capture the nuance of rhythm and phrasing. Playing jazz with smaller ensembles (or with louder groups when amplified) helps develop a sense of groove. Developing improvisation skills can not only

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<sup>81</sup>Ellis.

<sup>82</sup>Ellis.

aid in works where improvisation is a required element but also in making improvisation-like sections of composed works sound more spontaneous.

### **Exploration of Other Works**

The works explored thus far scratch the surface of a lot of new material available for the bassoon that incorporates jazz elements. The strategies in the previous chapter can be applied to other works in the repertoire. Below are a few other works that incorporate elements of jazz and a few main ways in which the above solutions can be useful when preparing and performing these works. I have chosen these pieces for their obvious stylistic jazz content, accessibility to bassoonists without a yet-established jazz background, and their availability in current print.

A work that is gaining a great deal of popularity with bassoonists is the *Suite Argentina* by Jorge Mockert. This five movement work was written for Argentinian bassoonist Andrea Merenzon and is based on Argentinian folk music and dance and Latin jazz. The pieces are highly syncopated and rhythmically complex, requiring a jazz sensibility to capture the essence of the rhythmic elements. It can be useful for the bassoonist to listen to authentic performances of the different dance styles of these movements, like the *Chamame* and the *Chacarera*, and learn the percussive rhythms away from the bassoon. The rhythm of the five movements should create a natural feeling groove in order to sound authentic. The movements also have sections that are written out “improvisations” similar to Bill Douglas’ music, which will sound more fluid if the performer has experience improvising.

Premiered in 2008, the *Concert Piece for Bassoon and Piano* by Libby Larsen is a traditionally structured three movement work that features blues oriented harmonies

and jazz rhythms. In addition to the rhythmic aspects and blue notes, the bassoonist is called upon to produce pitch bends and glissandi in a blues/rock style. The bassoonist must maintain the groove, but has the opportunity to “lay back” on the beat. There is a great sense of improvisation through the entire work, which is devoid of any specific head-improvisation-head structure. The overall style will be more natural and less square if the performer has studied the phrasing styles of other jazz performers using a method of copying their phrases by ear and applies stylistically appropriate phrasing and nuance.

The first of Manfred Schoof's *Two Impromptus* combines harmonic elements of bebop and syncopated jazz rhythms within a classical framework. The rhythmic aspects are similar to the driving force behind the third movement of the Previn *Sonata* and should be approached with a similar attitude. The second of the *Impromptus* offers the bassoonist and pianist an opportunity to actually improvise. At first the improvisation is slow and melodic over a chord structure in a Dorian mode, and eventually becomes more open for extended techniques in an *avant-garde* texture. At the end of the second movement there is a return to the bebop nature of the first movement. Again, it will be helpful to have some experience improvising to be comfortable with the real improvisation sections (Schoof writes a sample for bassoonists that are not comfortable improvising).

Michael Daugherty is a composer that frequently incorporates elements of jazz, rock, blues, and pop music in his orchestral and chamber compositions. *Dead Elvis* is one of several of his works that features the *Dies Irae* theme in this contemporary context. The grooving rhythm is related to jazz/rock music commonly found in “spy movie” themes, and the harmonies and embellishments on the *Dies Irae* theme are blues-scale based. The

piece also calls for a certain “bravura” from the position of the solo bassoon, who acts as a front-man to a jazz/rock ensemble (the instrumentation is the same as Stravinsky’s *Histoire du Soldat*, but the instruments are treated as rock instruments) while wearing a Las Vegas era Elvis costume.

### **The Use of Amplification and Effects**

One of the biggest challenges facing a bassoonist in a jazz context is being heard. For new works composers will need to heed Gernot Wolfgang’s advice: “keep the texture around it very light!”<sup>83</sup> However, by amplifying the bassoon and processing the sound in various ways composers can write for the bassoon in more dense and loud textures. Effectively amplifying the bassoon allows the bassoonist to be heard easily in ensembles where it would normally be inaudible. For an improvising player in a jazz context “all of a sudden you can think about the lines you play instead of having to push so hard.”<sup>84</sup> In composed chamber music with jazz influences the composer can be free to incorporate electric bass, guitar and piano and drum set grooves without fear of the bassoon not being heard. Additionally, effects can be used on the acoustic sound of the bassoon that give the composer and performer new palettes of sound to work with. The concept of *music concrète* is not new, and those musical concepts are still used in solo or chamber works such as Jacob Ter Veldhuis’ piece *Pitch Black*, which was recently adapted for four bassoons with pre-recorded audio. To match the audio level of the pre-recorded material the bassoonists performing the work at the International Double Reed Society conference in 2010 utilized amplification systems. Having the instruments sound from the same source as the pre-recorded material allowed the five voices to blend more effectively

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<sup>83</sup>Wolfgang 92.

<sup>84</sup>Hanson, Interview.

than if the bassoons were not sounding through the speakers. Beyond simple sound reinforcement, using these amplification systems means the bassoon can be placed in a context more typically reserved for electric guitar players in jazz, fusion, or rock ensembles.

There are essentially two methods of sound reinforcement of the bassoon. The first is to use traditional instrument microphones into a PA speaker setup. The second is to use a bocal mounted “pickup” microphone. Each method has its own set of pros and cons and is appropriate for different situations and requirements. A combination of the two methods may also be used which also has pros and cons versus the methods individually. My work as a member of the electronica band “The Magnetrons” in Minneapolis has given me a unique perspective of the bassoon in a heavily amplified and heavily processed environment. I have used this band as a laboratory for exploring problems and solutions to placing the bassoon in contexts where amplification is necessary. The volume levels with this dance club genre of music are incredibly high, with much of the music generated by computer delivered through large PA systems. The bassoon in its natural state would not be audible in these situations, so effective and efficient amplification of the instrument was a necessary hurdle to overcome. Further, the genre welcomes highly altered sounds especially from synthesizers, computer software, and other electric instruments. This placed the bassoon into a context where using different effects was appropriate.

Microphones placed near the instrument will deliver the most natural acoustic sound of the bassoon at a cost of irregularities and potential feedback issues. One microphone may be adequate for smaller venues or for with ensembles that do not easily overpower the bassoon. The microphone should be placed at approximately head level,



pointed slightly downward toward the center of the bassoon. Rabinowitz and Borca are two bassoonists that have frequently used a combination of two microphones strategically placed near the bell and near the right hand to capture notes coming from various tone holes of the bassoon. Rabinowitz uses microphones that are small and lightweight enough that they can be mounted with a flexible clamp mount to the bassoon.<sup>85</sup> This gives him freedom of movement on the stage without the position of the microphones changing in relation to the instrument. Borca positions microphones on stands not attached to the instrument, which keeps the physical weight of the instrument down, but forces her to stay in the same relative position in order to keep the sound levels the same. Although there is no ideal solution, for players where pure acoustic quality of the sound is desired this is the best solution. The biggest limitations of this solution are feedback issues and limitations with effect use. Because the sound of the bassoon projects from multiple tone holes pointing in various directions that differ from note to note the microphone gain level must be high enough to capture the sound of the bassoon evenly. This will increase the chance of the microphones feeding back, and will also likely pick up other sounds on the stage. It is also difficult to add many effects to microphones without further exacerbating the feedback issue. Distortion and delay effects are especially prone to those problems when traditional microphones are used.

The other primary solution is a bocal mounted “pickup” microphone.<sup>86</sup> This method requires a hole drilled in the bocal and an adapter soldered on by a technician for the pickup to be mounted. The greatest advantage to this method is that because of its

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<sup>85</sup>Michael Rabinowitz, “Bassoon Amplification in Jazz and Popular Music” 109-110.

<sup>86</sup>Technically there is no way that a “pickup” in the true technical sense of the word is possible on the bassoon. That, by definition, is a magnetic coil excited by a vibrating string as in an electric guitar. The available technology is more accurately described as a microphone, but is commonly referred to by bassoonists as a pickup due to the nature of its use.

placement quite literally inside the bore of the instrument there is a high level of isolation of the sound source. The greatest disadvantage is that the kind of sound ultimately reproduced by the pickup is not the natural acoustic sound of the bassoon, much in the same way that the clean electric guitar sound is not the natural sound of an acoustic guitar. Due to the isolation of the sound source these pickups are less prone to feedback, but no micro-phonic unit on an acoustic air column like the bassoon will ever completely eliminate all feedback issues. As of the time of this writing there are two available pickup units specifically designed for the bassoon and several clarinet barrel microphones designed for use with traditional Turkish clarinet playing.<sup>87</sup> Each pickup uses a different method of attaching itself to the instrument, so they are not all compatible with the same bocal modifications. The two specifically in the American market for bassoon are the Telex and the Little-Jake. The Telex is an in-ear monitoring unit designed for use in control rooms, but because of the size and electrical impedance of the unit can be used as a microphone. The Telex is simple to use but is the most prone to feedback of the pickup units available. Its sound is bright and nasal with a lot of high end frequencies which help the sound carry over an ensemble. To address the issues of unbalanced tone color, feedback, and inconsistent results with effects, and as a part of this project, I developed a new pickup called the “Little-Jake” to be compatible with the same bocal mount as the Telex. In the development of the Little-Jake pickup I took suggestions from Paul Hanson, Michael Rabinowitz, and John Goebel at Forrests Music in California in making a final product. Its sound is balanced differently than the Telex in that it has much more low end and a less nasal sound.<sup>88</sup> The Little-Jake is less plagued by

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<sup>87</sup>“Clarinet Pickup Microphone,” Gypsy Clarinet, Nov. 2010  
<[http://gypsyclarinet.com/clarinet\\_pickup](http://gypsyclarinet.com/clarinet_pickup)>.

<sup>88</sup>Rabinowitz, Interview.

issues of feedback than the Telex, although some issues with feedback are inevitable at high gain levels associated with distortion effects. Paul Hanson's FRAP pickup utilizes a screw type adapter that is more secure than the Telex's plug style mount, and at his suggestion I have also developed a version of the Little-Jake compatible with this interface. An impedance buffer or preamp is required for the most effective use of this pickup. A third option is in development by microphone maker David Josephson that attempts to create the most natural sound possible from a bocal mounted microphone and and the same time eliminate feedback issues. It will be compatible with the FRAP and Little-Jake style screw mount.<sup>89</sup>



*Illustration 20: Josephson Engineering  
WT2 Wind Instrument Pickup.*

A combination of traditional microphones and a bocal pickup can also be used as a compromise. The more natural sound of the microphones can be blended with the focused nature of the bocal pickup. The issues with feedback will be less serious from the microphones because the bocal pickup will add projection to the sound. The bocal pickup can still be treated with effects units or used clean for a more natural sound. The biggest

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<sup>89</sup>“Preliminary Data - New Wind Instrument Pickup From Josephson,” Josephson Engineering, 6 Oct. 2009, Nov. 2010 <<http://www.josephson.com/pdf/wtintro.pdf>>.

disadvantage to this setup is the complexity of it. Three sound sources must be blended by a sound technician and the bassoonist will have to deal with three wires hanging off of the instrument. This may be impractical in many venues. This is Michael Rabinowitz's typical setup when performing with Bassoon in the Wild.

All of these pickups provide a signal appropriate for use with effect units designed for guitar, synthesizer, or vocals. The effects can then be used in the same way that they would be in their originally intended applications. The bassoon sound naturally has a much more complex sound structure compared to a guitar.<sup>90</sup> The bassoon envelope, or the way in which the dynamics of the sound change over time, is dramatically different from the guitar as well; the guitar decays naturally over time while the bassoon can sustain as long as the player can continue the sound. The results of these two differences mean that effects interact with the bassoon differently than guitar. Distortion effects add harmonic content to the sound, and have been used by guitarists to color their sound in dramatic ways for decades. Because the bassoon's harmonic content is already quite complex, distortion effects need to be chosen carefully or the sound can easily become over-saturated with harmonics resulting in a harsh white noise. Distortion effects also increase the gain of the signal which will promote feedback issues already problematic with current pickup units. The extra harmonic content of the bassoon makes filter effects especially effective, whether envelope controlled (like the Mutron) or time controlled (like a phaser or flanger). These effects either notch or cut various aspects of the

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<sup>90</sup>Johannes Husinsky, "Comparison of the Frequency Spectra and the Frequency Decay of three different Electric (sic) Guitars," Oct 2002.

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F Fransson, "The Source Spectrum of Double-Reed Wood-Wind Instruments," Swedish Royal Institute of Technology, Speech Music and Hearing-Quarterly Status and Progress Report 7:4 1966: 35-37.

frequency spectrum and shift that notch or cut over time or according to dynamic input. The resulting sound is a vowel shifting or a “swish” in the tone color. Reverberation and delay effects are also quite useful on the bassoon to add depth or multiple voices in a texture. These do not typically alter the tone color of the instrument, although some effect units are intended to do so. Finally, pitch generating and harmonizing effects are especially useful in performance with the bassoon. These include ring modulators and digital pitch tracking effects that add harmonies based on the pitch played by the bassoonist. Pitch generating effects change the monophonic sound of the bassoon into a polyphonic sound like an organ or synthesizer. Finally, using either a computer or foot based unit, “loopers” are quickly becoming a part of many guitarists effect setups. For the bassoonist these units allow a new world of possibilities to record a phrase live and have it repeated while new phrases are played over the original, allowing a single bassoonist to play the harmonies and melodies of a piece.

With the technology so readily available and affordable to bassoonists across the world, new possibilities are available to composers for pieces with bassoon. Anna Meredith’s piece *Axeman* is just one example. The work for solo cello with looper entitled *Tetrishead* by cellist and composer Zoe Keating was recently transcribed for bassoon with looper by bassoonist Lynn Hileman<sup>91</sup> and performed on an all electric-bassoon recital at the International Double Reed Society conference in 2010. With the ability to compete dynamically with other electronic instruments and drums the bassoon can be put in contexts not possible without amplification. Changes in tone colors, adjustments in pitch and multi-voice writing possible with loopers and delay effects give the composer and performer a wealth of new sounds. The possibilities of new sounds from the bassoon

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<sup>91</sup>Lynn Hileman, Email interview. 23 Sept. 2010.

does face some opposition,<sup>92</sup> but I sincerely hope that composers take advantage of these possibilities.

## Conclusion

“You can bop around and get crazy, or whatever, but if you can't play a beautiful melody you won't get far in this world.”

Paul Hanson

While some proclaim “jazz is dead”<sup>93</sup> (a different discussion altogether!) the influence of jazz on classical music is still strong. Indeed, the list of works for bassoon (or bassoon in a chamber group) with a jazz influence is growing quickly. Composers with a modern aesthetic that have grown up with either jazz or other jazz-derived genres like funk, blues, and rock frequently show their history in their compositions. With audience attendance at classical music concerts declining, bassoonists also need to look for new audiences, possibly by branching out into jazz and other genres. Composers will hopefully see this need and write new works with these compositional devices in mind. As more bassoonists become involved in jazz, composers will undoubtedly be drawn to the unique aspects of the bassoon in the hands of a player with those skills.

While the bassoon is not a traditional jazz instrument, it is clear that a successful bassoonist of the 21st century will need skills related to jazz performance. Even for works that do not feature a strong jazz groove or improvisation, bassoonists will need to be equipped to perform works that call upon stylistic elements from jazz in the way of rhythm, swing, and phrase nuance. Paul Hanson advocates for more instruction in these

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<sup>92</sup>Ray Pizzi: “I prefer to discover the inherent Timbres and Textures of the Bassoon with my Soul and Heart rather than a Foot Pedal.” [www.raypizzi.com](http://www.raypizzi.com).

<sup>93</sup>Seth Colter Wells, “Jazz is Dead. Long Live Jazz,” *Newsweek*, 10 Dec. 2009, Nov. 2010 <<http://www.newsweek.com/2009/12/09/jazz-is-dead-long-live-jazz.html>>.

Also, Terry Teachout, Stuart Nicholson.

skills to the bassoonist early in their career: “There should be some serious consideration to see jazz and improvised music for the bassoon taught because the American music tradition strongly involves jazz.”<sup>94</sup> Developing skills in jazz and understanding the influence jazz has had on portions of the repertoire will enable the bassoonist to perform these works with appropriate musical interpretation and authenticity.

New solo and chamber works calling for improvisation require bassoonists to be able to draw upon improvisational skills from jazz and other musical genres authentically. Through practice of improvisation bassoonists can gain a better understanding of the harmony of jazz, which can be beneficial when forming an interpretation of a work influenced by jazz harmony. Improvising one’s own melodies over chord changes will give the performer a different perspective on the compositional process.

Playing groove oriented music is not a primary part of a typical bassoonists training. Gernot Wolfgang expresses a desire for classical performers to have skills with groove music: “Wouldn’t it be great if future generations of classical musicians had a chance to learn about grooves early on, as part of their curriculums?”<sup>95</sup> Because of the popularity of groove-based music<sup>96</sup> more composers and performers are drawn to it in an effort to attract a wider audience. I hope that more bassoonists will see the need for playing more groove oriented music and encourage more composers to write it for the bassoon.

New sounds from the bassoon are also now possible due to the rise of accessibility of bassoon pickups and effects. These sounds transform the bassoon into a new instrument

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<sup>94</sup>Hanson 106.

<sup>95</sup>Wolfgang 94.

<sup>96</sup>Wolfgang 94.

or group of instruments and give the composer and performer new tools to work with. While the effects are tools that require a unique learning curve they can be a powerful performance tool in not only jazz but in other art music as well.

The well-rounded “classical” musician of the 21st century needs to be comfortable in a number of genres. New works continue to show that jazz and classical music are cross-referential genres. The skills learned from an exploration of jazz can be applicable to a wide variety of pieces already in the repertoire. The bassoon is a more versatile instrument than it is often thought and it is my hope that more bassoonists will see this repertoire as a way to explore further levels of expression on their instrument.



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