

Russell Patrick Arts Undergraduate Research Award - Final Report

'Arranging and Orchestrating Music for Bassoon'

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Introduction

Academic research is not always pre-occupied with the analysis of statistics or compilation of surveys. There are times when as performers, we conduct research through the amplifying and adjusting of repertoire, the creation of new and groundbreaking recordings, and the writing of original works for the enjoyment of performers and non-performers alike. What is the context and history behind a set of French Baroque Suites for bassoon and harpsichord? How is music arranged and made more accessible? And what does this mean for the repertoire associated with ones instrument? These are some of the questions that performers deal with and come up with answers to as we conduct our research.

Since the early 16th century, the bassoon has emerged as one of the most longstanding and important woodwind instruments in the western art music scene. It is a wooden conical wind instrument, forming the base for the tenor and bass of the woodwind choir. It developed from the dulcian¹ in the early 16th century to the mature bassoon in the mid 17th century as we now know it, which has an expanded range, stretching from Bb2 to F5 (depending on the player, it can go even higher). The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (2nd Ed., 2001), describes the peculiar design of the instrument in detail:

The doubling back on itself of the bore, like a hairpin; the 'extension bore' beyond the sixth finger-hole; and local wall thickness allowing for finger-hole chimneys. These features give the instrument its essential tone qualities and condition its complex acoustics².

It holds a very special place in orchestral, chamber and solo music as one of the only low reed instruments. In the classical orchestral repertoire by composers such as Vivaldi and Mozart, it is often

¹ Waterhouse, William. *Bassoon* (Grove Music Online, Oxford University Press)

² Ibid.

assigned to double a melodic line in the cellos, giving it added weight and body. Contemporary composers have taken advantage of its versatility and unique colors to add contrast to orchestral colors and assigned prominent solos to the instrument. The well known opening of Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913) open with an expressive solo on the upper ranges of the instrument, and remains one of the most renowned openings to the 20th century's finest orchestral work.

Although possessing a unique sound, the bassoon was however under much criticism in the early 19th century for its weak sound in comparison to the body of the orchestra. Hector Berlioz, eminent composer and scholar, remarks that the bassoon *totally lacks in éclat and nobility, has a propensity for the grotesque which must be borne in mind when giving it prominence*³. Due to the design, the bassoon lacks the brilliance and strength borne by the other members of the woodwinds, and unfortunately is often covered by the brighter sound of the flute when playing with an orchestra. Given the nature of the instrument, it often finds itself more at home in chamber music, as the balance between the instruments give an advantage to the instrument. Classical composers such as Mozart and Vivaldi have also written concertos for the bassoon, an instrumental form whereby a solo instrument plays against a larger body of musicians, displaying the virtuosity and imagination of the soloist. An astonishing 37 concertos were written specifically for the bassoon by Antonio Vivaldi (1678 – 1741).

Summary of Project

To this very day, the bassoon has endured as one of the longest lasting instruments in history. It leaves behind a plethora of works written to showcase the instrument by a long list of prominent composers; Elgar, Mozart, Danzi, Haydn, Schuller, Ravel and Stravinsky just to name a few. However, repertoire for bassoon is often overshadowed by pieces for more popular instruments, such as the piano and violin, and does not appear on concerts or recordings as frequently. Therefore, my project under the supervision of UBC school of Music professor Dr. Jesse Read aims to enlarge the existing repertoire for the bassoon through the orchestration and arrangement of both popular and lesser known works for bassoon based ensembles. These arrangements serve to give aspiring bassoonists contemporary repertoire with which to work with, to enrich the existing concert repertoire, and to enhance and deepen the audiences' enjoyment of bassoon playing. Most of all, it is allowing audiences to enjoy a

³ Waterson, Grove Music Online

wide variety of repertoire, spanning four centuries from all over the world. Throughout the course of the AURA project, I was responsible for three primary tasks:

- 1) Proofreading and Editing Music for Publication
- 2) Orchestrating and arranging pre-existing music for bassoon quartet and voice
- 3) Transcribing and notating music from audio tracks

Orchestration is technically defined as a process where a musical work is adapted to a different ensemble or orchestra, whereas arrangement differs in that a certain artistic liberty is taken in re-assembling pre-existing music. In arrangements, the original thematic materials written by the original writer is kept while certain components of the work are changed around at the discretion of the arranger, so that the new arranged work can take on a new life. Some of the pieces that were arranged during the project included a remix version of Dave Brubeck's 'Take Five', and Simon and Garfunkel's version of the popular song, 'El Condor Pasa'. Orchestration was however the main focus of the project, and my goal as an orchestrator was to preserve the original intent of the composer as best as I could, while adapting the music for bassoons.

My first task as an AURA researcher was to proofread and edit scores for bassoon and basso continuo, a bass line that runs through the piece. Music by four eminent french composers from the mid 17th to 18th centuries were chosen: Louis-Antoine Dorvel's (1680 – 1756) *Concert Calotin*, Michel Pignolet de Monteclair's (1667 – 1737) *Deuxieme Concert*, Jean Hotteterre's (1677 – 1722) *La Noce Champetre*, and lastly Francois Couperin's (1668 – 1733) *Sèptieme Concert*. My part of the project follows work done by a long line of previous AURA researchers, who began the project by realizing the figured bass and translating it into the modern score format. That work that has been done already has helped us considerably to bring the project to completion. The complete scores have now undergone publishing and are available for purchase from Editions Viento. (www.editionsviento.com/)

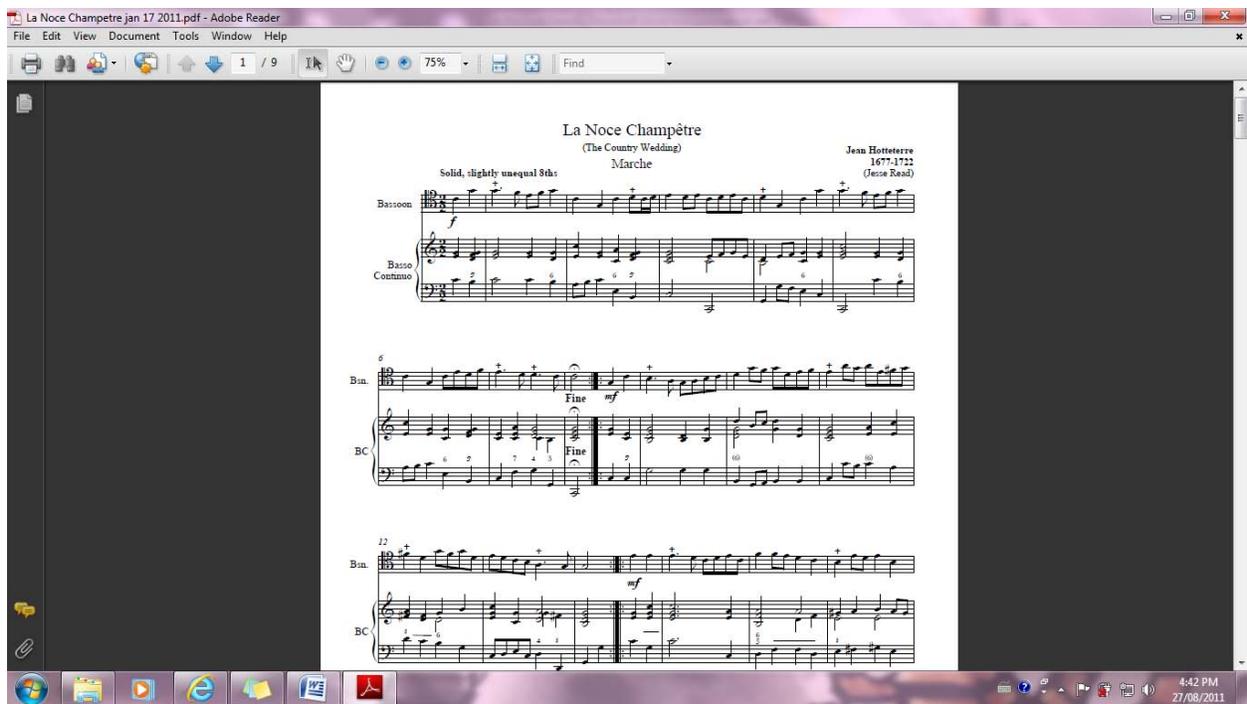


Figure 3 - La Noce Champêtre, Opening, by Jean Hotteterre

These pieces resemble each other in style and are multi-movement in form, meaning that the piece is made up of a collection of smaller pieces, which are also complete in of themselves. In the Baroque era, the suite was defined with pieces unified by key, and consisting of dances usually preceded by a prelude or overture. Dances that were commonly found were the *Allemande*, *Courante*, *Sarabande*, and the *Gigue*. Each dance found their stylistic origin from dances in different parts of Europe. Often interspersed within the dances are optional movements known also as galanteries: the *minuet*, *gavotte*, *passpied*, the *bourée*, to name a few. In reaction to the smooth polyphonic lines of the renaissance, baroque composers sought contrast to express affective states and move the listener's passions⁴. The melody is often given to the solo instrument, in this case the bassoon, and accompanied by a Basso Continuo and a keyboard instrument, most likely the Harpsichord (although there is a lot polyphonic writing within). The word 'accompaniment' did not apply to Renaissance polyphony and this is one of the most important developments in the early Baroque: the adaptation of the concept of accompanying from a bass line, with added chords. This development paved the way for further developments in classical music, with the rise of the concerto and sonata forms.

⁴ Sadie, Stanley. *The Baroque Era* (The Oxford Companion to Music)

The project was started in the late 80's by Dr. Read through a recording that he made with some of his colleagues of "French Baroque Miniatures", which is on compact disc ETCETERA KTC 1087. Through the production and dissemination of their album, many bassoon performers and aficionados were made aware of these pieces, which previously did not exist in the version on print. As a result of demands for the manuscript to these performances, the project of transcribing and editing the baroque scores began and ended after several years of work, culminating in the publication of these scores for the benefit of performers and audiences around the world. The four sets that were chosen reflect some of the more light-hearted repertoire in the baroque canon. *Concert Calotin* is a humorous depiction of ecclesiastical life of priests and other holy people, and gently mocks the pompousness with which they like to carry themselves. *La Noce Champetre* is almost programmatic in nature, as the music was meant as a quasi narrative prose, describing the day of a wedding.

A large part of the project involved arranging pre-existing works by deceased and living composers for bassoon quartet and voice. Over the course of the summer, I worked on arranging a set of three cabaret songs by the renowned American composer William Bolcom (1938-) and poet Arnold Weinstein. William Bolcom is a Pulitzer Prize winning composer teaching composition at the University of Michigan. Unlike the art songs or lieder of Schubert and Brahms, Bolcom's Cabaret Songs bring something new to the already saturated field of art songs with his jazz harmonies and accessible lyrics. Most importantly, his music serves to bridge the widening gap between popular and contemporary music, which has been seen as a specialist field not suitable for the amateur. This has been exemplified by American composer Milton Babbitt's provocative article re-titled as 'Who cares if you listen', which suggests that advanced contemporary music should be left to the hands of professionals, and kept from the public and its ubiquitous music.

The Cabaret songs were written for his wife Joan Morris, who is a well known mezzo-soprano. Of the two volumes of songs, Dr. Read chose three that he thought would be best suited to transcription for bassoon and voice quartet: Waitin', Amor, and Song of Black Max. These songs contrast each other very well in terms of style, mood, texture, and content. Above all, they work very well when orchestrated for bassoons.

11 Sop. but it some day just mightless my night. Wait-in Wait-in Wait-in

13 Bsn. I p Bsn. II p Bsn. III p Bsn. IV p

16 Sop. Bsn. I ppp Bsn. II ppp Bsn. III ppp

Figure 4 - Waitin', by William Bolcom (orc. Roydon Tse)

Amor

Arnold Weinsteim Music by William Bolcom

Light, Rhythmic; Pachanga Tempo ♩ = 140

Soprano It was-n't the po-lice- man's fault in

Light, Rhythmic; Pachanga Tempo ♩ = 140

Bassoon I pp Bsn. II f~p pp Bsn. III f pp Contrabassoon f p~pp

5 Sop. all the traf. bc your. in-stead of shout - ing halt when he

Bsn. I mp Bsn. II f

Figure 5 - Amor, by William Bolcom (orc. Roydon Tse)

Song of Black Max
(As Told by the de Kooning Boys)

13

Arnold Weisman Music by William Bolcom

March Tempo, ♩ = 132 *mf*

Soprano
He was al-ways dressed in black, long black jack-et,

Bassoon I *mf*

Bassoon II *mf*

Bassoon III *mf*

Contrabassoon *mf*

6

S. broad black hat, some-times a cape, and as thin, and as thin as

Bsn. I

Bsn. II

Figure 6 - Song of Black Max, William Bolcom (orc. Roydon Tse)

Waitin' is a gentle and quietly optimistic song. The poet laments his blindness while he waits for a light to 'bless his sight'. It is set to a slow tempo, with an undulating motif in the bass line. In Amor, we see Bolcom's tongue in cheek humor as the poem describes a woman who is full of herself in terms of physical appearances. It is set to a fast tempo and is in a major key, giving it a lilting feeling. And lastly, the Song of Black Max depicts the life of a dangerous gang member, who commands respect from all who know him.

The challenge when it comes to orchestrating such well known works is dealing with the limitations of the bassoon and translating the intentions of the author as accurately as possible. As the piano has one of the largest ranges of all orchestral instruments, it is often used as a blueprint for orchestral works and is an extremely flexible apparatus on which to compose. Although having one of the largest range of any woodwind instrument, it does not come close to the piano in terms of register, and cannot possibly accommodate for the pianistic writing that was originally composed. I solved this problem by transposing some of the higher passages an octave lower to accommodate the range bassoon. I've also taken some liberties in orchestrating the songs. In Amor for example, I added a solo

line in response to the soloist's passage to add to a sense of building up. (mm. 46 – 54)

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Amor', spanning measures 46 to 54. The score is arranged for a soloist (S.) and a bassoon quartet (Bsn. I, Bsn. II, Bsn. III, Cbsn.). The soloist's part includes lyrics: "look-ing at me show-ed A mor. Dad de da (scat)". The bassoon quartet parts are marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The score is presented in two systems, with the first system covering measures 46-50 and the second system covering measures 51-54. The music is in a 4/4 time signature and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The soloist's part is written in a soprano clef, while the bassoon parts are written in bass clefs. The bassoon parts are characterized by a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, often with slurs and accents. The soloist's part is more melodic and includes scat singing. The overall texture is dense and rhythmic, with the bassoon quartet providing a strong accompaniment to the soloist's line.

Figure 7 - mm.46 - 54 in Amor, with solo line inserted

Chordal passages on the piano were reduced so that only the essential notes remain, as bassoons cannot play more than one note at a time. I've therefore applied my skills as an arranger in the orchestration of these Cabaret Songs.

One of the more daunting challenges that I faced during the project was the task of transcribing from audio files music that was already recorded, and arranging it for bassoon quartet. For that, I needed to replay and notate what I heard onto manuscript and create what appears to be the original track, and then modifying various elements to accommodate to the nature of the bassoons. Pieces from well known jazz musician Dave Brubeck (Take 5) and classical guitar virtuoso Stephane Wrembel (Bistro Fada, from the motion picture 'Midnight in Paris') were my assigned pieces and each proved to be very tricky to arrange for. For one, each piece was conceived for different ensembles: Take 5 was a piece for jazz combo requiring piano, bass, drums and saxophone; Bistro Fada written for three guitars and bass as performed by Stephane Wrembel. Since completing a version for bassoon quartet, Bistro Fada has also been translated in to a guitar and bassoon version by guitarist Michael Strutt.

Bassoon III

'Bistro Fada'
from the Motion Picture "Midnight in Paris"
 Waltz Like ♩ = ca 60 Stéphane Wrembel (arr. Roydon Tsai)

Figure 4- Bistro Fada melody mm.8 - 24

Figure 5 - Arrangement of Bistro Fada

They were also stylistically varied and quite different from the baroque suites of Couperin and the ragtime pieces of Scott Joplin. I spent a lot of time studying the music and listening intently. One of the most important things an arranger needs to do is to transmit the spirit or zeitgeist of the piece while adding something new to the original material. There will be places where arrangers cut and edit, but the final product must capture the emotion that the composer chooses to convey. In these cases, the end result was not heavily edited and most elements from the audio tracks were successfully carried over to the arrangements.

Personal Reflection

As a student composer pursuing my studies in music composition, I have already much exposure to all sorts of different music through a variety of concert going as required by my program. However, what this project has done for me is to bring the music of everyday into a closer light, through arranging and recreating the music into a different form, namely for bassoon quartet. As mentioned in the general summary of project, an arranger is required to capture the spirit of the composition and transmit this in his or her arrangements. Skills that are required of arrangers include having technical expertise in using music setting software, to a practical ability to perform on differing instruments, to a capacity to pick out sounds and translating them onto paper. I've had to use all these skills throughout my project and it has been a great practice for writing my own compositions.

In addition, having the chance to arrange and orchestrate music for ensembles allowed me to test out different techniques of using the given instruments and learn the instrument for which I am working. Since the bassoon is such an integral part of the orchestra, learning to write for bassoons is a must for any aspiring composer. The instrument has agility unrivalled by any other instruments with such a low register, and adds a unique colour to an orchestral tapestry. As a result of this project, I've had a chance to work with many styles of music and learnt to appreciate them as much as the music that I'm already familiar with. I look forward to having the chance to hear our arrangements read by musicians, which is the only way to really learn how the instrument functions in a practical environment.

It is my great pleasure to say that all in all, I've benefited hugely from this project. Through the work and arrangements that I've been working on, I have now accumulated firsthand knowledge in the art of arranging. It has been said that like composing, arranging is also an act of creation. I'm very thankful for the chance to work on such a project as it has been an eye opening experience, and something that I look forward to do in my career as a composer and arranger.

List of Projects

- Concert Calotin – Louis-Antoine Dornel (1680 – 1756)
- Deuxieme Concert – Michel Pignolet de Monteclair (1667 – 1737)
- La Noce Champetre (The Country Wedding) – Jean Hotteterre
- Septieme Concert – Francois Couperin (1668 – 1733)
- Cabaret Songs Volume I: Amor, Waitin', Song of Black Max – William Bolcom (1938-)
 - Amor: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1Dkn_Owlj8&feature=related
 - Song of Black Max and Waitin': <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYfU1t5YwoY>
- Scott Joplin Portrait – Arr. Bill Holcombe
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFqyZQDsht4>
- Bistro Fada, from the Motion Picture 'Midnight in Paris' – Stephane Wrembel
 - Bistro Fada: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9YNKRwl5aU>
- The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin' Groovy) – Paul Simon
 - 59th Street Bridge Song: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvIW4bEjB5A>
- Red Robin meets Take 5 – Gerry Long, Lyrics by Harry Woods and Paul Desmond
- El Condor Pasa – Paul Simon
 - El Condor Pasa (Simon and Garfunkel): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pey29CLID3I>

References

- Stanley Sadie. *The Baroque Era*, The Oxford Companion to Music
- William Waterhouse. *Bassoon*, Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 2nd Ed, 2001
- Samuel Adler. *The Study of Orchestration*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 3rd Ed, 2002
- Walter Piston. *Orchestration*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1st Ed, 1955