MYSTERIES AND MISTAKES: A SUMMARY OF THREE PIECES PERFORMED ON A GRADUATE BASSOON RECITAL

by

Andrew C. Gascon

An Abstract
of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Art
in the Department of Music
University of Central Missouri

May, 2015
ABSTRACT

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This paper will revolve around the theme of mistakes and uncertainty, specifically relating to three pieces in the standard bassoon solo literature. These minute inconsistencies, endearing idiosyncrasies, and mysterious contradictions make for interesting stories and interpretation. Perhaps it is fitting that these pieces are written for the bassoon, one of the most eccentric instruments in the orchestra. The theme of mistakes is used to explore the subtopics of history, musical analysis, and performance techniques. The pieces discussed are Elgar’s Romance Op. 62, Vivaldi’s Concerto in E Minor RV 484, and Dutilleux’s Sarabande et Cortège. These pieces were performed across two recitals for completion of the degree of Master of Music in Bassoon Performance.
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May, 2014

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The story behind the creation of this piece is somewhat cryptic. Elgar dedicated his *Romance* to Edwin F. James, principal bassoonist of the London Symphony Orchestra. Jerrold Moore, one of Elgar’s main biographers, mentions little about the terms behind the writing of this piece; he only mentions that it was “a promise to Edwin James.”\(^1\) Elgar does not mention the work at all in published letters to any of his close acquaintances. Also curious is the lack of any evidence of friendship between Elgar and James, or of correspondence of any kind. The only mention of the piece is in his wife Alice Elgar’s diary: “…E. very busy with [Violin] Concerto and Bassoon piece…”\(^2\)

A likely explanation for its composition centers on Elgar’s desire for association with the London Symphony Orchestra. Hans Richter, the original principal conductor of the LSO, was forced to retire due to bad eyesight\(^3\); because he and Elgar were close friends, Elgar would have known about his physical difficulties and likely retirement. It also seems to be more than coincidence that Edwin James became chairman of the LSO the year before Elgar composed the *Romance*, and that Elgar was named Principal Conductor after a rehearsal of the piece, Elgar’s

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2 Ibid.
wife commenting that “Mr. James talked…with deep content of the idea of E. conducting the Concerts in Dr. Richter’s place – Touching devotion to E.”

This would suggest that either Elgar offered to write the piece for James hoping to secure the open position of conductor, or James and the other symphony musicians enjoyed working with Elgar in preparing his Symphony No. 1 and wanted to see more of him. However, orchestra leader William Reed’s comments concerning Elgar’s conducting seem to suggest the former, noting that when the composer conducted works that were not his own, he was “naturally very diffident and restrained…and this hampered him in many ways, so that he could not obtain that spontaneous expression that he nearly always elicited from his own works.” The fact that he was removed from the post of Principal Conductor only a year later is also a reliable sign that Elgar’s conducting ability did not match the LSO’s exacting standards.

Why would Elgar want to be Principal Conductor? Moore suggests that he was perhaps losing faith in his skill as a composer. Indeed, the piece was composed at an incredibly troubled time in Elgar’s career. After the premier of his Symphony No. 1 in December of 1908, Elgar entered a post-creative depression. His previous large work, The Dream of Gerontius, was not a great public success, and the new symphony wasn’t spectacularly popular with critics. Elgar was displeased in the collection of royalties for performances of the new symphony, complaining in his letters that Debussy and Sibelius were being paid more money than he was (when people

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4 Moore, Edward Elgar, 609.
6 Moore, Edward Elgar, 609.
bothered to pay Elgar at all) for performances.\footnote{Ibid., 726-732.} In addition to this, August Jaeger, the namesake of “Nimrod” in his \textit{Enigma Variations} and one of Elgar’s closest friends, passed away in May of 1909, and another close friend in his \textit{Enigma} circle also died later that year. To make matters worse, Elgar was often ill, and was suffering from a ringing in his ears and hearing loss from what would later be diagnosed as Ménière's disease. All of these challenges compounded with his natural self-deprecating personality plunged Elgar into an incredible despair.

One of the few motivations keeping Elgar going was the encouragement from his friend Alice Stuart Wortley, whom he affectionately dubbed Windflower. Elgar was also writing his \textit{Violin Concerto} at the time, the \textit{Romance}’s sister piece, and was unhappy with the progress he had made on it. He wrote to Windflower:

\begin{quote}
“I promised to tell you of my London visit – I do not think it has been a success: it is too lonely and I cannot see how we are to ‘take’ a place big enough for us all… I think a decent obscurity in the country is all I can attain to – there is really no ‘place’ for me here as I do not conduct or in fact to anything and I am made to feel in many ways I am not wanted… I am not sure about the Andante and shall put it away for a long time before I decide its fate. I am glad you liked it.”\footnote{Moore, \textit{Edward Elgar}, 568.}
\end{quote}

Windflower often pushed him to keep writing, insisting that “he must go on.”\footnote{Michael Kennedy, \textit{The Life of Elgar} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 119.} Her support inspired him to name several themes in the concerto as “Windflower themes,” and he referred to it as “our concerto” in a letter to her.\footnote{Ibid., 122.}

The true nature of Elgar’s relationship to Windflower is one of his many enigmas, but it is clear from his affectionate letters and the amount of time he spent with her that he cared for her deeply. Unfortunately, due to their respective marriages, they could not be together in any way that would have been accepted by society. Perhaps Elgar channeled some of the elements of

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this star-crossed romance into his bassoon piece, which has moments of overflowing love, but is cast against a reserved and melancholy background. It could also be the reason he decided to write a ‘Romance’ instead of another short genre such as an Intermezzo or Prelude.

Although Elgar officially had Edwin James in mind in writing the Romance, the piece was likely close to his own heart as well. Elgar actually played the bassoon himself at the age of fifteen in a quintet with his brother Frank and a few friends. The group would rehearse in a shed behind the Elgar family shop; Elgar affectionately dubbed the pieces he composed for this ensemble “Shed Music.” He would give each piece a whimsical title relating to jokes between members of the quintet, a precursor to the style used in his Enigma Variations. Elgar looked fondly upon this time in his life, even asking Hubert Leicester, the flautist from the quintet who had maintained the Shed-books, if he could borrow them and make copies in 1912, one year after the premier of the Romance. Elgar’s sense of humor presents itself prominently in the Romance.

The bassoon piece remains a strong presence in the bassoon solo repertoire because of the various facets of Elgar's personality present in the work: the playful, the serious, the melancholy, and the romantic. These elements combine wonderfully for a beautiful work ruled by these characteristically fickle human emotions. These delicate emotional nuances give this piece a level of depth that most Elgar scholars have overlooked entirely. Most consider it a mere reshuffling of themes from the Violin Concerto, but its uniqueness to the character of the bassoon makes it an independent and important composition.

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12 Ibid., 19.
13 Moore, Edward Elgar, 634.
Formal Analysis

Music critic Samuel Langford of the *Manchester Guardian* complained that the violin concerto showed “Elgar’s propensity for the constant juxtaposing of short melodic figures in place of long broad tunes.”\(^\text{14}\) While this may not be desirable in a long and serious work, it works perfectly in the Concerto’s smaller scale sister piece, the *Romance*. Elgar makes use of a very limited amount of melodic material, rearranging it in a variety of ways to form the basic outline of the piece.

The solo bassoon part is built on five primary themes:

Figure 1: Soloist Themes\(^\text{15}\)

Main Theme (A) mm. 3-6

Rising Theme (B) mm. 14-16

Ad lib. Theme (C) mm. 25-26


Nobilmente Theme (D) mm. 29-31

![Nobilmente Theme](image)

Triplet Theme (E) mm. 35-36

![Triplet Theme](image)

The accompaniment invariably plays either the exact same themes as the soloist or its own separate theme, the primary accompaniment theme shown in Figure 3:

Figure 2: Primary Accompaniment Theme (mm. 1-2)\(^{16}\)

![Primary Accompaniment Theme](image)

The arrangement of the themes in the solo part produces a rough arch form (ABA). The layout of the themes in the solo part can be seen in the following chart (note that Figure 2 shows which theme is assigned to which letter):

Figure 3: Formal Outline

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<tr>
<td>[A B A’ B ext. A]</td>
<td>[C D E C D E ext.]</td>
<td>[A B A E ext.]</td>
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<tr>
<td>A section (mm. 1-24)</td>
<td>B section (mm. 25-48)</td>
<td>A section (mm. 49-end)</td>
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\(^{16}\) Ibid., 1.
Note that the E theme is used as a coda theme in both the middle and ending sections. Also, the piece begins and ends with the primary accompaniment theme (Figure 3); at the end, the bassoon plays along with the primary accompaniment theme with a countermelody, while at the beginning the bassoon is absent.

As stated before, the accompaniment is composed primarily of variations of the primary accompaniment theme and themes from the solo part. However, in the section at m. 14 (and the analogous section at m. 53), the accompaniment plays two short original themes. These are likely present specifically to give a different character to the B theme in these sections. The first short theme creates an air of happy vivacity, while the second short theme sounds more like an exasperated sigh:

Figure 4: Short Accompaniment Themes. Left: "happy vivacity" (m. 16) and right: "exasperated sigh" (m. 18)

Another interesting detail to note is the harmonic function of the themes. Often, they tend to drift slowly by step or small leaps, then make a large leap upward, and finally make another large leap downward, creating a "sighing" figure (e.g. primary accompaniment theme in Figure 3). This leap functions as a chordal skip in most cases, emphasizing the chord members and increasing the drama. This is especially true of the fermatas in the opening and closing section, where the solo line’s held notes emphasize the dominant harmony. However, the leaps in the triplet theme (Theme E) often function as appoggiaturas, creating relentless dissonance in the

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17 Ibid., 2.
melody until a chord tone is finally struck at the end of the measure. Then, at the end of the piece where the E theme is modified into a closing theme, it continues its trend of emphasizing non-harmonic tones, but instead constantly leads the harmony to the dominant. This creates the feeling that the entire end of the piece is begging to resolve.

Strangely enough, Elgar doesn’t choose to resolve the key in D minor; instead he ends the piece on a Picardy third. It almost feels as if the piece resolves in the measure prior while the bassoon sustains an A under a D minor harmony (in fact, the first bassoon normally is on this chordal fifth in the final chords of most orchestral repertoire). Yet Elgar chooses to add a harmonic deception at the end. Perhaps he felt all romances should have a happy ending. Or perhaps the final chord is Elgar’s way of forcing himself to smile, even when confronted with an overwhelming sadness. In any case, he is unafraid to play with audience expectations.

Performance Notes

Beginning with style, it is fairly obvious (and incredibly important) that the piece be played in a Romantic, legato style with ample rubato. The tone should be generally warm and inviting; articulation should be gentle. The mood is somber and emotional, with constant sighing figures and sweeping swells to create the piece’s namesake romance. The most difficult interpretive aspect of the piece is deciding how much rubato to use, and by extension, how long to hold each tenuto and fermata. Mathematically speaking, a fermata should be about double the indicated value of the note, and should be longer than a tenuto. Even so, from a mathematical perspective, trying to figure out how long to hold each note can become very complicated.
For example, measure 9 provides a good picture of the level of complexity involved in note length calculations.

Figure 5: Measure 9 from Elgar’s Romance

Here it is somewhat unclear how long the tenuto should be because of the ritardando. While the second beat should surely be slower than the first, it is difficult to do this without causing the sixteenth note leading into the third beat to sound like a triplet. In addition to maintaining this rhythmic relationship in the second beat, the tempo continues to slow. This means that the F at the end of the bar needs to be double the written length in the slow tempo, making it quite long. After deciding how long to hold this fermata, the performer must play the final sixteenth note G-sharp rhythmically correctly in the slow tempo as well. Or does the ritard carry through until the end of the measure, causing the final sixteenth note to be in an even slower calculated tempo? And if the music continues to slow down during the duration of the F, then the F should be even longer than it would be in the tempo of beat three.

This sort of complex tempo fluctuation occurs a few times in this piece (notably at m. 20 with the stringendo and subsequent largamente section). One might decide not to fall down this rhythmic rabbit hole of complicated considerations and to simply slow down the tempo and lengthen notes in a chaotic fashion. This however will likely distort the inherent rhythmic relationships of the notes, creating rhythms that Elgar didn’t intend. Therefore, it is important to

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18 Ibid., 1.
analyze these moments of temporal instability very carefully. While exact tempos for ritardandi need not be specified or premeditated, one must keep the proportional relationships between notes consistent.

On the topic of tempo, the section beginning at m. 24 often proves perniciously difficult to produce the correct tempo. This section features two sections marked *ad lib.* which, judging by the subsequent *a tempo* markings and *colla parte* indication in the accompanying parts, would suggest that the soloist is to use an extraordinary amount of rubato. One way of accomplishing this is to linger heavily on the highest and lowest notes in the first part of the phrase, then creating an accelerando through the end of the measure. Despite these indications, the accompaniment consists of fairly regular eighth notes. This often culminates into one of two results: 1) the mismatch of soloist and orchestra creates an insurmountable temporal rift or 2) the soloist eliminates much of their desired rubato in order to create a regular enough rhythm for the orchestra to follow.

Another point to consider is that the *Più Mosso* begins two bars before the *ad lib.* sections. Thus, the orchestra or pianist has full control over tempo, and they are often reluctant to abandon their momentum going into the *ad lib.* measures. Perhaps Elgar introduced this strict rhythmic framework in order to prevent the soloist from taking this section too seriously. The object of this section is to create an air of playfulness; the harmony has ventured to the cheerful relative major, and the tempo is more animated. Since the orchestra is given so much control over tempo through rhythmic impetus, despite Elgar’s markings, the soloist should respond accordingly by creating contrast with the preceding sections of lilting sighs and brooding fermatas. How to be “playful” is completely up to interpretation, but the performer should not be
afraid to embrace a certain element of the ridiculous in how they choose to emphasize notes and speed up or slow down figures. However, the net result should be that the soloist remains (perhaps a bit reluctantly) in tempo with the orchestra.

The *nobilmente* section that follows is where the soloist regains control over the flow of the music. To fully understand the character of this section, one must understand the marking *nobilmente*, a made up musical term that Elgar often employed in his music. The term, meaning “with nobility,” alludes to Elgar’s obsession with the ostentatious pomp of 19th century Victorian chivalry.19 Contemporary poet and friend of Elgar, Siegfried Sassoon, noted this about Elgar in his diary:

> “Elgar is, outwardly, a retired army officer of the conventional Victorian type. He prides himself on his conventional appearance. I have often heard him use the phrase ‘a Great Gentleman.’ It is his sublimity of encomium—his encomiastic apex. No doubt he sublimates himself as a G. G.—the Duc D’Elgar.”

For Elgar, the word *nobilmente* invokes this air of seriousness and a sense of ceremony. Thus, this section should be played with much more rhythmic regularity than any of the previous material and with the attitude of playfulness completely absent. In the context of the piece’s theme of “Romance,” this is where the lover must abandon his wild unpredictable passion and maintain conservative values. This theme is somewhat special in the amount of descriptive text Elgar gives to it. However, when this theme returns at m. 40, Elgar marks it *sonore* and *espressivo* instead. This is where the love returns, with much more richness and rubato than it had as a *nobilmente* theme.

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There are some small inconsistencies in the score that are worth exploring. The first is in the slight variation in the length of the swells.

Figure 6: Comparing mm. 16-18 with mm. 53-55\textsuperscript{21}.

Elgar varies the lengths of his crescendos in other sections of the piece, but this is an example where the exact same material is altered. This could be overlooked as an editorial mistake, but perhaps the varying lengths could be a subtle hint at a difference in style. A more rapid crescendo indicates more contrast and emotion, while a longer crescendo is more reserved and measured. Elgar could be indicating that the second example should be played more calmly and with a more gradual tempo increase. It is almost as though Elgar is instructing the player to learn from his previous mistake of pouring his heart out too quickly, and to be more careful the second time around.

Another small inconsistency is Elgar’s use of both tenuto markings (seen in many of the figures above) and lines over notes, such as in the last measure of the piece:

Figure 7: Measure 70\textsuperscript{22}.


\textsuperscript{22} Piano Reduction, Elgar, Romance for Bassoon and Piano Op. 62.
The reasoning for this is fairly straightforward. A line, although traditionally signifying the performer to "play the note for full value", is also is an articulation marking, and should be tongued when underneath a slur. The word *tenuto*, however, indicates only that the note should be lengthened, not that it should be tongued. Thus the line over a note actually has the effect of giving greater emphasis than a *tenuto*. This explanation is consistent with the way Elgar uses the markings. Note that whenever *tenuto* appears, the note is already being tongued, while the line is used when the note would otherwise not be tongued.

Contemporary Elgar theorists often discuss the duality of Elgar in his writing, a contrast between the outer "*Pomp and Circumstance* Elgar" and the inner, more emotional Elgar.23 The *Romance* is very firmly in the realm of the inner Elgar. Even the *nobilmente* theme in the middle section sounds forlorn instead of glorious. While Elgar admired the artistic integrity of non-programmatic music, he also believed that music “must be…a reflex, a picture, or elucidation of [an artist’s] own life…”24 Any performer of this work has the responsibility of translating the ideas of unrequited love and mortality that plagued Elgar during this time in his life. A mature interpretation should be outwardly cheerful, but filled with a deep melancholy.

Vivaldi wrote a staggering thirty-nine concertos for the bassoon (two of them incomplete). Despite this prolific output, nobody really knows whom Vivaldi wrote his bassoon concertos for. Perhaps he wrote them for Giuseppe Biancardi, a bassoonist in Venice for whom Vivaldi’s RV 502 bassoon concerto was dedicated to.¹ This would make the most sense; if Vivaldi wrote one concerto for him, it is a good assumption that he played the concerto and many more. But the connection to Biancardi is little more than an assumption. All that is known about him is that he was a member of the Guild of Instrumentalists in Venice; there is little evidence of any connection to Vivaldi.

The more commonly told fairy tale is that the mysterious Venetian virtuosi is one of the young female musicians at the Ospedale della Pietà (often abbreviated as the Pietà) where Vivaldi worked for much of the early 18th century. This is somewhat plausible; the orphanage can be considered one of the world’s first music conservatories. In fact, the corresponding institutions for boys were known as “conservatories.”² Many of the girls left after finding a suitable marriage, but some stayed at the orphanage into middle age as teachers.³ Perhaps one of them was an incredible virtuoso on the instrument, and stayed for many years. Despite this, there was no winds teacher recorded on staff other than Ludovico Ertman from 1707 to 1709, who

taught oboe and other wind instruments. This is a decade earlier than the estimated dates for the bassoon concerti, but perhaps one of his talented pupils was the culprit. The Pietà's instructors often had deputies, known as maestri di coro, who were talented students at the Pietà that aided in teaching.

Although Vivaldi wasn’t always working at the Pietà as violin master in the early eighteenth century, he was constantly asked to compose concertos for the students there. Ledgers from the Pietà show that Vivaldi provided them with 72 concertos for various instruments between 1725 and 1729. Unfortunately, there is no way to identify any particular virtuoso at the Pietà that might have played these concertos. The girls at the Pietà were obscured by veils during performance, for it was considered unladylike to be seen with inflated cheeks. Therefore, visitors to the Pietà were unable to provide any physical descriptions of the girls in their writing.

Added to this conundrum is the uncertainty of which kind of bassoon Vivaldi was composing for. Documents show that there certainly was a dulcian at the Pietà as early as the seventeenth century, long before Vivaldi wrote his concertos. And yet, there is no record of when the French baroque bassoon was played in the Pietà, if it was played there at all. The instrument had made it to Venice by the 1690s, but it was only in the early eighteenth century that it began to gain popularity. Since the bassoon concertos are believed to be composed mostly in the 1720s, it is temporally possible that Vivaldi had the new baroque bassoon in mind. In fact,

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4 Ibid.
7 Kopp, *The Bassoon*, 83.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 82.
performers today that choose to use historically accurate instruments often record using the four-keyed baroque bassoon rather than the dulcian.\textsuperscript{10}

Despite constant bickering between historians over these minor details, the concertos themselves have become highly respected works in the baroque bassoon repertoire. Vivaldi notoriously borrowed his own material, often reusing the same themes or even entire movements from different solo works in order to satisfy the demand for his music.\textsuperscript{11} Because of this, only a select few of the 39 bassoon concertos have a strong modern performance tradition. In recent years, especially with the rise of the historical performance practice movement, many people have begun recording all of the concertos.

The E Minor Concerto is considered one of his finest, and was widely performed by many highly respected twentieth century bassoonists including Valery Popov and Leonard Sharrow. The Ricordi edition of the piece edited by Malipiero is considered the critical urtext, containing notes from the original manuscript as well as suggested articulations that have become common performance tradition.

**Formal Analysis**

Although there is some debate as to who invented the Baroque Ritornello form, Vivaldi is widely considered to be its greatest advocate and most responsible for its propagation in the

\textsuperscript{10} Taken from program descriptions of prominent baroque player, Sergio Azzolini. See Presto Classico Limited, Sergio Azzolini with brief program notes and quotes from reviewers. http://www.prestoclassical.co.uk/a/-/3686/Sergio-Azzolini/1 (accessed April 1 – May 5, 2015).

\textsuperscript{11} Marc Pincherle and Manton Monroe Marble, "Vivaldi and the 'Ospitali' of Venice," *The Musical Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (July 1938): 310-311.
This form was common in the fast movements of Vivaldi’s concertos, featuring recurring entrances of the full ensemble contrasted with solo episodes containing virtuosic melodic material. The ritornello entrances are often based on a theme, while solo sections tend to be freely composed and athematic. The first and third movements follow this design, each containing four ritornello sections punctuated by three solo episodes.

Vivaldi’s solo episodes follow a very characteristic pattern. Each begins with an opening melodic introduction, although occasionally this is omitted after the first episode. This opening introduction is followed in all cases by typical model-sequence behavior. The episode often features multiple sequences in succession. These sequences lead to codetta material culminating in a very strong perfect authentic cadence. In Vivaldi’s bassoon concertos, the E minor being no exception, the codetta material often features a bass line outlining the primary harmony (generally iv–I₆–V–I or some variation). This bass line alternates with an upper descant voice that remains on a pedal tonic until finally descending to the leading tone before the cadence. This type of counterpoint is fairly typical of the Baroque era, and works especially well on bassoon due to the instrument’s innate proficiency at moving between different octaves.

The ritornello theme is stated at the beginning of the movement and remains the same through the entire movement:

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This ritornello is lengthened with a short sequence, featuring a descending scale figure:

The ritornello repeats between solo episodes, though it is often shortened. This behavior is exactly the same in the third movement, only the phrase lengths are different in order to accommodate the differing triple time signature of the third movement.

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14 Ibid.
The first movement is unusual in the way Vivaldi approaches the solo episodes. The bassoon enters with the same material as the violins play in the opening ritornello, first with the ostinato arpeggio figure played by the first violins and following it with the lyrical theme from the second violins (see Figure 9). The arpeggio figure returns frequently in later solo episodes, including the ending phrase of the movement. The bassoon also reuses the descending thirty-second note figure from the short sequence in the opening ritornello. Because of this high level of thematic unity between the solo and tutti sections, this concerto could be considered one of Vivaldi’s most forward-thinking pieces, more similar to the ideas of the late Classical Era than the more improvisatory and sporadic Baroque.

One interesting choice that Vivaldi makes is the use of a descending harmonic minor scale in the ritornello theme of the first movement. The other forms of the minor scale are far more typical. However, it is in exactly this case, where descending scalar motion is desired in the context of a dominant harmony, where a harmonic minor scale tends to appear. Mozart and Beethoven often use the scale for the same reason as Vivaldi. The scale must have seemed very strange to Leonard Sharrow. In his piano reduction of the score in Figure 9 above, it is clear that he was very uncomfortable with the scale, writing in a sharp sign in parenthesis despite clear knowledge that Vivaldi did not write a sharp sign in the manuscript. However, he could not bring himself to write the scale as a natural minor scale either, unwilling to ignore the D-sharp written in the original manuscript. Perhaps he thought the absence of a sharp on the C was a careless mistake.
The second movement is typical of middle movements in Vivaldi’s concertos. It is played at a very slow tempo with a less intrusive, highly simplified accompaniment. The solo line is treated more like it would be in an aria, consisting of less technical passages and more mellifluous melodic material. For example, the second solo episode begins with a sequence implying Phrygian cadences in succession:

Figure 10: Sequence material in the second movement (mm. 22-24)\(^\text{15}\)

It is strange that Vivaldi decides not to fill out the harmony in the continuo on the second beat of m. 23. This feature is not unique to the piano reduction; the critical edition also features the same absence of supporting harmony. Perhaps Vivaldi liked the effect of increased instability caused by the combination of strong half cadences and thin instrumental texture.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
Performance Notes

It is impossible to discuss the performance of a Baroque piece without including an explanation of performance practice. Our current tradition begins with Joseph Joachim, a prominent 19th century violinist who was known for his stoic performance etiquette, especially in comparison to the very ostentatious Liszt. This style of performance characterized by high fidelity to the music over soloistic showmanship was further emphasized by Brahms, a close friend and contemporary of Joachim, leading to the popular ideal of Werktreue performance.16 This idea only gained more and more strength through the 19th and 20th century, and absolute adherence to a composer’s wishes as dictated in the physical music became a cultural obsession.

With Baroque music, the obsession with authenticity has led to the historical performance movement of the late twentieth century. Going above and beyond playing what is on the page, musicologists began analyzing old treatises on performance from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They discovered the common pitch centers and tuning relationships used in that time period. They also discovered that much of Baroque playing was improvisatory, with the composer only giving a rough outline for the soloist to follow; one can note a great increase in the use of ornamentation in recordings made since the 1950s.17 Most importantly, they learned how to design copies of instruments used at the time in order to replicate the sound of the Baroque orchestra.

Richard Taruskin, contemporary musicologist and professor at the University of California Berkeley, has since made many protests to this incredibly excising practice of

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deciding what music is considered authentic. His book *Text and Act*, along with a number of other short published papers, debunks the historical performance movement by claiming that any attempt to replicate the past is impossible, and is actually an inherently modernist approach to the study of old music in the sense that it completely abandons all contemporary standards of performance technique like no other generation of musicians has ever done before.\(^\text{18}\) He makes the bold claim that music should be judged on the communicative power of the performer rather than how authentic it purports to be.\(^\text{19}\)

So what is the modern bassoonist to do when they want to play some Baroque music in a post-apocalyptic musical climate that abandoned the bassoon entirely in favor of its three hundred-year-old ancestor? Fortunately, a new movement has begun termed ‘historically informed performance’ (HIP), where players use modern instruments and sound standards but play with the same performance ideals of the past.\(^\text{20}\)

This involves playing in the more improvisatory Baroque style by utilizing ornamentation. Because Baroque music contains so much repetition, the performer is expected to create interest by adding trills, mordents, turns, scales, and arpeggios in the style of the period and region. In Vivaldi’s E Minor bassoon concerto, this occurs most frequently in sequences. Since the modern classical musician is often no longer capable of extensive improvisation due to the modern tradition of pedagogy, these improvisations are often premeditated. Vivaldi was especially known for the amount of nonsensical and often untuneful use of wildly difficult and


\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., 171.

impressive ornamentation in his violin playing, as evidenced by accounts of his concerts by his contemporaries.\textsuperscript{21} The performer should spare no expense in ensuring each sequence has interest.

Specifically in this piece, the treatment of the ritornello theme in the opening solo episode of the first movement requires special attention to detail. Vivaldi was known for including difficult figurations into his bassoon parts that were often more idiomatic to the violin than the bassoon.\textsuperscript{22} In this concerto, he opens the first solo episode with difficult arpeggio figures. Here, the whisper lock can be engaged to allow for less thumb work. This will not affect the ability of the high notes to speak because all of the high notes in this section will be played with speaker keys (high A and C keys on the left thumb). The whisper lock should be disengaged as soon as possible after this section. One must then take careful note of the treatment of the grace notes versus the treatment of the tied thirty second notes in mm. 16-17. The grace notes should be light and executed before the beat, while the tied thirty second notes in m. 17 should be played as written with considerable weight on the first part of the beat.

Vivaldi wrote in no articulations; the provided articulations are merely a suggestion and are completely up to the informed discretion of the performer. A careful analysis of the music in order to determine which notes are most important in comparison to their surrounding notes is important in choosing effective articulations. The Ricordi edition also contains many slight alterations from the manuscript, such as in m. 21 with a slower figuration consistent with the modern performance tradition of the piece. In all cases, the safest assumption is to play what

\textsuperscript{21} Weiss and Taruskin, \textit{Music in the Western World}, 199-200.
\textsuperscript{22} Kopp, \textit{The Bassoon}, 84.
Vivaldi wrote in his manuscript as opposed to the editor’s notes, as this is likely closest to his intention.

It is important to remember that Vivaldi wrote this work at a time when music was still meant to entertain rather than impart a Romantic "universal truth". Vivaldi likely was not around for many performances of these concertos; it was up to the performer to decide what would create the greatest affect in his audience. Remember that the piece should be light and sprightly, with brisk tempo and crisp articulations, and should never take itself too seriously.
There is no mystery behind the influences and inspirations leading to this piece. Dutilleux wrote this short composition as an exam piece (*morceau de concours*) for the Paris Conservatoire in 1943. Since this piece was formed so early in his career, Dutilleux’s influences were primarily rooted in his studies at the Paris Conservatoire in the early 1930s. He won the prestigious Prix de Rome at the Conservatoire after five years of study, enabling him to study abroad; however, he quickly left Rome due to Italy’s shift to Fascism at the outbreak of World War II. Afterwards he briefly joined the army, but was demobilized after only a year. Then, for three years, Dutilleux managed to survive and support himself in occupied Paris by giving piano lessons, arranging music for café orchestras, and working begrudgingly for the Opera as choral accompanist.\(^1\) It was during these difficult war-torn times that he composed *Sarabande et Cortège*.

Despite being one of the most prominent musical institutions in the world, Dutilleux felt that the Conservatoire did not provide him with a diverse look at contemporary musical culture:

> Cultural life in Paris during the war was as just before the war. One must realize that musical life at that time was very important, but we the Conservatoire students were not very conversant with musical culture. For example, when Béla Bartók came to Paris, most people did not know him.\(^2\)

Also, upon his return to France during the occupation, the works of many contemporary composers were banned by the Germans, with concert programs limited mainly to the works of

German composers.\(^3\) He lamented over winning the Prix de Rome so early on in his studies, wishing that he had spent more time studying music history.\(^4\) Because of this, Dutilleux stayed true to his French roots, and was heavily influenced by the works of recent and contemporary French composers such as Debussy, Fauré, Dukas, and Ravel.

Ravel's music in particular had a profound impact on Dutilleux's imagination. In an interview late in his life, Dutilleux recalled the first French performance of Ravel's *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand* in 1937, noting that "…it was amazing because this concerto is wonderful, and for young musicians like me at that time, it was very awe-inspiring."\(^5\) One can see a considerable amount of Ravel's influence in *Sarabande et Cortège*. The piece's title is evocative of old musical forms, reminiscent of Ravel's neoclassical inclination. Also, the piece opens in a very mysterious, ethereal style, giving it an impressionistic feel. Dutilleux also makes use of a few of Ravel's musical ideas. For example, the cadenza toward the end of the cortège (m. 124) makes use of the same arpeggio figure (specifically an arpeggio rising from a static bass note) from the cadenza of Ravel's *Concerto for the Left Hand* (m. 34).\(^6\) In addition, the swift rising arpeggios (e.g. m. 51 of the cortège) are very similar to the unmetered arpeggios used in Ravel's music, contributing to the very airy *grazioso* sound typical of early 20th century French compositions.

Despite his own natural inclination, Dutilleux wanted desperately to distinguish himself from his countrymen. He struggled to find his own musical independence during the occupation of France, claiming: "…in my future works I should have to keep my distance from a certain

\(^3\) Ibid., 27.
\(^4\) Ibid., 26.
spirit in French music, defined by the world of clarity, charm, elegance, and balance." He would go on to denounce all of his works written in this period as mistakes of his earlier, uninformed self, discouraging performance of any of his music written before 1947.

Despite this, Dutilleux did not remove Sarabande et Cortège from publication, and it remains a staple in the bassoon repertoire. Many are fond of the opening movement's sense of mystery and the cortège's intriguing rhythmic interplay between bassoonist and pianist. Dutilleux has spoken about the atmosphere he has tried to create in his pieces:

“For me, musical activity is close to being a kind of ceremony, something very nearly sacred, including elements of mystery and magic and – as with love or religion – we should approach it with a certain gravity. If that is true for someone who receives the musical message, how much more is it true for someone who invents it.”

Dutilleux often went to great lengths to protect this enigmatic sense of 'magic' in his pieces, sometimes destroying original sketches of his works and refusing to speak of his compositional process. It is fortunate for bassoonists that Dutilleux has not destroyed this piece or made it difficult to access. Not only does it serve as an essential examination of his early influences and style, but it sounds quite good for a compositional mistake.

Formal Analysis

The piece is divided into two thematically independent movements, the lyrical sarabande and the fast march-like cortège. The sarabande is in a simple ABA form, ending with a short coda. Dutilleux opens the sarabande as though it had been written three centuries before, staying

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8 Rae, "Henri Dutilleux and Maurice Ohana," 23.
9 Nichols, "Dutilleux at 75," 701-702.
10 See Caroline Potter, Henri Dutilleux: His Life and Work (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1997).
faithful to traditional tonal harmonic conventions. Other than a single B-flat in m. 8 to add a bit of Phrygian flavor, the opening eleven bars of the piece remain strictly in A minor. The bassoon enters with imitation of the preceding piano melody at the fifth, as though this were the opening of a Baroque two-voice invention. The during the second statement of the 'subject' in the bassoon line, the piano introduces a 'countersubject' beginning in m. 5, which is later played by the bassoon in the analogous section towards the end of the movement (m. 30). Here, Dutilleux writes *en dehors* in the piano part to emphasize the importance of the subject. At m. 11, the introduction ends on an open fifth, emphasizing the open, ancient sound of the section.

An important feature to note about this opening movement is Dutilleux's characteristic use of "gravitational notes," which he also uses in other pieces such as his Piano Sonata.\(^{11}\) These notes tend to be a focal point of the localized harmony, and Dutilleux emphasizes them in the sarabande using fast mordent-like neighbor notes and by augmenting their rhythmic value compared to surrounding notes. For example, the opening motive on the piano features F as the gravitational note, while the bassoon entrance changes the gravitational note to F at m. 4.

Using a combination of the force of these notes and unconventional harmony, Dutilleux shatters the simplistic structure of the movement with a single chord at m. 12:

\(^{11}\) Obi-Keller, "Dutilleux in Context," 29.
Figure 11: Measure 11 leading into the first beat of Measure 12\textsuperscript{12}

This chord is a minor-major seventh chord based on the predominant (D in the opening key of A minor), which sounds particularly outlandish when juxtaposed with the open fifth in the preceding bar. In addition, Dutilleux keeps the previous gravitational note, A, in the bass voice of the piano part. Because the new chord strongly points to D minor, with the C-sharp leading tone and D minor harmonic structure, it causes a tearing of harmonic expectation; the ear hears a hint of the old harmony but struggles to reconcile it in this new superimposed structure. The chord is so jarring compared the previous material that it sounds like some sort of terrible error in the accompaniment part.

Dutilleux continues to use the same harmonic shift to produce incredible tension and distress in the middle section of the sarabande. In m. 16, the chord shifts to the same minor-major seventh chord, this time built on G with the previous tonic and gravitational note, D, in the bass. However, the new gravitational note presented in this measure, F-sharp, is based on a chromatic shift in the solo bassoon part rather than being relegated to the new tonic of G. Because this note is the leading tone of the new harmony, it creates an even more obvious rift from the previous D minor harmony due to the bassoon's contrasting tone color.

From this point forward (m. 16), the new gravitational note is dictated by the chromatically rising bassoon line (e.g. G in m. 20, A-flat in m. 22, etc.). However, Dutilleux changes his harmonic strategy at m. 22; instead of continuing the progression of minor-major seventh chords, he begins to directly juxtapose a new pattern of harmonic shifts on top of one another:

Figure 12: Measures 21-22

Here, Dutilleux changes the pattern by shifting the harmony to a focus on the new gravitational note, A-flat, rather than to the next subdominant (which would be F coming from C minor in mm. 20-21); he surrounds A-flat with an upper and lower fourth in the left hand of the piano. He retains the C as he has done in previous iterations, but instead of it being in the bass, it is paired with an E natural and crunched against the harmony of the left hand, producing incredible dissonance with the sounding D-flat and E-flat. The addition of a third above the C signifies an increasing reluctance to abandon the harmony from the previous bar, using two notes instead of one from the previous harmony (although E-flat has been changed to E to add further dissonance to the A-flat harmony).

13 Ibid.
This new trend continues to the final gravitational note of the middle section in m. 24, A natural, where the E-flat and D-flat framework returns along with the offending E natural and a new inexplicable dissonance in the form of G-flat:

Figure 13: Measure 24

To add to the cacophony of this dissonant harmony, Dutilleux demands the pianist to use the pedal in this section in order to maximize the tension between all of the stacked harmonies. All of this is combined with a constant animato until m. 26, where the pianist slams all of the notes at once in a forte dynamic with a broad accent. Then, the bassoon makes an impressive ascent to a high E natural in m. 28, one of the highest notes on the instrument. And yet after all of this tension, we somehow find ourselves transported back to the opening simplistic A minor harmony at the same moment the E shines through.

This movement ends in the same serene mood as the opening. Dutilleux's French compositional background can be seen in this section through a variety of elements. For instance, on the third beat of m. 28, the piano rests briefly on an E major-major seventh chord, an echo of the turbulent 7th chord harmonies utilized in the previous section, but also a sign of the jazz-

\[14\] Ibid.
inspired influence of Ravel. Dutilleux ends the movement with a series of chromatically rising chords beginning in m.40. These create a dreamlike drift upward and have a very impressionistic quality due to the parallel motion, reminiscent of Debussy.

The cortège is a modified rounded binary form, with an opening A section followed by a more technical B section leading back to a modified A section. This is followed by a build-up into a long bassoon cadenza, followed by a short coda. The following chart outlines this form:

Figure 14: Cortège formal structure

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<td>[A]</td>
<td>[B]</td>
<td>[A’]</td>
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<td>mm.</td>
<td>1-29</td>
<td>29-50</td>
<td>51-68</td>
<td>69-77</td>
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In this section, the bassoon part often engages in imitative interplay with the piano part, with the bassoon presenting a theme, then playing a countermelody while the piano repeats the same melodic material (e.g. mm. 5-18). This results in clever rhythmic interplay between the two parts in the B section.
Performance Notes

The opening section should be played in a rich, lyrical style with an element of mystery characteristic of other twentieth century French music such as Ravel and Debussy. The most important point to remember is that the gravitational notes need to be emphasized with vibrato and perhaps slightly increased length and dynamic where appropriate. In m. 6, the sixteenth notes need to be emphasized over the long notes in order to emphasize the meter of the section and dissonance of the notes.

The anímez beginning at m. 21 can be difficult to negotiate. The tendency is to increase the tempo too much too quickly, leaving no more room to increase the speed any further. The limiting factor in how quickly the section should become is the arpeggio in m. 25, which should be played as quickly as the player can manage. This is a difficult run, and serves as the fastest tempo of the animato.

The bassoon's reentrance at m. 30 should be in an entirely different character from the previous section. The best way to accomplish this is by using a delicate articulation on the opening E, such that the bassoon's presence is barely noticed, leaving plenty of room to crescendo through the countermelody. At the moment the piano plays the main melody, and the bassoonist must play in a more accompagnato style.

The cortège can be characterized by incredibly technical passages featuring a plethora of staccato notes. However, Dutilleux is meticulous in his articulation markings; biographers note that he places great emphasis on the visual appearance of a score, producing exceptionally neat
calligraphic scores.\textsuperscript{15} For example, the end of the B section at mm. 87 features multiple notes marked staccato, but also some notes interspersed that are not staccato. It is the non-staccato notes that are deserving of emphasis. However, there is one curious mistake here:

Figure 15: Comparison of mm. 92-93 between the piano score and solo part\textsuperscript{16}

Note that the staccato mark is missing at the beginning of m. 93 from the piano score of the original Leduc version (seen at left) compared to the solo part of the same original edition (seen at right). A close inspection reveals that all of the other articulation markings match perfectly between the two parts (even in mm. 89-90 where the marks appear to be especially erratic). This raises the question as to which part is correct and which is the mistake. One's instinct should be to follow the piano score and assume the copyist botched the bassoon part, especially since this interpretation matches the non-staccato E later in the bar, but the true answer is unknown.

Much of the piece is fairly straightforward as long as every specific detail is followed exactingly. The cadenza however deserves some special attention. Dutilleux ends this section with a high F, the highest note scored for the bassoon in the standard repertoire. Although the bassoon is capable of playing a G (and even a C above that by squeaking out another harmonic), these notes are incredibly uncommon. An F, especially accented as Dutilleux demands, is incredibly difficult on the German bassoon. Because it has a smaller bore diameter and less


\textsuperscript{16} Dutilleux, \textit{Sarabande et Cortège}.
complicated fingerings in the high register, the French bassoon for which Dutilleux originally wrote this piece for can produce this effect with much greater ease.

On the German bassoon, it is possible to design a more resistant reed with thinner channels and tip in order to accomplish the F with greater ease, but this sacrifices the response of the low notes in the earlier part of the cadenza and in the short cadenza in the first movement. One can choose to use a more high-note-oriented bocal to aid in producing the note; this strategy is often effective, but may come at a sacrifice of tone quality, especially in the more lyrical sarabande. Finding a correct balance of these strategies, along with constant practice, is essential in producing the note consistently. It is also important to ensure the corners of the reed are thin enough such that the E and F are able to be tongued. If all else fails, Dutilleux does include an ossia an octave down; he would rather the performer skip the high F rather than not perform the piece at all. Be advised that the piece is known for the high F, and skipping it is generally frowned upon.
CONCLUSION

It is an ancient tradition in ancient Native American, Islamic, and Oriental art (to name a few) to include a deliberate mistake, because only God is perfect. Surely plenty of artists have made this excuse over the years, and it is true: humans are inherently imperfect. Even DNA polymerase, the enzyme that replicates our DNA, makes an astounding number of mistakes despite its great fidelity. Thus each of us is filled with a billion tiny mistakes. But to claim that a mistake is deliberate is a fallacy, for any prideful human strives for perfection. Mistakes in music are inevitable: a copyist error, an incorrect pattern from a conductor, a wrong note from a performer. Even the greatest masters cannot play something truly difficult with absolute perfection 100% of the time. These accidental mistakes are what make us human, and what give art its power. It is refreshing to see mistakes in music as a reminder that every musician is human, plagued by human problems, with a human message to convey. The cracks in cathedrals, the imperfect brush strokes in paintings, and the odd notes in chords are what give these arts the unique power to bring humanity together.
REFERENCES


