

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: SAXOPHONE SONATAS 1980-2010

Timothy J. Powell, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2012

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The purpose of this dissertation project identifies contemporary solo saxophone literature, specifically sonatas between the years 1980 and 2010. The overwhelming majority of repertoire written during these thirty years consisted primarily of either multi-movement or through-composed character pieces. By limiting the selected repertoire to sonatas one can still investigate the breadth of the literature that has helped validate the saxophone in the realm of classical music in a format that has seemingly fallen out of favor with composers.

The saxophone had developed a unique voice by the middle of the twentieth century in both Europe and in the United States. European composers such as Claude Debussy, Florent Schmidt, Jacques Ibert, Darius Milhaud, Alexander Glazounov, Erwin Schulhoff and Bernard Heiden recognized the potential and beauty of the instrument, while the saxophone had found quite a different niche in vaudeville, jazz, and military bands in the United States. If not for the dynamic performances by concert saxophonist such as Marcel Mule, Sigurd Rascher, Jean-Marie Londeix,

Daniel Deffayet, Cecil Lesson, Larry Teal, Eugene Rousseau, Fredrick Hemke and Donald Sinta, the timbral possibilities and technical virtuosity of the saxophone would not have been discovered. The awe inspiring performances by these soloists led to the commissioning of a multitude of works by composers looking to expand the sonic possibilities of this relatively new instrument. Through the 1970's American composers such as Leslie Bassett, Paul Creston, Henry Brant, Robert Muczynski, and Karel Husa were writing significant works for the saxophone, while European composers such as Ingolf Dahl, Edison Denisov, Alfred Desenclos, Henri Tomasi and Marius Constant were each making their own contributions, all leading to a significant quantity of repertoire that met the quality demands set by the performers.

The compositions chosen for this dissertation project were selected after numerous performance, pragmatic, programming and pedagogical considerations were taken into account. The three recitals occurred on: March 7, 2010, December 10, 2010 and May 1, 2011 in either the Gildenhorn Recital Hall or Lecture Hall 2100.

SAXOPHONE SONATAS: 1980-2010

By

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Supplemental Materials

- I. CD Recording, Recital I: Timothy Powell, saxophones; Michael Adcock, piano. March 7, 2010, Gildenhorn Recital Hall
- II. CD Recording, Recital II: Timothy Powell, saxophones; Jessica Stitt, piano; Gene D'Andrea, piano. December 10, 2010, Gildenhorn Recital Hall.
- III. CD Recording, Recital III: Timothy Powell, saxophones; Michael Adcock, piano; Gene D'Andrea, piano. May 1, 2011, Lecture Hall 2100.

I. **Justification and Historical Background**

This project identified important sonatas for solo saxophone, written between 1980 and 2010. These works were performed in a series of three recitals held on campus at the University of Maryland, College Park. By narrowing the repertoire to the sonata genre, I avoided the large number of character pieces written during this time, while still exploring the varied and expressive literature written for the concert saxophonist. I chose works specifically titled “Sonata.” While not all of these works fit the traditional definition of the term in regards to form, the fact that these composers consciously chose to use that title speaks to their view of these works as part of the that tradition. A review of existing literature revealed that while there have been a number of dissertations on post-1980 solo saxophone repertoire, none deal specifically with sonatas.

Beginning with Jean Marie Londeix’s decision to only play new music written specifically for the saxophone after the 1970 premiere of the Russian composer Edison Denisov’s *Sonate* at the World Saxophone Congress, the literature evolved into something unforeseen in the past. During a 1966 visit to the Interlocken Arts Academy Londeix was introduced to the possibilities of the altissimo register by American saxophonist Donald Sinta. The altissimo range was now to be explored by these two men rivaling only the efforts of German saxophonist Sigurd Rascher. Techniques such as multiphonics appeared in Denisov’s composition along with microtonal tuning. Londeix, the saxophone professor at the Bordeaux Conservatory, brought other extended techniques into the forefront such as slap tonguing (both the pizzicattoesque closed mouth and percussive open mouth), flutter-tonguing,

bisbigliando, key sounds and glissandi. Prior to this, the concert saxophonist had mostly explored traditional technical aspects of the instrument; tone and technical fluidity. Works of this nature include Paul Creston's *Sonata*, Paule Maurice's *Tableaux de Province* and Alfred Desenclos' *Prelude, Cadence et Finale*.

The saxophone had been neglected as a concert instrument prior to the 1980's by significant composers. It can be argued that this neglect led the saxophone world to continually look for new literature to expand the horizons of the instrument and bring it further to the forefront. This desire amongst the community has led to the development of a rather unique and significant voice in the music of the twentieth century, particularly in jazz. As an orchestral instrument, the saxophone developed rather interestingly. A few well-known composers did take advantage of Adolphe Sax's new instrument in the nineteenth century such as Berlioz, Bizet and Massenet. By the early and mid twentieth century composers such as Ravel, Rachmaninov, Prokofiev, Berg, Weill, Gershwin and Bernstein were using the instrument for special effects in their orchestral works, though it remains rarely used in symphonic music.

The saxophone saw a large expansion in its chamber music repertoire in the mid-twentieth century. This is due to the fact that in Europe, the saxophone, was first being taught at the Paris Conservatory by Marcel Mule in 1942 who needed contest pieces for his students to play every year. These pieces explored the timbral palette of the saxophone eventually leading to the exploration of technical virtuosity amongst Mule and his students.

If not for the dynamic performances by concert saxophonist such as Marcel Mule, Sigurd Rascher, Jean-Marie Londeix, Daniel Deffayet, Cecil Lesson, Larry

Teal, Eugene Rousseau, Fredrick Hemke and Donald Sinta, the timbral possibilities and technical virtuosity of the saxophone may not have been discovered. The virtuoso performances by these soloists led to the composition of a multitude of works by composers looking to expand the sonic possibilities of the saxophone in its solo repertoire. Through the 1970's, American composers, such as Leslie Bassett, Paul Creston, Henry Brant, Robert Muczynski, and Karel Husa, wrote significant works for the saxophone, while European composers such as Ingolf Dahl, Edison Denisov, Alfred Desenclos, Henri Tomasi and Marius Constant were making their own contributions. These pieces became significant in the repertoire due to the expansion of the capabilities of the saxophone at the time, both in range and extended techniques, as well as popularity amongst saxophonists.

Outside of the recital setting, the saxophone was seen primarily in popular and jazz idioms. This can be attributed to the enormously popular novelty works by vaudeville saxophonists Rudy Weidoeft in the 1920's. Weidoeft had a significant influence on one of the first jazz saxophonist, Frankie Trumbauer, who, with the efforts of Sidney Bechet, brought the saxophone into the jazz world. Saxophonists such as Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Dexter Gordon, Cannonball Adderly, Eric Dolphy, John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Joe Henderson and Michael Brecker further explored the virtuosic possibilities of the jazz saxophone.

II. Selection of Repertoire

A. Criteria for Selection.

At the beginning of this project, numerous works were considered by consulting recordings, bibliographies, concert programs, curricula from universities and consulting with Colleagues.

After compiling a large list of potential repertoire, various criteria were used:

- I. The quality of the composition
- II. Frequency of performance
- III. Pragmatic programming in regards to how the pieces fit together as well as burdening the pianist with too many incredibly difficult scores to navigate.
- IV. Pedagogical reasons both as a teacher and as a student of the saxophone
- V. The familiarity of the piece to myself, Dale Underwood, Chris Vadala and other colleagues consulted during the process. This resulted in discovering literature that was known to both myself and my colleagues

The compositions chosen were well written, significant to the repertoire and made for pragmatic recital programming. The works chosen challenge the saxophonist within the technical limits of the instrument while never sacrificing musicality of the sake of pyrotechnic technique. The compositions were also chosen by looking at the reputation of the composer and by the frequency of performances of their music beyond their works for saxophone. Sir Richard Rodney Bennett has had an extremely successful career as a composer. Having studied with Pierre Boulez, as well as multiple trips to Darmstadt, Bennett composed three symphonies, several

operas and a multitude of chamber music all written for a variety of instruments. David Maslanka has received wide acclaim for his compositions for orchestra, band, percussion and chamber music. William Albright, a student of Ross Lee Finney and Olivier Messian, was a successful organist and ragtime pianist in addition to his compositional efforts. Both John Cheetham and David Gillingham have found great success composing for concert bands.

In determining the selection of works, there were numerous works that were investigated and left out of the project due to programming issues such as having too similar a compositional style and for variety of the performance. Equally as significant to the repertoire as the work chosen, Edison Denisov's second *Sonata*, Gregory Wannamaker's *Sonata Deus Sax Machina*, Takashi Yoshimatsu's *Fuzzy Bird Sonata*, Gunther Schuller's *Sonata* and Jennifer Higdon's *Sonata* were omitted from the project reluctantly and only after careful thought to programming considerations. Wannamaker has written two sonatas for the saxophone, one as a duo with clarinet and the other in the more traditional setting with piano. Both sonatas have become very popular among saxophonists since they were written in the first decade of the millennium. I decided to play the *Duo Sonata* to showcase the saxophone in more of a nontraditional chamber music setting while still using the same extended techniques explored in his other composition. By choosing the *Duo Sonata*, I decided that I did not need another piece with alternate instrumentation such as Denisov's *Sonata* written for saxophone and cello.

In choosing pieces for the final recital it became a bit unclear as to which pieces would be worthy to include in this project. The sonatas by William Albright,

John Harbison and David Maslanka, performed in the first two recitals, have become standard repertoire over the past several years. When dealing primarily with very recently composed music, however, most of the composers are relatively unknown. Although not as well known as more established composers, their works show great promise for their voice in the future.

I believe that in order for young saxophonists to become successful educators and performers they must be well-versed in both the classical and jazz traditions of the instrument. I therefore decided to include two compositions that require jazz improvisation within classical composition, a style was termed “the third stream” by Gunther Schuller. Both the Dobbins and Ricker sonatas deal with this concept head on.

It should also be noted that, since the repertoire chosen for this series of recitals is specifically in the sonata genre, which tend to be long works, only a relatively few pieces could be played on each recital. Unlike many of the one-movement, through composed character pieces such as Piet Swerts’ *Klonos* or Rodney Roger’s *Lessons of the Sky*, many of the sonatas written during the time explored are often around twenty minutes long. This explains why only a relatively few works were included in this project.

B. Examination Process for Selection

After the criteria for selection were addressed, the repertoire was further assessed by using the following process for selection:

- I. Personal experience as a teacher and performer.
- II. Discussion with Dale Underwood.

III. Discussion with other colleagues in the field including:

Chris Vadala, Professor of Saxophone and Jazz Studies,
University of Maryland, College Park
David Stambler, Professor of Saxophone, Pennsylvania State
University
M. Dan Yoder, Professor of Jazz Studies, Pennsylvania State
University
Doug O'Conner, Professor of Saxophone, University of
Wisconsin, Eau Clair
Mathew Taylor, DMA Candidate, University of Miami

IV. Examination of concert and recital programs including conferences
such as the Navy Band Saxophone Symposium and the North
American Saxophone Alliance.

V. Examination of journal articles and CD reviews in the *Saxophone
Journal*

VI. Examination of recordings, if available, of the literature.

VII. Examination of repertoire lists at other saxophone studios at various
universities.

C. Clarification of literature to be explored

The purpose of this dissertation is to include the following:

I. Saxophone Sonatas - Including unaccompanied saxophone pieces
(Rueff, *Sonata*), chamber music with piano (Albright, *Sonata*) and
chamber music with instruments other than piano (Wanamaker, *Duo
Sonata*)

It shall not include the following:

I. Character pieces both unaccompanied and chamber music

- II. Saxophone Concerti (Ibert *Concertina da Camera*; Mackey *Concerto*)
- III. Electro-acoustic compositions
- IV. Saxophone Ensembles (Duo, Trio, Quartet, ect...)
- V. Saxophone in a larger chamber music setting as an equal member
(Chambers, *Cold Water, Dry Stone*; Villa Lobos, *Sexteto Mistico*;
Tomasi, *Printemps*)
- VI. Saxophone as a member of a larger ensemble (Band or Orchestra), not
as a soloist, in a piece that could not be described as a concerto
(Ravel, *Bolero*; Prokofiev, *Lieutenant Kijé*; Schmitt, *Dionysaques*)
- VII. Jazz or Commercial genres

III. Conclusion and Programming

The scope of this project was to identify significant contemporary repertoire for the saxophone, specifically sonatas. I have identified ten sonatas that merit the attention of faculty and student saxophonists in an academic setting. These ten sonatas will most likely become standard repertoire, if they have not already.

The three recitals were divided up, for the most part, chronologically. The pieces themselves were not presented chronologically, but rather each recital represents a specific time period. It is not the purpose of this project to present the material as a statement of the trends of the times but rather a chronological survey of

the literature. The three recitals occurred on: March 7, 2010, December 10, 2010 and May 1, 2011 in either the Gildenhorn Recital Hall or Lecture Hall 2100.

Dissertation Recital I – Saxophone Sonatas (1980-2010)

Timothy Powell, saxophones
Michael Adcock, piano
March 7, 2010, Gildenhorn Recital Hall

Alto Saxophone Sonata (1988) David Gillingham (b. 1947)
I. Slowly, with expression; Fast
II. Chaconne
III. Presto

Sonata (1986) Richard Rodney Bennett (b. 1936)
I. Poco allegro
II. Scherzando
III. In Memory of Harold Arlen
IV. Vivo

Sonata (1984) William Albright (1944-1998)
I. Two-part Invention
II. La Follia Nuova: a lament for Cacioppo
III. Scherzo “Will O’ the Wisp”
IV. Recitative and Dance

Program Notes:

Alto Saxophone Sonata – David Gillingham

The *Alto Saxophone Sonata* was premiered at the World Saxophone Congress in Japan in 1988 by John Nichol, Professor of Saxophone at Central Michigan University, with David Gillingham at the piano.

The first movement is structured in a sonata design preceded by a slow and plaintive introduction. The allegro portion of the movement features an athletic primary theme which requires rapid tonguing and fingering and a more lyrical, but angular, secondary theme. A mystical chaconne with nine variations comprises the second movement. The third movement is cast in sonata-rondo form with the driving primary theme accompanied by triplet figures in the piano and a very tuneful secondary theme. A frantic tempo governs this movement from its intense beginning to its wild and flourishing ending.

David Gillingham is Professor of Music Composition at Central Michigan University in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

-David Gillingham

Sonata for soprano saxophone and piano – Richard Rodney Bennett

English born Sir Richard Rodney Bennett is perhaps most noted for his versatility in both his compositions as well as his performing career. He has composed for concerts and film, played piano in contemporary music and jazz performances, as well as singing and playing classic cabaret selections.

Having spent his summers at Darmstadt and a two year period as one of Pierre Boulez's first students, Bennett developed a neo-Romantic approach to serialism much closer to Berg than Weber. After moving to New York City in 1979, Bennett was able to allow his multiple influences affect his compositional style instead of the pigeon holing he had complained of in London.

Sonata for Soprano Saxophone and Piano was written in 1986 by way of a commission by saxophonist John Harle, for whom the piece is dedicated, and funds provided by the Greater London Arts. The work was first performed on November 23, 1988 by John Harle and John Lenehan who consequently have made the only commercial recording of the work.

Sonata for alto saxophone and piano – William Albright

The *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano* was written in 1984 for a consortium of three saxophone/piano duos, Laura Hunter/Brian Connelly, Donald Sinta/Ellen Weckler, and Joseph Wytko/Walter Cosand, with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Of all the movements, the second perhaps most deserves comment. This movement is dedicated to the memory of the composer George Cacioppo who died unexpectedly on April 8, 1984. Co-founder of the ONCE group and mentor to two generations of composers, Cacioppo and his music and personality rest at the foundation of my thinking. He would have very much appreciated the use of the the traditional title "La follia" (the madness) in my reincarnation as "La follia nuova." Like its Baroque antecedents, the movement is in a chaconne-variation form, although at one point the sections jumble together, or intersect. The fact that the key is F# minor may be important, or it may not be.

-William Albright

Dissertation Recital II – Saxophone Sonatas (1980-2010)

Timothy Powell, saxophones

Jessica Stitt, piano

Gene D'Andrea, piano

December 10, 2010, Gildenhorn Recital Hall

San Antonio, Sonata for alto saxophone and piano (1995) John Harbison (b. 1938)

- I. The Summons
- II. Line Dance
- III. Couples Dance

Sonata (1988)

David Maslanka (b. 1943)

- I. Moderate
- II. Slow
- III. Very Fast

Sonata (1990)

Bill Dobbins (b. 1947)

- II. Somewhat Freely
- I. Somewhat Freely / Jazz Waltz

Program Notes:

San Antonio, Sonata for alto saxophone and piano – John Harbison

I. The traveler has a free afternoon in San Antonio. It is August, 105 degrees. Expecting to start with the cool promenade along the river, he is instead lured by a sound. He follows it up a long stairway and finds himself in a little fiesta: a hot square, many people, no shade, a few people dancing to a fast beat, the band playing and singing in Spanish.

II. The first dancers finish, exhausted. Then, as if on cue, the whole crowd gets into a line of people of all ages, nine to ninety. They all know the steps, which change with the phrases.

III. The music changes again becoming slower. The people continue on in couples. No one seems to feel the heat and the band hardly stops. Everyone, the traveler included, sink into it. Towards the end, a young girl asks the traveler to dance. He declines.

But a year later, when the tourist puts down the memory of the sounds, something about a saxophone, and a few rhythms in his distorted memory, he accepts.

-John Harbison

Sonata for alto saxophone and piano – David Maslanka

The opening movement of the sonata has three themes-two very similar, both in A-minor; and one in C-major: The development takes up elements of the first theme. The recapitulation is of the third theme only and the coda recalls theme two. The attitude of the movement is reflective, with sudden eruptions of boiling energy.

The second movement is a broad soliloquy with an opening that has the feel of an accompanied recitative. The second section is an intricate evolution of theme one from the first movement, and the third section is a shortened restatement of the opening. I feel a strong influence in the movement of the harmonies and expressive qualities of certain madrigals by Gesualdo.

The third movement is a huge rondo form-ABACA and coda. The opening section is a crunching, flying C-minor music. The second section is mournful, and the third is a playful C-major Variation of the opening material. The C section is a dense, turbulent aria. The recapitulation is literal until it releases rather suddenly into an ethereal coda. This movement evokes feelings of struggle and ultimate resignation.

The *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano* was commissioned by the North American Saxophone Alliance and was premiered at the United States Navy Band International Saxophone Symposium in 1989.

-David Maslanka

Sonata for soprano or tenor saxophone and piano – Bill Dobbins

Bill Dobbins' *Sonata for Soprano Saxophone and Piano* combines music elements from both the classical and jazz traditions. It was written partially with the intention of stimulating the growing interest in crossing the boundaries between jazz and classical music, and also to encourage creative musicians to become familiar with the vocabularies and performance practices of both. The work was written for specifically for Ramon Ricker and was premiered at the World Saxophone Congress in Angers, France, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the invention of the saxophone.

The three highly contrasting movements are developed through an imaginative and widely varied use of the same thematic material. Only movements I and II will be performed tonight.

Dissertation Recital III – Saxophone Sonatas (1980-2010)

Timothy Powell, saxophones

Michael Adcock, piano

Gene D'Andrea, piano

Mark Gallagher, clarinet

May 1, 2011, Lecture Hall 2100

Sonata (2001)

John Cheetham (b. 1939)

- I. Giocososo
- II. Lento, grazioso
- III. Con moto

Sonata (1998)

Harold Levin (b. 1956)

- I. Allegro
- II. Aria
- III. Allegro Vivace

Duo Sonata (2002)

Gregory Wanamaker (b. 1968)

- I. Departure
- II. Elegy
- III. Scherzo
- IV. Arrival (Blues)

Jazz Sonata (1991)

Ramon Ricker (b. 1943)

- II. Ballad (danse d'amour)
- I. Introduction and Allegro (danse macabre)

Program Notes

Sonata for alto saxophone and piano – John Cheetham

John Cheetham taught music theory and composition at the University of Missouri, Columbia from 1969-2000. He has written for a variety of media and his works have been widely performed in the United States and abroad. He has received commissions from the Kentucky Derby Museum, Texas Tech University, Atlanta Symphony Brass Quintet, Central Oklahoma Directors Associations, Springfield (MO) Symphony, Summit Brass and the Air Force Band of the Midwest, as well as from numerous soloists.

Cheetham's *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano* is the first of two works written for saxophonist Kenneth Tse and was premiered at the North American Saxophone Alliance Biennial Conference at the University of North Texas in 2002.

Sonata for alto saxophone and piano – Harold Levin

Currently on faculty at Cleveland State University, Harold Levin has had an active and varied career as a violist, conductor, composer and teacher. He holds degrees from Ball State University, University of Cincinnati and Rutgers University. He studied composition with Charles Wuorinen, Joel Hoffman and Ernesto Pallegri.

Levin's *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano* was commissioned by John Vana. This piece uses the rhythmic concepts of minimalist composers such as Philip Glass and Steve Reich. The outer movements maintain this aesthetic from beginning to end using this rhythmic interplay to continually push the piece forward. The middle movement opens and closes with an unaccompanied meditative recitative. The contemplative "aria" section of the movement is tonally free but never lacks a sense of melodicism. This continually builds until the recitative returns for a final statement.

Duo Sonata for alto saxophone and clarinet – Gregory Wanamaker

Duo Sonata combines the traditional formal aspects of classical sonata genre with some more recent musical trends and languages and exploits many of the coloristic and virtuosic qualities of the clarinet and alto saxophone as individuals and as an ensemble.

Duo Sonata is in four movements each exploiting a different musical style characteristic while sharing common motives and themes.

1. *Departure* is a highly chromatic and rhythmically driven movement in sonata form
2. *Elegy* is strictly white-note Aeolian and freely rhythmic
3. *Scherzo* resembles the popular so-called minimalism
4. *Arrival (Blues)* is a fast blues with a development

-Gregory Wanamaker

Jazz Sonata – Ramon Ricker

Ricker's *Jazz Sonata* combines music elements from both the classical and jazz traditions. It was written partially with the intention of stimulating the growing interest in crossing the boundaries between jazz and classical music, and also to encourage creative musicians to become familiar with the vocabularies and performance practices of both. This work was premiered by Ricker and his long time musical collaborator Bill Dobbins in Naples, Florida in May, 1991. Though originally written for soprano saxophone, it is equally idiomatic for the entire saxophone family. Tonight's performance will be played on the tenor saxophone.

The first movement, *danse macabre*, focuses on the quasi-latin groove based primarily on minor and diminished sonorities creating an ominous, dark soundscape. This is propelled further but the use of counterpoint, pedal point and the improvised solo sections.

Danse d'amour, the second movement, uses thematic material Ricker composed fourteen years earlier in the form of a tune he had written for his wife. The lyrical melody is propelled forward into a double-time feel using pedal point harmonies again to take the collaborative ensemble into their improvised solo sections before the recapitulation of the initial melody.

The three highly contrasting movements are developed through an imaginative and widely varied use of thematic material. Only the first two movements will be performed tonight.

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