

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY
CLARINET CONCERTOS OF JOHN
CORIGLIANO, JOAN TOWER, WILLIAM
BOLCOM, AND JOHN ADAMS

Matthew Frederick Rynes, Doctor of Musical
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The clarinet concertos by John Corigliano, William Bolcom, John Adams and Joan Tower are among the most technically demanding pieces for the instrument of the last half-century. Each of the four composers utilizes a unique musical language that borrows from earlier pieces and musical styles. All four concertos also challenge the clarinetist's ability to interpret various musical styles from contemporary and popular genres. This document outlines the form of each concerto, the various compositional languages utilized by each composer, and the popular and contemporary genres borrowed in each concerto.

THE AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY CLARINET CONCERTOS OF JOHN
CORIGLIANO, JOAN TOWER, WILLIAM BOLCOM, AND JOHN ADAMS

by

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Introduction

The clarinet gained prominence as a solo instrument in the last half of the twentieth century, with several major composers exploring its musical, expressive, and technical potential in major works. American composers John Corigliano, Joan Tower, William Bolcom, and John Adams have each written particularly demanding clarinet concertos that pose several challenges for soloists. Each composer borrows material, compositional techniques, and musical styles from earlier pieces in their concerto's musical language. The resulting combination of styles and techniques creates a dense, elaborate musical language unique to each of the four composers. These concertos, unfortunately, are not performed regularly, as each piece requires a level of technical and musical skill beyond most clarinetist's abilities.

John Corigliano's Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra

John Corigliano's Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra (1977–1978) was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic in 1977. The concerto is dedicated to the orchestra's then-principal clarinetist Stanley Drucker and principal guest conductor Leonard Bernstein.¹ Corigliano had neither written a concerto nor a piece for a full orchestra before the orchestra approached him to write the clarinet concerto for Drucker. The composer's father, John Corigliano Sr., was the concertmaster of the Philharmonic from 1943–1966. It was through his position that the composer had access to Bernstein and the players at such a young age.² Corigliano's knowledge of the players' personalities and abilities influenced the orchestration of the piece, as he wanted to highlight every musician.

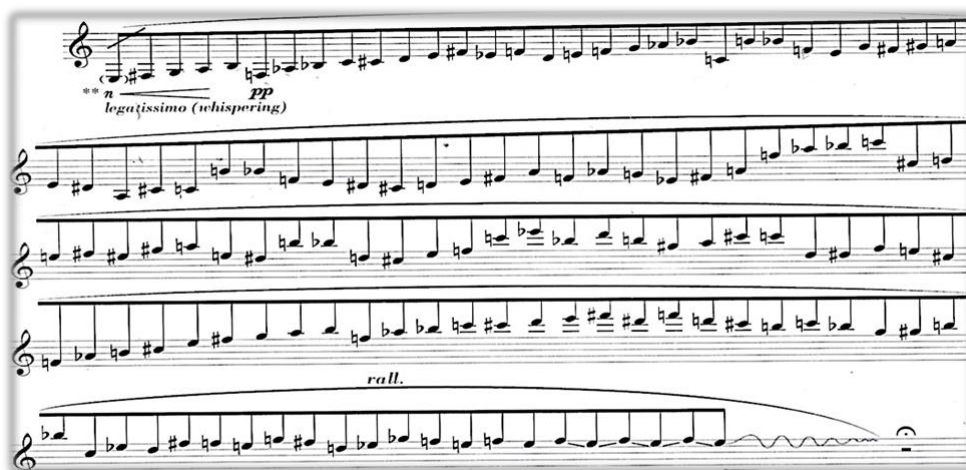
¹ John Corigliano, *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra*, 1997, piano reduction by Paul Mckibbins, rev. ed. (Milwaukee: G. Schirmer/Hal Leonard, 2015).

² Farnsworth Fowle, "John Corigliano Is Dead at 74; Ex-Philharmonic Concertmaster," *The New York Times*, September 2, 1975.

Cadenzas

The first movement unfolds in a loosely symmetrical form marked by two cadenza passages, one soft (*Ignus fatus*) and one loud (*Corona solis*). *Ignus fatus* opens the concerto and sounds like a series of improvised, nearly inaudible pitches (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Corigliano, Clarinet Concerto, mvt. I: *Ignus fatus*



Source: John Corigliano, *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra*, mvt. I (Milwaukee: G. Schirmer/Hal Leonard, 2015), m. 1.

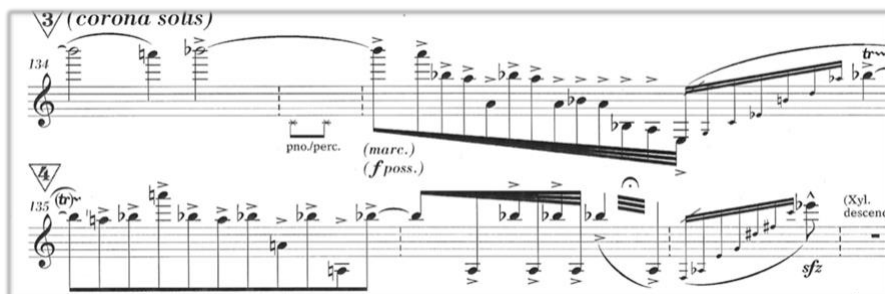
Following a brief pause, the solo clarinet plays a variation of the opening cadenza, an octave higher, accompanied by a quarter-tone drone in the strings. The end of the first variation introduces a new, freer, leaping gesture. A series of repeated notes and arpeggio figures follow the leap gesture in the solo clarinet. After another pause, the soloist plays a final variation on the opening cadenza, featuring aggressive trills. The soloist's trills gradually slow down as the opening cadenza figures transition into what Corigliano marks an orchestral interludium.

The interludium features members of the orchestra playing a series of solos based on the solo clarinet's various cadenza figures. Following a bass clarinet solo, the clarinet

soloist reenters, playing a short, lyrical passage. A crescendo in the orchestral brass reignites the frenetic energy from the movement's opening, followed by an articulated version of the solo clarinet's first cadenza in m. 49. The development section from mm. 80–132 unfolds with the solo clarinet playing variations on the arpeggios, leaps, and trill gestures from the opening cadenza.

Beginning in m. 118, the soloist alternates between altissimo B $\flat$ and A in anticipation of the second, loud cadenza labeled *Corona solis*. The second cadenza (mm. 134–36) initially sounds like a louder variation of the opening clarinet cadenza played up an octave, but the passage continues upward into the extreme altissimo register of the clarinet (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Corigliano, Clarinet Concerto, mvt. I: *Corona solis*



Source: John Corigliano, Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra, mvt. I (Milwaukee: G. Schirmer/Hal Leonard, 2015), mm. 134–135.

A battery of percussion instruments interjects between the soloist's cadenza figures. Asynchronous rhythmic passages played by the orchestral players accompany the soloist's wailing altissimo pitches. The soloist and ensemble play a combination of freely notated figures in m. 149, producing an extraordinarily loud, aggressive sound for an instrumental concerto.

Mirroring the first half of the movement, variations on the opening cadenza repeat in the solo clarinet, juxtaposed against members of the orchestra playing a collage of those same cadenza figures. The sound produced by the solo clarinetist and orchestra playing the same material at full volume is overwhelming. As the sound slowly lessens in intensity, the solo clarinet plays a nearly inaudible retrograde variation of the opening cadenza, drawing the movement to a close.

Elegy

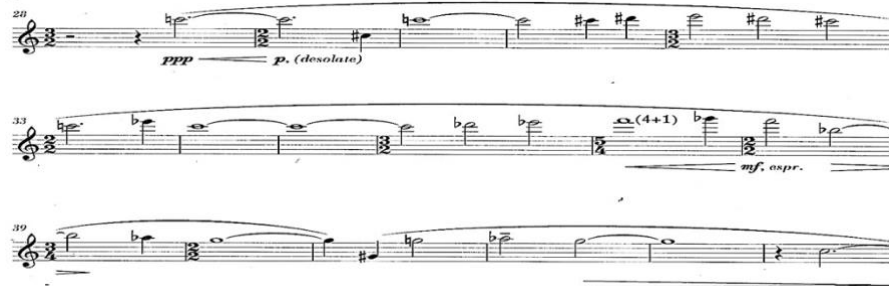
The second movement is a musical lamentation dedicated to the memory of the composer's father.³ According to Corigliano, his father spent much of his time practicing the violin, while living an otherwise "very lonely" life.⁴ In contrast to the chaotic, short motifs of the first movement, the elegy features long, melancholic phrases dually symbolizing the father's isolation and the son's grief.

³ Fowle, "John Corigliano Is Dead at 74."

⁴ John Corigliano, "Masterclass with John Corigliano," February 1, 2012, part 3, 3:10, *Artist's House Music*, accessed January 2019, <http://artistshousemusic.org/?s=corigliano>.

Upper strings begin the movement, playing with cold, meandering phrases followed by pauses. In m. 28, the solo clarinet enters with an aching melody in the altissimo register (see figure 3). Following restatement of the solo clarinet melody in the chalumeau register, the concertmaster begins an extended solo in m. 89.

Figure 3. Corigliano, Clarinet Concerto, mvt. II: soft clarinet entrance



Source: John Corigliano, Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra, mvt. II (Milwaukee: G. Schirmer/Hal Leonard, 2015), mm. 28–38.

The clarinet joins the violin in m. 94 and the two soloists pass quarter-note figures back and forth in a strange duet. After the duet, the violins and clarinet return to their opening melodic ideas in m. 147. The music fades away as the soloist sustains an extraordinary soft C, leaving the tension between the string and clarinet melodies unresolved.

Antiphonal Toccata

Corigliano introduces antiphony in the third movement, adding yet another level of complexity to the concerto's already intricate ensemble writing. Several orchestral horns, trumpets, and clarinets are omitted from the orchestra, as Corigliano feared that they would be lost if seated within the ensemble.⁵ Instead, he places those players

⁵ John Corigliano, Program Notes to Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra.

offstage and withholds them until the third movement to balance the ensemble and add an element of surprise.

Strings open the movement with the pitch G passing from the violins on the audience's left side of the stage to the cellos on the right. The Sonata pian e' forte by Giovanni Gabrieli is quoted in the orchestral brass at m. 6 against the pulsating strings.⁶ Following the Gabrieli quotation, the orchestral strings and percussion play murmuring gestures, which build to the solo clarinet's entrance.

The solo clarinet enters with a series of fast, short, angular figures marked "computer-like" (see figure 4).⁷

Figure 4. Corigliano, Clarinet Concerto, mvt. III: "computer like" passage



Source: John Corigliano, Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra, mvt. III (Milwaukee: G. Schirmer/Hal Leonard, 2015), mm. 14–22.

Offstage trumpets introduce the antiphonal ensemble players through a series of asynchronous gestures, which are repeated by the orchestral trumpets. The solo clarinet mimics the trumpet gestures, playing a series of repetitions on the pitch C and aggressive trills on the pitches D $\sharp$, C $\sharp$, and C. These pitches harken back to the solo clarinet's melody from the second movement. Two tympanists placed on opposite sides of the stage

⁶ Corigliano, Program Notes to Concerto.

⁷ John Corigliano, Program Notes to Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra.

play an aggressive duet in m. 72, expanding upon the spatial element introduced in the string's opening measures.

Following the rhythmically and thematically dense opening, the music turns cold as Corigliano reintroduces material from the second movement. The solo clarinet melody, now in the upper altissimo register, sounds strained against the ensemble in m. 104. Muted brass returns with the Gabrieli chorale in m. 109 as the clarinetist continues to play softly in the altissimo register. Two offstage clarinets echo the soloist's music out of tempo, producing an eerie effect.⁸

Fluttering strings and offstage horns signal the return of the opening music in m. 124. The pitch G passes between the onstage and offstage players, mirroring the movement's opening. As the pitch passes from the front to the back of the hall, the solo clarinet restates the "computer-like" figures softly and without accents in m. 127. Offstage clarinets, horns, and trumpets interrupt the soloist's music as Corigliano's layering of earlier thematic strands creates an even more complex musical texture.

From mm. 192–206, the solo clarinet plays a cadenza incorporating thematic elements of all three movements. Offstage horns follow the cadenza, playing glissandi and repeated figures before the ensemble and offstage trumpets pass their asynchronous gestures. Tympani and percussion in m. 214 play what sounds like rock beats against altissimo clarinet pitches from the slow section of the movement at fortississimo. The music shifts suddenly to the final statement of the Gabrieli chorale with the entire brass section playing the chorale as loudly as possible. Following the brass, the solo clarinet

⁸ The effect sounds particularly strange if the offstage clarinet's pitches are out of tune with the soloist.

plays a “quasi glissando” followed by a piercing trill as on-and offstage ensemble players reach an extraordinarily loud, climactic, final blow.

Joan Tower's Clarinet Concerto

Joan Tower has written a number of significant chamber pieces for the clarinet over the past 40 years. Several of her compositions, like *Wings for Solo Clarinet* (1983) and Fantasy Sonata “*those harbor lights...*” (1983), have become staples of the contemporary repertoire in recent years. Her Clarinet Concerto (1988) was commissioned by the Walter W. Naumberg Foundation for the clarinetist Charles Neidich and was first performed by American Symphony Orchestra under Jorge Meister.⁹ Unfortunately, her concerto has fallen into relative obscurity in comparison to those written by her peers. The concerto's original orchestral version has only been recorded once and the piece is more often performed as a duo for clarinet and piano.¹⁰

Tower's concerto unfolds in a single, unbroken movement. In “The Art of Meld: Pitch Organization and Transformation in Joan Tower's Music for Clarinet,” Cassie Ann Keogh notes that Tower commonly develops a single interval throughout a piece like a theme.¹¹ In her Clarinet Concerto, Tower develops the interval of a tritone in turbulent, rhythmically complex passages and perfect fourths and fifths in less active sections.

⁹ Joan Tower, *Clarinet Concerto* (New York: Associated Music Publishers, 1990).

¹⁰ Joan Tower, *Clarinet Concerto*, David Shifrin, soloist, Joseph Silverstein, conductor, *Concertos*, recorded with the Louisville Symphony Orchestra, 1997, D'Note Classics 36674519, CD.

¹¹ Cassie Ann Keogh, “The Art of Meld: Pitch Organization and Motivic Transformations in Joan Tower's Music for Clarinet” (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2015), pp. 71–75.

Following an extended orchestral introduction, the solo clarinet enters in m. 45 playing a series of triplet, sixteenth, and quintuplet patterns against steady triplets in the strings and marimba (see figure 5). As the solo clarinet's opening figures decelerate, the orchestra aligns with the soloist, playing in rhythmic and harmonic unison in m. 74.

Figure 5. Tower, Clarinet Concerto: fast clarinet entrance



Source: Joan Tower, *Clarinet Concerto*, (New York: Associated Music Publishers, 1990), mm. 45–48.

The solo clarinet initiates a series of trills based on a whole-tone pitch collection in m. 111. Low strings, a solo trombone, and a solo bassoon accompany the clarinet soloist's trill figures with an ostinato similar to the "Augurs of Spring" ostinato in Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.¹² As the solo clarinet's whole-tone trills grow in intensity, the low-pitched ostinato figures are passed to the violins, piano, and temple blocks.

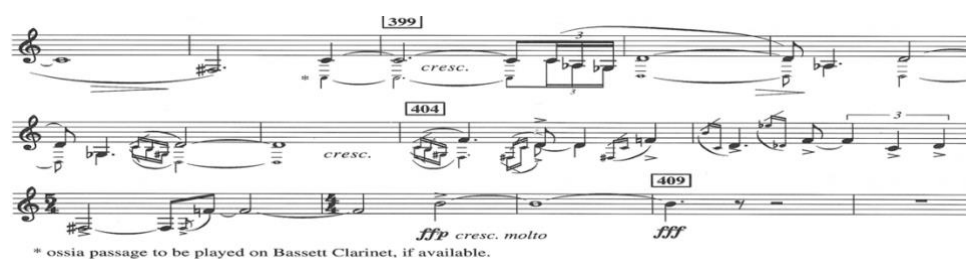
In m. 170, the solo clarinet's music combines pentatonic scale flourishes with new, jagged passages based on a new whole tone pitch collection. The soloist plays trills and tremolos, building to a florid, unaccompanied solo passage up to an altissimo B in m. 184. Orchestral oboes and clarinets mimic the solo clarinet's gestures, before the music transitions to the concerto's slow, middle section.

¹² Igor Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring*, 1913, reprint (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1989), pp. 12–31.

The solo clarinet plays a haunting melody in m. 250 that emphasizes the interval of a tritone. Strings accompany the soloist with soft quarter notes, enabling the soloist to play extraordinarily soft.¹³ The soloist restates the soft tritone melody, before initiating a series of fast, rhythmically intricate figures. Horns and low brass join the soft string accompaniment, as the clarinet figures become increasingly more active. The music builds to another climax in m. 295 as the soloist plays another wild passage up to a fortissimo, altissimo C $\flat$.

In m. 379, the solo clarinet's melody suddenly falls into the lowest register of the instrument. Tower originally composed the concerto to be played on the basset clarinet, which extends the range of the standard A clarinet down by a major third. The basset clarinet's additional tubing allows for the soloist to play forcefully and in tune in the low register, which can sound unfocused on standard A clarinets. When played on the basset clarinet, the lowest pitches create an eerie timbre (see figure 6).

Figure 6. Tower, Clarinet Concerto: optional basset clarinet passage



Source: Joan Tower, Clarinet Concerto, (New York: Associated Music Publishers, 1990), mm. 397–405.

In m. 409, the solo clarinet begins a short melodic idea, based on the interval of a perfect fourth, which is then picked up in the orchestral woodwinds and strings. The solo

¹³ Tower's dynamic marking for the solo clarinet begins *ppp*.

clarinet then restates the repeated whole-tone quintuplet figures heard in the earlier, fast section of the concerto. Fanfare figures, now in the full brass section, accompany the solo clarinet's quintuplets as the music coalesces in a quasi-chorale in m. 475 in the brass and woodwinds. The chorale builds to yet another climax before the soloist plays an extended cadenza.

Following a pause, the soloist begins the cadenza, playing a series of repeated As, displaced by octaves, followed by an Eb. The music accelerates through a series of staccato two sixteenth/one eighth note rhythms before Tower instructs the soloist to improvise. Suddenly, the clarinet plunges into loud, accented low notes which harken back to the Bassett figures from m. 379. The concerto ends with solo clarinet and orchestral strings in unison, playing soft, sustained notes which build and then diminuendo into silence.

William Bolcom's Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra

William Bolcom was the second major composer of his generation to write a clarinet concerto for Stanley Drucker and the New York Philharmonic. His Concerto for Clarinet (1988) was commissioned by the Philharmonic to be one in a series of works celebrating its 150th season in 1992.¹⁴ Like his Twelve New Etudes for Piano (1977–1986), Bolcom's concerto playfully draws from classical forms, contemporary compositional techniques, and popular styles.

Allegro

The first movement unfolds in sonata-allegro form. Following a short introduction, the clarinet soloist plays a part of a descending D minor scale: D–C–B $\flat$ –A (Theme 1a). A series of extensions based on Theme 1a culminates in another four-note descending scale, followed by an appoggiatura up to a sustained B $\flat$ (Theme 1b) which then descends, melding Themes 1a and 1b together.

¹⁴ William Bolcom, Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra (Milwaukee: Edward B. Marks Music/Hal Leonard, 1988).

The appoggiatura portion of the theme initially appears as an extension of the Theme 1a motive (see figure 7). However, Theme 1b undergoes as many motivic developments throughout the concerto as Theme 1a and the yet unheard secondary theme.

Figure 7. Bolcom, Clarinet Concerto, mvt. I: variants of theme 1

The image shows a musical score for the Clarinet Concerto, mvt. I, by William Bolcom. It features two themes, Theme 1a and Theme 1b. Theme 1a is marked 'poco cantabile' and 'p' (piano). Theme 1b is marked 'mf' (mezzo-forte) and 'mp' (mezzo-piano). The score includes dynamic markings like 'f' (forte) and 'p' (piano), and articulation marks like '>' (accents) and '<' (accents). The score is written for a single melodic line, likely for the clarinet.

Source: William Bolcom, Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra, mvt. I (Milwaukee: Edward B. Marks Music/Hal Leonard, 1988), mm. 5–24.

Orchestral winds and strings repeat the opening melody as the solo clarinet and piccolo play a countermelody starting in m. 29. The soloist introduces a triplet melody in A major that becomes an agitated sequence leading to a loud altissimo A in m. 63. Aggressive orchestral figures accompany the soloist' spiky sixteenth note sequence.

In m. 92, the solo clarinet introduces the romantic, melancholic secondary theme in C minor (see figure 8). Bolcom presents the second theme simply, with eighth-note accompaniment in the orchestra.

Figure 8. Bolcom, Clarinet Concerto, mvt. I: expressive theme 2



Source: William Bolcom, Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra, mvt. I (Milwaukee: Edward B. Marks Music/Hal Leonard, 1988), mm. 91–95.

The clarinet melody shifts to the major mode and suddenly alludes to ragtime in m. 101, with chromatic approach tones and syncopated rhythms enhancing the stylistic change. Mirroring the repeat of Theme 1a, the orchestra restates the solo clarinet's melody in the ragtime style.

The orchestra's music becomes tumultuous in the transition to the development section. Chaos erupts between the solo clarinetist and ensemble, with heavy percussion that nearly obliterates the sound of the soloist. Modally mixed sonorities in B $\flat$ obscure the music's pitch centricity, as the orchestral accompaniment clashes with the solo clarinet. A sustained B $\flat$ in the solo clarinet initiates the recapitulation with a chromatic ascending line that resolves to D minor. The first theme's restatement in the recapitulation sounds disingenuous following the tumultuous development section. Harmonically, the music anticipates a transition to the restatement of the secondary

theme in either A major or minor. Instead, the music deceptively moves to F# minor in m. 146.

A cadenza for the solo clarinet begins in m. 162, following another orchestral barrage. The solo clarinet plays a literal restatement of its development section music, followed by two prominent Bbs, the second under a fermata. The music then accelerates through a sequence of thirty-second notes, ending on a forceful altissimo G. After a pause, the soloist plays three “free” and “misterioso” descending minor ninth intervals, building to a forceful growl. The cadenza ends with soft, unmeasured pitches played the clarinet soloist.

Orchestral strings reenter, playing turbulent triplet figures following the solo clarinet’s cadenza. At m. 192, Bolcom anticipates the third movement’s allusions to Brazilian music by instructing the soloist to play “with a jazz inflection but not dotted.” A solo horn restates Theme 2 in the ragtime style in D major. The solo clarinet then plays the romantic version of Theme 2 in D minor in m. 209. Following the restatement of Theme 2, the movement concludes with the soloist playing a jazz-inflected version of the Theme 1a in D minor.

Cantabile

The second movement unfolds as a da capo aria disguised as a doo-wop pop ballad from the 1950s. After an introduction in the orchestral brass, the solo clarinet plays a swooning, lyrical melody comprised of the first movement’s three themes. Orchestral strings restate the clarinet’s melody, before the music transitions to the B section. The lush strings give way to series of repeated, unaccompanied figures played by the soloist

in m. 25. Orchestral flutes, oboes, and clarinets accompany the soloist's repetitive figures with soft, sustained pitches forming dissonant harmonies over several measures. The harmonic tension between the soloist and ensemble ratchets up to a climax in m. 37, culminating in a harsh D minor sonority.

Following the murky B section, the solo clarinet plays a highly embellished version of its doo-wop melody in m. 40. The solo clarinet's repetitive figures from m. 25 return in m. 55, accompanied by a sustained, dissonant sonority in the upper woodwinds. Suddenly, the upper woodwind pitches resolve to form an F major chord. The movement ends with the solo clarinet outlining the pitches of an F major triad with the woodwinds.

Scherzo-Finale

Bolcom models the third movement after Maurice Ravel's *La Valse*.¹⁵ Tympani opens the movement playing downbeats in a waltz tempo, as the solo clarinet plays a jerky melody in F# minor. Suddenly, the solo clarinet's music sputters out of control in a transition marked *quasi una cadenza, ma in tempo*. Following a pause, Bolcom transforms Theme 1a from the first movement into a Brazilian chorinho in D minor. The tempo gradually accelerates through a series of sequences based on Theme 1b, before the orchestral strings restate the waltz melody.

A wild glissando played by the solo clarinet transitions out of the waltz, initiating a "rough and spiky" outburst in m. 101. The solo clarinet, following the outburst, plays a variation on Theme 2 marked "drunkenly" in the score. Short, dissonant chords in the brass rudely interject the soloist's drunken music, before the chorinho theme returns in m.

¹⁵ Maurice Ravel, *La Valse*, 1921, reprint (Paris: Durand 1997).

163. Following the restatement of the Theme 1b sequences in the solo clarinet, the orchestra restates the “drunken” melody in A major. Orchestral brass and low strings interrupt the drunken melody with aggressive fragments of the waltz melody.

As the solo clarinet’s gestures become increasingly wild, the music transitions to a brash version of the waltz melody in m. 258. The tempo dramatically slows before the full orchestra plays the drunken melody in m. 292. Bolcom writes in the score that the passage should be played “Crassly Grand! under the tempo!” The soloist interjects with extraordinarily loud arpeggios that encompasses the full range of the instrument.

Suddenly, the music comes to a screeching halt in m. 310. The solo clarinet initiates the final presto, playing a series of eighth-note sequences. In the final allusion to Ravel’s *La Valse*, the music accelerates, as the clarinet repeats three articulated passages up to a shrieking altissimo B. The concerto ends in D major, with the soloist and full ensemble playing three short, violent chords.

John Adams' *Gnarly Buttons*

John Adams' *Gnarly Buttons* (1996) has become one of the more frequently performed and recorded contemporary clarinet concertos.¹⁶ The concerto was commissioned by the London Sinfonietta and the ensemble's then-principal clarinetist Michael Collins.¹⁷ Adams chose to score the concerto for an unusual chamber ensemble featuring two electronic keyboards with synthesizer patches, English horn, bassoon, trombone, guitar, banjo, mandolin, violin, and cello. The unusual combination of sounds produced by this particular ensemble allows for Adams to blend stylistic elements like jazz, American-folk, and bluegrass throughout the concerto.

The Perilous Shore

The Perilous Shore unfolds as a series of gradually accelerating melodic fragments that build throughout the movement. The solo clarinet opens the movement with an unaccompanied chant in G minor (see figure 9).

Figure 9. Adams, *Gnarly Buttons*, mvt. I: unaccompanied soft chant



Source: John Adams, *Gnarly Buttons*, mvt. I, (New York: Hendon Music/Boosey and Hawkes, 2001), mm 1–10.

¹⁶ John Adams, *Gnarly Buttons*, 1996, piano reduction by John McGinn (New York: Hendon Music/Boosey and Hawkes, 2001).

¹⁷ Anthony Taylor, "John Adams's *Gnarly Buttons*: Issues of History, Performance and Style" (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 2007), pp. 17–19.

The moderate tempo (quarter-note=72), repeated pitches, and rhythmic figures create a musical atmosphere that sounds simultaneously tense and numb. In m. 74, the tempo increases slightly to quarter-note=78, with dotted rhythmic figures bridging the movement's opening and middle sections. The solo clarinet's dotted rhythmic figures now have a bouncy quality, in contrast to the opening's somber eighth-notes.

The English horn begins a countermelody against the solo clarinet's incisive, dotted figures in m. 89, coinciding with a modulation to A $\flat$ melodic minor. G melodic minor pitch material returns in m. 93, following a rhythmic change from the dotted patterns to straight sixteenth notes in the solo clarinet. The tempo increases, again, through m. 102, before the soloist plays a short cadenza. Suddenly, the tempo accelerates to eighth-note=132 as the soloist's music becomes wilder.

In m. 115, rhythmic dissonance is introduced between the soloist and ensemble with the solo clarinet playing sextuplets against off-beat sixteenth notes. The solo clarinet's sextuplets rhythmically modulate to sixteenth-notes in m. 134 and the tempo settles to quarter-note=126. Coinciding with the change in tempo, the solo clarinet's part extends into the altissimo register. Wide leaps in the soloist's music accentuate the neurotic, unpredictable quality of the movement. A solo clarinet sequence in m. 164 expresses nearly the entire range of the instrument (concert D $\flat$ 3 to F $\sharp$ 6), signaling a transition to the recapitulation.

Strings play the opening chant pitches (G–A–B $\flat$) like a motor, as the English horn and keyboards play a legato, rhythmically augmented version of the opening chant. The recapitulation begins with solo clarinet restating its opening chant figures, now nearly twice as fast, in m. 169. In m. 217, the solo clarinet plays a series of polyrhythmic

arpeggios against ensemble eighth notes, obscuring the music's sense of pulse. The dotted rhythmic figures return in m. 246, now written as a pattern of alternating sixteenth and thirty-second notes, in a section Adams marks *scherzando*. Following a restatement of the soloist's polyrhythmic figures, the ensemble winds play fragments of the opening chant against aggressive eighth notes in the strings played "behind the bridges."

Hoedown (Mad Cow)

Hoedown (Mad Cow) is the concerto's scherzo movement. The solo clarinet's quirky opening tune unfolds as a series of minor-third patterns in F major. In mm. 22–24, the mandolin introduces a bluegrass-like countermelody against an Alberti bass pattern played by the solo clarinet. The dotted rhythmic figures from the first movement return in m. 25, now written as swing-inflected triplets and syncopated sixteenth notes.

The piano and strings restate the solo clarinet's opening tune in m. 92, before the soloist joins the ensemble in m. 109. In the pickup to 150, the solo clarinet initiates a series of sixteenth-note sequences similar to those in the first movement. The sextuplet sequence beginning in m. 155, in particular, harkens back to the first movement. Alberti figures return in the solo clarinet, now two octaves higher, before the music transitions to the movement's B section.

A change in meter from 2/4 to 3/8 in m. 179 marks the beginning of the movement's B section. In m. 188, the solo mandolin plays a two-measure ostinato that emphasizes the change in meter from 2/4 to 3/8. The B section ushers in a change in the music's texture and pitch material, as a series of legato fourths patterns pass between the clarinet soloist and the ensemble. In m. 215, the solo clarinet plays the mandolin's

ostinato as the fourths patterns pass between the strings and keyboards. Marking the return of the A section, the soloist restates a rhythmically displaced version of its opening tune in m. 247. The movement ends with the solo clarinet and mandolin, the most prominent of the ensemble parts, playing in unison.

Put Your Loving Arms Around Me

While Adams was composing *Gnarly Buttons*, his father died from complications related to Alzheimer's disease.¹⁸ The concerto's third movement, Put Your Loving Arms Around Me, musically depicts the father's failing mental state at the end of his life. The movement opens with the ensemble piano and guitar playing repeated chords in the style of a pop-ballad from the late 1960s, before the solo clarinet plays an aching melody. Adams develops the instrument's melodic figures, recalling his treatment of the first movement's opening chant.

In m. 35, the English horn and bassoon play a haunting variation of the clarinet's melody. The soloist re-enters in the pickup to m. 60, playing a new, elongated version of the melody that spans several measures. Mirroring the tempo's acceleration in the first movement, the tempo increases slightly in m. 80. The solo clarinet begins a syncopated variation on its opening melody m. 88, as tension builds between the soloist and ensemble. Gradually, the soloist's music extends into extreme altissimo register of the clarinet.

¹⁸ Thomas May, *The John Adams Reader: Essential Writings on an American Composer* (Pompton Plains: Amadeus, 2006), p. 158.

The buildup to the altissimo B in m. 105 sounds like a scream heard from a distance (see Figure 10).

Measures 106–131, again, recall the first movement’s gradual acceleration. A wild climax builds to m. 122 and the solo clarinet’s music accelerates rhythmically from sixteenth notes to sextuplets. The soloist’s figures become increasingly frantic while the ensemble sounds as if it is being torn apart rhythmically and harmonically.

Figure 10. Adams, *Gnarly Buttons*, mvt. III: soft altissimo passage



Source: John Adams, *Gnarly Buttons*, mvt. III, (New York: Hendon Music/Boosey and Hawkes, 2001), mm 99–105.

The soloist’s music suddenly becomes manic in m. 152. Quintuplets in the clarinet are accompanied by sixteenth notes in the piano and strings, obscuring the sense of pulse. A flurry of notes from the clarinet soloist builds to a climactic, fortississimo, altissimo B. Strings and keyboards answer the soloist’s piercing note with short, violent chords. Then, the music suddenly changes mood, as the guitar and piano play variations on their figures from the movement’s opening. As the music dies down, the soloist plays a final, incomplete statement of its opening melody. The movement ends with the opening’s piano and guitar repeated chords fading to silence.

Conclusion

The clarinet concertos of Corigliano, Tower, Bolcom, and Adams explore the technical, expressive, and stylistic possibilities of the instrument. While each of these concertos highlight different challenges for the clarinetist, their difficulties arise from features of each composer's musical style and are not simply tests of a soloist's abilities. All four concertos discussed herein, for example, require the soloist to play proficiently in extreme altissimo register for extended periods. Although uncomfortable to execute for the performer, such passages can be highly expressive in the slow movements of Corigliano's and Adams' concertos or playful in the works by Bolcom and Tower. Learning to control the extreme altissimo register of the instrument can convey the specific thematic intentions of a composer in individual clarinetist's performances.

Before learning their clarinet concertos, I performed several unaccompanied and ensemble works by each of the four composers. Initially these concertos were beyond my technical and musical ability. The process of studying these concertos was ultimately gratifying because I had to meet the unique challenges required to convincingly play each concerto. Performing and studying these concertos has made me a more technically proficient clarinetist and over-all musician.

Technical challenges in the solo works of composers from the last half-century place increasing demands on clarinetists. "Extended" techniques for the instrument, though not utilized in the four concertos discussed herein, are common in several contemporary solo works. These pieces require the soloist to perform multiphonics and multiple articulations as well as circular breathe during long, unbroken phrases. Such

techniques are required to perform the clarinet concertos written in the twenty-first century by the composers Kalevi Aho, Magnus Lindberg, and Kaija Saariaho.

Traditional clarinet pedagogy does not address these skills, but modern clarinetists must adapt our training to fit within a modern musical paradigm. There exist opportunities in the traditional pedagogical practice to address these more contemporary techniques in private study, ensuring that these and other solo works remain part of the repertoire. Such techniques should be introduced to undergraduate students through the study of contemporary unaccompanied pieces and etudes in addition to traditional etudes and solo literature.

The solo clarinet literature is a fluid and growing collection of works that encompasses the instrument's past and present. For the clarinet to continue to be a major solo instrument in this century, soloists must meet the challenges of performing works from the recent past. The clarinet concertos by John Corigliano, Joan Tower, William Bolcom, and John Adams demand a greater level of skill from soloists than at any other point in the instrument's history. Ignoring these works because of their challenges will inevitably lead to fewer works written for the clarinet in the future. We, as clarinetists and pedagogues, must prepare our students to meet the demands of an ever-changing musical landscape. Accepting and building upon these challenges will transform the clarinet solo literature into a yet unrealized future for the instrument.

Appendix I: Recital Programs

Recital 1: December 7, 2018
 Tawes Recital Hall
 8:00 PM

Matthew Rynes, Clarinet
 Eunae Han, Piano

Episode Neuvieme: “Fortem Magnum Coloratum” (1990)Betsy Jolas (b.1926)

Lied for solo (1982)Luciano Berio (1925–2003)

Gnarly Buttons (1996)John Adams (b. 1947)

- I. The Perilous Shore
- II. Hoedown (Mad Cow)
- III. Put your loving arms around me

Intermission

Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra (1988)William Bolcom (b.1938)

- I. Allegro
- II. Cantabile
- III. Finale-Scherzo

Recital #2: Februrary 23, 2019
 Tawes Recital Hall
 8:00 PM

Matthew Rynes, Clarinet
 Bora Lee, Piano

Parable XIII for Solo Clarinet, Op. 126 (1973) Vincent Persichetti (1915–1987)

Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo (1919) Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Clarinet Concerto (1988) Joan Tower (b.1938)

Intermission

Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra (1977–1978) John Corigliano (b. 1938)

- I. Cadenzas
- II. Elegy
- III. Antiphonal Toccata

Recital# 3: April 22, 2019
 Tawes Recital Hall
 8:00 PM

Matthew Rynes, Clarinet
 Bora Lee, Piano
 Kevin Sloan, Violin

Dance Preludes (1955) Witold Lutoslawski (1913–1994)

Petit Piece (1910) Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Drei Romanzen op 94. (1849) Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

- I. Nicht schnell
- II. Einfach, innig
- III. Nicht schnell

Intermission

Gra for solo clarinet (1994) Elliot Carter (1908–2012)

Sequenza IX for clarinet (1980) Luciano Berio (1925–2003)

Largo for Clarinet, Violin and Piano (1901) Charles Ives (1874–1954)

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