

Lucy Hatem

Recorded Recital, Advanced Diploma

5/15/20

Program Note

The selection of music on this recital has been the result of necessity rather than choice. When I began this semester I was imagining a much different concert program, revolving around Italian music of the 20th century and featuring solos by Lovreglio, Sciarrino, and Berio, plus chamber music by Carter and Bernard Herrmann. When we switched to remote learning in mid-March, it became obvious I would have to change the whole recital, so that the concert as a whole would include music I could play alone at home, and also so that none of it was too difficult to put together during what has been a somewhat strange and stressful two-month period.

This has been a time of extreme limitations in terms of my clarinet studies, but I am also proud of what I have still been able to achieve. I certainly feel that I have continued to learn and progress at home; my teacher, Prof. Gythfeldt, has been a great help to my productivity and general well-being. This recital program has in the end become a snapshot of my surprising semester: each piece represents in some way both the restrictions of the coronavirus quarantine but also how it has been possible to continue learning with and around those restrictions.

Including etudes on the program began as a way to just add more time to the recital, but both the Polatschek and Caravan etudes have real musical value as well as technical, and as I have learned a lot from each book they represent an important part of my learning this semester. "Long Meadow" is a piece by a friend written during and about this time. The Poulenc duet illustrates one method I have used to approximate chamber music during this time, by pre-recording half of the piece and performing together with myself. The Tailleferre Sonata is a small but appealing piece which I discovered in the search for more solo music; it pairs nicely with the Poulenc, and provides the rare opportunity to perform work by a woman composer.

Finally, the Sciarrino and the Reich are the two pieces which I had already planned to perform this semester, pre-quarantine; both have been interesting in different ways to study during this time. Sciarrino's music lives in a strange and dreamy soundworld. Studying it has taught me a lot about extended techniques and allowed me to spend time in a place far from the standard clarinet sounds I usually inhabit. Reich's New York Counterpoint is in many ways the ideal quarantine piece: it allows me, while alone, to perform as a member of a large and musically expressive ensemble.

Victor Polatschek (1889-1948) was a Czech clarinetist, a major player of the 20th century. He played with the Vienna Philharmonic from 1912-1930; he then emigrated to the US, becoming principal clarinet of the Boston Symphony under Koussevitzky. His Advanced Studies are of particular interest to the advanced student clarinetist. Each etude takes as a starting place a theme from a major work, meaning that the etudes have substantial musical as well as technical interest. The repertoire choices are interesting and varied; there is an etude based on Barber's Second Essay for Orchestra, and even one after "Pierrot Lunaire."

This etude, #6, is an adaptation of the Allemande from Bach's French Suite No. 2 in C minor, BWV 813. There are six of these keyboard suites, from the years 1722-25. This etude is a particular pleasure for a clarinetist, as we do not usually get to play Bach (clarinet didn't become a commonly-played instrument until the end of the 18th century).

Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983) was a French composer known as the only female member of Les Six. This group (which also included Poulenc, Milhaud, Honegger, Georges Auric, and Louis Durey) was so-called by a 1920 article by the critic Henri Collet. Collet named the group in parallel to the pre-existing Russian Mighty Five, a group that included Mussorsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Mily Balakirev, and Cesar Cui. Les Six were all very different composers; the collective was somewhat artificial. However they were all contemporaries, worked together, and were inspired by the likes of Jean Cocteau and Erik Satie. The six also shared a reactionary stance against both Wagnerian Romanticism, and Debussy-style Impressionism.

Tailleferre was a piano prodigy. Her music fits with Stravinskian neoclassical style; she was heavily influenced by Faure and Ravel. Unfortunately two rocky marriages and recurring financial problems sapped much of her creative energy, and much of her reputation and artistic output decreased sharply after the heyday of Les Six. This petite solo sonata, from 1957, is a rare later work. In three movements, its melodies are light, almost childish in tone; but the harmonic content seems to be more interesting. The last movement, though just a few minutes long, even features a cadenza.

Expanding my arsenal of extended techniques has been an important goal of this semester. To this end, along with Polatschek, I have been studying Ronald L. Caravan's Polychromatic Diversions for Clarinet: a book of extended-technique etudes. Caravan (1946-) is a clarinetist, saxophonist, and teacher. He earned his Doctorate from Eastman and has spent much of his career as a professor at Syracuse University. These etudes are dedicated to Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr of the Verdehr Trio, a clarinet-violin-piano trio which commissioned many 20th-century classic pieces for their instrumentation.

The second of these two selections, "Reverie," is dedicated to the composer Howard Hanson, who was also one of the first directors of the Eastman School of Music.

From the composition notes:

"No. 2 – Digital Etchings – One of the most important adjustments for the clarinetist in contemporary music is becoming accustomed to utilizing his fingers in various unconventional ways. Some of the most unusual ginerings in this entire collection occur in this piece. (Holding and decaying a clarion-register tone without the assistance of the register key, another flexibility the contemporary clarinetist should possess, is also exercised in this piece.

No. 4 – Reverie – Set in a slower, more subdued ballad-like context, the multiple sonorities contained in this piece should be performed with fine control, avoiding any harshness or dynamic extreme which would run counter to the general tone of the composition."

“Long Meadow” is by far the most contemporary piece on the program: it was written for me last month by my friend Max Johnson. From the composer’s note:

“While the globe wracked with sickness and death during this global pandemic, I often find it hard to think about anything else. The simple act of remaining calm becomes a daily struggle, and a thought about even the most mundane task can snowball into a wall of anxiety. ‘Long Meadow’ began as a short meditation for clarinetist Lucy Hatem, who has been a wonderful friend during these stressful times, reflecting on our walks through Brooklyn’s Prospect Park. But just as it’s hard to keep a quiet mind, this piece became carried away, taking on an increasingly nervous and manic energy. The result ends up mirroring my currently constant struggle to remain calm in this age of anxiety and uncertainty, not knowing what comes next.”

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963), another member of Les Six, was a composer of great versatility. His body of work encompasses nearly every musical genre; he collaborated with many artistic contemporaries in mediums other than music. His music is sometimes radically irreverent, but he wrote religious music too (he was a sincere Catholic); and also composed sometimes in a neo-classical style, hearkening back to Baroque French figures like Lully.

Among clarinetists, Poulenc is a mainstay for his 1962 clarinet sonata, a work of great beauty and virtuosity and one of the last pieces he composed before his death. This duo sonata dates from 1918, much earlier in Poulenc’s career, and has a very different sound. Poulenc’s chamber music from this period is often brief, light-hearted, and quirky, mixing folk-like melody and simple harmony with surprising dissonances and uneven rhythms. This duo, written for A clarinet and Bb clarinet together, is charming and edgy. The first movement is madcap, with a lyrical middle section; the second movement is slow and purposely monotonous, almost in a way reminiscent of Satie; the final movement is fast and silly.

Salvatore Sciarrino (1947-) is a primarily self-taught Italian composer. He started out as a painter, then moved to music in his teens. He has written extensively in many genres: chamber, solo, vocal, opera/theatrical, some electronics. He lives in Umbria on a fairly small scale, but is a well-known composer who has had a good career for a long time.

His music often focuses on extended techniques, ways of playing an instrument other than the standard, and unusual sounds an instrument is capable of making; his pieces are also often quite quiet. His music often seems to include a reference to another style, or a programmatic reference point.

This piece is from 1982. It was originally intended to be a counterpart to Berio Sequenza (1980) on my recital.

The title of this piece, “Let Me Die Before I Wake,” comes apparently from a book by Derek Humphry, an advocate of assisted suicide/euthanasia/the right to die philosophy. It contains true stories of people who desired and achieved the right to die in peace and dignity. I only learned this fact very recently and am somewhat puzzled by how it applies to my performance of the piece, which contains no program note or explanation from the composer. Certainly my sense of the piece is that is very calm and

beautiful; I do not feel like there is anxiety to this music. It is about death but from the perspective of someone who is not afraid. It is high drama but on a very small scale.

The construction of it is very technical in terms of how the clarinet works as an instrument; but the end result is mysterious and otherworldly. The majority of the music is built from these tremolo multiphonics, which form a chorale of sorts; the lower pitches change and the upper pitches are stable. The intervals in these multiphonics are large. Sciarrino asks the performer to emphasize the upper and lower pitches in these multiphonics differently at different times. Then, increasingly as the piece goes along, there are regular chord multiphonics. There are also quick passages of slap tongue.

New York Counterpoint (1985), commissioned for the clarinetist Richard Stolzman, is an electroacoustic clarinet classic. It is composed for a soloist playing with a pre-recorded tape track; the instrumentation is eight pre-recorded Bb parts and three bass clarinets, with the final ninth Bb part performed live. Reich wrote other "counterpoint" pieces in a similar style for the same time. *Vermont Counterpoint*, from 1982, is for flutes and was the first in the series; the others are *Electric Counterpoint* (electric guitars) and *Cello Counterpoint*. With its reference to the city of New York, this particular counterpoint has a jazzy and syncopated sound. The opening pulsing swells are a reference to *Music for 18 Musicians*, from 1976.

The piece is in three movements, fast-slow-fast, performed without pause. The tempo is in fact unchanging throughout, although the subdivisions and beat patterns change in a way that creates a great deal of variety and contrasting mood. In the last movement, the most rhythmically interesting parts are in the bass clarinet lines, which repeatedly involve hemiolas; the soloist part is mostly accompaniment in this movement.

Besides the way the rhythm functions, the most characteristic element of this piece is the unique combination of electronic and acoustic components. While it is certainly electroacoustic music, performed with a tape track, that tape is created completely from clarinet sounds, without added editing. The overall effect is a distinctively human use of technology in performance. I have loved this piece for a while, and was learning it this semester before the quarantine began. Since campus closed, though, and I have been unable to play with my usual chamber music partners, this piece has been a true pleasure to study.

Special thanks go to Gleb Kanasevich, who kindly lent me his recorded track to the piece when I ran out of time to create my own.