

University of Pécs Faculty of Art
Doctorate School

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**Chamber musical opportunities of the
saxophone-cello duo**

The introduction of the two instruments' tone suitability through
Edison Denisov's Sonata and the pieces composed specifically for
the Misstiq Duo

DLA dissertation

Thesis

Consultant:

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Subject of research

At the centre of my dissertation stands the chamber music of the saxophone and cello duo. I have examined the acoustic characteristics of the instruments and I am introducing their tone suitability through four chamber musical pieces. I, myself, am the founder of Hungary's very first saxophone and cello duo – the Misstiq Duo. It was the peculiarity of this chamber formation that drove me to this topic to my dissertation discussion. Saxophone-cello duos are extremely rare in the home counties, as well as around the globe, which is mirrored by the very small repertoire, that were originally composed to this particular formation. This is why I felt that I would like to contribute to enhancing the popularity of the wind-string duos among artist and composers. In order to get started on this, I have asked two composers to write new pieces for our duo for the 18th Saxophone World Congress. The premier of these pieces took place at this congress in Zagreb, 2018. These pieces form base of my research, in addition to Edison Denisov's Sonata for alto saxophone and cello, which is a fundamental piece for this composition.

Adolf Sax had hoped to create an instrument, that could have been the outdoors equivalent of the strings. Sax had envisioned an apparatus, with a sound character close to that of the string instruments, yet more powerful and with more intensity. As a result of this initiative – in relation to the creation of this instrument, saxophone was able to meld together with the tone of cello particularly well, which I have definitely been able to confirm throughout my research. Due to me examining the fusion of the two instruments through contemporary pieces, I found it important to introduce the enhanced contemporary saxophone techniques as well.

Methodology of research

In order to get an accurate picture of the popularity of the wind-string duos, I felt it was paramount to conduct a research on the repertoire. In demonstration of this, I have included a catalogue, as an appendix of my dissertation, of the pieces I

found for wind-string duos. I feel the data speaks for itself – until date (2022) I have found 201 pieces for this formation.

Among these, the duos of woodwinds and strings are the most popular. Perhaps this is no accident, it is likely to be owed to the capabilities of these instruments. The narrowness of the repertoire has proved that the pairing of these instrument families are not widely spread. Based on the data of my research, my opinion is that popularisation of the pairing of the aforementioned instruments does indeed have its *raison d'être*, as there are only a very few pieces composed for these duos, which means, musicians, composers, students, teachers as well as audiences are missing out on fabulous opportunities.

Moving on, I will be discussing the duo of saxophone and cello specifically. Firstly, I am introducing this formation from the saxophonist's perspective, without neglecting the cellist of course. I was looking for answers to my musical intuition and feelings, which I found through our acoustic mensurations. With the help of Dr. Janos Pap, physicist, I have studied the sound characters of saxophone and cello. This brought the answers as to why this formation is so unique with its own opportunities, and exactly what it is, that really bonds the two instruments' sound characteristics. Arthur Benade's average spectrum mensurations (Conn-alto saxophone) show too, that saxophone, compared to brass instruments has a lot less overtones. Above approx. 5000Hz we barely find any overtones in the c1-h1 interval. This characteristic demonstrates the instrument's particular similarity to singing voice – saxophone is a 'singing' instrument. It actually is the singing voice and the singing sound character that join these two instruments. Cello's sound is a real tenor voice, at the higher notes slightly pressed, nasal, which is the case with many singers' voice. The E flat – E flat 3 sound range of the alto saxophone incorporates female alto singing voice (F - B flat 2) sound range. In essence, we can say that a masculine, in descants at times turning to nasal voice, plays with a thick, mature, slightly deep feminine voice in the cello-alto saxophone duos.

In my dissertation, I am dealing with four chamber musical pieces, that are all contemporary compositions, which is why I felt the importance of briefly discussing the extended contemporary saxophone techniques as well, comparing

them with the tones and roles of the cello. There is no literature available in Hungarian on the contemporary techniques for saxophone, therefore I tried to put together my work in a way that it will be useful to saxophonists, who are only getting acquainted to these techniques. It would be very difficult to define the terms 'extended saxophone techniques' or 'modern saxophone techniques', as the number of possibilities are forever growing, therefore I interpret every sound, tone, effect and artistic skill that point beyond the common instrument handling techniques. We can include the altissimo register, circular breathing, slap attacks, multiphonies, micro tonal scales, pitch trills, double tongue, growl (singing and playing the saxophone simultaneously), subtone and every technique, that snaps us out of classical performing style. In addition to the opportunities of modern instrument handling, I have examined certain techniques with an acoustics specialist also, as well as looked for examples on how the composers of the pieces forming the base of the dissertation use the tones of saxophone coupled with the capabilities of the cello.

I am introducing the truly close relationship and opportunities of the saxophone and cello through the above mentioned chamber music pieces, in which the starting point was the most prevalent piece for this formation – Edison Denisov's Sonata for alto saxophone and cello. Although Denisov (1929-1996) was not actually considered a contemporary composer, his piece can indeed be included in the contemporary music literature (thanks to the style of his writing, as well as his use of modern techniques) and it is a fundamental piece for the duo of saxophone-cello. A complex piece of work that challenges the artists in a soloist, as well as in a chamber music performer capacity, the contemporary innovation of the sonata genre. There are no formal boundaries in the piece, he just uses parts with different patterns, that are not formally segregated. The analysis detailed in my assignment can provide practical assistance in relation to performance. I managed to compose a short, but succinct and useful examination, which greatly aids the learning process, as well as the formation of the performance concept – that I also had the opportunity to experience throughout my investigation.

Following this, my choice has fallen onto three pieces, that were composed specifically to our duo, therefore my personal involvement in these is strong. Whilst analysing the pieces, I am introducing the composers, the pieces' historical and theoretical backgrounds, their formation and structure, as well as the experiences gathered through my own performances. I felt it was important to emphasise the performance element more, to better support understanding, learning and performing for other musicians too.

The pieces included in my assignment are:

Edison Denisov: *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Cello* (1994)

Stanislava Gajić: *Echoes of Goldenpine Woods* (2018)

Stanislava Gajić: *Night train* (2018)

Balogh Máté: *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (2018)

Introducing a musical setting from Stanislava Gajić – *Echoes of Goldenpine Woods*, followed by another piece of hers, titled *Night train*, which also bases its mood on one of her previous works' theme in terms of melody. Both of these pieces have a mythological backgrounds, which comes through in their sonority as well, and I also find it intriguing how the composer is actually bringing in ideas from work of a composer of a different era – André Jolivet. I have even conducted a comparative analysis on the back of this – between the pieces of A. Jolivet's *Chant de Linos* and S. Gajić's *Night train*. The research and analyses have made Gajić's unique artistic style very clear, which only changes slightly dependent on the formation of the instruments. She deploys the saxophone-cello duo similar to that of an orchestral sonority or trio composition or even Jolivet's flute-piano duo. Her pieces are easy to digest, a pleasure to play, however the opportunities presented through the saxophone-cello duo were perhaps not fully exploited.

Mate Balogh is one of the outstanding characters among the young Hungarian composers. His piece dedicated to our duo specifically, has a literary background to it. Inspired by the ancient Persian world and poetry, this piece makes this world realistically audible for the audience, whilst applying the tenor

saxophone's and cello's identical sound intervals, to an extent, that it is often quite challenging for the listeners, to identify who is playing when. The *pseudounisono* can easily confuse the audience, whilst the music does not stop, the instruments are constantly engaged. This 'current' is what is broken by a static matter, which represents today's world. Throughout the piece, the extent of these different matters duration change, the static portion becomes longer and longer, whilst the Persian component shortens – owing to this, the last section, that contains the Persian element, only consist of one single tact.

Results and conclusions of research

My dissertation is primarily based on my own, personal involvements and experiences. I chose a topic, for which, only very few pieces had been written before. In Hungary, nobody has researched this topic yet, literature and music notes are limited, therefore my research and discussion are a novelty and gap-fillers potentially. I have wandered to new territories as a saxophonist, when I started playing with a cellist in a duo formation, and the taste of this novelty was what helped me gain momentum in acquainting this with more and more people. I wanted to dig deeper into the relationship between the two instruments, to explain my personal experiences with theories and opportunities provided by science. Perhaps composers have not yet even thought of how they could pair up the two instrument families' members in a way, that they give the most of themselves. However, a well-executed matching could result in these instruments melding together, playing as one instrument or sound totally segregated, keeping an enormous distance between one another.

The innovation of my research is that I have conducted acoustic mensurations on a rare instrument formation, that brings responses to the feelings I felt whilst playing, in addition, I am introducing the pairing of the two instruments through pieces that were not examined before my experiment. The introduction of the extended, contemporary saxophone techniques in Hungarian and their acoustic mensurations are gap-filling pieces of work. Denisov's Sonata was a perfect starting point for playing together, as well as for analysis and it

also helped with the realisation of how to fully exploit the characteristics of the instruments, whilst also pushing the artists' boundaries. And the speciality of Stanislava Gajić and Mate Balogh's pieces hides in that they were composed specifically to our duo, for an important event. I had the opportunity to examine and introduce today's composers' attitudes towards the duo of saxophone-cello and the unique and simultaneous use of the two instruments'.

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