

UNIVERSITY OF PÉCS FACULTY OF MUSIC AND
VISUAL ARTS

Doctorate School

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The transformation of saxophone literature prior to 1970

The theses of the DLA dissertation

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2022

1. Subject of research

The aim of my research is to introduce the process in which the main focus is on the evolution and then expansion of the literature for saxophone. The pledge of survival for the instrument is the development of its own language, which could materialise easiest through the creation of musical compositions. Since Adolphe Sax had realised this at an early stage, he asked his composer friends to write music for his new invention. In the following period – past Sax’s death – the development of the repertoire was not robust, hence the times when the number of compositions started to rise were so interesting. From the 1930’s the quantity of repertory has started to explode, which was not only to be owed to the increasing popularity of the instrument, but to the hard work of the saxophone artists also. As a result hundreds of new pieces were born. I am examining this period through four compositions to 1970, grabbing a piece from every decade whilst taking under consideration the circumstances in which they were created. Based on a number of different criteria, I am looking into the changes to the repertoire and how the relationship of the composers and saxophone evolved. The compositions examined were: Glazunov *Concerto in Es*, Creston *Sonata*, Desenclos *Prélude, Cadence et Finale* és Denisov *Sonate*. I picked these pieces because as them being part of the standard repertoire they are the most popular and most played, also, the evolution of the literature can be beautifully portrayed through them.

2. Methodology of research

Through my research I have put the main emphasis on the presence and progression of the saxophone repertoire, therefore I have used sources through which I could fully demonstrate this from the birth of the instrument. To enhance deeper understanding, I have included events by which the pieces were composed. I tried to take new avenues and examine the times and places where the survival of the instrument was uncertain. Listing famous composers, who even though have not composed for saxophone, were still intrigued by and interested in it seemed an interesting viewing point. I tried to grab the moments from Adolphe Sax’s life, which were to do with his relationship with composers and his ideas on how to increase popularity of his invention. He founded his own publisher, to avoid pieces composed by the composer friends he had asked to write for him getting lost. This is why we know compositions from that era, which grew significantly year on year afterwards. The starting point was the collection of the compositions which were completed in Adolphe Sax’s life.

This number serves as basis for my research and through these pieces it was easier to demonstrate the incredible evolution that had gone down in the 120 years I examined. I am attempting to reveal the unsuccessfulness of the period past Sax's death, as well as to highlight the points at which the literature had continued to grow despite of the inventor's departure.

One of the most important keys to the survival of saxophone was its presence in symphonic orchestra. The compositions listed here were written as of the 1920's, in an era, where famous composers rediscovered the instruments through jazz. I have played most of the mentioned symphonic orchestra pieces myself, therefore I have detailed my own experiences together with the analysis of the composers' instrument handling suggestions.

There are plenty of great reads about the three famous saxophone artists, however I felt the importance of the inclusion of Marcel Mule, Cecil Leeson és Sigurd Raschèr's lives and work in my research, to ensure greater understanding of the other elements and aspects of my thesis. It is obvious that without the diligence, dedication and work of these three artists, saxophone would not be what it actually is today – such progress of modern repertoire in such a short period of time would have been impossible. Through their motivation, high degree of artistic skills they inspired vigilant composers to take advantage of the limitless opportunities of an unknown instrument. These three have not only conquered as artists, but passed their knowledge onto the younger generations too, ensuring further evolvement of the instrument and greater enhancement of its popularity. They started to work independently on providing their learners with quality literature. Saxophone arrangements, etudes and other compositions are to be thanked to them – most of which are still played these days.

Prior to the first composition, I am detailing the situation in Russia in relation to saxophone, followed by Glazunov's life and the circumstances around the genesis of the saxophone, which will lead to my analysis. The pieces introduced are predominantly examined from a saxophonist point of view. The formal, melodic and harmonic structure is not the main focus, even though in some cases these will be referred to as well. Main criteria of my observations are as follows:

- instructions relating to volume and enhancement of dynamic scale
- use of different attacks, accents
- examination of difficult technical parts
- use and interpretability of rhythm
- further tools of composer expression

- exploitation of sound range, use of altissimo

Based on the above will the process of giving the heart of the dissertation crystallise. The chosen compositions more or less came to life as a result of cooperative work. The mutual effects of the artists and composers listed was also a criteria for my research, as the player's skills, knowledge and character could have a profound impact on the completed composition's characteristics.

I picked pieces which were written in different countries, at different times and for different artists, therefore the conclusions of the dissertation are somewhat subjective. Although I would have got different semi-results if using other compositions, the report using the piece from 1970 would have still concluded the same.

The composer of the first piece is Glazunov. He had a Russian background, however composed his piece in Paris in 1934, dedicated to Sigurd Raschèr. Paul Creston was American, he composed his *Sonata* to his friend specifically, Cecil Leeson in 1939. The third piece is Alfred Desenclos' work – *Prelude, Cadence et Finale*, which he offered to Marcel Mule and finished composing in 1956. Desenclos and Mule were both French and shared a close friendship. The last composition is Edison Denisov, Russian composer's creation – the *Sonate*, which he wrote to Jean-Marie Londeix in 1970.

3. Results of research

Throughout the research a growing tendency of the repertoire can easily be observed even from a quantity perspective. The list of the earliest, original compositions, which accounts for more or less 50 years, provide an important foundation to this. The dissertation gives a comprehensive overview of the increase of the repertory as well as the fruitful period between 1930 and 1970.

In the appendix I listed nearly 500 compositions, which has not yet been pulled into a single source until date. The pieces collected got sorted into eight groups:

- Pieces composed upon Adolphe Sax's request and/or his time
- Compositions written for Marcel Mule
- Compositions for Marcel Mule's request for the exams of the Paris Conservatoire, in chronological order
- Pieces dedicated to Marcel Mule's quartet for SATB-saxophone

- Works dedicated to Sigurd M. Raschèr
- Opus' composed for Raschèr quartet for SATB-saxophone
- Pieces written for Cecil Leeson
- Works by Cecil Leeson (1902-1989)

Whilst examining the orchestral pieces containing saxophone, I have found personal connections between the composers and the instrument itself on a number of occasions, which I have not come across in any articles, literature before. In the forty years discussed, music itself has gone through a significant transformation, therefore this coincidence was part of the reason for such a rapid, explosive change. The boundaries started to get pushed in all aspects, the possible enhancement of tones, volume, increase of speed, attacks, accents, embellishments have demanded greater technical and musical knowledge from the players. Increased tempo as well as the decrease of rhythm value, the more confident use of enhanced sound range on both the lower and higher registers too can all nicely be observed through the pieces introduced. We must not forget about the great influence of jazz, as it has interrupted traditional saxophone at many points in history. Think about the modern playing techniques that were first used in jazz. In my dissertation I discuss the beginning of this process, as Denisov's composition – the last piece I have examined – has truly opened new avenues up towards modern music. From this point artists and composers became more and more open to broadening their horizons and to new opportunities. A brand new language had been created and as a result a brand new repertoire awakened.

4. Conclusions of the research

Saxophone, being a young instrument does not have an extensive repertoire from the baroque or classical eras, which is why it is imperative that we see the stunning progress leading to the birth of the repertoire. It can fabulously be observed how the literature of saxophone was progressing, how more and more pieces were created and who the instrument and/or its artist was inspiring. I intended to introduce the progression of the literature from a unique perspective and through the pieces analysed in the dissertation. As a result, I can describe a process in which every single component examined has got pushed out of 'its comfort zone'. With the enhancement of the technical opportunities an intriguing era commenced – it is still quite a popular topic within the saxophone society. For me personally it appeared to be a

challenge to study the era prior to this, to learn how we eventually got to the doorstep of modern music.

5. Bibliography

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