

Solo Bassoon Performance: Relevant Issues

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ABSTRACT: This paper covers issues related to the solo bassoon performance (without accompaniment). XX-XXI centuries are known as a period of active development of wind instruments performance. Bassoon, as a bright representative of the woodwind family, is also experiencing its "revival" and going through the stages of formation of its new, solo "role". Modern genre, stylistic, dramaturgic, and timbre-coloristic searches allow us to look at the instrument from a new angle. The bassoon appears on the stage not as an orchestral instrument, but as a full-fledged solo instrument, capable of communicating a wide range of feelings and experiences to the listener.

Keywords: - bassoon, solo, genre, style, bassoon performance.

I. INTRODUCTION

The XX century is a period of searches and experiments. People turn to the heritage of different times and different countries, the experience of theoretical and practical knowledge from various fields of activity. The beginning of the XXI century in the cultural and artistic senses is a continuation of the twentieth century, but this continuation has certain results, which were reflected in the development and reinforcement of new genre, linguistic, structural, intra- and interstyle phenomena. Everything that has been mentioned above perfectly relates to the field of musical art. In music, this can be traced in such processes as the search and application of new, from the viewpoint of tonal characteristic, timbres (both artificially synthesized with the help of electronic equipment and produced by new musical instruments), and well-known musical timbres.

One of such classical academic musical instruments, whose timbre was revised in the twentieth century, is the bassoon. The bassoon received the role of a solo concert instrument, without losing its traditional function of one of the main woodwind instruments in the symphony orchestra. This is evidenced by the emergence of an original repertoire for bassoon solo, and a large number of performing competitions for bassoonists.

Solo bassoon performance is part of the general history of the development of the practice of playing music on woodwind instruments. Today the art of playing the bassoon is in full swing. It must be pointed out that to create solo pieces for bassoon, a composer must know, understand and hear the instrument very well, almost the same way as the performer does, take into account peculiarities of sound production on the bassoon, characteristic techniques of the instrument, its timbre color and sound intensity in different registers, expressive capabilities and modern techniques of the musical language. Not all composers who wrote music for the bassoon could play this instrument, but if we have a look at the solo repertoire (without accompaniment), we will see that it was mostly created by practicing bassoonists. This fact is also confirmed by the works for solo bassoon, which today make up the core repertoire of performing competitions – they are created by practicing performers with all the specifics of the instrument in mind and reflect the entire palette of the bassoon sound. Composers of all eras tried to take into account the peculiarities of the instrument, for example, since the time of classicism concertos for a solo instrument (with or without an orchestra) have included solo cadenzas in which the soloist maximally reveals all the technical and expressive capabilities of the instrument, talent and artistic taste. Scholars who study music of different eras keep records of general trends and processes in composer's creativity associated with the specific timbre and constructive development of the instrument. In recent decades the striving for individualizing timbre in academic music has become a common thing and it concerns not only orchestral instruments, but also those instruments which, throughout the history of musical art, have established themselves as recognized soloists. The relationship between the improvement of the bassoon design and the influence of the instrument's virtuoso-technical and figurative-expressive capabilities awoke interest in bassoon

performance. Many composers of the second half of the XX-XXI centuries, including F. Mignon, M. Allard, G. Jacob, V. Waterhouse, S. Gubaidulina and others, address solo bassoon music. Compositions created by them represent a rather diverse palette of genre and stylistic solutions.

Awareness of the value of a separate personality became especially acute in the world in the second half of the twentieth century, after the Second World War. This understanding extended over the individuality to all forms of human activity. It is no coincidence that art in general and music in particular received a powerful impetus to the realization of individual unique manifestations of creativity.

II. PIECES FOR SOLO BASSOON

Music pieces for solo bassoon have been created throughout the history of the instrument. There are well-known compositions written in the early stages of the bassoon practice development when composers were just beginning to pay attention to the possibilities of solo performance on this instrument. An interesting example of early compositions for solo bassoon is Jean Daniel Braun's *Solos* for bassoon, published in Paris in 1740. This collection of several unaccompanied pieces for bassoon is an appendix to his *Sonate de Mr. Braun, A flute transverse et basse*. Gordon Jacob's *Partita for Solo Bassoon* (1970) can also serve as a striking example of a work for solo bassoon, written in accordance with traditions of the past. The composer dedicated this work to one of his talented bassoon students William Waterhouse, who was a teacher, historian and soloist of many European orchestras. The partita was completed by the composer on August 3, 1970 and was first performed at the *Wigmore Hall* in London. The work consists of five movements:

- I – *Preludio*;
- II – *Valse*;
- III – *Presto*;
- IV – *Aria Antiqua*;
- V – *Capricietto*

The partita is indicative of Gordon Jacob's style. This work continues Classical-Romantic traditions, allowing the bassoon to master peculiarities and possibilities of the style of past eras, excluding modern techniques of musical composition.

The palette of the modern solo bassoon repertoire cannot be imagined without the works of the Brazilian composer François Mignon. His creative legacy is a fairly wide range of works for bassoon:

- Sonatina for solo bassoon* (1961),
- Sonata for solo bassoon* (1961),
- Concertino for clarinet, bassoon and orchestra* (1980),
- 16 waltzes for solo bassoon* (1979/1981).

In different periods of his creative work, the composer wrote five different waltz cycles, three of which were intended for piano, one for guitar and one for bassoon:

- Valsas de esquina nos.1-12, piano* (1938-43),
- Valsa brasileira nos.4-12, piano* (1979),
- Valsas choros 1-12, piano* (1946-55),
- Valsas (in EVERY minor key!) Guitar* (1970).

16 Waltzes for Solo Bassoon is one of the first original works for solo bassoon of the XX century and one of the most popular compositions among performers and listeners. Genre and stylistic features of the waltz allowed the composer to maximize capabilities of the instrument. Here F. Mignon borrows some elements from Brazilian popular music. Skillful use of various techniques of musical expressiveness, such as changing registers, variety of articulations, dynamic drops, various melismas and a general unique style, opens up a huge world for the performer and provides an opportunity for self-realization and self-expression. François Mignon's waltzes are undoubtedly a gem in the repertoire of bassoonists around the world.

According to the new approach for characterization of the bassoon timbre as a timbre with its own acoustic specificity, it is necessary to pay attention to the original work of V. Levit - *Sonata for two bassoons*. Although this piece is not a solo piece, it is mono-timbral. This work emphasizes the bassoon timbre as special, with its own "voice" and character. The sonata is dedicated to the famous bassoonist and teacher V. Popov and his son A. Popov. The sonata consists of three movements:

- I - *Andante espressivo*,
- II - *Allegretto*,
- III - *Andante espressivo rubato*.

In the first movement, the performer of the first part is on the stage, and the performer of the second part comes in later and plays backstage. The part of the second bassoon is quite simple – it is a "son" who is just learning to play. In the second movement, both performers are on the stage, their parts are equal in meaning and complement each other, creating roll calls, mirror reflections in different directions of movement – they both

compete and help each other, these are two strong manifestations of the same beginning. In the third movement, the performer plays the first bassoon behind the scenes, the second one on stage; the Father gives way to his son. Their parts are more equal than in the first movement, however, the part of the second bassoon is now of leading importance. One can trace how interesting, unusual and witty an additionally interpreted sonata can be performed using one timbre, albeit with two instruments. Two bassoons here represent a unity, although each remains itself, one and only – this is a new interpretation of sonata form presented in the *Sonata for two bassoons* by V. Levit.

III. CONCLUSION

With bassoon's acquiring a solo function, composers get an opportunity to solve a number of genre, stylistic, linguistic, and dramaturgic problems. Gaining functional timbre freedom by the bassoon is currently a natural trend. As it is one of the last among other orchestral woodwind instruments to develop in the direction of solo practice, this development is more striking and tremendous. The specificity of the bassoon timbre is viewed in a new light, revealing its various facets, in particular, its sharp character or special psychological nature; the timbre of the solo bassoon sounds quite new and fresh for the listener. Today composers, performers and listeners percept and understand bassoon's timbre as a universal timbre which is characteristic to many other instruments with rich solo practice. And this understanding is also reflected in the works written, as a rule, in a new language, with the use of new composing techniques based on new forms and genres. Thus, the twentieth century gave the bassoon a chance to start its "life", so to speak, from scratch. It is important not to forget that all these phenomena would have been impossible without many processes associated with playing the bassoon. One of the most important processes is the improvement of the instrument itself, its technical and expressive capabilities. This is happening now, helping both performers and composers and listeners to find new colors, new images, and new perspectives in this instrument. Another important factor in the development of bassoon performance was and is the activity of people – performers, composers, educators, who, by their personal example, helped the bassoon take its special place in modern professional music, which distinguishes it from its other "colleagues". The proof is both the activity and creativity of outstanding musicians of the XX-XXI centuries, as well as the modern situation associated with the development of bassoon art throughout the world, the emergence of prestigious performing competitions, the flourishing of professional and social life, which is reflected in the creation and development of societies and associations of wind instrument performers.

So, we can state that bassoon art is experiencing its heydays. The rapid growth of bassoon performance and the enrichment of the repertoire with a wide palette of pieces for solo bassoon are a vivid confirmation of global trends in the development of wind instruments performance. This article is intended to give the modern bassoon art a new creative impulse and to focus maximum attention on further study of a wide range of issues related to wind instrument performance.

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