

Brief program notes for a saxophone lecture recital: compositions by Benjamín Gutiérrez,
Fernande Decruck, Karel Husa and Robert Muczynski

by

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Abstract

The repertoire selected for this Master of Music lecture recital represents a variety of musical styles composed by composers of diverse backgrounds. Each selection discussed is considered a significant piece of saxophone literature for a variety of reasons. Composer Benjamin Gutiérrez was born in 1937 and is a highly respected and successful Costa Rican composer. *Rapsodia para Saxofón Alto y Orquesta* was composed in 1974. This work represents the first major classical saxophone piece ever written by a Costa Rican composer. The piece is dedicated to Costa Rican classical saxophone pioneer Norman Calderón. Fernande Decruck, born in France in 1896, was a female composer who studied at the Paris Conservatory. Her major works for saxophone were primarily dedicated to French saxophone pioneer Marcel Mule, including her *Sonate en Ut# pour Saxophone Alto et Orchestre* which was composed in 1943.

Karel Husa, a world renown composer and Pulitzer Prize winner, was born in 1921 in the Czech Republic. He passed away in 2016 in the United States. Husa had a very successful career in France as a composer and as a conductor. His passion, however, was composition. He taught composition at Cornell University and spent the remainder of his life in America leaving behind a legacy of highly regarded compositions. *Élégie et Rondeau pour Alto Saxophone et Orchestre* was premiered by German and American saxophone pioneer Sigurd Raschèr.

Robert Muczynski was a prominent American composer and pianist who was born in Chicago in 1929. He was a talented musician and composer who worked with numerous musicians who commissioned pieces from him due to his national and international successes. The *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano, Op. 29* represents one of his commissioned pieces. The composition was commissioned by saxophonist Trent Kynaston, who asked Muczynski to compose a piece to be premiered at the 2nd World Saxophone Congress in Chicago in 1970. Since its premiere, the *Sonata* has become part of the standard classical saxophone repertoire.

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Rapsodia Para Saxofón Alto y Orquesta - Benjamín Gutiérrez

Benjamín Gutiérrez was born in 1937 in San José, Costa Rica. Gutiérrez studied at the Conservatory of Music at the University of Costa Rica, National Music Conservatory of Guatemala, New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, Casals Music Festival of Puerto Rico and at the Aspen Music Festival under the direction of Darius Milhaud. He later attended the University of Michigan where he pursued a master's degree in music education under the direction of Ross Lee Finney. In 1963, Gutiérrez was one of the founders and the first Director of the University of Costa Rica School of Music. Two years later, he was granted a fellowship to study at the Latin American Center of High Musical Studies in Buenos Aires, Argentina under the direction of Alberto Ginastera.¹

Rapsodia para Saxofón Alto y Orquesta was composed in 1974. The piece represents the first Costa Rican major classical saxophone work ever written. The composition was dedicated to Norman Calderón, an autodidact and very talented saxophonist who brought notoriety to the saxophone as a serious concert instrument within the University of Costa Rica School of Music. After having the opportunity to learn of the talent of Calderón, Gutiérrez decided to compose *Rapsodia para Saxofón Alto y Orquesta*. He also created a transcription for saxophone and piano.²

According to the composer's notes, the first movement, titled *Allegro con fuoco* (fast and bright with fire), is a combination of romantic lyricism and post-romanticism. The second movement, titled *Andante moderato* (moderately slow), is dodecaphonic. Movement three, titled *Allegro marcato* (lively, fast, marked, accentuated), is based on a Bach concerto.³

The first movement has a complex harmonic language described as polytonal by the composer. There are clear tonal centers present throughout the movement. Harmonically, there

¹ Javier Valerio, "The Emergence and Development of a Classical Saxophone Repertoire in Costa Rica." (DMA diss, University of Kansas, 2013), 2-5.

² Valerio, "The Emergence," 5.

³ Valerio, "The Emergence," 7-13.

are V to I cadences implied within the various tonal centers. The composer's use of duple and triple rhythmic figures adds rhythmic interest and variety within the music. Movement two is tranquil in character. Gutiérrez utilizes twelve-tone technique within this movement. The melodic exchanges that occur between the saxophone solo and accompaniment create a conversational atmosphere. The third movement is the longest of the three movements and is described by the composer as an "homage to tonal music." Gutiérrez implemented various melodic and harmonic ideas from *Concerto No. 1 in D Minor, BWV 1052* of Johann Sebastian Bach. He created motives that give the movement a baroque-like character.⁴

Gutiérrez explores the full range of the saxophone in addition to the extended registers throughout the composition. This piece contains many challenges for the saxophonist related to intricate movements within the altissimo register. Dramatic dynamic changes are important expressive elements throughout the piece.

⁴ Valerio, "The Emergence," 11.

Sonate en Ut# Pour Saxophone Alto et Orchestre - Fernande

Decruck

Fernande Decruck was born in Gaillac, France in 1896. She began piano lessons at the Toulouse Conservatory at the age of eight. When she was 22 years old, she was admitted into the Paris Conservatory in order to study composition and organ. She was influenced greatly by her organ professors, Eugène Gigout and Marcel Dupré, who introduced her to improvisation. Decruck moved to America in 1928 with her husband and two children. In 1933, she returned to France and began a period of great composition productivity. Decruck later taught harmony at the Toulouse Conservatory. In 1942, she moved back to Paris in order to reunite with her husband and in order to promote her music. Decruck died of a stroke in 1954.⁵

Sonate en Ut# pour Saxophone Alto et Orchestre was composed in 1943 and is dedicated to Marcel Mule, who served as Professor of Saxophone at the Paris Conservatory.⁶ There is an alternative solo viola part for this *Sonata*. This is likely due to the fact that the viola, an instrument with a similar range to that of the alto saxophone, was more widely known when compared to the saxophone at this time. Differences between the saxophone and viola parts include some note and articulation discrepancies.⁷ The score for this piece indicates the viola part key, therefore, is considered easier to read for the pianist when compared to that of the written key of the saxophone.⁸

Movement one, titled *Très modéré, expressif*, translates to very moderately, expressive. The first six measures begin with a calm introduction in the piano part. The introduction leads to a climatic saxophone entrance which showcases the high register of the saxophone. This

⁵ Joren Cain, “Rediscovering Fernande Decruck’s Sonate En Ut# Pour Saxophone Alto (ou Alto) Et Orchestre: A Performance Analysis.” (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 2010), 7-13.

⁶ Cain, “Rediscovering,” 29.

⁷ Christopher Gugel, “Analysis of a Recital a Report on Four Saxophone Works by Paul-Agricole Génin, Fernande Decruck, Ida Gotkovsky, and Luciano Berio Inspired by Four Important Saxophone Figures: Adolphe Sax, Marcel Mule, Daniel Deffayet, and Claude Delangle.” (Master’s report., Kansas State University, 2014), 9.

⁸ Cain, “Rediscovering,” 31.

movement may be described as conversational, featuring many tempo fluctuations. The dramatic changes of tempo add to the expressive nature of the music. Movement two is titled *Noël*, which translates to Christmas. Similar to the first movement, the second movement is also expressive dynamically. In particular, Decruck explores soft dynamic colors. She utilizes the term *doucement*, which translates to: with care, softly, gently, quietly, for example. The simple and tuneful melodic lines create a nostalgic and warm character of music which could be compared to that of an emotional connection associated with Christmas carols.⁹

Fileuse is the title of movement three which translates to spinner: a person who spins thread.¹⁰ This idea of spinning is programmatically represented in Decruck's consistent use of sextuplet rhythmic figures. These figures create the illusion of a spinning machine's motion. The last movement is composed in two parts: *Nocturne et Rondel*. The title of *Nocturne* refers to nighttime. As the title suggests, the musical character is calm and quiet. There are, however, brief climatic moments such as the climax occurring in measure 17. The title of *Rondel* refers to the musical form of a rondo. This form may be characterized as a reoccurring principal theme which alternates with new, contrasting themes. Decruck utilizes a standard five-part rondo form plus an introduction and coda: Intro - A - B - A - C - A - Coda.¹¹

⁹ Gugel, "Analysis of a recital," 11.

¹⁰ Gugel, "Analysis of a recital," 12.

¹¹ Cain, "Rediscovering," 128.

Élégie et Rondeau Pour Saxophone Alto et Orchestre - Karel Husa

Karel Husa was born in the Czech Republic in 1921 and passed away in 2016 in the United States. His parents wanted him to become a civil engineer. While he began formal training in this field, he was unable to complete his training due to the Nazis Party closing down his institution of training. Husa began private composition lessons with Jaroslav Řídký of the Prague Conservatory of Music, where he later received a formal education studying tonal harmony. During the year 1946, Husa traveled to France to study composition at the École Normale de Musique in Paris. It was during this time that he was first exposed to post tonal music as this type of music was considered decadent in the Czech Republic. While Husa was in France studying under the direction of Arthur Honegger and Nadia Boulanger, he explored many avant-garde composition techniques. In 1954, he was offered a teaching position at Cornell University which he accepted. Husa became an American citizen in the year 1959.¹² He was the recipient of numerous awards, including a Pulitzer Prize in the spring of 1969 for his *String Quartet No. 3*. This work was commissioned by the Fine Arts Quartet.¹³

Élégie et Rondeau is a twentieth century piece composed in 1960 for alto saxophone and piano. The piece was later arranged for alto saxophone and orchestra. The composition was premiered on July 29, 1960 by saxophonist Sigurd M. Raschèr and pianist William Krevis at the Eastman School of Music in New York.¹⁴ Raschèr was an important German and American saxophonist born in Germany in 1907. In addition to creating approaches for how to play and teach saxophone, he commissioned numerous new works for the saxophone. There are more than 140 compositions dedicated to Raschèr. Many of these pieces are considered standard, important

¹² Angela Ching-Chi Tam, "KAREL HUSA: AN AMERICAN TE DEUM" (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 1986), 1-5.

¹³ Benjamin John Tomlinson, "The Percussion Writing in the Wind Ensemble Works of Karel Husa" (D.Mus. Florida State University, 2017), 16.

¹⁴ Susan Hayes Hitchens, *Karel Husa a Bio-Bibliography*. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 22.

compositions within the classical saxophone repertoire. Karel Husa's *Élégie et Rondeau* is one such example.¹⁵

Élégie is French for elegy, which translates to a poem or song that expresses sad feelings, especially for somebody who has died.¹⁶ The *Élégie* may be considered in three parts. Part one begins softly with simple melodic and rhythmic exchanges between saxophone and piano. A sorrowful character is created through Husa's use of singing, sustained long tones. Part two is more intense due to the composer's introduction of trills, faster rhythmic figures, and louder dynamic language. The repeated high tones and trill figures convey an angry and helpless character that may be associated with a process of overcoming mourning. A cry of anguish is portrayed in Husa's climatic use of the high and altissimo registers of the saxophone. Part three may be characterized as a slow and soft fading away into silence.

While the second movement (*Rondeau*) is written in 6/8 time, a sense of pulse is purposefully vague due to Husa's use of silence and intricate rhythmic figures. Strong pulses become clearer as melodic ideas continue to develop. Husa's dynamic intent is for the *Rondeau* to reflect an intense crescendo from beginning to end: pianissimo to triple f's. The composer's use of angular melodic ideas and tonal dissonance creates a most colorful and dramatic character of music.

Due to Husa's use of highly syncopated rhythmic figures in both the saxophone and piano parts, it is vital for the saxophonist to have a clear understanding of the piano score. In addition to purposeful listening, the saxophonist is advised to mark thoughtful cues within the saxophone part. It is recommended that the saxophonist thoughtfully consider the use of vibrato. The use or disuse of vibrato can be flexible. The saxophonist's decision to not apply vibrato in soft, intimate moments can be most effective. A saxophonist's use of alternate side key fingerings are appropriate in certain soft passages. These fingerings not only assist the saxophonist in creating subtle, short-tube colors, they assist the saxophonist with tuning. It is important for both saxophonist and pianist to follow Husa's numerous musical directions, including very specific articulation markings.

¹⁵ Matthew Jeffery Taylor, "Teaching Extended Techniques on the Saxophone: A Comparison of Methods" (DMA diss., University of Miami, 2012), 2.

¹⁶ Oxford Dictionaries, "Oxford Learners Dictionaries"

<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/elegy?q=elegy>

Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano, Opus 29 - Robert Muczynski

Robert Muczynski was a prominent American composer born in Chicago in the year 1929. He had a successful career as a pianist and educator. In 1955, he became a faculty member of DePaul University, the same university where he received both bachelor and master degrees in music.¹⁷ As a composer, Muczynski worked with a large number of musicians who commissioned pieces from him due to his national and international reputation. The composer also worked as a professor in 1956 at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa,¹⁸ and in 1965 moved to Arizona, where he served as head of composition at the University of Arizona until 1988.¹⁹

Muczynski's *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano, Op. 29* was commissioned by saxophonist Trent Kynaston in 1970. Originally titled both *Desert Sketches* and *Desert Serenade*, Kynaston suggested retitling the piece *Sonata* as he believed this more formal title would better promote the composition as a serious concert piece. Kynaston later stated that he still thinks about desert images while playing the piece and wishes he would have followed Muczynski's original idea for the title of the composition.²⁰ He premiered the *Sonata* at the University of Arizona in December of 1970 with Muczynski on piano. They presented the world premiere of the piece at the 2nd World Saxophone Congress in Chicago that same month.²¹ Muczynski's *Sonata* is now considered a core piece within the saxophone repertoire.

The *Sonata* is comprised of two movements and is approximately seven minutes in length. Movement one, titled *Andante maestoso*, is dramatic and lyrical in character. Muczynski's strong use of syncopation gives the music a stately and serious atmosphere. This

¹⁷ Anne Marie Thurmond, "Selected Woodwind Compositions by Robert Muczynski: A Stylistic and Structural Analysis of Muczynski's Sonata, Opus 14, for Flute and Piano, Sonata, Opus 29, for Alto Saxophone and Piano, Time Pieces, Opus 43, for Clarinet and Piano, and Moments, Opus 47, for Flute and Piano" (DMA diss., The University of Georgia, 1998), 1.

¹⁸ Thurmond, "Selected Woodwind Compositions," 1.

¹⁹ Rebecca Hee-Jung Lim, "A Stylistic Analysis of and Performance Suggestions for Robert Muczynski's Second Piano Sonata, Opus 22" (Master's thesis, California State University, 2017), 3.

²⁰ Thurmond, "Selected Woodwind Compositions," 12.

²¹ Thurmond, "Selected Woodwind Compositions," 13.

movement has a nocturnal character that could programmatically represent the desert at nighttime. The music could broadly be viewed in three parts. Muczynski creates dramatic dynamic contrast between the first and final statements of the music with the final statement serving as a soft echo of the first statement.

Movement two, titled *Allegro Energico*, is very energetic and fast as the title indicates. Muczynski's angular writing, use of syncopation, and strong accents could programmatically reflect a desert chase. The composer's use of octatonic patterns is notable.

Muczynski's *Sonata* includes many passages involving the altissimo register. In particular, those tones directly above written high F-sharp are utilized throughout. These tones are employed in many rapid passages in the second movement. Finally, it is advised that the saxophonist create a most thoughtful breathing plan in movement two, in particular. It is important for the saxophonist to not over-breathe in the many rests of the syncopated phrases.

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