

Historical Contexts of Standard Bassoon Repertoire

Bryan Timperley

Glenn Korff School of Music, UCARE Summer 2015

Camille Saint-Saëns

1835-1921

French

(Late) Romantic

Teachers: Pierre Maleden, Fromental Halévy

Contemporaries: Franz Liszt, Hector Berlioz, Charles Gounod, César Franck, Richard Wagner, Gabriel Fauré, Jules Massenet, Georges Bizet, Claude Debussy, Johannes Brahms, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Mighty Five

Major solo bassoon work: Sonata for Bassoon and Piano, Op. 168

In 1920, Saint-Saëns wrote to his former student and close friend Gabriel Fauré, “I have no other plans for composition in my head. The grape harvest is over! at 85, one has the right to be silent – and perhaps the duty.” However, he was still to compose three woodwind sonatas, including his final opus, Sonata for Bassoon and Piano, Op. 168, in May-June 1921. It was published by Durand in November of the same year and Saint-Saëns died in December in Algiers at the age of 86. The three movement sonata was dedicated to Léon Letellier, the principal bassoonist of the Paris Opera and of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. In 1922, Letellier became professor at the Paris Conservatoire and he included the first two movements of this sonata as the *concours* solo for 1924 (it made two more appearances as part of the 1981 and 1994 competitions). It was likely played first on a nineteen or twenty-keyed French bassoon. The first movement, *Allegretto moderato*, is mostly in G major and its phrases are usually built with repeated melodic gestures. The second movement, *Allegro scherzando*, employs the rhythm of four sixteenth notes and an eighth note in numerous contours and beat placements to connect the larger sections of the movement. Also in second movement the bassoon is required to play an E at the top of the treble clef staff, a note even higher than the *Rite of Spring* solo he scoffed at on multiple occasions. The third movement is made up of two parts, *Molto adagio* and *Allegro moderato* and concludes the piece in G major.

Paul Hindemith

1895-1963

German

20th Century (Modernist)

Teachers: Arnold Mendelssohn, Bernhard Sekles

Contemporaries: Arnold Schoenberg, Richard Strauss, Kurt Weill, Carl Orff, Anton Webern, Béla Bartók, Igor Stravinsky, Dimitri Shostakovich, Darius Milhaud, Arthur Honegger, Francis Poulenc, Aaron Copland

Major solo bassoon work: Sonata for Bassoon and Piano

A commonly performed bassoon work from the 20th century, Hindemith's Sonata for Bassoon and Piano was completed in 1938, during a period when he and his music were falling out of favor with Hitler and the Nazi regime. The first movement was completed around January 1, while the second movement was finished in June, shortly after the premiere of his opera *Mathis der Maler* in Zurich. In September, Hindemith moved to Bluche, Switzerland. The sonata was premiered on November 6th in Zurich as one bookend of a lecture on *Mathis der Maler* (possibly in connection to Switzerland's branch of the International Society for Contemporary Music). At the premiere of this work, the bassoon soloist, Gustaf Steidl, was running late. Hindemith decided he would pass the time by finding a bassoon—an instrument he enjoyed—and playing the sonata. When Steidl arrived, he heard somebody playing the sonata rather well and was worried he had been replaced, but it was only the composer. Hindemith's style mixes a Neo-Baroque use of counterpoint with the unique concept of melody, harmony, and tonality explained in his theoretical text *The Craft of Musical Composition*. This sonata also falls under his category of *Gebrauchsmusik*, or “music for use.” The first movement, *Leicht bewegt*, (“lightly moving”) is in ABA form and has two primary themes with a bridge between the repeated theme in the second A section. The second movement is divided into three larger sections, *Langsam* (“slow”), *Marsch* (“march”), and *Beschluß, Pastorale-Ruhig* (“ending, pastoral, quiet”).

This poster provides a brief overview of two major bassoon works by two the composers I researched this summer as part of this project. The information on the pieces and composers were accessed through the UNL Libraries resources, including ILLiad, and summarized in the form of a highly annotated bibliography. All of the historical information gathered will be used to compile extensive, analytic program notes for selected major works for the bassoon, led by **Dr. Jeffrey McCray**, Associate Professor of Bassoon in the Glenn Korff School of Music at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Dr. McCray and I are currently completing theoretical analysis and important historical background for the four pieces by three composers researched last summer (**Telemann, Mozart, and Weber**) and will be proposing the material for publication in the *Double Reed* (the journal of the International Double Reed Society). The program notes will provide a useful and indispensable pedagogical tool to be used by university and professional bassoonists.