Without Ceasing: A Performance Analysis of Six Solo Works for Saxophone

by

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Abstract

This thesis for the Doctor of Music degree consists of an audio recording, a public recital, a scholarly essay and program notes to compliment the recorded and live performance. The recording and concert consist of the following unaccompanied saxophone works: *Le Frêne égaré* (1978) for alto saxophone and *…sur un îlot de la rivière..* (2010) for soprano saxophone by French composer, François Rossé; *Oxyton* (1993) for baritone saxophone by French composer Christophe Havel; *Smoking Mirrors (Symbia II)* (1995) for alto saxophone by American composer John M. Kennedy; *Tilework for Saxophone* (2003) by American composer, currently residing in France, Tom Johnson; and finally *Strata* (2012) for solo tenor saxophone by Canadian composer Colin Labadie. This scholarly essay explores the performance challenges and decisions that were made in preparing these works for the recording and final performance. In discussing historical saxophone literature, and how repertoire has transformed since 1970, this paper will compare and highlight the compositional techniques and notation found in the six unaccompanied saxophone works. Furthermore the discussion of the relationship between the performer, composer and score, and the challenges found within each work, will provide insight into the musical decisions that are showcased in the audio recording and live performance.

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My main goal as a saxophonist has always been to achieve a high level of technique, to develop communication skills and an expressive command of the saxophone. The Doctor of Music degree program and the repertory choices I have made have pushed me into a realm of performance techniques and concepts found in saxophone literature that were new, challenging and ultimately rewarding. My repertoire choices created a need to not only learn the techniques presented in the works, but more importantly created an opportunity to successfully communicate the musical ideas to the audience intelligently and expressively. As a result of the technical challenges found in performing contemporary solo saxophone works, my research over the past four years has been focused on the relationship of the performer with the score and the composer. Some research questions that have resulted in performing contemporary works are: What is the process of score reading and interpretation? How does the score and its notation influence performance decisions? How is the composer's intention brought to life in the interpretation and performance of a work? These are the very questions I have sought to answer in preparing the musical works for my final recital and recording project. Thus, for my final Doctor of Music project, I have chosen to include works that have challenged me technically, physically and artistically in interpreting the score, as well as works that have provided a platform for direct interaction with the composer.

For this concert and recording I have prepared the following unaccompanied saxophone works: *Le Frêne égaré* (1978) for alto saxophone and *…sur un îlot de la rivière..* (2010) for soprano saxophone by French composer, François Rossé; *Oxyton* (1993) for baritone saxophone by French composer Christophe Havel; *Smoking Mirrors (Symbia II)* (1995) for alto saxophone by American composer John M. Kennedy; *Tilework for Saxophone*

(2003) by American composer, currently residing in France, Tom Johnson; and finally *Strata* (2012) for solo tenor saxophone by Canadian composer Colin Labadie. Through preparing these works I have been able to interact with all of the composers, some in person and others through email exchanges and Skype video and audio conferencing. Through these interactions I have gained tremendous insight into some of the performance practices involved in preparing these works, and such insight will become apparent in my analysis of them. The works I have included are not necessarily similar in style or genre, or easily categorized into a unified group; however, in my performance analysis of each work I will highlight the complexities and specific performance challenges presented by the composer in the scores. I will do so by first providing a brief historical background on saxophone literature, and the post 1970 transformation of literature to include contemporary compositions. Then I will discuss each work, highlighting composition techniques, and use of notation that contributes to the technical, mental, and physical challenges found in each score. The discussion of the relationship between the performer, composer and score, and the challenges found within each work, will in turn provide insight into my performance decisions that are showcased on the recording.

The saxophone, a relatively young musical instrument, overall lacks (in comparison to other orchestral instruments) a rich and sustainable historical repertoire. The majority of early classical saxophone repertoire written between the late 1840s and the late 1960s consists of conservative works, harmonically and structurally, written by relatively unknown composers who were often personally associated with saxophone performers, or

in Europe, associated with the music conservatories.[1] Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s avant-garde composers sought new ways with which to express sonic events. To successfully communicate these sonic events and musical ideas, some composers of the avant-garde moved away from what we today call standard notated music, to a notation system that was visual, graphic, or any system that best fit the musical ideas. Galia Hanoch-Roe in her article "Musical Space and Architectural Time: Open scoring versus linear processes" speaks about notation describing, "as a mode of communication distinct from sounding music, musical notation has assumed a variety of forms, reflecting the changing needs and purposes of those who write and read it."[2] Saxophone literature experienced a change as more performers and composers began to discover its capabilities as an instrument, and together found new ways to express what the instrument could do sonically.

In 1970, Saxophonist Jean-Marie Londeix premiered Edison Denisov's *Sonate* for alto saxophone at the World Saxophone Congress, in Chicago, Illinois. Londeix's performance of this work exposed saxophonists and composers to a full gamut of idiomatic possibilities of the instrument.[3] Denisov's *Sonate* uses extended techniques, (multiphonics, quarter tones, glissandi, flutter tongue), complex rhythms and a wide range of serialized dynamics and timbre variations, and spatial notation that, used together, created a unique and challenging composition for the saxophonist. Since 1970, composers have written works for saxophone, which explore a much fuller range, timbral possibilities, and technical

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[1] Richard Ingham, ed. "The Cambridge companion to the Saxophone," (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 53. Also see *150 Years of Music for Saxophone* by Jean-Marie Londeix.
[2] Galia Hanoch-Roe, "Musical Space and Architectural Time: Open scoring versus linear processes," (IRASM 34 2003) 2, 145-160.
[3] Umble, *Master of the Modern Saxophone*, 222.

faculties that ultimately challenge the performer both mentally and physically through the interpretation and realization of the score.

In speaking about his first work for saxophone *Le Frêne égaré* (1978) François Rossé suggests that a saxophonist should "forget any basic knowledge of the saxophone and be open to a new concept of the instrument. Try to step back from any preconceived ideas for a moment so that you can find yourself in another culture."[4] This "other" culture Rossé is referring to, has to deal with his use of notation, and the extended techniques he incorporated in the work, that were not commonly used by composers of saxophone music prior to 1970. A change in adapting traditional notation to accurately communicate sonic ideas and extended techniques allowed composers to fully explore the timbral capabilities of the saxophone. Vincent McDermott states in his article "A Conceptual Musical Space," "Every pitch, timbre, dynamic, every group of tones, every formal intricacy, every durational emphasis, even every rest - in sum, everything about a piece of music - contribute in some manner, substantially or only slightly, to the spatial organization of the work."[5] This is the culture Rossé has created in *Le Frêne égaré.* Having flexibility with notating sonic ideas has allowed composers to find new ways to fully express their intents, while giving the performer the opportunity to interact with the score more openly.

It took about two years to fully develop the ideas and concepts François Rossé used in his work, *Le Frêne égaré* (1978) for solo alto saxophone. The length of *Le Frêne égaré* is quite extended in comparison to other solo works that had previously been written for saxophone. To provide a comparison, early saxophone solo works such as Paul Bonneau's

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[4] James Umble, *Jean-Marie Londeix: Master of the Modern Saxophone*, (Cherry Hill, NJ: Roncorp Publications, 2000), 279.

[5] Vincent McDermott, "A Conceptual Musical Space" The American Society for Aesthetics Vol. 30, No. 4 (Summer 1972), Pg. 491.

Caprice en forme de valse (1950) is approximately four minutes in length, and Eugene Bozza's *Improvisation and Caprice* (1952) is approximately three minutes in length. *Le Frêne égaré* is performed around 10-12 minutes in length which is a significant difference. Saxophonist, Jean-Marie Londeix wrote that, "It is well-known today that *Le Frêne égaré* is an extremely important work, not only because of its modernity, but also because of the fact that this modernity led to the discovery of many of the saxophone's extraordinary idiomatic possibilities."[6] Londeix goes on to say how it is the many innovations in *Le Frêne égaré* that helped break new ground for saxophone performance and literature.[7] Rossé was a disciple of Olivier Messiaen at the Paris Conservatory when Londeix asked him to compose a work for saxophone in 1977.[8] With limited knowledge of the saxophone, working closely with Londeix, Rossé developed the ideas and concepts that would be included in *Le Frêne égaré*. Rossé describes working with Londeix stating:

> Working together with Jean-Marie Londeix was essential, both in learning about writing for the instrument and about the intricacies of performing…we both approached this experience without any *a priori* ideas about the instrument – it was not easy, and we both felt that, musically, we were stripped of all of our protective layers.[9]

Rossé himself suggested that performers should take a similar approach to performing *Le Frêne égaré* as he did in composing it.

When studying this score, the performer must surrender preconceived notions of many musical elements and traditional notation from the very onset of *Le Frêne égaré*. The non-measured notation system presented throughout the work requires the saxophonist to think abstractly and begin to formulate an individual interpretation of the musical events.

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[6] Umble, *Master of the Modern Saxophone*, 275.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Umble, 164
[9] Ibid.

Although there is a welcomed platform for performer interpretation of the notation and individuality in performance of the work, what truly challenges the performer is the precision and level of expectation Rossé requires from his performer as indicated in the score. At any given point within this work, the performer is challenged in the concept of time, varying dynamics, extended technique, difficult technical passages and by the overall pacing and duration of the work.

The notation is a radical departure from saxophone repertoire written before *Le Frêne égaré*. The opening motive A is repeated in slight variation at section C and E of the score, is spatially notated, and can be found in the following example:

Figure 1: *Le Frêne égaré* François Rossé pg. 1 line 1.

As you can see from this example the duration of the opening F# followed by a multiphonic and finally an intake of breath is indicated by the length of the line, rather than measured notation. The performer is therefore required to decide the duration of this opening motive, determining how to place each event in reference to other events, true to ones interpreted visualization of the duration of the line indicated by Rossé. The variables of time open up a new relationship with the score, allowing the performer to think critically about how to execute each sonic event.

The next section to follow at B, truly complicates the performer's and the audience's concepts of time. In section B, Rossé writes "free, as fast as possible." He notates breath tone figures in opposition to oscillating augmented- fifth eighth notes (F and C#) which are played strictly in time, at a tempo of eighth note equals ca. 48.

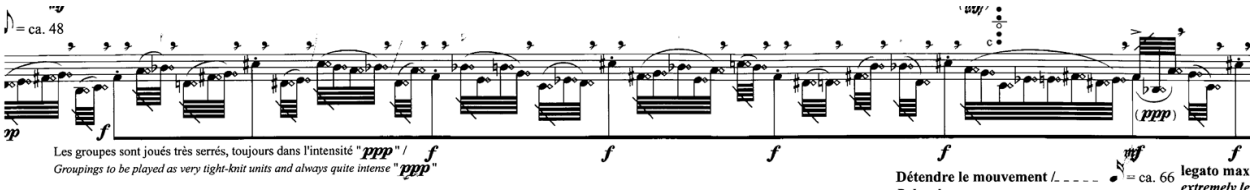

Figure 2: *Le Frêne égaré* François Rossé pg. 1 line 2.

From this example you can see that section B requires the performer to mentally keep time with the metronomic oscillating eighth notes, while the material between is always "to be played as very tight-knit units and always quite intense"[10] at *ppp* with the addition of breath in the tone. The F's and C#'s in contrast are played *f* and slap tongue, and as this section develops, Rossé eliminates expectation of strict time by altering the dynamic of the eighth notes, or even eliminating them all together by the middle of the third staff of page one. This section, is one of many that require the performer to compartmentalize the way in which he/she will execute the individual events, while being aware of how all the components fit into the greater context of the larger section and ultimately into the entire score.

The middle section of the work, dubbed the "monster," by Londeix, was named for its athletic attributes and requirements of musical assertiveness.[11] Beginning on page four of the score, Rossé again imposes strict time (sixteenth note = 76) in which oscillating minor sixths set a metronomic pace. Similar to section B, Rossé eliminates the element of predictability as he transitions away from strict time into time that is spatially notated. Overall the "monster" section requires immense control both mentally and physically. In terms of technical facility, the performer is required to accurately execute the varying dynamics, which often change instantly between motives. Moreover, the clean transitions

[10] François Rossé, *Le Frêne égaré*, (Paris: Gérad Billaudot, 1981), pg. 1.
[11] Umble, 279.

required from frequent changes in articulations (accents, staccatos, accented tenutos, tenutos etc.) to varying extended techniques such as vibrato manipulations, flutter tongue, quartertones, air tone/full tone, multiphonics, portimenti/glissandi and finally extreme register changes, are an added level of complexity. The multiple different levels of thought process required for the "monster" section challenges the performer to make performance decisions on how to pace oneself and place individual events based simply on how it is notated in the score, complicated by the total length of the section, ensuring that the performer has enough physical stamina to maintain the energy required of this section. Overall, if a performer "step[s] back from any preconceived ideas for a moment so that you can find yourself in another culture [*sic*]" [12] a performer will indeed find a new culture within the score. A culture they can interact with and help shape, as they are led to make performance decisions.

...Sur un îlot de la rivière... (2003), also by Rossé, for solo soprano saxophone is an unmeasured score and incorporates aspects of spatial notation. The work can be divided into three main sections: the first being fast with large dynamic contrast; the second section soft, legato, that incorporates a suspension of time in its use of spatial notation as well as the use of silence; and finally the last section which begins vivo and rather chaotically, gradually dissipating and resulting in an ending which is meditative As this work is unmeasured, it is up to the performer to individually create a concept for time and tempo within the guidelines Rossé provides, as well as within the performer's technical abilities as a saxophonist. However, just like *Le Frêne égaré*, it is important to be mindful of

[12] James Umble, *Jean-Marie Londeix: Master of the Modern Saxophone*, (Cherry Hill, NJ: Roncorp Publications, 2000), 279.

the directions Rossé provides for understanding his use of notation. In the legend below, Rossé indicates how his notation should be interpreted.

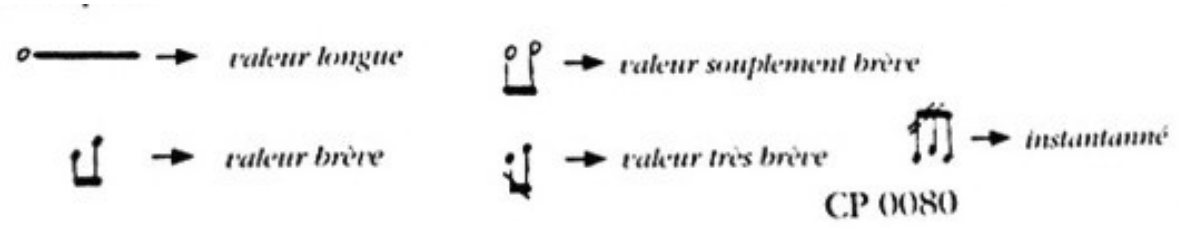

Figure 3: *...Sur un îlot de la rivière…* François Rossé pg. 1

From this legend provided above and in the score, the performer decides how fast, how soon, how brief and how long each event will be, within his/her capabilities as a musician. Line three on the first page of the score further outlines how this notation is complicated for the performer as Rossé alternates between events that are "*valeur très brève*," quarter tone accented grace notes, *sfz* "*instantanné*" followed by "*valeur longue*" beginning in the fourth stanza of the same page. Careful attention is required in order to ensure that each notation system is accurately presented.

Page two begins to highlight some of Rossé's Eastern music influences, with his use of pitch bends, and use of modal tonalities. Written by request of Chinese saxophonist Tong Lang, as was common with the genesis of Rossé's other works, he wrote this piece for the performer rather than the saxophone itself. As a result, Rossé's works often include influences of the individual performer's personality, culture, musical abilities and more. For *...Sur un îlot de la rivière…* Rossé said that, "Asia was forcibly present in my relationship with Tang."[13] Grace notes, flutter tongue, quatertones, pitch bends and vibrato manipulations, all of which Rossé uses in *...Sur un îlot de la rivière…*, hold a common place in

[13] Information gathered through email correspondence with François Rossé

traditional Chinese performance practices. The most apparent homage to Chinese culture is Rossé's use of spoken Mandarin found on page four of the score and at the end of the work, where he requires the performer to recite a passage from the Ode "Kouan Kiu" from the Book of Songs compiled by Confucius.[14] The text is surrounded by a repeated multiphonic, played in a bell tone style to simulate the chiming of ritual bells. It requires precision and accuracy from the saxophonist to attack and voice the multiphonic correctly, while recognizing the reoccurrence of the bell tones will need to be replicated very methodically and precisely. Following the first five bell tones, the performer then speaks in Mandarin:

> When we cannot find
>
> Wide awake or asleep, we think about it constantly
>
> Pensively, pensively
>
> Without ceasing to turn and turn[15]

The addition of a spoken text, in Mandarin adds an extra complexity requiring the performer to speak calmly, and take on the role of an actor in communicating the text to the audience. Thought, intention and practice need to be considered in the delivery of the text. To conclude the work, the saxophonist performs a "modal Chinese song"[16] that incorporates grace notes, quatertones, pitch bends and vibrato manipulations that are reminiscent of Chinese folk music.

On the bottom of page three in Rossé's *...Sur un îlot de la rivière…*, the composer quotes *Le Frêne égaré.* Rossé describes this moment as being amber: an orange transparent stone in which prehistoric items, like insects, have been archeological and naturally stored

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[14] François Rossé, *...Sur un îlot de la rivière…* (Paris: CPEA, 2010), pg. 4.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Information gathered through email correspondence with François Rossé

as a way to keep them preserved in their original form.[17] Rossé suggests that is a bit of the role in which *...Sur un îlot de la rivière…* plays, "preserving the prehistoric," the prehistoric being his first work for saxophone, and the ancient Chinese culture. As mentioned when speaking about *Le Frêne égaré*, Rossé uses breath tones, as well as dramatic breath intakes through the instrument. Breath also plays a significant role in *...Sur un îlot de la rivière…* For Rossé, the biological origin of the sound is the breath; the breath is that which comes before the sound. Therefore the "movement of the breath is like a river that gives energy, (without it) there will be no music, nor man…"[18] The role of the breath in both works adds another challenge for the performer. As breathing is an innate process, we often do not think about its possible timbral effects. Experimentation is required to explore and discover, what type of breath and intake of air will have the overall desired special effect.

French composer Christophe Havel, (1956) composed *Oxyton* (1993), a solo for Baritone saxophone for Bordeaux saxophonist Marie Bernadette Charrier. Londeix describes Havel's music as having a "spectral shape in which the various elements of sound, pitch, dynamics, timbre, duration…are considered as such, for their expressive value, regardless of the discourse."[19] *Oxyton* is a piece that incorporates extreme contrasts, exposing the wide ranges and capabilities of the baritone saxophone. It is not only extremely challenging because of the techniques Havel incorporates in the work, but moreover, within the challenging techniques he incorporates fast shifts between ideas and technical concepts. Havel describes *Oxyton* as beginning with "multiple cries that gradually oxidize and dematerialize. Its sharp and sweet smelling acid-like resonances, converge to

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Information gathered through email correspondence with François Rossé

[19] Jean-Marie Londeix, *Londeix Guide to the Saxophone Repertoire 1844-2012* (Glenmoore, PA: Roncorp Publications, 2012), pg. 186.

infinity and immobility."[20] The multiple cries, Havel alludes to, are the multiphonics that he uses from the onset of the work. The first presented multiphonic, depicted in the example below as a balanced cluster of tones, played at a *f* dynamic, ending with a glissando, is significantly reminiscent of a cry.

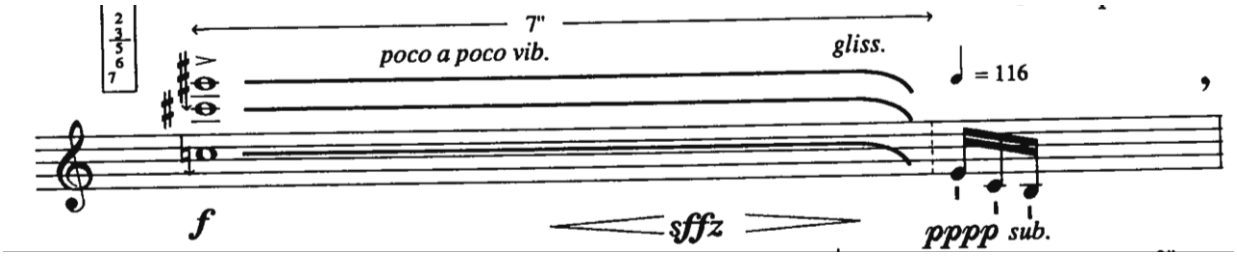

Figure 4: *Oxyton*, Christophe Havel pg. 1 line 1.

Complicating the mutliphonic further, Havel layers other techniques on top of the multiphonic. Havel writes the multiphonic at a *f* dynamic, held for seven seconds, with vibrato slowly added, a crescendo to *sffz* followed by a decrescendo and a glissando at the end. When executed correctly, with all the elements correctly interpreted from the score, the sonorous value of the multiphonic, becomes much more expressive, than the multiphonic would on its own. The opening muliphonic cry, is immediately followed by an instant contrast of a subito *pppp* three short note figure. This figure plays a central role throughout the remainder of the work as it reoccurs in various forms serves as pillars in the work, signifying the close to each section.

Oxyton as a whole incorporates a wide range of dynamics from *pppp* to *ff*, and often changes occur suddenly. When playing the soft articulated sections which encompass most of the first half of the piece, the challenge comes in executing the dynamic, articulations and key clicks accurately, ensuring that the notes are heard in the correct range, as most of

[20] Christophe Havel, *Oxyton*, (P.J. Tonger, 1993).

these sections are notated in the lower register of the instrument. There is a tendency for the notes to be voiced an octave higher than written when playing in the low register at a *p* dynamic. In the beginning the mutliphonics, or the cries, are more prolific, with small interjections of quiet articulated sections. As the first section of the piece develops, the quiet sections become more prevalent, and the multiphonic cries "oxidize" and dissipate, to the point that the opening multiphonic is finally repeated at *pp* dynamic in the fifth stanza of page six of the score. From here the quiet metrically fluctuating material takes over, growing dynamically until the end of the section on page seven.

Havel provides tempo indications throughout the score, however some sections experience time fluctuation based on how they are notated in the score. For example, Havel uses a beaming notation that indicates whether the melodic line should accelerate or decelerate. Beginning the middle of page six, Havel instructs the performer to fluctuate between tempos, creating an irregularity to the rhythm, which accelerates and decelerates at the discretion of the performer.

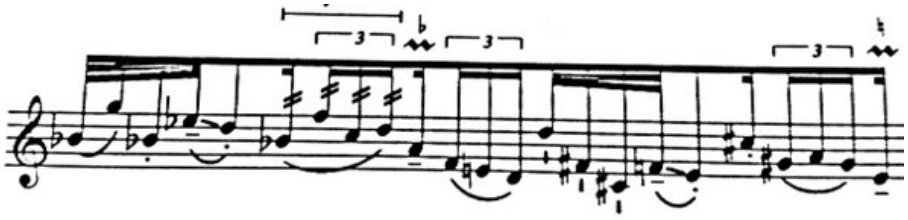

Figure 5: *Oxyton* Christophe Havel, page. 6 line 6.

Although the tempo fluctuation is controlled by the performer, Havel also provides overall control using the beamed notation, as shown above, indicating the areas he would like the performer to speed up and slow down. On page nine, Havel uses standard metered measures without the insertion of spatial notation in direct contrast to the previous section

which is unmeasured and moves in and out of the time that is indicated. The performer is thus required to methodically think about the notation, and make a fast mental transition between the two types of notation. Additionally preparing for the hard challenges of the advanced techniques presented in this work requires a lot of physical and mental exercise to truly communicate the ideas presented by the composer.

Smoking Mirrors (Symbia II) (1995), for solo alto saxophone, by American composer John M. Kennedy was written as a part of a series of virtuosic works written for solo instruments. About these works Kennedy says, "All the pieces in this series are intended to work on two levels. First, to provide the skilled performer with a work that showcases his/her talents. Second, to force the composer to create a work for solo instrument which is contrapuntal, as in the suites and partitas of J.S. Bach, using little or no extended techniques so common in the solo repertoire of the Twentieth Century."[21] *Smoking Mirrors (Symbia II)* is organized into three sections, in which "the harmonic and melodic material combines with virtuosic gestures to articulate the form."[22] Kennedy uses repetitive patterns through mirroring motives, sequencing or adding variation. He suggests that, "the mirrors eluded to in the title occur as large blocks of material organized as a palindrome. Within each block the repeated material is developed to maintain dramatic intensity throughout the work."[23] Having knowledge about the mirror effects allows the performer to better understand the form of the work and, successfully prepare the technical passages.

Smoking Mirrors (Symbia II) is quite challenging in its musical requirements as Kennedy uses non-idiomatic intervallic relationships within the motives, and incorporates

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[21] Program notes, provided to me by John. M. Kennedy
[22] ibid.
[23] ibid.

large register variances throughout the work. On occasion Kennedy exposes the upper register of the saxophone for an extended duration.

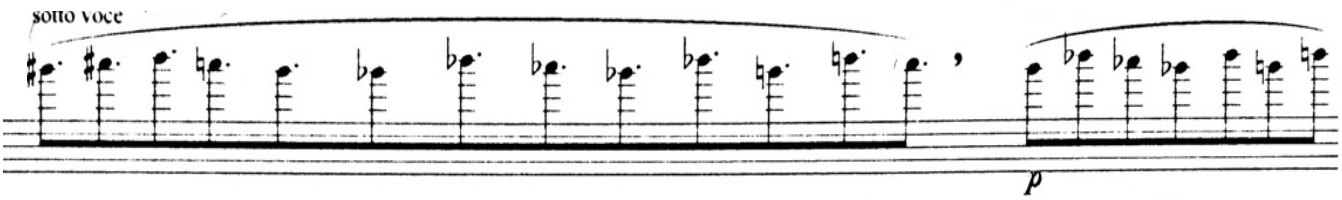

Figure 6: *Smoking Mirrors (Symbia II),* John M. Kennedy Page 6, Line 2

In the passage above the saxophonist is required to play for an extended period in the altissimo register at a *p* dynamic. This section in particular is extremely challenging and requires precise control of embouchure and air, and psychological focus by the performer. Physically, the performer needs to ensure that exhaustion does not affect the ability to successfully play in altissimo register.

The notation Kennedy uses is similar to Rossé and Havel, in that *Smoking Mirrors* is largely unmeasured and like *...Sur un îlot de la rivière…* uses groups of beamed notes, and aspects of spatial notation. A unique characteristic of Kennedy's notation, in comparison to the other presented works, is that he uses stem direction to highlight different layers of the melodic material, as can be seen in the following example.

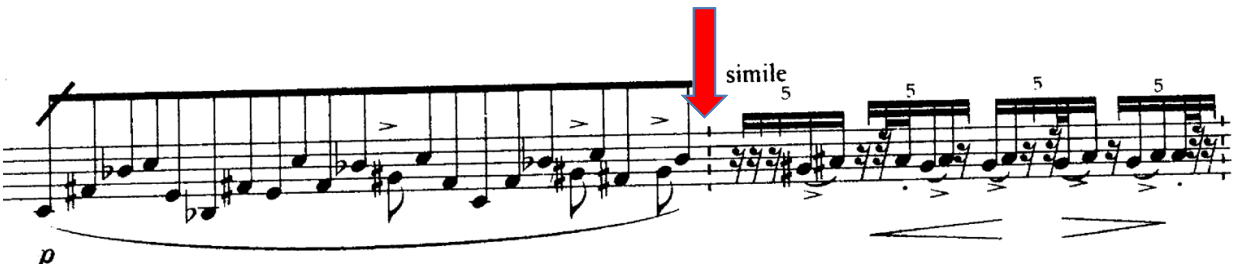

Figure 7: *Smoking Mirrors (Symbia II),* John M. Kennedy Page 1, Line 2

From this example, Kennedy uses a group of beamed notes to create a motive, while inserting another voice, accented G#'s which are beamed in the opposite direction, creating

a polyphonic-sonic event within a monophonic motive. This type of beaming effect occurs throughout the work and requires the performer to mentally recognize the different voices, while executing both voices within the same beamed group and musical motive. Kennedy uses perforated measure lines, as seen in the previous example, to signal to the performer that the material within the perforated measures should be played in strict time.[24] The material that follows the perforated measures occurs in most cases, instantly, for varied durations, generating an instant shift from "free time" to "strict time." Thus, the performer needs to not only execute metric precision within the "in time" sections, but also a mental preparation of the transitions between free and strict time is required. Additionally, the performer should be mindful to the spaces within the score, and ensure that events are placed very methodically and according to their place on the page. As a result the constant changes can be physically challenging, as there are very few extended passages of silence within the work too allow for rest.

The last two works, *Tilework for saxophone* (2003) and *Strata* for tenor saxophone (2012), were composed using a technique of layering material, and minimalist composition techniques. *Tilework for saxophone* (2003) like Kennedy's *Smoking Mirrors* was written as a part of a collection of works for solo instruments. In 2002, Johnson devoted much of his compositional output to 14 tilework pieces, one for each instrument of the orchestra.[25] Johnson describes *Tilework* as having "to do with fitting together little tiles to fill lines and loops. One can think of this as making mosaics in one dimension, but it is also very much like stringing beads onto necklaces in various patterns."[26] *Tilework* for saxophone is

[24] Program notes, provided to me by John. M. Kennedy
[25] Tom Johnson, Tilework for saxophone, (Paris: Editions 75, 2003).
[26] Ibid.

written in three movements, with each movement incorporating repetitive rhythmic loops that begin as separate entities that slowly merge with other loops to create layers.

To look at the score, *Tilework* looks like a straightforward minimalist composition, and unlike the previous pieces uses traditional notation. Timothy A. Johnson in his article "Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique" defines minimalist technique as having "a continuous formal structure, even rhythmic texture and bright tone, simple harmonic palette, lack of extended melodic lines, and repetitive rhythmic patterns."[27] *Tilework* fits into all these categories as outlined by T.A. Johnson. However Tom Johnson suggests that:

> The idea of minimalism is much larger than most people realize. It includes, by definition, any music that works with limited or minimal materials: pieces that use only a few notes, or pieces that use only a few words of text, or pieces written for very limited instruments, such as antique cymbals, bicycle wheels, or whisky glasses. It includes pieces made exclusively from recordings of rivers and streams. It includes pieces that move in endless circles. It includes pieces that set up an unmoving wall of saxophone sound. It includes pieces that take a very long time to move gradually from one kind of music to another kind. It includes pieces that permit all possible pitches, as long as they fall between C and D. It includes pieces that slow the tempo down to two or three notes per minute.[28]

By Johnson's definition of minimalism, *Tilework* also fits into this compositional category. *Tilework* does not incorporate any extended techniques, and it is performed strictly in time. To perform a loop out of time at any given time would distort the rhythmic tiles and loops. The rests play a significant role in the creation of the tiles and layers. During rests, time continues, and the rests, as found in first and second movement, eliminate predictability of

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[27] Timothy A. Johnson, "Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique" *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 78, NO. 4, Winter 1994. Oxford University Press.

[28] Tom Johnson, "Minimalism in Music: in search of a definition," Introduction for the catalogue for the exhibition of *Musica Silenciosa,* curated by the author at the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid. (Accessed Online, November 27, 2014) www.editions75.com/Articles/Minimalism%20in%20music.pdf

the repetitive loops. The rests often displace the loop, resulting in a loop being placed on the offbeat rather than the down beat as seen in the following example.

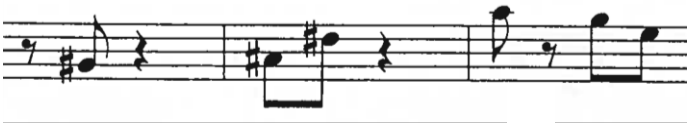

Figure 8: *Tilework*, Tom Johnson Movement 1 pg. 1 measure 16.

Additionally rests also become shorter or non-existent as the loops are layered, as seen in the middle of the third movement and in the following example.

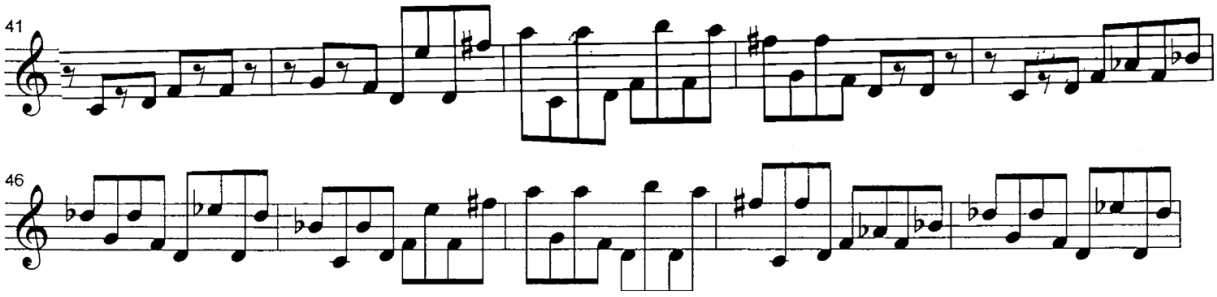

Figure 9: *Tilework*, Tom Johnson Movement 3 pg. 8 measure 41.

With the elimination of the rests, and layer of multiple tiles as seen in the above example, this section requires physical stamina from the performer. Here the performer should attempt to circular breath, while articulating all the notes to ensure that the layers are clear. Additionally the performer needs to pay attention to the tiles that are looped on top of one another and understand how they fit together to create a nineteen-measure sequence.

The second movement is uniquely notated for solo wind repertoire. It includes two staves, which isolate the layers of the tiles. The bottom staff includes a three-note ostinato pattern that repeats throughout the duration of the movement at a *p* dynamic. The second staff is used for the other three tiles presented in the movement, performed at a *mf* dynamic.

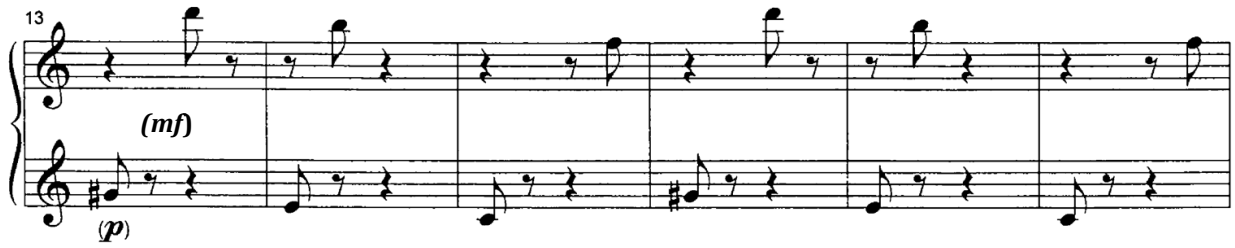

Figure 10: *Tilework*, Tom Johnson Movement 2, pg. 4 measure 13.

The challenge for the performer is in reading the two staves at once while executing the correct contrasting dynamics. Articulations and other musical decisions are to be determined freely by the performer.[29] In the second movement for example, I have chosen to use different articulations (tenuto, staccato, and slap tongue) to highlight the different tiles presented, and also adding to the complexity of the movement. When the tiles become more closely layered, the clarity and accurate execution of the articulations provide an extra challenge for the performer, a varied sonic experience for the listener.

Colin Labadie's *Strata* (2012) for solo tenor saxophone, like Tom Johnson's *Tilework,* uses layers of material as its compositional framework. *Stata* was written for saxophonist Allison Balcetis and premiered at the North American Saxophone Alliance, Biennial Conference in Phoenix Arizona in 2013. It is the first piece in a series of works written by Labadie that incorporates "simple layers (strata) of material to create complex textures."[30] Individuals who have experienced a performance of *Strata* will often comment suggesting it sounded as if multiple saxophones were playing at the same time, or that an electronic track was looped through speakers to produce the complex textures. Labadie was inspired by the Swedish extreme metal band Meshuggah, and describes their music as containing

[29] In email correspondence with Johnson, he encouraged me to explore his other works and recordings of tilework to help determine my performance decisions. Through this I decided to highlight the layers of the tiles by using different articulations. Johnson was supportive of this decision February 24, 2015.
[30] Colin Labadie, *Strata*. http://www.colinlabadie.com/works/strata.html

"dizzying rhythmic and metric patters that push the listener's threshold of perception, without sounding overly technical or contrived."[31] Additionally Labadie was influenced by, the great bebop saxophonists "whose extended solos had an energy and intensity that I've always found mesmerizing and surreal."[32] With *Strata's* unrelenting strict time and constant process, a performance of this work ultimately leads to the illusion of electronic looping, and multiple instruments performing at once.

To create the layers, Labadie uses accented notes which pop out of the texture that is a murmur of continuing sixteenth notes as shown in the example below.

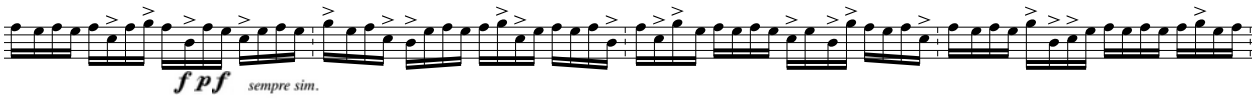

Figure 11: *Stata* – Colin Labadie pg. 1 m. 19

The accented notes are articulated and played at a *f* dynamic and the non-accented notes are played at a *p* dynamic and slurred throughout the duration of the piece. Rests and silences do not play a role in the work at all, and as a result *Strata* requires the performer to circular breathe for most of the work. In essence Labadie has "set up an unmoving wall of saxophone sound," a description Johnson used to describe minimalism. As the piece develops the range of the instrument is also exploited. Beginning on page two of the score Labadie introduces accented altissimo notes requiring the saxophonist to execute large register leaps.

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[31] ibid.
[32] ibid.

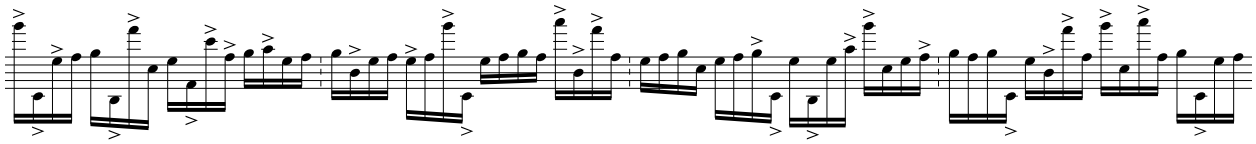

Figure 12: *Stata* – Colin Labadie pg. 3 m. 98

Fast and clean technique is required to effectively execute the vast jumps in registers. As the whole work is constant without breaks, the mental and physical control required to stay focused, and to not let the mind wander needs to be a top priority. The minute thoughts leave the music, the more likely a performer is to make a mistake, and most likely alter the strict rhythm. In the last measure of page three, Labadie introduces a series of multiphonics. In the muliphonics one can really hear the clash of the bop and metal influences, creating massive sonic experiences. *Strata* although challenging, physically exhausting and at times quite intense, as a whole it is a meditative process, requiring the performer to be absolutely present in each section of the work as they move through.

The performance decisions and practices, based on my interactions with the composers and scores of *Le Frêne égaré, …Sur un îlot de la rivière…*, *Oxyton*, *Smoking Mirrors (Symbia II)*, *Tilework* and *Strata,* are presented in my final recording and live performance of these works. In this paper I have outlined a brief synopsis of saxophone repertory and the post 1970 transformation of literature emphasizing 20th and 21st century saxophone works. The discussion of each work highlights the compositional methods that contribute to the technical, mental, and physical challenges. The feedback I received from the composers through conversations and performance suggestions about their works became an integral part of my interpretation of the score. With the information I have gained through these interactions and the research presented above, it is my intent that these

works are presented both in the recording and live performance with the highest degree of integrity. I am confident that my performance overcomes the presented challenges of the works, and showcases a sincere commitment to communicating expressive command of the instrument. The professional relationships, which I developed with the composers has provided insight into score reading and interpretation. Through my performance, I have presented how the composers' intentions are brought to life.

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Appendix 1:

Program Notes – Performance Date: Sunday, May 24, 2015 2:00 PM Convocation Hall, Old Arts Building, University of Alberta

Programme Notes:

French composer **François Rossé** (b. 1945) has written a significant amount of works for not only solo saxophone but also works that include saxophone. For most of his young life he was a self taught musician who did not begin formal piano lessons until the age of seventeen at the Strasburg Conservatory. Beginning in 1974, Rossé studied composition and analysis at the Paris Conservatoire National Superieur de Musique with Olivier Messiaen and Betsy Jolas. Through his work with composer Ivo Malec, Rossé became influenced with "methodological plan in composition." Beginning in 1978, Rossé also began to collaborate with saxophonist, Jean-Marie Londeix. It is from this period that Rossé's works are categorized as being radical in approach; included in this category is *Le Frêne égaré for solo alto saxophone.* Rossé served as a professor of composition at the Conservatoire de Bordeaux (1974-1985). (billaudot.com)

In speaking about his first work for saxophone ***Le Frêne égaré*** (1978) François Rossé suggests that a saxophonist should "forget any basic knowledge of the saxophone and be open to a new concept of the instrument. Try to step back from any preconceived ideas for a moment so that you can find yourself in another culture." (Umble, 275) This other culture Rossé is referring to, has to deal with his use of notation, and the extended techniques he incorporated in his work, that were not commonly used by composers of saxophone music prior to 1970. Rossé, was a student of Olivier Messiaen at the Paris Conservatory when Londeix asked him to compose a work for saxophone in 1977. Not knowing a lot about the saxophone at the time, together with Londeix, Rossé worked to develop the ideas and concepts that would be included in *Le Frêne égaré*. Rossé describes working with Londeix stating, "Working together with Jean-Marie Londeix was essential, both in learning about writing for the instrument and about the intricacies of performing…we both approached this experience without any *a priori* ideas about the instrument – it was not easy, and we both felt that, musically, we were stripped of all of our protective layers." Londeix wrote that, "It is well-known today that *Le Frêne égaré* is an extremely important work, not only because of its modernity, but also because of the fact that this modernity led to the discovery of many of the saxophone's extraordinary idiomatic possibilities." Some of these extraordinary idiomatic possibilities showcased in Le Frêne égaré are the extended range of the instrument and effects such as vibrato manipulation and flutter tongue, extreme dynamic ranges, multiphonics and the unique use of breath which plays a significant role in the piece as a whole.

American composer **John M. Kennedy** produces an eclectic group of work, ranging from mixed ensemble and solo pieces to multi-media compositions. In January, 2014 he collaborated with director Tanya Kane-Parry on the premiere of an original musical adaptation of Jean Paul Sartre's "The Wall" in Los Angeles. Upcoming premieres include a new work for the Sound Ways Festival in St. Petersburg, Russia, 2015. Since January 2012, he has received premieres by the Moscow Contemporary Music Ensemble; performances at the Malta International Music Festival and Competition in Valletta; the 2012 World Saxophone Congress, St. Andrews, Scotland, and the 2013 Thailand International Composition Festival in Bangkok. He is currently the chair of the Department of Music, Theatre and Dance at California State University, Los Angeles, and is on the master teacher roster of the Malta International Music Festival, where he has been in residence every summer since 2012. For more information on Kennedy's music: www.johnmkennedy.net.

Smoke and Mirrors (Symbia II) for solo Eb alto saxophone is part of a series of virtuosic works for solo instruments. The goal of these works is to provide the performer with a virtuosic venue to showcase their abilities, while also forcing the composer to create a solo work that is contrapuntal, using little to no extended techniques, idiomatic to the solo instrument. The term "symbia" is derived from the biological term, "symbiosis" which describes a relationship between dissimilar organisms able to exist and thrive within an ecosystem. *Smoke and Mirrors* is composed in three parts in which the harmonic and melodic material articulate the form of the piece. The "mirrors" occur in large blocks of repeated material that is developed and organized as a palindrome. Kennedy uses non-idiomatic intervallic relationships within the motives, and

incorporates large register variances throughout the work. On occasion Kennedy exposes the upper register of the saxophone for an extended duration, highlighting aspects of virtuosity within the work. *Smoke and Mirrors (Symbia II)* exists in two forms, the original alto saxophone version and later versions for clarinet and bass clarinet.

The University of Alberta is extremely fortunate to have **Colin Labadie** as a Doctoral Candidate composition student in the Department of Music. Currently located in Waterloo, his compositional and performance output consists of concert works, sound art, improvisation and interdisciplinary collaboration. Labadie has a wide range of influences spanning "austere and pattern-oriented to spastic and loud art." Labadie regularly uses machines to realize his works, which has resulted in the creation and the modification of many electronic instruments. His works have been performed across Canada and Internationally. Some notable collaborations include: The New York New Music Ensemble, Arraymusic, NODUS Ensemble, QUASAR Saxophone Quartet, Penderecki String Quartet, Stealth, Enterprise Quartet, University of Alberta Symphony Orchestra, Roger Admiral, Allison Balcetis, Chelsea Shanoff, Laura Jordan, Lisa Cella and Robert Bekkers.

Strata (2012) *for solo tenor saxophon***e** was written for saxophonist, Dr. Allison Balcetis, and was premiered at the North American Saxophone Alliance Bi-annual conference in Phoenix Arizona in 2013. It is the first piece in a series of works written by Labadie that incorporates "simple layers (strata) of material to create complex textures." Labadie was inspired by the Swedish extreme metal band Meshuggah, suggesting their music contains "dizzying rhythmic and metric patterns that push the listener's threshold of perception, without sounding overly technical or contrived." Additionally the tradition of bebop saxophone "whose extended solos had an energy" as Labadie describes, provided an influence for *Strata* as Labadie has always found bebop solos to be "mesmerizing and surreal." Individuals who have experienced a performance of *Strata* often comment that is sounds as if multiple saxophones are playing at the same time, or that an electronic track was looped throughout the performance to create the complex textures. Written in strict time, *Strata* requires the performer to circular breath through most of the work, while accented notes that pop out of a murmuring, constantly running texture. Fused together complex textures are created. (www.colinelabadie.com/works/strata.html)

Residing in Bordeaux France, composer **Christophe Havel** (b.1956) studied science and music, including saxophone with Jean-Marie Londeix. Havel is the co-founder and artistic director of the Proxima Centauri ensemble and has been the artistic director of Scrime since September 2011. His early works were inspired by electro-acoustic experiences both in sound design and in the use of different technologies. In the mid to late 1990s, Havel's works focused on harmonic and rhythmic materials, which played an important role in the formal dynamics of the works. Most recently Havel's compositional style "focused on the use of gestural grammar to apprehend the sound phenomenon in its entirety." In 2004 Havel was appointed the associate researcher at Laboratoire Bordelais de Recherche en Informatique. Since 1991 he has been teaching electro-acoustic composition at the Conservatoire in Bordeaux. (http://www.babelscores.com/christophehavel)

Oxyton (1993) was written for saxophonist Marie Bernadette Charrier of Bordeaux France.
Londeix describes Havel's music as having a "spectral shape in which the various elements of sound, pitch, dynamics, timbre, duration…are considered as such, for their expressive value, regardless of the discourse."[1] *Oxyton* is a piece that incorporates extreme contrasts, exposing the wide ranges and capabilities of the baritone saxophone. Havel describes *Oxyton* as beginning with "multiple cries that gradually oxidize and dematerialize. Its sharp and sweet smelling acid-like resonances, converge to infinity and immobility."[2] The multiple cries, Havel alludes to, are the multiphonics that he uses from the onset of the work. *Oxyton* incorporates fast shifts between extreme ranges and loud dynamics to soft fast rhythmic gestures. A three note figure presented at the beginning of the piece, plays a central role throughout *Oxyton* as it restated in various forms and serves as pillars, signifying the close to each section found within the work.

Composer, **Tom Johnson** (1939), received his BA and MMus degrees from Yale University. He studied privately with Morton Feldman. After working in New York for 15 years, Johnson relocated to France, where he has lived since 1983. Johnson is considered to be a minimalist composer as his works generally incorporate a reduction in materials. However different from most minimalists, Johnson uses "formulas, permutations, predictable sequences and various mathematical models." Johnson is commonly knowns for

his operas, which have been staged internationally. He has written a number of work sof radio including Radio France, Australian Broadcasting Company and WDR Radio in Cologne. His Tilework project includes 14 pieces for solo instruments. (http://www.editions75.com/)

Tileworks - for saxophone (2003) was part of Johnson's Tilework project of 14 pieces written for solo instruments. Johnson describes *Tilework* as having "to do with fitting together little tiles to fill lines and loops. One can think of this as making mosaics in one dimension, but it is also very much like stringing beads onto necklaces in various patterns." *Tilework* for saxophone is written in three movements, with each movement incorporating repetitive rhythmic loops that begin as separate entities that slowly merge with other loops to create layers. *Tilework* does not incorporate any extended techniques, and it is performed strictly in time. To perform a loop out of time at any given time would distort the rhythmic tiles and loops. The rests play a significant role in the creation of the tiles and layers. During rests, time continues, and the rests, as found in first and second movement, eliminate predictability of the repetitive loops. The rests often displace the loop, resulting in a loop being placed on the offbeat rather than the down beat. Different articulations have been added in the second movement to highlight the different tiles.

...Sur un îlot de la rivière.. – (2010) was written by request of Chinese saxophonist Tong Lang. Rossé's works often include influences of the individual performer's personality, culture, musical abilities and more. For *...Sur un îlot de la rivière…* Rossé said that, "Asia was forcibly present in my relationship with Tang." Rossé incorporates spoken Mandarin, where he requires the performer to recite a passage from the Ode "Kouan Kiu" of the Book of Songs compiled by Confucius.

> When we cannot find
> Wide awake or asleep, we think about it constantly
> Pensively, pensively
> Without ceasing to turn and turn

The text is surrounded by a repeated multiphonic, played in a bell tone style to simulate the chiming of ritual bells. To conclude the work, the saxophonist performs a "modal Chinese song" that incorporates grace notes, quatertones, pitch bends and vibrato manipulations that are reminiscent of Chinese folk music. Rossé quotes *Le Frêne égaré* mid way through the *...sur unîlot de la rivière…* and he describes this moment as being amber: an orange transparent stone in which prehistoric items, like insects, have been archeological and naturally stored as a way to keep them preserved in their original form. Rossé suggests that is a bit of the role in which *...sur un îlot de la rivière…* plays, "preserving the prehistoric," the prehistoric being his first work for saxophone, and the ancient Chinese culture.

Appendix 2:

Selections from correspondence with composers – used with their individual permission

François Rossé:

"Sur un îlot de la rivière" était une demande de Tong Yang (actuellement professeur en Chine) alors qu'il était encore étudiant à Bordeaux. C'est une proposition dédiée à l'esprit de la Chine, la monodie évolue peu à peu d'une texture inharmonique vers une texture modale plus claire (pages 2 et 3) avec un élément rituel un moment donné, page 4, les sons multiphoniques du 3ème système sonnent comme des cloches d'un rituel (les "mp" peuvent être attaqués avec un léger sfz) et cela nous conduit aux mots de Confucius, centre du rituel; une démarche analogue se situe pages 5 et 6 d'une monodie inharmonique qui s'oriente vers un chant chinois modal qui se conclut sur une courte apparition du texte de Cinfucius. En anecdote, au bas de la page 3 vous pouvez déceler quelque chose que vous connaissez certainement (2 derniers systèmes)"

1) Pourquoi avez-vous decide de citer le frêne égaré dans cette pièce?

"… c'est une pierre orange transparente où sont parfois intégrés des insectes datant de la préhistoire, une façon archéologique et natruelle de les conserver, c'est un peu le rôle de cette pièce qui conserve ainsi un petit bout de ma première pièce pour saxophone (pièce préhistorique aujourd'hui)"

2) Quelle est la signification du text parlé en chinois?

"la traduction est dans la partition (à la page concernée), c'est un petit poème de Confucius"

3) Dans les deux (…sur un îlot de la rivière et le frêne égaré) l'utilisation du souffle est très importante. Quelle est la signification du souffle?

"bien sûr "expirer" donne le son à travers l'instrument, mais l'origine biologique c'est toute la respiration avant le son, le mouvement du souffle est comme celui de la rivière qui donne l'énergie sans quoi il n'y aura ni musique ni hommes... l'interprète n'est pas qu'un saxophoniste, il est un être entier qui s'exprime à travers le saxophone, c'est une conception plus "acteur" de l'interprète, mais important quand on est sur scène"

4) …sur un îlot de la rivière: quel est la role de la musique de l'asie dans cette pièce?

"l'Asie est très vaste, je connais mieux le Japon où j'étais déjà deux fois et j'ai pu jouer avec des japonais, la Chine c'est un autre monde, et avec Tong Iang j'ai rencontré la Chine, je n'écris pas pour les instruments mais pour les interprètes et donc l'Asie était forcément présente dans le rapport avec Tong... en outre, l'occident a été très inspiré par l'Asie, l'Inde pour commencer qui est encore très différente avec une grande culture musicale très savante, Olivier Messiaen était mon professeur et sa musique est très inspirée à la fois par la rythmique indienne, le Japon et Bali."

Christophe Havel:

1) Did you have an inspiration for writing Oxyton, or is it based on your composition interests at the time?
"Both of them: at this time I was very interested in the spectral writing, so I developed some processes to compose this work. But I was inspired by the saxophone timbre himself, especially by the multiphonics, and I used them as models to organize the material."

2) How do you feel Oxyton challenges the performer?
"I hope it's exiting!"

3) The multiphonics (particularly page 1), should the dominate tone be the top? Or should they be more balanced, or focused in the lower end of the mutliphonic?

"It depends on the situation: sometimes I use them as a spectral color, and in this case they have to be well balanced, but in some cases (particularly in the last part) I use them as an element of articulation between two situations, using a filtering technique, and in this case you have to focus in one or the other note of the multiphonic."

John M. Kennedy:
3 Poetic Thoughts on Smoking Mirrors (prepared for Canadian premiere in 2011)

I. Catch!
(murmur)
Catch!

Catch!
(murmur)
drive-Drive-DRIVE

Catch!

SSSSingggg
Catch!

(murmur)

catch, murmur, sing, catch, drive, Drive, DRIVE!

II. Long

Arioso

Connect

Angular-Mechanical

Angular
Long
Mechanical
Arioso
Repose
Mirror

III. Catch! (murmur) Catch-Catch

Long-Song-Intense- Driiiiiiive!!

Tumble

Smoke