

Silence for a Disturbed Yell

by

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Abstract

The saxophone continues to inspire through its ability to both play an extremely wide array of dynamics and evoke intense emotions. This recital and recording project explores works for saxophone written in the last forty years that best encapsulate the extreme musical and emotional dynamics of the instrument. This document traces how each of the pieces in the recital relate to this concept and gives background information on the composers and premiere performers of the works, providing a context for the listener for each work's creation. The project takes its title from François Rossé's engaging work of the same name for baritone saxophone and piano, *Silence for a Disturbed Yell*. Other works in the program are *Wrath*, a dramatic work for tenor saxophone and piano by Stacy Garrop, *Le Fusain Fuit la Gomme*, a mysterious and engaging solo piece for baritone saxophone by Marie-Hélène Fournier, *Ali*, a quick and powerful alto saxophone solo by Alex Mincek, and *Sonata*, a monumental contemporary standard for alto saxophone and piano by William Albright.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Stacy Garrop – <i>Wrath</i> (2016)	1
Mari-Hélène Fournier – <i>Le Fusain Fuit la Gomme</i> (2000)	5
François Rossé - <i>Silence for a Disturbed Yell</i> (1995).....	7
Alex Mincek - <i>Ali</i> (2010)	9
William Albright - <i>Sonata</i> (1984)	11
References	16
Final Recital	17

Silence for a Disturbed Yell

This recital is titled after François Rossé's powerful composition for baritone saxophone and piano, *Silence for a Disturbed Yell*, one of the works on the program. This piece, and its evocative title, beautifully mirror the versatility of the saxophone. The piece calls for some of the softest playing possible, almost imperceptible to the audience. This "near silence" requires some of the softest saxophone playing, weaving in and out of the resonance of the piano, until the piece builds to a moment of great power, "a disturbed yell." This moment of high intensity and power falls in complete contrast to the silence of the opening and communicates the other extreme of dynamic possibilities for a saxophone. In addition to being a full volume outburst, Rossé's title clarifies this moment as "a disturbed yell." Qualifying the yell in this way amplifies another strength of both the saxophone and this music—the saxophone's ability to evoke powerful emotion. In this work, and throughout this recital, I will display the extremes of the saxophone: quiet and loud, a lament and a mad dance. Each of the works on this program has been chosen because of its internal contrasts in musical material, as well as its connection to intense emotion. As I interpret these works, I will demonstrate the strengths of the saxophone as I explore intense emotion. The same emotion that has driven my study of this instrument and this music.

Stacy Garrop – *Wrath* (2016)

The first piece on this recital, *Wrath*, was composed by Stacy Garrop in 2016. The work for tenor saxophone and piano is in three movements titled Menace, Shock, and Amok. Stacy Garrop works as a full-time freelance composer based in the Chicago area. She has written for saxophone throughout her career, developing her understanding of the

instrument and its capabilities over more than thirty years. When talking about writing for saxophone, Garrop said, “it feels similar in some ways to how I feel about writing for the human voice, though without words - I am constantly thinking about how each saxophone will speak in each part of their ranges, what kinds of colors I want them to evoke, should vibrato be used or not, etc.”¹ This piece grew out of a consortium effort of many saxophonists and collaboration with saxophonist, David Stambler. In this work, Garrop chose to revisit an idea from one of her earlier compositions for saxophone and piano, *Tantrum*. *Tantrum* is inspired by the experience of a baby or young child throwing a temper tantrum. In *Wrath*, Garrop reimagines this same child as “a leaner, meaner, ferocious teenager who has moved on from an infant’s temper tantrum into an all-out vengeful fury.”² The emotional inspiration of this work is clear through the storyline associated with it. Garrop’s treatment of the saxophone’s voice and timbre allows performers to evoke these intense emotions throughout their performance of the work.

Menace

Wrath begins with the tenor saxophone alone, playing a melodic line and utilizing many of the different timbres of the saxophone available to the performer. The saxophonist’s tone growls and flutters glissandi, quarter tones, and timbre trills at dramatic dynamic markings from *pp* to *ff*. Garrop invites the performer to utilize their “own voice” in the performance of this “dynamic and brash” section marked “very freely (feel unmetred).” She writes that the performer begin this piece with their “own unique voice” utilizing “improvised affectation and ornamentation” including a range of timbres

¹ Stacy Garrop, email message to author, December 27, 2021.

² Stacy Garrop, *Wrath*, (King of Prussia, Pennsylvania: Theodore Presser Company, 2016), 2.

and performance techniques to convey the strength of their own menacing wrath.³ This opening section sets the stage for the “all-out vengeful fury” that is to come.⁴

As the music nears the end of the movement, the saxophone’s volume grows gradually through a crescendo in the upper register while the piano line increases in complexity as runs of sixteenth notes move upwards interspersed with thick chords. The saxophone ends this section by improvising for five measures utilizing “growls, shrieks, multiphonics, etc.” as the pianist continues playing full volume. Garrop’s use of improvisation and an allowance for the performer’s freedom to express in one’s “own voice” allows for each performance of this work to be unique. Encouraging the performer to engage with the performance in this way allows “all of the consortium members (and future performers) [to] have the opportunity to put their own personal stamp on the piece.”⁵ This kind of connection has allowed me the opportunity to perform my own material engaging with the emotional content of the work.

Shock

The second movement, *Shock*, is marked “unflinching.” The piano begins with big chords on strong beats at a steady tempo, matching the unflinching movement of time while in shock. The saxophone enters with a slow melodic line in the middle register, moving stepwise and with minimal vibrato while maintaining the same steady tempo.

Next, the tempo increases as the music is marked “with growing unease.” The accelerando happens steadily at a rate of three beats per minute every two bars, slowly

³ Garrop, *Wrath*, 3.

⁴ Garrop, *Wrath*, 2.

⁵ Stacy Garrop, email message to author, December 27, 2021.

gaining speed until arriving at the next section, marked “Freely; sinister.” This section, in the score from measure 38 to 78, grows in intensity and excitement as a steady crescendo and increasing tempo leads to a flurry of notes in the saxophone’s altissimo register. Finally, the movement ends as the music returns to the steady pulse and tempo of the beginning and a moment of stillness as the saxophone and piano parts fade away.

Amok

The final movement, *Amok*, grows in intensity from beginning to end. The term, amok is defined as “in a violently raging, wild, or uncontrolled manner.”⁶ Garrop uses two separate themes to achieve this concept of “amok.” The first she marks as “fast & furious.” This theme starts soft and quick in 6/8 time, and it quickly gains excitement through its quick notes, driving tempo, and sudden pauses. The piano drives the time with staccato chords while the saxophone plays a more melodic part.

After this theme repeats a few times, the piece transitions to the second theme, titled “wacky, mocking.” This section, written in 2/2 time, has steady running lines of eighth notes in the piano with rests on the downbeats, obscuring the beat similar to the first movement. Here the saxophone plays a slow melody that often emphasizes the weak beats of the measure and plays with both duplet and triplet note durations. In combination with the relatively steady piano ostinato, the resulting sound is uneven and could be understood as wacky or confusing. The intensity in this section grows while the saxophone transitions from steady notes to a smear between pitches in the altissimo

⁶ “Amok,” *Merriam-Webster*, 2022; Accessed 11 Jan. 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/amok>.

register. As the saxophone smears, the piano rhythm intensifies as the two instruments increase volume as they return to the opening theme.

The two themes alternate back and forth gaining excitement and speed throughout the movement evoking the ideas of amok. This continues into an exhilarating finish with the saxophone climbing up to the extreme altissimo register (written F#7) where the final note is written with a dramatic scream and intense pitch fall to end the piece.

Mari-Hélène Fournier – *Le Fusain Fuit la Gomme* (2000)

Mari-Hélène Fournier's *Le Fusain Fuit la Gomme* was written for solo baritone saxophone in the year 2000. The duration of this piece is fifteen minutes, and it was written for French saxophonist Serge Bertocchi, a prolific performer known for his work on baritone saxophone. Fournier is a French pianist, composer, and teacher renowned for her collaborations with performers of unusual instruments to create unique works that "...turn towards the perception of listening, the transmission of emotion, and body/instrument relationships."⁷ Through her collaborations with performers, Fournier is able to incorporate many extended performance techniques into her compositions. At the start of *Le Fusain Fuit la Gomme*, the performer is asked to circular breathe while articulating fast repeated notes in the low register. Later in the work Fournier includes other extended techniques including slap tongue articulation, where the performer uses their tongue to slap the reed against the mouthpiece of the instrument creating a pitched percussive note with little sustain, and multiphonics where multiple pitches are played at the same time. She uses different notation styles to describe both the fingering used to

⁷ "Fournier Marie-Hélène (1963)," *CDMC*, July 2009; Accessed 11 Jan. 2022, <http://www.cdmc.asso.fr/en/ressources/compositeurs/biographies/fournier-marie-helene-1963>.

create the multiphonics and sounding pitches throughout the work, sometimes including a fingering chart (common practice for multiphonics) and other times listing the fundamental fingering and then noting what alterations the saxophonist should make (similar to Alex Mincek's notation in *Ali*).

Le Fusain Fuit la Gomme explores various different timbres available on a baritone saxophone while transitioning between moments of great power and loud dynamic to quiet calm and stillness. The piece focuses on the exploration of sound and performance techniques. Fournier writes sections focused on quick repeated single pitches, slow multiphonics that sound like “bell-tones,” explorations of different articulation styles, and melodic lines that incorporate non-traditional techniques, multiphonics, and the extreme altissimo register. Often, these ideas slowly develop and morph over time as the timbre of the saxophone is manipulated using different performance techniques. For example, the first few pages of the work focus on the repetition of a single pitch at a soft dynamic, with slow additions of harmonics, played via multiphonics, and slight changes to articulation style. In this way, Fournier slowly shifts the saxophone sound while maintaining a steady pulse. However, at other times during the piece, these sections shift abruptly capturing the audience unaware with a quick shift of energy. An example of this transition can be seen as the “bell-tone section” ends and the saxophone enters at full volume on repeated articulations of the saxophone's lowest note (written low A). These articulations are immediately marked to slowly transition from a typical staccato to slap tongue. The music continues to explore these different sounds, timbres, and techniques, shifting between moments of aggressive power and calm stillness.

François Rossé - *Silence for a Disturbed Yell* (1995)

François Rossé's *Silence for a Disturbed Yell* was written for the saxophone/piano duo of Jean-Michel Goury and Yves Josset. Rossé, an accomplished pianist in addition to being a composer, has written several consequential works for the saxophone, and he is intimately familiar with the intricacies and capabilities of the instrument. This work, written specifically for baritone saxophone utilizes the full range of the instrument in terms of pitch content. It also displays significant dynamic contrast, articulation style, and uses a variety of extended performance techniques. The piece was inspired by the composer's interest in Japanese culture, started during his time studying with Olivier Messiaen at the Paris Conservatory (1976-1978) alongside one of his classmates, Susumu Yoshid, a Japanese composer. Rossé describes Japan as a fantastic civilization that embraces the extremes of silent meditation and violent energy release. In a visit to Japan, Rossé was able to visit Zen temples of Kamakura and to work with dancer and master of Noh and Kabuki theatre, Shiro Daïmon. From his experience observing Japanese culture, he conceived this piece and the gestures required to perform it. The work is to be performed fearlessly, allowing the silence to be an extreme gesture, and the disturbed yell to be played with abandon. This commitment to extremes is inspiring to performers and audiences alike, and this recital is built of music reliant on that commitment.⁸

The work begins with two ideas at play: attack and sustain. In the opening section, the pianist strikes a single key and then lets the strings resonate. At the same time, the saxophonist plays in the low register from a *niente* dynamic (or as close to nothing as possible) to marked *ppp*. The saxophonist weaves almost imperceptibly in and out of the

⁸ François Rossé, email message to author, January 10, 2022.

sound emanating from the piano strings' resonance. This lays the groundwork for the "silence" of the piece, requiring performers to produce extremely quiet gestures with the goal of captivating the listener. In the immediately following section, the saxophone and piano play similarly to the gestures played by the pianist in the opening of the piece, but with much more pronounced attacks and immediate soft sustained notes.

After a grand pause, the rhythmic activity of both parts begins to be more active as the music slowly transitions away from the silence of the opening. The piano then enters with an ostinato figure of falling 32nd notes. These figures land on the beat and for the first time in the piece provide a steady pulse to the composition. The saxophone enters and plays a melodic line that falls in contrast to the piano's rhythmic pulse with many different rhythmic durations, ties over the beat, grace notes, and short flurries. The saxophone melody meanders beyond its rhythmic complexity by using quarter tones and soft dynamic swells, as in the first section. Following the ostinato, activity continues to increase as the piano plays running lines with melodic interjections while the saxophone has huge dynamic swells in the lower register. At this point, it is clear that the music is moving away from silence. After these swells, the saxophone plays running lines elaborated by the piano part. These runs begin at a soft dynamic, use microtones and extended rhythms for a sense of uneven rhythmic and intervallic content. Then, the activity energizes in the piano part as well. Finally, the intensity grows through increases in dynamics, extended pitch range, and rhythmic complexity. Here the music fully transitions from "silence" into what is the "disturbed yell."

The climax of this section is evident where the saxophone is playing at full volume and with bursts of piano chords interspersed, also at full volume and sustained.

This full intensity section is characterized by drastic interval leaps, multiphonics, diverse articulations, extreme registers, and uncharacteristic timbres produced through flutter tongue and falls where the saxophonist sings into the instrument while playing. The intensity here has reached a climax, the opposite of the relative silence of the opening measures. This climax ends with ensemble rests between low aggressive notes in the saxophone part, emphasizing the strength of the yell and the strength of the silence.

In the final section of the piece, the saxophonist begins by speaking, interspersed with saxophone sounds including slap tongues, air sounds, and key clicks. During this section the piano plays a steady rhythm marked, *bien articulé*, a combination of 16th notes and rests creating a regular pulse. The saxophonist begins by whispering, like the pianist whispered earlier in the work. These whispers transform into mid-voice and then return to whisper as the audience tries to grasp the meaning of the different syllables. Near the end of the work, both saxophonist and pianist incorporate speaking, making references to the work's premiere performers, Jean-Michel Goury and Yves Josset. In addition, the final words from the pianist "moi pas sax" translate to "me not sax" and show Rossé's own instrument, the piano, dominating over the competing saxophone.

Alex Mincek - *Ali* (2010)

Alex Mincek is a co-director of the New York based Wet Ink Ensemble, and an assistant professor of composition and music technology at Northwestern University.⁹ In addition to being an accomplished composer and teacher, Mincek also has a career as a saxophone performer. His understanding of the instrument is evident in his different

⁹ "Alex Mincek," *Northwestern University*, Accessed 11 Jan. 2022, <https://music.northwestern.edu/faculty/profile/alex-mincek>.

saxophone compositions, many of which use a complicated pattern of extended techniques to great success. This work, although only around 7 minutes in length, requires great virtuosity and technical flexibility from the saxophonist.

In *Ali*, Mincek uses his own style of notation to explore a concept he refers to as a “saxophone malfunction.” The notation focuses on instructions for the performer on how to produce the sound (i.e. which keys to press or lift, dynamic marking, and articulation pattern). However, there is often incomplete information to identify the resulting pitch. What is written in the score does not necessarily dictate what is heard in performance. The score is left somewhat unclear as Mincek writes: “the resulting sounds from these combinations at times varies greatly (especially with different dynamic intensities) and also often seems to make the saxophone “malfunction”. This is the desired effect.”¹⁰ The composer does not fully explain what should be heard in performance, and the performer is left to their own devices to interpret what is heard. However, the idea of writing for a “malfunctioning instrument” is certainly not unique to the music of Alex Mincek. But, unlike some other works for “malfunctioning instruments,” in this piece Mincek relies on the performer’s ability to use extra keys to manipulate the sound, instead of adjusting the instrument itself. This allows the performer to transition back and forth between traditional playing and a “malfunctioning instrument.” In addition, Mincek takes advantage of the experience of the traditional performer, utilizing traditional patterns and notation that the performer is used to performing, but adjusting the instrument to create a nontraditional sound. The music can therefore seem relatively familiar to the performer, with traditional scale or chord patterns, but the resulting sounds are far from traditional.

¹⁰ Alex Mincek, *Ali*, New York: PSNY, 2010, 2.

The performer produces new sounds while utilizing familiar technique and finger patterns.

In addition to his use of nontraditional techniques, Mincek's use of repetition stands out throughout the piece. Although much of the piece is steady 32nd notes at a soft dynamic. These steady running notes are often interrupted by outbursts of louder notes spaced irregularly throughout the running lines. These outbursts often come as a surprise, popping out of the texture at different points throughout the measure. Furthermore, Mincek uses repetition in the piece via the literal repeat signs written throughout the work. Some of these repeat signs repeat long sections once, perhaps going unnoticed by the audience. Others repeat short sections as many as ten times, drawing the clear attention of the listener as the saxophone line establishes a repeated groove. The combination of different types of repeats (long single repeats, short multiple repeats, and variations in between) keep the listener guessing about what will come next while still allowing for a sense of familiarity throughout the work.

William Albright - *Sonata* (1984)

William Albright was a noted composer, organist, and professor at the University of Michigan. He studied composition with Ross Lee Finney, George Rochberg, and Olivier Messiaen, and he wrote works for a variety of instruments.¹¹ Many of his compositions and performances received great acclaim. Albright wrote the *Sonata: alto saxophone and piano* in 1984 for three saxophone/ piano duos, Laura Hunter/ Brian Connelly, Donald Sinta/ Ellen Weckler, and Joseph Wytko/ Walter Cosand.¹² The work

¹¹ Don C. Gillespie, "Albright, William," Grove Music Online, 2001; Accessed 11 Jan. 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.00482>.

¹² William Albright, *Sonata: alto saxophone and piano*, New York: C.F. Peters, 1984, preface.

is in four movements and the duration is approximately twenty minutes. The *Sonata* has been recorded by numerous saxophone and piano duos and it still receives regular performances worldwide.

Two-Part Invention

This movement equally features the saxophone and piano in two-part counterpoint. The interplay between the two parts is very important to the understanding of the work as the melodic and harmonic contour weave together creating an overall dense and exciting texture. Albright writes very specific articulations, dynamics, and rhythms that require great flexibility and precision for both the saxophonist and pianist. The movement starts with a section marked “*Molto intenso, alla fanfara*” (very intense like a fanfare). This intense declamatory statement sets the stage for what is to come in the movement as well as throughout the piece. After the fanfare is a short section marked “*più agitato*” (more agitated) that builds intensity into the first cadenza (Rehearsal H in the score). This first cadenza section falls out of strict time, with the two performers playing freely, with repeated sections ad lib. This contrasts with the strict counterpoint and straight time of the opening fanfare. Following the great intensity of the cadenza section, the music shifts to “*Placido, legato, sempre a tempo* (like a distant chorus)” (calm, smooth/connected, still at tempo). This section of steady legato repeated notes in rhythmic unison comes in stark contrast to the cadenza section it follows. The moment of contrast allows for a palette cleanse before another moment of growing intensity into the next cadenza section. This cycle then repeats one more time before a final cadenza marked “*eroico ma con rubato*” (heroic but with rubato).

La follia nuova: a lament for George Cacioppo

The second movement of this work is dedicated to the composer's teacher and mentor, George Cacioppo, who passed away unexpectedly on April 8, 1984. The composer writes, "Cacioppo and his music and personality rest at the foundation of my thinking. He would have very much appreciated the use of the traditional title 'La follia' (the madness) in my reincarnation as 'La follia nuova.'"¹³ Clearly inspired by his former teacher, Albright writes a beautiful melody that he interweaves into both the piano and saxophone parts. He continues, "Like its Baroque antecedents, the movement is in a chaconne-variation form, although at one point the sections jumble together, or intersect."¹⁴ Albright is using traditional forms to pay homage to his mentor.

The movement ends with special instructions for the performer. The saxophone is marked "*pppp* (very muted) – turn away from audience... "a private performance" perhaps looking into the piano." The performer turns away from the audience, playing a haunting melody with a steady rhythmic pulse from the piano. As the saxophone melody ends, the piano plays powerful chords at *fff*, written to be played "like a tolling bell." These are repeated "any number of times" with great power signifying the end of the lament.

Scherzo "Will o' the wisp"

The "will o' the wisp" is a term from ancient folklore describing a fleeting light over a foggy bog or marsh. Sometimes thought to be controlled by an elemental sprite, this elusive light would distract travelers in a mist.¹⁵ In this scherzo movement, Albright

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Will-o'-the-wisp," *Merriam-Webster*, 2022; Accessed 11 Jan. 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/will-o%27-the-wisp>.

personifies the fleeting and quick nature of the will o' the wisp through the quick and quiet lines in both the saxophone and piano parts. The movement begins with quick fragments of running lines at a *pp* dynamic played by the saxophone. This same idea is then played in the piano part as the two lines alternate fleeting soft lines that dissipate into nothingness. This movement is about one minute in length, ending as mysteriously as it began.

Recitative and Dance

The final movement of this work is split into two parts: recitative and dance. The recitative is true to its typical form and is played with *rubato* by the saxophone alone. After the mystery of the third movement, the recitative begins with a soft melody that grows in intensity and speed over time. What starts as graceful and melodic writing, speeds up into flurries of notes running into the high altissimo register. Then suddenly, the material stops, with a pause before the “mad dance” begins.

The saxophone and piano enter in unison at a fast tempo with repeated eighth notes, anticipating what is to come. Throughout this dance, there are elements of jazz as the piano plays “quasi pizz. (string bass)” and the saxophone is marked “bop (swing it!)” This jazz dance is however, a little bit “mad.” Throughout the piece, the saxophone is marked “honky! angry” and “angrier.” The musical lines are full of strident, powerful passages, and soft and quick lines as energy and intensity go from high to higher throughout the movement. This piece is exciting with driving energy throughout. In this work, the saxophone and piano play in many different styles: a two-part invention, a lamenting chaconne, a mysterious scherzo, a powerful recitative, and a mad dance. The

Sonata utilizes the full range of the saxophone and evokes a variety of intense emotions throughout its performance.

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<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/will-o%27-the-wisp>

*Final Recital****Silence for a Disturbed Yell***

Ben Whittier – Saxophone
 Roger Admiral – Piano

April 27, 2022 7:30 PM
 Doctorate of Music Final Recital
 Convocation Hall, University of Alberta

Wrath (2016)

1. Menace
2. Shock
3. Amok

Stacy Garrop (b. 1969)

Le Fusain Fuit la Gomme (2000)

Marie- H el ene Fournier (b. 1963)

Silence for a Disturbed Yell (1995)

Fran ois Ross e (b. 1945)

~Intermission~

Ali (2010)

Alex Mincek (b. 1975)

Sonata (1984)

1. Two-Part Invention
2. La follia nuova: a lament for George Cacioppo
3. Scherzo “Will o’ the wisp”
4. Recitative and Dance

William Albright (1944-1998)