

Fragile: Notes to Accompany a Performance and Recording Project

by

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## ABSTRACT

The saxophone's capacity to produce a wide range of sounds, timbres, and techniques has astounded performers, composers, and audience members throughout its short history. This Doctoral thesis, which is composed of a recording project, accompanying scholarly program notes, and a live recital performance, explores some of the many sounds available to the saxophonist. The works performed and discussed are predominantly unaccompanied works for a variety of members of the saxophone family. They are: *Mysterious Morning III* for solo soprano saxophone by Fuminori Tanada, *Sakana* for solo tenor saxophone by Dai Fujikura, *Zahir III* for baritone saxophone and electronics by Simone Movio, *Strata, mvmt 1: Sonder* for solo tenor saxophone by Colin Labadie, *Alter Ego* for solo tenor saxophone by Georges Aperghis, and *The Last Leaf* for solo soprano saxophone by Chaya Czernowin. As discussed in these program notes, each of these pieces explore the theme of fragility through different means thus informing my title. These notes, written as an accompanying document to the CD recording, discuss the history and impetus behind these pieces, the techniques used, and their challenges from a performer's perspective. The notes also reflect on the techniques, sounds, and ideas that connect these pieces, with a focus on the soundscape that each composer intends and the challenges that face the interpreter in bringing these ideas to life. The recordings were produced and edited at the University of Alberta in Convocation Hall under the guidance of Russell Baker.

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## INTRODUCTION

The saxophone's versatility of sound, style, and timbre has been explored by many composers throughout the instrument's short history, particularly from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. From a desire to imitate the sound quality and vibrato amplitude of a string instrument, to comparisons with the human voice, saxophonists have been on a journey of exploration and imagination since the instrument's inception. Composers have had varying attitudes towards the saxophone and its legitimacy, but those who explore its sonic possibilities have been able to access rich and diverse soundscapes.

In creating a program that explores the saxophone's tonal and timbral diversity, I felt that several considerations must be made. Among those considerations was whether to program solo works, accompanied works, chamber music, or music with electronics. This CD focusses primarily on solo saxophone works to most clearly display the sonority of the saxophone. However, one piece for saxophone and electronics has been included, since the use of electronics combined with the saxophone (be it live or taped) has become a fairly common method for exploring different sound capacities of the instrument. Working with electronics is also a skill that I wanted to improve upon, having no previous experience with programs such as Max/MSP. This project gave me the opportunity to not only work with Max/MSP, but also to experiment with different ways of recording electronic tracks with an acoustic instrument.

Another consideration for my recording project was that I felt my CD should include pieces on a variety of different members of the saxophone family. Though there are many saxophonists today who specialize on one or two saxophones, I feel that versatility on different sized saxophones is vital in fully exploring contemporary music written for the instrument. This has been a theme that has carried through all of my DMA recitals and I felt it imperative to continue this thread. For this recording and recital project, I have included pieces on soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone saxophone.

Along with showcasing a variety of saxophones, the repertoire chosen for this CD project requires the performer to employ a number of extended techniques on the saxophone. Critical to creating an artistic, imaginative, and sensitive interpretation of each composer's piece, it is integral that the interpreter display a strong understanding of the techniques required of them in order to effectively integrate these

techniques into the piece. At times, this work is fairly straightforward, and at others, artistic decisions need to be made to retain the spirit of a composition while maintaining fidelity to the written score.

In addition, choosing works by a diverse list of living composers is important to me, as I believe this diversity in voices contributes strongly to creating a vivid, living program of imaginative music. The composers who are currently writing for saxophone are the ones moving the instrument in many different directions. Some of the included pieces are by composers who are well established in their field; respected composers who are still opening new sonic doors, and who are influencing the next generation of composers and performers. Other pieces are by composers who are younger, closer to the beginning of their careers, yet have already established themselves as composers who show great imagination and dexterity in their writing.

This CD project was recorded, edited, mixed, and mastered at the University of Alberta, under the guidance of Russell Baker. Recordings were undertaken in Convocation Hall in December 2019 and in January and April 2020. Editing took place in January and April 2020. In the recordings, we used a Royer SF-12 stereo ribbon microphone, through a Grave m108 preamp, and a RADAR Nyquist Analogue converter. Editing, mixing, and mastering was done using Wavelab 6.0.

### MYSTERIOUS MORNING III

This disc opens with a programmatic piece by Japanese composer Fuminori Tanada. Born in Okayama, Japan, Tanada began his studies at the *Tokyo Music and Arts National University*, studying composition, orchestration, and accompaniment.<sup>1</sup> In 1981 he was admitted to the *Conservatoire Nationale de Paris*, where he was awarded the première prix in three disciplines: composition, orchestration, and accompaniment. Tanada studied with Paul Méfano and Betsy Jolas, among others. He also completed an after-diploma program for composers.<sup>2</sup> Upon completing his studies, Tanada became

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<sup>1</sup> Tanada, Fuminori, Biography. Editions Henri Lemoine. <https://www.henry-lemoine.com/en/compositeurs/fiche/fuminori-tanada>

<sup>2</sup> Tanada, Fuminori, Biography. Ircam-Centre Pompidou, 2009. <http://brahms.ircam.fr/fuminori-tanada>

the chamber music instructor at *L'École Supérieure de Musique Bourgogne-Franche-Comté*, the pianist for the *Ensemble Itinéraire*, and began his career as an active composer. Tanada's works often include flute, and a majority of his output are works in a chamber music setting.

*Mysterious Morning III* is the third in a series of four evocative pieces of the same title: *Mysterious Morning I* for solo harp, *Mysterious Morning II* for saxophone quartet, *Mysterious Morning III* for solo soprano saxophone, and *Mysterious Morning IV* for two harps and ensemble.<sup>3</sup> Claude Delangle, saxophone instructor at the *Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris* commissioned Tanada to write a piece for solo soprano saxophone after hearing his 1991 alto saxophone concerto, *Chant des lumières*. Delangle asked that the composer write a Japanese-inspired work.<sup>4</sup>

In *Mysterious Morning III*, Tanada was influenced by the music of Tristan Murail and Gérard Grisey, both pioneers of spectral music and researchers of acoustic phenomena, as well as recordings by jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker.<sup>5</sup> Tanada explains that the reference to Charlie Parker is less of a stylistic influence and more an attempt to imitate the saxophonist's improvisatory freedom and expansion of playing techniques. The piece evokes a harried, hurried, and whispered conversation with someone in quite a bit of distress. It has an energy that is maintained throughout and is punctuated by louder outbursts that appear unexpectedly. Tanada uses multiphonics, trills, and quarter tones to great advantage in maintaining this whispered vocalised quality. He says that in the piece he "wished to create a state of sonic instability by means of extremely virtuoso writing, with various playing techniques...this instability is an image of a man quivering with madness, a madness that he attempts to conceal within himself."<sup>6</sup>

In his directions for the performer, Tanada states that "the piece should be played straight through without stopping (excepted for pauses for breath), giving the impression of a wild saxophonist

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<sup>3</sup> Tanada, Fuminori, Works. Ircam-Centre Pompidou, 2009. [http://brahms.ircam.fr/fuminori-tanada#works\\_by\\_date](http://brahms.ircam.fr/fuminori-tanada#works_by_date)

<sup>4</sup> Delangle, Claude. Liner notes for *The Japanese Saxophone*, Claude Delangle. BIS-CD-890, 1993, 1997, 1998, 1 compact disc.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

nervously improvising, playing anxiously.”<sup>7</sup> These directions do indeed remain true throughout the score, where he includes breath marks that represent panting (“breathe deeply but rapidly”), and the addition of ‘*avec souffle*’ or breathy tone to hint at a saxophonist on the brink of losing control.<sup>8</sup> The challenge to the performer in this piece is to evoke this image of mental fragility, while maintaining control. The dynamic range and note range of this piece is very wide and the performer must endeavor for total accuracy, especially in dynamics in order for this fragility to be evoked.

### SAKANA

Dai Fujikura is a Japanese born composer who currently resides in the United Kingdom. He moved to London at age 15 intending to pursue music studies with an ambition to become a film composer.<sup>9</sup> After studying the works of Boulez, Ligeti, and Stockhausen, he changed his focus to contemporary music and received tutelage from some of the major composers of contemporary music such as Pierre Boulez, George Benjamin, and Péter Eötvös.<sup>10</sup> His work with Pierre Boulez led to him receive commissions to write a work for the composer’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration, and for the *Ensemble Intercontemporain*, which brought a global awareness to his music.<sup>11</sup> Now in his early 40s, Fujikura continues to write pieces with visual content in mind, just as he had when he wanted to become a film composer. Fujikura prefers not to be labelled as a Japanese composer, as his influences are far ranging. In his own description of his style, he says he has immersed himself in several different aesthetic movements, borrowing from many of them, without finding himself defined by any specific school.<sup>12</sup>

The title *Sakana* is a Japanese synonym for fish. It is a piece filled with tremolos, multiphonics, and quarter tones that evokes a certain graceful movement: “In this piece, I imagined light reflecting off of fishes bodies as they move around in water – sometimes smoothly and sometimes with rapid

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<sup>7</sup> Tanada, Fuminori. *Mysterious Morning III*. Paris: Editions Henry Lemoine, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Fujikura, Dai, Biography. <https://daifujikura.com/biography>

<sup>10</sup> Planet Hugill album review, Flare: The Music of Dai Fujikura. 3 August, 2013.

<https://www.newfocusrecordings.com/catalogue/dai-fujikura-flare/>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Fujikura, Dai, Biography. <https://www.newfocusrecordings.com/catalogue/dai-fujikura-flare/>



movement.”<sup>13</sup> The tremolos that are integrated into this piece often merge with a fast, rhythmic line, truly give the intended impression. These tremolos and the ensuing phrases that spin out from them require precision and control.

Fujikura wrote *Sakana* for Japanese saxophonist Masanori Oishi. They worked together extensively to explore the limits of the techniques Fujikura was employing.<sup>14</sup> He also consciously chose to write softly for the saxophone in order to challenge the popular perception of the instrument as a loud one. This choice to exploit the extreme soft dynamics on the saxophone in order to create a specific soundscape appears as a connecting thread to several other pieces in this recording, notably *Alter Ego* and *The Last Leaf*.

Though the movement in *Sakana* is quite fast, Fujikura regards it as a slow piece; “there is a lot of action if you are standing near to this piece, however, if you are “looking” from afar, it is a slow moving fish...”<sup>15</sup> Fujikura achieves this effect by using slow changes in structure and harmonic movement, with fast individual gestures. All of these minute gestures give the piece a feeling of frantic energy and intensity until one sits back and listens with a more global idea of the piece. These small, fragile gestures all share dynamics, and pitches between each other and create a much calmer, more graceful and intentional piece, much like watching a fish swim through water. Each individual fin may be working hard, but when one looks from afar they see the more graceful picture of a fish gliding through the water.

### ZAHIR III

Italian composer Simone Movio found his most important inspiration for his compositional style while studying with Beat Furrer at the *Universität für Musik und Darstellende Kunst* in Graz.<sup>16</sup> That experience helped him compete in and win many European composition awards and propelled him to

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<sup>13</sup> Fujijura, Dai, Program notes. Sakana [https://www.daifujikura.com/un/lw\\_SAKANA.html](https://www.daifujikura.com/un/lw_SAKANA.html)

<sup>14</sup> Planet Hugill album review, Flare: The Music of Dai Fujikura. 3 August, 2013.

<https://www.newfocusrecordings.com/catalogue/dai-fujikura-flare/>

<sup>15</sup> Fujijura, Dai, Program notes. Sakana [https://www.daifujikura.com/un/lw\\_SAKANA.html](https://www.daifujikura.com/un/lw_SAKANA.html)

<sup>16</sup> Movio, Simone, About. <https://simonemovio.webs.com/about>

study throughout Europe. As a performer, Movio is a guitarist who focusses mainly on Renaissance and contemporary music.<sup>17</sup>

Movio often writes pieces as part of a larger cycle, and his *Zahir III* for baritone saxophone and electronics is no different. His *Zahir* cycle consists of: *Zahir I* for string quartet, *Zahir III* for baritone saxophone and electronics, *Zahir V* for saxophone quartet (SATB), and *Zahir La* for string quartet.<sup>18</sup> The second and fourth pieces in this series were written as composition projects that the composer ultimately decided not to release.<sup>19</sup>

This series of *Zahir* works take their titles from a short story by Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges which tells of a small, unassuming, yet demonic object: the *zahir*.<sup>20</sup> The object appears to observers as a small object such as a coin, or a handkerchief. To those who encounter the *zahir*, everything surrounding it fades into the background as if distant, or muffled. Upon longer observation of the *zahir* one is able to see it from a 'spheroidal' view; that is, seeing the front and back, inside and outside, past, present, and future all at once.<sup>21</sup> In this way, the whole of the object is contained in each of its parts. Movio works with this idea to attain a musical representation of a *zahir*. Within literature, this theme is often explored using different perspectives or experimenting with time. Musically, Movio does this by eschewing traditional notions of thematic material, and instead creating musical cells that at first seem to contrast strongly. Only towards the end of the piece does it become clear that a noncontinuous and nonlinear process has taken place, and this process reassembles and condenses material at the very end of the work.<sup>22</sup>

In *Zahir III*, Movio states that the *zahir* story is the structure of the piece, with the electronics representing the *zahir* itself.<sup>23</sup> The electronic materials in this piece are produced in real time and are strictly connected with the instrumental sound. To Movio, "they are the essence of the sound itself. They create a reflection and a complement to the saxophone sound, more and more present until the roles are

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Movio, Simone. Email conversation with the composer, January, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Böggemann, Markus. Article "Guided Dreams: Simone Movio" 2014 Ernst Von Siemens Composer Prize. <https://www.evs-musikstiftung.ch/en/prize/prize/archive/composers-prize-winners/simone-movio.html>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Movio, Email conversation with the composer, ibid.

reversed and the instrumental sound becomes a complement to the electronic one.”<sup>24</sup> Borges said of his own writing that his literature was “nothing but a guided dream” and Movio’s goal is to achieve this same impression in his writing.<sup>25</sup> The addition of electronics that are somewhat reactive to the saxophone creates a new perspective on sound for the performer. One must keep the piece moving, and not get too distracted by the electronic treatments of the sound. The disjointedness of the piece is a challenge for the performer to make sense of what they are playing and to connect these differing sections.

## STRATA

We have moved from an opening piece reflecting mental instability (*Mysterious Morning III*), to the fragility of nature (*Sakana*), to a piece that teeters on the edge of stability (*Zahir III*) to reach the midpoint of this CD, *Strata*, a piece that is made up of various layers of rhythmic fragility, but whose overarching sentiment is decidedly solid and stable. *Strata* for solo tenor saxophone is a work by Canadian composer, Colin Labadie. Labadie is a University of Alberta alumnus working as a composer, teacher, and sound designer. His musical influences are diverse, and these influences can be heard in his music.

*Strata* was originally written for Dr. Allison Balcetis and is the first movement of what will eventually be a three-movement work, dedicated to Balcetis, as well as Dr. William Street and Dr. Sandra Joy Friesen.<sup>26</sup> Though it is most commonly known as a stand-alone piece entitled *Strata*, this first movement is actually called *Sonder* and is often performed on its own. Dr. Balcetis and Dr. Friesen premiered the second movement, *Opia* for alto saxophone and piano, at the World Saxophone Congress in Strasbourg, France in 2015. Eventually, a third movement, *Adronitis* will be added to this set.<sup>27</sup>

The main title, *Strata* refers to geological layers of rock, similar to the layers being created within the texture of the piece. For Labadie, the idea of layers has always been a fascination.<sup>28</sup> In his academic

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Böggemann, 2014. Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Labadie, Colin. Works. <http://www.colinlabadie.com/listen>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Labadie, Colin. Email conversation with the composer, February 2020.

studies, he pursued a minor in anthropology in his undergraduate degree and even participated in an archeological dig of 1800 year-old human skeletons in Italy. His interest in these layers are a matter of scale. He says “I like anything that has a large scale to it – geology, cosmology, etc. I like trying to wrap my head around the scale of it, which is often impossible.”<sup>29</sup>

The titles of each movement of *Strata* draw their names from John Koenig’s *Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*, which is a collection of invented terms that describe unique emotions for which no words currently exist.<sup>30</sup> Koenig defines the term *sonder* as:

“*n.* the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own-populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness- an epic story that continues invisibly around you like an anthill sprawling deep underground, with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives that you’ll never know existed, in which you might appear only once, as an extra, sipping coffee in the background, as a blur of traffic passing on the highway, as a lighted window at dusk.”<sup>31</sup>

The first movement contains a long uninterrupted series of notes punctuated by accented pitches that leap out of the texture, creating a multi-layered effect. The piece’s unrelenting continuity of sound creates the impression of an unending loop. Of this, Labadie says “through simple patterning and subtle variation, I seek to build intricate yet clear structures and sounds.”<sup>32</sup> When asked about the source of ideas for this piece, he cites Swedish heavy metal band Meshuggah as one of his main sources of inspiration.<sup>33</sup> On first listen, it seems impossible to link the two, but Labadie explains: “what I really like about their music is that they layer different patterns and meters in really compelling ways, but they often keep it within a symmetrical framework (usually four-bar hypermeters of 4/4, despite all the other craziness that’s happening), so you have this frame of reference against which you can hear the time dissonances...it’s like a kind of counterpoint, in a way [sic].”<sup>34</sup> This time dissonance is similar to what Labadie undertakes in *Sonder*. He sets up a framework of continuous sixteenth notes, which provides the listener an underlying pulse upon which it is easier to perceive the different patterns overlaid on this material. This pulse also enables the listener to sense the constant addition of more and more patterns which Labadie utilizes to

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Koenig, John. *Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*, website. [www.dictionaryofobscuresorrows.com](http://www.dictionaryofobscuresorrows.com) 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Labadie, Colin. Biography. <http://www.colinlabadie.com>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Labadie, Colin. Email conversation with the composer, February 2020.

explore the limits of that perception. Labadie has explored this technique of patterning over a base layer of sixteenth or eighth notes in several of his compositions since *Sonder*, including his 2019 piece, *Parallax* for saxophone quartet, which was commissioned by the Proteus Quartet, of which I am a member.

One technique required of the saxophonist in the *Sonder* movement is circular breathing. This technique is centuries old and was used in ancient metal work for breathing a constant stream of air towards a flame to soften a metal.<sup>35</sup> It requires the musician to store air in their cheeks, which they release into the instrument while simultaneously taking in air through their nose, allowing the player to maintain a continuous sound throughout the entirety of the piece. This technique can be quite fatiguing for the musician, and concentration can potentially be lost quite quickly. The large intervallic leaps within this continuous structure also contribute to the challenging nature of this piece.

### ALTER EGO

Greek composer Georges Aperghis was born to artist parents; his father was a sculptor and his mother a painter, which gave him a rich artistic background from a young age.<sup>36</sup> Aperghis was mainly self-taught and divided his interests between painting and music. Growing up in Athens, he knew little about the European avant-garde movement, but he stumbled upon the first experiments in *musique concrète* by Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry.<sup>37</sup> These works came as a revelation to him, and by 1963 Aperghis decided to give up painting entirely and he moved to Paris to study music. Since 1976, he has worked equally on music, text, and movement, combining them in different ways. He also established *Atelier Théâtre et Music* (ATEM), an experimental music theatre company.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps because of his extensive work in theatre, Aperghis' compositions including *Alter Ego* for solo tenor saxophone, contain a strong theatrical element. In *Alter Ego*, this element is reminiscent of a stage whisper.

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<sup>35</sup> Kim, Kyung Mi and Miller, Cristanne. *Poetics and Precarity*. New York: Suny, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Aperghis, Georges. Biography. <http://www.aperghis.com/biographies.html>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Written in 2001 for Swiss saxophonist Marcus Weiss, *Alter Ego* is energetic, filled with microtones, syncopation, and speech-like whisperings. Because of its speech-like quality, at times it shares a similarity in tone with Tanada's *Mysterious Morning III*. Also similar to Tanada, Aperghis is a well-established composer of chamber works, though he is known primarily for his work in experimental musical theatre.

In much of his writing for acoustic instruments, Aperghis is a self-proclaimed champion of the “neglected” aspects of the instrument: “An instrument always ‘plays’ itself. But a clarinet that plays like a clarinet is not what really interests me. A singer can sing with various voices, with breathiness, without breathiness, with vibrato, without vibrato; he can even scream. Why shouldn’t instruments do that as well?”<sup>39</sup>

Marcus Weiss, for whom the piece was written, has studied *Alter Ego* and the works of Aperghis extensively. In explaining how he has students approach the piece, he has this to say:

I have my students watch and listen to the *Récitations* and *Jactations* (a 2001 collection of vocal pieces for baritone). In these pieces his expression is not just love and hatred, but it can be much more absurd and in between. Often the performer can have quite defined roles, like a drunken beggar... In each of these pieces each movement is a different theatrical expression and character. In listening to these pieces you begin to understand the notes you are playing are not sounds, but they are more like text. If the saxophone is your voice, you become a singer without words. You become a singer, a speaker, a stumbler. However the performer doesn’t have to be inventive, but follow the rhetoric of the text, just as there is specific rhetoric for the work of J.S. Bach.<sup>40</sup>

In *Alter Ego*, Aperghis has provided explicit demands on the performer with the expectation that if the performer succeeds in a type of inexpressiveness, or “no emotion, no playing of anything,” the desired effect will be achieved. To Aperghis, “if you ask the musicians to play ‘expressively’ or you write ‘espressivo’, that leads, in my opinion, to something old-fashioned. I, on the other hand, want to find a construction that brings a certain expression along with it. If that is successful, it is enough for the musician to simply play the notes. The expression comes on its own.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Hahn, Patrick. Interview with Georges Aperghis, 2006. Appears on [http://saxophonemes.fr/eng.saxophonemes.fr/Aperghis\\_2.html](http://saxophonemes.fr/eng.saxophonemes.fr/Aperghis_2.html)

<sup>40</sup> Fusik, James. “The Theatrical Saxophone: Visual and Narrative Elements in Contemporary Saxophone Music.” DMA Dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 2013.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

The dynamic level of this work is a continuous *pianississimo*. It is of course entirely possible to play at this dynamic on the saxophone, but “in the notated range (it) would be drowned out by the sounds of the fingers and keys,” according to Weiss.<sup>42</sup> This frenetic piece full of leaps, trills, and vocal additions in a sustained soft dynamic incorporates the sounds of depressing the keys, thus creating the alter ego of the saxophone. Though this brings to mind a certain percussive effect to the piece, it is in fact fairly fragile and puts the listener in a similar state of tension or agitation as the performer who must be constantly in control of the tone production.

### THE LAST LEAF

Chaya Czernowin was born in Israel and has studied composition in Germany, the United States, Austria, and Japan.<sup>43</sup> Czernowin splits her time between composing and teaching composition at Harvard University.<sup>44</sup> She is the first female composition professor to have taught there. Her music is known to be exploratory and curiosity driven, often including themes of nature such as leaves, trees, rocks, and water.

In *The Last Leaf* for solo soprano saxophone, Czernowin is attempting to make a single solo instrument sound like three instruments communicating together.<sup>45</sup> The piece contains fragile and unpredictable tremolos, trills, and silence, combined with larger, more solid or stable sounds. Most engaging to me in this piece is the balance between frantic sound and still silence.

Czernowin’s pieces often explore nature as a theme: “I am very fascinated by nature, it is a great teacher. Whenever I find something that is mystifying or piques my curiosity I look into “Why? What is so special about it?” I pull it apart actually quite analytically.”<sup>46</sup> When discussing *The Last Leaf* in particular, she discusses the fleeting quality of the musical line: “It’s such a line that you can’t put your finger on it. That line is the beginning of something, it’s like the spontaneous line of an Egon Schiele painting. You

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Czernowin, Chaya. Biography. <http://chayaczernowin.com/biography>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Czernowin, Chaya. Interview, *5 Questions for Chaya Czernowin*. I Care If You Listen. <https://www.icareifyoulisten.com/2012/12/5-questions-to-chaya-czernowin-composer/>

<sup>46</sup> Ensemble Dal Niente. Meet the Composer: Chaya Czernowin. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/10152266052920243/>

don't exactly know where the line is going to end, it is almost like the line a drop of water leaves on the mirror."<sup>47</sup> From this concept, she began to explore the more solid, uncompromising sounds of the low register of the saxophone, "This is how the journey sets up its parameters, between the fleeting, strangely unpredictable line to the fat, immovable fact of something being there and not budging: the piece already exists in a world and develops from there."<sup>48</sup>

The title of the piece is taken from the short story "The Last Leaf" by O. Henry.<sup>49</sup> The story tells of a young artist diagnosed with pneumonia. She lies in her bed, staring out the window at the brick wall of the building next door, counting the leaves left on the ivy crawling up the wall. She believes that when the last leaf falls, she will die of her illness. As the number of leaves diminishes, her roommate grows concerned and tells the elderly man downstairs of her roommate's believed impending death. The neighbour is also an artist who has been waiting his whole life to paint his masterpiece. A day later, only one leaf remains. That night, a storm comes through, but when the curtains are opened the next day, the last leaf still hasn't fallen. Days later, the leaf remains and the artist recovers from her pneumonia, only to be told that the elderly man from downstairs has died from pneumonia after spending a night outside painting an ivy leaf onto the brick wall.

The ideas of fragility, of death, of the solidity or permanence of a painting on a brick wall that only appears fragile explored in this story relate directly to Czernowin's depiction of a fragile line in the beginning, which later explores more concrete and stable sounding lower range notes. The soprano saxophone is also an instrument with incredibly fragile tuning tendencies and which requires quite a bit of control in order to produce the dynamic range and intensity of sound required in this piece.

## CONCLUSION

The main thread running through this recital is the concept of fragility, which is approached differently in each piece, through larger thematic and structural ideas to the exploitation of the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Czernowin, Chaya. *The Last Leaf*. Berlin: Schott Music, 2010.



saxophone's dynamic range and extended techniques. All of the pieces are unaccompanied and by diverse living composers, but each demonstrates fragility, curiosity, excitement, whispering, or even a fluttering quality. This dichotomy of the required strength, stamina, focus, and agility to produce a program exploring the theme of fragility is one that represents my artistic aesthetic. Perhaps the theme of fragility can be stretched even further to include that of the future of contemporary music. The future of classical music is something discussed quite extensively as a fragile entity, with symphonic orchestras failing and concert attendance waning. I share in the belief that it is the composers' curiosity and their collaboration with performers now and in the future that will advance the genre of classical music for future generations.

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