

Erica Smith
clarinet

Recital in partial fulfillment of the
Master of Music degree, 2023
Student of Thomas Martin

with
Jingsi Lu, piano
Kei Otake, cello
Emma Strange, soprano

Sunday, November 19, 2023
8:00 p.m.
Burnes Hall

PROGRAM

Leslie Bassett

(1923–2016)

Soliloquies

Fast, aggressive, driving, dramatic

Flowing, singing

Fast, abrasive, contentious

Slow, lyrical, expressive

Theresa Martin

(b. 1979)

Paragon

Jingsi Lu, piano

Franz Schubert

(1797–1828)

Der Hirt auf dem Felsen

("The Shepherd on the Rock"), D. 965

Emma Strange, soprano

Jingsi Lu, piano

Intermission

Johannes Brahms

(1833–1897)

**Trio in A Minor for clarinet, cello and piano,
op. 114**

Allegro

Adagio

Andantino grazioso

Allegro

Kei Otake, cello

Jingsi Lu, piano

*I'd like to start by thanking all the music educators in Rhode Island,
especially my band directors— Karyn Kauffman, Leland Brown, and Toni-Annette Silveira.
Thank you for your passion, for giving me everything I needed to start my musical journey.*

*I wouldn't be here without the guidance and support from the clarinet professors
I studied with, including Frances Brown, Kelli O'Connor, Vincent Mattera, Ian Greitzer,
Jon Manasse, Ken Grant, and Michael Wayne.
I was honored and privileged to be their student.*

*I would like to thank my professor at NEC, Thomas Martin,
for helping me grow more than I could have imagined.
Because of your guidance and fun spirit, I know that I can do anything now!*

*Thank you to my friends for tuning in, in person or online.
You've been on this journey with me, some of you from very early on,
and I am grateful to have you as some of my biggest supporters.*

*Lastly, I'd like to thank my family for always being there,
through my best and worst days.
Thank you for believing in me since day one!*

All program notes are by Erica Smith unless noted otherwise.

Bassett *Soliloquies*

Leslie Bassett received many awards and accolades throughout his life, including the Pulitzer in 1966 for his *Variations for Orchestra*. Influenced by composers like Bartók and serialist composers like Ross Lee Finney and Roberto Gerhard (the latter studied with Schoenberg for five years), Bassett developed his own style of “tonal chromaticism.” In her MA thesis, Barbara Ballard interviews Bassett and describes his compositional style:

“When first hearing or looking at Bassett's music, it appears to be serial. In fact, Bassett very often uses twelve tones in a line, but his music does not adhere to a system...Bassett has freedom; he chooses his notes carefully and uses what his ear likes. He feels that a serialistic system makes for a great theoretical paper. But not necessarily beautiful music” (Ballard 19).

Bassett incorporates all chromatic notes like a serialist, but handpicks notes to add beauty to the music, creating what sounds good to him. This “tonal” aspect of Bassett’s style is more pronounced in the second and fourth movements. In the first and third movements, however, the piece takes on very different emotions. In a 1987 interview with Bruce Duffie, Bassett discusses the origins of *Soliloquies*:

Leslie Bassett: [*Soliloquies*] was written for a clarinetist who wanted to show off how good he was —and he was very good. For several years the piece was considered unplayable.

Bruce Duffie: Did you write it to be difficult?

LB: Yes.

BD: Did you write it to be pretty?

LB: I wrote it to be difficult and to be pretty, on occasion. Quite a bit of it is nice, but there are places which are quite raucous, quite strident...You have to write fast, shrill, aggressive music for the clarinetist to play in order to convey to the listener the impression of shrillness, aggressiveness and so on, which is a perfectly wonderful reaction to have. Music doesn’t always have to be sweet and saccharine.

(Excerpt from *Composer Leslie Bassett: A Conversation with Bruce Duffie*)

Despite the whirlwind of emotions and notes, he does rely on a general structure. Bassett tells Ballard, “There is always either a pitch or a chord which is meant as an anchor for the piece. This anchor recurs throughout the composition” (Ballard 16).

This process, combined with special effects on the clarinet, are the ingredients that form this truly one-of-a-kind piece.

Martin *Paragon*

From the composer:

I first discovered the term *paragone* while reading a book about the science of competitiveness. In the Italian Renaissance, *paragone* was the idea of competition between creative artists: painters, musicians, and sculptors. They believed that only through *paragone* could you see the real significance of a work. Artists trained side-by-side in direct competition and often debated over which of the creative endeavors was the most worthy.

In modern times, the English term paragon, has come to mean a model or pattern of excellence, an ideal or standard. This is where my inspiration was fully ignited. I wanted to write a piece that, in my mind, outlined the perfect life. It would begin with birth and a soul being surrounded by love, move through phases of learning, joy, amusement, and adventure, and would come back full circle to all-encompassing love into a peaceful departure from this world.

Paragon has personal significance for me, as well. During the course of writing the piece, a relative of mine passed away from cancer at age 62. No one knows how much time we will have on this earth. Paragon is my shared hope for the ideal life, full of meaning, love, and joy.

Theresa Martin, Jan. 2016

Schubert *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*

Though they never met each other in person, the friendship between composer Franz Schubert and soprano Pauline Anna Milder-Hauptmann was a special one. Milder had previously premiered one of Schubert's *Lieder* (art songs), and the composer had dedicated another Lied, *Suleika II*, to her. Milder had tried to get one of Schubert's operas staged in Berlin. Although she was unsuccessful, Schubert expressed his gratitude by composing *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* in 1828, only about a month before his death. It would be the last piece he would ever compose.

In his music, Schubert does something called "text painting," where the music quite literally reflects the words. No real effort is required; I encourage you to follow along with the text, and notice how the clarinet and piano parts almost serve as sound effects that flow with the scene. Disney could make a boat ride out of this piece, if they wanted to. Feel free to agree or disagree with me after the performance. Keep your hands and arms inside the vehicle, and enjoy the ride!

This is the story of a shepherd, who at first dwells on his feelings of loneliness, but later develops a more hopeful outlook on life. By stringing together the words of three source poems, Schubert creates a slice-of-life scene that engages the imagination. The first poem by Wilhelm Müller, *Der Berghirt* (The Mountain

Shepherd), tells the story of a shepherd who hears the echoes of his own voice through the valley, while longing to see his sweetheart. You'll notice the clarinet and piano echoing the voice, creating the illusion of an expansive valley. With the second source poem by Karl August Varnhagen, *Nächtlicher Schall* (Nightly Sound), the story takes a melancholic turn by exploring the shepherd's feelings of loneliness and misery. Then through the words of Müller's *Liebesgedanken* (Love Thoughts), the shepherd develops a hopeful outlook on life by singing that spring will come, that his status quo will soon change for the better.

Der Hirt auf dem Felde

*Wenn auf dem höchsten Fels ich steh',
In's tiefe Tal hernieder seh',
Und singe,*

*Fern aus dem tiefen dunkeln Tal
Schwingt sich empor der Widerhall
Der Klüfte.*

*Je weiter meine Stimme dringt,
Je heller sie mir wieder klingt
Von unten.*

*Mein Liebchen wohnt so weit von mir,
Drum sehn' ich mich so heiß nach ihr
Hinüber.*

*In tiefem Gram verzehr ich mich,
Mir ist die Freude hin,
Auf Erden mir die Hoffnung wich,
Ich hier so einsam bin.*

So sehnend klang im Wald das Lied,

*So sehnend klang es durch die Nacht,
Die Herzen es zum Himmel zieht
Mit wunderbarer Macht.*

*Der Frühling will kommen,
Der Frühling, meine Freud',
Nun mach' ich mich fertig
Zum Wandern bereit.*

The Shepherd on the Rock

When I stand on the highest rock,
Look down into the deep valley
And sing,

From far away in the deep dark valley
The echo from the ravines
Rises up.

The further my voice carries,
The clearer it echoes back to me
From below.

My sweetheart lives so far from me,
Therefore I long so to be with her
Over there.

Deep grief consumes me,
My joy has fled,
All earthly hope has vanished,
I am so lonely here.

The song rang out so longingly through the
wood,

Rang out so longingly through the night,
That it draws hearts to heaven
With wondrous power.

Spring is coming,
Spring, my joy,
I shall now make ready
to journey.

*Translation © Richard Stokes, author of The
Book of Lieder (Faber); Provided via Oxford
Lieder (www.oxfordlieder.co.uk)*

Brahms Trio in A Minor for clarinet, cello and piano, op. 114

Ferdinand Schumann, grandson of composers Clara and Robert Schumann, often wrote about Brahms in his journal entries. “Yesterday Brahms said to grandmother that he no longer composed for the public, but only for himself. One composes only until one’s fiftieth year. Then the creative power begins to diminish.” By age 57, Brahms had convinced himself that he was no longer fit to be a composer.

Clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, whom Brahms called the “dear nightingale,” shattered that limiting belief. When the composer heard Mühlfeld’s performance in the German town of Meiningen, all thoughts of sipping piña colada on the beach disappeared. What followed, between 1891 to 1894, was a series of masterpieces dedicated to the clarinetist: a trio, quintet, and two sonatas, in that order.

Brahms was considered one of the more conservative composers in the second half of the 19th century, but his works contain evidence to the contrary. In the Trio, for example, musical phrases begin where you don’t expect them to. Some rhythms may throw your mind off balance. He sometimes creates canon-like displacements in melodic lines (Think “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” rounds, but more subtle). “That’s how Brahms builds drama, more than any other composer in this world,” says Bruce Adolphe, resident lecturer at the Lincoln Center. “Brahms, rhythmically, was a great innovator.”

Musicologist Kai Christiansen concisely summarizes what to expect from the piece as a whole:

“The outer two (first and last) project a dark and melancholic mood from the lonely cello solo in the beginning to the decisive crush of the final cadence at the end, a rough outer skin that nests the sweetest fruit within. Both inner movements glow with a gentle, delicate brightness reminding many of Brahms’s late intermezzi, his touching soft spots” (Christiansen).

From Mozart to Weber to Brahms, some of the best music for clarinet was born out of the composers’ friendships with clarinetists—Anton Stadler, Heinrich Baermann, and Richard Mühlfeld, respectively. Beautiful things come out of surrounding yourself with the right people, who wholeheartedly support you and your dreams.

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