

# A Musical Analysis of the Senior Recital Repertoire of Gavin R. Grove

Gavin Grove

## Abstract

*In this summary of my larger study, selected works from Francis Poulenc (1899- 1963), Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), George Gershwin (1898-1937) and Artie Shaw (1910-2004) undergo a musical analysis, with a specific emphasis on form, key and tonal relationships, rhythmic and melodic structures, and any other pertinent musical concept present in these compositions. The more comprehensive study not only examines the musical aspects found in these works, but also provides a brief overview of each composer and the inherent stylistic characteristics present. This contextual background serves to enhance the overall comprehension of the pieces originally presented in the November 12, 2023 Senior Recital of Gavin R. Grove. This detailed analysis of my Senior Recital repertoire aims to contribute insights into the works of these famed twentieth century composers, providing a greater understanding of the repertoire performed. This summary will provide a brief analysis of the structure of each of the five works, in addition to a statement on the experimental nature of clarinet composition in the twentieth century.*

## A General Analysis of the Works

### Poulenc's Sonata for Clarinet and Piano

Francis Poulenc's Sonata for Clarinet and Piano was composed in 1962. A revised edition, for which this analysis is based, was released in 2006 by Chester Music. This sonata was commissioned by famed clarinetist and bandleader Benny Goodman (1909-1986) and premiered on April 10, 1963 at Carnegie Hall in New York City. The piece consists of three movements – Allegro Tristamente, Romanza and Allegro con Fuoco. Despite the title of this work, one would expect Francis Poulenc to stay within the realm of sonata form. However, instead

of developing his thematic material in the exposition, he instead opts for a contrasting middle section. While he still incorporates the exposition and recapitulation, it is still noteworthy that he strayed from traditional compositional practices. Throughout the entire work, there were examples of cyclically occurring themes and motifs. The cyclical treatment of these themes produces an analogous composition that meshes to create a similar, yet unique experience of twentieth century music.

### Poulenc's Sonata for Two Clarinets

Francis Poulenc's Sonata for Two Clarinets, written for A and B-flat clarinet,

was composed in the Spring of 1918. The piece consists of three movements – Presto, Andante, and Vif. As an early composition of his, it is inherently evident that Francis Poulenc primarily utilized this work as an experiment, exploring the realm and possibilities of twentieth century music. The piece lacks strong tonal ties and relies on melodic cadence as its harmonic function. Throughout the composition, Poulenc craftily utilizes compositional techniques such as ostinati, isomelody, polyrhythm, polymeter and strategic dissonance to create a charming composition. While still very early in his career, it was evident that Francis Poulenc was a talented composer who had the ability to be at the forefront of musical composition in the twentieth century.

### **Stravinsky's Three Pieces for Solo Clarinet**

Three Pieces for Solo Clarinet was composed in the Fall of 1918 in Morges, Switzerland. The composition consists of three movements, referred to by Stravinsky as “pieces.” Interestingly, it is written for unaccompanied performance of the B-flat and A clarinet, which had largely never been done before this time. During the time of creation of this work, Stravinsky was fascinated with jazz and ragtime. Stravinsky received reduced piano scores of this type of music from jazz clarinetist Sidney Bechet (1897-1959) and was instantly enamored with it. Despite not hearing jazz at this point, he began incorporating facets of it into his composition strictly by looking at his scores. This work was one of the first to incorporate facets of the jazz idiom into the world of classical music. As a whole, this composition serves as a microcosm of Stravinsky's revolutionary compositional style and is emblematic of his drive and desire to explore the wide-range of possibilities in music.

### **Gershwin's Blues from An American in Paris**

Blues from “An American in Paris” is a contemporary arrangement of George Gershwin's timeless symphonic poem, An American in Paris. The piece was originally composed in the Spring of 1928, in an attempt to depict his homesickness for New York City and the Hudson River. Michele Mangani originally published his interpolation of this piece for solo clarinet and piano in 2003. Despite the suggestion of “blues,” this composition does not follow the traditional 12-bar blues structure that one may expect. Instead, it opts for the turnaround, a compositional practice in jazz that allows for short, cyclical progressions that enable adequate improvisation. Blues from “An American in Paris” stands as a compelling interpretation, blending elements from the realm of classical music and the jazz idiom, that serves as a testament to the enduring brilliance of George Gershwin's musical legacy.

### **Shaw's Concerto for Clarinet**

Artie Shaw's Concerto for Clarinet was composed in 1940 for the film Second Chorus. The composition is a single movement work that primarily utilizes tempo as a means to create contrast. Throughout the entire work, Shaw presents simple themes and improvises over them. Throughout the piece, Shaw relies on the 12-bar blues structure as a basis for his improvisation. Artie Shaw's Concerto for Clarinet is a staple in the clarinet repertoire, being celebrated for its technical challenges and showmanship. This composition stands as a timeless showcase of Shaw's brilliance, capturing the essence of an era and pushing the boundaries of musical expression.

### **Experimental Nature of Clarinet Composition in the Twentieth Century**

In the twentieth century, the clarinet underwent a revolutionary journey that allowed it to transcend the constraints of its traditionally established role in classical music. The innovation of many helped to lead the instrument into a new frontier, across a variety of genres and stylistic movements. From the remnants of romanticism and early facets of impressionism, to the new age realm of avant-garde composition, the clarinet emerged as a versatile conduit for musical innovation and experimentation. Composers and musicians of this era, fueled by societal upheavals, advancements in technology, and a desire to break free from established norms, embraced the challenge to redefine the capabilities of the clarinet. The compositional evolution of the clarinet's utilization in the twentieth century has served as a testament to the instrument's enduring versatility and an embrace of the ever-changing currents and trajectories of musical innovation.

### **Debussy's *Première Rhapsodie***

Claude Debussy's (1862-1918) *Première Rhapsodie* for clarinet and piano was one of the earliest influential pieces of clarinet composition in the twentieth century. Despite utilizing a traditional medium of performance, the work reflected a changing style of attitude in how the clarinet was utilized, with a new found emphasis on the expressive capabilities of the instrument. Perhaps a microcosm of the larger movement of impressionism, *Première Rhapsodie* reflects a departure from romantic conventions, instead prioritizing atmosphere, color and mood. As a result, Debussy creates the ethereal composition that has cemented itself into the modern clarinetist's repertoire.

### **Berg's *Vier Stücke für Klarinette und Klavier***

Alban Berg's *Vier Stücke für Klarinette und Klavier* was another revolutionary work. Unlike Debussy, Berg systematically adhered to a compositional technique known as twelve-tone serialism. In short, this practice abolished any hierarchy associated with notes, and instead treated each individual chromatic pitch equally. In addition to this unique compositional style, the work also served to expand how the clarinet was utilized, as emphasized through Berg's use of extended technique.

### **Swing Era**

The 1930s and 1940s ushered in a zenith of clarinet utilization in jazz settings. While introduced into jazz in the 1920s, the clarinet became wildly popular due to the dominance of big bands and larger-than-life bandleaders such as Benny Goodman (1909-1986) and Artie Shaw (1910-2004). Compositions such as Goodman's *Sing, Sing, Sing* (1936) and Shaw's *Begin the Beguine* (1935) continued to push the boundaries of clarinet performance. The use of clarinet in jazz also pushed the technical bounds of the instrument, as several extended techniques were utilized to craft an appropriate atmosphere. Most notably, clarinetists began to use techniques such as the glissando, vibrato, pitch-bending, and "growling."

### **Stockhausen's *Der Kleine Harlekin* and Reich's *New York Counterpoint***

Stockhausen's influential work blurred the boundaries between music and theatre, as the performer was costumed, interacted with stage props, and was tasked with following precise choreography. In a broad sense, this composition was influential in the world of the avant-garde and experimental music scene. In 1985, Steve Reich (b. 1936) composed *New York Counterpoint*, a revolutionary work in the

clarinet repertoire. With the technological advancements in recording in the latter half of the twentieth century, Reich decided to incorporate prepared tape into his composition. This piece includes the technique of phasing, the effect that is created when two or more instrumentalists perform the same pattern at different intervals of time, moving in and out of phase. With the addition of electronics, Steve Reich helped to significantly expand the possibilities of clarinet composition. As a result of this piece, the electroacoustic genre was greatly popularized and has cemented itself into the repertoire of today's twenty-first century clarinetist.

To this day, modern clarinet repertoire finds inspiration from all of these trailblazing compositions and composers. The evolution of music reflects the ever-changing human experience, and as I eagerly anticipate the future, inspired by the groundbreaking works of those who came before us, I look forward to witnessing the continued innovations that will shape the musical landscape of this century.

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