

GOUNOD

Solo de Trombone

ADASKIN

Sonatine Baroque

Adagio
Andante
Allegro

LUSSIER

Cinq Caprices for Solo Bassoon: Caprice No. 2 "En Forme d'Élégie"

Solo de Trombone

Charles Gounod

(b. Paris, 1818 / d. Paris, 1893)

In the Paris Conservatoire, careers could be made at the year-end competitions for each instrument, largely based on the performance of the “imposed” piece. Well-known Paris-based composers were often commissioned to challenge potential graduates with pieces that explored the full range of an instrument’s compass as well as its musical limits. The class of 1855 was unusually small. An article in the *Musical Review and Gazette* pointed out that many of the students had already left classes, as they took up arms as part of various regiments during the Crimean War. “But,” the article assured, “there were still enough left for the competition to be honourable.”

The trombone portion of the competition lasted but one morning, as there were only two students. Aside from a sight-reading exercise, the competition was a performance of the imposed piece, *Solo de Trombone* by Charles Gounod. Likely because of the scant class and the ongoing war, Gounod’s score was never published, and the work was thought lost until two different manuscripts were discovered recently, making it possible to reconstruct the piece.

The Solo is in two movements. The first, in G minor, begins with an Andante introduction, which leads to an aria-like Adagio cantabile in 6/8 time, unsurprisingly operatic given the Gounod’s fame as an opera composer. As with many a competition piece, the slow opening section challenges the performer’s ability with breath and line, while the second showcases virtuosity. And indeed, the second movement is marked *Molto pomposo e ben marcato*, and features many technical hurdles and passages.

Sonatine Baroque

Murray Adaskin

(b. Toronto, 1906 / d. Victoria, 2002)

In 1946, a community-minded concert organization was formed in an upscale Toronto neighbourhood, with a mission to present a series of performances each season. Further to that mission, the society also mandated that new works be commissioned for the series, by Canadian composers and performed by Canadian musicians. A Baroque-themed concert was presented on March 10, 1952 with guest violinist Eugene Cash. For this concert, Murray Adaskin was commissioned for a new piece.

Adaskin was by this time one of Canada's most respected and noted composers, and was a violinist himself, having spent 10 years with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. During his professional life, he is probably most closely identified with Saskatoon, where he held a number of positions including head of the Music Department at the University of Saskatchewan.

With the Baroque idea of the concert in mind, Adaskin's *Sonatine Baroque* follows a familiar Baroque template – a *sonata di chiesa* for solo violin (much like the Bach sonatas) – and while largely a tonal work, does feature Adaskin's penchant for sharp-edged harmonies. The work is in three movements (in this, it differs from the *sonata di chiesa's* four-movement, slow-fast-slow-fast formula), going from a more contemporary sound to a much more Baroque-tinged conclusion.

Adaskin dedicated the work to noted Canadian violinist Andrew Dawes, who was a lifelong friend of Adaskin. Dawes recorded the work, and played it many times in concert performances throughout the world. The opening begins mysteriously in the violin's lower compass – a haunting Adagio that increases in passion and drive. The Andante second movement is a tender, slow song, with double stops providing a counterpoint to the main melody. The finale has the earmarks of a triple-time court dance (with a slower central section dominated by double stops), very Baroque in mannerism and feel, with only the odd angle to the melodic line to bring us squarely into the 20th century.

Cinq Caprices: Caprice No. 2

Mathieu Lussier

(b. Montréal, 1973)

Canadian bassoonist, conductor, and composer Mathieu Lussier is a highly-regard period-instrument musician, and has performed as part of many prominent early music ensembles throughout North America. In 2019, he was appointed Music Director of the Arion Baroque Ensemble. But he teaches contemporary as well as historically-informed bassoon at McGill University as well as the Université du Québec à Montréal. Not surprisingly, most of his own compositions are for his instrument (a notable exception is his contribution to the score of Denys Arcand's acclaimed film *The Fall of the American Empire*).

Mr. Lussier performed with the Edmonton Symphony in November 2016, as guest conductor rather than bassoon soloist. His *Cinq Caprices for Solo Bassoon* were published in 2001, with each one dedicated to a Canadian bassoonist. Nadina Mackie Jackson, who has recorded all five, was the dedicatee of two of the caprices, including No. 2, titled “En Forme d'Élégie.”

It begins tentatively, jumping from low to high notes before settling into a ruminative mood, still full of runs taking in wide swaths of the instrument’s range. The long, lyrical lines of the music challenge the breath control of the performer – a true display for a talented soloist, despite its brevity.

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