

Reprints from the

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*to promote communications among trumpet players around the world and to improve the artistic level of performance, teaching,
and literature associated with the trumpet*

October 2015 ITG Journal

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International Trumpet Guild® JOURNAL

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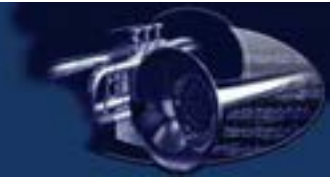
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REPERTOIRE CORNER

BRYAN PROKSCH, COLUMN EDITOR



The *Repertoire Corner* examines historic, analytic, and performance issues in the trumpet's solo literature. Ideas, suggestions, and submissions should be directed to: Bryan Proksch, Lamar University, PO Box 10044, Beaumont, TX 77710; repertoire@trumpetguild.org

QUINTET, Op. 27, No. 1: OLD NOTES IN A NEW WAY

BY VINCENT A. JOCKIN

I have borrowed my title from Leonard Bernstein, who once remarked, "The test of a great composer is to use old notes in a new way," and that is part of what inspired my Quintet, Op. 27, No. 1 for trumpet and string quartet.¹ To be honest, I had never considered writing specifically for brass until I met several brass players who encouraged me to do so. It turned out to be a great opportunity for me to compose and collaborate in a new (to me, at least) way.

Part of the challenge in writing chamber music for brass is the high level of expertise required. We cannot compose music for wind instruments—and even less for brass instruments—in the same way we do for strings! We have to continuously think about phrasing, since the musicians are so reliant on breath. For a composer, such constraints are always a source of inspiration; the more we feel compelled to do something, the more we strive for freedom.

Another challenge (or opportunity, perhaps) is that the solo and chamber repertoire for brass is much smaller in quantity than that for piano or strings. Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms wrote hundreds of masterpieces for string quartet, but there is a mere handful of such works for trumpet! This is, of course, one reason why brass players are always seemingly looking for new works to play. Perhaps it is also why they seem to prefer new works that are based on the Classical style (rather than Baroque or Modern), which is rather unusual for this kind of instrument.

The situation, for me, is an ideal one. A composer such as myself who seeks to create new music—modern music, but definitely linked to past and the great masters—must collaborate with brass players eager to play new works.

As a French composer (born in Toulouse in 1976), I was trained to consider any composition as universal in scope.

Given this very traditional artistic background (stemming from Saint-Saëns, Bizet, Fauré, Ravel, and others), form plays a central role in my approach. Form is not a part, but rather a whole—something that is clear, coherent, and well defined.

With a truly modern approach, but also willing to make use of the *savoir-faire* inherited from our great masters (from my point of view, Bach's counterpoint and Mozart's form), my purpose is to renew a musical language by extending the sonata-form principle. The diagram in Figure 1 illustrates my concept of the essence of sonata form as conceived for the twenty-first century. Here, the shapes (square, disc, triangle, etc.) symbolize musical themes or motives (style, rhythm, ornaments, etc.); the shadings represent keys, modes, tonalities, and the like. One might allow a work to progress through different ideas in different tonalities, potentially layering different things upon one another. At the point of return, some things are necessarily changed, even as they retain aspects of their initial presentation.

There is no question here of establishing a model, much less a magic formula; rather, I am trying to represent abstract concepts in more concrete terms.

I attach great importance to the composition of a musical work and to the means of creating it, because I believe deeply that it is only the form and structure that permits us to understand anything at all. In order for the work to be beautiful—my goal in the act of composition—there must be a delicate balance between the architecture of the whole and its parts. An inspired composer cannot create even one decent work if he doesn't organize his melodic ideas and other musical phrases.

Taking all these elements into consideration, I would like now to present my Quintet, Op. 27, No. 1 for trumpet and string quartet. Composed in October 2012, this piece was commissioned by Tomislav Spoljar, director of the Velika Gorica Brass Festival and a great friend of mine ever since. This

"The more we feel compelled to do something, the more we strive for freedom."



Figure 1. A graphical representation of my concept of sonata form in a modern context

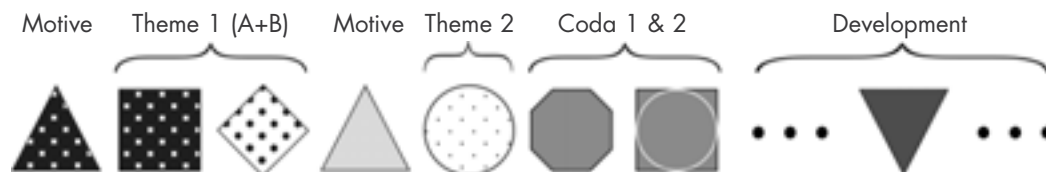


Figure 2. A graphical depiction of my creation of the motives and themes in the Quintet's exposition

work premiered at this same festival on May 7, 2013, with trumpeter Sergiu Carstea and the Sebastian String Quartet.

From the very beginning of the creative process, I meant to compose something melodic, happy, bright, and (especially) appealing in its thematic material. I chose a single-movement sonata-form structure to avoid any disruptive breaks. Endurance for the trumpeter was a concern, so I wanted to keep the piece less than fifteen minutes long. Choosing trumpet and string quartet inspired me to delve into contrasts: wind vs. strings, individual vs. group, modernity vs. classicism, freedom vs. constraint, jazz vs. classical, etc. in order to find—or at least try to find—a true balance.

Instead of distributing one theme to the strings and the other one to the trumpet, I chose to present both themes in the trumpet, though these are always preceded by the same introductory motive played by the strings. This introductory motive is itself constructed using elements taken from the two main themes in a manner illustrated by the diagram in Figure 2.

The first theme (notated in 12/8 meter) includes two sections (A+B): the first one in F (main key) and the second in D-flat. The second theme (notated in 9/8 meter) is in C and uses only a single antecedent-consequent phrase. The codas close this second theme and all the exposition in the key of B (a tritone away from the initial tonic of F). The development section runs through numerous permutations along these lines.

Because the exposition is only a presentation of apparently unrelated elements, the goal of the recapitulation is to put each element in its proper place by demonstrating the hidden connection. Of course, another goal is to find balance, calm, and order. The recapitulation is symbolized by the diagram in Figure 3.

The most important aspect of the recapitulation is the fusion of the two themes (2 and 1A) at the leftmost side of Figure 3 and symbolized by the square with rounded corners (a fusion between square and circle). Make no mistake; the purpose is not to surprise! The purpose is really to make the audience think that they are listening to the first theme, when they are actually hearing the second theme together with the accompaniment of the first. This process, drawn from jazz, is, for me, one of the best ways to find balance within a piece of music.

The recapitulation resolves harmonic tension by returning everything to the tonic, hence the similar diagonal patterns in Figure 3. However, I have extended this recapitulation into domains other than key. Where the two themes were originally in different time signatures (12/8 and 9/8), I merged them here into 4/4 meter. Recapitulations normally use a single key,

but my concept also resolves tension by bringing together different modes and styles. The goal was to create order out of disorder—a true balance, if you will.

Of course, there are as many conceptions of sonata form as there are composers, so my only aim has been to share my creative process. If an understanding of a work of art is based on impression, emotion, and feeling, and if the composer's inspiration is inexpressible, then the creation is only based on technique, *savoir-faire*, sweat, and hard work!

Now, by way of conclusion, I would like to direct myself to the brass player who is interested in performing this piece—not just analyzing it. Of course, my music is tonal; even if my music were not tonal, like twentieth-century classical music (because it uses a lot of different modes and scales), it still is part of a Classical lineage. For those experienced with complex contemporary compositions, my music probably seems quite simple from a technical point of view, and that is the problem! While it is not so difficult technically, it demands a high level of musicality and requires the understanding of the form in order for its message to become intelligible.

Why would a musician run the risk of performing a new piece of music that seems so simple for the audience? Let's become modest again. The performer, as well as the composer, is not aspiring to his or her own glory. They are here for the unique purpose of serving the music, not themselves. They are here to make the audience daydream and to share the music with all the people, in order to share a different kind of world—that of beauty—so that all of us can rise and shine like stars together.

About the author: In a career of fifteen years, French composer Vincent A. Jockin (SACEM) has already authored more than fifty works for various ensembles (orchestra, choir, quartet, piano, etc.). His first album of compositions was released in 2012. Since then, he has generated a growing interest across the world, with premieres in Spain, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Australia, and France. In 2014, he published three additional works for brass: Brass Quintet, Op. 27, No. 2; *Shine of Brass (Éclats de Cuivres)*, Op. 28, No. 1 (for horn, trumpet, and trombone); and Trio for Trumpet, Horn, and Piano, Op. 28, No. 2.

Endnotes

- 1 I am grateful to Georgiana Dragota for assisting me with the translation of this essay from French into English. Leonard Bernstein, "On Modern Music," *Gentleman's Quarterly* (Summer 1958), 76 and 123ff.

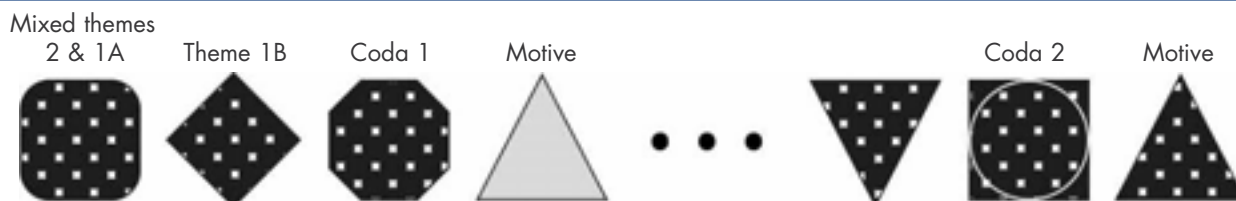


Figure 3. A graphical representation of the recapitulation of my Quintet