THE OBOE CONCERTO OF JOHN HARBISON:
A GUIDE TO ANALYSIS, PERFORMANCE, AND THE COLLABORATION WITH
OBIST, WILLIAM BENNETT

DOCUMENT

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
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ABSTRACT

Oboists are extremely fortunate to have a twentieth-century concerto written by John Harbison, a highly sought after, award-winning, and prolific American composer, in their repertory. Unfortunately, this significant work has not yet been fully integrated into the standard repertoire due to its complexities and a lack of thorough scholarly documentation. I hope to change this by being the first to complete such documentation. The project includes proper analysis of the work and a study of the collaboration between John Harbison and William Bennett, the oboist for whom the piece was written, to identify how much the performer influenced the composition. In addition, performance concerns and difficulties, along with their subsequent suggestions for interpretation and execution, are contained in the text.

Harbison, former composer-in-residence with the Pittsburgh Symphony and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, is a Pulitzer Prize winner. He wrote his *Oboe Concerto* in 1990-1991 for William Bennett, principal oboist of the San Francisco Symphony.

This study utilized many different methods. I have collected biographical information on Harbison and Bennett and documented the historical context of the concerto, including its conception, collaborative process, and premiere. A detailed structural analysis is also included, containing form charts for each movement. In
addition, I interviewed both Harbison and Bennett and had an oboe lesson with Bennett on this concerto. Transcripts of these interactions are included in the document. Finally, I have practiced and performed this work.

The three-movement concerto is unique in its employment of traditional baroque forms, jazz, and blues. The first movement is based on a Gregorian chant-like theme and is composed in sonata form. The second movement is a two-voice passacaglia, and the third is a fantasia designed to sound like a 1920s big band. Bennett collaborated extensively with Harbison, and Bennett’s suggestions, personality, and playing style influenced the concerto. These conclusions are extremely significant because valuable interpretive and technical insights are presented from two primary sources, John Harbison and William Bennett. From these insights, this work will become more comprehensible for scholars and more accessible for oboists and become an enduring piece in the oboe repertoire.
Dedicated to my mom and dad
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank John Harbison for his participation in my document and his many insightful and useful quotes. I also thank Sarah Schaffer, John Harbison’s extremely helpful assistant, for her generous time in this endeavor.

I thank William Bennett for his enthusiasm of this project that included giving me a wonderful oboe lesson and allowing me access to many original scores and reviews.

I am grateful for my amazing oboe teacher and adviser, Professor Robert Sorton, along with my other supportive committee members: Dr. Jere Forsyte, Dr. Russel Mikkelson, and Professor Christopher Weait.

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<td>2002</td>
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

G.P.: grand pause

Intro: introduction

m: measure

mm: measures

mvt: movement

N/A: not applicable

qtd.: quoted
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

INTEREST IN THE STUDY

My interest in this study developed at the age of 18. I was first exposed to
twentieth-century oboe concertos as a freshman music major at the State University of
New York College at Fredonia. There I heard a performance of John Corigliano’s
Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra and John Harbison’s Quintet for Winds. I
immediately fell in love with these two pieces and became obsessed with twentieth-
century music. My oboe professor informed me that both Corigliano and Harbison,
whom I declared as my new favorite composers, wrote concertos for oboe and orchestra.
After listening to recordings of them both, I decided that I would perform one in the
school’s concerto competition. When the time came for me to choose a concerto to
compete with, I decided that Corigliano’s Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra was more
accessible at the time, and I was fortunate enough to perform a portion of it with the
school’s orchestra during my senior year. Since I did not learn Harbison’s Oboe
Concerto as an undergraduate, I decided that I would study and perform it in my doctoral
degree program. While speaking with colleagues about this piece, I was shocked to
discover that no other oboe student in my master’s or doctoral programs had performed
it, and many had not even heard it before. I decided I would try to change this through my research, which includes a lecture-recital and this DMA document.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

There is a great need for a study of this kind because John Harbison’s *Oboe Concerto* is one of the most beautiful, exciting, and fun concertos that oboists have in their repertoire. However, it is not performed frequently by professional orchestras nor is it studied regularly in conservatory or university music programs. This is due, in part, to the concerto’s complexity and technical demands and a lack of understanding stemming from a void of scholarly documentation. Through this document, I wish to make the piece more understandable and accessible in the hopes that it will gain the popularity it deserves.

I will solve two problems with this study. The first is to analyze the form and performance issues of the concerto so that the work will be more comprehensible to music scholars and performers. The second is to determine to what degree William Bennett, the oboist for whom the piece was written, influenced the final composition of the concerto. This will have crucial implications for the role of the performer in the creative and interpretive process of this work.

This document contains eight chapters. Throughout these chapters, I have included a brief biography of John Harbison and William Bennett and a history of the concerto’s conception, collaboration, and premiere. In addition, this document contains a detailed structural analysis of the work as well as a description of difficulties the oboist may encounter while learning the piece. Suggestions to overcome these potential
problems are also included for successful execution and performance. Finally, I have devoted one chapter to the transcript of the interview I conducted with Harbison and one chapter to the oboe lesson and interview with Bennett.

**PROCEDURES**

A widespread acceptance of this work into the standard oboe concerto repertoire will only be achieved through comprehension of Harbison’s and Bennett’s intentions. In this study, I have examined specific compositional and performance intentions through four main methods: analysis, interviews, lesson, and oboe practice. I analyzed each concerto movement in order to identify its unique compositional characteristics and have included form charts for each movement within the document text. Through my interview and subsequent correspondence with John Harbison, I was able to verify much of my analysis with the composer himself. The lesson with William Bennett was devoted to stylistic interpretation as well as practice and execution of difficult technical passages and twentieth-century oboe techniques found in the work. Through these procedures, it is easy to see that Bennett’s suggestions, personality, and playing style influenced Harbison in writing a work that is complex, intricate, and ingeniously structured while remaining deeply musical and emotionally stirring.
JOHN HARBISON

John Harbison is one of the most celebrated American composers alive today. He was born in Orange, NJ on December 20, 1938, and has been a recipient of many prizes, including the MacArthur Fellowship and Heinz Award. In 1987, he won the Pulitzer Prize for his cantata *The Flight into Egypt*. Harbison has served as the composer-in-residence for many prestigious orchestras, such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Pittsburgh Symphony (Sadie and Tyrell 10: 841), and the Tanglewood, Aspen, and Marlboro Music Festivals (McCutchan 43). In addition, he has been commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera, Atlanta, San Francisco, and Boston Symphonies (Sadie and Tyrrell 10: 841-842).

John Harbison grew up in Princeton in an intellectually and musically stimulating environment where he studied both classical and jazz music (St. George 1). He credits jazz music and the music of J.S. Bach to be his earliest musical influences. As a child, he studied piano, violin, viola, tuba, and voice (“John Harbison: Conductor”). At the age of 11, Harbison was a jazz pianist in his own band (Sadie and Tyrell 10: 841) and for quite a while was not sure if he wanted to enter the profession of classical or jazz music (Harbison, Interview 59).
John Harbison received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Harvard in 1960 where he studied composition with Walter Piston. While at Harvard, Harbison received awards in poetry as well as composition. In 1961, he furthered his study at the Berlin Musikhochschule with Boris Blacher. Harbison earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from Princeton in 1963 where he was a pupil of Earl Kim and Roger Sessions (Randel 357; Sadie and Tyrell 10: 841).

Jazz music has been a huge influence on his compositional style, and jazz rhythms, harmonies, and instrumentations find their way both consciously and subconsciously into his music. Harbison has also been greatly affected by early music, Bach cantatas, (Harbison interview, 58-59) and the music of Igor Stravinsky. Compositions from the composer’s early period depict “…the dual influences of serialism and Stravinskian neo-classicism.” He “…went through a period of intense engagement with serialism before finding his own distinctive voice.” (Sadie and Tyrell 10: 841) In this unique style, one can find innovative approaches to classical and baroque forms and some traditional techniques such as imitation and sequence (Spittal 16).

Today, John Harbison is a distinguished Institute Professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology where he teaches one term a year. He is also an avid conductor, conducting a Bach cantata series every season at Emmanuel Church in Boston and various concerts with new music ensembles (Harbison, Interview 58). From 1969-1973, he conducted the Cantata Singers in Boston. He has also been the conductor of Collage, a new music group, beginning in 1984. In December 1993, the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston asked him to conduct a group of Messiah performances. While teaching, Harbison resides in Massachusetts, but he does most of his composing during
the summer months at his mother-in-law’s farm in Wisconsin (St. George 2-3; von Buchau 22).

**WILLIAM BENNETT**

William Bennett was born in New York City on May 31, 1956 (Bennett, E-mail, August 15). He joined the San Francisco Symphony in 1979 as associate principal oboe at the young age of 22, playing next to his long time idol, principal oboist Marc Lifschey. Lifschey retired in 1985, and Herbert Blomstedt, the Symphony’s music director, appointed Bennett as Lifschey’s successor in 1987 after two grueling auditions (Bennett, Interview 117; von Buchau 21).

Bennett grew up in Connecticut where his father, an amateur clarinetist, was a physics professor at Yale. Bennett began to learn the clarinet as a young boy as his older sister was studying the oboe (Bennett, Interview 122-123). He said:

…my older sister…studied…for a very short time and found out that you have to make reeds, and she thought, “That was a loser.” …she’s much smarter than me, and she suggested that maybe I should go to the next lesson. So, she gave me her instrument, her reed tools, and everything and sent me off, and I kind of liked the idea of having these knives (Interview 123).

Thusly, Bennett switched from learning the clarinet to learning the oboe. He studied the oboe with many different students of Robert Bloom before finally studying with Bloom himself at Yale. Bennett then continued to study with Bloom for one year at Juilliard before winning his job with the San Francisco Symphony (Bennett, Interview 124).

Bennett frequently solos with the San Francisco Symphony. In addition to the Harbison *Oboe Concerto*, he has played Richard Strauss’s *Oboe Concerto* and *The Flower Clock* by Jean Françaix. Likewise, he has performed the concertos of Bach,
Samuel Barber, Joseph Haydn, and Frank Martin. Over the last two decades, Bennett has performed often in Europe, the Americas, and the East as a recitalist, chamber player, orchestral musician, and concerto soloist. Likewise, he has played at the prestigious Aspen, Festival D’Inverno, and Marlboro festivals along with Tanglewood’s Berkshire Music Center.

Today, in addition to serving as the Symphony’s principal oboist, Bennett is on faculty at the San Francisco Conservatory (“Members of the Orchestra: William Bennett, Oboe”).
CHAPTER 3
HISTORY OF THE CONCERTO

CONCEPTION

Shortly before Bennett was appointed the San Francisco Symphony’s new principal oboist, he made the finals for the principal oboe position with the Boston Symphony Orchestra (Bennett, Interview 117). Not wanting to lose him to Boston, Blomstedt and the management of the San Francisco Symphony decided to entice Bennett to stay in California by commissioning an oboe concerto for him (von Buchau 21). The concerto was to be written specifically for Bennett, and he would play the premiere performance. Bennett fell in love with Harbison’s writing after playing his *Quintet for Winds* with the Caselli Ensemble, a woodwind quintet made up of San Francisco Symphony musicians, and felt that he would be the best composer to write him a concerto (23-24). Bennett said, “I had wanted a piece, and I loved his writing. I knew of his interest in jazz, and there wasn’t yet an oboe piece that did that. I thought it would be really fun if we could try to do that.” (Bennett, Interview 118) The orchestra management decided to commission Harbison for the concerto. However, they failed to inform Bennett about this commission. Eventually Bennett began to hear rumors from other musicians that Harbison was composing a concerto for him. These rumors prompted Bennett to write Harbison a letter inquiring about the commission. When
Harbison confirmed the rumors and told Bennett that he was indeed writing a piece for him, Bennett asked the composer if he would entertain his thoughts on the writing of the concerto. Harbison agreed, and this began an extensive collaboration process between the composer and oboist, perhaps the most elaborate collaboration between composer and performer to result in an oboe concerto (Bennett, Interview 118; von Buchau 24).

COLLABORATION

To begin this collaboration, Harbison asked Bennett to find out if anyone in the orchestra’s clarinet section could play the alto saxophone (von Buchau 24). Donald Carroll, the Symphony’s bass clarinetist at the time, played the saxophone on the performances and the recording (Bennett, E-mail). Harbison wanted to explore the jazz potential of the oboe even though the oboe is not typically thought of as a jazz instrument (von Buchau 24). Below, the composer explained what he meant by this jazz potential of the oboe by comparing it to the woodwind instrument used most often in jazz music, the saxophone. Harbison said:

…the oboe has in common some of the very powerful expressive capacities of some of the other reed instruments like the clarinet, the saxophone, and the bassoon, but it has a great advantage over the saxophone in that the sound of its different pitches is not as uniform as the saxophone. When the saxophone is played, the player has to do a huge amount of inflecting to make the instrument interesting, but the oboe and the bassoon are actually interesting inherently because the different notes on the instrument have different timbres. …one of the things I was thinking of about the oboe and the jazz inflection is that the oboe, when it plays phrases which might be associated with the jazz language, can in some ways be even more detailed in its expression than the saxophone. Because in some ways, I think that saxophone players through the twenties, thirties, and forties in the United States were just learning to turn their instruments into an oboe, in terms of the variety of sound (Interview 69-70).
Next in May of 1991, Bennett wrote Harbison a lengthy letter about the commission that included his playing limitations and different finger combinations that would or would not work well on the oboe. Bennett also sent him tapes of some of his past performances and comments on the existing solo oboe repertoire. Bennett mailed Harbison recordings and sheet music of *Le Api* and *Concerto Sopra Motivi Dell’ Opera “La Favorita” Di Donizetti* (qtd. in von Buchau 24). Both were written by the Italian oboe virtuoso, Antonio Pasculli. In addition, Bennett included one of his own compositions, a set of fifteen solo variations on Mendelssohn’s *Wedding March* that he wrote for a cousin’s wedding. In this letter, Bennett suggested a larger orchestra than is usually used to accompany an oboe concerto, and he wanted the concerto to showcase the orchestral musicians. Lastly, Bennett asked Harbison if he could write one of his “…trademark, apocalyptic swing numbers.” Harbison responded to this letter by telling Bennett that their ideas were similar but that Bennett might be surprised by the concerto’s “…structural relationship to Bach cantatas.” (qtd. in von Buchau 25) After Harbison completed some of his initial concerto sketches, he would than mail them to Bennett. Bennett would record himself playing the sketches and mail them back to Harbison with written reactions (Bennett, Interview 128). The orchestral score was completed in Token Creek, Wisconsin on October 18, 1991 (Harbison, a, 90). Harbison finished the piano score in December of 1991 and informed Bennett of its completion with a card that stated, ‘Ear candy it has!’ Bennett received the complete concerto from Harbison in January 1992 (qtd. in von Buchau 25).
PREMIERE

The concerto was premiered in San Francisco on December 2, 1992, at 8pm in Davies Hall with William Bennett and the San Francisco Symphony conducted by Herbert Blomstedt. In addition to the concerto, the Symphony also performed Till Eulenspiegel by Strauss and Symphony No. 5 by Ludwig van Beethoven.

TOUR

After the premiere in San Francisco, Bennett performed the concerto on tour with the Symphony on the following programs:

New York City, Carnegie Hall: March 9, 1993, 8pm
   Paul Dukas: Sorcerer’s Apprentice
   Harbison: Oboe Concerto
   Jean Sibelius: Symphony No. 7
   Stravinsky: “Firebird” Suite

Frankfurt, Jahrhunderthalle Hoechst: March 14, 1993, 8pm
   Carnegie Hall program

Vienna KonzertHaus: March 17, 1993, 7:30pm
   Carnegie Hall program
Hamburg, Musikhalle: March 19, 1993, 8:30pm
  Carnegie Hall program

Copenhagen Tivolli: March 22, 1993, 8:30pm
  Carnegie Hall program

London, Royal Festival Hall: March 24, 1993, 7:30pm
  Harbison: *Oboe Concerto*

  Anton Bruckner: *Symphony No. 4* (Bennett, E-mail, August 15)
CHAPTER 4
CONCERTO ANALYSIS

INSTRUMENTATION

2 Flutes (second doubling piccolo)
2 Bb Clarinets
Alto saxophone (doubling bass clarinet)
3 Bassoons (third doubling Contrabassoon)

2 Horns in F
2 Trumpets in Bb
2 Trombones
Tuba

Timpani

Percussion (3 players)
   Tubular Bells
   Xylophone
   Tam-Tam
   Suspended Cymbal
   Crash Cymbal
   Gong
   Glockenspiel
   Vibraphone
   Snare Drum
   Triangle
   3 Wood Blocks
   Temple Blocks
   Marimba

Harp

Strings (Harbison, b, inside cover)
STUCTURE AND FORM

The concerto is written in three movements to be played without breaks in between. The movement titles suggest baroque forms (Harbison, b, inside cover). In the program notes of the premiere Harbison wrote:

In my view, the orchestra has two leaders, the concertmaster and the principal oboist. There exist concertos which seem to be designed for a concertmaster, like the Stravinsky Concerto or the Haydn Concertante, where the soloist plays a great deal with small groups of his or her colleagues. In Baroque concertos, such as the Bach Double or the Brandenburgs, the soloist even plays along in some of the tutti passages, as if to underline the common origins of soloist and section player. This Oboe Concerto gradually evolves toward this collective ideal. At the end, soloist, concertino groups, and the orchestra as a whole aspire to a clear and calm unity (qtd. in von Buchau 23).

This work cannot be analyzed using traditional 1-IV-V-I harmonies as the concerto does not contain key signatures. However, Harbison does use blues and jazz harmonies, modes, and pedal points that “…provide tonal centers and a sense of formal progression throughout the movements.” (Riggs 68) In addition, the concerto’s large scale structure is exceedingly clear, and its micro-form is also quite obvious. Smaller gestures and motives constantly develop using some traditional techniques such as retrograde, sequence, and diminution.

MOVEMENT I—“ARIA”

The word ‘aria’ is a term applied to any lyrical, solo voice piece. In the 17th and 18th centuries, this term was also used for instrumental music written in a vocal style or containing a subject suitable for variations (Sadie and Tyrrell 1: 887).

This movement can be analyzed in sonata form. An outline of the movement follows this text.
### Table 1. Macro-form chart, mvt. 1 (Riggs 68).

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<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; key area)</td>
<td>(2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; key area)</td>
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<tr>
<td>THEME</td>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TONAL CENTER</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORCHESTRAL PEDAL</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>1. E</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. F#</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>B’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEME</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>1. A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. G</td>
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</table>
The tonal center of this movement is E. The tempo at the beginning, Tempo I, is indicated at half note equals 66. The movement opens in 3/2 and should be played in a vocal style. It begins with a four measure introduction in which there is an E orchestral pedal. After the introduction, an exposition occurs from mm. 5-90. The exposition starts with the first key area, which is the A section, comprising mm. 5-64. The A section has an orchestral pedal of E in mm. 5-13. The theme of this movement is based on a Gregorian chant-like melody in the E Phrygian mode (Harbison, Interview 70). This melody, theme 1, first occurs in the accompaniment at m. 5, the beginning of the exposition, and finally in the solo oboe at its entrance in bar 37. Since theme 1 centers around an E, the various pitches go away from the E and then return to it again. The F’s and D’s create dissonance and give a suspended, uneasy quality to the theme. Half note triplets are an important rhythmic gesture. While these triplets are played in the theme, the accompaniment below usually contains quarter and 8th notes. The juxtaposition of these rhythmic elements creates a free, vocal, and almost improvised-like quality to the solo line that seems to be appropriate in an aria. This first theme can be heard in many different orchestral instruments. It is first presented by horn 2 and trombones in mm. 5-12. These instruments are playing the same pitches, with different rhythms, that the oboist has in mm. 37-43. Horn 1 and trumpets take over the theme in mm. 12-17. The brass, again, play the same notes that the solo oboe will play in mm. 44-47. In mm. 16-22, flute 1 has the same pitches but different rhythms as the solo oboe has in mm. 44-49. Horn 2 and trombones again take over this thematic material in bars 21-26, which is the same material that the oboist will play in bars 54-57. In mm. 32-36, the first flute plays the theme to be continued by the oboist in mm. 54-57. Measures 35-36 contain a ritard.
into the a tempo at m. 37. The musical example below illustrates the beginning of the chant theme, theme 1, in the solo oboe.

![Musical example of the beginning of chant theme in solo oboe, mm. 37-43, mvt. 1 (Harbison, c, 2)](image)

The orchestral pedal changes from an E to an F# in mm. 37 when the solo oboe enters with the theme. This F# pedal lasts until bar 56. Lastly, mm. 59-64 contain an A pedal as mm. 59 begins to modulate to the new tonality of the B section.

The **B section** (second key area) is in D, begins in m. 65, and continues until m. 89 (Harbison, E-mail, August 19). This section is in 2/2 at Tempo I, half note equals 66. Harbison marked this section to be played smoothly and mysteriously. The second theme is first presented in mm. 65-78 in the solo oboe. Half steps are extremely important in this theme, and large leaps by minor 9ths and octaves are also prominent. Half steps are equally prevalent in the accompaniment, and the celli and violas contain many
syncopated rhythms in this B section. The beginning of the second theme in the solo oboe is contained below.

Fig. 2. Beginning of second theme in solo oboe, mm. 65-74, mvt. 1 (Harbison, c, 3)

This second theme is developed using diminution. In the solo oboe, mm. 79-82 contain the same material played in bars 64-72 diminished by half. In other words, these bars, mm. 79-82, are played twice as fast as the first time theme 2 was presented. Measures 88 and 89 contain a ritard. There is a grand pause at m. 90 before the C section begins. Next is an example of the second theme as it is diminished, beginning in mm. 79.
The development consists of mm. 91-145. The C section comprises bars 91-140. This section is now marked Tempo II, quarter note equals 100, and is in 2/2. Harbison referred to this section as a “blues interlude” (Harbison, b, inside cover). The C section opens with melodic thematic material played by the bass clarinet and bassoons. This material is repetitive and contains syncopated 8th note and dotted quarter note rhythms. These woodwinds are accompanied by a solo string bass playing mostly pizzicato quarter note triplets. After this brief introduction, the solo oboe enters in bar 100. Harbison wrote a glissando in between the soloist’s octave A’s in m. 102. During this C section, the oboist has large leaps by 7ths and octaves. There are numerous syncopations in the oboe part, including written accents on weak parts of the beat such as in mm. 112, 114, and 115. Harbison also included quarter note quintuplets and grace notes that add to the bluesy, improvisatory feel. At m. 124, the thematic material from bars 91-99 returns, although it now serves as accompaniment to the solo oboe and this time is in the bassoons and trombones. The previous string bass solo is still pizzicato but is now played by the entire bass section. These accompaniment gestures become an ostinato figure that is repeated throughout, until the section ends at m. 141. Above these gestures, the oboe has
many different rhythmic values and grace notes. Starting in m. 124, Harbison exploits
the instrumentation to make the audience feel as if it has suddenly been transported out of
the concert hall and into the Blue Note as trombones 1 and 2 use a cup mute and trumpet
1 plays with a plunger. This trumpet solo is a repeat of the earlier material in the oboe.
The trumpet music from mm. 124-136 is identical to the oboe part from the second half
of m. 111 to bar 123. Like the trumpet, the alto saxophone plays a solo from bars 124-
133. Here, the saxophone is used for the first time in this movement since the opening
three measures, and its material is identical to the solo oboe’s material in mm. 100-109,
except for two pitches. In m. 127 on the and of beats 2 and 3, the alto saxophone has a
concert G and F. In the corresponding place in the oboe part, the soloist has a concert F
and Eb. In this C section, the oboist plays its highest note in this concerto, an F# (first F#
above the staff) in m. 137.

There is a transition section that leads us back into the recapitulation. The
transition occurs in mm. 141-145. This section is indicated at Tempo I, half note equals
66. It is in 3/2 and contains melodic and rhythmic material from the A section.

The recapitulation begins in m. 146 and lasts through m. 174. It is made up of
an A’ section containing the first theme, a B’ section, and a grand pause. The A’ section,
mm. 146-159, is back to E Phrygian and is marked meno mosso, half note equals 56. It
remains in 3/2 throughout. As indicated in the score, the oboe may delay its first
entrance, m. 146, by as much as one measure. Here, the oboist has a written out cadenza
in two voices to be played extremely freely. The pitches in the upper voice of this
cadenza make up theme 1, and the G#’s in the oboe’s lower voice are also important
notes because they provide harmony and accompaniment to the chant theme and make a
major 3\textsuperscript{rd} interval with the E orchestral pedal. After the downbeat of m. 146, the only pitch played in the accompaniment is an E. The E is played as 16\textsuperscript{th} notes in the first and second violins, one section at a time. Harbison wrote in the score, “The string accompaniment, quietly and mysteriously, moves spatially away from the soloist.” (Harbison, a, 24) The oboist ends this section on a long A that gives an interval of a perfect 4\textsuperscript{th} with the violin E’s. A ritard occurs in m 159.

Next, the B’ section comprises the pickup to m. 160-m. 173. This section is even slower than the previous one, but like the former section, it is also a written out cadenza. The score indicates meno mosso, half note equals 52. It is in 2/2 and contains material from the B section, including theme 2. One would expect the theme to be presented in E if Harbison was keeping with traditional sonata form. Instead, this theme is written in its original key of D. In the pickup to m. 160-m. 167, the oboe has the same skeletal structure that it had in mm. 65-72. In other words, the pitches are the same, but some decoration now occurs between these pitches. This is depicted in the following figure. This portion sounds very ethereal as the only accompaniment instruments are strings and harp. Harbison wrote a descending pattern of perfect 5\textsuperscript{ths} in the orchestral pedals. An A pedal occurs in mm. 160-164, a D in mm. 165-168, and a G in bars 169-173. Circle of 5\textsuperscript{ths} pedal progressions are often used in jazz and frequently used in baroque writing (Riggs 68). There is a grand pause in m. 174.
The coda begins in m. 175. Theme 1 occurs in this A’’ section, mm. 175-182, which Harbison called a “Gamelan celebration” (Harbison, b, inside cover). The tempo here is back to Tempo I, half note equals 66. This section is in 3/2, and the pitches played on the downbeat are the same pitches that occurred on the downbeat of m. 1. Marimba and violin 2 play repeated E 16\(^{\text{th}}\) notes just as marimba, trumpet, and cello did in the opening measure. The oboe 16\(^{\text{th}}\) notes in mm. 176-182 are a diminished presentation of the original chant theme, and Haribon stated, “…it’s a kind of compressed restatement of the opening melody…it goes all the way once through the melody and then cadences on the A.” (Harbison, Interview, 77) The oboe and first violin play this same material from mm. 176-182. As the oboist plays “within the orchestral tutti” (Harbison, c, 6), the listener is reminded of a baroque concerto grosso. All of the other accompaniment players have 16\(^{\text{th}}\) notes. A grand pause occurs in bar 183.
There is a brief two-bar **closing section** in mm. 184-185. In these measures, the oboe and strings end on a held A as marimba and harp play 16\textsuperscript{th} note A’s. In the piano reduction, however, it looks as if Harbison wrote 16\textsuperscript{th} note C’s in the left hand. This is an error; the treble clef is missing (Harbison, E-mail, September 19). Accompanists must be aware of this so that they do not play A and C pedal 16\textsuperscript{th} notes instead of just the intended A. The final bar of the movement, m. 186, contains a grand pause and an attaca.

**MOVEMENT II---“PASSACAGLIA”**

A ‘passacaglia’ is a form in which a bass subject is repeated continuously throughout the movement. Variations happen above the subject, which may also be varied and/or transposed (Sadie and Tyrell 19: 191-192). A form chart of this movement is contained on the next page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEASURES</th>
<th>1-10</th>
<th>11-40</th>
<th>41-50</th>
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<tr>
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<td>B</td>
<td>A’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBJECT NUMBER</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>TONAL CENTER OF SUBJECT(S)</td>
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<td>1. D minor</td>
<td>2. F minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSTRUMENTS PLAYING SUBJECT(S)</td>
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<td>1. flutes 2. cellos 3. bassoons 1 and 2</td>
<td>bass clarinet, bassoons 1 and 2, horns, trombones, harp, timpani, violins, viola</td>
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<tr>
<th>MEASURES</th>
<th>51-67</th>
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<th>86-95</th>
<th>96-125</th>
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<td>D</td>
<td>A’’</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>1. D minor</td>
<td>2. F minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSTRUMENTS PLAYING SUBJECT(S)</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>violins, viola</td>
<td>oboe</td>
<td>bassoons, horns, tuba, timpani, harp, strings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Macro-form chart, mvt. 2
This entire movement is in 3/4 with two different primary tempos. Tempo I is indicated as quarter note equals 76-80, and Tempo II is marked quarter note equals 72. The opening is in Tempo I and should be played boldly, vigorously, and decisively. The character is very dark, dissonant, and almost angry sounding. The subject of this passacaglia is ten measures long and originally stated in a B tonality. Below, Harbison described the opening of this movement.

Well, the tonality is B, some sort of a B. In fact, I certainly think there is a way in which the whole passacaglia subject can be heard referential to B with the first sonority being just the two notes of the B minor triad. In terms of the conception of the piece, it’s more important just to focus on the intervals of each measure. It’s a two-voice piece. The passacaglia subject is in two voices, and what will recur as the passacaglia are those intervals. They’ll be absolutely intact in every statement of the passacaglia; that’s unvaried. (Harbison, Interview 78)

The intervals of the subject are a minor 3rd in m. 1, a minor 2nd in m. 2, a major 2nd in m. 3, an augmented 2nd (or minor 3rd) in m. 4, a major 2nd in m. 5, a minor 3rd in m. 6, a major 2nd in m. 7, and a major 3rd in m. 8. On the first beat of bar nine the interval is a minor 3rd, on beat 2 a major 3rd, and beat 3 an augmented 2nd. In bar 10, the interval on beat 1 is a major 3rd, on beat 2 a minor 3rd, and the final interval on beat 3 is a diminished 4th. These intervals follow in chart form.
### Table 3. Intervals of passacaglia subject, mvt. 2

<table>
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<tr>
<th>MEASURE</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tr>
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<td>minor 3rd</td>
<td>minor 2nd</td>
<td>major 2nd</td>
<td>augmented 2nd</td>
<td>major 2nd</td>
<td>minor 3rd</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEASURE</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| INTERVAL | Beat 1: minor 3rd  
Beat 2: major 3rd  
Beat 3: augmented 2nd | Beat 1: major 3rd  
Beat 2: minor 3rd  
Beat 3: diminished 4th |

In the opening ten measures of this movement, the passacaglia subject can be found in the bass clarinet, first and second bassoons, trumpets, trombones, timpani, harp, and strings. The soloist does not play in these opening ten bars.
The A section consists of the original presentation of the passacaglia subject, bars 1-10. Measures 9 and ten 10 contain a two-bar poco ritard into the slower Tempo II.

The B section begins in m. 11 and lasts until m. 40. This whole section is in Tempo II, quarter note equals 72. The passacaglia subject transposes up by minor 3\textsuperscript{rd}s throughout the movement (Harbison, Interview 79). For example, the subject in mm. 11-20 begins on D and F on the downbeat of bar 11 to make the minor 3\textsuperscript{rd} interval. During these ten measures, the subject is in the flutes. In mm. 21-30, the subject begins on F and Ab. Here, it is played by the cellos. Bassoon 1 and 2 play the subject in mm. 31-40. The subject is again transposed up a minor 3\textsuperscript{rd}, making the first two bassoon notes G\# and B.
In this B section, the oboe plays a long, beautiful, and lyrical melody over the repeated subject. This oboe melody starts out serene and delicate. It appears to be through composed and independent of the passacaglia happening beneath it. However, the solo contains mini-climaxes every ten bars as the subject begins again. This gives the listener something auditory to grab onto, making the movement’s structure more apparent and comprehensible. It also gives cohesion to the movement as a whole.

The A’ section is from mm. 41-50. It is in Tempo I. There is a two-bar ritard in mm. 49 and 50 to the poco meno mosso. When the A section returns as A’, so does the transposition of the original passacaglia subject. The beginning two pitches are again B and D. The subject is played by the bass clarinet, first and second bassoons, horns, trombones, timpani, harp, violins, and viola. More harmonic and rhythmic tension is added at this A section variation with more half steps and duples against triples than earlier in mm. 1-10. There is no solo oboe in this section.

The C section occurs from mm. 51-67. It is in Tempo II, and in this section, the passacaglia subject disappears. Harbison stated, “…There is really an oasis in the middle of the piece, which is kind of isolated. It’s almost like two-measure interval fragments of the passacaglia which are extended, and then, of course, the passacaglia returns later [in m. 86].” (Interview 80) Although the passacaglia subject is absent here, it is easy to identify the intervals that are common between the subject and the C section. For example, the first interval of the subject is a minor 3rd. The harp, vibraphone, and first and second clarinets play a D-F minor 3rd tremolo in the first measure of the C section. Various minor 3rd tremolos remain prevalent throughout the section, and the solo clarinet sextuplets usually end with the same interval. This whole portion has a dreamlike,
ethereal quality due to the quiet tremolos. The solo oboe plays many large intervallic leaps that are answered by either the clarinet or bass clarinet playing sextuplet runs during the oboe’s long notes. There is a ritard in bar 67.

The D section, mm. 68-85, remains in Tempo II. The passacaglia subject is also absent here. This place in the score is fuller and richer than the C section and begins with a mezzo forte or forte in the accompaniment. The minor 2nd, which is the interval in the second measure of the subject, is important in both the solo oboe and accompaniment. Starting in m. 68, the upper strings introduce the new triplet motive that is followed by 8th notes and grace notes. When the soloist enters in m. 76, he or she has the same first pitches that the upper strings had in bar 68. The soloist then plays the 8th note and grace note gestures. The first clarinet and first flute have solos consisting of sextuplet runs, reminiscent of the clarinets’ figures in the former section. Measures 84 and 85 contain a molto ritard.

The passacaglia subject returns in the upper strings in the A’’ section, mm. 86-95, and is in the same transposition as the A and A’ sections. Tempo I also returns here, followed by a poco ritard in mm. 94 and 95.

Section B’, mm. 96-125, is thirty measures long. This is the same length as the prior B section, and B’ is likewise in Tempo II. This last major portion of the passacaglia movement contains continuous 32nd notes in the solo oboe part. Here, the oboist plays the notes of the subject with the melody pitches and also accompanies itself with tremolo notes. This style of writing, in which the soloist accompanies him or herself by juxtaposing different registers, was favored by Antonio Pasculli, the oboist mentioned earlier. Bennett also used this technique in his wedding composition. Harbison had
never heard any Pasculli pieces before this collaboration, and he said, “...I got quite interested in these because it was a kind of a concept of the oboe that I didn’t know about.” (Interview 64) He also said, speaking about this movement in his own composition, ‘You’ll see that I’ve brought Pasculli into the twentieth century.’ (qtd. in Bennett, Interview 131) In this 32\textsuperscript{nd} note passage, the passacaglia subject is consistently the lowest two notes in the oboe part. Therefore, the subject begins on D and F in the oboe in mm. 96-105. In bars 106-115, the passacaglia starts on F and G#, and in the next statement, mm. 116-125, it begins on G# and B. These three transpositions of the subject correspond with the similar places in the B section and follow the constant, upward minor 3\textsuperscript{rd} transposition of the movement. Harbison also stated, “Basically what the solo oboist is doing in this instance is what the orchestra did before. It’s laying down the passacaglia subject, and the tunes are in the other folks.” (Harbison, Interview 81) Although the soloist consistently plays the subject, he or she also has the difficult task of playing the melody notes at the same time. These notes, which are also in the accompanying instruments, are the oboe’s accented 32\textsuperscript{nd} note pitches. Following are the opening bars of this perpetual motion section.
The final section of this movement, A''', begins in m. 126 and lasts until the ultimate bar of the movement, bar 137. Here, the loudest place in the movement is reached as the bassoons, horns, tuba, timpani, harp, and strings play the subject. This last section is written in the first tempo, and for the ending, Harbison finished the cycle of transposition by bringing the subject back to its original key of B. However, unlike the previous A sections, A''' is comprised of 12 measures. After the original 10-bar subject is presented in its entirety, Harbison added a two-bar tag so that this movement would connect harmonically to the next movement. This lengthening of the final presentation of the subject creates tension for the performer and listeners which will be resolved by the attaca to the third movement. The final chord of the last section is a cluster of many different pitches. One can hear, however, an F# major triad. This chord is the 5th of the new key of the third movement, which is in B. Also, the F# is an important pedal in the upcoming movement.
MOVEMENT III---“FANTASIA”

The term ‘fantasia’ was primarily used in the Renaissance for an instrumental composition whose structure and invention were exclusively derived from the ability and fantasy of the composer. During the 16th and 19th centuries, the characteristics of a fantasy varied significantly. It may have been free and improvisatory, contrapuntal, or sectionalized (Sadie and Tyrrell 8: 545). A form chart is contained for this movement, which is primarily made up of the opening section, three oboe cadenzas framed by three orchestral tuttis, and the coda.
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<tr>
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<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; CADENZA</th>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>G</td>
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<td>ORCHESTRAL PEDAL</td>
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<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; TUTTI</th>
<th>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; CADENZA</th>
<th>G.P.</th>
<th>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; TUTTI</th>
<th>CODA</th>
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<td>228-244</td>
<td>245-286</td>
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<td>288-312</td>
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<td>D’</td>
<td>C’’</td>
<td>G.P.</td>
<td>D’’</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>D Dorian</td>
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<tr>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>F#</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Macro-form chart, mvt. 3 (Harbison, E-mails)
This movement starts in 4/4, and the indicated tempo is presto, quarter note equals 240. This fantasia, which is in B, takes on the character of a 1920s big band. The introduction is the A section of the movement and comprises the first 28 bars. The B section, mm. 29-123, is based around G. After a grand pause, the A’ section returns to the B key center. A’ begins in m. 124 and lasts until m. 142. In referring to the harmonies of this movement, Harbison said:

…B is going to be the key of the movement. There is a huge middle part around G, but B is the key of the movement. The whole introduction is about a pedal point on F#, the dominant pedal upon which is superimposed little riffs in G. However, the first sonority is various forms of dominant with neighbor tone dominants of B. That is either side of the F# and then finally, the F# sharp itself in the fifth bar. Although the play, the tension tonally all through the movement, is between the two key centers: the B which is represented most often by its dominant, the F#, and then, this little complex around G, the semi-modal jazz complex around G. They contend with each other, and then finally, the coda is in B. In the coda, the final section of the piece, there’s a reiteration of the introduction and the circling around the F#, and then the F# settles in as the pedal point. Then finally, it does bring about a real B, which it didn’t before. It’s a real root position B, which it’s been threatening to do but really doesn’t ever do until the end. (Interview 86-87)

The A, B, and A’ sections contain syncopations, call and response, and big band instrumentation such as alto saxophone, muted trumpets, and trombones. The B section contains various walking bass patterns. Below, Harbison described the phrasing that he used in this movement.

…actually, what I tried to do in writing a big band number was to place a restriction on that, which would add something else to the equation, something very different. So, I adopted this technique of what I would call additive phrasing, which is that I would take a phrase model and then enlarge it from inside. So, that’s what is happening in the introduction of the piece, after the first four measures. Each of those little phrases is being expanded from within it, and you can almost see it on the page. So, it’s the middle of the phrase that’s gaining girth, and that actually continues to happen all the way through the movement… There’s a little two-bar phrase at m. 29, and then, it expands by a measure. It
expands really in the middle of it, and then the next one expands by another measure. Now, the interesting thing about that is that the bass line ignores that and plays the larger pattern. So, all the way through this piece, there are these little riffs. They are unlike jazz riffs, which would be in symmetrical phrases, that is the basic phrase lengths would be multiples of each other, because these phrases are enlarging at their center, the midpoint, all the time. The phrases are of unequal length. My hope was, that these big band things would have another twist that one wouldn’t necessarily hear at the surface, but which would certainly be influential in terms of the way one hears it as a whole… (Interview 84-85)

As mentioned in the previous quote, Harbison expanded these oboe motives by adding onto the middle of each melodic and rhythmic gesture. For example, Harbison uses the first three oboe pitches in bar 9 as the first three oboe pitches in bars 11 and 18. He also uses the last three pitches of bar 9 as the last three pitches in mm. 12, 15, and 20. Each gesture is longer than the former, however, by adding notes in between these consistent first and last pitches. This happens again in the oboe gestures throughout mm. 28-37, 41-49, 58-61, 63-81, 124-133, and 337-354. Each of these little subsections has different starting and ending pitches, but the pattern for development in between remains similar to the one established in the opening 20 measures.

For the opening oboe gestures of the A section, mm. 9, 11-12, etc…, Harbison stated that he used C as an axis around which he composed the other pitches (Interview 87). This is clear on the page. For example, in mm. 11 and 12, the C is directly in between four pitches to the left and four pitches to the right. The other pitches are in symmetrical intervals from the C. The downbeat of m. 11 is a major 2nd above the C, while the last note of m. 12 is a major 2nd below the C. The F on the and of beat 1 of m. 11 is a perfect 4th above the C, and the G on beat 2 of m. 12 is a perfect 4th below the C. It is interesting to note that even in bar 9, the pitch C acts as an axis even though it is not
notated in the bar. One can imagine a C between the C# and B. The other pitches are in symmetrical intervals around this imaginary C, just like in the previous example. This axis is used in almost every similar oboe gesture that occurs later. Below are the opening oboe gestures where the C pitch axis and growth in the middle of the measures are evident.

![Opening solo oboe gestures, mm. 9-20, mvt. 3 (Harbison, c, 10)](image)

It is also interesting to see Harbison use some traditional development techniques. For example, the oboe part in m. 124 that is shown on the next page is a retrograde of its material in m. 9, and measures 126 and 127 is a retrograde of mm. 14 and 15.
This movement contains three oboe cadenzas or “excursions” as Harbison called them in his program notes (Harbison, c, inside cover). The oboe playing is constant with repeated pitches, development, and continuous meter changes. These elements give the cadenzas an improvisatory feel that one might find in jazz or a baroque fantasia. The cadenzas are accompanied with orchestral drones dissonant to the soloist and various instruments that play the same material as the oboe. Harbison originally stated in the score that the conductor may mark the downbeats of each measure of these excursions or leave them entirely unconducted (Harbison, a, 73). He wanted the orchestral players to almost memorize the meter changes and accompany the soloist as if playing jazz. This eventually happened in later tour performances but only after much rehearsal time (Interview 88).

The **C section**, the first cadenza of the movement, starts at the pickup to m. 144 and ends on the downbeat of m. 183. Here, the soloist is playing in B Aeolian against dissonant C pedals in the accompaniment. This section is to be played excitedly with the new quarter note equaling the quarter note from the previous A section. This cadenza contains many different meters, such as 7/8, 3/4, 8/8, 12/8, 6/8, 5/8, 2/4, 4/4, 3/8, and 2/2, that change rapidly between one another. The oboist’s range in this incredibly difficult
cadenza is from a low C# (half step above middle C) to a high E (first E above staff). Minor 3rd, half steps, major 7th, and minor 9th are important intervals here. In this excursion, certain intervals and pitches from one measure are often repeated in the next bar or two bars later. This helps to create cohesion for the listener. An example of this is in mm. 158-165 as the D-B interval in m. 158 repeats later in m. 160. Also, the F#-E-D pitches in m. 161 repeat in mm. 163 and 165. In addition to the development of pitches, rhythms and meters likewise develop in this cadenza. For example, in mm. 169, 171, and 174, one D is consistently removed from the number of D’s that came before. Below are a few opening measures of the first oboe cadenza.

Fig. 10. Beginning of first oboe cadenza, mm. 143-147, mvt. 3 (Harbison, solo oboe part, 12)

After each of the three cadenzas, there is an orchestral tutti refrain section. Each refrain is used structurally to confirm the soloist’s mode in the previous excursion, and each is a variation of the other (Harbison, Interview 89).

The end of the C section, downbeat of m. 183, elides with the beginning of the D section. The **D section**, which is an orchestral interlude with no soloist, begins at this
downbeat and continues through m. 194. The D section is in 2/2 and should be played with force. The new tempo is half note equals 60, with the previous whole note equaling the new half note. This fortissimo section contains many triplets against duples, which can create an uneasy feeling.

Next comes the C’ portion, mm. 195-227, comprising the oboist’s second cadenza. Here, the soloist is in C Locrian, and the tempo and style are the same as indicated in the first cadenza. Just like in the C section, this place contains many different time signatures that change rapidly. The soloist’s range in this excursion is from a low Eb (first Eb above middle C) to a high Eb (first Eb above staff). Leaps of minor 9th are prominent, and descending minor 3rd intervals are abundant. Similar to the previous cadenza, pitches are repeated and developed both melodically and rhythmically.

D’ also elides with the end of the C’ section and consists of mm. 228-244. This section is a variation of the previous orchestral interlude. It is played in the same tempo and meter as the D section and contains similar rhythmic motives such as quarter note triplets followed by a half note. This portion also has the same basic melodic contour, but most of these pitches are a half or whole step higher than in the previous corresponding places.

The oboist’s third cadenza is the C’’ section beginning at m. 245 and ending at m. 286. This last excursion is in the same tempo as the prior two and contains comparable meter changes. The tonality of this last cadenza is “D Dorian but freely harmonized” (Harbison, E-mail, August 19). The oboist’s range is from a low D (step above middle C) to a high E (E above staff). Diatonic sequences are used frequently as in mm. 265-266 and mm. 270-271. Interval, pitch, and melodic motive repetition supply cohesion.
The final refrain is played by the oboe soloist. This section, mm. 288-312, is labeled D” and is also a variation of the former D sections. Unlike the previous two refrains, this place follows a grand pause and does not elide with the end of its corresponding cadenza. In Harbison’s program notes he states that this ‘…last refrain is suddenly intimate and reflective, ushering in an elevated, serene coda based on the beginning Fantasia.’ (qtd. in “John Harbison: Concerto for Oboe”) The tempo and meter are the same as in the two previous interlude sections. Here, however, the oboist plays the melody in a sweet character, as opposed to the forceful nature used by the orchestra in the other two places. In mm. 288-290, the solo oboist has the same pitches as the first violin had in mm. 183-185, except for the first C natural in the oboe; it is a C# in the violin. Later in this passage, the pitches in the oboe line are up a full step from the corresponding violin pitches in the first D section tutti.

Lastly, the movement ends with a coda in bars 313-356, labeled A”’. The coda, which is in the first tempo, is in B. It begins in 2/2 and remains in this meter until the end of the piece. The coda is a false recapitulation as its first eight bars are identical to the movement’s opening eight bars, except for the orchestration of the percussion instruments. In addition, instead of the oboe entering with the same material that it had at its first entrance, it now has a sweet and singing melody. This melody, mm. 321-336, contains the same rhythmic motives with different pitches as the opening eight bars of the movement. In mm. 337-the end, the soloist has continuous 8th note gestures answered by its own B-C# trills. These 8th note motives were developed from the oboe’s first motive in m. 9. The first two 8th notes in m. 337, F-D, are retrograde of the D-F 8th notes in m. 9. Likewise, the last two 8th notes in m. 337, Bb-G, are retrograde of the G-Bb pitches in bar
9. All of the oboe’s 8th note gestures in the coda develop by adding pitches to the middle of them, as described earlier. The final chord of the movement, stated by Harbison himself in the interview, is a root position B major chord (87).

This coda contains two cuts that Harbison added after the score was complete. The cuts, from m. 329-m. 336 and m. 339-342, are included in the published piano reduction and were taken on Bennett’s recording. Since then, Harbison has changed his mind and now prefers the ending to be played as originally written, without the cuts (Harbison, Interview 67-68).

The piece ends anti-climatically and in the words of Harbison, with a “…Chaplinesque final gesture.” (Harbison, c, inside cover) When Harbison was asked why he wanted to end the piece anti-heroically and anti-climatically, he responded:

The piece is not, in the end, about the hero struggling to break free, but it is the leader reconciling the whole group. So, this concerto did not seem to want to assert the utter independence of the soloist but rather the soloist’s ability to lead everyone to the same place (Interview 89).

Bennett was not entirely pleased with the way this concerto concluded and requested a bigger, more dramatic ending (Bennett, Interview 122). Harbison initially complied with this request and wrote another ending in which he inserted two forte bars before m. 355. On the manuscript of this ending, Harbison wrote to Bennett, “Another possible approach to making the ending more final (though I’m not sure we want to).” (Harbison, Letter) In the end, Harbison stayed true to his original idea and did not change his original ending. The ending with the inserted forte bars is not published.
CHAPTER 5
PERFORMANCE CONCERNS AND SUGGESTIONS

This piece is extremely difficult, both technically and musically, and is perhaps the most challenging concerto in the oboe’s repertoire to date. One of the biggest challenges facing any oboist performing this work is its endurance demands. The piece is about 20 minutes long, and there are few rests in the soloist’s part. As stated earlier, the movements are to be played continuously, without breaks in between. Because of these factors, sufficient breath control and embouchure endurance are essential to performing this piece well. In order to build up this necessary control and endurance, it is imperative that one consistently practices long tones and runs the concerto as many times as possible. Obviously, one is going to begin working on the concerto in small sections before putting it together as a whole, but it is important to begin running the piece in its entirety as soon as possible, even before it is completely learned up to tempo. Also, a few weeks or months prior to performance, one may want to begin jogging. This can help the oboist perform the piece without being quite as winded and fatigued as he or she may have been otherwise. As I was not a runner prior to performing this piece, I built up jogging endurance the same way I would embouchure endurance. I ran short distances and made sure that my breathing always remained rhythmic. As soon as I lost control of
my breath, I stopped jogging. I was eventually able to run longer and longer distances while maintaining controlled and rhythmic breathing.

This piece also poses many technical challenges due to its indicated tempi and difficult finger patterns. Likewise, the concerto contains many trying rhythms and articulations. These will be examined more in depth in each movement.

Making the right reed to successfully perform this work can also be difficult. The orchestration is thick at times, and one must have a big enough reed to be heard above the accompaniment. Some of the loud, accented low register notes in the last movement require that the reed be very open. Conversely, one must have an easy and light enough reed so that he or she can make it through the entire piece, in terms of embouchure endurance and breath control. The many quick, low register passages and glissandi need a free and vibrant reed. However, each movement also requires that the oboist play loudly and strongly in the extreme high registers as well as quietly and delicately in the same range. In those sections, a more focused and stable reed would be appropriate. Therefore, one must spend many hours making a reed that can do all of these requisite things.

MOVEMENT I

In the first movement, the endurance problems are immediately evident as the soloist is required to play 53 consecutive measures at a slow tempo, including ritards, with only three and a half slow beats of rest. Breaths must be carefully planned and consistently practiced to be able to play these phrases and have enough air for all of the dynamic contrasts and ritards. Since this opening is based on a chant-like theme, the
oboist should try to sound as vocal as he or she can. The dynamic contrasts must be brought out as much as possible to lead the listener to the important notes in the phrases, such as the F in m. 38 and the D in m. 46. In mm. 56, Bennett suggested omitting the decrescendo because the underlying accompaniment is so dense. Also, the next bar needs to be played forte. One should only diminuendo when it is indicated in m. 62 (Interview 92-93).

In the B section, mm. 65-89, the oboist must be able to make very rapid changes of character. The opening should have an element of mystery and an almost masked quality. It needs to sound very fluid and connected while the oboist brings out the important pitches in the passage. For example, the sforzando D in m. 67 and the tenuto D in m. 72 must be emphasized. A more violent quality begins to surface with the fortепiano E in m. 76, and the oboist can really open up and go wild from m. 78 to the end of this section. Again, the important notes need to be brought out to the listener. In mm. 84 and 85, the low notes in the line must be highlighted. Measures 88 and 89 should be played as smoothly as possible while getting proportionately quieter and slower to usher in the new section (Interview 93-96).

The next section of this movement, mm. 91-141, is the blues interlude. There are a few note clarifications that must be addressed. In m. 106, the oboist should trill the Db to an Eb, not an E natural as indicated. The last note of the quintuplet in m. 107 should be a C natural, and the B should be trilled to a C natural (Harbison, Interview 77).

This interlude is likewise tremendously challenging for the player because of endurance. After only the ten bars of rest that follow the previous tiring section, the oboist is required to play 41 consecutive measures with only an 8th note worth of rest in
the last measure. In regards to range, the performer is also stretched. The oboist plays piano low C#’s in m. 107 and then, wails in the high register in bars 126 and 137-139. The soloist’s highest note in the concerto, the high F#, is found in m. 137 and must be played fortissimo.

Since it is vital to accentuate the bluesy character of this interlude, the oboist is free and encouraged to take many liberties with the music. An example of this is playing glissandos. Harbison notated only one, in between the octave A’s of m. 102, but other spots can be added and are left to the discretion of the soloist (Harbison, Interview 74). One could be added in m. 100 before the high A, m. 108 before the Bb, m. 112 before the C, m. 114 before the D, and m. 115 before the C. Bennett added many more, and glissandos can certainly be played in between any large interval where the oboist is comfortable and has enough time.

Before an oboist attempts glissandos in this section, it would be helpful to listen to some recordings of Johnny Hodges to try to imitate his blues style. Hodges was the lead alto saxophone player in Duke Ellington’s saxophone section. A glissando on the oboe is produced by manipulating both the embouchure and the air. To do this, one should start with a little less air pressure than normal, roll the reed out a bit, and drop the jaw at the start to play the first note slightly flat. While sliding to the next pitch, one should increase the air pressure, roll the reed in, and raise the jaw to a more normal embouchure position. This causes the desired pitch sliding effect. Even though the glissandos sound free and improvisatory, they should all be practiced because some are easier to do than others. In addition, each reed will require slightly different fluctuations in air and embouchure.
The rhythms throughout this section are varied and complex. Harbison uses a mixture of 8\textsuperscript{th} notes, 16\textsuperscript{th} notes, triplets, quintuplets, and sextuplets. It helps to play some of them strict and straight and some swung. The rhythms in mm. 100-124 should be played fairly strictly to line up with the accompaniment. More freedom can be used in mm. 125-141 to help accentuate the blues and jazz character. The high F on the fourth beat of m. 126 can be elongated, but then the following 16\textsuperscript{ths} must be played a bit hurriedly so that the oboist is not late to the subsequent downbeat. This can also be the case with the high D on beat 2 of m. 128 and the high D on beat 3 of bar 131. On Bennett’s recording of this concerto, he swung the 16\textsuperscript{th} notes in mm. 129-130 and mm. 133-139. Bennett suggested that these measures should be practiced swung, even if the performer’s goal is to eventually perform them straight (Interview 99). This will help the oboist capture the style and better convey it to the audience. In m. 137, Bennett played the first high F of the measure like a dotted 16\textsuperscript{th} followed by a 32\textsuperscript{nd} note E and dotted 16\textsuperscript{th} F. This pattern was also followed in the next bar (Bennett, Recording). As I cannot recall a time I have ever performed swung rhythms in an oboe solo, I elicited the help of a jazz saxophonist friend. With his help, I decided to alter the articulation Harbison wrote in mm. 133-136 because the friend felt that the notes would only really swing if slurred. Included is an example of the measures as Harbison wrote them and the measures with suggested additional slurs and accents added in red.
This written out cadenza, mm. 146-173, poses similar endurance problems as some of the previous passages. Therefore, the oboist may wish to delay its entrance as Harbison has allowed for in the score (Harbison, c, 12). Delaying the entrance will also help the soloist adequately change character from the previous wailing blues section to a more subdued, yet expressive, style. Another challenge is to play the wide slurred intervals as smoothly as possible while adequately differentiating between the two voices.
To best execute wide downward leaps, one may crescendo slightly at the end of the upper note and then quickly and infinitesimally drop the air pressure just before playing the lower pitch. While making these changes in air, it will also help to push the reed a bit into the upper lip as the low note is fingered. In order to play an upward slur smoothly, one needs to increase the airspeed right before going up to the higher note. It will also help to change the vowel inside the mouth from an “ah” to an “ee”. If these techniques are used throughout, it will be easier to make this section more legato. After practicing these intervals for quite some time, one should try to bring out the two voices as Harbison has indicated while maintaining the overall line and smoothness (Harbison, c, 6). It is important to realize that in this cadenza, the pitches in the upper voice make up the opening chant theme of this movement. This must be emphasized so that the listener can discern the chant from the lower, accompanimental oboe voice. Pacing the air within the indicated ritards can also be difficult and should be sufficiently practiced. Even though bars 160-173 are marked piano, the oboist must give enough support so that the low notes will always speak.

The tonguing of the Gamelan celebration is very trying and must be diligently practiced. Most oboists will wish to double tongue this section. Double tonguing here is a little bit more challenging than normal as many runs begin on the second 16th note of a beat, not on the first. The oboist must therefore begin on a “kah” or “gah” syllable. This should be practiced many times very slowly so that the correct syllable is said. Also, the “kah” or “gah” must be explosive so that the low E it most often produces speaks loudly, clearly, and on time. The fingerings in this section can feel awkward. However, if the oboist realizes that the pitches make up a diminished version of the original chant theme,
(Harbison, Interview 77; Riggs 69) it may help in learning and execution. The 16th notes need to be practiced slowly and in varying rhythms so that the fingers and ear learn to play the theme at this new, lightning quick speed.

**MOVEMENT II**

This second movement is very challenging for many reasons. It consists of extremely long phrases that push endurance to the limits. In addition, this movement contains continuous, exceedingly fast 32nd notes with awkward fingerings. The 32nd note section, as well as the cadenzas in the last movement, is the most technically demanding place in the piece, in regards to speed and fingerings.

The oboist is required to play an exceptionally long and taxing passage as soon as it enters in m. 11. During this whole B section, mm. 11-40, the oboe does not have a single rest. Breaths must be meticulously planned and consistently practiced. Good places to breathe are after the Bb in m. 17, after the Bb in m. 25, after the A in bar 30, and after the downbeat Eb in m. 35 (Bennett, Recording). Some optional places to breathe are after the Eb in m. 22 and after the first D# in bar 39. One should take those breaths only if it is absolutely necessary.

The opening character of this section is nostalgic and delicate. The oboist must play as smoothly and connectedly as possible, especially during the wide octave leaps. The long oboe melody contains high points in mm. 21, 31, and 41, corresponding with reiterations of the subject. It is important that the soloist is aware of this underlying structure and brings out these climaxes for the listener. This will help the listener to better understand the form upon initial hearing. The septuplets in mm. 28 and 37 must be
executed rhythmically accurate. If the second note of each is stretched, the D in the first bar and the E in the second, it will be easier to play the figures correctly.

In mm. 51-66, the best thing to do musically is to bring out the frequently occurring wide leaps to highlight their heroic quality. One must pull back dynamically in mm. 54, 56, 58, 62, and 66 so that the clarinet and bass clarinet sextuplets can be heard. Most likely, these players will take some time during their runs. Therefore, the oboist must listen for the clarinet downbeats to know where to place his or her after-beats in mm. 55, 57, etc… The oboist should bring out the half step intervals in mm. 76-82 as Harbison indicates with the tenuto markings (Harbison, c, 8). Bars 84 and 85 contain a ritard, and it is essential that the oboist’s third beat F lines up with the first violin F on the same beat. Bennett marked this as a reminder to himself in the unpublished score (Harbison, d, 51). Subsequently, the following fortepianissimo D on the downbeat of m. 86 must be coordinated with the recommencement of the passacaglia subject.

This next passage, which is section B’ (mm. 96-126), is perhaps the most intimidating at first glance. With enough time, energy, and diligence, any competent oboist can perform the 32nd notes. First, it is imperative to decide which alternate fingerings will be utilized in each measure. Practice should start by only playing the accented, melody notes and leaving out all the 32nd notes in between. This will train the eyes, ears, and fingers to know where they are aiming, and this type of practice will make learning the 32nd note patterns considerably easier. This section should then be practiced slowly, one measure at a time. One should play the 32nd notes first as 8th notes, then triplets, and then 16th with various dotted rhythms. It will also help to practice this whole section in six for quite some time and then gradually move the metronome upwards from 50.
8th note equals 112 to 8th note equals 132. Lastly, one can switch to practicing slowly in three until it is finally possible to play the indicated tempo. This whole process will most likely take many weeks or even months.

Circular breathing in this section is best, however, this concerto can certainly be performed if an oboist does not know how to circular breathe. Harbison felt that his musical intention would still be conveyed, (Harbison, Interview 82) and he indicated many places where the oboist can leave out 32nd notes (Harbison, c, 8-9). These notes would then be taken over by various orchestral members or the accompanist if performing with piano. The oboist must determine exactly where he or she wants to leave out notes as all of the indicated suggestions in the solo oboe part are not actually necessary for a non-circular breather. For example, one can choose to only leave out beat 3 in m. 102, beat 1 in bar 103, beat 3 of m. 110, beat 1 of m. 111, beat 3 of bar 122, and beat 1 of bar 123 or other combinations as seen fit. Since the accented notes are melodic pitches, they need to be played more than the tremolo, accompanying 32nd notes. The oboist can decide whether to simply use more air and/or tongue on those notes or to play them a bit longer than the surrounding notes. It will sound more musical to slightly stretch each melody note, playing some longer than others as the phrasing dictates, but this will probably depend on ease of technique, since the stretching must not interrupt the overall rhythm. Listed on the next page are some fingering suggestions to perform these difficult measures more easily.
m. 96---play all F’s forked
m. 98---use left hand Ab-key and left hand Eb-key at the same time throughout the
measure (except for A natural on beat 2) [Bennett used left hand Eb’s in this measure
and right hand Ab’s instead of using both keys simultaneously.] (Harbison, f, 7)
m. 101---play all F’s forked
m. 102---play all F’s forked and leave Eb-key on through the end of the measure
mm. 103-104---play all F’s forked
m. 105---use G#-key on beat 3 C#, and leave G#-key on for the rest of the measure
m. 106---use Ab-key on downbeat Db, and leave Ab-key on for the rest of the measure
m. 107---use the F-Gb trill fingering
m. 110---use the F-G trill fingering
m. 111---use Ab-key on downbeat Eb, and leave Ab-key on for the rest of the measure
m. 112---use Ab-key on all of beats 1 and 3
m. 113---use Ab-key on downbeat Eb, and leave Ab-key on for the rest of the measure
m. 114---use Ab-key for all of beat 1
m. 120---use Ab-Bb flat trill fingering
m. 125---play forked F on downbeat
MOVEMENT III

This movement is probably the most technically difficult due to its speed. The syncopated rhythms, varied articulations, and constant meter changes during the excursions also add to its difficulty. The tempo of quarter note equals 240 should be aimed for, but if it is not quite attainable, it is more important to play the movement one notch slower on the metronome while maintaining the stylistic integrity, than to play it faster, unsteady, and flippant.

The correct big band style of this movement must be addressed early on and consistently executed before the practice tempo is increased. To help achieve this character, Bennett suggested that the performer should try to make the oboe sound like a percussion instrument. In order to obtain this goal, the final note in nearly every oboe gesture should be accented as if playing a rim shot. In addition, all of the syncopations must be brought out and accented (Interview 113). Most of these syncopations happen on a C in the oboe part. It is structurally important to bring out all of the syncopated C’s because, as discussed earlier, Harbison used the C in each gesture as an axis around which the other notes were composed. Next is an example of this; both the final notes and the syncopated C’s are circled.
All of the gestures must be practiced slowly and in dotted rhythms to solidify the fingerings. Forked F’s can primarily be used whenever an alternate F fingering is called for. One cannot really hear that forked F’s are being played because the movement is so fast, and it makes the subsequent low B’s and Bb’s easier to play than if a left F is played before them. Bennett, however, marked left and forked F’s intermittently throughout his original solo part, so the oboist can certainly decide what is most comfortable for him or her. Practicing these passages in slow, dotted rhythms will also help the player learn to perform the many different articulations accurately and evenly.

From mm. 29-122, the soloist must play out and make sure he or she can be heard over the accompaniment. The orchestra has call and response motives with the soloist, and the oboist’s answer must not get lost in the texture. In mm. 79-81, the oboist is required to play low B, Bb, B, and Bb in quick succession by sliding the left pinky. This
slide can be difficult to do if the finger is not lubricated. Therefore, the performer should make a note in the preceding rests to rub his or her pinky on the outside of the nose in order to grease the finger. Once this is accomplished, the somewhat intimidating measure will become quite easy to play.

All of the excursions are demanding for a variety of reasons. The fingerings are very difficult, especially at the presto tempo. Rhythmically they are likewise challenging as the meters change nearly every bar. For these reasons, they must be practiced many, many times tremendously slowly so that the performer can begin to aurally and tactitely memorize the different metric patterns. The oboist must make sure the 8th note remains constant throughout all of the changes before increasing the tempo and should try to accent each rhythmic grouping, whether it is a duple or triple. This will not only help the player, but the conductor and orchestra as well (Bennett, Interview 114). Bennett included a cautionary sticky note for himself in the final cadenza. He wrote “fumble” over m. 265 (Harbison, d, 103). This bar is very awkward at the indicated speed. Clearly, extra practice is warranted to sound as effortless and clean as Bennett did on his recording.

These cadenzas are also taxing due to their length. The oboist can play each in one breath, circular breathe, or sneak breaths in. It is up to the comfort of the player. A quick breath can be taken after the final high D in bar 171. This will give the player more lung power to play the following loud, accented low C#’s and crescendo to a fortissimo. The second excursion, mm. 195-228, will most likely be played in one breath. The final cadenza, bars 245-286, is the longest and toughest to play in one breath. However, there are a few spots to breathe. A slight ritard can be played in mm. 268-269. A breath would
then be taken before beginning the next bar, 270, which would be back in tempo.

Similarly, a ritard could be played in mm. 274-275 with a breath taken before returning to the old tempo in bar 276. Lastly, a breath could be placed after the third A quarter note in m. 277. A slight space would be needed to take this breath before continuing in tempo. No ritard would be needed in this instance. This breath is similar to the one suggested for the first cadenza. Only one of these breaths really needs to be taken, and it must be worked out with the conductor and orchestra or accompanist ahead of time. As the player continues to work on this concerto and builds up endurance, a breath may not be needed after all, but it is imperative that the performer plans out at least one in case it is needed in the heat of a performance.

The following section, mm. 288-312, is arguably the hardest in the entire work. As Bennett did in the final cadenza, he showed his true feelings about this section with yet another yellow sticky note. This one said, “tired” (Harbison, d, 105). This spot is so difficult because the oboist has just played about 18 minutes of mentally and physically taxing music with few rests. After playing tremendously fast and loud in all registers of the instrument, the performer must immediately play long and soft high notes in a dolce quality. The oboist may be simply fatigued at this point in regards to embouchure endurance, breath control, and mental focus. Upon seeing longer, softer notes in the slower tempo, the tendency is to start this section too slowly and then drag. This will only exacerbate the aforementioned fatigue issues. The soloist, conductor, and orchestra must keep this section moving at all times. Fortunately, there are many places to breathe here, such as in the rests of mm. 291, 292, 302, and 303 and after the long, tied notes. The oboist should feel free to take as many of these breaths as needed in order to fully
exhale, inhale, and recharge the lungs. These breaths sound very natural and also help to line up the soloist with the accompaniment.

Bennett changed two articulations in this section. He slurred the low C# half note triplet in bar 305 all the way to the downbeat C# in the next measure. He also did this exact same slur on the low C half note triplet of m. 307 to the low C on the downbeat of m. 308 (Recording). This makes the low notes speak easier and remain in the dolce character. The banana key can be used in mm. 307-308, or the right pinky can be slid if it is sufficiently greased as in the earlier low B-Bb slide.

Harbison marked the final coda of this piece to be played in the first tempo. It could work, however, played one click slower on the metronome as it is a soft, sweet, and vocal coda. As previously mentioned, Harbison would like the work to be played in its entirety, without the indicated Vide’s. It is imperative that when this long and difficult concerto winds down, the final F# attacks in the soloist line up exactly with the accompaniment.
CHAPTER 6

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH JOHN HARBISON

August 15, 2005

12 noon, EST

GENERAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

AF: I was wondering if I could ask you a few general questions before I ask you specific questions about your Oboe Concerto.

JH: Sure.

AF: Could you tell me where your current faculty positions are and if you are currently conducting any ensembles?

JH: I’m an Institute Professor at MIT, and I teach there usually one term a year. I generally conduct a Bach cantata series for about four or five weeks at Emmanuel Church. I’m called the Principal Guest Conductor. I’m only scheduled for two next year, but I usually do more. I also work occasionally with the Cantata Singers in Boston, and I’m doing a concert with a new music group called The Dinosaur Annex in March.
AF: I’ve read many articles about the importance of early music and contemporary music to your compositional style. Can you talk about what attracts you so much to those two types of music?

JH: Well, I guess with the recent music, I just like to know what’s going on. I recently programmed a new music festival at Tanglewood which mostly contained pieces that had come into me, [pieces] that I didn’t really have to go looking for. The early music was really centered around Bach and had to do with discovering this very large group of cantatas when I was in high school. Then, I was a conductor of an orchestra while I was in college. We did Bach cantatas. I started a group when I was in graduate school at Princeton, also to perform the cantatas. From there, I think I branched out to some 17th century music from Schein and Schütz. I think the interest in that really began very early with being involved in learning and performing the music of the cantatas.

AF: Of course I know that jazz is extremely important to you as well. Do you usually intentionally choose to incorporate jazz into your pieces, or is jazz subconsciously inherent to your musical language?

JH: Well, it varies. I think that at a certain point earlier on, I would be more conscious about introducing it or trying to work towards an integration of it. Sometimes, though, I would say the presence of it is not so much intentional but just a part of a way that I tend to hear because I was, for quite a long time, not certain which branch of music I was going to go into.
AF: I think it’s fascinating to play jazz music written by classical composers as an oboe player, and that’s one thing that really drew me right away to your concerto since I don’t get to play jazz very often.

JH: Yes, the oboe has been kind of neglected as a jazz instrument and also as an improvising instrument. Of course, it was part of the Bach and Handel culture where I think players, and musicians in general, were expected to be improvisers or be able to [improvise].

AF: I read an article in which William Bennett is quoted as saying, ‘I’m partial to atonal music, and I love the jazz idiom,’ speaking of your work (qtd. in von Buchau 21). Do you consider most of your work atonal?*

JH: Well, I don’t usually conceive it that way, but also certainly, I don’t have the capacity to state very precisely the way in which my composing is tonal. I don’t think I start any piece with a preconception of what allegiance it has to one or the other. I guess I find a lot of opportunities in situations where the tonality is not specified, but I also sometimes very much need to have a structure in which there is a very clear tonal location. I suppose the music that interested me most when I was starting to get into concert music was a mix of things that were both tonal and not tonal. From very early, on

* Bennett was misquoted in this article. He actually said, “I’m partial to tonal music…” (Bennett, Email, October 11)
Schoenberg’s music was very fascinating to me, and I didn’t think of it as much as non-tonal but as having harmonies that I wanted to make use of.

CONCERTO HISTORY AND COLLABORATION QUESTIONS

AF: I know that you had a relationship with the San Francisco Symphony prior to the composition of the Oboe Concerto. Can you tell me a little bit about your first commission from the orchestra?

JH: Yes, I wrote a symphony for them, the Second Symphony, for Blomstedt and the orchestra. That piece is actually a pretty typical case of a piece which is located somewhere between explicit tonality, and it also has a lot of sections that are not very decided as to where they’re located tonally. It’s a big dramatic piece, actually. It was also the time in which I became familiar with some of the players in the orchestra. Some of them had played chamber music that I had written earlier. I had dealt with or had begun to know some of them, particularly the principal wind players, quite a few years before that. There was a festival up there called Wet Ink where I worked for the first time with quite a number of San Francisco players. This was chamber music, and they played my Concerto for Oboe, Clarinet and Strings.

AF: Is this where you first became familiar with William Bennett’s playing?

JH: Yes, I think so. He was in a quintet. They played my [woodwind] quintet. Yes, I think that would be when I first became acquainted with him and his playing.
AF: Can you tell me a little bit about the chronology of the commission? William Bennett has recounted it in an article that is a little confusing. He stated that when he suggested you write the *Oboe Concerto* for him, the symphony administration ‘…already had a plum Harbison commission on the back burner and were reluctant to relinquish a purely orchestral work for an oboe concerto.’ (qtd. in von Buchau 24) Do you recall what this commission was that they had already had with you?

JH: I’m not sure that I ever knew about that, but it certainly was true that once he came up with the idea of the *Oboe Concerto*, we both wanted to do that. It seemed like a really good project for me because through all of my Bach conducting, I always thought of the oboe as a primary solo instrument for the orchestra, probably the most important solo instrument in the orchestra.

AF: Was Bennett the person that contacted you about the commission, or was it the San Francisco Symphony itself?

JH: I think it was from the Symphony. I think that probably it could’ve even been a conversation with Mr. Blomstedt, who I knew from working on the *Second Symphony*.

AF: Bennett also stated that he, ‘…wanted the great 20\textsuperscript{th}-century oboe concerto. He felt that you had a tremendous amount of pressure, but he felt that you came through (qtd. in von Buchau 22). Did you feel more pressure than normal when you were composing this piece?
JH: I didn’t, but I did want to make a really grand concerto, what one should call a symphonic piece. This goes back a lot to the sense of the baroque orchestra being divided into all kinds of small units that play with each other. I’m thinking of the oboist as the leader of all of these units, which is something that I knew from the orchestration of Bach cantatas.

AF: When you first became familiar with Bennett’s playing, can you describe what you thought characterized his playing and how this influenced the composition?

JH: I think that there were a lot of factors that influenced it. First of all, he is a very versatile player who stylistically ranges very far, and he is a player who is able to convey many different kinds of character. He also composes. He has a great sense of humor, and naturally, that sort of quality comes into his compositions. I wanted the piece to be a portrait of the soloist as well as a display of various relationships to the orchestra. I wanted it to reflect some of his temperament. I tend to do that in general when I write vocal music and solo music, to always have an initial personality in mind. It helps very much to focus the kind of music I want to write. Also, I knew that he was not only a leader in the orchestra but that he had a bunch of very close friends in the orchestra. In selecting the concertino groups, the groups that play with the soloist, I chose from among those people that I knew he hung out with.
AF: I’m hoping to be able to take a lesson with him on this piece in the next coming months for a lecture-recital on the concerto, and I’m really looking forward to that. I do think that his personality definitely comes across in his playing.

JH: Oh, it certainly does, and some people have told me that they can hear it also in the writing of this concerto, which I like. I’m glad to know that. He definitely plays extremely well when he has an absolute solo, that is to say by himself and accompanied, which I did a lot of in the Passacaglia movement of this piece. However, he’s also tremendously effective when he’s in some sort of unit within the orchestra. That’s one of the things that I was trying to get at in the final movement of this piece, the idea of the oboist collecting up and meeting home a whole bunch of his colleagues.

AF: Bennett has said that he wrote you a long letter in May of 1991 describing some of the ideas for the piece along with his playing limitations, which is quite hard for me to imagine that he had many playing limitations (24). I was wondering if you recall this letter and how it factored into the composition?

JH: Oh yes, definitely. In fact, I have a very interesting correspondence pertaining to the evolving of the elements of the piece. His limitations were, as you can imagine, not very prominent. He also sent me a tape of himself playing Pasculli etudes [Le Api and Concerto sopra Motivi dell’ opera “La Favorita” di Donizetti], and I got quite interested in these because it was a kind of a concept of the oboe that I didn’t know about. They’re
in another tradition from the central German oboe tradition, which is what I did know, and I became interested in trying to integrate some of that into the piece.

AF: This is the part, I’m assuming, in the Passacaglia where he accompanies himself by juxtaposing the different registers?

JH: No, I’m talking about the part in the Passacaglia where he gets into that perpetual motion figuration [mm. 96-126].

AF: Right, okay.

JH: One of things he told me is that he doesn’t circular breathe or that he was learning to circular breathe at that time. That’s become an issue with the piece, actually. It is worked out for a non-circular breather to play the passage, and it has been done that way. It comes across fine, but some people seem to think that they have to be able to execute every note of that passage. That passage [mm. 96-126] sounds like it’s just a noodling passage, just a pure virtuoso passage. In fact, one of the things I had to do to write it was to really understand the fingering issues for that speed because all of the notes in that passage are conforming to the passacaglia subject. Everything the oboist plays in that passage is the outline of the intervals of the passacaglia. Since in that register, in those lower registers, not everything can be quick, I had to really study to fit it together, that is, the execution of the passage and the passacaglia subject itself.
AF: Was this perpetual motion section also influenced at all by the wedding composition he sent you?

JH: Yes, well he did some fast passage work in that, very fancy too. He was sympathetic to one of the things I like about the oboe which is the powerful, expressive quality of the very lowest notes. Quite a few things in the concerto come to their arrival point, their most expressive point, in the lowest register of the instrument, which of course is the thing that as composers we’re often warned against. Though, there are quite a few Bach arias which do the same thing.

AF: Playing in the low register is one of my favorite things about playing the oboe. How did the recordings that Bennett sent you of him playing the concerto sketches change the concerto, and did the sketches evolve much?

JH: I mainly needed to check certain passages to see that they could be executed the way that I wanted them. Bennett would try them out. I also had an old, Italian book by Alfredo Casella that went into the technique of the oboe in very great detail. So putting that together with what he [Bennett] gave me, it was not such a big problem for him to confirm that things could be done. There are some very long phrases which other players, even Bach players, have found difficult in the piece. One of the things I had learned from my colleagues, my friends who play oboe, is the need to stop, and this piece pushes that right up to the edge.
AF: Have you collaborated with many other instrumentalists in the same way?

JH: Yes, I would have to say I have with the violin. Not in the same way but in similarly detailed ways, and then occasionally with singers, with the tailoring of a part for singer. When the Metropolitan [Opera] did my The Great Gatsby, the singer of Myrtle was Lorraine Hunt-Lieberson. For the first run, she and I reworked her part quite extensively in the placement of some of the low and the high notes. Then actually, in the second run, she went back to the original version. That was very interesting to work that out with her. I wrote a piece for Benita Valente, which was really like working with Bill. Her husband, who is also her manager, went over her voice with me, every half step of her voice.

AF: Was there anything in the score or the oboe part that was altered after Bennett and the orchestra first started rehearsals?

JH: There were some things in the timing of the cadenza. We worked out certain adjustments that helped him to set it up better and cover the lengths of the phrases better. That definitely was worked out in the course of it. Then of course, I had this idea at a certain point that I needed to shorten the final phrases, which I’ve now come to feel was a mistake.

AF: Are those the final phrases in the third movement with the Vides?
JH: Yes, I put a cut into that even after the recording was finished. It was recorded as it was originally, and then I had been thinking about it needing to be shorter. However, as I now look at the piece and examine it, I don’t like the cut that’s on the recording.

AF: How was the concerto first received at the premiere?

JH: Well, it was very mixed. Most of the San Francisco critics just really didn’t like it at all. I choose to feel they misunderstood the virtuoso passages as sort of make-work for the soloist, but they’re all very integrated into the subject matter of the piece. I think there are other factors. I think the piece was such a challenging feat for the orchestra to actually become fluent and nimble with the soloist. It was certainly about five performances, and I have actual recordings of some of those, before the piece gained a real kind of performance level. That is collectively before the conductor and the players really felt like they could handle it, particularly the last movement. I don’t think the cadenzas reached a totally presentable level until the Copenhagen performance on the tour when they suddenly really locked in. However, I tend to take the long view on things like that. There are some pieces where you want something that’s unusual to happen, and they may not be ready yet at the first downbeat.

AF: Do you feel that the piece has grown in acceptance over the years?

JH: Off of the recording it certainly has and in subsequent performances. Some of those problems become more manageable for performers that come along to it later.
AF: Why did you want to use traditional baroque forms within this concerto?

JH: *Because I associate those with the finest oboe music we have, which are arias in the Bach cantatas.*

AF: I also know that you spoke with Bennett and said that you wanted to explore the jazz potential of the oboe that we briefly talked about already (qtd. in von Buchau 24). What do you consider this potential to be for the oboe, and can you talk about some specific examples in the score where it was explored?

JH: Well, the oboe has in common some of the very powerful expressive capacities of some of the other reed instruments like the clarinet, the saxophone, and the bassoon, but it has a great advantage over the saxophone in that the sound of its different pitches is not as uniform as the saxophone. When the saxophone is played, the player has to do a huge amount of inflecting to make the instrument interesting, but the oboe and the bassoon are actually interesting inherently because the different notes on the instrument have different timbres.

AF: Right.

JH: So, one of the things I was thinking of about the oboe and the jazz inflection is that the oboe, when it plays phrases which might be associated with the jazz language, can in some ways be even more detailed in its expression than the saxophone. Because in some
ways, I think that saxophone players through the twenties, thirties, and forties in the United States were just learning to turn their instruments into an oboe, in terms of the variety of sound.

AF: Right.

CONCERTO ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

MOVEMENT I

AF: I was wondering if I could ask you some more analytical questions about the score.

JH: Yes.

AF: In the opening of the first movement, I feel that an E pitch center is set up very strongly, but I feel that the mode is a little ambiguous. Do you agree with this?

JH: Well, what I did in the first movement is I just made up a plainsong, like a cantus, which is a modal cantus. It’s an E mode, but it’s a Phrygian. That’s the cantus that’s played as the tutti, and then it’s played as the first oboe solo.

AF: Right, it’s in m. 5 with the first horn and trombones and then m. 37 when the oboe comes in.

JH: Yes, they play the same tune.
AF: I feel that A is also a strong pitch center in this movement. Is that due to the modal tonality?

JH: *Well, that’s the other possible tonal center for the mode, yes.*

AF: When the oboe enters at m. 37, the tempo is slower in the orchestral score than when the theme is originally presented in m. 5. However, in the piano reduction that is published by Hal Leonard, both places are marked at half note equals 66. Did the tempo evolve or change with the publication, or is that an error?

JH: *Hmmm. So it’s a faster tempo in the orchestral score?*

AF: It is, yes.

JH: *Hmmm. I’m looking at the orchestra score, and it’s 66 in both places.*

AF: Well it starts at 66, but at m. 37 in my score, when the oboe enters, that’s when it says half note equals 60.

JH: *Oh.*

AF: And it stays the same in the piano reduction at half note equals 66.
JH: But it changes in the orchestra score?

AF: Yes.

JH: Wow, because I have the orchestra score here, and it says 66. So I can’t answer the question, but I thought it would be the same.

AF: It says Tempo II, half note equals 60.

JH: Wow. If the change was made, it was made because it was a practical change. It didn’t sound quite right, just keep the same tempo, but I don’t recall that. In the score I’m looking at, it’s the same.*

AF: Okay. Hmmm. I notice that the half note triplets are very prominent in this movement. Can you talk about that a little bit?

JH: Yes. Well, I don’t know. It’s one of those things that are hard to get up to the conscious level because that was always the rhythm of that tune.

AF: I was feeling as I was practicing and learning this piece, that when the solo line has these triplets, usually there are duples underneath in the accompaniment. That helps me

* It was discovered later that we were looking at different editions of the score.
feel like I am more improvised or more vocal in quality than the accompaniment. I’m not sure if you agree or not.

JH: Yes, I would go with that. That seems right.

AF: I also notice that in m. 65, when there is a new theme in the oboe, the half step interval is very important. Is there a conscious reason for this, or is this intuitive to the melody?

JH: Well yes, that melody has different harmonic content too of course. It’s in the nature of a second subject. It also shifts tonal centers. There’s where I have the 60, Tempo II at m. 65.

AF: Yes, that’s in this score as well although, it doesn’t say Tempo II. It just says half note equals 60.

JH: I see. That was the place that I initially conceived of a slightly slower speed.

AF: Okay. Where exactly has the tonality center changed? Is that right on that measure [m. 65]?

JH: Well, it is actually when the oboe comes to the A at the end of the tune. There is a long dominant pedal [mm. 59-64] in which a lot of the harmonic content of the next tune
is introduced or is dwelled on, so that the end of the oboe tune has already made a modulation to the new harmonic content.

AF: In your program notes you mention a blues interlude in the first movement. Does that begin at m. 91?

JH: Yes.

AF: I’m also curious about the glissandos in this particular passage. In my score, I don’t have any marked, but there are a few marked in the piano reduction. Of course, Bennett played a lot more on the recording than are marked in that score. How do you feel about that [Bennett’s] interpretation?

JH: I wanted to suggest them in the notation, and actually, I did. I guess we have different editions of the orchestral score because there are certain ones marked in the orchestra score too. I have one, for instance, in m. 102. Maybe some of these got added at a later date. What I wanted to do was just add enough of them, suggest enough of them, so that players who were comfortable both with the execution and the style would add them, and then those who didn’t, wouldn’t because it’s not exactly a universal part of oboe technique.

AF: Right.
JH: That's more or less the principle that prevailed with Bill, too. I would say that in the early performances of the piece, there were a good deal less of the jazz inflection, and it accumulated as he played the piece.

AF: In later measures, in mm. 129, 130, and 134-140, he swung the 16th notes on the recording. Was that purely his decision, or was that a suggestion that you had made?

JH: No, it’s the same idea. It’s something that the player would certainly do if they can do it with authority, convincingly, but generally I would probably advise most performers not to do that at the start. It’s what we talked about right in the beginning, about whether the jazz element is voluntary or just sort of happens. Let’s just say I’ve had, overall, better luck with people not inflecting than inflecting, at least in an early stage with the piece. It’s almost better if they begin to inflect the rhythms and then somebody might point out to them that they’re doing it, and they are surprised that they’re doing it, if you get the distinction.

AF: Right. I’m interested to see what you have marked in your score in mm. 141 and 142 in the oboe part.

JH: Are you talking about in the full score?

AF: Yes.
JH: *Is that the tempo change measure, m. 142?*

AF: Yes.

JH: *It’s just a downbeat and the rests.*

AF: That is what is in the piano reduction score, but in the [orchestral] score that I have, the oboe has a two measure trill on an E.

JH: *That proved to be a practical defect because after the previous passage, the player really didn’t want to continue trilling. I think I might’ve added the sax trill later.*

AF: These few measures here, beginning at mm. 141-145, I felt that this was transitional, leading to the meno mosso section at m. 156. Do you agree with that?

JH: *Well, yes, but it’s also a repeat of the first tune. It’s the initial plainsong tune, which the cadenza [beginning in m. 146] is also going to start out with.*

AF: Is the Gamelan celebration that you mention in your program notes the section beginning at m. 175?

JH: *Yes, though it also is eventually a complete statement of the modal tune.*
AF: This section reminded me of the perpetual motion of a baroque concerto grosso. Was this your intention as well?

JH: Yes, to some degree, but probably more important is that it’s a compressed restatement of the opening melody as well. I think it goes all the way once through the melody and then cadences on the A.

AF: I actually have a few pitch questions about the first movement that one of the publishers at Schirmer sent me. Going back a little bit, in m. 85, beat 3 to 4, the fourth note of the quintuplet, is that an E natural or an Eb?

JH: That’s an E natural. It’s in the lower octave, but I probably should have a cautionary natural sign there.

AF: In m.106, he wanted me to ask if the Db trill really does go to an E natural.

JH: No, it shouldn’t. It should be to an Eb.

AF: In the following measure, m. 107, on beat 1 and 2, is the fifth note of the quintuplet a C# or a C natural?

JH: Those are both C naturals in the upper octave.
AF: Those were all the questions he sent me.

JH: *I used to have a general note that the accidentals only applied to their register, but I guess there are so many situations where that’s ambiguous. It’s always better to just go ahead and mark it.*

**MOVEMENT II**

AF: In the second movement, the Passacaglia, I wanted to get your feelings on the very opening of the movement. Is the tonality B diminished with an added minor 6th? Am I looking at that correctly?

JH: *Well, the tonality is B, some sort of a B. In fact, I certainly think there is a way in which the whole passacaglia subject can be heard referential to B with the first sonority being just the two notes of the B minor triad. In terms of the conception of the piece, it’s more important just to focus on the intervals of each measure. It’s a two-voice piece. The passacaglia subject is in two voices, and what will recur as the passacaglia are those intervals. They’ll be absolutely intact in every statement of the passacaglia; that’s unvaried.*

AF: Can you share some of your thoughts on how the oboe solo that begins in m. 11 was composed and developed?

JH: *Yes.*
AF: This solo is particularly elegant and beautiful, and it’s so long. I’m wondering how you developed this over the ten bar subject of the Passacaglia.

JH: Yes, I can say something about that. I’ve made quite a few passacaglias of various kinds, and it seems to me, one of the important things is that the passacaglia subject itself has to have a certain memorability and sort of squareness. In the case of developing this one, well actually, I didn’t develop it; it just kind of came out pretty well as it is. I wanted to have a few things about it that would be memorable to the ear, the tiny little rhythmic variants that take place within it. Then, very importantly, the speed up of the harmony right at the end of it, where it sort of moves up by suspensions in the last two bars, bars 9 and 10 in the original statement, so that it would be very audible when a given statement of the passacaglia ends. Then of course, there’s a scheme of transposition which is followed all the way through the piece. It’s up by minor 3rds as I remember. Therefore, the tonality, or locus of the passacaglia, changes. The tutti you’ve just heard [mm. 1-10] before the oboe comes in is on B. When the oboe enters [m. 11], it [the subject] starts on D because it’s the transposition up. It’s always seemed to me that the melodic content of the passacaglia needs to, in some ways, phrase independently of the subject. A very simple example would probably be the final aria of Dido in Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* where there are just enough overlaps and moments of independence from the given subject that it gives the piece a certain kind of lift. This oboe solo is made up of three statements of the original passacaglia. Each time that the new statement begins, I wanted the oboe to both mark it by a certain point in the melody but also be in the middle of something in terms of its phrasing.
AF: I felt when I was working on this, that this solo really doesn’t resolve or come to a climax until m. 51, but I can definitely feel each little mini-climax with each restatement of the passacaglia [subject].

JH: Yes, that’s really true, and the tune itself has demarcations which one could even find independently of where one is in the passacaglia. Also, of course, there is an orchestrational change at the beginning of each new passacaglia statement, which is meant to at least underline or make clear the relationship between the solo and the given material.

AF: Starting in bar 51, I have not been able to continue to locate the passacaglia. I’m not sure if I’m missing it or …

JH: Yes, m. 51 is not based on the passacaglia. It’s actually a variation on a couple of isolated moments in the passacaglia which are held or suspended. There is really an oasis in the middle of the piece, which is kind of isolated. It’s almost like two-measure interval fragments of the passacaglia which are extended, and then, of course, the passacaglia returns later [in m. 86].

AF: Okay, right. That’s what I thought. I wanted to make sure I was correct.

JH: Yes, you’re right.
AF: We already talked briefly about the section with all of the 32\textsuperscript{nd} notes in the oboe beginning at m. 96, and again, I couldn’t find the passacaglia here. I certainly hear the melodic notes and then the other notes accompanying those notes, but I’m not sure…

JH: Well, the passacaglia at m. 96 is consistently the lowest two notes in the oboe part. So, it’s D and F in bar 96. It’s Eb and D in m. 97 and so forth. It’s Eb and Db in the next bar. It’s the same transposition of the passacaglia that accompanied the oboe in its first big solo.

AF: Okay, I see now.

JH: In this instance, the melodies are in the orchestra where they’re being shadowed by the oboe. Basic ally, what the solo oboist is doing in this instance is doing what the orchestra did before. It’s laying down the passacaglia subject, and the tunes are in the other folks.

AF: You mentioned that William Bennett was learning to circular breathe at the time or could not circular breathe.

JH: Well, I think he was working on it, that is, he was acquiring it.

AF: I notice in the Hal Leonard edition that there are many more optional rests than in this original score.
JH: Is that right?

AF: Yes, which I am taking [the optional rests] currently because I am also learning to circular breathe, but you mentioned previously that you feel it’s still effective even if these rests need to be taken.

JH: Yes, it is effective. The other version with the other instruments taking it over [solo oboist’s 32nd notes] actually works just fine, and the listener is even a little confused as to who’s playing. Circular breathing is kind of a mixed blessing anyway. There are many passages in all kinds of oboe music where one would rather hear the oboe breathe than not.

AF: That’s true. I recently performed a Pasculli concerto, and that’s exactly how I felt. I felt that the audience needed a rest with me.

JH: Yes, and in some of [Heinz] Holliger’s Bach recordings, even the stress of having to fit the breaths into certain of these long melodies is valuable for the music. So, if an oboe player can play, for example, a certain Bach phrase without breathing, it’s often better to breathe.

AF: I notice the very last statement of the passacaglia at the end of the movement [mm. 126-137] has two additional measures with a syncopated rhythm. Is that in anticipation of the attaca to the third movement? Is that why you added the measures?
JH: Yes, that’s exactly right. By the way, you had some general questions about specific textual things. One general one which you raised is the same question that my friend Robert Levin, the pianist, asked about the printed version of a sonata I wrote for him. That is the issue of marking a crescendo as a hairpin or writing it [the word] out. I think that the editors at Schirmer continue to regard those as equivalences. That is to say whether it’s written out or whether it’s a hairpin is, in terms of syntax, the same to them. In some of my music, I don’t feel that it is, or at least I don’t feel that it graphically contains the same message. However, because of the practical issue of working with the editors, I’ve now come around to their viewpoint. Actually, in some scores where I’m really pressed for space, I’ll wind up writing it out instead of using the hairpin simply because I can’t fit the hairpin in. This is, of course, an editorial question in all kinds of music, including older music. In some composers, it’s very difficult to resolve. In the case of Schubert’s music, I don’t know whether you’ve ever seen Schubert’s hand-scores, it’s sometimes very difficult to even tell when he’s writing hairpins as his accents are very long. Sometimes you don’t know one from another. So, it’s really important to take care of these things, but I’ve finally understood that when Schirmer transcribes for me, which they do because I don’t work on a computer, they will take these things to be equivalent.

MOVEMENT III

AF: In the third movement, you’ve stated in your program notes that a 1920s big band arrives, and I also know that Bennett requested one of your famous swing numbers (qtd. in von Buchau 25). Besides the prevalence of syncopation, your use of call and response,
and, of course, some of your instrumentation, I was wondering if you could tell me some more specific compositional techniques that you use. Because I do think it’s very uncanny that when anyone first listens to this movement, he or she thinks it is a big band or a jazz band as opposed to a symphony orchestra.

JH: Yes, actually, what I tried to do in writing a big band number was to place a kind of restriction on that, which would add something else to the equation, something very different. So, I adopted this technique of what I would call additive phrasing, which is that I would take a phrase model and then enlarge it from inside. So, that’s what is happening in the introduction of the piece, after the first four measures. Each of those little phrases is being expanded from within it, and you can almost see it on the page. So, it’s the middle of the phrase that’s gaining girth, and that actually continues to happen all the way through the movement. Each of those little trio phrases that starts in m. 29...

There’s a little two-bar phrase at m. 29, and then, it expands by a measure. It expands really in the middle of it, and then the next one expands by another measure. Now, the interesting thing is that the bass line ignores that and plays the larger pattern. So, all the way through this piece, there are these little riffs. They are unlike jazz riffs, which would be in symmetrical phrases, meaning that the basic phrase lengths would be multiples of each other, because these phrases are enlarging at their center, the midpoint, all the time. The phrases are of unequal length. My hope was that these big band things would have another twist that one wouldn’t necessarily hear at the surface, but which would certainly be influential in terms of the way one hears it as a whole. I think one gets used
to these phrases not growing in the usual way, which is to add onto the end of them, but they grow because they add onto the middle of them.

AF: I notice also that some of these gestures develop using traditional techniques such as imitation, sequence, inversion, and retrograde. Are these techniques that you frequently use in your compositions?

JH: *Not so much, but in this piece, I’m using them because I’m working at the one level with common ground jazz gesture, and I’m trying to refract it or look at it through another technical thing which is really the ancient idea of the talia, the phrase that has a predetermined length. Actually, you can begin to see the way these lengths are working when you look at bar 57, for example, and you see that the accompaniment pattern starts to reflect the growth in length of the phrases, which are arithmetical.*

AF: I was actually studying this piece once in a coffee shop. I showed the score to my friends and said, “Look at this. It’s so great. It’s so mathematical.”

JH: *It really is, and the fun was, of course, in trying to then fit it together with harmonies which are referential to that old 1920s band style. Because I always thought that the instrumental sound of that era was one of the most pleasing, inventive American orchestrational sounds. I don’t wish to denigrate my earlier colleagues, but if you think of the Roy Harris symphony being written at the same time as Fletcher Henderson’s*
arrangements for his big band, Fletcher Henderson sounds, to me, much better, just as a sonority.

AF: I had a little bit of trouble identifying the tonal center at the very opening as I have to admit, I’m not as fluent in jazz or big band as I would like to be. Can you talk about the very opening a little bit?

JH: Just harmonically?

AF: Yes, please.

JH: Yes. Well, it’s neighbor tones. It’s the dominant of B, and B is going to be the key of the movement. There is a huge middle part around G, but B is the key of the movement. The whole introduction is about a pedal point on F#, the dominant pedal upon which is superimposed little riffs in G. However, the first sonority is various forms of dominant with neighbor tone dominants of B. That is either side of the F# and then finally, the F# sharp itself in the fifth bar.

AF: That helps me, definitely.

JH: Although the play, the tension tonally all through the movement, is between the two key centers: the B which is represented most often by its dominant, the F#, and then this little complex around G, the semi-modal jazz complex around G. They contend with each
other, and then finally, the coda is in B. In the coda, the final section of the piece, there’s a reiteration of the introduction and the circling around the F#, and then finally, the F# settles in as the pedal point. Then lastly, it does bring about a real B, which it didn’t before. It’s a real root position B, which it’s been threatening to do but really doesn’t ever do until the end.

AF: In the solo oboe gestures beginning at m. 9, I notice a lot of use of perfect 4ths when they expand in the middle. Is that something that you were consciously trying to do, or is that because of the harmonies?

JH: It’s partly because of the harmonies. It’s all symmetrical, those little tunes are all symmetrical around an axis of C, but the C is not important harmonically. It’s just the axis of symmetry. Just look at the tune in bar 9 as a sort of microcosm. So, C is never sounded there, but it is the midpoint of the melody. The melodies are little palindromes around… It [a C] is touched in the next tune, the next phrase, and as it’s touched, it’s the center of a little 4th thing. Of course, that isn’t functionally the way you hear it. You really hear that as jazz harmony centered on G with the constant return of the F# pedal as a dissonance. In other words, the F# is persistent, but it’s not harmonically central.

AF: I noticed that the alto saxophone usually plays the first two beginning pitches and the last two ending pitches of the solo oboe part as well as certain percussion, such as the temple blocks, marimba, and xylophone. They seem to be very structurally important within the solo line. Can you tell me why you chose those instruments for that function?
JH: Well, that’s that concertino that I chose as the group of colleagues. Also, it is a complement that, to me, sounds a little bit like one of the old bands.

AF: Was the alto saxophone player someone in the clarinet section of the San Francisco Symphony?

JH: Yes, it was. They had an in house sax player, which not every orchestra does.

AF: Right. Also, I wanted to talk a little bit about the oboe cadenzas or the excursions as you have called them. These places are my favorite spots to play in this movement. I feel that the constant playing, the repeated pitches you use, all of the development, and all the meter changes give them an improvisatory feel of jazz or a baroque fantasia. Is this what you had in mind stylistically when writing the cadenzas?

JH: It is. Also, I had this very idealistic idea that their execution would be almost memorized, not so much calculated by the measure count. People would learn it and just go with it. That is what we achieved in the Boston performance but at the price of a huge amount of rehearsal time. So, it was not exactly a miscalculation, but it was unfortunately, a correct calculation that if I wanted to do this, I was dealing with quite an impracticality, at least for the time being.

AF: The first cadenza, beginning at m.143, feels to me to be centered around a D. Is this correct?
JH: It’s a modal scale based on B. It is a consistent modal scale, and the held C pedal
tone is dissonant to the modal scale.

AF: What do you feel is the formal significance of the sections that take place after these
cadenzas? Are they used to give a rest after the long cadenzas?

JH: The tutti right after the first cadenza confirms the real tonality of the first cadenza.
Then that relationship changes, which is that the pedal point of the second cadenza
continues the B, but the soloist’s mode changes. So in a sense, the soloist and its
accompanists are then the ones who are dissonant to the accompaniment or independent
of the accompaniment. Then, the tutti comes in, and it confirms again the mode of the
solo.

AF: You also mentioned in your program notes that you chose to end the piece anti-
heroically with a Chaplinesque gesture. Can you clarify what that gesture is and tell me
why you wanted to end the concerto anti-heroically and anti-climatically?

JH: I don’t know why, but I did. Actually, that casual shuffle that happens at the end of
the piece, which I thought went on too long, but I now don’t think it did, is the most in
character with the collegial, very centered quality of the whole piece. The piece is not, in
the end, about the hero struggling to break free, but it is the leader reconciling the whole
group. So, this concerto did not seem to want to assert the utter independence of the
soloist but rather the soloist’s ability to lead everyone to the same place.
AF: Some of my last few questions you’ve already answered. I was going to ask you about the cuts. In the very last two bars of the piece, in the piano reduction, the oboe has a crescendo to forte, but there’s no crescendo at all in the original orchestral score.

JH: *That’s an omission; I’m quite sure.*

AF: Okay. Well, those are actually all of my questions for you. Thank you so much for your time.

JH: *Well, great. Good job.*
CHAPTER 7
TRANSCRIPT OF OBOE LESSON AND INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM BENNETT

March 9, 2006
10AM, PST

LESSON

MOVEMENT I

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 37-89)

WB: Okay, good. That’s a good stretch to play just to warm up.

AF: It is.

WB: That’s so hard to get through it. I find it’s almost harder than the Strauss.

AF: I think so. We [Robert Sorton and I] were just talking about that.
WB: Yes, there are so many control things you have to deal with, and there’s a lot going on underneath you. You really have to play with a very full sound, but it can’t be pushed too much. It has to be dolce and cantabile, and in a melancholy mood. There is a lot going on, and the bass voices are especially very powerful. Why don’t you try playing that again, and think of a little bit longer line? See if you can fill out the horizontal part of it a little bit more.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 37-61)

WB: I would put a little bit more into that, a little bit more juice where it says forte (sings mm. 54-58), very dramatic. Imagine a violinist playing Sibelius or something. They’re going to dig into that a little bit more, even though it’s a kind of lonely piece in a lot of ways. It still has a lot going on there. Play that last phrase from m. 50.

AF: Okay. (Plays oboe, mm. 50-57)

WB: I really wouldn’t back off on that trill [m. 57]. (Sings mm. 54-59, bringing out beat four of m. 57 as if there are accents on the C, B, and C) Get to the A trill [m. 59] before you start relaxing the sound at all.

AF: Okay. So is this decrescendo [m. 56] an added editor’s marking?
WB: Just delay it a little bit because in reality, you can’t be heard if you’re not pumping it out there.

AF: Okay. (Plays oboe, mm. 54-64)

WB: Good, and then you can back off and relax a little bit [end of mm. 61-63]. You really have to know what’s going on here with the bassoon [mm. 62-65]. There are a lot of ensemble issues in this. You have to have a very steady tempo. The constant filigree in the 8th note movement is going to keep you on track with that. During these syncopated motions in the bass again [syncopated against oboe triplets such as in m. 45-46], be really on top of those triplets, especially the broad beamed ones. Okay, go ahead from the new theme, pickup to m. 65.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 65-89)

WB: Okay. Good, good. The quality of this legato misterioso can have a little bit more longing (sings mm. 65-66) and have a little bit more mystery, as he writes. Then, when you get into all of this ornamentation [mm. 79-89], you don’t want to lose that quality. You want to go back and forth. This is a very schizophrenic kind of piece, and there are a lot of places where you have to be very lightening fast in your mood and character changes and also in terms of what you want to highlight and what you don’t want to highlight. The articulations have to be hidden within a legato line, but sometimes they have to be crisp. For example, this spot at m. 76 (sings mm. 76-78), they’re almost like
trumpet calls. Then you have to get right back into this (sings m. 78). Even though you’re bouncing between registers all over the place, you still have to try and go for that misterioso (sings mm. 79-80). Try and keep that feeling of mystery going. Why don’t you try it again from the pickup to m. 65? Again, make it as legato as you can.

AF: Okay. (Plays oboe, mm. 65-69)

WB: Good, good. Can you play it for me at that speed but with a feeling of in two? It’s too vertical right now.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 65-74)

WB: Good, good. Ann, what’s the important note for you in this? (Sings mm. 70-72, emphasizing beat 1 of m. 72) He [Harbison] puts a tenuto over that downbeat D [m. 72] and then shades it off again with a diminuendo in m. 74. So, you really have to drive it through there. See if you can bring out those elements. Take it from pickup to m. 70. Lean on that tenuto D [m. 72], but carry it through until you get through the C# [m. 74], okay?

AF: Okay. (Plays oboe, mm. 70-74)

WB: I could still use more direction. (Sings mm. 70-74)
AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 70-84)

WB: Better. Good, good, so there it is again, right? (Sings m. 82) There’s a little bit more violence in this section, but it’s still within the confines of legato misterioso. So, you have to go back and forth very quickly. (Sings mm. 75-76) that’s the first one [beat one of m. 76]. That fortепiano has to be very pronounced with a little bit of a sting (sings mm. 75-77). That’s the kind of thing that comes back later in the piece, in the second and last movements. This is where you first start getting this feeling that there’s going to be a mix of genres too, where it’s going back and forth, and you’re not sure where he’s going to settle, personality-wise. So, be a little bit more schizophrenic (sings mm. 75-80). Try that one more time from that 8th note pickup to m. 75.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 75-89)

WB: I would suggest that you try and dig out some of these lower notes in this passage here [mm. 75-81]. I lost you a little bit in the lower register from about m. 78.

AF: Okay.

WB: (Sings mm. 78-79) it’s like in the Rite of Spring when the horns are going (sings horn register leaps from Rite of Spring). It’s that in a miniature context. It has to have a certain wildness about it, but the rhythm has to be (starts snapping) very straight ahead. (Sings mm. 77-82) Again, go to that D [tenuto beat 3 of m. 82]. (Sings mm. 83-85) Dig
those [B, E, A, Ab, and G of mm. 84-85] out a little bit more. (Sings mm. 85-87) Then, once you get to the ritard molto, don’t accent as much. (Sings mm. 88-89) It has to relax there and prepare for the nice, bluesy interlude. Okay, play from the same place, pickup to m. 75.

AF: (Plays oboe, pickup to mm. 75-81)

WB: Good, right. That was good. Let’s start at m. 81.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 81-89)

WB: Good, and if you can make that softer at the end, even better. So, the main things from this introduction are to keep the long line happening and to be very conscious of where you’re leading the listener because there’s so much activity, and it’s thick. You have to be very clear about the emotional high points. To you, I think it’s pretty obvious what you want to hit when you’re playing it. (Sings mm. 37-38, emphasizing the F on the downbeat of m. 38), that one is obvious. (Sings mm. 39-43, emphasizing the G on the downbeat of m. 41), that’s clear. (Sings mm. 44-61), then you can relax. (Sings mm. 65-66, emphasizing the A on the downbeat of m. 66), you just have a natural feeling to go to that A [downbeat of m. 66]. (Sings mm. 67-72, emphasizing the A on the downbeat of m. 69 and the D on the downbeat of m. 72), bring out that D again [downbeat of m. 72]. (Sings mm. 73-79 emphasizing the A on beat 3 of m. 79), bring out that A again [m. 79, beat 3]. (Sings mm. 79-82 emphasizing the D on beat 3 of m. 82), here it’s the same
thing. (Sings mm. 83-87 emphasizing the E fortissimo on the downbeat of m. 87), you want to get to that E [m. 87], and then relax. (Sings mm. 88-89) Play it a little bit more sculpted. Go ahead.

AF: I’m still feeling a little self-conscious about the glisses.

WB: Well, there are only one or two glisses written in. I went a little bit nuts with them the first time, and he thought it was fine.

AF: I’ve added a couple in.

WB: Okay, go ahead.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 100-141)

WB: Good, all right. So, what do you think?

AF: (Panting), it’s so hard to play.

WB: That’s right. It is very hard.
AF: Well, I think everything just needs to be more exaggerated to come out over the orchestra. As for the glisses that I’m doing, I like where they are, but I want to make sure they sound intentional and not as if I’m having reed problems.

WB: Right. They do sound intentional. The main thing here is to get the pulse right. So (sings bassoon and bass clarinet theme beginning in m. 91), you have to lean back on that beat. That’s what you have to feel all the way through this. (Sings melodic and rhythmic composite of oboe solo line and accompaniment, mm. 98-103) Keep feeling that lazy accompaniment beat going on, no matter how active the oboe line becomes. Be very conscious of where they move. Have you written that into your part?

AF: No, but I should.

WB: Yes, you should sit down with a score and write in where the winds are doing their shifting because it will help you aim things a little bit better. Keep being lazy within the tempo. One thing that I would suggest here is that you make it less accented. I like the intention of the accents, but see if you can play a little bit more horizontally. Think of it in the context of this lazy, steady music, as if you’re getting on a stream or a train. You’re riding it. It’s a lazy journey at first, but it gets more complicated as it goes on.

Try again from m. 100.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 100-121 with Bennett singing accompaniment in various measures)
WB: You have to be right on top of those triplets [in accompaniment beginning in mm. 119]. (Sings mm. 119-120, oboe solo and accompaniment) They’re [tuba, first and second bassoons, first and second horns, and first and second clarinets] moving right off of your beat, so be aware of where they are. Why don’t you take it from m. 118? (Sings m. 118), play through these figures.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 118-136)

WB: Good, good. A good exercise for you would be to practice this using your metronome and trying to do a little bit more swinging, but just for practice. I did a little bit too much on the recording, or it just wasn’t the right kind of character and rhythm. It’s a tough thing to do, especially on the oboe where everything is so pointed and immediate. It’s hard to be [like] a saxophone and slide around on it, especially when you’re playing with a saxophone and muted trumpet, but (sings mm. 126-129, swinging 16th notes in m. 129) it has to have that kind of feeling. (Sings mm. 129-135, swinging all 16ths) it has to have that swing to it. Even if you decide to play it precisely, you should still practice swinging. It has to swing even if you’re going to play what the written note values are. (Sings mm. 132-137 with precise rhythms and swing feel) Try it, and hit the main beams there. Take it from m. 129.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 129-131)
WB: *Okay, move right through that quintuplet [m. 131]. If you just put the accent on the first beat [high D m. 131], you’ll move through it better.*

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 129-141)

WB: *Good, those last two measures were perfect. That’s the feeling you want to get, (sings mm. 139-140). It’s that Duke Ellington and Fletcher Henderson feel, the early jazz between Louis Armstrong and the big bands. They don’t really swing it in terms of the way we’re used to in triplets. (Sings swung rhythms), it’s not like that. It’s a little drier and a little bit more precise in terms of 16th notes, but it’s still obviously very swung. So, go back and listen to some of that stuff again to get the feel. I think some of the great sax soloists cut their chops in those orchestras. You can hear a lot of things happening. I think Louis Armstrong even played in some of those bands. Okay, so you got that quintuplet right, and then right after it, you lost the feel on the triplets [mm. 132-133].*

AF: Yes.

WB: *(Sings mm. 131-133), don’t be so serious about each one; move through them. That was good though. Those last two measures were what you want. Aim for that downbeat at m. 141 because it’s a very dramatic moment there. Okay, start at m. 146.*

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 146-185)
WB: Excellent. This is a written out cadenza. You really want to get this two-voice thing happening, but again, it has to be in a very expressive, dolce quality. See if you can go for the horizontal when the horizontal is really important. There was a pre-concert lecture that John did before I performed this the first time, and he played some of these things [beginning at m. 146] on the piano just to show what he was going for. I didn’t hear this until after, but the way he played it on the piano was so beautiful. There are things that a piano can obviously do that an oboist can’t. Still, try to strive for that kind of delicacy and almost Debussy-like quality to it. See if you can go for that a little bit more. Have a little bit more blurriness, but bring out the different registers in conversation with each other. Try that at m. 146 again.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 146-156)

WB: Good. You need to think a little bit more about where you’re going with it. So, start again at m. 146, and see if we’re on the same page.

AF: Okay. (Plays oboe, mm. 146-150)

WB: Okay, so, can you do that without marking each one so much? (Sings mm. 146-147) Okay, see what I mean?

AF: Okay, yes. (Plays oboe, mm. 146-150)
WB: Good, good. When you listen to your recording, you’ll hear that there’s a little bit more glue holding everything together. Now you can go for more registral differentiation, but try and keep that glue happening and that quality in the sound, okay? Then it just has a little bit more poignancy and mystery again.

The section you played at m. 160 was nice. That was the way to do it with that idea of glue, (sings mm. 160-161) The way the oboe winds down in the first movement before the blues [mm. 88-89], that’s foreshadowing of this right here, going into m. 173. It has to have the same kind of feeling with just a little bit more relaxation. When you go into the low register, you’re afraid the notes aren’t going to come out. Don’t be afraid of it, just try and make the musical gesture work. Your double tonguing is terrific.

AF: Oh, thank you.

WB: You have to stay with the vibraphone and marimba, unfortunately [mm. 176-182]. Let’s hear the second movement.

**MOVEMENT II**

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 11-41)

WB: Okay, good. That’s another tough phrase, and it’s a real long one too. Do you know the aria in the *St. Matthew Passion* with the flute and the two English horns?

AF: Yes
WB: This is sort of like that in terms of texture and the way you’re accompanied with this nice pulse, and that pulse is going to be very steady. Everything you play has to be against that. So, when you play those septuplets [mm. 28 and 37], you can’t beat them to the punch. You’re rushing through a little bit.

AF: Okay.

WB: I liked what you were doing at the beginning (sings mm. 11-16). Do you know Das Lied von der Erde?

AF: Yes.

WB: Do you know the solo in the last movement, not the opening one that’s angry and spitting but the second one that’s pastoral? (Sings solo), that is what you want to go for here, a little bit dreamier. But there’s a lot of activity and a lot of rubato that you can take within there. So, play it again, and save a little bit of the drama for m. 21 when you get up to that high Db. Then come back right away, and save it again for when you get up to the septuplet [m. 28]. Come back again, and save the drama until you get to (sings mm. 31-32).

AF: Okay. (Plays oboe, mm. 11-16)
WB: I really love what you’re doing there with the sound and the quality, but I’m not convinced that you’re right on the money with the pulse. (Sets metronome to quarter note equals 72)

AF: (Plays oboe with metronome, mm. 11-29)

WB: Okay, a little too fast through that septuplet [m. 28]. (Sings mm. 27-28) It can be much broader and more romantic. Take it from m. 25, where you take your breath [between the B and the A].

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 25-30)

WB: Okay, good. So, that was right. Now, you want to aim for that C natural at the beginning of m. 30, and then, take a breath [between the A and C# of m. 30] and move again.

AF: Okay. (Plays oboe, mm. 25-32)

WB: Good, and can that be much more declamatory and in a different dramatic world than the opening [mm. 30-32]? (Sings mm. 30-32) It has to be very heart-on-your-sleeve-like.

AF: Okay. (Plays oboe, mm. 30-38)
WB: Good, okay, and again, lean a little bit more on the first note of the septuplet [m. 37] or the quintuplet. When those kinds of combinations come, lean a little bit more on the first note of each, and you’ll get it right. It will also sound a little bit more satisfying in terms of the drama. (Sings mm. 25-35) It has to be a little bit more operatic.

AF: Okay. (Plays oboe, mm. 29-35)

WB: Good. Be very direct and honest about where you’re going. You’re hesitating a lot of the time, and I don’t get the payoff. (Sings mm. 32-33) You want to go there [C# downbeat of m. 32]. (Sings mm. 33-34) What I’m hearing a lot of time is (sings mm. 31-32 with a hesitation before the C# downbeat of m. 32). Go over the break or whatever it is that’s making you slow down there.

AF: Okay. (Plays oboe, mm. 29-39)

WB: That was almost perfect, (sings mm. 38-39) but you hesitated getting into the A# there [downbeat of m. 39]. It was satisfying until then, but then what?

AF: I was thinking that if I pulled back it would be more dramatic, but I guess it’s not coming out that way.
WB: Well, the real gesture is this (sings m. 39 emphasizing the A#’s). So, make sure they [the A#’s] come out, and make sure they come out in the right place. Remember that the pulse is going to be just chugging along. They’re not waiting for you.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 35-53)

WB: This is going to be basically very free [beginning at m. 51], compared to the previous material. What does it say to you?

AF: I’m not sure.

WB: Well, it’s good to get a real fix on that then. (Sings mm. 51-52) What kind of adjective can you come up with to describe the feeling you want the listener to get here?

AF: It’s very heroic sounding.

WB: It’s kind of stirring, and what about it do you feel is heroic?

AF: …all of the leaps and the return to the same high notes after the leaps.

WB: Okay, so make more out of these wide intervals. See if you can soar a little bit more when you go up to the high ones, and see if you can sweep down a little bit more when you go to the low ones.
AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 51-53)

WB: Don’t end before you end. You went (sings mm. 51-53 going away on beat 2 of m. 53). The energy has got to go all the way through the phrase and set up the clarinet player.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 51-58 with Bennett singing clarinet lines in mm. 54 and 56)

WB: When you play it, make sure you wait for the clarinet player to do whatever he wants on these figures (sings solo clarinet lines mm. 54-57) because that should be very free, and it’s very effective that way. Go ahead.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 59-62)

WB: Again, Ann, have an arrival point in mind, and direct the air to that point. Don’t give up on the way because if you let down the tension, the listener just thinks, “I’m not that interested anymore.”

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 59-66)

WB: Good, you want to get to that B [m. 65] before you relax. It’s not a question of dynamic; it’s a question of intensity and core in the sound. Let’s move ahead.
AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 76-86)

WB: I would suggest you play a little bit more marcato on these (sings mm. 82).

[Measure 76] can be very stretchy and lyrical. Then (sings mm. 80-81), because it’s against 16th notes [in the flute solo], you want the different rhythmic elements to come out a little bit more. Do you want to play the tremolo [mm. 96-126]?

AF: Sure.

WB: Okay, let’s hear it.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 96-102)

WB: Okay, right away I have a recommendation for you. Put the metronome on 72, right there. Make sure you stay with your tempo, and play as soft as possible. The really interesting stuff is all going on around you in these different instruments creeping around and the color changes. See if you can pop out the melody notes, but you are being doubled in all of it. Go ahead.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 96-98)
WB: Okay. Just as an exercise right now, make sure you hit the melody notes on the beat, and keep going no matter what. Fit them in, whatever you’re going to do. (Sings mm. 96-99)

AF: Do you think of giving them [accented melody notes] a little more time or not?

WB: No, it’s best if you can keep it really solid and let them do their lyrical stuff within the tempo.

AF: Okay. (Plays oboe, mm. 96-102)

WB: Good. I hear you laboring just a little bit at the beginning when you start with these notes. Let your fingers totally relax. Make sure that when you play this, your shoulders are relaxed, your arms are relaxed, and you’re completely loose. Then, go for the (sings mm. 96-98, emphasizing accented melody notes), and who cares about what comes out in terms of those tremolo notes, just keep the effect going. Stay with the melody, and you’ll find that the tremolos are easier. Give it one more shot, and see if you can ignore whatever problems you think you have.

AF: Okay. (Plays oboe, mm. 96-116)

WB: So you don’t circular breathe?
AF: I’m learning to right now, but I can’t do it yet.

WB: Well, he gives an ossia. You can do that. The main thing is to try and keep going. It doesn’t even really matter what’s happening after a little while. It’s the effect of not stopping that builds the tension. If you can beat the metronome to the next beat, that helps too. Take it again from m. 110, and stay loose.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 110-126)

WB: Good. A good way to practice this is to do just what you were doing. Also, as you start getting more confident with it, be as stretchy as possible when you hit those melody notes, and think about how you want to phrase it through. Be very clear of where you want to arrive, where you want to direct the listener’s ear. So you go (sings various measures, then sings only melody notes), and just keep going, and hit those places. Good luck!

AF: Do you have any trick fingerings or anything? There’s only one measure that seems completely impossible to me, m. 125.

WB: No, it’s just hard. A lot of finger combinations are hard. When you’re practicing it, make note of the things that you do that make it work. I’m trying to remember. I haven’t played this in awhile. (Sings and fingers various measures) Okay, this is all good. As I recall, there are some places where you’re hitting the F’s, and it’s hard to pop up for
the...yes, like here. It seems that whenever you have to move these two fingers together [middle and ring finger, right hand], it’s always hard. Be aware that you have to move them together, and then practice slowly, trying to keep them as close to the keys as you can. Then if you have to lift up a little bit more, do it intentionally. The way that you’re playing it sounded pretty clean to me. It’s just hard. You’ll get it. You have to do it a lot. Okay, let’s hear some of the last movement.

MOVEMENT III

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 9-37)

WB: Okay, good. Actually, just to get the right kind of feeling about it, play from pickup to m. 29 a little bit slower. (Sings mm. 29-30, slowly)

AF: Okay. (Plays oboe, pickup to mm. 29-37)

WB: Okay. Now, as an American, somebody raised here, it [the phrasing] is in your blood. What is your natural impulse here? (Sings mm. 29-36, emphasizing the tied, syncopated C’s in each gesture) You started doing it, actually, in the last phrase there. Now, go for it at the beginning. Stay loose, and think about those syncopations. (Sings same previous measures) Then, just let everything else vanish. (More singing) It’s always going to be those notes [m. 29 second half of beat two, m. 31 second half of beat four, m. 35 second half of beat two] that pop out. Try that again.
AF: From that same spot?

WB: Yes.

AF: (Plays oboe, pickup to mm. 29-33)

WB: Okay, I’m not hearing accents. He doesn’t write accents on those C’s, okay, but I’m not hearing them. (Sings pickup to m. 29 with a strong accent on the C), that should be more than anything else. Stay loose, and play those accents.

AF: (Plays oboe, pickup to mm. 29-39)

WB: Okay, I’m not hearing it. (Sings again) It’s like a conga line. (Sings and kicks out leg to conga line rhythm) You want that accent, and if you don’t get that accent (sings same conga without accents), it doesn’t work, right?

AF: Right.

WB: The other rhythm doesn’t work either. (Sings mm. 29-37 with pronounced accents on each C in the staff), it has to be like that. (Sings Charleston rhythm) It’s this Charleston, and everything else in our blood. Just let it bubble out.

AF: (Plays oboe, pickup to mm. 29-37)
WB: So you have (sings accompaniment bass line, mm. 29-37) going on underneath, right? (Sings same oboe line, mm. 29-37), you hear I’m not singing straight 8th. They’re almost straight, but they’re not, okay? Trust your natural nationalistic impulse here.

AF: Do you want me to go from the beginning, or…?

WB: Yes.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 9-15)

WB: Okay, again, (sings mm. 9-15) it’s almost like you’re playing a percussion instrument; you’re not playing the oboe anymore. (Sings m. 9) It’s like you’re doing a hit or a rim shot if you were playing set drums. (Sings mm. 9-15 with strong accents on last notes of each gesture) Okay? Make sure you get those angular rhythms in there. Go ahead. Play it one more time.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 9-15)

WB: Better, good. It can have a lot of energy and be slower as long as you’re playing the right kind of accents and letting it swing. (Sings mm. 29-33) You have to do this with the other instruments too. They’ll help you. Okay, go on from m. 41.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 41-49)
WB: Good, so you’re almost always aiming for that last note. (Sings mm. 41-49) It’s that syncopation into the next bar. It’s the big four, New Orleans, or whatever. You’ll get it. When you hear yourself here, you’re going to see what I’m talking about. Before, you were doing it very square. Now it’s starting to swing a little bit. You don’t need to play this next thing [mm. 53-61]. Let’s move on, how about m. 63?

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 63-72)

WB: Again, (sings mm. 68-72) it has to have those syncopations. Okay, keep going though, m. 74.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 74-81)

WB: Good. That’s the idea. All right, why don’t you go ahead to the cadenza?

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 143-183)

WB: Good, good, good. Okay, now that had a lot more of that marked quality to it than what you played before, and that’s what you want to go for. It’s enormously helpful to the people accompanying you if that can be really extreme and if you have your phrases very well organized (sings various measures between 143 and 183) so all that stuff [accents and meter changes] really pops out. Then they can get used to the patterns. They need to be able to hear those very clearly. Good, play the next one.
AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 195-228)

WB: Good, and don’t be afraid to sound a little bit like a donkey in here (sings mm. 209-212). Just really slam it. (Sing mm. 220-224), it’s not supposed to be pretty.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 245-261)

WB: Yes, that’s a little faster. (Sings mm. 254-260)

AF: Oh, okay. (Plays oboe, mm. 245-286)

WB: Excellent, very good.

AF: Did you play this all in one breath?

WB: The cadenza?

AF: Yes, this last one, mm. 245-286.

WB: Probably not. It’s really hard though, I know. You’re just toast by the end of this piece, but probably I struggled with the same thing. No, I think you just have to do it on one breath. If you do it up to tempo, it just goes by fast enough that you can do it, but you’re close. Also, you find that you have reserves that you didn’t know you had when
you’re performing it. This is where it gets hard though [mm. 288-312]. As you come back to this when you’re totally drained, and you have to play something beautiful.

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 288-312)

WB: Okay, good. Why don’t you finish?

AF: (Plays oboe, mm. 321-the end)

WB: Okay, good. The ending is a little bit more effective if you can get back to that jazz style. Again, you’re playing percussion, (sings mm. 329-end). The tenuto piano over the last beat, in principle, is a good idea maybe, but in reality, it just doesn’t work. It’s a little too heavy there, orchestrationally. The people want to know it’s the end, and it’s a little bit diffuse if you don’t do it that way [it’s diffuse if a tenuto piano is played on the last note]. Backing up a little bit to the con tenerezza, there are a couple things to mention. The first of which you did, that is, if you can do it at tempo and maintain that tempo, it’s a lot easier and will keep it moving. The tendency is to get really bogged down here. Again, have your direction very clear in your head. It will help you a lot. (Sings mm. 288-290) If you’re going to that C# [m. 290] when you start, it won’t be as tiring. (Sings mm. 291-295), you can take a nice big breath there [after the high C# in m. 296]. (Sings mm. 296-301) Play to the D [measure 301] (sings mm. 302-307). Then, go to that F# [m. 307] (sings mm. 307-309), and try not to be too marked here. This is again that murky kind of dissolve that he does at the end of the first movement.
The faster you can play the last movement, the better, but all that kind of looseness has to be there. It’s hard. If you can get everybody to think in terms of (sings various gestures)...

**INTERVIEW**

WB: Well, what can I tell you? I played in a wind quintet that did his [Harbison’s] *Quintet for Winds*, and it was a pretty popular staple of our repertoire. I had this good and bad luck in a way. I was auditioning for the Boston Symphony, and they kept asking me to come back. Marc Lifschey was retiring [from San Francisco], and Blomstedt was looking for a new principal oboe. I had auditioned and qualified, but he was nervous because of my age and inexperience. So, he wanted to do the audition again, and in the mean time, there was a Boston audition. This was the first time they did it, back in 1987, and I was a finalist for that, along with Cynthia Koledo DeAlmeida. She’s in Pittsburgh now. Boston kept bringing me back, and the management here started getting nervous. So, when I won the job here, they wanted to bait me a little bit to keep me. One of the things that I wanted to know about was a concerto, and they asked who I would like to have write one. I thought of John right away because I had enjoyed a lot of the music that we had played of his. I had suggested that, and the management went ahead and commissioned this piece but never told me.

AF: Yes, I was wondering about that. I read an article in an International Double Reed Society journal about it, and it sounded very confusing. It said that you were listening to other tapes, but… (qtd. in von Buchau 24)
WB: Yes, they never told me that they had commissioned it, and then I started hearing rumors that John was writing a concerto for me. So I wrote to him, and I asked, “What’s the scoop?” He said that yes, indeed they had asked him if he would do an oboe piece, and so it was going to happen. I asked him if he was open to suggestion, and he said he was. Although, I have a suspicion that he was already pretty far ahead with it, and it was by lucky coincidence that we were both thinking the same way. I had wanted a piece, and I loved his writing. I knew of his interest in jazz, and there wasn’t yet an oboe piece that did that. I thought it would be really fun if we could try to do that. He wrote back to me, and he said that the two interests of the Baroque and the jazz and trying to meld them fit well. One of the other issues that I was interested in was making the orchestral accompaniment very colorful and involving for the players and presenting soloists in pairs along with the oboe. John was into that too, so this concertante idea came out of that. Like I say, I think he was well ahead of me, but he’s such a nice guy. He always gave me credit for supplying him with some ideas. I always appreciated that. I think that will be a mystery, but he did write me back and say… I’m not sure where the letter is. I’ve got all this stuff here.

AF: Did you have a strong interest in jazz before this? Have you played much jazz before, or did you just like it and want to play it in an oboe concerto?

WB: The thing is I didn’t have a huge background in it. When I moved to San Francisco, I played for about five years in the orchestra as associate principal, and there was a lot of time when I wouldn’t be involved in the big piece that was being worked on that week.
I had some time on my hands, and I thought it would be kind of fun to take an instrument, first of all that I didn’t have any experience with, and then try and play music that I didn’t have any background in. I figured a stringed instrument because I never played a stringed instrument. I wanted to try guitar, and I wanted to play pop music and see what improvising was all about. So, I got myself a teacher and started working at that. I found it one of the most frustrating experiences of my life because I was an adult by then, and I was a pretty, well trained musician. I knew what I wanted to hear, but just getting it physically was very difficult. To begin with, I don’t really have a natural physical affinity for the guitar, and improvising was very difficult for me, even at this very basic level of playing simple blues with any kind of feeling. It was embarrassing for me because I was such a square. I would hear myself play, and I would just get totally flustered. But I kept trying, and I took lessons for about three years and really worked hard at it. Then I got involved in all these auditions, and I didn’t really have time to do it anymore. But it was a really healthy experience for me, and I did learn a lot from it.

Then, I started trying to translate it a little bit to the oboe, and I found that our concept of rhythm as classical musicians and the way we’ve been trained is quite a limiting kind of factor in terms of playing jazz. Things just aren’t precise in the same way. I started trying to play some jazz like that, and then I discovered that, especially with articulation, the oboe is an extremely square instrument. It’s hard to make it bend and do those kinds of things, especially with attacks. If you listen to a great jazz soloist like Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, or Louis Armstrong, the way that they’re able to come in and go out is so much less defined in terms of starting and stopping. It’s not that it’s less defined, they just have a broader palette to work with. The challenge for the oboe player,
then, is to try and find articulation styles that match the feeling of jazz without imitating exactly how most of the jazz wind players do it because they articulate so much on the off-beat. You’ll hear most saxophone players and trumpet players play, if the beat is here (claps and sings behind his clapping), and if you do that on the oboe, it sounds crisp, clean, and dorky. You know?

AF: Yes.

WB: So, you have to try really hard to figure out a different way of articulating things, and certainly, sliding into notes and things like that are also difficult. The quality of a glissando on the oboe as defined by Heinz Holliger, [Krzysztof] Penderecki, or Elliot Carter is so different than the quality of a glissando in “Potato Head Blues”. However, there is a looseness to the oboe that most of us are trained out of. If you go back and start exploring it, you find that there are reserves there. When John wrote this concerto for me, I was really just beginning to explore that stuff. I’ve done more with it. I’ve done transcriptions and things like that. I find that, actually, the more I get into it, the less inclined I am to do those kind of tricky things. I find that there are ways of adapting to the feeling of popular music, and it’s more just a question of pulse and, of course, that indefinable element of swing that jazz players talk about. If you watch that Ken Burns jazz series, they talk about what swing is. It’s funny because they don’t really answer. They know what it is though. There is this funny moment where Wynton Marsalis is talking about Count Basie. Basie would play the piano a little bit, and then he would get up and walk around the club and talk to the different patrons. The band would be
chugging along while Basie was schmoozing. Then he would come back to the piano and play one note, and Wynton Marsalis said, “...but it swings.” It [swing] is just this feeling of pulse that is very foreign to us as classical musicians. It’s a really fun thing to explore, and I think that the Harbison concerto, actually, has so much room for development in that way. I fully expect that in the future, people are going to come along who really have exactly the right feeling for it and take it in places and ways that I can’t even imagine right now. I keep hoping I’ll hear one of those performances, but so far, I think that it’s been a pretty big challenge. I think that it has its own kind of popularity, but I think it hasn’t really been taken on by a lot of major orchestral players. I think it’s really hard. Endurance wise, it’s very, very, very tough, but there are people that could do it. I’d certainly want to play it again.

AF: Have you played it again since the tour?

WB: I haven’t been asked to, but I will at some point. What else can I tell you?

AF: Well, I want to know a little bit more about you and your oboe playing. You studied with Robert Bloom. Did you study with anybody else?

WB: Yes, well, I grew up in New Haven. You can take these too. These are some program notes I wrote for John’s piece called Six American Painters...

AF: Oh great, okay.
WB: I don’t know if you know that piece.

AF: No.

WB: It’s a terrific piece. It’s a quartet. If you want to take a look at it,... Do you want to take a look at the handwritten orchestral score?

AF: Oh yes, that’d be great.

WB: (Leafing through original materials), they may have some markings in it. Here’s the first oboe part that I worked from. Did I give you the whole piano score there? I just want to make sure. Yes, I did. It’s in a binder. I did a lot of cutting and pasting. He wrote, “Another possible approach to making the ending more final, though I’m not sure we want to.” He stuck to his guns on that one. I think I told him at one point, “I want to have a louder ending” or something like that. These are all the originals. I gave you copies of all these reviews.

Anyway, I grew up in New Haven, and Robert Bloom was teaching at the Yale School of Music. My father was a physics professor at Berkeley College. It’s one of the residential colleges at Yale, and Bloom was also a fellow there. There was this little faculty club, and they would eat their meals in the hall when they were teaching classes. They got to know each other there, and my dad, being a physicist and a music enthusiast, was heavily into the engineering side of it. He was sort of an audiophile and had quarter inch tape when nobody was dealing with those kinds of things. He was everybody’s
favorite person to record their concerts. Bloom asked him a couple of times to record recitals that he was doing in the dining hall, at the United Church on the Green, Battell Chapel, and places around Norfolk. When I was very young, my dad brought home recordings of Bloom playing [Charles] Loeffler’s Rhapsody No. 2, the Bach Double Concerto, various Bach cantatas, and the Mozart Oboe Quartet. There were all these things that I got to hear him play, and so I became interested in the oboe that way. My dad was playing the clarinet, and then it came time for me to start an instrument. My parents viewed starting an instrument as something that you had to do; it was part of your education. My older sister was playing the flute and the piano at that time, and I started playing the clarinet because my dad had an extra one. He was teaching me, and I didn’t stay with it very long because everyone plays the clarinet and the flute in the school band, right?

AF: Yes.

WB: So, my older sister, who is a lot smarter than I am, had the bright idea of taking up an instrument that would actually give her some spotlight, and so, she picked the oboe because it was just unheard of. She took a few lessons from one of Bloom’s students at the time, Patricia Nott. Now she’s the dean at the New World School. Jean studied with her for a very short time and found out that you have to make reeds, and she thought, “That was a loser.” Again, she’s much smarter than me, and she suggested that maybe I should go to the next lesson. So, she gave me her instrument, her reed tools, and everything and sent me off, and I kind of liked the idea of having these knives. I started
playing, and Pat taught me for six months or so. Then she moved on, and Dick Killmer came to Yale. He was really my first big influence and the first of many Bloom students. While I was growing up, I studied with him for awhile. Then he went to Oklahoma City, and Harry Sargous came. I studied with him for awhile, and then Dick came back to do a doctorate so I studied with him again. Then he got the St. Paul job, and I went to study with James Ryon. Jim’s now at Louisiana State University, and when Jim left, I studied with Roger Cole for a little while. I worked with Ronald Roseman and Sally Bloom my first year at college before Bob would start teaching me, and he taught me for three years. I was with a lot of Bloom students over the years. I spent some summers studying with Ray Still. Then I came out here. I went to Juilliard after Yale and started a master’s degree, but didn’t finish it because in the spring of that year, I got this job.

AF: What kind of oboe do you play on?

WB: I play a Loree.

AF: Do you? Okay. I play a Laubin, and I didn’t know if maybe Bloom did or some of his...

WB: Yes, Bloom was always a Loree fan, but he liked Laubins too. I bought a Laubin English horn, which I still have, and I really like. I’ve played on a lot of really good instruments. It’s just that I got used to the quality of the Lorees. They have a sheen that I like.
AF: I was just curious. Do you teach anywhere else other than San Francisco Conservatory?

WB: That's my main thing right now. I do occasionally take some private students, but they’re not regular. They’re not weekly. They’re monthly, bi-monthly, sort of loose, and people like you come through.

AF: Have you played much of Harbison’s other oboe music?

WB: Yes, when he was working on this concerto, he sent me a piece that he wrote in 1979. I don’t think it’s published. It’s called Amazing Grace.

AF: He’s actually sending that to me.

WB: It’s another extremely difficult piece. I’ve performed that a couple of times, and I actually did a studio recording of it. I still haven’t edited it to make it ready for posterity, but I will. That’s a much more modernistic piece. There are many more extended techniques such as multiphonics and fluttering tonguing, but it’s very accessible still. It’s tremendously challenging because it’s solo, and it goes on for quite awhile. Then there’s this Six American Painters which is a terrific quartet. I think it was originally written as a flute piece, flute and string trio, but easily adapted. I’ve played the quintet [Quintet for Winds], Snow Country, and the Concerto for Oboe, Clarinet and Strings. I’ve played some of his orchestral music, though not nearly as much as I’d like. We’ve recorded his
Second Symphony and Music for 18 Winds. He sends me many recordings of pieces that he’s been writing and working on, and much of it I wish the Symphony would play. I’ve suggested many times, but I’m out of the loop or something. The power structure that decides those things is doing their own thing. There’s a lot of good music there.

AF: Did you know him before he started to write this concerto?

WB: Yes, he was out here not as a composer-in-residence, but he was here for a kind of festival of some music of his or part of an American ... I can’t remember the exact details of it, but that may have been the first time we played his quintet. I got to know him a little bit then, with a bunch of the other wind players. I think Steve Paulson, our principal bassoonist, was the one that got everybody turned on to the Quintet for Winds, and he organized a number of performances of that. It became a real vehicle for us. John was out here for awhile and Michael Steinberg, I think, got us all together. We had a lot in common, kind of shared sensibilities. Actually, it was kind of funny. When he came out here for the premiere of the Oboe Concerto, I heard a story from him that was just a hilarious coincidence. This music stand belonged to my grandmother. We were giving John a ride somewhere during the week of the concerto performances, and I started talking about my grandmother who had lived in Princeton because he had gone to Princeton. His father was on the faculty there as a history professor. We were talking about transcriptions and transcribing jazz, in fact. He was talking about how Gunther Schuller was really terrific at that kind of transcription. When John was a graduate student, he had received a job transcribing folk tunes from other countries for this old
woman that lived in Princeton. I knew immediately who it was. It was my grandmother.

I said, “Oh my gosh. This has really got to be my grandmother.” He said, “Really?” I said, “Was her name Dorothy Berliner Commins?” He said, “Yes, I think that’s right.”

She had gone around the world on some kind of a United Nations grant and had collected all of these folk tunes from different sources all over. She had brought them back, and she hired music students to transcribe them. John was one of them. Then she did these settings, and what’s really funny about this is that she was always very interested in lullabies. (Leafing through his grandmother’s published book), she collected all these things, as you can see, from all over the world. Some of them from the Middle East, Sahara in Africa, and so on have these unbelievable melismas. They’re incredibly intricate and very difficult rhythmically and melodically. So, John was telling this story, and he said, “When I was a graduate student, I needed to make a little bit of money on the side. I saw this advertisement that this lady needed somebody to do transcriptions of lullabies and folk tunes, and I thought, that’d be easy money.” He went over to her house, and she gave him this stack of tapes that she had collected in Iran and other places. Then he went home, and he put it on and (Bennett sings many melismas). He said that a few of them were just so unbelievably hard that he remembered slaving over them. I said, “Well, I happen to know who that person was. She is my grandmother.” He asked, “Really?” She published this book, and I showed him this book. He went through it, and he said, “Yes, I remember this one, and I did this one and this one.” Then a little while later, I can’t remember exactly what he said, but it was very diplomatic, he said, “Your grandmother has a very interesting sense of harmony.” He said, “You know, it’s amazing. Even with these Middle Eastern things, she has a way of turning everything
That’s what she was like. She was a very Victorian old woman, and she loved Chopin and Debussy. She would work these things out, and then everything she played ended up sounding like that with a lot of pedal and these very lush, delicate chords. Anyway, John was very amused by that, and it was just kind of a funny coincidence at the end of all of this, to find out that we had some other connections.

AF: Right. Let’s see, he said he sent you some sketches when he was composing.

WB: Yes, actually, here’s the preliminary copy. This is the piano score and everything. He sent me an oboe part which turned out to be pretty much the final version.

AF: Okay.

WB: I practiced it and put it on tape for him as quickly as I could and sent it back. Then he told me where to go with it. He had some suggestions from that. Another thing though, was that I had made a demo tape for London Records hoping that they might be interested in doing something, before this whole commission thing came up. The big piece on that tape was Herbert Howells’ Sonata. Do you know that?

AF: No.

WB: When I found out that John was writing the piece for me, I sent him a copy of the tape. I think subliminally there were a couple of things from the Howells that sort of
made their way into John’s own language. Do you know his [Harbison’s] First Symphony?

AF: Yes.

WB: John had written an overture called Remembering Gatsby which was really a lot of fun, and I loved the finale of the First Symphony. It had this apocalyptic swing to it, and I asked him to make sure he wrote something that had one of his apocalyptic swing numbers in it. I think that that’s sort of the way the jazz things came into it. If you ever get a chance to listen to the Howells, that piece has a few elements in it that… I never asked him about that, but I had a feeling that it might’ve perked up his ears.

AF: Was there anything that changed after he sent you the sketches? Did you play anything and say it was too hard?

WB: No. I had sent him a piece called Le Api by Pasculli, and the main reason I had sent it to him was because it was such a compendium of finger combinations and things. I just wanted to write down things that were easy for me to do and things that were hard for me to do. I told him I wasn’t into the real screechy high registers. I’m not a big fan of many modernistic techniques. I can do them, but it’s just not my favorite kind of music. I like pulse and melody. I guess I have a more conservative approach to the orchestra. You’ll see in those reviews there were many good, warm receptions to it [the concerto], but the local press especially was very negative.
AF: Yes, I read some of them.

WB: I always felt kind of guilty about it, that John had that kind of an experience here. I think it may have been more painful for me than it was for him. He was older and wiser and knew himself better than I knew myself at that time, and I found it very difficult to handle. I’ve played an awful lot of new music in the orchestra, and there’s a lot of it that really goes in one ear and out the other. I really don’t understand why we don’t get to play more of the music that might be immediately accessible. The thing is, I’m open-minded about this stuff, and there are a lot of composers whose music I like but whose styles I might not necessarily understand. I guess I’ve gotten a little bit of a reputation for being a reactionary, and I just always appreciated John’s strength of character and confidence in himself and the kind of music he writes. I think that’s pretty unusual.

AF: You also sent him another Pasculli concerto, the *Concerto sopra Motivi dell’ opera “La Favorita” di Donizetti*… (qtd. in von Buchau 24)

WB: Well, I had taped it. That was part of my oboe tape.

AF: You had taped it, okay. In the second movement of Harbison’s Concerto, did you want that section where you accompany yourself to be in there?

WB: Well, I didn’t expect that. I think he looked at *Le Api* and heard the more tremulous sections of “La Favorita” and recognized in there a dramatic element that he could put
to good use. He wrote me a note saying that... There is this one letter, I’m sorry I haven’t been able to find it here, saying that, “Yes indeed, I’m writing this concerto.”

When he sent me the first sketch of the oboe part, he said, “You’ll see that I’ve brought Pasculli into the twentieth-century.” It was sort of a written out cadenza, and I think he liked the idea of the audience being made uncomfortable by the stress of the physical job that the player has to do there, circular breathing. It is a real nail biter. The audience really does get very upset as you go through, and it’s quite effective. I think that was his main aim there, not so much to do the Italian park band thing, but to create that tension.

AF: He also told me that you were learning to circular breathe at the time. Were you learning for that piece in particular, or were you just…?

WB: I was learning it for Le Api, I think. It was just one of those things. We used to have Heinz Holliger as a pretty regular soloist, and I got to know him fairly well. He’s the one that told me about Pasculli and told me where to get a hold of the original manuscripts. Holliger played a premiere of the Carter Concerto with us. We did several tours with him. He’s very generous, and I spent a lot of time with him playing and learning, just from talking to him about how some of these things are done. I think it was a good influence in a way. He inspires a certain kind of flexibility that you don’t learn in American oboe schooling. Although, I would not choose to play in that way myself, I like the Philadelphia School. Those are my roots, but I certainly have an appreciation for all the things that he was able to do, especially at that time. He was really playing very beautifully and doing a lot of very challenging things.
AF: Yes, I’m having a hard time with it [circular breathing]. I hope I can learn before May.

WB: Yes. It really stretches you to try to do those things. I wouldn’t have been able to play that *Amazing Grace* piece without having had those experiences. So yes, I learned circular breathing from him and a lot about double tonguing and flutter tonguing. Although linguistically, I think if you’re raised in Europe with the way they roll their r’s, it’s a different experience learning these things. Holliger could go from a (simulating flutter tonguing). He could roll an r at the back of his throat and then gradually slow it down and turn it into triple and double tonguing. He could just seamlessly go back and forth between single tonguing and a flutter tongue. It was quite impressive. I certainly tried.

AF: Okay. Well, this is sort of a random question, but Harbison actually told me to ask you about an electronic realization or accompaniment you made.

WB: Yes, when I first received the score, I had a… Well here, why don’t we go down to my studio? I’ll just show you what I have. It has a sequencer on it. Do you use any kind of electronics?

AF: No.
WB: I found it a very useful thing to have when I’m learning a concerto because I can play the orchestral parts into it. Then for a long time I used this, Proteus, which is a sound module. It has orchestral sounds in it. You can tell they’re electronic, but some of them are quite good. They approximate well enough the sound of the orchestra, and so I made these tapes to practice with. (Plays electronic orchestral accompaniment, movement 1, beginning)

AF: Wow.

WB: Now, this is primitive by today’s standards. This was in 1992, but you kind of get a feeling for what it sounds like. With the keyboard, you can program in ritards, accelerandos, volume, and so on. It’s very crude, but I had added a metronome track so that I could practice with it. I would play it really slowly. It was basically a fancy metronome. I practiced with it so I could really get the sound in my ear, and actually, I played the first performances from memory.

AF: Oh wow!

WB: Which I wouldn’t do again. I was being young and brash. There are all these rhythmic elements here that we were talking about before. When you’re practicing, you have to be aware of them. I’ll play you something faster. You have to hear this next section. You’ll hear the wind instruments. I think that I sent him a tape of this with me
playing along, and I put in a little ghost oboe so that I could follow along in the cadenzas. I think he was really horrified and tickled at the same time.

AF: Well, he said it was funny.

WB: This doesn’t have a metronome. It’s like a Music Minus One. It’s relentless. You can get a feeling for how it’s going to sound.

AF: Yes.

WB: The bass clarinet is very convincing. You can tell it’s a clarinet, but it’s just kind of wooden. The brass instruments, [especially] the muted horns, don’t work that well. You get the idea.

AF: Yes.

WB: It’s really a great practice tool though. I would punch in passages on there, do them really slowly, and just put it on a loop. It was really a great way to work on something and get it in your head. You just have to be careful not to take the musical ideas. Okay, so is there anything we’re forgetting?

AF: No, I don’t think so.
WB: I’d love to have a copy of it when you’re done.

AF: Oh sure. Thank you for your time.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

As one can see, oboists are extremely lucky to have this interesting, beautiful, and expertly crafted oboe concerto in their repertoire. Its use of jazz, blues, lyrical oboe writing, baroque forms, and innovative phrasing make it exciting to listen to and fun to play. The many hours needed to learn the piece are well worth it.

The poignant “Aria” allows the soloist to play lyrically and vocally while exploring glissandos and swing rhythms in the blues section. In the second movement, the oboist soars above Harbison’s strict, formal passacaglia writing and transpositions in a painfully gorgeous melody filled with longing, nostalgia, excitement, and drama. Harbison showed his compositional expertise when he showcased William Bennett’s virtuosic technique while incorporating both the passacaglia subject and the melody in the movement’s 32nd note section. In the “Fantasia”, performer and audience alike are immediately captivated by the first notes. The oboist is free to be energetic and jovial while playing in the style of a 1920s big band, something few oboists will ever truly experience, and showing off his or her technique in the riveting cadenzas.

Bennett’s contributions to the compositional process, both suggestions and interpretations, are invaluable to future study and performances. Although Bennett
remains humble about his role in the collaboration, it is easy to see his influences imprinted on the concerto. His quirky sense of humor is featured in the schizophrenic phrasing of the first movement. His affinity for the writing of Pasculli made its way into the second, and his light-hearted nature is found in the third. Bennett’s skill at long and lyrical playing is highlighted in the “Aria” and “Passacaglia” as well as his technical abilities in the “Passacaglia” and “Fantasia”. Bennett’s friends influenced the instrumentation of the concertante sections, and it is certainly evident that Bennett received the swing number he requested.

With each new insight revealed from studying this composition, one will be more and more impressed with Harbison’s work. In addition, each subsequent listening of Bennett’s recording will unveil the depth of understanding and sensitivity that he brought to each phrase. Up until this point, this knowledge and understanding was afforded only to him as the premiere performer. Every oboist should enrich their lives by learning and performing this work. Every music student should be excited to learn how to tackle the inherent technical and musical challenges offered in this piece, and every college oboe professor should insist on including John Harbison’s Oboe Concerto in his or her pedagogic repertoire.
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