

# Master Lesson on Bozza's *Aria*

by  
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Few works in the classical saxophonist's repertoire have enjoyed as much popularity as the *Aria* by Eugene Bozza. Bozza (1905-1991) wrote this work for alto saxophone and piano in 1936 for the famous French saxophonist, Marcel Mule. It is in the style of J. S. Bach and is very similar to Bach's third-movement aria from the organ Pastorale in F, BWV 590. These two arias share the same mood, meter and accompanimental style. In fact, Bozza quotes Bach's aria exactly in his four bars before rehearsal number 3. Below are some ideas and suggestions that I share with my own students in their first lesson on the Bozza *Aria*.

## Tempo

The *Aria* seems to flow best at a relaxed tempo of eighth note equal to 63-69. If the tempo gets slower, the phrases become too long to control. If it is played faster, the piece becomes hurried and anxious.

## Style

The style is best described as relaxed, mournful, and introspective. There is a certain sadness in this piece and the player must work to contrast the initial simplicity of the opening theme with the more mature and passionate sections marked *En animant un peu* (a little faster).

## Breathing

Breathing is the biggest challenge in the *Aria*, so give this area much attention and planning. Remember, running out of air in a piece of music feels like drowning, and a drowning person seldom cares about making good music! Pace yourself just as a long-distance runner or you will not be able to make it to the end.

The first thing to realize is that you do not have to observe all of the written breath marks. Choose ones that work best for you and add others as needed. Be sure to mark them in the music and always follow your plan. Where possible, aim for a two- to three-bar breathing pattern to follow the regular phrase structure. Once a personalized breathing scheme is developed, perform the work frequently in its entirety to be sure that the breaths work and to condition the body for the performance. Below are some specific places that I suggest for breathing.

At one before rehearsal number **3**, replace the tied C# on beat with a breath. This will allow you to ignore the breath in the second bar of **3**. Make the F# one before **6** a long eighth note, leaving a full eighth rest to breathe. Observe the *cedez* (slow down) here, yet make it a bigger retard to give yourself time to catch your breath and prepare for challenges from **6** to the end. (The pianist should hold through here until the saxophonist cues the downbeat of rehearsal number **6**.) Insert a breath four measures from the end in place of the dot on the B. This will give you the air needed to fade the last note with control.

## Intonation

Intonation, specifically sharpness, is another major concern in this work. Since there are few rests, the embouchure becomes tight as the piece goes on. Since the breathing is challenged to the limit, notes are often supported with the last reserves of air. The frequent use of typically sharp pitches — such as high A, B, C, and C# — add to intonation problems. The biggest errors tend to occur from rehearsal number **6** to the end, when the player is tired and the dynamics are extremely soft. Use a metered tuner to work on intonation and many problems can be solved before rehearsing with the pianist.

## Phrasing

Bozza makes use of numerous long notes in his *Aria*. To avoid a lifeless interpretation, always shape held notes with either a *crescendo* or *decrescendo* to give them direction. For example, *crescendo* the first bar up to a *mezzo-piano* in bar two and *decrescendo* back to a *piano* dynamic in bar three. (Use this basic shaping whenever this theme occurs.) Be sure that the held notes are always going to or away from the high point of the phrase. Some specific phrasing suggestions are listed below.

The *crescendo* in bars five and six before rehearsal number **3** should lead to a healthy *mezzo forte* at the *En animant un peu*. Notice that the grace notes four before **3** are played before the beat. The tempo one measure before **3** should retard slightly to achieve *Tempo I* at number **3**. The figure at **3** is a written out *gruppetto* and should occur on the beat in a relaxed manner. Interpret the *fortissimo* seven measures before **5** to mean a full-bodied *forte*; do not play this too loudly, since this is not in keeping with the style of the piece. Be sure that the *decrescendo* two before **5** only goes to a *mezzo forte* or the dynamics will get too soft before rehearsal number **6**.

The *pianissimo* at **6**, which represents a distant echo of the beginning, is best played without vibrato for greater control. Insert the missing *crescendo* one bar before **7**, bringing the volume up slightly, and use a little vibrato to add just a touch more energy. (I even suggest that students play the fifth bar of rehearsal number **1** at a *mezzo-piano* dynamic, not *pianissimo*, to parallel the one-level dynamic increase seen at **7**. Some players may consider that this is recomposing Bozza's work, but we all know how full of mistakes these early Leduc publications can be.) Make the crescendo after **7** go from *pianissimo* to a rich and full *forte*. Narrow the vibrato down to a straight tone in the last measure and fade away to nothing.

Eugene Bozza presented saxophonists a lovely, easy-sounding composition when he wrote his *Aria*. The problem is that this charming piece presents many challenges to those saxophonists who do not prepare it properly. Give this technically simple piece the initial attention it deserves and you will be rewarded with a polished performance.