



Steve Mauk

Creative Teaching Techniques

Eugene Bozza's *Improvisation and Caprice*

Eugene Bozza (1905-1991) was one of the most prolific French composers of music for the saxophone. He wrote over twenty works for the instrument, ranging from unaccompanied solos to saxophone quartets. His two most popular works are his *Aria for Alto Saxophone and Piano* (see the master lesson by this author in the September/October, 1993 issue of the *Saxophone Journal*) and his unaccompanied *Improvisation et Caprice*, both

published by Alphonse Leduc of Paris. Bozza dedicated his two-movement work to the legendary Marcel Mule, then professor of saxophone at the Paris Conservatory. These pieces first appeared in Bozza's 1944 book of twelve etudes (*Douze Etudes-Caprices pour Saxophone*) as numbers six and seven respectively. The *Improvisation* is taken from his *Image*, Opus 38 for unaccompanied flute, written for Marcel Moyse and published in 1940

by Leduc. Bozza lifted the middle section of the *Image* intact, transposed it down a minor third, and added a fermata to the last note. (Interestingly enough, Bozza then used most of the remaining two outer sections of *Image* to create his *Piece Brève*, another unaccompanied work for saxophone.) I have found no prior source for the *Caprice*, so assume it to be an original composition for saxophone.

IMPROVISATION

Bozza marks the *Improvisation* with a "moder-

ato" tempo indication and the stylistic phrase, "a piacere, avec le caractere d'une improvisation" (at your pleasure, with the character, or style, of an improvisation). Bozza then adds an "animando" and several "ritardandi" to help the performer shape the music. These tempo fluctuations, plus the title, show that the

composer wants the piece to sound spontaneous or improvised.

I recommend that a saxophonist begin the study of this work by setting a pulse of quarter-note = 66-72 and playing it with a metronome. This helps the performer learn the rhythmic subtleties and allows for concentration on the challenges of the G# minor key signature and the numerous accidentals. Once these areas have been addressed, the saxophonist should abandon the metronome and approximate the tempos and rhythms to help create the illusion of a classical improvisation. Using a pushing and pulling approach to the tempo will also help direct the melody properly. The general rule is to find held notes, which indicate a pulling back of time, and to follow them with a slight pushing ahead of the tempo to serve as a contrast. Each player must determine the extent to which this device should be used.

As with any unaccompanied work, dynamics are crucial. Bozza's limits are wide, ranging from "pp" to "f." Since the piece was originally for flute, however, it would be best to avoid overwhelming "fortes." One wonders if the saxophone version was done hurriedly since there are so many discrepancies between it and the flute piece. I recommend that the dynamics listed below be added to parallel those in the *Image*.

Add an "mf" at the beginning of bar six and a crescendo in measure seven, which leads to a "p" on the downbeat of bar eight. Though not a dynamic, a "ritardando" is indicated for beat three of measure eleven. A decrescendo is marked in bar twelve going into beat

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two. There is no decrescendo in measure fourteen, although bar fifteen does contain an "mf" on the downbeat and a decrescendo under the last three eighth notes. Measure sixteen indicates a quick crescendo and decrescendo on beat two, and bar seventeen should have an "mf" on the first beat. Measure eighteen contains the word "echo" over the second half of beat two with a corresponding "pp" below. Add a crescendo in measure twenty, which prepares the printed "mf" in the following bar. The flute version has a decrescendo in the last two bars, preparing the "p" which occurs in the next section. Since it is difficult to play the saxophone's low register softly, I recommend that these bars be kept "mp to mf." Add only as much decrescendo to the last note as can be controlled gracefully. Aside from these printed dynamics, crescendos and decrescendos should be used along the way to give the music expressive direction.

There are two other suggestions I make in teaching this piece. The first is to slur the last three notes in bar five

and the same pattern in the third measure from the end (not the last four notes as printed). These are the markings used in the *Image* and are presumably errors in the saxophone part. The second suggestion is to use palm-key fingerings for the last note in measure nineteen and the first two notes of bar twenty. Finger a standard C plus palm Eb for the D. Add the palm E key for the D# and then the F# for middle E. This gives a hollow, haunting effect to the pianissimo passage and adds another color quality to the tone.

CAPRICE

The *Caprice* is a perpetual-motion piece, lasting around one minute and fifteen seconds. Its whirling technique is most impressive to the listener, while being an enormous challenge to the performer. Many performers get caught up in the excitement of the piece and rush ahead toward their own musical destruction. These suggestions may be useful in making the performance more successful.

Although the work sounds very fast, Bozza only assigned it an "Allegro

moderato" tempo. I recommend a pulse of quarter-note = 92-100 as the ultimate performance tempo, with a considerably slower pace used during the practice periods. A final tempo of half-note = 46-50 is even better, avoiding a hammered approach and allowing the movement to float more effortlessly.

Unlike the *Improvisation*, which fluctuates widely in tempo, the *Caprice* remains rather constant throughout. The only place that I suggest a tempo alteration is in eight bars from the end. An added "rallentando" prepares the listeners for the needed breath before beat three. A gradual "accelerando" after the rest up through the next two measures leads to the final phrase and its drive toward the finish.

Bozza uses few dynamic markings in this movement. With the exception of the "p" indication in the eighth measure from the end, the only other marking is "mf." The "mf" found in bar two leads me to the conclusion that the piece should actually start around "mf" or at least a healthy "mp." The return of the original theme, in bar five

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from the end, should be similarly marked, with the addition of the crescendo and decrescendo as before. Each player must determine how low and soft the numerous open-ended crescendo and decrescendo markings should be played, but I suggest an overall effect of "mf."

To make the piece technically accessible, saxophonists should make full use of alternate fingerings. (Refer to this author's article on alternate fingerings in the November/December,

1991 issue of the *Saxophone Journal*.) Using an alternate F# in bar one and the side C in bar two can alleviate numerous blips from the technique. In bar six, I recommend playing the high D with the C key down and the middle D by fingering C plus the palm Eb. The G#-A# passage, which appears first in bar seven, can be easily performed by merely adding the side Bb key to the G# fingering. The high D-E figure in measure eight can be simplified by just adding the high E key to the D finger-

often needs a breath before the next rest. Taking full, deep breaths and working on the smaller sections from one rest to the next are essential. As the tempo is gradually increased, these sections can then be pieced together to combine longer phrases. Only when each section can be played up-tempo should the whole piece be attempted, thereby allowing the performer to play the final breathing pattern.

Two breathing spots are crucial to the successful performance of this work. I suggest that the second note in bar eighteen (middle F) be omitted and a breath taken in its place. There is a breath mark here, but it is impossible to take the breath and play the note without a disturbance in the musical flow. This gives a logical breath between the rests in measure fifteen and twenty-three, thereby balancing the piece into more manageable sections. The other spot, mentioned previously, is the critical breath in bar twenty-three. An added "rallentando" gives the player ample time to refresh the body with a big breath here. Another unique option practiced by several of my students is to play the piece using circular breathing, without an audible breath or rest. Of course, the musician must have command of this technique and must re-compose the assumed notes left out at the rests. The effect can be stunning when done well.

My final suggestion regards style and mental imagery. The overall effect of Bozza's *Caprice* is quite similar to *The Flight of the Bumble Bee* by Rimsky-Korsakov. I suggest that the saxophonist imagine a bee, with its buzzing getting louder and softer as it whizzes around, and try to imitate that sound in the dynamic changes of the piece. Repeating the first bar numerous times until the effect is achieved can be of great help. Using this approach and the more relaxed, half-note pulse can give the piece a wonderfully light and whirling style.

Eugene Bozza packed many demands into this three-minute piece. It has come to be a staple in the repertoire of many saxophonists due to its charm and challenges. Using these suggestions and adding personal ideas to the interpretation can add even more life and energy to this fine composition. §

Recordings

- ☐ LAURA HUNTER, DUO VIVO: CD651 or C651 • Rogers The Nature of This Whirling Wheel; Bolcom Lilit; Cooper Four Impromptus; Gottschalk Jeu de Chat; Galante Shu Gath Manna "Exciting Recording, Significant Contribution to New Literature," *Saxophone Journal*
- ☐ LEO POTTS, SAXOPHONE: C159 • Maurice Tableaux de Provence; Grieg Erotik; Sayaka Akiyama Piece; Hayes Concertino; Reidling Serenade in Sol; Reidling Johnny
- ☐ HARVEY PITTEL, SOPRANO & ALTO SAXOPHONE: S105 • Loeillet Sonata; Rodriguez Sonata; Stevens Dittico; Maurice Tableaux de Provence "Musically Stimulating," *New York Times*
- ☐ BRIAN MINOR, SAXOPHONE: C151 • Persichetti Parable; Lunde Sonata; Leon Stein Quintet for Saxophone & Strings (with Chicago Symphony String Quartet & Lawson Lunde, piano)
- ☐ BARITONE SAXOPHONE: MARK WATERS: C152 • Boismortler Sonata; Bonneau Caprice; Linn Saxifrage Blue; Pelusi Concert Piece for Baritone Sax, Brass Quartet & Percussion
- ☐ NOVA SAXOPHONE QUARTET: C153 • G. Pierne Introduction et Variations; P. Pierne Trois Conversations; Clerisse Introduction et Scherzo; Absil Suite "Sensational Playing," *The New Records*
- ☐ BRIAN MINOR, SAXOPHONE: S154 • Leon Stein Sextet for Alto Saxophone & Wind Quintet; Creston Suite; Heiden Sonata (with Westwood Wind Quintet & Cola Heiden, piano)
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- ☐ EUGENE ROUSSEAU & DENNIS BAMBER, SAXOPHONES: S156 • Loeillet Trio; Smith Mood Music; Lamb Barefoot Dances; Cunningham Piano Trio "Artistically played," *The Instrumentalist*
- ☐ HARVEY PITTEL TRIO: S157 or C157 • Bach/Rodby New Classics Suite; Creston Sonata; Villa-Lobos Bachianas Brasileiras Aria; Duke Ellington Medley (saxophone, cello & piano)
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- ☐ SEXTUOR A VENT (Harvey Pittel w/ Westwood Wind Quintet): C353 • Milhaud Scaramouche; Heiden Intrada; Dubois Sinfonia "Delightful Music, Winningly Played," *Fanfare Magazine*
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