

SELFISH: A RECORDING OF MY OWN COMPOSITIONS

by

MICHAEL BENNETT JOHNSON

JONATHAN WHITAKER, COMMITTEE CHAIR

DON FADER

KEVIN CHANCE

CHARLES SNEAD

THOMAS ROBINSON

WILLIAM KEEL

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ABSTRACT

This project comprises a professional recording of several of my compositions and an accompanying manuscript discussing my general approach to composition and my unique role as a composer-performer. The recorded compositions include works for trombone choir, solos for bass trombone and piano, a duet for tenor trombone and bass trombone with trombone octet, and a piece for bass trombone and fixed media written specifically for this project. The manuscript focuses on the harmony, rhythm, and form of my compositions. Stylistic traits such as neotonality, asymmetric forms, and novel rhythmic textures are discussed with examples from the compositions. The manuscript concludes with a discussion of the duality of being a composer-performer, addressing various perspectives on why the two should be mutually inclusive, or why they should be kept separate.

DEDICATION

This manuscript and the accompanying recordings are dedicated to my parents William and Suzanne Johnson. I am the first person in my family to follow music as a career, as well as the first to pursue a doctoral degree. Even though they may not understand what I do for a living or how I do it, my parents always made sure that I had everything I needed to succeed. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for all that you have given and sacrificed for me to get where I am today.

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INTRODUCTION

As a composer-performer, I feel isolated at times. Most performers do not compose, and many composers give up their instrument to compose full time. Especially within the brass community, there is a dearth of musicians who both perform and compose. Composers who do participate directly in the realization of their pieces more often conduct than perform. Personally, however, I have found several pedagogical advantages and career opportunities through my experience as a composer-performer. Composition has deeply influenced my performing, and vice versa. While the accompanying recordings demonstrate my instrumental proficiency, this manuscript seeks to describe my compositional style; it concludes with a discussion of my experience as a composer-performer and a discussion of the benefits of combining these disciplines.

CHAPTER 1: THE COMPOSITIONS

The compositions for this project are written for one or more trombones, with various accompanimental configurations, including trombone choir, solo trombone with piano, solo trombone with trombone choir, and solo bass trombone with fixed media. This chapter provides background for each piece, explaining why it was written and some of its defining elements. Subsequent chapters discuss individual stylistic traits in greater detail, with examples.

Counterintuitive is the most challenging and complex work recorded for this project and my most challenging trombone choir piece. The piece was written as a fanfare for the University of Alabama Trombone Choir to open their concert at the 2015 Alabama Music Educators Conference in Montgomery, Alabama. The slow tempo marking of this rhapsodic piece contrasts with its highly complex rhythms and counterpoint, which produce a strong sense of forward motion. Two double-time sections interrupt the work to build up exuberant energy and volume; the first of these is halted by a sudden return to the slow and rhythmic idea from the introduction. This piece was shortened to accommodate the premiere's time constraints, which is why the second double-time section leads into a sudden and bright finish that seems abrupt but conclusive.

Spar is a recent addition to my portfolio, written for the Round Rock High School Trombone Choir's performance at The Midwest Clinic in Chicago in 2016. I designed the piece to be fun and straightforward to play. I aimed to create a musically satisfying whole in which each part is independently engaging and enjoyable to play. The musical style is intense and energetic, like a film score that accompanies a battle between two superheroes (hence the title,

Spar). The introduction establishes a rhythmic motive that recurs in most subsequent phrases. The original version of this motive remains constant in the bass voices, while other parts in the ensemble play variations of the motive in the melody and countermelody. Glissandi appear in both the melody and accompaniment, creating a sharp contrast to the rigid rhythmic structure of the opening motive.

932 is also a recent addition to my portfolio. This piece was written in the summer of 2016 while pursuing my Master of Music degree at Texas State University. The college at which I earned my bachelor's degree was only a two-hour drive from home, so I never felt isolated. Once settled in Texas, however, I experienced a newfound sense of loneliness. 932—titled after the approximate distance in miles between where I lived in Texas and my home in Alabama—is meant to be a soundtrack of my emotions during the seventeen-hour drive from Alabama to Texas. The piece features two main ideas separated by a half-step transposition; these dominate the beginning and ending sections of the work. The first idea represents the anxiety and fear of moving so far away for the first time, while the second—like the first but transposed a half-step down—depicts the joy of remembering that there is always a place to call home. The piece is dedicated “to those that make home special...”

Equalize for bass trombone and fixed media was newly composed for this project. The piece is inspired by the final fight scene from the movie *Equalizer* (Antoine Fuqua, 2014). The title also alludes to the balance between the soloist and media during a performance as well as the EQ (equalization) of the track. The fixed media includes elements of modern pop music genres like trance and dubstep, especially the use of “drops” that lead into higher-energy chorus sections. The melodies and harmonies are based on pentatonic scales, an homage to the pop music styles it mimics. The structure of the piece parodies a standard verse – prechorus – chorus

structure, with each section drastically more developed and extended than its typical pop music counterpart.

Capriccio was written in 2013 and premiered the next year by the University of Alabama Trombone Choir. The main melody of the piece is fragmented, with players sometimes only expressing one measure of the melody at a time. A contrasting slow section emphasizes the melody with extended solos for a single tenor and bass trombone player before returning to the energetic and highly rhythmic starting material.

Felicity was originally written for flugelhorn and piano. It was commissioned by a friend for his senior recital in 2015. He challenged me to write a piece similar to tonal works from the common practice era: he wanted “the piece to look like perfect theory homework.” Consequentially, *Felicity* employs tonal and structural elements atypical of my other works. It is structured as a set of variations that evolve through simple eight-bar phrases with a basic tonal progression. This was a challenge, as my compositions typically feature non-functional harmonies and asymmetrical forms. *Felicity* has been adapted for several different instruments, including euphonium, clarinet, horn, and flute. The version recorded for this project is in Eb (the original key was F major) and was recorded on bass trombone.

Chorale 2 is my second experiment in chorale-style writing for trombone choir. Most of my pieces are energetic and rhythmic, but with *Chorale 2* I forced myself to write in a lyrical, calm style. The piece explores the beauty and sonority of the trombone choir as analogous to a vocal choir’s gentler affect. Its slow pace creates opportunities to showcase the ensemble’s various colors and timbres. This piece experiments with harmony, featuring complex and extended harmonies that blur the sense of a tonal center.

Sibling Rivalry, for a tenor and bass trombone duet with trombone octet accompaniment, was composed for the annual Big 12 Trombone Conference Composition Contest hosted by Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. The title is both programmatic and a play on words since the two soloists are from the same instrument family. The piece begins with the soloists “arguing” as different solos interrupt, overlap, or mockingly imitate one another. After the argument, a cadenza allows each soloist to “plead their case” before descending into a dark, slow section (“Dad comes home”). Each “sibling” tries to plead their case again to avoid punishment. When the opening section returns, the solos no longer argue. Instead, they are harmonious and sound more like a duet than a battle, signifying eventual accord and peaceful play. The harmonic and rhythmic language is like that of *Counterintuitive*, partly because these two pieces were written simultaneously in the Fall of 2014.

Barlines is my only concerto for bass trombone. The piece was commissioned by a close friend and fellow alumnus of both The University of Alabama and Texas State University. While in school, my friend worked in breweries and quickly developed a passion for brewing. For the final recital of his Master of Music degree, he requested a concerto on the topic of beer. *Barlines* is four movements long, each based on a different kind of beer: “Pale Ale,” “Hefeweizen,” “Vanilla Porter,” and “IPA.” I asked him to send me detailed descriptions of the flavor and brewing process for each beer. These descriptions were serialized into specific musical elements and became the basis for the two main motives (“hops” and “beer”) that dominate the melodic landscape. The “hops” motive is frequently heard transposed and consists of an ascending octave leap followed by a major second and a perfect fourth. The “beer” motive is frequently altered chromatically, but the letter names (whether natural, sharp, or flat) are always B–E–E–D.

CHAPTER 2: HARMONY

My harmonic language has been described as neotonicity, sometimes also known as neocentricity. In his dissertation on the analysis of twentieth-century music, Peter Silberman defines neotonic music as “repertoire that combines features of common-practice tonality with features of atonality.”¹ The sibling term, neocentricity, describes music that creates tonal centers by means other than traditional functional harmony.² While I do not subscribe to any particular school of composition, these terms neatly describe aspects of my compositional style. This chapter analyzes tonal, neotonic, and other non-functional harmonic elements of several of the recorded works. *Felicity* is the most compelling tonal example while *Chorale No. 2* and *Sibling Rivalry* will be studied for their neotonic and atonal elements.

Felicity is one of my few functionally tonal pieces. It centers around a simple harmonic progression and melody that develop through variation in subsequent phrases. Though the music is clearly in E \flat major, certain sections of the piece feature non-functional harmonies and asymmetrical phrase structures that enter and leave the texture, foraying into neotonicity without challenging the work’s overarching tonality.

The piece opens with an ostinato on a tonic E \flat chord with an added ninth (see Example 1). The melody, first played by the left hand in the piano, implies some of the harmonies that are soon clarified by the second phrase and the entrance of the soloist.

¹ Peter Scott Silberman, “Neighbor Spaces: A Theory of Harmonic Embellishment for Twentieth-Century Neotonic Music” (PhD diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 2006), 4.

² Kip Douglas Wile, “Collection in Neocentric Music: A Study in Theory and Analysis of the Music of Debussy, Stravinsky, Scriabin, Bartok, and Ravel” (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 1995), xxv.

Example 1. *Felicity*, opening mm. 1–3. (0:00)

The image shows a musical score for the opening of the piece 'Felicity' in measures 1-3. The score is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of three staves: a bass staff at the top, a grand staff (treble and bass) in the middle, and a bass staff at the bottom. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 70. The first two staves are marked 'tenuto' and 'p' (piano). The bottom staff is marked 'mp' (mezzo-piano). The music features a steady accompaniment in the right hand and a melodic line in the left hand.

When the second phrase begins (see Example 2), the right-hand maintains as many common tones as possible with each harmony changes. This serves to obscure the harmony a little longer before revealing the true progression of the piece. The harmonic structure of this new eight-bar phrase is clarified by the bassline introduced in the left hand and the repeat of the opening melody in the trombone. The progression $I-V^6-vi-V-vi-V^6-I-V$ emerges. The first two times through this progression, the root-position dominant (m. 14 in Example 2) is expressed as a cadential $6/4$ that does not resolve before the deceptive motion back to vi . The melodic focus on $\hat{3}$ during this progression makes it sound like an extension of tonic harmony rather than dominant harmony. In the following phrases, however, the cadential $6/4$ motion and clear dominant function of this chord are stated more clearly in the piano despite the central role of $\hat{3}$ as a point of arrival in the melody.

Example 2. *Felicity*, mm. 11–19. (0:38)

The musical score for Example 2, *Felicity*, mm. 11–19, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 11–19) is marked *mtabile* and contains a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The second system (measures 20–28) is marked *f* and *mp* and also contains a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *mp*, and *pp*. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score is divided into two sections, A and B, indicated by boxed letters above the measures.

A modulation begins at measure 68, starting with a brief tonicization of F major in measures 68–71. In measures 72–76 (see Example 3), the tonal center destabilizes as an unusual harmonic progression leads to a cadence in C major. The progression for measures 72–76 is as follows: Ab major–Gb major–D major–G major–C major. In the key of C, this progression is $\flat\text{VI}-\flat\text{V}-\text{II}-\text{V}-\text{I}$. In the key of F, it is $\flat\text{III}-\flat\text{II}-\text{VI}-\text{II}-\text{V}$. The final three harmonies can be considered a string of secondary dominants, while the preceding Ab-major and Gb-major harmonies could be explained as double neighbor motion around the dominant.

This example reveals a brief return to my more familiar compositional style, characterized by harmonies used non-functionally. The progression of measures 72–76 drives the piece towards the climax through harmonic instability and rapid figuration in the solo part. These brief non-functional (or neotonal) uses of harmony and form do not disturb the listener’s sense of tonic, making it reasonable to categorize this work as tonal.

Example 3. *Felicity*, mm. 71–76. (3:54)

5

71 *f* *f* *fp* *f*

73 *fp* *f+* *mp*
mf *f+* *mp*

75 *f+* *ff*
ff
Red. Red.

Chorale No. 2 is harmonically ambitious and can be described as both neotonal and neocentric. The piece was inspired by the vocal music of composers like Eric Whitacre and Morten Lauridsen, which has been transcribed for trombone choir. The use of colorful chord extensions and dissonant suspensions (especially in Eric Whitacre’s music) were starting points

for my own harmonic experiments. Since trombone choirs have a long history of pairing with voices, I found it intuitive to imitate choral writing for the trombone choir, hoping for opportunities to express the ensemble's potential for beautiful and powerful timbres.

In *Chorale No. 2*, the harmonic structure is neocentric. At times the piece follows an ostensibly simple progression in A minor, the tonal center obscured by dissonances and chord extensions. Locally, harmonies are pandiatonic, formed from an entire diatonic scale instead of focusing on the triad specifically. For example, when implying A-minor harmony, the A minor triad will be present along with other notes from the natural minor scale (some subset of B, D, F, and G). This allows for minimal but colorful use of chromaticism when switching diatonic collections (F# in D major and Bb in F major, for example) and preserves several common tones between each pair of harmonies. This creates a trance-like wash of harmony that is defined primarily by the bass voices.

The first example of this neocentric approach begins at measure 10 (see Example 4). A firm cadence on A minor finally establishes tonic after a seemingly atonal introduction. The cadence thins out to octave A's that drone for a few measures, defining the pitch center further. When the bass voices split in measure 17, the piece moves to a clear F major chord, soon obscured by the upper bass voice's ascent in measure 18. Non-chord tones blur the atypical progression in measure 18, but because of the pervasive diatonicism, the arrival of A minor in measure 19 feels like a firm pitch center.

Example 4. *Chorale No. 2*, condensed score, mm. 10–19. (0:31)

The image shows a condensed score for measures 10 through 19 of 'Chorale No. 2'. The score is written for two staves, likely representing the upper and lower voices of a choir. The time signature is 4/4. Measures 10-11 show a melodic line in the upper voice with eighth and quarter notes, and a harmonic accompaniment in the lower voice. Measures 12-13 feature a long, sustained note in the upper voice, possibly a suspension or retardation, while the lower voice continues with a steady accompaniment. Measures 14-15 show a continuation of the melodic line in the upper voice. Measures 16-17 show a change in the melodic line, with a more active eighth-note pattern. Measures 18-19 conclude the passage with a final melodic phrase in the upper voice and a sustained accompaniment in the lower voice.

Measures 45–58 employ a thicker texture that better exemplifies the work’s harmonic structure. In Example 5, common tones are retained between harmonies which lack tonal function. While the style of the phrase in Example 4 was inspired by pieces like Lauridsen’s *O Magnum Mysterium*, the use of consonant suspensions and retardations in measure 45 was inspired by the conclusion of Eric Whitacre’s *Sleep*. This passage begins similarly to measure 18 of the previous example. The arrival of F major in measure 45 is complicated by pedal tones in the upper tenor trombone parts. Slowing note durations bring the piece to a near halt as it softens to a series of gentle swells at measure 49. The texture thins to four voices as a false recapitulation begins at measure 57.

The Whitacre-inspired suspensions and retardations begin at measure 47 with a 4–3 suspension in D major in the accompaniment, followed by 6–5 suspensions in the melody. As the music slows and expands at measure 53, the remaining four voices make their way back to A minor. The following phrase (measure 59) leads to the climax of the work, which arrives in F major.

Example 5. *Chorale No. 2*, condensed score, mm. 45–58. (2:32)

The image shows a condensed score for measures 45 through 58 of 'Chorale No. 2'. The score is written for piano in 4/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system covers measures 45 to 51, and the second system covers measures 52 to 58. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *mf*, and *p* in the upper staff, and *pp* in the lower staff. A box containing the letter 'D' is placed above measure 56. The notation features complex chordal textures with many suspensions and extended phrases.

This chapter's final example comes from *Sibling Rivalry* for tenor trombone, bass trombone, and trombone octet. Measures 46–63 compellingly exemplify my neotonal harmonic approach. At measure 46, the octet begins a descending pattern of simple suspensions while the soloists play individual extended phrases. These suspensions obscure the tonal center of the phrase. The melodies are based on the highly embellished harmonies that result from the series of suspensions in the accompaniment. These melodies seamlessly create cohesive lines over the rapidly changing harmonies in the ensemble. The transition at the end of this section (measures 64–67) is a final, slightly exaggerated 4–3 suspension that settles the piece into E major.

Example 6. *Sibling Rivalry*, condensed score, mm. 46–63. (1:21)

46 **F** Solo parts 47 48 Tenor trombone solo 49

sfz Ensemble parts *mf*

50 *ffp* 51 *mp* 52 53

54 **G** Bass trombone solo 55 56 57

58 59 60

61 62 63

CHAPTER 3: RHYTHM

Rhythm is a defining aspect of my compositional style. This may be partially inspired by my enjoyment of heavy metal and rock music. The rhythm of melodies, especially in solo works, moves freely against the accompaniment, occasionally obscuring the meter; prominent triplet figures and hemiola further complexify the rhythmic foreground. The free and jagged nature of my melodic writing may also stem from my compositional process. Usually, I create the harmonic structure and background first, then improvise the melody by singing or playing on trombone or piano. Even when a melody comes first, it typically takes on a disjunct and asymmetric structure.

Barlines provides great examples of my rhythmic writing. Two motives, based on the words “hops” and “beer,” respectively, generate the melody for *Barlines*. Since no specific rhythm is associated with each motive, they appear in a variety of rhythms and tempos. Both motives are generated from the words using a simple cryptogram. Applying the cryptogram to “hops” resulted in the pitch-classes A–A–B–E; the resulting melody is heard at various transpositions and in various rhythms. The intervals for this motive, always ascending, are an octave, a major second, and a perfect fourth. The second word, “beer,” produces the pitch-classes B–E–E–D. Since this pitch-class configuration is more obviously connected to the original word, I decided to maintain its original letter names, permitting chromatic alteration and rhythmic variation.

Example 7 reproduces the solo part from the first movement, “Pale Ale,” in its entirety. Barely 50 seconds long, this movement introduces harmonic and melodic ideas that are

developed throughout the work. The solo line begins with an unembellished statement of the “hops” motive. This example demonstrates the intensely disjunct nature of my melodic writing. The accompaniment is slow and chorale-like, consisting of whole notes and slowly shifting atonal harmonies. The melody seems restless compared to the accompaniment, and though mostly diatonic, its jagged contour helps the accompaniment blur the sense of a pitch center.

Example 7. *Barlines*, 1st movement, solo part.

The image shows a musical score for a solo part in bass clef, 4/4 time, with a tempo marking of ♩=75. The score is divided into four systems, each starting with a measure number: 7, 13, and 17. The first system (measures 7-12) features a red box around the first measure labeled "hops" motive and another red box around a triplet in measure 11. The second system (measures 13-16) has a blue box around a triplet in measure 13 labeled "partial 'hops' motive" and a red box around a triplet in measure 15. The third system (measures 17-22) has a blue box around a triplet in measure 17. The fourth system (measures 23-28) shows a long melodic line with a "rall." marking. Dynamics include *mf*, *f*, *p*, and *mp*. There are also triplets and slurs throughout the piece.

Example 8 comes from the third movement, “Vanilla Porter.” After a lengthy introduction and brief cadenza, the trombone ensemble begins a persistent eighth-note ostinato split between voices to create a 3+3+2 rhythmic subdivision. To avoid establishing a tonal center, every measure in the accompaniment expresses a different minor triad, following no discernible pattern or progression. This persistent minor harmony extends from measure 29 to measure 58.

The melodic line at measure 37 is one of the most intricate and disjunct moments in the piece. The melody flows freely against the constant eighth-note pulse of the accompaniment and combines several variations of the “hops” and “beer” motives. As mentioned previously, the

“hops” motive appears transposed while the pitches of the “beer” motive are unaltered. The two motives here are combined and varied in a melody with copious metrical dissonance. The range of this melody barely exceeds three octaves; it is frequently dissonant against the rapidly shifting harmony. In Example 8 below, red and blue rectangles denote the “hops” motive, while yellow rectangles denote the “beer” motive.

Example 8. *Barlines*, mvt. 3, mm. 29–53, solo part. (1:49)

When composing my trombone choir fanfare *Counterintuitive*, I had recently discovered the Boston Pops recordings of John Williams’ film scores and fanfares. *Counterintuitive* is heavily influenced by Williams’ cinematic style. This piece is highly rhythmic, with thick textures and dense counterpoint playing a central role.

Although the piece includes many relevant examples, the three sections discussed below best highlight my rhythmic style. The first of these is found in measures 10–11 (see Example 9). Here, the melody enters for the second time in the low tenor trombone parts, now presented in octaves instead of unison. The bass trombones continue a simple ostinato while the high tenor

trombone parts exchange sixteenth-note triplet interjections. The ensemble texture here is representative of the rest of the work.

Example 9. *Counterintuitive*, mm. 10–11, full score. (0:11)

The musical score for Example 9, *Counterintuitive*, measures 10–11, is presented in a full score format. It features eight trombone parts: Tbn. 1, Tbn. 2, Tbn. 3, Tbn. 4, Tbn. 5, Tbn. 6, B. Tbn. 1, and B. Tbn. 2. The key signature is three flats (B-flat major/D minor) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is marked with a 'B' in a box above measure 10. The music features sixteenth-note triplet interjections in the high tenor trombones (Tbn. 1-4) and a simple unison rhythm in the low voices (B. Tbn. 1-2). Dynamics range from forte (f) to mezzo-piano (mp).

A few measures later, the piece builds towards a *subito* double-time section. In Example 10, the melody remains in the low tenor trombones and the bass trombones continue their ostinato. The high tenor trombones, however, split off into new contrapuntal lines that thicken and blur the texture. The rhythmic tension resolves in the double-time section as the ensemble begins a new idea with a simple unison rhythm in the low voices.

Example 10. *Counterintuitive*, mm. 16–19, full score. (1:00)

Musical score for measures 16–19, measures 1–5 of the section. The score is for a tuba ensemble (Tbn. 1–6) and two bass tubas (B. Tbn. 1–2). The key signature is two flats (B-flat major/D minor). The time signature is 4/4. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *pp*, *ff*, *mf*, *mp*, and *p*. Performance instructions include "quick swell" and "mf" with a "3" indicating a triplet. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system ending at measure 19 and the second system starting at measure 18.

Musical score for measures 18–19, measures 6–8 of the section. The score is for a tuba ensemble (Tbn. 1–6) and two bass tubas (B. Tbn. 1–2). The key signature is two flats (B-flat major/D minor). The time signature is 4/4. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff*, *p*, and *pp*. A performance instruction "D" is present above measure 18, with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 150$. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system ending at measure 19 and the second system starting at measure 18.

The idea from measures 16–19 is reiterated in measures 74–75; here, the piece reaches its most sophisticated and rhythmically intense moment as the music barrels towards the final double-time section. This reiteration is approached by several phrases exploring melodic ideas from the opening and a few short transitional phrases that explore more complex variations of the sixteenth-note triplet interplay. In Example 11, the top trombone part sounds the melody while the rest of the tenor trombones' individual lines combine into an intense rhythmic texture. The bass trombones provide stability by playing open fifths in even eighth notes. The sixteenth-note triplets are still passed among the ensemble, obscured somewhat by other simultaneous subdivisions of the beat (for example, 4:3:2 on the third eighth note of measure 74).

Example 11. *Counterintuitive*, mm. 74–76, full score. (4:07)

74 13

Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3
Tbn. 4
Tbn. 5
Tbn. 6
B. Tbn. 1
B. Tbn. 2

Detailed description: This musical score covers measures 74 to 76 of the piece. It features eight staves for the tuba section, labeled Tbn. 1 through Tbn. 6, and B. Tbn. 1 and B. Tbn. 2. The key signature is three flats (B-flat major/D-flat minor) and the time signature is 4/4. Tbn. 1 has a melodic line with slurs and accents. Tbn. 2 through Tbn. 6 play rhythmic patterns, many involving triplets. B. Tbn. 1 and B. Tbn. 2 play a steady quarter-note accompaniment. The page number '13' is in the top right corner.

75 K $\text{♩} = 150$

Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3
Tbn. 4
Tbn. 5
Tbn. 6
B. Tbn. 1
B. Tbn. 2

pp *ff*
pp *ff*
pp *ff* *p*
pp *ff* *p*
pp *ff* *p*
pp *ff*
pp *ff*

Detailed description: This musical score covers measures 75 and 76. It features the same eight staves for the tuba section. A double bar line is present at the start of measure 75. A key signature change to two flats (B-flat major/D-flat minor) occurs at the beginning of measure 76, marked with a 'K' in a box. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 150. The score shows a dynamic contrast between the two measures. In measure 75, most parts are marked *pp* (pianissimo), while in measure 76, many parts switch to *ff* (fortissimo). Tbn. 1 has a melodic line with accents. Tbn. 2 through Tbn. 6 play rhythmic patterns, many involving triplets. B. Tbn. 1 and B. Tbn. 2 play a steady quarter-note accompaniment.

CHAPTER 4: FORM

My compositional use of form is difficult to describe because I often compose without a strict structure in mind. Though it may sound cliché, I like my compositions to develop organically. If my mental concept for a melody or entire piece starts to change direction, I follow where it leads. The result is an improvisational structure that resists easy categorization. Compositions that lack a repeat structure are sometimes called “through-composed,” but that term’s application to specific types of 19th-century art music render it less useful in a general sense. Therefore, more specific terminology may be helpful to accurately describe my compositional practice.

In Brad Osborn’s article on through-composed songs in modern rock genres, he notes that the term “through-composed” was originally used to describe “songs whose strophes were each set to new music” and developmental process pieces like those of Steve Reich and other minimalists.³ Through-composed songs are characterized by a lack of a return to previous material. In through-composed music, the music is continually morphing and developing; though sections may share themes or textures, precise repetition (e.g., A–B–C–A) is avoided. To categorize a variety of through-composed songs while accounting for sections with similar material, Osborn divides through-composed music into four categories: one-part monothematic, one-part polythematic, multi-part monothematic, and multi-part polythematic. Osborn identifies whether a song contains “section groups,” which are used to organize sections into larger groups

³ Brad Osborn, “Understanding Through-Composition in Post-Rock, Math-Metal, and Other Post-Millennial Rock Genres,” *Music Theory Online* 17, no. 3 (2011): 2.

based on thematic unity or other musical factors.⁴ One-part through-composed songs, regardless of whether they are monothematic or polythematic, have no section groups separating the theme or themes. Conversely, multi-part songs have two or more section groups separating the various themes, related or unrelated.

Even Osborn's flexible taxonomy of through-composed music fails to fully explain my use of form. Although my music may seem to fit one of Osborn's categories, material heard before repeats itself exactly or in transposition, which violates the essential definition of a through-composed work. Osborn's methodology for defining section groups, then, helps organize my music on the micro level, while standard terms like binary and rondo are more revealing on the macro level. Osborn's method and traditional formal analysis not only help explain the piece at hand (932 for solo bass trombone and piano), but also give general insight regarding my approach to form.

Since I wrote 932 to perform myself, almost every characteristic of the piece is tailored to my specific skills. This contrasts with my usual approach, in which I spend considerable time tailoring the music for accessibility to amateur vs. experienced performers. Though I had no form in mind during the compositional process, 932 developed into a sectional ternary form (Statement–Departure–Recapitulation). Osborn's methodology provides tools to succinctly describe the thematically-related phrases and sub-phrases that constitute these large structural sections. Figure 1 describes the form of 932 using Osborn's section/section group terminology.

⁴ Ibid.

Figure 1. Form of 932.

Section Groups	Section	Measures	Ternary Form Sections
I	Intro.	1–8	A
	a	9–26	
	b	27–38	
	Transition	39–46	
II	c	47–63	B
	Transition	64–70	
	c'	71–82	
	d	83–92	
	Transition	93–98	
	e	99–112	
	f	113–126	
	Transition	127–139	
I'	a'	140–157	A'
	b'	158–167	
	b''	168–180	

While the ternary label provides a convincing summary of the overarching form, Osborn's methodology for identifying thematically linked sections allows for much more detailed discussion of how the phrases within each section interrelate. Considering only the first two section groups, the piece exemplifies a multi-part polythematic song. The return to the first section group material, however, keeps the piece from being fully through-composed. Section groups clearly demonstrate the thematic unity between individual themes and phrases while highlighting their unique identity.

The piano accompaniment for 932 contains the defining material for each section group. The solo part is more through-composed, never repeating any material in full. A rhythmic ostinato in the right hand ties the A and B sections together, establishing the key for each phrase. In the B section, the first three pitches of the ostinato lower by a half-step, expressing A \flat major instead of A minor and consequently sounding more joyous and pleasant. After the left hand enters in measure 19, it continues to develop through the B section, varying in rhythm as the

phrase comes to an end. Though the two sections could potentially be labeled A and A' because of the similar rhythm and contour, the separate labels of A and B better account for the change of harmony effected by the half-step transposition. They also account for more intense development of the material when it returns in the I' section group (the recapitulation) as the piece approaches its climax.

Example 12. 932, Excerpts from A and B sections, full score. (0:54)

a. Excerpt of A section, mm. 13–24.

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system, covering measures 13 to 18, features a melodic line in the upper voice (bass clef) and a piano accompaniment in the lower voice (bass clef). The melodic line begins with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a half note G4, and finally a quarter note G4 with a fermata. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern: G4-A4-B4-A4-G4. A dynamic marking of *mp* is present at the start of the first system, and a *f* marking appears at the beginning of measure 19. A crescendo hairpin is located at the end of measure 18, and an asterisk (*) is placed at the end of measure 24. The second system, covering measures 19 to 24, continues the melodic line and piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment includes a 'Ped.' instruction and a *pp* dynamic marking at the beginning of measure 19.

b. Excerpt of B section, mm. 27–34. (1:43)

The musical score shows an excerpt of the B section, measures 27-34. It is written in 3/4 time. The top system features a solo line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (bass clef). The solo line begins with a rest, then enters with a melodic phrase marked *mf* and *f*. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note ostinato in the left hand and a more complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand. A 'Ped.' (pedal) marking is present in the first measure of the piano part. The score is labeled with '30' at the beginning of the piano part.

In section group II (see Figure 1), the structure is again delineated by the accompaniment. The solo part continues to weave new lines over the piano's various textures, never borrowing or mimicking melodic ideas from the piano part. The sections in group II are once again linked by an ostinato, this time beginning in the left hand. As section group II progresses, the unifying ostinato becomes more obscured as the right hand engages in various chordal and contrapuntal motions over the ostinato. The ostinato also develops slightly, becoming shorter and more succinct in the final few phrases to allow more expression in the right hand. Example 13 demonstrates how the sections are unified by the ostinato, while the right hand continually develops and varies. This example also reveals the deeply through-composed nature of the solo part.

Example 13. 932, Excerpts from C, C', D, E, and F sections of Section Group II, full score.

a. Excerpt from C section, mm. 51–54. (3:06)

51

mp

3

Ped.

* *Ped.* *

b. Excerpt from C' section, mm. 79–83. (4:12)

79

3

p

Ped.

* *Ped.* *

c. Excerpt D section, mm. 84–88. (4:26)

84

3

* *Ped.* *

* *Ped.* *

d. Excerpt from E section, mm. 102–10. (5:08)

102

mf

p

*Ped. *Ped. *

e. Excerpt from F section, mm. 115–119. (5:38)

115

p

Ped. *Ped. *Ped.

The recapitulation, or section group I', is based on the same piano part as the original A and B sections. The solo part, however, continues to play new melodies above the familiar material. The B'' section stays in the same tonal area as the B and B' sections, but the ostinato pitches in the right hand rapidly develop and flourish (see Example 14). The rhythmic ideas in the left hand also develop to their most active form. Following the climax in measure 174, the piece gradually softens to pianissimo, slowly thinning the texture by removing chordal extensions and suspensions, finally ending on a simple Ab-major triad.

Example 14. 932, B'' section, mm. 169–175. (8:26)

169

173

ff

ff

Red.

** Red. **

CHAPTER 5: THE COMPOSER-PERFORMER

In addition to writing each of these compositions, I premiered them, either as soloist or ensemble member. Each composition was influenced by my experience and ideas as a trombonist. Even my works in which trombone plays a less central role are substantially influenced by my performance approach. Before considering scholarship on the idea of composer-performers, I would like to share my own experience.

In the trombone community, there is a glaring lack of composer-performers. Even in the broader brass community, few musicians write and perform their own works. I have yet to find a compelling reason for the two disciplines to remain so separate. To me, they are mutually inclusive. Many of the artistic decisions made by a composer overlap those made by a performer interpreting the piece. A composer might, for example, specify crescendo placement; the performer, especially where dynamics are not explicitly designated, makes the same decision while determining how to perform the section. The process is not substantially different; in both situations, identical artistic decisions are being made on the same material. The main difference is contextual: the composer creates conceptually while the performer manipulates sound directly.

As a composer-performer, the two disciplines are always interacting. When performing, my compositional practice informs my phrasing and expression. When interpreting another composer's work, I consider how I might have written it differently. I see myself split between the two disciplines. During performance, technical aspects are relegated to the performer side, while the composer side offers opinions on interpretation. During composition, the performer side informs technical decisions like register, tuning, orchestration, rhythm, and idiomatic

concerns like slide positions. When composing, I imagine performing the music I write, which leads to decisions on rhythms, register, and so forth. This dual role is practical. In a traditional scenario, performers and living composers can discuss their preferences regarding interpretation, but miscommunications are rampant. When the performer and composer are one and the same, this problem is avoided. A potential drawback is that the music develops a strong and unique personal identity that limits its accessibility.

Philip Alperson also claims that the processes involved in composition and performance are interdependent, “each involving an element (or elements) of the other.”⁵ Alperson points out that fundamental elements of each are often thought to belong to the other. Composers are often credited with bringing a piece of music to life in audible form, while performers are credited with making decisions about how a piece should sound.⁶ These fundamental elements still sound reasonable in reverse. Alperson highlights a few potential contradictions. The first is that imagining performing is a distinct process from actually performing, which would contradict my opinion that my performer side is continuously active while I compose. The second is the question of whether performing your own work in a large ensemble setting really constitutes performing your own composition (that is, since other performers are also contributing to the final result, you lack full control of the interpretation). The third is that if the composer often “performs” the work mentally during composition, the overall process is more like rehearsal than performance.⁷ Alperson's response to these criticisms cogently summarizes my beliefs regarding composer-performer duality: “inwards performances would seem to be functionally necessary for

⁵ Philip Alperson, “When Composers Have to Be Performers,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49, no. 4 (1991): 370.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

the composition of most music...I believe that composition typically involves an element of performance.”⁸

Lukas Foss writes, “We owe our greatest musical achievements to an unmusical idea: the division of what is an indivisible whole, ‘music,’ into two separate processes: composition (the making of music) and performance (the making of music)...”⁹ Foss believes that this division between composing and performing arises from the labor involved in each, since “the procedural advantages are too great to be sacrificed.”¹⁰ There is merit to this idea, as both composing and performing are individually time-consuming. With the roles separate, composers can dedicate more time to composition and guiding performances of their works. Performers, on the other hand, can dedicate more time to preparing works for performance. Foss implies that splitting these roles allows for the “procedure” of creating new music to improve; in the end, it still separates “an indivisible whole.” I personally find numerous benefits to engaging in both activities and I believe there are great pedagogical advantages to studying both.

Composition, for example, dramatically improved my sight-reading and ear training skills, especially as a younger musician. Figuring out the pitches and rhythms I heard in my head or whistled aloud was essentially an exercise in dictation. I gained a strong understanding of rhythm and subdivisions as I built a secure connection between my ear and the notated result. These same skills are vitally important as a performer. For most performers, playing with good intonation, slotting, etc. requires accurate audiation prior to playing, a skill developed effectively through composition. Audiation is indispensable for improvisation, which in turn informs the

⁸ Ibid., 371.

⁹ Lukas Foss, “The Changing Composer-Performer Relationship: A Monologue and a Dialogue,” *Perspectives of New Music* 1, no. 2 (1963): 45.

¹⁰ Ibid.

compositional process. Sight-reading and ear training are critically important to nearly every facet of performance, and composition is an invaluable resource in developing these skills.

As a performer, I am exposed to an enormous variety of music that directly influences my compositions. Performers often analyze and engage with the pieces they perform at a deeper level than most listeners. Rehearsal and personal practice bring a different understanding of the work compared to the more passive process of absorption through listening. As my compositional and performance skills continue to grow, these disciplines cross-pollinate and become ever more rewarding.

CONCLUSION

The trombone suffers from a lack of repertoire compared to piano, violin, or even other brass instruments. Composers and other musicians sometimes fail to grasp how versatile and capable the trombone family can be, and I hope this project and my compositions demonstrate some of the instrument's excellent capabilities. I hope it demonstrates, too, the natural connection between performing and composition, inspiring more performers to embrace composition and vice versa. Personally, I hope to contribute as much as possible to the trombone's artistic landscape, both as performer and composer. It is exciting to witness increased recognition for the instrument outside of the orchestra, a trend which will hopefully continue for years to come.

The landscape for up-and-coming musicians is swiftly changing. Increasingly, young musicians are pressured to diversify themselves as much as possible to secure careers in music. My dual interest in performance and composition has led to many opportunities, and it continues to be a defining aspect of my career. It is my hope that this manuscript and the accompanying recordings inspire more young performers to embrace this path.

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