

Stylistic and Interpretative Considerations in The Work *Scaramouche* for Saxophone and Piano by Darius Milhaud

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Abstract

Saxophone is an atypical musical instrument, as it is one of the few instruments used in all music genres. In France it is granted a double identity, situated at the boundary between classical music and jazz, although it is the instrument that lends itself to all existing forms of classical and folk music. Thus, it passes through: late romanticism, impressionism, neoclassicism, atonal music, serial music, expressionism, contemporary music, jazz, pop, rock, punk, folk music. It was precisely this plurality that ensured the popularity of the saxophone (Berendt , 1963).

Keywords: *saxophone, France, atypical, jazz, identity*

Introduction

When the saxophone "hatches", the cultural life is really about to transform.

Saxophone becomes known in the middle of the 19th century and its popularity will grow while art will pass, especially in France, through many transformations until the 21st century. Paris is considered the capital of arts and aspires to receive any form of novelty. From the end of the 19th century, artists of all genres will come to stay in France, attracted by the atmosphere that dominates the French artistic life. Paris will host great composers, whose presence will have a decisive role for the saxophone (Bartok, Prokofiev, De Falla, Albeniz, Glazunov, Milhaud, Donizetti or Rossini) (Grove, 1954). In this respect, after 1870 there is an increase in the number of musical associations, such as the National Music Society, the Chamber music society for wind instruments, Colonne concerts or Lamoureux concerts. This reputation will continue throughout the 20th century, despite the two world conflicts and the great period of social and political instability affecting the country before 1950. Today, France is an unparalleled welcoming and broadcast space for contemporary music. International saxophone artists (composers or performers) set up in Paris to get a confirmation of their talent (Fennell, 1954).

Our work aims to highlights the importance of this instrument in the music development and to make a detailed analysis of one of the most important and high difficulty work – *Scaramouche*

by Darius Milhaud. The originality of our paper consists in the interpretative considerations resulted from a direct experience of teaching, but mainly, playing of this composition on the stage.

Saxophone – the global instrument

When we think of the saxophone, we would be tempted to believe that it is an American instrument, since it represents the jazz symbol, so widespread in the United States. For others, it is Belgian because its inventor was born in the city of Dinant. However, the saxophone appeared and evolved in Paris. Although it has been removed from major musical institutions, from the inventory of orchestras and from the systematic programming of festivals for more than 165 years, it would seem that an evolution is currently being felt in France and not only (Rorive, 2004).

Currently there is a real family of saxophones, which has seven members: sopranino saxophone in E flat, soprano saxophone in B flat, the alto saxophone in E flat (most prevalent by its repertoire and by its use in education), the tenor saxophone in B flat, the baritone saxophone in E flat, bass saxophone in B flat and double bass saxophone in E flat. Similar inventions come to complement the saxophone family: tubax (a tool that takes on the principle of the double bass saxophone), soprillo or electronic saxophones (Delage, 1992).

Although it was born too late to be permanently integrated into the symphonic orchestra, the saxophone takes advantage of globalization to accede to all forms of cultures.

In Paris, many works will be composed for saxophone, sometimes due to the chance of meetings between the musician and the creator. Thus, French music will be asserted since the end of the 19th century as an intimist and even sober, devoid of any ornament. In some composers there is even a convergence of sounds in the French style (in Claude Debussy, Edgar Varese or Betsy Jolas). The same feature is found in performers, both in classical and jazz music. Consequently, they talk about a refined, graceful, clear, sensual French style, sometimes “vaporous” in the work of Debussy, simple, funny and spicy in the case of Milhaud, but always expressive. A certain French taste is distinguished by the hesitation between the change brought by innovators or avant-gardists, and the cult of tradition supported by conservators (Bartolozzi, 1967). In the universe of saxophone, we will see that both saxophonists and composers also oscillate between these two principles. That is why the saxophone, created in the midst of an industrial revolution, will be threatened to disappear in 1900 in the musty military fanfares. Jazz, a new genre, but disturbing in 1920, will pull it out of lethargy (Londeix, 1989).

In the atmosphere of refound general carelessness and euphoria, the '20s in particular, but also the '30s, in other words the interwar period (1919-1939), will be marked by an intense creative musical activity. In both classical music, opera and operetta, and music hall, this musical effervescence will gradually take the place of the golden age of café-concert.

People are clamouring to see the shows animated by Mistinguuet, Maurice Chevalier or Josephine Baker, dance to the music brought from America, marvel at the talent of Ravel, Honneger, Stravinsky, etc., discover the dodecaphonism, but especially do not see the signs that announce the odious conflagration of 1939.

French music for saxophone (1840-1920)

The repertoire opens with the *Sacred Song* by Hector Berlioz (1803-1869), with two trumpets, flugelhorn, bass saxophone in EE flat and two clarinets. Written to greet Sax's inventions enthusiastically, the anthem is an adaptation of Berlioz's sacred chorus song dating from 1843. The first public performance takes place in Paris, in the Hertz Hall, on February 3, 1844, under Berlioz, with Adolphe Sax at the bass saxophone.

Thanks to the people close to Adolphe Sax, the saxophone can also be heard outside military circles. Composers provide an active musical promotion, broadcasting an easy, spectacular and very fashionable repertoire in order to seduce the high society of the time. Saxophone is the newcomer from private concerts held in Parisian salons or from fashionable meetings held in parks and gardens. In the hectic period from 1880 to 1920, art in France is effervescent and creative; all forms of art, often revolutionary, are experienced.

In this respect, all the French composers form a real team around the inventor, Adolphe Sax, so most of their works are songs with variations accompanied by piano, but there are also some chamber music records.

Until 1900, some works, which we cannot call masterpieces, are still worth mentioning for their historical interest: *Three Songs from Old Peru* (1865), for three saxophones, by Ambroise Thomas (1811-1896); *Ave Maria* (1865) for vocals, alto saxophone, Sax trombone system, bass saxophone and double bass saxophone, *Serenada op. 33* (1862) for saxophone and piano, as well as *Fantaisie sur un theme original* (1866) for alto saxophone and piano by Jules Demersseman (1833-1866); *Quintette of Saxophones* and *Fantasy on the themes of Freischütz* (1855) for alto saxophone and piano by Jerome Savari (1819-1870); *Big Saxophones Sextet* (1850) by Georges Kastner (1810-1867).

Since 1900, we can retain some works of French composers, very important for saxophone, thanks to the initiative of Elisa Hall. First performed in 1904, Vincent D'Indy's *Varied Choral* (1851-1931) is the favorite work of the partner (Elisa Hall), who included it in almost all of her programs. Lacking technical difficulties, the work is a passacaglia on a motif for four notes.

Too rarely performed, Claude Debussy's "Moorish" or *Oriental Rhapsody* (1904) (1862-1918) takes the bipartite (slow-alert) form. The melancholy of the saxophone here manifests a strong sensuality. The soloist intervenes only episodically, without virtuosity. The first public performance will take place only in 1919 and is due to Francois Combelle, a musician from the Republican Guard. Claude Debussy makes the saxophone an instrument capable of imposing itself in the orchestra with all its simplicity, thanks to uttered poetical solos of a very special softness.

A work of symbolic conception dating back to 1918, *The Legend* of Florent Schmitt (1870-1958) was performed in public for the first time in a version for alto saxophone and string orchestra in 1919. While the soloist plays the role of storyteller, the orchestra performs a range of timbres and colours. The work suggests a mystical atmosphere, both exalted and sensual. Trills, tremolos, wonderful harmonies and unusual rhythms create an oriental sound atmosphere that urges us to dream.

Composer and orchestra conductor, winner of the Prix de Rome scholarship (first prize), Andre Caplet (1878-1925) is Debussy's friend and loyal collaborator. Its *Legende* (1903) written for 9 instruments (oboe, clarinet, alto saxophone, bassoon, string quintet) will be performed publicly

for the first time in Boston by his partner, in 1905. Saxophone is used as an orchestra instrument. Both impressionistic and postromantic, *Legende* is one of the most successful works. The dialogue between the instruments is undoubtedly exemplary. The saxophone gives a modern touch to this very coherent play in which the timbres fuse or sometimes sing in unison or octave. *Suite* (1915) of Gabriel Grovlez (1879-1944) is a chamber music work (alto saxophone, string quintet, horn and harp) inspired, clear and neat, with a sensitivity that seriously requires the attention of the performers.

Legend (1905-1906) of Georges Sporck (1870-1943) for alto saxophone and orchestra follows a French-style aesthetic, close to that of Vincent D'Indy or Gabriel Faure. The saxophone, meditative, pessimistic and sometimes exalted, sings in cadential passages and tumultuous *tutti*. Another work in the spirit of spectacular fantasies of the 19th century, *Sarabande et allegro* for saxophone and piano by Gabriel Grovlez is a pleasant post-classical play, which is well suited to the concert program (Rorive, 2004).

***Scaramouche* by Darius Milhaud – a stylistic and interpretative approach**

French composer, Darius Milhaud was a pioneer in the use of random technique, jazz, and polytonality. His creation includes more than 430 works, in all musical genres, chamber music representing a favourite domain of Milhaud, which will emanate a strong sense of balance, framed on an extremely varied rhythm.

One thing to remember when talking about the works of Darius Milhaud is that the folklore is not represented by quotations, but by inventing folk songs to which the exotic rhythm of jazz and folk dances, Jewish song and Provençal melodies will contribute. In this respect, his music will have an ambiguous feature in terms of tonality, a feature given by the timbral and instrumental combinations and the polytonal mix.

In the summer of 1937, Darius Milhaud proposes several plays for the Paris International Expositio, including a duet for two pianos, written for the pianists Marguerite Long and the old friend of the composer, Marcelle Meyer. Milhaud resumes the first and last part of the suite, choosing for the slow movement an excerpt from a work composed for the play by writer Jules Superville in 1936 – *Bolivar*. Thus, the final form will be: I – *Vif* in *C major*, II – *Modere* in *B-flat major*, III – *Brazileira* in *F major*.

After the interpretation of the suite by the two pianists, the work draws attention and is edited by the publicist Deiss, thus avenging to the great concert halls of the world. In time, Darius Milhaud makes new arrangements of the suite, the most famous being the one for the saxophone (<https://www.saxontheweb.net/threads/milhaud-scaramouche.19517/>).

(I) *Vif*

The bright opening of the first part, *Vif*, is pigmented with effects of bi-tonalism, but having a diatonic sonority that brings us to the Parisian atmosphere of the last century (through its harmonies). The theme of this part is presented from the first two measures, both in the plan of accompaniment and that of the soloist (m. 1-2) and it is based on harmonic bonding reminiscent of the perfect compound cadence I(-VI)-IV(II)-V-I (m. 1).

The saxophone melody is distinguished by the descending chromatic trend from the tonic of the *C major* tonality, the descending meaning being solved by ascending chromatic trend. The two groups of sixteenth of the saxophone will be transposed at high ascending second interval, thus

the double exposure of the motif completing the explosive sonority.

I VI IV (II) V7 I VI IV (II) V7

Ex. 1 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 1-2

A *Capella* segment following the main motif (m. 3) preserves the rhythmical structure of the exposure, after which the melodic line brings back the ascending and descending chromatic motif, but with another harmonic support in chromatic trend (*E flat-D-D flat-C, F-E-E flat-D*).

Ex. 2 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 3-5

The new *a Capella* intervention (m. 6) brings new figurations, having as melodic basis the previously exposed solo motif, then it returns again to the beginning sonority by resuming the first two measures (m. 7-8). The song receives a new rhythmic construction (m. 9-11) supported by the piano discourse and bass, by overlapping the syncopated formulas with the time trial ones, fragment developed by multiple sequences, after which the whole development collapses into a dynamic fragmented by chromaticism (m. 12-13) which is led to the chord by *E major* (m. 14). Except for the few three-eighths (12) and a half note in the end, the melodic line described so far is based exclusively on a rhythm consisting only of sixteenths. Considering also the motion indication noted by the composer, *Vif*, we can conclude that from the technical point of view, there are some peculiarities that require a careful approach from the soloist's perspective. Rhythmically speaking, the execution must be very precise, equally treated, which will undoubtedly lead to a plus in highlighting the character of virtuosity, and the articulations, evenly positioned, come to maintain balance. (m. 1, 2, 4, 5).

With a bright, lively sonority, the saxophonist is put in a position to balance the intensities of the exposure of the main motif, from *mf* to *mp*, in a gradual, logical manner. However, given that it is the first solo intervention, we can say that it is not wrong if, instead of *mf*, as it is noted in the

score, *f* or even *ff* will be used in the score, in this way, the performer managing to better capture the three stages of nuance of the main motif. (m.1-2, 4-5, 7-8).

Measures 12 and 13 outline an intervention of virtuosity which, in the study phase, can be rearranged or rethought as follows: instead of grouping the rhythm of the sixteenths from four to four as is normal in the measure of 4/4, we can visualize it in groups of three. In this way, the simplicity of the passage will be observed, the melody gaining an almost symmetrical, descending trend, from semitone to semitone (from three-to-three sixteenths). Once understood this principle, the appropriation of this fragment of two measures, which at first glance seemed a dangerous intervention, will become a formality. (m.12, 14).



Ex. 3. – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 9-14

Next, we find the entire exposure from the beginning, transposed in a varied way at an interval of perfect fifth (m. 16-31). The short modulatory inflections that appear in the soloist score find their solution to the agogic indication *au Mouvement* (m. 32) which surprises by introducing a new apparent thematic motif in *C major*, but with the tonal base in *F major*.

Looking more closely at the saxophone score in the previous presentation, (m.15 – 31), we will notice that the rhythmic formulas, articulations and even nuances are organized rationally, which will balance the melodic line, of which we can say that it has a tumultuous and nonconformist character. Thus, the musical phrase can be organized into three distinct motifs (m. 24-26, 27-28, 29-30) that have identical rhythms and articulations, it can be thought of as having the role of counterbalancing the song.

The next square phrase of eight measures (m. 32-39) brings the line of the main melody into the plane of the accompanying piano, while the soloist sings concluding passages.



Ex. 4 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 32-39

The same square phrase will be exposed again (m. 40-47) inverting the sound planes, the main melodic line being taken over by saxophone, while the accompaniment shows variations in the rhythm of the counter time in the previous phrase.



Ex. 5 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 40-47

There follows a virtuosity section for the performer (m. 47-60), consisting of a square shape, each of the two articulations of four measures having interior enlargements of two measures (4+2+4+2m.). Here, the saxophonist will follow the rhythmic equality, approaching a darker, slightly matte sonority, but without escaping from the structure of the nuances, considering at the same time that in this fragment the piano plays the main role. A priority of this segment is the perfect integration of exceptional formulas in the dictated meter. In this respect, we can say that it is advisable to insist more on the first note of the group of sixteenths organized in septuplet, to the detriment of equality.

Ex. 6 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 48-53

The consistency of the square period (m. 54-59) overturns the melodic interventions of the saxophone, turning the ascending trends into descending ones, after which we are partially reminded fragments of the two themes (m. 60-69), and the transition to the varied resumption of the first is ensured by a short bridge of the accompanying instrument (m. 70-72).



Ex. 7 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 70-72

The dynamism of the first part is driven by the varied resumption of the first section (ms. 73-87), differentiations existing at the level of the final cadence that assumes the role of the first part's coda (m. 87-92). The I-VI-IV(II)-V7 relation reminds of the main motif for the last time and brings back the stability of the tonal functionality of *C major*.



Ex. 8 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 90-92

For a proper performance and style, the instruments must start from a breathing technique with an emphasis on sound support by dosing the airflow according to the intervals and registers in which they are played. In this respect, a suitable, extremely difficult example is the one at the end of the part, (m. 87, 88), when the soloist has to make a passage in octaves, in *legato* formula, or even the last two measures that evolve in the super acute register, thus widening the segment's trebles to *F#* in the third octave.

(II) *Modere*

The second part, *Modere*, in *B flat major*, is distinguished by a calm and graceful music, in which the cantability of the musical discourse emerges from the combination of melodic themes. The first section (m. 93-108) begins with a delicate saxophone speech that brings a simple melodic line that combines the descending leap from the third to the fundamental of the tonic (m. 93) with the dotted rhythm of the arpeggio overturned and completed with passage notes (m. 94), while the piano harmonically illustrates the chord of the tonic, *B flat*.

The second phrase (m. 100-108) that completes the double period, surprises by transposing the initial musical discourse in the homonymous tonality (m. 100-101), and then modulating in the *E flat major* tonality (ms. 101-104), as at the end of the articulation to return to *B flat major* (m. 105-106). The link for the next fragment of the part, makes it necessary to stop the saxophone

line on the seventh chord of the dominance of the initial tonality (m. 108), the semi cadence being prepared for an *a Capella* moment of the soloist (m. 106-107).



Ex. 9 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 100-108

The expressive dialogue between saxophone and piano is even more beautifully outlined in the next stage, section, (m. 109-118) which is more limited in length, having a single square phrase. The idea of dialogue is highlighted by the process of imitation, the new anacrusis song of the saxophone (m. 109) being transposed by the piano line to ascending octave (m. 109-110).

The image displays a musical score for Darius Milhaud's "Scaramouche", measures 109-117. The score is written in 4/4 time and features a piano (p) dynamic. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system has a single melodic line in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the grand staff. The second system has a single melodic line in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the grand staff. The third system has a single melodic line in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the grand staff. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 10 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 109-117

Up to this point of the part we can analyse some features of interpretive approach, which have as

starting point the flow, fluency, clarity and equality of the musical content. The first thing that draws attention is the dotted formula (eighth with point followed by sixteenth) on which the melodic lines develop. Here, out of an excess of caution, stolen by the grace of the melodic line, the performer can lose sight of the accuracy of the performance, so a moment of distraction of this kind can involve gaps that are difficult to redress, thus affecting the melancholic character and the state to be induced.

Another fact that should not be omitted is related to the way of performance of the articulations that do not stand out by diversity or large number, but by precision and quality, creating a pure sound every time, without the slightest interference. Of course, this can only be done through a good control of the embouchure and a well-organized volume of air, which are also beneficial for the play of nuances proposed by the composer.

A new section developed in the *F major* tonality (m.119-141) is announced by the change of the binary meter in the ternary of 6/8 and by the indication of movement *au Mouvt* (m.119).



Ex. 11 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 119-124

The rhythmic diversity of the new discourse ensures the flow of the musical context, while the reversal of sound plans as a process is again present (m.125-128), allowing the saxophone to complete the melodic line of the accompaniment.



Ex. 12 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 125-128

Further, the transposition and sequencing of the ternary melodic motif (m. 131-134) is followed by a moment of instrumental virtuosity (m. 135-138), in which *the trebles* are extended to the *E* in the super acute register, and the rhythm acquires exceptional divisions of triolet in the first two measures of the fragment, which will have to be perfectly integrated to the extent imposed.

The last section (m. 142-159) brings together the three themes of slow motion and overlaps them in an original and ingenious way. The motif of the saxophone in the beginning of the part is superimposed with the second song in the accompaniment plan (m. 142-148), a hearing sensation that can create a slight ambiguity for the audience.

Ex. 13 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 142-148

Generally speaking, the difficulty encountered by the performer in this part is related to intonation, the song being included in the medium and acute register. For the notes from the high registers to be equal from the sound point of view, but also clearly intonated, whether the nuance is large or very low, the performer must rely on amplifying the intensity of the airflow without

crunching the embouchure, which would close the reed and produce more than likely a failure. Ornamentation is represented only by appoggiaturas in the middle area of the part, only two of them making the performance difficult. The first is that of measure 125 which can be approached with the false position C3, and the second is in measure 139 and can be played without lifting the finger from the position of the note *B*. In this way, the *legato* will be a well performed, without fluctuations of intensity or technical inaccuracies that can be given by the classical positions.

(III) *Braziliera*

The last part, *Brazileira*, in *F major*, is distinguished by the soundness of Brazilian folk music and renders the ardent spirit of the South American culture, the samba *tempo* being present throughout the melodic presentation. The movement begins with a brief introduction (m. 160-161) that prepares the exposition of the main melody, characterized by a festive and cheerful sonority. The harmonic richness of the piano score, on sixteenths alternating the two hands, will keep the rhythmic character of the first section (m. 160-185) without agogic fluctuations.



Ex. 14 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 160-161

The line of the Brazilian rhythm is distinguished by the time trial formulas (m. 162), while the saxophone's interventions are short and concise. The structure of the first half of the phrase (m. 162-165) is enlarged to ensure continuity (ms. 165-169), after which the theme is varied (m. 170-173), inner enlargements boosting the cadence to tonic *F*.



Ex. 15 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 162-169

A virtuosity fragment for the soloist instrumentalist follows, at which point a new melodic line is exhibited in the piano discourse, supported by the samba rhythm in bass (m. 186-197). The entire musical moment makes an incursion towards the intense and ardent sound image of Brazilian music. This passage in which the saxophonist displays his qualities of agility, poses problems of sound equality, but especially rhythmic equality, because of the combinations of sixteenths and demisemiquavers that outline the difficult rhythmic formulas. For equality, clarity and security, one can insist more on the first note in each beginning of the measure, and in the intonation of *E* in measure 188 the false position *C*₄ can be used, for the same reasons.



Ex. 16 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 186-192

The median area of the part demands at the highest level the technique of the soloist, put to the test by the tight positions, organized on a not very difficult rhythm, but in a rather alert *samba tempo*. The accents marked in the score contribute to the development of the exotic character of the work, surprising in a pleasant way.

The journey into Brazilian music ends with the resumption of the motif from the beginning of the movement that generated the entire thematic diversity (m. 252-275), ensuring the structural proportionality of the form. The entire musical discourse of the suite ends in the same dynamic sonority from the beginning, the *fortissimo* cadence on the tonic *F* of the major mode (m. 275) completing the multi-coloured sonority.



Ex. 17 – Darius Milhaud, “Scaramouche”, m. 271-275

The passages in this part and not only are a good exercise for colour gamut, broken, straight arpeggios and combinations thereof. The entanglements impress not only by difficulty but also by their expansion, thus posing breathing but especially resistance problems.

Everywhere, the performer will have to solve the problems related to clear articulation, in the used registers and large intervals, with a well-supported air pressure, all exposed in a fast movement, to highlight the brilliant style of Brazilian music.

In addition to the peculiarities exhibited so far, the dynamics also makes its way, creating the echo effect not infrequently (m. 259-260) so in this context we can say that this work is one with a valuable and interesting melodic potential, not being available to any performer.

Conclusions

The spread of music for the saxophone and the variety of ways of teaching the instrument leaves us to assume that it takes advantage of a real openness and that its two identities (classical and jazz) make "a good combination". Great musicians, saxophone performers and composers have apprenticed in Paris or have a close relationship with France. The main creators and artists come to make contact with this instrument in Paris, being certain that the saxophone belongs to the French culture. Classical saxophonists argue that before becoming an instrument intended for jazz and exported outside France, saxophone was born in this country as a classical music instrument.

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