

METTLE – SonataPalooza I

Volume I: Kennan, Pilß, Mittner – January 9, 2019

Volume II: Hindemith, Shapero, Ewazen – January 12, 2019

Volume III: Peeters, Stevens, Antheil – January 13, 2019

Volume IV: Hubeau, Loeb, Sowerby – January 19, 2019

The Backstory – from the ivories and valves

Many sonatas are famously familiar to most trumpeters and lauded for their significance and importance. Unfortunately, those same works are unfamiliar to non-trumpeters, hidden in history as obscurities even in the broadest, thoughtful musical conversations. This project, conceived by Jack Sutte and Christine Fuoco, hopes to change those dialogs. We embraced the idea of a long-term sonata collaboration, realizing the artistic potentials in the genre, and the audacious idea to perform (and record) all the sonatas in this canon was struck. This first series is our start. The idea of the SonataPalooza was to combine *Sonatenabends* (multiple sonata evenings) in a way that was fun and unusual. These twelve sonatas in four closely scheduled concerts demanded new strategies for learning, rehearsing, performing, and recording. The title, *METTLE*, was chosen to describe the arduous undertaking of the project's scope and spoke to our individual artistic endeavors.

"Mettle" is a person's "ability to cope well with difficulties or to face a demanding situation in a spirited and resilient way, having fortitude, determination, resolve, bravery, daring, fearlessness, courage, and grit." This descriptive quality works for the trumpeter, the pianist, and the audience, and the homonym wordplay with "metal" is intentional.

METTLE – SonataPalooza I

Volume I: Kennan, Pilß, Mittner – January 9, 2019

Sonata for Trumpet and Piano (1954, rev. 1986)

Kent Kennan (1913-2003)

- I. With strength and vigor
- II. Rather slowly and with freedom
- III. Moderately fast, with energy

Kent Kennan's Trumpet Sonata, like those by Paul Hindemith, Halsey Stevens and Eric Ewazen, has become a central choice for high school, collegiate, and professional recitals, perhaps more than any 20th-century piece in the trumpet repertoire. Kennan provides a perfect musical backdrop for learning the essentials of chamber music in this Sonata, which has long been overwhelmingly popular.

Kennan incorporates varied meters, many tempo changes, composite rhythms, and a color palette that uses straight and Harmon mutes with singing and fanfare qualities, all beautifully scored within three distinct movements. While there are few doubts that comparisons can be made to Hindemith, Kennan, as he outlined in his book *The Technique of Orchestration* (1952), strives for an understandably American aesthetic.

Kennan was very supportive of the recordings of his Sonata by James Darling and Raymond Mase, each made using a different edition. In commenting about Darling's, Kennan effusively loves the overall performance of the duo (with pianist Genevieve Sidoti), but is already critical of his 1956 version, in that the ending of the first movement is "a bit too drawn-out and somewhat redundant...." This and other comments, already leaning toward revision by Kennan, are clear in letters from Kennan to Darling. Mase made the first recording of the 1986 version, and Kennan was happy that he planned to record the corrected version. Jack was fortunate to work on this piece with Mase while

studying with him in New York City, and to have Darling as a colleague in The Cleveland Orchestra (1999-2005). James Darling taught at the Baldwin Wallace Conservatory from 1969-2002.

Sonate für Trompete und Klavier (1935)

Karl Pilß (1902-1979)

1. Allegro appassionato
2. Adagio, molto cantabile
3. Allegro agitato

The Sonata for Trumpet and Piano by Karl Pilß is a stylistic change-up to the other sonatas in this series. Composers of the Classical and Romantic periods offered few works for solo trumpet. Revered post-Romantic composers such as Anton Bruckner, Richard Strauss, and Gustav Mahler, among others, chose to highlight the trumpet's powerful tone and virtuosic capabilities in solo passages in symphonic works. As the design and construction of the trumpet improved, and its production increased, the previously dominant cornet lost favor. A natural consequence occurred when composers born during the decades before and after the turn of the 20th century embraced the trumpet as a solo instrument. Similar to sonatas written by Johannes Brahms, Robert Schumann, and César Franck, the trumpet finally has its developmental turn in scope and promise with that of the historically favored piano, and violin.

Pilß studied composition with Franz Schmidt at the Vienna Academy of Music in the 1920s. A decade later, he worked with Richard Strauss at the Vienna State Opera as a vocal coach and Lieder accompanist. Pilß shared his compositions with Strauss, who offered feedback and informal instruction. It is possible that this sonata was among those works. Pilß also wrote sonatas for violin, oboe, horn, and bass trombone, primarily favoring writing for wind instruments. His music has largely remained unfamiliar outside of Austria, though his Trumpet Sonata is widely known. Like Strauss, Pilß

chose to compose in a stylistic language that yields itself to a tonal, post-Romantic style, not uncommon for composers who were uninspired by the Second Viennese School, or who resisted other early 20th-century compositional pressures.

Pilß's Trumpet Sonata was written for Helmut Wobisch (1912-1980). Wobisch served as principal trumpet with the Vienna Philharmonic (1939-1978), was an active SS member (1934), and years later, under scrutiny, was appointed the Philharmonic's director (1953). Notwithstanding Wobisch's abhorrent political activities, it is historically understood that his trumpet playing and his teaching were both at a very high level. The history of Wobisch, the Vienna Philharmonic, and other musicians who survived under the Nazi regime, are more and more in the public eye as archival materials are being requested and explored. In contrast to the horrors of the political and social fallouts in Austria and throughout Europe during the 1930s through WWII, Pilß's Sonata is replete with beautiful melodies and rich harmonies, both ideals within Romantic compositional aesthetics.

Sonata per tromba e pianoforte (2001)

Jiří Mittner (b. 1980)

- I. Andante tranquillo - moderato allegro
- II. Andante tranquillo
- III. Finale: Allegro non troppo

Jack Sutte came across Mittner's Sonata while shopping for sheet music in Vienna. "Browsing the music bins at physical stores is a great way to spend some down time on tour, with the added benefit of increasing the height of my music-to-learn pile. Neither Christine nor I knew of Mittner's music, but upon our first reading of this Sonata, we were intrigued and compelled by his musical language. I emailed Mittner and posed questions about his work. Was there any meaning or inspiration behind the sonata that could guide our interpretation?"

Mittner kindly and promptly replied, “The trumpet sonata does not contain any specific non-musical program. In my music, I prefer concentrating on the music itself in its abstract form, without referencing something specific. Of course, any piece of art always has a sort of abstract meaning – if this is what you meant – what I understand generally as the surrounding world which makes the footprint on the composition. This surrounding world combines other music, artistic experience, life experience, the society around, family, country, mood, other people, everything.

“Within the composition, however, there are many references and relations, which you will for sure discover while rehearsing it. To mention just a few: the opening and its recurrences appear on important structure points of the composition.” This beautiful yet haunting melody incorporates both the intervals of the major and minor 2nd, and their inversions, the minor and major 7th, respectively. Mittner continues, “The same applies for the main theme of the first movement (g – f# – ab – g), which reappears in a very different shape at the start of the recapitulation (first movement), or just near to the end of the third movement [before the coda].” These intervals (the *Dies irae* motive) in transposition are the same patterns famously used in Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 14 (B-A-C-H), and in the *Dies irae* quote in the fifth movement of Berlioz’s *Symphonie fatastique*. “The harmonic structures of the second movement are combining classical harmony with fourth-chord and fifth-chord structures,” wrote Mittner. The second movement opens with the trumpet alone, again, spinning an interplay of second and seventh intervals, then accompanied by the chord structures as Mittner describes, with the eastern European folk-dance rhythm of a short-long pattern. “The final movement main theme is based on the idea of putting notes before the bar line, while actually leaving only one single note behind the bar line and sometimes not even that. The transformation of the main theme of the third movement from 9/8 into a 4/4 rhythm near the end and turning it into an even more aggressive mood is another reshaping, and you will find many more in the composition.” More information about Mittner’s music, and a recording of his Sonata by Vit Gregorovic with Mittner at the piano, are available at www.jirimittner.cz.