An Introductory Commentary on Timbral Effects in Magnus Lindberg's Clarinet Concerto

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Abstract

This paper presents information on the execution of timbral effects in Magnus Lindberg's Clarinet Concerto, one of his most frequently performed compositions. It also provides historical information on Finnish music as well as practical tips on practising the piece. This paper concentrates on contemporary timbral effects used in the concerto and explains how they should be performed. In a way, this paper is kind of performance guide for those interested in studying or performing Lindberg's Clarinet Concerto.

Keywords: Clarinet Concerto - Magnus Lindberg - Modernism - Clarinet Technique - Timbre

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Introduction

From the beginning and during my musical career as a clarinettist, I had a few moments when I heard a piece of music for the first time and realized that I would really want to perform it in the future. Lindberg's Clarinet Concerto impressed me with its musicality and difficulties, which combines melodic beauty and strong contemporary timbral effects. Through this concerto I became interested in and familiar with the music and career of Magnus Lindberg.

The brief overview at the beginning of this paper about modernism in the eighties explains the influences and development of Finnish music. A few words about Lindberg's other pieces shows how his compositional style changed during his career. This paper also describes a few contemporary compositional techniques that are used in this concerto, all of them explained from my own point of view and confirmed by several sources. I can describe myself as the clarinettist who had the opportunity of studying with many different clarinet teachers in Finland, where one of them was Kari Kriikku to whom this concerto was dedicated. This paper is intended for clarinettists who seek advice in interpreting this work in a manner consistent with the composer's values.

Chapter 1: The Early Years of Modernist Finnish Music

In this chapter, I will present a brief overview of the main events that shaped Finnish musical culture and modernism. This introduction will help the reader to understand the main topic of my paper. I will start by giving some historical background which will provide the basis for my discussion of timbral effects. According to Burkholder, Grout and Palisca, Finland became part of the Russian Empire in 1809 and gained its cultural independence in 1917. However, Finland was dominated by Sweden which had ruled the country for centuries.[1] Alex Ross states that it was during the twentieth century when a minority of Swedish speakers began to take positions in the highest ranks of society, something which to a certain extent is still true today. Jean Sibelius belonged to this segment of society and defended the independence of his country from the very beginning, especially after Tsar Nicholas II introduced some measures to suppress Finland's autonomy.[2]

Kimmo Korhonen, author of several books about Finnish music, argues that this strong sense of Finnish independence has always been hidden and that it is most apparent in Finnish art. Olavi Paavolainen, leading member of the modernist literary group named Tulenkantajat (Firebearers), states in his essay collection "In Search of Modern Time" that at around 1920 the younger generation of artists were very interested in a new era and new phenomena: "We live in a new, creative age. It is fortunate to be young in such an era. It is a time of revolutions and utopias. No one believes in the truths of the past any longer, and the truths of the future have yet to be shaped. Nothing is certain but the present – and were you to ask for the truth of the present, it will only respond: seek!".[3] Although the First World War did not directly affect

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[1] James Peter Burkholder, et al. *A History of Western Music* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2014), 879-80.
[2] Alex Ross. *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 128.
[3] Olavi Paavolainen. *Nykyaikaa Etsimässä* (Finland: Otava, 1929).

Finland, Finnish society shared the sentiments of many nations of post-war Europe, as the Finns themselves were fighting their own bloody civil war in 1918 right after gaining their independence in 1917.

In the field of music, Korhonen mentions that modernism, movement in philosophy and the arts which arose during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, refers specifically to the year 1911. The daring style and expression of Sibelius's Fourth Symphony had a great impact on two future modernist composers, Väinö Raitio and Aarre Merikanto. Due to the strong influence of Russia on Finnish culture, both went to study in Moscow to emulate the expressionist compositional style established by Scriabin and other contemporary composers. The influences coming from Paris were also a good example for them, but they were not so much interested in the dodecaphony of Schönberg, Berg and Webern, since they identified more with Franco-Russian expressionism.

In the 1920s Finnish music flourished. Sibelius, as one of the late Romantic composers, was at the top of his career, and also other young modernists were most productive. In fact, the decade was still dominated by nationalist romanticism, and modernism had only little impact despite modernist efforts. In the 1930s, modernism was further weakened when modernists, with the exception of Uuno Klami, resorted to a more traditional style. The 1930s turned out to be a less productive time for Finnish music due to a general withdrawal of modernist composers and a reduced productivity on part of the main Romantic composers; with the exception of the Eighth Symphony, Sibelius did not present any new works. Similarly, Madetoja finished composing his opera *Juha* in 1934 and did not composed any new pieces.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Finland again experienced a new wave of modernism in all branches of art. Post-war musical modernism was looking for new directions, resulting in two main trends. The first trend proceeded from expressionism via the twelve-tone system

(serialism) to integral serialism, a more rigorous form of serialism. Integral serialism extended beyond the pitch domain to other musical parameters and was practiced by composers such as Stockhausen and Boulez. The second trend, which appeared a bit later, included a freer expression and attributed great importance to tone color, new types of texture, and the use of chance and improvisation. This trend affected the styles of composers such as Witold Lutosławski, Krzysztof Penderecki, Iannis Xenakis and György Ligeti. This new wave of modernism came to Finland in a concert organized by the Society of Contemporary Music in 1956. Eventually, Finnish music was much more aligned with international modernist trends than it was in the 1920s.[4]

Korhonen also comments on a transition period that took place in the 1960s, a time when many Finnish composers experienced frustration with the modernist trends in music. To proclaim the "death" of modernism became common practice at this time, but it was particularly strong in Finland, which is why Finnish composers embraced again more traditional stylistic values and practices. The result of this transition ended in postmodernism, introduced in the arts in the 1970s and defined by Mikko Heinio and Kimmo Sarje as a critical response to modernism. At this time, composers expanded their modernist language through the use of quotations and collage technique.[5] By the 1980s, announcement of the death of modernism was premature. Modernism had been eclipsed by the new free tonality that began in the 1960s, but it had survived anyway in part due to the work of composers such as Erik Bergman, Usko Meriläinen and Paavo Heininen and, later, Erkki Jokinen, Jarmo Sermilä and Jukka Tiensuu in the 1970s.[6]

[4] Kimmo Korhonen. *Inventing Finnish Music* (Jyväskylä: Finnish Music Information Centre, 2007), 99.
[5] Ibid., 114.
[6] Ibid., 166.

Chapter 1.1: A New Modernist Wave and the "Ears Open!" Society in the 1980s

Already in the 1980s, modernism became once again a real and very significant option, just as in previous decades. Composers who were active in this decade, embraced the line of thought of Jürgen Habermas, a German philosopher who described modernism as an "unfinished project." The "Ears Open!" society ("Korvat Auki!" in Finnish), which was founded in 1977, was the first driving force of Finnish modernism in the 1980s. Its founding members were Eero Hämeenniemi, Kaija Saariaho, Olli Kortekangas, Tapani Länsiö, Jouni Kaipanen, Magnus Lindberg and Esa-Pekka Salonen. They organized concerts, seminars, committees and shared the common goal of making contemporary music more accessible to the general public. Although the society still exists today, the main members disengaged from the group in the same decade of its creation. According to Korhonen something in modernism had changed. He argues that the trend was to delve deeper into things that had already been discovered in the avant-garde stages of modernism. For the modernists it was important not only to discover the basic ideology which was to focus on searching for new material, but also to discover what kind of progress had been made in the 1950s and 1960s.[7]

The development of electronic devices at that time opened up new possibilities to create a more advanced type of music, as composers were interested not only in improving electronic music but also in creating computer-aided compositions. Spectral harmonies based on the analysis and manipulation of the harmonic series was developed as a result of computer technology. They proved helpful to composers in their attempts to construct such harmonies, for example to study sound properties and tone color. Magnus Lindberg, Jukka Tiensuu and Kaija Saariaho had a particular interest in this new field of music creation.[8]

[7] Kimmo Korhonen. *Inventing Finnish Music* (Jyväskylä: Finnish Music Information Centre, 2007), 164.
[8] Ibid.

As with earlier modernist composition trends, this new wave of modernism had a strong international component - that is, young composers often went abroad to study current trends in composition and distanced themselves from the Finnish cultural environment, which they felt was very conservative. The prospect of new technology led a large number of composers to Paris: Tiensuu, Saariaho and Lindberg found their artistic home at IRCAM, a French institute that investigates music and acoustic phenomena. However, Finland was also an attractive place for new music which is why several festivals were dedicated exclusively to contemporary music: (1) Stockholm and Helsinki organized ISCM in 1978; (2) the Helsinki Biennale was founded in 1981, which had a crucial impact on the dissemination of modern repertoire and was later called Musica Nova Helsinki; Musica Nova convened each year for several years; (3) the Time of Music festival was created by Jukka Tiensuu; (4) the Tampere Biennale which unlike the Helsinki Biennial focused only on Finnish music; and (5) Aboa musica which was organized for the first time in 2001 in the city of Turku. In the same way, performers and chamber groups have also been an essential pillar in the dissemination of their music. For example, the Avanti! Chamber Orchestra and Toimii Ensemble were for young composers.[9]

This rise of modernism coincided with a general boom of Finnish contemporary music in the 1980s. Apart from the festivals mentioned above, new concert halls were built, new record labels emerged and new orchestras of great quality were created such as the Tapiola Sinfonietta and the Sixth Floor Orchestra. The quality of the performances improved by leaps and bounds, and towards the end of the decade the international press described Finnish music as "amazing" in terms of its creative aspect and interpretation.[10]

[9] Kimmo Korhonen. *Inventing Finnish Music* (Jyväskylä: Finnish Music Information Centre, 2007), 165.
[10] Ibid., 166.

Chapter 2: The Music and Artistic Path of Magnus Lindberg

In this chapter I will address the main points of Magnus Lindberg's biography as well as Lindberg's artistic path in light of his compositions. Like several members of the "Ears Open!" society, Magnus Lindberg became a successful, internationally acclaimed composer. He was born in Helsinki, Finland in 1958. For Lindberg, Saariaho and other composers from this generation, Paris was an important center, and all of them made use of the new technologies that were now available. However, the compositional styles of Lindberg and Saariaho could not be more different: while Saariaho's work was dominated by slow processes of change and dreamy atmospheres, Lindberg's pieces featured aggressive rhythms and huge bursts of sound. The music of Saariaho has been compared to that of Ligeti and Grisey, while Lindberg's music is more reminiscent of the music of Xenakis, Berio and Boulez.[11]

Harmony, timbre, texture and rhythm are the fundamental components of Lindberg's music. The lack of melodic writing is especially apparent in his early works. In the first period of the late 70's his work was strongly based on serialism. Starting with *Arabesques* for wind quintet, Lindberg begins to abandon this technique. At the beginning of the eighties, he experimented with a wide variety of new techniques: The orchestral work *Sculpture 2* includes textures and rhythms so complex that two conductors are needed for its performance. In the chamber works *...de Tartuffe, je crois* and *Linea d'ombra,* musicians must not only play their instruments but also say words and make noises. And in *Action-Situation-Signification,* a background recording is included, thus adding a second musical dimension to the chamber group.[12]

[11] Kimmo Korhonen. *Inventing Finnish Music* (Jyväskylä: Finnish Music Information Centre, 2007), 182.
[12] Ibid., 183.

Chapter 2.1: Lindberg's Most Noteworthy Works

One of Lindberg's most well-known pieces is *Kraft*, which in German means "power." It was composed between 1983 and 1985 and scored for an ensemble of soloists and large orchestra: winds, percussion, harps, piano, celeste, and strings. The soloists include an E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, and contrabass clarinet, two percussionists, one pianist, one cellist, a sound controller and the conductor. These soloists must leave the stage from time to time to play on an assortment of junkyard percussion instruments or perform various other extended techniques such as the following: playing piano with Ping Pong balls, changing the sound by touching the piano strings by using a pick, metal rod or spoon, using styrofoam on the gong, and making paper-crunching noises, to name just a few.[13] Lindberg described it as a "combination of the hypercomplex with the primitive," stating that "only the extreme is interesting."[14] In recognition of this piece, he not only won the first prize at the International Rostrum of Composers (IRC) but was also awarded the Nordic Council Music Prize in 1988. It is a work of an overwhelming sound agglomeration, criss-crossed rhythms and harmonic alterations. But it also contains moments of quiet and strange beauty and is therefore considered one of the great works of modernism of the late twentieth century. For its composition, Lindberg relied heavily on computer technology using it to calculate the progression of huge sets of harmonies capable of creating up to seventy-two different voices.[15] Korhonen devotes a special section to this work and comments that both hypercomplexity and the use of new technologies could be considered manifestations of late modernism. However, other styles also appear. For example, the expansion of the percussion section with scrap metal as springs, steel pipes and other materials represents the concept of *Arte Povera* which was an art movement originating

[13] Magnus Lindberg (1985). "Kraft". G. Schirmer Inc. Retrieved June 1, 2016. http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/work/4310 (accessed December 31, 2019).
[14] Kimmo Korhonen. *Inventing Finnish Music* (Jyväskylä: Finnish Music Information Centre, 2007), 184.
[15] Ibid., 184-85.

in Italy in the 1960s characterized by experimentation with simple, everyday materials (such as paper, rags, or twigs) and concerned with challenging conventional elitism in the mainstream art tradition. Other details such as electronically amplified water bubbles are characteristic sounds of *musique concrète*. Tape-recorded musical and natural sounds, often electronically distorted, arranged in planned combinations, sequences, and rhythmic patterns to create an artistic work.[16]

Chapter 3: Magnus Lindberg's Clarinet Concerto

In this chapter I will analyse the structure of Lindberg's Clarinet Concerto, and I will include my personal suggestions related to some clarinet contemporary timbral effects which may be helpful in performing the piece. Before I discuss the clarinet concerto in detail, I will provide a general definition of concerto form:

> An instrumental work that maintains contrast between an orchestral ensemble and a smaller group or a solo instrument, or among various groups of an undivided orchestra. Before 1700 the term was applied to pieces in a variety of forms for an even greater variety of performing media, voices as well as instruments; it was also used in the sense of 'ensemble' or 'orchestra'. Not until the beginning of the 18th century was it applied consistently (though not exclusively) to works in three movements (fast–slow–fast) for soloist and orchestra, two or more soloists and orchestra (concerto grosso) or undivided orchestra.[17]

Lindberg's concerto deviates from the concerto form as defined above in that it is composed as a single movement, and it is more difficult to recognise the various sections. Three-movement concertos show different contrasts and temporal organisation such as fast or slow movements, combination, alteration or opposition. One-movement concerto form mostly

[16] https://www.dictionary.com/browse/musique-concrete (accessed January 20, 2020).
[17] Arthur Hutchings, et al. "Concerto." Grove Music Online. https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.40737 (accessed January 4, 2020).

depends on the composed solo part, using methods such as dialogue, development, restatement and final resolution.[18] Lindberg comments on his piece:

> I wrote the Clarinet Concerto for Kari Kriikku, whom I've known since the late 1970s: he studied harmony with me at the Sibelius Academy. So after 25 years I think we've developed quite an understanding – and I couldn't have written it without him. During the summer, I work at my cottage on an island in the Gulf of Finland: the house has been in my family since the 1830s and it's where I grew up. Kari Kriikku lives on the outskirts of Helsinki and though I could drive to his house, it's much easier to take the boat. So each spell of writing the concerto ended with a wonderful recreation, a boat trip! It was a perfect reward. The Clarinet Concerto is a big work, not in length but in scale. Kari's first words to me were 'Write something fortississimo for the orchestra but allow the clarinet to be heard!' So often with new music, people are afraid of putting solo instruments against a loud orchestra. But we did it! Of all my works, the Clarinet Concerto is one I still have a lot of affection for.[19]

For people who are more familiar with the modernist complexity of *Kraft*, the first hearing of the Clarinet Concerto might be a surprise. It is enough to hear a few seconds of each of the movements or to see the score to realise how Lindberg's composition style changed between 1982 (first premiere of *Kraft*) and 2002 (first premiere of Clarinet Concerto). As Tim Howell states, some kind of concertante elements are visible in Lindberg's earlier works. Concertante elements means that the music is "imbued with a particular sense of drama, a decidedly human quality that emerges from pitting the individual against the mass."[20] A good example is the ensemble of soloists performing *Kraft* as well as his Cello Concerto, composed fifteen years later and dedicated to Anssi Karttunen.[21] The Clarinet concerto was his next composition, and it is one of his most melodic works. Clarinettists "expresse a whole range of voices, contrasting characters and wide-ranging emotions, adopting a variety of roles at different stages during the piece".[22] The initial pentatonic motive plays an essential role in becoming almost an idée fixe, something that comes as a surprise to the listener accustomed to

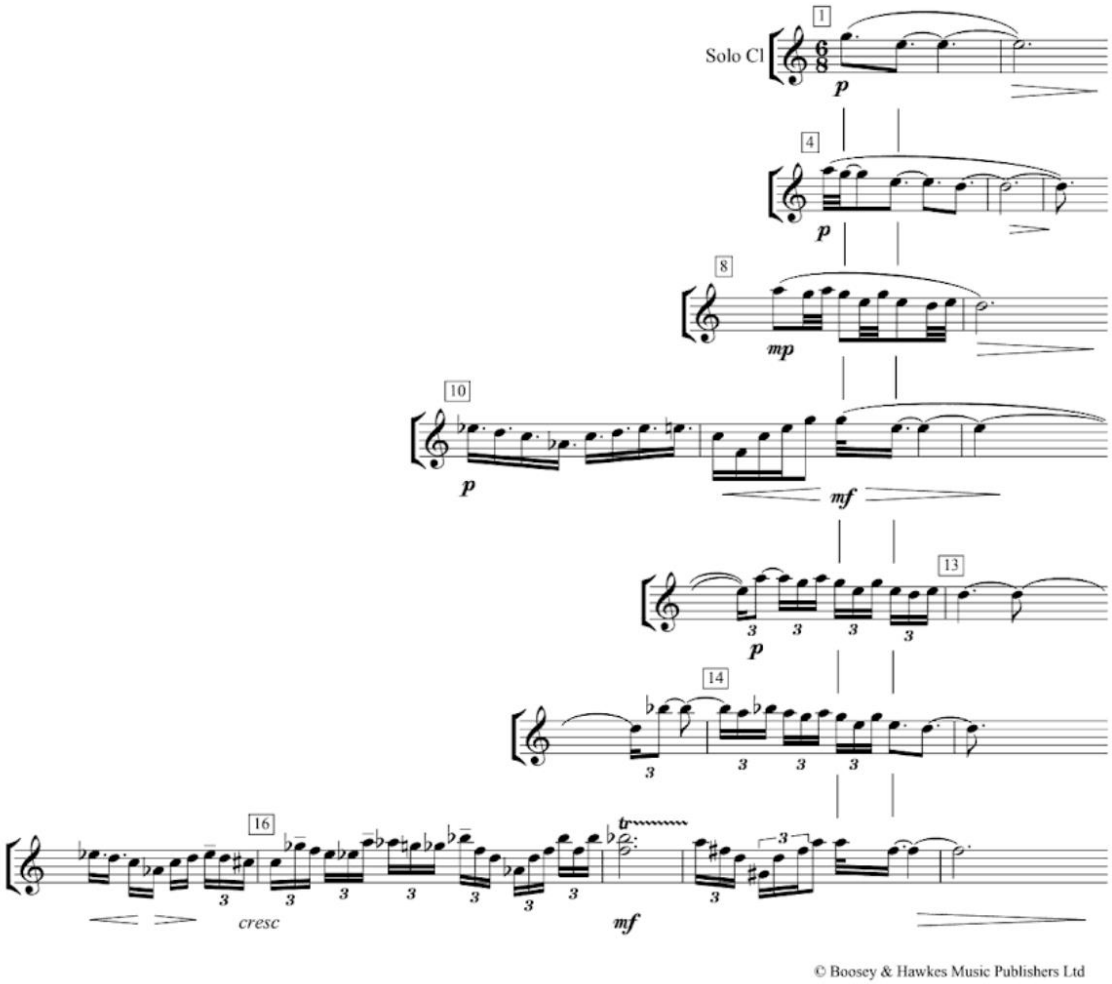
[18] Tim Howell. *After Sibelius: Studies in Finnish Music* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 255.
[19] http://www.karikriikku.com/projects/magnus-lindberg-clarinet-concerto/ (accessed January 20, 2020)
[20] Tim Howell. *After Sibelius: Studies in Finnish Music* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 254.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

the style of *Kraft.*[23] If one directly compares his Clarinet Concerto and *Kraft*, one can see two completely different compositional worlds. Lindberg's style developed, but one can still see similarities in expression. Generally, all compositional parameters are emphasized at different levels on the musical journey: rhythm, harmony, form, melody and tone color. Each of these works might be perceived as chaos, but in reality these works reveal order by projecting the progression from imbalance to underlying symmetry.[24]

The example below shows how fast a simple melody can turn into a virtuosic passage. Diatonic notes change to more chromatic, virtuosic material. The number of notes and the dynamic of the piece increase, and still rely on the main melody. According to Howell's analysis, the part from the beginning until m. 177 can be recognised as the first section.

[23] Ibid., 253.
[24] Ibid., 259.

Example 1: Magnus Lindberg, Clarinet Concerto, Idée fixe, first section (mm. 1-177).



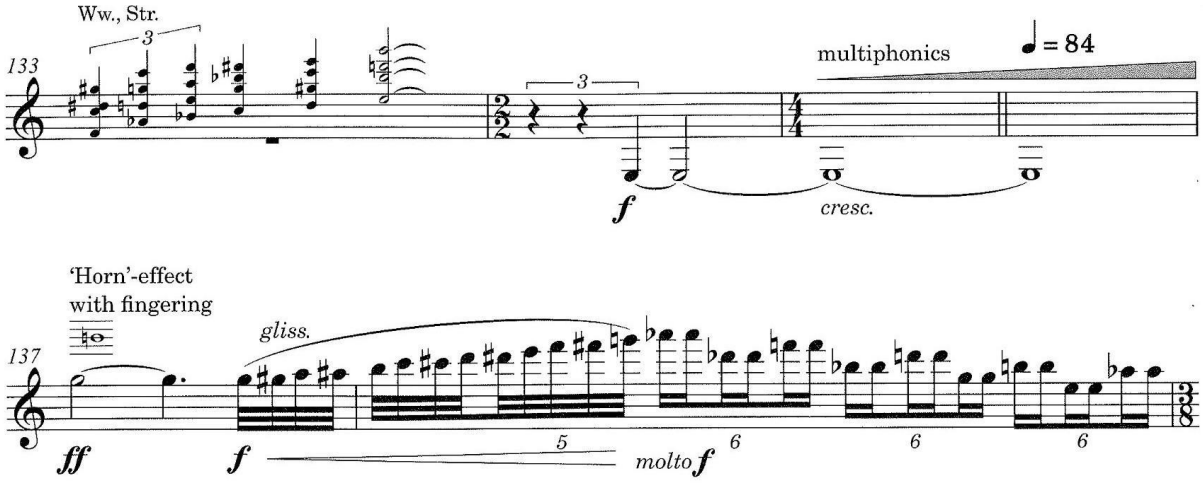
Before moving to the next section, I will draw attention to the timbral effect "multiphonics" in m. 135. See Ex. 2 below. This effect is a mixture of broken low tones and multiphonic glissandi. Broken low tones means to bring out upper partials of the tone fingered by changing the playing technique. These generate a thick, richly dissonant column of sound on top of the fundamental.[25] To achieve this timbral effect, clarinettists relax the embouchure (to break the tone) and move the tongue from its normal position (close to the teeth) backwards in the mouth (glissando).[26] The next timbral effect called "horn effect" in m. 137 (Ex. 2) can be achieved by overblowing the first octave B natural note of the clarinet. For some players it is

[25] Mikko Raasakka. *Exploring the Clarinet* (Helsinki: Fennica Gehrman, 2009), 72.

[26] Michael Lowenstern. *Harmonic Glissando: So you want to be a Bass Clarinet player.* (YouTube). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mah7O2RHW8Q (accessed January 25, 2020).

easier to control it without the index finger of the right hand, but this depends on many aspects such as embouchure, mouthpiece, reed and instrument.

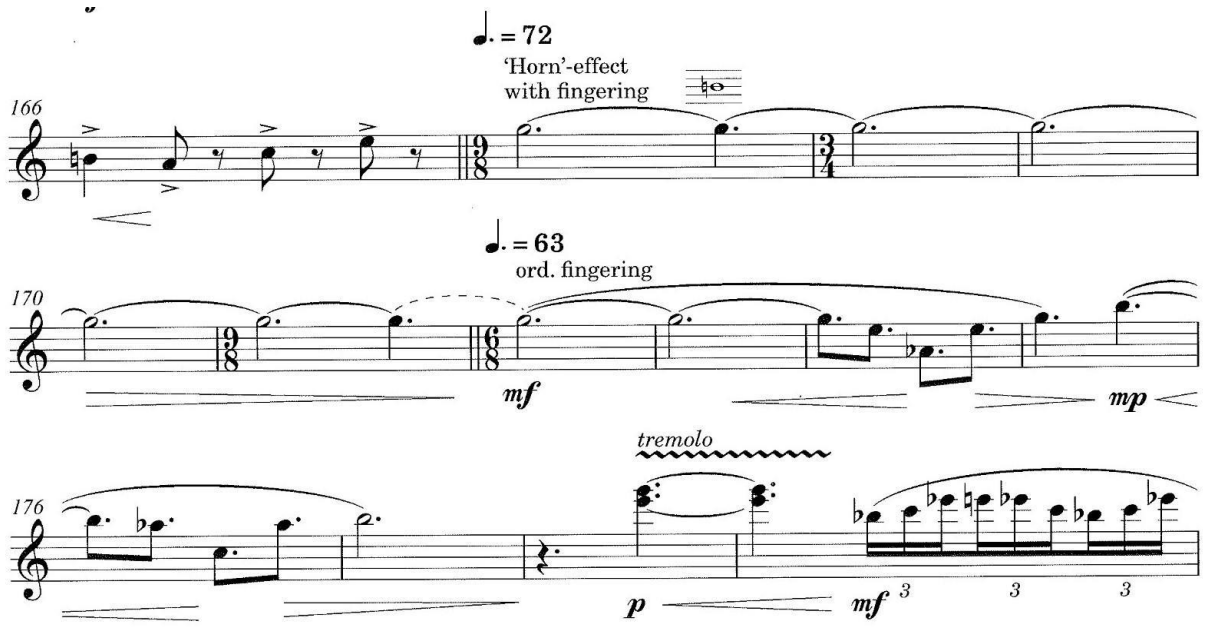
Example 2: The first two timbral effects in the concerto, multiphonics and horn effect, mm. 133-138.



As Howell states, the second section starts at the measure 178 because of the calmness in the accompaniment and the tremolo in the clarinet solo part. See Ex. 3 below. This section is based on a block-like construction of the first section, corresponding to the natural development of traditional form of the concerto; it offers many different contrasts such as slow/fast fragments, dialogue/opposition, as well as lyrical and aggressive parts in the clarinet and orchestra.[27]

[27] Tim Howell. *After Sibelius: Studies in Finnish Music* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 257.

Figure 3: Second section starting at m. 178.

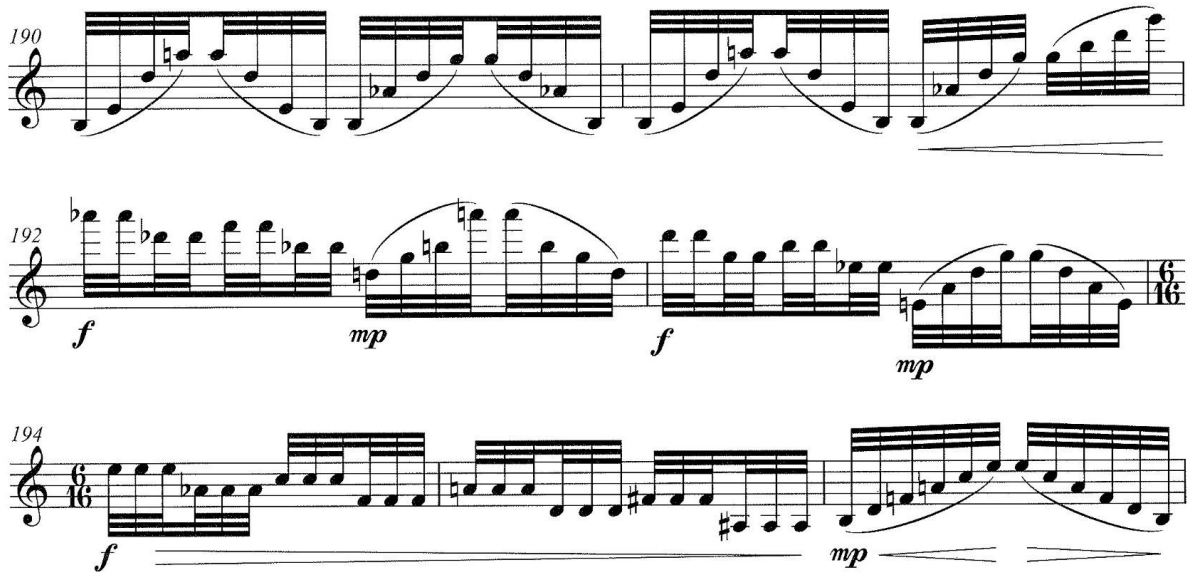


Starting at m. 190, clarinettists have the opportunity to display their technical skills. See Ex. 4 below. The fast demisemiquavers are reminiscent of those featured in Paganini's Caprice No. 1, Op. 24 for solo violin. In both works, the melody moves rapidly through different dynamics, tonalities and ranges. This whole section features frequent dialogues between the soloist and the orchestra which did not happen in the first section. Passages without rests in the clarinet part require a circular breathing technique which enables playing the instrument while inhaling at the same time. The air inhaled, while blowing, is stored in the cheeks and pharynx. Circular breathing makes it possible to play extensive phrases without pausing.[28] From my own experience, it is easier to breathe while playing in the lower clarinet register, for example at the beginning of mm. 196 and 197. From m. 194 onwards. Lindberg also uses fast repeated staccato demisemiquavers which might be tiring to keep in tempo while using natural tonguing. The double tonguing method might be essential for this as well as for the other fragments that appear later in the piece. Double tonguing is a technique employed for rapid articulations where the air

[28] Mikko Raasakka. *Exploring the Clarinet* (Helsinki: Fennica Gehrman, 2009), 35.

flow is interrupted alternately with the tip of the tongue (as if pronouncing the sound ‘t’) and the base of the tongue (as if pronouncing the sound ‘k’).[29] For instruments such as a flute this technique is easier to control, mainly because there is no external feature inside the mouth like the mouthpiece and the reed. This technique requires the same analysis, preparation and planning in advance as circular breathing.

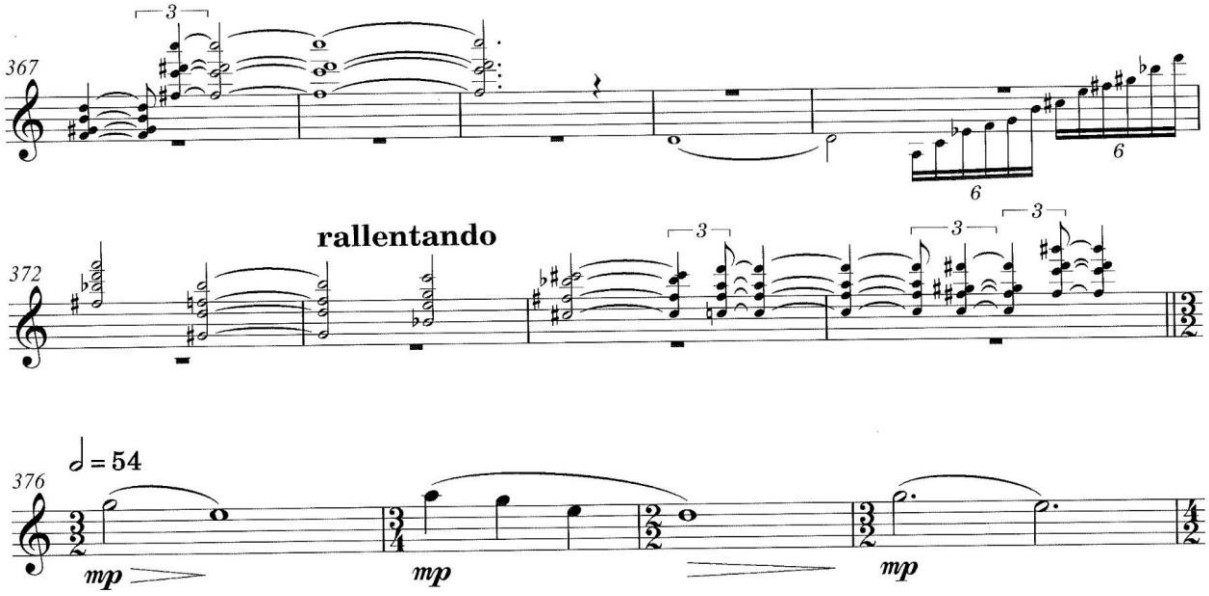
Example 4: Paganini style, double tonguing fragment and the possibility of circular breathing, mm. 190-196.



An aggressive, strong harmony occurs, in the orchestra part at m. 367, and a sudden dynamic change introduces listeners to the third section which starts at m. 376. See Ex. 5 below. The opening melody appears again, in slower tempo, keeping mezzo piano dynamics accompanied by sustained and rich harmonic chords. In Howell’s analysis, the third section is located right in the center of the piece and could be compared to the second, usually slow movement of the traditional concerto form.

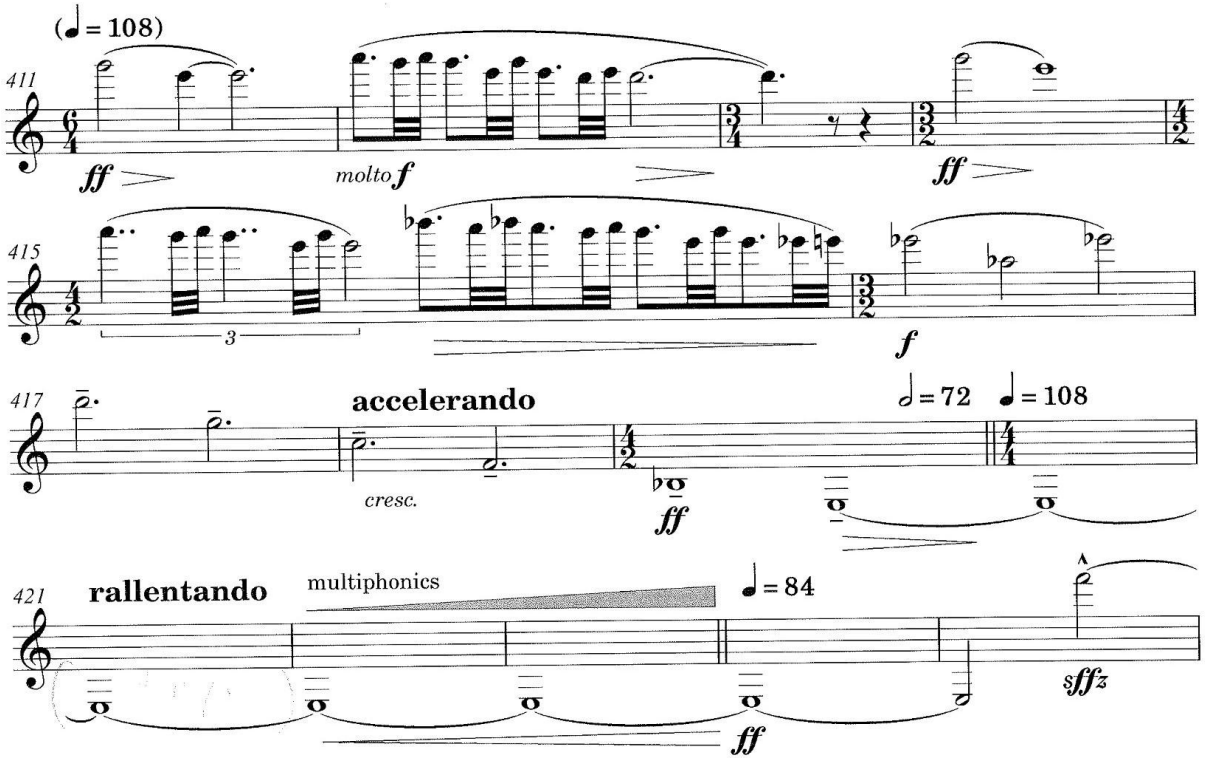
[29] Mikko Raasakka. *Exploring the Clarinet* (Helsinki: Fennica Gehrman, 2009), 38.

Example 5: Beginning of the third section (mm. 367-423).



The culmination of this section occurs at m. 411 where the soloist performs the main theme one octave higher. See Ex. 6 below. This is the second time where Lindberg presents the opening theme in almost unchanged form which ultimately ends the third section and initiates a transition.

Example 6: Opening theme one octave higher, transition to the fourth section (mm. 424-557).

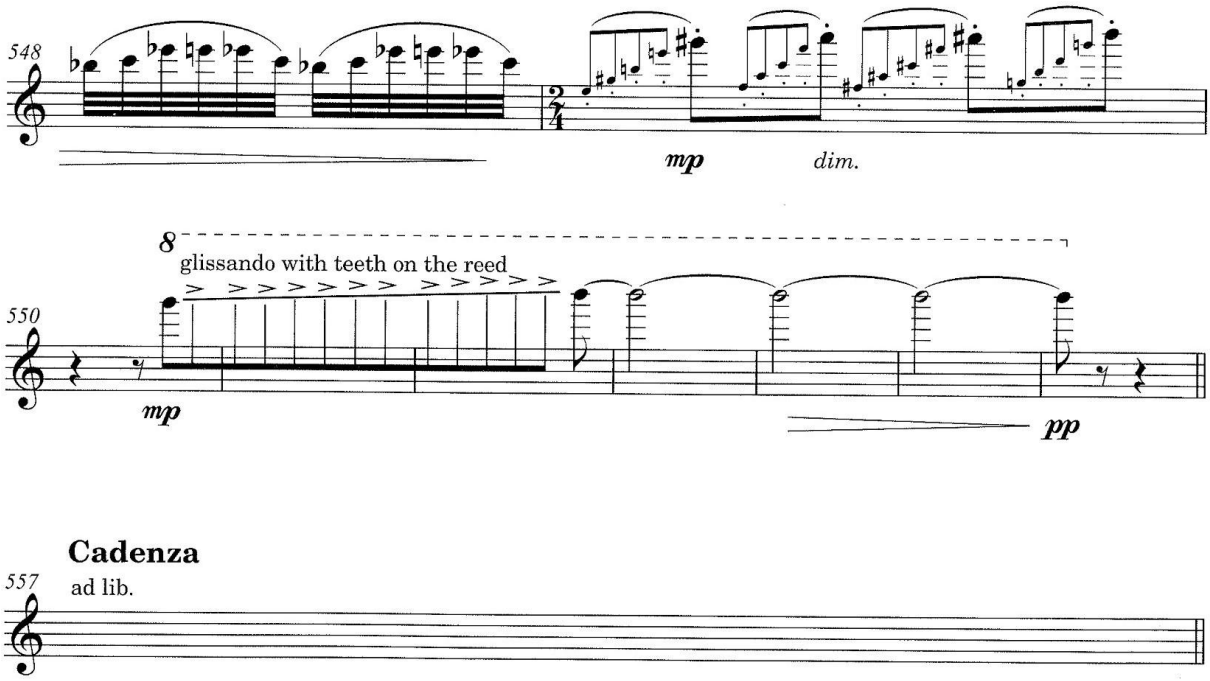


Section 4, which Howell describes as a counterbalance between the third and the final sections, starts at m. 424. This whole section features extreme dissonance, aggression and virtuosity in the clarinet part, interspersed with elements of drama, humour and lyricism.[30] The entire section prepares listeners for the unwritten clarinet cadenza which is performed after another timbral effect described as "glissando with teeth on the reed." See Ex. 7 below. To achieve that, clarinettists need to slide their lower teeth on the reed. Using a little amount of air might be helpful in creating such a registral peak group of notes which are difficult to control. Lindberg did not provide any information how the cadenza should be performed or composed, giving soloists freedom of interpretation. Kari Kriikku's suggestion was to compose my own cadenza, combining my favourite concerto fragments in a musically convincing way. In Kari

[30] Tim Howell. *After Sibelius: Studies in Finnish Music* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 257.

Kriikku's recording with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, I can hear that his cadenza is based on the fragments of the melody that appeared in the fourth section.[31]

Example 7: Timbral effect "glissando with teeth on the reed," mm. 550 ff. preceding an unwritten clarinet cadenza.



The last and fifth section continues after the cadenza at m. 558. It recapitulates the material that has been used in all previous parts and could be compared to the final movement of the traditional concerto form. Repeating the material from the previous sections gives listeners the feeling that it is the climax of the piece, due to the loud dynamics in the solo part, the fast tempo, and the strong timbre of the orchestra. The piece ends in the same character as it started, simply and quietly.

[31] Magnus Lindberg. *Clarinet concerto / Gran Duo / Chorale* (Helsinki: Ondine, 2005).

Conclusion

Lindberg's Clarinet Concerto could be compared to other challenging works such as the clarinet concertos composed by Nielsen or Françaix. The only difference is that these compositions have been performed and recorded many times by different clarinettists all over the world. There are many different opinions on how to interpret Nielsen and Françaix's concertos, but these concertos have already been discussed in great detail. These pieces became part of the standard repertoire, often requested by jury members at the last stages of clarinet competitions.

Lindberg's Clarinet Concerto is a relatively new composition, and clarinettists starting to show interest in this piece. With only one available professional recording and a few live performances, it is difficult to imagine how the work should be performed. From the other point of view, this paper has been written in the twenty-first century where the possibility of meeting a person to which this work has been dedicated only raises two limitations: the finances of the student and the available time of the mentor. It is my hope that this paper provides a good starting point for clarinettist studying Lindberg's clarinet concerto and that this concerto will soon become a part of mainstream clarinet repertoire.

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