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Exploring Unaccompanied Clarinet Repertoire

Kamil Lebowa

Northern Illinois University, Z1886714@students.niu.edu

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

“Exploring Unaccompanied Clarinet Repertoire”

A Capstone Submitted to the

University Honors Program

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree

With Honors

Department Of

Music

By

Kamil Lebowa

DeKalb, Illinois

May 2024

University Honors Program
Capstone Faculty Approval Page

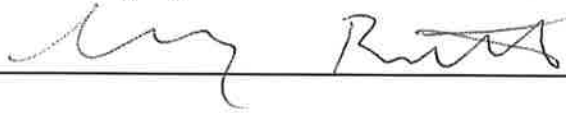
Capstone Title (print or type)

Exploring Unaccompanied Clarinet Repertoire

Student Name (print or type) Kamil Lebowa

Faculty Supervisor (print or type) Dr. Gregory Barrett

Faculty Approval Signature



Department of (print or type) Music

Date of Approval (print or type)

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Date and Venue of Presentation

4/21/23, Music Building Recital Hall

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Abstract

The goal of this project was to explore solo clarinet works over the course of the semester and to perform them in an unaccompanied recital. The project culminated in a full-length recital on April 21st, 2023, in the Recital Hall of the NIU Music Building. Each of the works that were performed explored a different aspect of unaccompanied clarinet music. The works that I chose required me to learn how to play the clarinet in a variety of different ways. Some of the pieces required a high level of technical efficacy while others required extended techniques, playing on different parts of the clarinet, and even acting. All of the pieces required a high level of musicality and preparation to perform.

Summary

Excluding piano, the repertoire for the vast majority of instruments is accompanied in one way or another. For wind instruments especially, it is almost always the case that a recital is performed with an accompanist on nearly every single piece. Because of this, most of the repertoire that I am familiar with for clarinet is accompanied. This repertoire is excellent, but sometimes an accompanist is not available. Because an accompanist may be inaccessible due to a wide variety of circumstances, I wanted to explore what music is available for unaccompanied clarinet and perform those works in a recital, helping me to grow as a musician and allowing others to hear live music that they would not typically hear performed.

The recital consisted of five pieces: *Yoh-Wu-Moh*, an etude based on a Chinese folk song which would usually be used for pedagogical purposes but can also function as a concert piece; *Bits & Pieces*, a multi-movement work that has the performer play parts of the clarinet rather than the whole instrument; *Three Pieces for Solo Clarinet*, easily the most famous unaccompanied work for clarinet; *a Paganini*, an arrangement of a popular unaccompanied

violin work for clarinet; and *Woodshedding (practice makes...)*, a theater piece which showcases what practicing is like in a humorous manner. Each of these pieces posed their own unique challenges during the preparation process.

Three of the pieces on the program were more or less conventional clarinet pieces, requiring the performer to just play on the clarinet, albeit with their own technical challenges. These pieces, *Yoh-Wu-Moh*, *Three Pieces for Solo Clarinet*, and *a Paganini*, called for a high level of technical facility and a great level of control of the clarinet. Furthermore, *a Paganini* calls for the use of certain extended techniques such as slap tonguing and flutter tonguing. *Bits & Pieces* required different techniques to be learned for each movement. The first movement requires playing the mouthpiece and barrel while controlling the pitches with your hands. The second movement has the player play overtones, microtones, and sing while playing, all with just the bottom half of the clarinet. The third movement has the performer play their clarinet like a brass instrument, buzzing to produce a sound instead of vibrating a reed. Lastly, the fourth movement makes extensive use of multiphonics while playing only the top half of the instrument. *Woodshedding (practice makes...)* requires the performer to act during the performance, utilizing various props and instrument switches to give the audience an idea of what practicing feels like sometimes. Learning all of these different techniques helped me gain a greater understanding of the instrument and what it is capable of, as well as pushed me to become a better musician.

The greatest challenge that this project posed for me, by far, was performing an entire recital unaccompanied. Usually the performer has at least one other person accompanying them during a recital performance, which helps to reduce the amount of pressure that the soloist is feeling. In an unaccompanied recital however, there is nobody else that the performer can rely

on. Because of this, a very high level of preparation and knowledge of the works that are to be performed is required for a successful performance. Because of this increased pressure, I learned new ways to practice, learned more about myself as a performer, and learned how to prepare music at an even higher level than I had previously. In other words, this project forced me to become better as both a musician and an artist.

Recital Recording: <https://youtu.be/RR03ftC7CZA>