

California Polytechnic State University  
San Luis Obispo

# DAVIS LERNER

## BASSOON

A Senior Recital in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for a Bachelor of Arts in Music

Paul Woodring, accompanist

April 22, 2023

Saturday at 3 p.m.

Davidson Music Center

Room 218

Sponsored by Cal Poly's Music Department and College of Liberal Arts



# PROGRAM

**Senior Recital**  
**Davis Lerner, bassoon**  
**Paul Woodring, piano**

*Bassoon Concerto in F Major*, RV 485 . . . . .Antonio Vivaldi  
Allegro non molto (1678-1741)  
Andante  
Allegro molto

*Colored Stones* for Solo Bassoon . . . . .Jenni Brandon  
I. Smoky Quartz (b. 1977)  
II. Lapis Lazuli  
III. Tiger's Eye

— Intermission —

*Bassoon Concerto in B-flat Major*, K. 191/186e . . . . . Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart  
Allegro (1756-1791)  
Andante ma Adagio  
Rondo: tempo di menuetto

*Sicilienne et Allegro Giocoso pour Basson et Piano* . . . . .Gabriel Grovlez  
(1879-1944)

## PROGRAM NOTES

### ***Bassoon Concerto in F Major, RV 485, by Antonio Vivaldi***

Although Antonio Vivaldi wrote music mostly for the orphan girls of the Venetian orphanage called Ospedale della Pietà, he was known throughout Europe as one of the most prominent composers of his time. Born in Venice on March 4, 1678, he was known as *il prete rosso*, or the red priest, because of the curly red hair he inherited from his father. Vivaldi, from birth, had what was called *strettezza di petto*, which translates to “tightness of the chest.” This condition is similar to what is now known as chronic asthma. This life-long burden influenced many of his career choices. He had even stopped saying mass because of his condition and on three recorded occasions, he left the altar before finishing his mass services. Despite this physical challenge, he is now considered one of the most influential composers of the concerto. He provided the “model” for the standard tempo plan for concerti, which is usually a fast movement followed by a slow movement, then ending with another fast movement. This plan was an important precursor to the Classical symphony. Vivaldi has almost five hundred surviving concerti, and more than three hundred are for solo instrument and orchestra. About 230 of these concerti are for solo violin and almost forty are for the bassoon.

Despite the fact these concerti are an important part of the modern bassoon repertoire, it is unclear exactly why they were written. The *Bassoon Concerto in F Major, RV 485*, is estimated to have been written between 1728 and 1737, possibly for the students at the Pietà. However, there are no purchase records from the Pietà for instruments or reeds. The concerto could also have been written for Gioseppino Biancardi, an accomplished bassoonist to whom RV 502 was dedicated. All of Vivaldi’s bassoon concerti are part of a manuscript collection in the National Library of Turin, Italy. Unfortunately, as they were not published during his lifetime, it is hard to gauge their success. Although this specific concerto is not particularly famous, Vivaldi’s thirty-nine bassoon concertos have all become a principal part of bassoon solo and pedagogical repertoire.

Vivaldi’s bassoon concerti were written for a very different instrument than the modern bassoon. The bassoons of his time had very little keywork—usually around three keys—which is very few compared to the seventeen to twenty-four keys employed by modern instruments. This design limited both the range and flexibility of the bassoon, which makes some of the rapidly changing disjunct notes all the more impressive. Vivaldi’s original scoring for solo bassoon and string orchestra with basso continuo is reduced in today’s performance to solo bassoon and piano. Consistent with most baroque concerti, the first movement is in ritornello form, which means the music alternates between the accompaniment and the soloist. The mood is very stately and courtly.

Although somewhat slow, the constant eighth-note pulsation in the accompaniment drives the reflective mood of the second movement. The use of dissonance, or harsh notes, is especially prominent in this movement, as moments of tension are both created and released. In the closing section of the piece, there is a false return to the darker key of C minor that quickly resolves to the movement's initial brighter key of C Major.

The third movement is the most intense. It achieves moments of great tension by means of both its harmony and rhythm. There are times when the bassoon plays just a half-step above the accompaniment, which is then released in the climactic moment before the closing passage of the piece. The last movement's structure returns to that of the first movement: ritornello form. The rhythm and melodies are incredibly varied, but the finale holds together thanks to small recognizable motifs that reappear throughout the movement.

### ***Colored Stones*, by Jenni Brandon**

Jenni Brandon's affinity for storytelling through music is apparent in her characterization of poetry and the natural world. Born on May 6, 1977, in Hershey, Pennsylvania, Brandon is an active composer, conductor, and vocalist. She has won the American Prize for Choral Composition, the Women Composers Festival of Hartford International Composition Competition, the Sorel Medallion, and the Bassoon Chamber Music Composition Competition (BCMCC). Her works have been performed (and frequently recorded) by the Musical Arts Quintet, Yale Glee Club, the Singer-Minnesota Choral Artists, The University of Texas at Arlington Wind Symphony, Ceora Winds, Young New Yorkers Chorus, Vox Femina, Sundance Trio, Long Beach Camerata Sings, and Voices of Ascension.

Brandon's compositions are incredibly vivid. Her piece for solo voice and piano, "Imperceptible" was described as "sensual and sensitive . . . haunting" by Jeannie Pool in "Art Song: Alive and Well in Los Angeles." Brandon's CD, *Songs of California: Music for Winds and Piano*, was nominated for the 10th Independent Music Awards. She has made guest appearances as a vocalist with the Boston Pops, Pacific Chorale, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and at the Hollywood Bowl. Her works often reflect aspects of nature. Some of her compositions include *The Sequoia Trio*, *Sun Songs*, and *The Wildflower Trio*. She also frequently works collaboratively with other contemporary musicians and artists.

In spite of being written quite recently, *Colored Stones* has already risen to a prominent place in the modern bassoonist's repertoire. *Colored Stones* was the winner of the 2014 BCMCC, which was open only to female composers and was limited to a solo piece. The competition is part of a collaboration between the BCMCC and the Meg Quigley Vivaldi Competition, which featured the winning work as a requirement for the 2016 MQVC, a competition for young women who play bassoon in the Americas. *Colored Stones* was premiered by Susan Nelson, assistant professor of bassoon at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. Like many

of Brandon's other pieces, it was written to tell a story. The unaccompanied bassoon explores the unique and spiritual qualities of a different stone in each of the three movements.

The first movement, titled "Smoky Quartz," represents the brownish-grey stone of the same name, and explores its dual nature. The stone is believed to promote stability and has a quality of "grounding." It is also thought to dispel dark and gloomy energy. These two qualities are represented by the bassoon's contrasting "grounding" and "playful" nature. The "grounding" melody is extremely free-flowing, while the "playful melody" is glimmering and exciting.

Throughout many cultures' history, the sparkling blue stone lapis lazuli has been a salient symbol of wisdom, strength, and beauty. The second movement, therefore, is incredibly luxurious. The bassoon is deep, smooth, and free-flowing. Reflecting the stone's nature, the speed moves freely, and constantly pushes and pulls. There is also a moment of levity, prompted by the expressive marking in the score: "crisp, with flashes of gold." This faster interjection conveys the glimmering aspect of the stone.

The third and final movement, titled "Tiger's Eye," is much more aggressive than the previous ones, perhaps because the tiger's eye gemstone is thought to provide spiritual protection. The musical representation of the stone alternates between a watchful protector and a dream-like, ethereal idea. The movement is very idiomatic of bassoon music, with its bouncy aggressiveness contrasted by moments of gloomy dreaminess.

### ***Bassoon Concerto in B-flat Major, K. 191/186e, by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart***

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is probably one of the most recognizable names in classical music today. He was born in Salzburg, Austria, and from a very young age, was impressively talented. He was schooled by his father Leopold in mathematics, literature, dancing, religion, and music. Mozart started composing music when he was five years old, wrote a full symphony at nine, a mass at twelve, and an opera at fourteen. He composed in most of the art-music genres of his time and was incredibly successful in all of them. He was even compared to William Shakespeare by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, one of the most prominent German novelists, poets, and playwrights. Mozart was very prolific, and over the course of his regrettably short life, he wrote around six hundred pieces of music.

Although composed when Mozart was only eighteen years old, the *Bassoon Concerto in B-flat Major* demonstrates his careful musical maturity. Everything from the range to the melodic lines to the technical displays is very idiomatic to the bassoon. The concerto shows off the bassoon's unique qualities, such as the sound of its different registers, and demonstrates the instrument's ability to perform large leaps and rapid notes. Mozart finished the concerto in Salzburg on June 4, 1774. Scholars believe it was commissioned by Baron Thaddäus von Dürnitz, an amateur

bassoonist and aristocrat. It is ranked as one of Mozart's less challenging pieces, which makes sense considering its probable origin as a piece for an amateur. This is Mozart's first documented concerto for a wind instrument. It is possible that he wrote a total of five for the bassoon, but any others that may have once existed have been lost. The piece is THE standard work in the bassoon repertoire; it is heard in conservatory examinations, concerto competitions, and auditions, and is frequently performed in concerts.

The first movement of the concerto is a grandiose display of the bassoon's capabilities. Its stately mood and galant style are instantaneously recognizable as Mozart's writing. The piece starts with an introduction by the accompaniment, a statement of the main themes by the bassoon, a short development of the melodic materials, and a restatement of the main themes. Also typical of first movements in classical concerti, the opening tempo, marked "Allegro," is fast and bright. The original performance medium called for a solo bassoon and a small orchestra of two oboes, two horns in B-flat, and strings, but the ensemble has been reduced to solo bassoon and piano for this performance. In this first movement, the bassoon demonstrates its virtuosity through fast technical passages, large leaps, and expressive singing melodies.

The second movement contrasts the galant effect of the first movement with relatively calm and lyrical melodic material. Most likely influenced by Italian opera, this movement almost sings. Actually, Mozart later used the notes of the bassoon's opening phrase in his opera, *The Marriage of Figaro*, within the Countess's aria "Porgi Amor."

The third and final movement is an exuberant showpiece in which the bassoon constantly moves around and jumps between different styles. It is a lively dance, in rondo form, meaning it presents a main theme that repeats with interspersed episodes of different musical material. The last movement is incredibly energetic and extroverted, thanks in part to its use of a lively triple meter, in which each measure is divided into three beats.

### ***Sicilienne et Allegro Giocoso pour Basson et Piano, by Gabriel Grovlez***

Gabriel Grovlez was quite the cosmopolitan. He was not only a French composer, pianist, and music critic, but an active director who performed as a guest conductor at opera houses in Cairo, Chicago, Lisbon, Monte Carlo, and New York. His endeavors were incredibly important for French music. He took piano lessons from his mother, who was the daughter of a student of Chopin. Grovlez then studied at the Paris Conservatoire with Descombes, Kaiser, Gédalge, Diémer, Lavignac, and Fauré. Grovlez served as the professor of piano at the Schola Cantorum from 1899-1909. Having a knack for stage music, he became the choirmaster and conductor at the Opéra-Comique, a position he held from 1905-1908, and later he became the director (1914-34). He was also appointed as the music director at the Théâtre des Arts from 1911-1913. As a conductor and director, he premiered Ravel's *Ma mère*

*l'oye* (Mother Goose Suite) and helped with the revival of ancient composers such as Monteverdi, Lully, Rameau, and Gluck. Grovlez also conducted Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes for a year. Grovlez was appointed the Professor of Chamber Music at the Paris Conservatoire in 1939.

Grovlez's *Sicilienne et Allegro Giocoso pour Basson et Piano* is an incredibly important addition to the bassoon's repertoire. It was written in 1930 for the annual competitive examinations of the Paris Conservatoire, which would include a newly commissioned composition (such as this piece) and one from the standard solo bassoon literature, such as Mozart's or Carl Maria von Weber's bassoon concerto. Grovlez's piece was dedicated to Léon Letellier, a professor at the Paris Conservatoire. Letellier had been a student of Eugène Louis-Marie Jancourt (a virtuoso French bassoonist) and the successor to Eugène Bourdeau, a French bassoonist and composer who had also taught at the Conservatoire. Grovlez's piece also may have served as the model for Eugène Bozza's *Récit, Sicilienne et Rondo* (composed six years after Grovlez's work), since Bozza utilized a very similar form and compositional techniques. Interestingly, Bozza's work was also a commissioned piece for the Conservatoire's annual bassoon exams.

Grovlez's *Sicilienne et Allegro Giocoso* is a beautifully colorful piece in which the bassoon can express an array of characters. His compositional techniques are reminiscent of his teacher, Fauré, and the style is representative of a neo-classical work, meaning it combines aspects of the past and modern music-making. The labels for the two parts—"Sicilienne" and "Allegro Giocoso"—prepare us for contrasting effects. The sicilienne is a dance associated with the Sicilian region of Italy. It is slow, with beats divided into groups of three. It also has a lilting melodic line and is usually in a minor key. Grovlez's "Sicilienne" is full of deep emotional pathos.

Contrasting the melancholy "Sicilienne," the "Allegro Giocoso" is a fast, lively, and playful segment. The character of this section is much brighter, achieved through varying performance styles. Some notes are performed shorter and sharper, while others are smoother and more connected. These varied performance techniques are called articulations, and the piece employs these contrasting articulations to create an almost cartoon-like atmosphere: highly appropriate, since "Giocoso" means "joking."

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