Henri Tomasi was a French composer who lived from 1901 to 1971 who split his professional career between composition and conducting (Cuppes, 2008). He composed the Ballade in 1938 for Marcel Mule, who was an influential professor at the Paris Conservatoire at the time (Cuppes, 2008). The piece was inspired by a poem his wife Suzanne Malard wrote and the translated work can be seen below. The piece follows the thoughts of a clown who has entertained for many years and describes his melancholy scenario. Despite his weary soul, he sees his saxophone and resides to the fact his job is to bring others joy. As per the description, one can anticipate this piece has a vast range of musical material. The piece can be broken down into three sections, a folk-like lyrical Andantino, a lively Gigue and a glum blues section. In an attempt to show the repetition of the clown’s life, the finale recaps the Gigue which leads to a sonorous mess.

On an old English theme, long, thin and phlegmatic like him a clown tells his melancholy tale to the night.

The shadow of his fate, the length of the zigzagging quays and the taste of the fag-end that in his mouth has taken up old jests makes him mad.

To get away from his coat, too big, and his dull flesh while only being, between joy and sorrow, a saxophone hesitating!

His despair, to the bottom of a sounding pool sinks right down.

And the clown resigns himself again to making the public laugh. (Delfs, p.2)

[Originally in French]

Frenchman and award winning multi-graduate of the Paris Conservatory; Eugene Bozza is a renowned composer for his works, especially that of the woodwind family (Kuyper-Rushing, 2013). Born in 1905 and passing 1991, he has contributed upwards of 140 works ranging from solo instrumental pieces to rarely performed symphonies (Kuyper-Rushing, 2013).

His work, Improvisation et caprice (Improvisation and Caprice) was written in 1952 as a solo work for the Saxophone for Marcel Mule (Cuppes, 2008). The two were close friends from the same generation and as a result, a number of works written for the instrument were dedicated to Mule (Cuppes, 2008). The work is split into two movements for the Alto Saxophone showcasing the performers’ and the instruments capabilities of range, tone, expression and technical facilities. The two movements possess vastly different characters to exploit the general sound of the Saxophone (Kuyper-Rushing, 2013). The first movement, Improvisation, is a slow lyrical movement, that although may not sound so, is technically challenging and requires superior control of the instrument to follow the composers wishes. Improvisation is a rather expressive movement that ideally attempts imitate the qualities of an improvisation. Several meter and tempo changes alongside marked rubato and ritardandos aid in the sense of the improvisation by eliminating a certain sense of pulse. The improvisation
exploits the Saxophones range of pitch and dynamic control, ranging from pianissimo to forte and encompassing most of the saxophones written basic range. For the current recital, the caprice has been omitted from the program.

John Williams has been deemed one of the most successful composers of the last 30 years, winning series of awards and his music appearing regularly in movies and on orchestral stages (Akkerman, 2004). A well trained musician, Williams has studied Piano at the Julliard School of music in New York and composition with Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (Akkerman, 2004). Escapades was composed in 2002 as a three movement suite that was adapted from Williams’ film score titled ‘Catch me if you can’. Each movement has been adapted slightly from the film to accommodate the needs of live performance (Akkerman, 2004). When describing the piece Williams stated:

“The film is set in the now nostalgically tinged 1960’s, and so it seemed to me that I might evoke the atmosphere of that time by writing a sort of impressionistic memoir of the progressive jazz movement that was then so popular. The alto saxophone seemed the ideal vehicle for this expression and the three movements of this suite are the result.”

The concerto depicts the escapades of a daring con man and impersonator Frank Abagnale set in the 1960s (Lehman, 2013). The use of jazz elements, classical composition and hints of postmodernism create a clever score that highlights ‘tongue in cheek’ moments which complement the films concepts (Akkerman, 2004).

The first movement is titled ‘Closing In’ and is established in the key of g minor. This movement is essentially made up of 8 bar triplet themes which has been highlighted as a typical characteristic of jazz standard repertoire (Akkerman, 2004). The movement is marked as stealthily at 152 crotchet beats per minute and provides strong interplay between the saxophone and piano. The use of sparse sounds, oscillating minor thirds and finger snaps create a tense atmosphere which provides an exciting contrast for the coming movements (Akkerman, 2004).

The second movement is titled ‘Reflections’ and as this suggests, is a much slower, more lyrical reflection in contrast to the first movement (Lehman, 2013). This movement prominently features the saxophone soloist. Despite no given key signature, this movement is once again predominantly in g minor as it travels through a landscape of slow lyrical melodies, moving jazz lines and a fragmented cadenza (Akkerman, 2004).

The third movement is titled ‘Joy Ride’ and finishes the concerto with a demanding and rather contrasting piece compared to its counterparts. As the longest movement of the suite, Joy Ride is comprised of two alternating main themes which return with varying modifications each time (Akkerman, 2004). This movement exhibits a number of time changes alongside key written jazz improvisation points which underline the somewhat flustered nature of the movement. This movement depicts Abagnales’ flights around the world in his attempts to avoid capture (Lehman, 2013).


