

HAYS, ANDREW PAUL, DMA. A Performer's Guide to the Saxophone Music of Sherwood Shaffer. (2007)
Directed by Dr. Steven Stusek. 72 pp.

During his career, composer Sherwood Shaffer has written thirteen concert works for the saxophone. These compositions represent a wide range of instrumentation from solo saxophone with piano, saxophone quartets and other chamber works, to solo saxophone with full orchestral accompaniment. Despite their quality, these works occupy a relatively unknown niche of the saxophone repertoire. The purpose of this study is to provide a brief biography of Sherwood Shaffer and an overview of his works for saxophone, to analyze sections from several representative pieces from the standpoint of performance preparation, and to provide an overview of stylistic and technical challenges found in common among his works.

Three works, *Summer Nocturne* for alto saxophone and piano, *Charades* for violin, tenor saxophone, and piano, and *Sinfonia* for saxophone quartet, were chosen from the set of thirteen to serve as the primary examples for this research. In order to obtain information about the origins and influences behind these works, the composer and several of the musicians who commissioned them were interviewed. Insights into the difficulties found in these works as well as

historical data regarding their composition and premiere performances were gathered. Technical and textural challenges found in these works were identified through performance analysis.

Shaffer uses complex textures, and the active nature of his individual parts creates difficulty during rehearsal and preparation. When learning these pieces, performers must identify melodic themes as they are passed from instrument to instrument. Only through proper ensemble balance and stylistic interpretation do the important melodic themes prevail. Other factors including interpretation of accent marks, proper use of written dynamics, and awareness of common melodic structures are examined.

A PERFORMER'S GUIDE TO THE SAXOPHONE MUSIC OF
SHERWOOD SHAFFER

by

Andrew Paul Hays

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Musical Arts

Greensboro
2007

Approved by

Committee Chair

To Sherwood,

*whose character inspires, whose music brings beauty to the world, and whose
uncompromising craftsmanship challenges each of us to pursue a higher level of artistry.*

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation proposal has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair

Committee Members

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the Study	3
Status of Related Research	4
Procedures	4
II. SHERWOOD SHAFFER	6
III. THE MUSIC	10
IV. SHAFFER'S MUSICAL LANGUAGE	27
Visual Aspects of the Language	28
Melodic Structures	38
Elements of Time and Meter	44
Phrasing	48
V. CONCLUSION	57
BIBLIOGRAPHY	62
APPENDIX A: SAXOPHONE COMPOSITIONS BY SHERWOOD SHAFFER	65
APPENDIX B: CATALOGUE OF WORKS BY SHERWOOD SHAFFER	67

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sherwood Shaffer (b. 1934) “is one composer to keep an eye on,” proclaims a review in the *American Record Guide*.¹ His catalogue of over one hundred and fifty compositions contains solo instrumental, choral, chamber, symphonic, and operatic works. Shaffer’s compositions have been performed and recorded throughout the world and have earned much praise. His opera, *Winter’s Tale*, was nominated for *Opera America*’s first Composers Showcase in 1981, and his *Quintet No. 2*, written for the Clarion Woodwind Quintet, was broadcast on PBS and Voice of America as part of the United States Bicentennial celebration in 1976.² The album *Max Lifchitz Performs American Piano Music*, which included Shaffer’s work *Lines from Shelley*, was nominated for a Grammy Award in 1992.³ His orchestral work *Catherine Wheels* has been performed

¹ Sherwood Shaffer. Interview by the author. 15 November, 2006, Winston-Salem. Tape Recording

² _____. *ibid.*

³ _____. *ibid.*

throughout the United States and Europe and was recorded by the Bohuslav Martinu Philharmonic of the Czech Republic in 1991.⁴

Shaffer has been granted commissions by the National Endowment for the Arts, Meet the Composer, the North Carolina Arts Council, and the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation. He has had works premiered by the Chattanooga Symphony Orchestra, the Winston-Salem Symphony, the New World String Quartet, the New Century Saxophone Quartet, and the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, as well as by many other nationally and internationally known artists and ensembles.⁵ Shaffer served on the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music before becoming one of the founding faculty members of the North Carolina School of the Arts (NCSA). In 1992, he was awarded the O. Max Gardner Award of the Consolidated University of North Carolina. This is the highest faculty award granted by the University of North Carolina system, and Shaffer was the first musician selected to receive this honor since its inception in 1949.

⁴ Shaffer. *ibid.*

⁵ _____. *ibid.*

Purpose of the Study

During his career, Sherwood Shaffer has written thirteen concert works for the saxophone. These compositions represent a wide range of instrumentation from solo saxophone with piano, saxophone quartets and other chamber works, to solo saxophone with full orchestral accompaniment. These well-crafted works contain many technical as well as musical challenges for the performers, and their neo-romantic style ensures that they can be enjoyed by a wide audience. Despite their quality, these works occupy a relatively unknown niche of the saxophone repertoire. Furthermore, the majority were composed for the tenor saxophone, an often overlooked member of the saxophone family in terms of classical repertoire. Shaffer's interest in the tenor saxophone was driven by his professional relationship with James Houlik, a renowned saxophone soloist and former faculty member at NCSA. All but two of Shaffer's saxophone compositions were commissioned or dedicated to Houlik or his former students.

The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of Sherwood Shaffer's works for saxophone, to analyze sections from several representative pieces from the standpoint of performance preparation, and to provide an overview of stylistic and technical challenges found in common among his works.

Status of Related Research

Other than one lecture recital which I attended about Shaffer's music, I have found no evidence of any research pertaining to his saxophone music. No dissertations, books, or articles have been written about the saxophone compositions of Sherwood Shaffer. Furthermore, no research about Sherwood Shaffer in general or his compositions for other media has been found.

Procedures

In order to obtain information about the origins and influences behind the saxophone compositions of Sherwood Shaffer, the composer and several of the musicians who commissioned these works were interviewed. When possible, these interviews were conducted in person and recorded using a Sony TCM-20DV cassette recorder. Other interviews were conducted by telephone and recorded with the same cassette recorder using the telephone's speaker function. Insights into the technical and musical challenges found in these works as well as historical data regarding their composition and premiere performances were gathered. The musicians were also asked to comment on their relationship with Shaffer and the events that led up to the commissioning of these works.

Three works, *Summer Nocturne* for alto saxophone and piano, *Charades* for violin, tenor saxophone, and piano, and *Sinfonia* for saxophone quartet, were chosen from the set of thirteen to serve as the primary examples for this research. The scores of these works were obtained so that a thorough analysis from the standpoint of performance preparation could be completed. Technical and textural challenges in these works were sought. Each piece is unique, but all share many similar challenges due to Shaffer's original compositional style.

Shaffer's style is often texturally complex. Due to the active nature of individual parts, performers may have some difficulty identifying which part contains the most important musical material in a given section of the piece. Identifying these melodic themes as they are passed from instrument to instrument is a very important part of the preparation of these pieces. Only through proper ensemble balance do the important melodic themes prevail. This study is intended to help the performer analyze his or her part from the standpoint of melodic content. Once the important melodic themes are identified, performance of these works becomes much less difficult. Other factors including interpretation of accent marks, proper use of written dynamics, and awareness of melodic and rhythmic structures were also considered in this study.

CHAPTER II

SHERWOOD SHAFFER

Sherwood Shaffer was born in Refugio, Texas on November 15, 1934. His earliest expression of musical interest occurred at the Texas Centennial Fair in Dallas when he was two years old. "I ran away from Mom and her mother and was later found by a policeman marching in front of the band, 'conducting' it as it played."⁶ Although Shaffer's mother had been a pianist and organist before she married, his earliest musical training took place in school music class in Austin, Texas. Shaffer learned to read music and studied solfege and music appreciation. He also sang solos at Grace Methodist Church in Austin, but "when (my) voice changed that ended my singing career."⁷

Shaffer originally wanted to study piano, but his family could not afford to buy one. He instead chose to play the clarinet in the school band. "(I) wrote my very first composition, a march, after the very first band class. Composing was continuous from then on!"⁸ His earliest compositions were for clarinet

⁶ Shaffer. Interview by the author. 15 November, 2006, Winston-Salem. Tape recording.

⁷ _____. *ibid.*

⁸ _____. *ibid.*

which he often performed himself. Early musical influences included Bach, Beethoven, Mozart's clarinet concerto, von Weber's clarinet concertos, and Brahms' clarinet sonatas. These works were performed as well as studied by the young Shaffer. During his high school years, he taught himself theory, counterpoint, orchestration, and form and analysis by studying books borrowed from the local library.

Shaffer also listened to radio broadcasts fervently. Saturday broadcasts live from the Metropolitan Opera, as well as many live orchestral performances, become a consistent part of his musical studies. When possible, he would obtain a copy of the scores of the pieces to be performed from the local library so as to follow along during the broadcast. Shaffer also became enthralled with a recording by Jose Iturbi of Chopin's "Polonaise in Ab." It was this recording that solidified his decision to pursue classical composition as his career.⁹

As his high school years progressed, Shaffer was given the opportunity to conduct his high school band at rehearsals. These rehearsals included some of his compositions as well as standard band literature. By eleventh grade, Shaffer was accepted to study composition with Clifton Williams at the University of Texas. He received, however, only two lessons before his family moved to Tyler,

⁹ Shaffer. *ibid.*

Texas and his lessons ceased.¹⁰ Despite this setback, his musical influences continued to grow. Shaffer was now studying the works of Richard Wagner, Charles Ives, Samuel Barber, Gian Carlo Menotti, Howard Hanson, Lou Harris, Igor Stravinsky, and Benjamin Britten.

Shaffer began his undergraduate education at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He studied composition, piano, and tutored theory and counterpoint. Because of his exceptional abilities, he was allowed to take several graduate and upper-level undergraduate courses. Despite his success, Shaffer felt drawn toward more challenging experiences. In the winter of 1955, he applied to the Curtis Institute with the intention of studying composition with Barber or Menotti who were on the faculty there. Shaffer was accepted, but by the time he began his studies, Barber and Menotti had both left the school. Shaffer began his studies with famed Czech composer, Bohuslav Martinu. Martinu also left Curtis one term later, and Shaffer began studying with Vittorio Giannini. This apprenticeship would last for seven years.

Shaffer completed his degree at Curtis in 1960. Giannini had taken a position at the Manhattan School of Music, and the young composer followed to work on his master's degree. Following the completion of that degree, Shaffer

¹⁰ Shaffer. *ibid.*

stayed at Manhattan and served as Chair of Freshman Theory from 1962-65. He also wrote a freshman theory text which was used by the school for seven years.¹¹ In addition, Shaffer taught advanced theory, Renaissance and Baroque counterpoint, ear training, and some advanced courses for composition and theory majors. In 1965, Giannini brought Shaffer to North Carolina to serve as the Chair of the Theory Department of the North Carolina School of the Arts. He continued teaching there until his retirement in 2000.

¹¹ Shaffer. *ibid.*

CHAPTER III

THE MUSIC

Shaffer's thirteen concert works for saxophone represent a significant addition to the repertoire. These pieces are unique in that they represent a wide range of instrumental combinations and most feature the tenor saxophone, instead of the alto, as the solo instrument. Shaffer's focus on the tenor saxophone results directly from his professional relationship with saxophonist James Houlik, a fellow faculty member at the North Carolina School of the Arts. Almost all of these works were commissioned by or dedicated to Houlik or his students. All thirteen pieces have been listed in chronological order based on date of composition. Instrumentation, structure, duration, and a brief description of the premiere and other performance information have been provided as well.

Vision of a Peacock (masque) (1971)

- Instrumentation: actress/dancer, alto saxophone, percussion, and tape (or three alto saxophones)
- Structure: single-movement work, sections of sung and spoken text are separated by dance sequences
- Duration: 15 minutes

Shaffer composed this work for actress/dancer, alto saxophone, percussion, and tape (or three alto saxophones). It stands as the earliest of his saxophone compositions and is the only work not to be commissioned by James Houlik or one of his students. Shaffer composed this work in 1971 following a general call to composers by saxophonist Ken Dorn for saxophone works which included parts for an actress/dancer.¹² The actress/dancer performs sections of sung and spoken text which are separated by dance sequences. *Vision of a Peacock* has never been performed.

¹² Shaffer. Interview by author, 21 November 2006, Winston-Salem.

Summer Nocturne (1981)

- Instrumentation: alto saxophone and piano
- Structure: five-movement work; movements performed continuously with no break

- I. Verse: "the dark has a star of its own"
- II. "Go and catch a falling star"
- III. Verse (reprise)
- IV. "The night in silence under many a star"
- V. Verse (envoi)

- Duration: 16 minutes

Jonathan Helton commissioned this work while he was an undergraduate at the North Carolina School of the Arts.¹³ Helton had often enjoyed premieres of Shaffer's works while attending NCSA and approached him following one such occasion to ask if he had written anything for saxophone. Shaffer responded that he had not, but he had been thinking about it and asked Helton to stop by his office the following day. During this meeting, Helton was asked to demonstrate a few tremolos and other passages and then sent on his way. Despite Helton's belief that nothing would probably come of this meeting, Shaffer completed *Summer Nocturne* a few days later and dedicated it to the

¹³ Jonathan Helton. Phone interview by the author, 29 November, 2006. Tape recording.

young saxophonist. Helton premiered the work on his senior recital at NCSA in Winston-Salem, North Carolina in the spring of 1982.

Shaffer composed *Summer Nocturne* as a five-movement work intending that the movements be performed without pause. The inspiration for the individual movements came from lines of poetry which Shaffer had collected over the years. The lines are as follows: “The night has a star of its own” from *Blizzard* by Marie Graybeal Sparks, “Go and catch a falling star” from *Song* by John Donne, and “The night in silence under many a star” from *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d* by Walt Whitman.¹⁴

The sound and symbols of the poetry inspired the work as a musical experience rather than as a literal musical representation of their meaning. Therefore, the poetry only suggests the catalyst rather than specifically indicating what the music is about. The musical experience is the intent. The work is played without major pauses between the short movements.¹⁵

The saxophone part for *Summer Nocturne* is only moderately hard; however, the piano part is very difficult. Finding a pianist willing to spend the time required learn the part may be the greatest challenge of performing this piece. The ensemble work between the saxophone and the piano is complicated

¹⁴ Shaffer. Interview by the author, 21 November, 2006, Winston-Salem. Tape recording.

¹⁵ _____. *Summer Nocturne*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

and requires some extra rehearsal time as well. Despite these challenges, this piece is an excellent concert work for alto saxophone and currently is the most frequently performed of Shaffer's saxophone compositions. The music showcases the saxophone's lyrical nature and technical virtuosity.

Sonata: When Mountains Rising (1983)

- Instrumentation: tenor saxophone and piano
- Structure: three-movement work
 - I. Bold and surging
 - II. Past singing springs
 - III. To reach the stars
- Duration: 15 minutes

Following his graduation from the North Carolina School of the Arts, Stephen Pollock commissioned *When Mountains Rising* in 1983. At that time, Pollock performed many recitals in western and central North Carolina, and he premiered the piece on one of these recitals the same year that the piece was composed. He recorded the middle movement on his 2005 solo release, *So Near, So Far*. Unlike *Summer Nocturne*, the movements of this work may be performed as separate concert works if the artist chooses. Much like *Summer Nocturne*, Shaffer composed this work with poetic inspiration.

[*When Mountains Rising*] was inspired by the first lines of the long poem *The Czars* by Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926): “It was in the days when the mountains were first rising upon the earth: wild trees sprang bold without design and crystal shining rivers roared forth” (my own paraphrased translation from the original German). The tenor saxophone sounds that way to me, bold, surging forth from an unseen somewhere with an energy and power that is at times primeval. When Stephen Pollock commissioned a work for tenor saxophone, these Rilke lines and images came to mind. I. Bold and surging, the drama of the emerging power of first rising mountains, sometimes awesome, sometimes benign, yet ever rising. II. Past singing springs, crystalline waters of a new born world caroling as they grow. III. To reach the stars, what else are mountains for?¹⁶

When Mountains Rising is a moderately difficult work for tenor saxophone.

This piece does not extend beyond the normal written range of the tenor, but does incorporate many wide intervals and challenging phrases. As in much of Shaffer’s music, the most difficult challenge is putting the piece together with the pianist. Complicated interplay between the saxophone and piano parts require much diligent rehearsal as well as knowledge of the whole piece by both performers. The second movement displays the beautiful vocal quality of the tenor saxophone while the outer two movements display its ability to perform powerful yet agile phrases.

¹⁶ Shaffer. *When Mountains Rising*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

Charades (1985)

- Instrumentation: violin, tenor saxophone, and piano
- Structure: three-movement work; movements performed continuously with no break

- I. Moderato
- II. Slow
- III. Fast

- Duration: 17 minutes

James Houlik commissioned *Charades* for presentation on “The Sarah Johnson and Friends” chamber series. It was premiered at the Dock Street Theater in Charleston, South Carolina on November 19, 1985 by Sarah Johnson, James Houlik, and Nelson Padgett on violin, tenor saxophone, and piano respectively.¹⁷ This was the first of many works commissioned from Shaffer by Houlik. The three movements of this work are performed continuously without pause. The work is literally a musical game of charades in which the musicians take turns miming and guessing. The performance directions in the score indicate where each new game of charades begins and which instrument is doing the miming.

¹⁷ Shaffer. *Charades*. Score, 1985.

Charades makes great demands of the ensemble and requires an extended amount of rehearsal time. The individual parts are only moderately difficult, but the ensemble work is very challenging. This piece becomes much less difficult as the performers gain understanding of the whole work and not just their own parts. This includes the performers understanding their role in the game during the different sections of the piece as well. Shaffer asks for a minor third of extended range from the tenor, including a difficult trill between altissimo G# and A. While most of the piece is exciting and intricately composed, it contains another beautiful slow movement which features the tenor saxophone's expressive vocal quality.

Rhapsody (1986)

- Instrumentation: tenor saxophone and symphonic winds
- Structure: three-movement work; movements connected by solo cadenza and performed continuously with no break
 - I. Bold, expansive
 - II. Slow, lyrical and flowing
 - III. Very fast, driving and excited
- Duration: 15 minutes

James Houlik commissioned this work and premiered it with the U.S. Navy Band at the 10th International Saxophone Congress in Washington, D.C. in January, 1987. Houlik later performed it with the Baylor University Wind Ensemble.

Conceived as a brilliant showpiece for the soloist along “classical” lines, the *Rhapsody* is in many ways like a violin concerto. It explores the great variety of nuance, color, and expressive qualities of the tenor saxophone throughout its nearly four octave range—from the low rich bass notes into its newly developed high flute-like altissimo register.¹⁸

As the composer’s description implies, this is a very difficult work for the saxophonist. Not only does Shaffer write an octave above the normal written range up to altissimo F# (it should be noted that this was at Houlik’s request), but he also demands technical virtuosity from the performer throughout the entire work. The saxophonist has little time to rest as the space in between movements is filled with solo cadenza. *Rhapsody* superbly showcases the technical virtuosity capable of the tenor saxophone in a soloist role.

¹⁸ Shaffer. *Rhapsody*. Score, 1986.

Concerto (1987)

- Instrumentation: tenor saxophone and orchestra
- Structure: three-movement work; movements connected by solo cadenza and performed continuously with no break

- I. Bold, expansive
- II. Slow, lyrical and flowing
- III. Very fast, driving and excited

- Duration: 25 minutes

Composed for James Houlik, the *Concerto* for tenor saxophone is simply an expansion of the *Rhapsody* scored for orchestral accompaniment instead of symphonic winds. The overall structure of the piece and the musical material within remain the same. The three movements are performed without pause and are connected by solo cadenzas just as in *Rhapsody*. Shaffer extended the length of the piece somewhat, stretching it to twenty-five minutes. This work has yet to be performed.

Barcarolle (1990)

- Instrumentation: tenor saxophone and piano
- Structure: single-movement work
- Duration: 6 minutes

Shaffer composed this work from the middle movement of *Charades* on request by James Houlik. The main thematic material is the same, but Shaffer extended the piece somewhat and added a new middle section. Though far from being simply an incidental piece, *Barcarole* could serve as a nice separation between two larger works on a concert program. While certainly not as difficult as the *Rhapsody* or *When Mountains Rising*, Shaffer still asks the saxophonist to play up to an altissimo A during the climax of the piece. The main challenge in this work is to play all of the lines as lyrically and beautifully as possible. *Barcarole* would be an excellent piece for a student or a more advanced performer who is unfamiliar with Shaffer's works.

***Stargaze* (1991)**

- Instrumentation: narrator, tenor saxophone, and orchestra
- Structure: single-movement work
- Duration: 18 minutes

James Houlik commissioned this work on a grant from the North Carolina Arts Council and premiered it with the Winston-Salem Symphony on its Children's Concert Series on February 5, 1991.¹⁹ The text, written by both Houlik

¹⁹ Shaffer. Interview by the author, 21 November, 2006, Winston-Salem. Tape recording.

and Shaffer, explains some basic facts about astronomy and celestial objects.

Photographic slides of the corresponding stars, planets, and galaxies were also used for the premiere performance and were obtained from NASA. During the premiere, Houlik served as the soloist and the narrator, although a separate narrator could be used instead.

While the logistics of performing this piece are more involved than some of Shaffer's other works, the music is beautiful and less difficult than some of his other compositions. Due to the subject matter, the piece seems almost programmatic. He does ask the saxophonist to execute a few altissimo notes, however, but these sections could be performed an octave lower by a performer who is not confident with the upper range.

***Sicilienne* (1991)**

- Instrumentation: alto/baritone or soprano/tenor saxophone and piano
- Structure: single-movement work
- Duration: 5 minutes

Shaffer composed *Sicilienne* in response to a request he had from Houlik, as well as other saxophone professors, for a work that could be more easily performed by their less advanced students. He composed two versions that may

be performed by Eb or Bb saxophones respectively. The earliest performances were given by students of Houlik at the North Carolina School of the Arts. Although the work is technically less difficult than Shaffer's other compositions, it still demands that the performer be able to shape a musical line. This piece also works well as an incidental work between larger works on a concert program.

Sinfonia (1992)

- Instrumentation: SATB saxophone quartet
- Structure: three-movement work; movements may be performed as separate concert pieces
 - I. Quick and vibrant
 - II. Lyric
 - III. Presto
- Duration: 18 minutes

Sinfonia was commissioned by the New Century Saxophone Quartet for their New York debut as winners of the 1992 Concert Artists Guild National Chamber Music Competition. They premiered the work at Carnegie Hall in New York on March 23, 1993.²⁰ *Sinfonia* became a standard part of this quartet's

²⁰ Pollock. Phone interview by the author, 3 December, 2006. Tape recording.

repertoire, and they have performed it throughout the United States and Europe. New Century requested that Shaffer compose the work so that each movement could be performed separately. The three movements flow together well but can stand alone as single concert works.

With the exception of a few spots, the individual parts are only moderately difficult. Shaffer does write some tricky technical passages and asks for a slightly extended range from the alto and soprano. As is the case in much of Shaffer's music, the main challenge is putting the piece together as a whole. He constantly moves melodic lines from one instrument to another, and these must be performed with rhythmic accuracy and matching style. This piece serves as a wonderful addition to the quartet concert repertoire, and would be a good challenge for any advanced student quartet.

Unicorn Music (1996)

- Instrumentation: tenor saxophone and chamber orchestra
- Structure: three-movement work; movements performed continuously

without pause

- I. Quick and vibrant
- II. Slow and singing
- III. Presto

- Duration: 28 minutes

The Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble commissioned *Unicorn Music* on a Meet the Composer grant. They premiered the work with David Stock conducting and James Houlik as soloist in March of 1998.²¹ Houlik later recorded the piece with the Prague Radio Symphony in October of 2000 with support from the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation. This recording has yet to be released. While composing *Unicorn Music*, Shaffer took inspiration from “the image of a gleaming golden horn, shared by both the mythical unicorn and the modern saxophone.”²²

Jubilees (1996)

- Instrumentation: tenor saxophone and organ
- Structure: three-movement work
 - I. Vibrant, vigorous
 - II. Broad, lyrical
 - III. Very quick, joyous
- Duration: 18 minutes

²¹ Shaffer. *ibid.*

²² _____. *ibid.*

James Houlik premiered this work with organist Pierluigi Lippolis at a festival in Tarranto, Italy in the summer of 1996.²³ This premiere was also broadcast by RAI Television in Italy. Houlik has since performed the work on subsequent tours in Italy and in the U.S. *Jubilees* is a difficult piece for both performers. The organist is by no means an accompanist but an equal collaborator. Shaffer explores the wide pallet of colors possible when combining saxophone and organ. The combination of power and sensitivity produced by the organ balances well with the similar qualities of the tenor saxophone.

***Shell Game* (2000)**

- Instrumentation: SATB saxophone quartet
- Structure: single-movement work
- Duration: 7 minutes

The most recent of Shaffer's saxophone works, this piece was commissioned by the New Century Saxophone Quartet and premiered by them in Baltimore in the spring of 2004.²⁴ *Shell Game* was originally conceived as a short show piece and is, literally, a musical shell game. In this programmatic work, each member of the ensemble takes turns guessing where the pea is until

²³ James Houlik. Phone interview by the author, 6 December, 2006. Tape recording.

²⁴ Pollock. *ibid.*

one of them guesses correctly. The tempo is very quick and the lines are complex and intertwine between the four saxophone parts. According to the New Century Quartet, the piece is difficult to put together but fun to perform and has been well received by audiences.

It was so complex and so much going on, we really felt that there was no way an audience was going to guess who actually got the pea. We didn't think it was it was written in such a way where the audience would get it. But to our amazement, every time we've played it for an audience, the first or second person who raised their hand knew that the tenor player got it. Obviously Sherwood was more successful than we thought.²⁵

²⁵ Pollock. *ibid.*

CHAPTER IV

SHAFFER'S MUSICAL LANGUAGE

For the saxophonist who chooses to prepare and perform the music of Sherwood Shaffer, a great and rewarding challenge awaits. This is not to say the performer will have to master a new skill or advanced technique in order to learn this music; the challenge lies in understanding Shaffer's musical language. These challenges can initially be found on the surface, while others will be discovered as the performer learns the piece more intimately. Ultimately, the true challenge and reward of performing Shaffer's music is uncovered during the rehearsal process.

The following chapter will outline many aspects of Shaffer's musical language and give suggestions as to how to incorporate this knowledge during rehearsal. Musical examples will be taken from *Summer Nocturne*, *Charades*, and *Sinfonia*. These works have been selected because they represent three different genres from the thirteen works. All of the examples discussed can be applied to the preparation and performance of any of Shaffer's works.

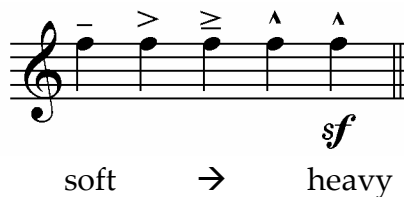
Visual Aspects of the Language

At first glance at one of Shaffer's scores, the saxophonist will notice that they were not prepared using a computer notation program but rather are written in the composer's own manuscript. Given some time to adjust, however, the saxophonist should not find this to be a problem. Shaffer's scores are notated very neatly with great consideration to details such as page turns. Further examination will reveal that his attention to detail extends to the use of all kinds of performance markings. He fills his parts with accents, dynamics, tempi, text directions, and other performance data to ensure that the performer is not lacking in information when learning the piece. Though mostly common, these markings must be understood in the context of Shaffer's writing and need to be interpreted accurately.

Shaffer's use of accents presents the first challenge to a saxophonist. Most saxophonists grew up playing concert band music or jazz, and therefore may unintentionally misinterpret these accents. The execution of accents in concert band music, and especially jazz, sometimes involves an increase in articulation strength, or impact, as well as an increase in volume. Shaffer's use of accents is somewhat different. In his performance notes for *Sinfonia* he states, "strive for a variety of accent nuances from the heaviest accent ^, to the usual accent >, and

the agogic accent --, or softer pressure accent. None of the accents imply choppiness or jerky playing.”²⁶ Example 1 illustrates the various accents found in Shaffer’s music from softest to heaviest.

Example 1



To properly execute these markings, the saxophonist should treat them with varying levels of weight. The best example for this is to consider how a violinist interprets accents. Accents are executed through an increase in bow pressure or weight. The violinist applies more pressure to the string with the bow to achieve the desired increase in emphasis required for an indicated accent. A saxophonist can achieve a similar effect with an increase in air pressure but with no change of articulation. If this technique is new to the performer, interpreting accents in this way may seem awkward at first or even a bit ineffective. With practice, the saxophonist can learn to create a wide range of accents using only varying increases in air pressure.

²⁶ Shaffer. *Sinfonia*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

While pressure accents do not sound as obvious to the listener as an accent aided by articulation, they are more appropriate to Shaffer's style of writing. It should be noted that most of his accent markings indicate notes with melodic importance. As a result, even subtle changes in their emphasis can alter the overall interpretation of the musical line. Furthermore, any unnecessary percussion from the saxophonist's tongue could damage the overarching connection within a long musical line. Example 2 from *Summer Nocturne* illustrates Shaffer's use of accents in context. Notice that the *sf* marking is used in conjunction with ^, the strongest accent. Despite the combination of these two markings, this accent is only performed with a sharp increase in air pressure. The articulation should not become heavier or more percussive.

Example 2: *Summer Nocturne*, mm. 2²⁷



When performing a piece with only piano accompaniment, the saxophonist has some leeway as to how these accents are interpreted. When

²⁷ Shaffer. *Summer Nocturne*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

performing a chamber piece, however, this interpretation must be the same from each player. This is especially critical when a single melody is being passed from one instrument to another or when multiple instruments have unison or harmonized lines. Example 3 from the 2nd movement of *Sinfonia* illustrates this problem. Professional quartets will most likely come to an agreement just by listening, but student groups may need to discuss their interpretation during the rehearsal process. The most effective way to unify the interpretation may be to have one member of the group dictate the style and have the others match it. The instrument with the melody in the section in question will usually be the most likely and effective choice.

Example 3: "Lyric," *Sinfonia*, mm. 305-307 ²⁸

305

²⁸ Shaffer. *Sinfonia*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

Unlike his use of accents, saxophonists should not find Shaffer's use of dynamic markings any different from their previous musical experiences. Nonetheless, dynamic markings deserve some attention at this point. Dissimilar to some composers, Shaffer's dynamic markings are frequent and very specific. In reference to his markings the composer states that they are performed "as marked, please strive for a clear variety of dynamic levels from *ff* to *pp* without the loudest level being unpleasant or overbearing."²⁹ While some sections contain blanket dynamics that change infrequently, others will demand very sudden changes in dynamic level. These changes can be drastic at times. Furthermore, these changes may also occur in the very lowest or highest range of the saxophone demanding much control from the performer to properly execute them without sacrificing other elements of musicianship. Example 4 illustrates Shaffer's use of dynamics in context.

Example 4: *Summer Nocturne*, mm. 237-238 ³⁰



²⁹ Shaffer. *Sinfonia*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

³⁰ _____. *Summer Nocturne*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

Along with his dynamic markings, Shaffer also uses short crescendo and decrescendo figures frequently. Often these correspond to the natural rise and fall of the melodic line and serve as a reminder to the saxophonist to execute what may happen naturally. Other longer crescendo and diminuendo markings can be found as well and should be performed as written. As with the other dynamic markings, written crescendos should never lead the saxophonist to play with a harsh or overbearing sound.

In order to properly perform Shaffer's works, the performers must adhere to his dynamic markings very closely. His orchestration tends to be somewhat dense, which can cause the melody to become buried in the texture. Even in works with only saxophone and piano, the performers may occasionally feel as though they are fighting amongst themselves in order to be heard. This problem is magnified in his chamber works. Following the written dynamics will alleviate some of this problem.

Shaffer's attention to detail creates some dynamic challenges for the performers as well. His countermelodies and accompanying parts are often as interesting and enjoyable to play as the melody. As a result, performers have the tendency to overplay these less important parts. Discovering which voice has

the melody and ensuring that this is the loudest or most prominent will fix this problem. In his chamber works and quartets the composer makes this discovery process easy for the performers. Shaffer uses a set of brackets to denote melody and counter melody parts. The composer states “play the areas so marked louder than the non-melody parts, so that these areas are heard clearly as the primary (loudest) voice. A parenthesis around the large “M” indicates a major counter melody slightly less loud than the melody.”³¹ Proper treatment of the melody is vital when performing Shaffer’s music. See example 5 for a sample of this notation. The soprano saxophone, the top line, has the melody through these six measures. Also notice the counter melody marking in the tenor part on the third line.

Example 5: “Presto,” *Sinfonia*, mm. 450-455 ³²



³¹ Shaffer. *Sinfonia*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

³² _____. *ibid.*

Due to the saxophone family's homogenous tone, saxophonists performing one of Shaffer's quartets may find that adjusting dynamic levels will not be enough to ensure that the melody prevails. This can be especially problematic when the melody is written in the low range of the soprano or the middle range of the alto or tenor. When the New Century Saxophone Quartet first began performing *Sinfonia*, they experimented with using different tone qualities or colors to help with balance.³³ Stephen Pollock of the New Century Saxophone Quartet recalls this challenge.

It wasn't as simple as just playing softer in spots; you had to play drier. Sometimes when you have so much sound and so much fullness, even though the sound is beautiful, it just blurs up and makes things unclear. You had to make your sound thinner. In a way, that made it heard more easily.³⁴

When student groups are learning this piece, the saxophonists not playing melody parts should use a drier or thinner tone in order to avoid obscuring the melody. A drier tone color can be described as being more compact or perhaps having less tone. Producing this tone may be a challenge for some groups at first as it differs greatly from the full, warm sound used for solo performance. Through experimentation with changes in the shape of the oral cavity and the

³³ Pollock. *ibid.*

³⁴ _____. *ibid.*

direction of the air stream, however, a more compact sound can be achieved.

The use of a drier tone can aid in clarity of articulation and rhythmic execution as well.

The 3rd movement of *Sinfonia* makes an excellent example of the previously mentioned situation. The tenor and alto together have a driving accompaniment part with the exception of a few melodic interjections made by the alto. The soprano has the melody in this section, but it is in the lower register of the instrument which may not project as well. The soprano part could be played louder, but the written dynamic is *mp*. If the alto and tenor play too softly, however, the rhythmic integrity of their part can become unstable, and it is the driving force which underlines the whole movement. The most effective way to perform this section is for the alto and tenor to use as dry a tone as possible. This will allow the soprano melody to prevail without being played too loudly. See Example 6 for a brief excerpt from this section.

Example 6: "Presto," *Sinfonia*, mm. 330-337 ³⁵



Shaffer's scores also contain other instructions such as tempo changes, accelerando and ritardando markings, and even text directions. Tempo markings are normally found at the beginning of the piece, but Shaffer occasionally asks for a sudden change of pace during a movement. Slow movements may contain sections that move from freer to stricter tempi as well. Occasionally, Shaffer will simply write plain instructions in the score. "Rush ahead," "move more," "hold back," "pensive," "lonely," and "joyous" are but a few examples.³⁶ All of these instructions should be performed as accurately as possible but never in a way that damages the musical line. Shaffer uses all of these directions and instructions to ensure that the performer properly expresses the musical phrase. If the performer focuses solely on executing the directions in

³⁵ Shaffer. *Sinfonia*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

³⁶ _____. *ibid.*

the score without considering them in context of the piece, then the overall purpose of these explicit instructions has been lost. Example 7 illustrates some of these directions in context.

Example 7: *Summer Nocturne*, mm. 213-217 ³⁷



Melodic Structures

Saxophonists who perform Shaffer's music will find that interpreting the melody is one of the most difficult challenges. Shaffer's melodic structures are not necessarily unorthodox, but are challenging nonetheless. On the surface, these melodies often contain wide intervals or repetitive phrases which seem to suggest a very rhythmic, vertically aligned approach to interpretation.

Unfortunately, the performer who addresses only the vertical aspects of the melody will miss much of the intended phrasing. While the vertical part is

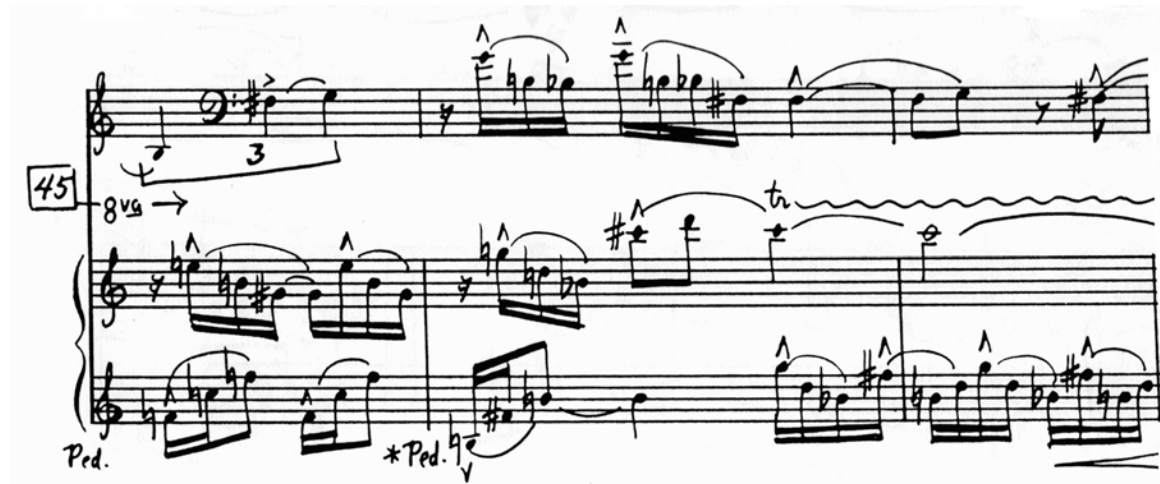
³⁷ Shaffer. *Summer Nocturne*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

important, the horizontal is always the most vital aspect of this music. These horizontal characteristics must be discovered and brought out. Shaffer states “strive for long-line, elegant phrasing (never choppy) regardless of breathing spaces, dynamics, accents, rhythms, or textures. Aim for the goals of each phrase as well as the goals of each section and each movement for full directional phrasing.”³⁸ Shaffer’s melodies often reach across the beat, the barline, to the next phrase, or to the next section. They push forward giving a feeling of constant motion towards the next climax or the end of the piece.

One of the most common structures encountered in Shaffer’s music is the sixteenth rest on the beat followed by three sixteenth notes. These three sixteenths often serve as pickups to the next beat, even when the following beat is not the downbeat. Although this is a fairly common occurrence in music, the saxophonist must execute this structure accurately. The initial rest will usually be filled with a note in another part such as the piano accompaniment. These must line up precisely, as the parts are very much interrelated. Example 8 illustrates this figure.

³⁸ Shaffer. *Sinfonia*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

Example 8: *Summer Nocturne*, mm. 45-47 ³⁹



This sixteenth-note rhythm also often occurs in the middle of a melodic line as it is passed from one voice to another. In his chamber works, Shaffer often distributes a single melody among several voices. The musicians must strive to play this melody as one single phrase despite the movement from instrument to instrument. If the transitions are performed accurately, the listener only hears a single melodic line. This requires great attention to rhythm, phrasing, balance, tone color, and style. To properly execute a passage such as this, the musicians must all feel the same sense of internal pulse. At faster tempos, they will not have time to react to the downbeat. In this situation, the voice entering following the rest will often be late. The feeling of lateness may also cause rushing in order to catch up rhythmically. The resulting melodic line

³⁹ _____. *Summer Nocturne*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

will now sound rhythmically unstable and disconnected, ruining the intended effect. If several of these entrances are late and subsequently rushed, the location of the downbeat may be lost by the other members of the group causing a breakdown in the rhythmic integrity of the piece. Example 9 from *Sinfonia* illustrates this figure.

Example 9: "Quick and vibrant," *Sinfonia*, mm. 1-5 ⁴⁰



Several rehearsal strategies may alleviate problems with sections such as example 9. Firstly, all of the musicians must know which voice has the melody at any given spot in the piece. While this idea may seem obvious, it can be a challenge in Shaffer's works. The melody may be passed between several instruments in a single measure, and a single voice often does not complete an entire melodic phrase by itself. While Shaffer does mark the location of the

⁴⁰ Shaffer, Sherwood. *Sinfonia*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

melody in that instrument's part, the musicians may not be aware of which voice is handing off the melodic phrase or to which voice the melody is being handed. Due to the length and complexity of these works, it is unlikely that a musician could remember all of these transitions without a great deal of score study and rehearsal time.

In order to help speed up this process, the New Century Saxophone Quartet labeled their parts with a color code when learning *Sinfonia*.⁴¹ A different color represented each of the four voices in the quartet. Each musician drew colored lines representing the melody instrument above their own part. As a result, the members of the quartet always knew which instrument had the melody and could adjust their performance accordingly. The quartet members also practiced the piece playing only the melody. Each musician would play when they had the melodic line and then drop out once it was handed to another voice.⁴² Problems with rhythm and style are much more apparent when using this technique and can be addressed more quickly and easily. Though time consuming, this makes the rehearsal process much more efficient and effective.

Shaffer's melodies also often contain ties across beats or barlines. These ties can make the interplay between multiple parts difficult. When they occur

⁴¹ Pollock. *ibid.*

⁴² _____. *ibid.*

immediately before the entrance of another voice, rhythmic errors may result.

This kind of interplay occurs frequently in sections of *Summer Nocturne*.

Examples 10a and 10b show this figure. Notice that the change in rhythm in the piano part from sixteenths to triplets occurs immediately before the tie. This further disrupts the saxophonist's feeling of time and may lead to a sloppy entrance. Also notice that while the piano part repeats, the saxophone part enters a beat earlier in example 10b. The tempo is very quick in this section leaving little time to react to the downbeat before the entrance. The saxophonist needs to understand the entire score in this section and may be aided by writing piano cues in the saxophone part. Even with written cues, the saxophonist will need to be able to hear the connection between the two parts in order to accurately perform this phrase. These entrances look easy enough in the score but are much more difficult in context.

Example 10a: *Summer Nocturne*, mm. 149-152 ⁴³

The musical score for Example 10a shows measures 149-152 of *Summer Nocturne*. The saxophone part (top staff) has a rest in measure 149 and enters in measure 150 with a melodic line. The piano part (bottom staff) has a complex rhythmic pattern of sixteenth and triplet notes. A 'Pod.' (pedal point) is indicated in the piano part. The score includes various musical notations such as ties, slurs, and dynamic markings.

⁴³ Shaffer. *Summer Nocturne*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

Example 10b: *Summer Nocturne*, mm. 159-162 ⁴⁴



Elements of Time and Meter

Meter plays an important role in much of Shaffer's music and is a significant aspect of his musical language. His works for saxophone often include many time signature changes. Some of these are easily executed while others can create problems for performers. Many modern composers experiment with asymmetrical, mixed, and unconventional meters, and these meters serve as the driving structure behind the melody. Shaffer, however, uses melody to dictate meter instead of meter dictating melody. As a result, his meter changes are more subtle to the listener but can be more difficult to execute for the performer. Furthermore, some of these meter changes are implied and not notated.

⁴⁴ Shaffer. *Summer Nocturne*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

Shaffer's chamber work *Charades* contains many meter changes. The first encountered by the performers is a 4/4 to 5/4 meter marking. The measures alternate between 4/4 and 5/4 throughout this section of the work. The beat and pulse are stable and only the number of beats per measure changes. The major challenge here is not executing the written rhythms but the rests. The meter is only marked at the beginning of the section, and it is easy to forget whether a measure is in 4/4 or 5/4 when counting a rest. See example 11 for an excerpt from this section.

Example 11: *Charades*, mm. 10-13 ⁴⁵

The image shows a handwritten musical score for measures 10-13 of Shaffer's *Charades*. The score is written on four staves, organized into two systems of two staves each. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Handwritten annotations are present throughout the score, including '(v) accel.' at the beginning of measure 10, 'cresc.' and 'accel.' markings, a boxed 'R!' with the note 'Some faster = 112 at frog', and pedal markings 'Ped.' and 'Ped. II. (Sost.)'. The score illustrates a complex rhythmic structure with alternating 4/4 and 5/4 measures, as mentioned in the text.

⁴⁵ Shaffer. *Charades*. Score, 1985.

During sections of *Charades* the time signature changes rapidly, but not in a repeating pattern. This often happens during transitions between large sections. In example 12, the pulse remains the same, but the unit of beat changes from a quarter to a half note.

Example 12: *Charades*, mm. 162-165 ⁴⁶



Shaffer explores some less frequently encountered time signatures in the middle section of *Charades*. The “Barcarolle” movement begins in 12/16 and moves to 15/16 and 9/16 later in the section. Most saxophonists will have encountered music in this time signature before, and this section should not present any real challenges involving the meter. See example 13 for an excerpt from “Barcarolle.”

⁴⁶ Shaffer. *Charades*. Score, 1985.

Example 13: *Charades*, mm. 288-290 ⁴⁷



The most difficult meter related challenges occur when the melody or accompaniment imply a different meter than the one in which the music is written. The musicians' sense of time may be thrown off by seeing something that does not quite match what they are hearing. In the following example, the written time signature is 3/4, but the melody and accompaniment sound as though they are in 2/4. The accent markings in the parts accentuate the implied meter. Shaffer confirms this visually by barring groups of eighth notes across the barline. The disagreement between written and implied meter can cause missed entrances and miscounted rests and rhythms. These implied meters occur in several sections of *Sinfonia*, as well as in Shaffer's other works. See example 14.

⁴⁷ Shaffer. *Charades*. Score, 1985.

Example 14: "Quick and vibrant," *Sinfonia*, mm. 179-185



Phrasing

The most important consideration when performing Shaffer's music is the interpretation of the musical line. This is true for both melody and accompaniment parts. Every line is important and should be played as such. Shaffer's melodies move ever constantly forward, reaching over the beat and the barline and leading the listener to the next climax or the end of the piece. The accompaniment parts provide color and aid in the forward motion of the work. All of the aspects of Shaffer's musical language previously discussed play a part in the musical line, and each must be properly executed. The end goal of all of these markings, however, is the proper melodic interpretation.

An example of the accompaniment setting the proper forward moving feeling can be found in the 2nd movement of *Sinfonia*. The movement, notated in 6/8, begins with only the baritone and tenor saxophones. Shaffer writes the word "pulsating" in each part to help explain the desired feeling. Due to the slow

tempo of the movement, the performers may take this to mean that they should provide a steady eighth-note pulse throughout the measure by slightly accenting each beat. This decision is incorrect, however, and will not provide the proper accompaniment for the melodic line. Notice the accent marking on beat four in each measure of the accompaniment parts in example 15. Shaffer intends that the accompaniment push towards beat four and then come away a bit.

Interpreting beat four as the main emphasis of each bar implies a larger unit of beat and provides a more forward driving accompaniment. The entire measure, not just the eighth note, should be felt as the unit of beat by the performers. The eighth-note pulse should serve as a subdivision. The melody in this section implies the same sense of a larger beat. In each measure the melodic line leads to beat one of the next. This corresponds to the soft pressure accent found in the melody on beat one of each measure. The crescendo and decrescendo markings aid in this feeling of pulse as well.

Example 15: "Lyric," *Sinfonia*, mm. 265-271 ⁴⁸



⁴⁸ Shaffer. *Sinfonia*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

In rehearsal it may be helpful to have the musicians tap their feet on only beat one and four. Even more effective, though a bit more difficult is to have each musician raise their foot on beat one and place it down again on beat four. This technique sounds a bit unorthodox but is a very effective way to eliminate a heavy rhythmic interpretation and create a sense of forward direction. This technique is equally effective at slow and fast tempi.

All of Shaffer's works contain points of climax, and these are directly connected to the melodic interpretation of the line. If the musicians can determine these points of climax, then each section of the piece will have a goal, or a point to which the melody is moving. Following these climaxes, the intensity usually dies down and a new section of building begins. Looking to the dynamic markings alone will not reveal these spots with accuracy. A lengthy movement may contain only two or three major climaxes, while numerous sections are marked *f* or *ff*.

Beyond just looking for sections with louder dynamics, Shaffer's climaxes can be identified using several other criteria. Extremely high or extremely low notes along with loud dynamics can denote an area of climax. Shaffer will often build a line towards a high or low arrival note. Looking for extreme range can aid the performer in identifying an important arrival point of a melodic line, but

it is still not the most important criteria. Looking for high or low notes alone may yield several smaller less important climaxes or even a false climax as well.

Example 16 illustrates a small, less important climax from *Summer Nocturne*. The score in this example is notated in concert pitch, so the saxophone part is actually near the top of the range. These measures meet most of the climax criteria, but they do not have support from the accompaniment. The piano part is marked *ff* in measure 21 but is tied through the saxophone's arrival on Eb and D making it unable to support a true loud climax. See example 17 for the first significant climax in this section of the piece. The saxophone lands on a low concert C#, low Bb on the saxophone, in measure 49 and is joined by the piano with full support in measure 51. All of the energy in the beginning of this section of *Summer Nocturne* builds up to measure 49 in example 17. Following this climax, the dynamic intensity and textural density fall back to lower levels and a new build begins. This rise and fall of intensity drive the piece forward to the final climax and the end of the piece. All of Shaffer's works are driven by this type of tension and release.

Example 16: *Summer Nocturne*, mm. 20-26 ⁴⁹

Handwritten musical score for Example 16, measures 20-26 of *Summer Nocturne*. The score is written on two systems of staves. The first system (measures 20-24) features a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a complex accompaniment. The second system (measures 25-26) continues the piece. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *ff* (fortissimo) and *p* (piano). There are also handwritten annotations like "Ped. →" and "8va →" indicating pedal and octave shifts.

Example 17: *Summer Nocturne*, mm 45-53 ⁵⁰

Handwritten musical score for Example 17, measures 45-53 of *Summer Nocturne*. The score is written on two systems of staves. The first system (measures 45-50) features a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a complex accompaniment. The second system (measures 51-53) continues the piece. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *f* (forte) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). There are also handwritten annotations like "Ped." and "8va →" indicating pedal and octave shifts.

⁴⁹ Shaffer. *Summer Nocturne*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

⁵⁰ _____. *ibid.*

In some of Shaffer's works, these climaxes are very easy to find. In *Charades*, a climax always appears at the end of one of the games. Remember that *Charades* is literally a musical game of charades played by the performers. The beginning of each game is marked in the score with a rehearsal letter, and the games are separated by a refrain figure. In example 18, both the saxophone and the violin have guessed the piano's mime correctly. The pianist confirms this in measure 205 and the climax of this section occurs in measures 209 and continues for the next few measures. The refrain figure enters at R4 signaling the end of the round.

Example 18: *Charades*, mm. 205-217 ⁵¹

⁵¹ Shaffer. *Charades*. Score, 1985.

Example 19 shows the final and biggest climax of the 1st movement of *Sinfonia*. No other section of this movement should be louder or more powerful than this section. All other *f* and *ff* markings throughout the movement should be scaled appropriately. This climax occurs after a complete recapitulation of the original material from the beginning of the movement. When performing this section, the quartet should strive to keep the intensity building through the chord in measure 255 to the cutoff at 257. Creating a bit of crescendo, despite the *ff* marking, throughout measures 255 and 256 will greatly aid the forward motion of the line. The loudest dynamic should occur right before the cutoff.

Example 19: "Quick and vibrant," *Sinfonia*, mm. 247-257 ⁵²

⁵² Shaffer. *Sinfonia*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

One of the most important jobs when learning one of Shaffer's works is identifying the climax points. This does require a bit of score study by the performer, but these climaxes are the hinge-points around which the composer builds each piece. A climax will always be marked by an increase in dynamic, usually a high or low held note value, and by accompaniment support for this arrival. Some climaxes will be obvious while others may be harder to discover. Shaffer concedes that while the performers' interpretation may not necessarily match his own, if they execute these spots convincingly the piece will move forward as intended. Discovering the location of climaxes will further help eliminate the problem of overplaying and give the musicians musical goals throughout the movement or the work. Playing towards these goals will give the piece the forward directional phrasing that the composer intends. Ultimately, the musicians must trust their ears, their eyes, and their knowledge of Shaffer's music when identifying these spots.

Although a climax indicates a point of arrival and Shaffer's are often marked by loud dynamics on high or low notes, it is important to keep the music light and energetic, not heavy and cumbersome. Many of his technical passages are angular and slightly tricky, and may entice the saxophonist to play them with a heavy and powerful sound. Much of Shaffer's music, despite its muscular

phrasing, would be better interpreted as lighter or even sprightly. The energy should always move forward like a runner or a hurdler, and not downward like the sledge hammer of a miner or railroad worker. While the temptation to play heavily exists, the musicians should strive for light and quick energy. This will aid not only the interpretation but also the execution of the many linkages between the voices. Furthermore, lighter playing allows the melodic voice to more easily prevail over the accompanying texture. The musicians should only allow the most significant climax spots to become heavy and powerful.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Sherwood Shaffer spent his life pursuing two full-time careers. On one hand, he was a dedicated educator. As a founding faculty member of the North Carolina School of the Arts, he served as chair of the composition and theory department and authored much of the theory curriculum used there throughout his tenure. In recognition of his efforts, the University of North Carolina system gave him a prestigious award for his years of dedicated service. On the other hand, he is a composer with over 150 concert works in his catalogue. Furthermore, many of these works are significant in length, have won awards and critical acclaim, and have been performed throughout the world.

For a man so busy with two careers, to have written thirteen concert works for the saxophone is significant. Even more so is the fact that two of the earliest of these works were written for students at the North Carolina School of the Arts. Unlike established artists, students cannot offer large grant rewards for pieces commissioned, and they cannot guarantee numerous performances on tours around the world. When writing for these young artists, Shaffer easily

could have written something incidental, but instead he chose to compose large, challenging concert works to showcase their unique talents. These works piqued the interest of their teacher, concert saxophonist James Houlik, who went on to commission many works by Shaffer. The relationship between Shaffer, Houlik, and his students has given the saxophone community a wonderful gift in these works.

For musicians who choose to perform Shaffer's works, a great task and great reward await. His compositions are powerful yet sensitive, complex yet able to evoke great energy and forward movement. They continually build in tension and release, moving forward toward the final climax and the end of the piece. Much like a great author, Shaffer draws in the listener by building suspense and creating great anticipation of the resolution. The audience is left guessing at the outcome until the final resolution of the piece. When one of his works is performed well, both the performers and the audience are treated to an exciting and beautiful experience.

Much of the beauty in Shaffer's music comes from his level of craftsmanship. He composes his works carefully, and no detail is incidental. He considers every accent and every nuance. The textures are dense at times, but each voice can be heard as unique and also as part of the whole. Texture is one

of the most important aspects of his works. His writing is both polyphonic and counterpunctal at the same time. Each line is a unique and independent melody, yet is an important part of the whole and heavily interrelated to the rest of the piece. In many ways, his works reveal a great understanding of counterpoint.

Shaffer's works are also difficult, and the reward of performing them can only be achieved through some effort. The music is complex and requires time to learn. The musicians must learn the score, not just their own part in order to truly understand the piece. While individual practice is necessary, much of the true learning of the piece will occur during the rehearsal process. His accompaniment parts are far from just accompaniment. This fact is obvious in looking at his works for solo saxophone and piano. The piano parts are complex and showcase the ability of the pianist as equally as the ability of the saxophonist. More importantly, the parts intertwine as melodies are passed from one voice to the next. Far from a solo exhibition, a performance of Shaffer's music can best be described as a team effort. This aspect is another reward of performing his music. The interplay between the parts is complex and challenging. When well executed, the combined effort of the musicians creates a feeling of exhilaration and accomplishment.

To further challenge the unwary performer, Shaffer's influences are hard to identify. For a composer who lists so many significant composers as influential throughout his career, none of them stands out as an obvious influence in his work. Certainly they are all there, but the end product is uniquely Shaffer. He has processed his influences and synthesized a language that is all his own. His phrasing and melodic structures are unlike those found in other saxophone works, and his orchestration challenges the performers in new and different ways. He writes in a beautifully uncompromising fashion, asking the musicians to strive to interpret complex phrases and transitions. Despite the technical challenges, he expects nothing less than beautiful tone, subtle variations in articulation, and joyous musical interpretation.

Shaffer's pieces challenge students and professionals alike. For a student, the challenge lies in learning Shaffer's language and understanding his complex phrasing. For the professional, the challenge lies in continuing to find new and different ways to interpret Shaffer's melodies and the discovery of new and subtle nuances throughout the work. His compositions are never truly learned but always a work in progress. Each performance brings new challenges and a renewed sense of excitement. Given the beauty and challenge found in his

music, Shaffer's works deserve to be part of the standard repertoire of the saxophone.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Helton, Jonathan. Phone interview by author, 29 November, 2006. Tape recording.

Houlik, James. Phone interview by author, 6 December 2006. Tape recording.

Pollock, Stephen. Phone interview by author, 3 December 2006. Tape recording.

Shaffer, Sherwood. "Bio/Musical Info." Sherwood Shaffer publicity packet. Winston-Salem, 2006.

_____. Catalogue of Works, 2006.

_____. Interview by author, 15 November 2006, Winston-Salem. Tape recording.

_____. Interview by author, 21 November 2006, Winston-Salem. Tape recording.

Musical Scores

Shaffer, Sherwood. *Barcarolle*. Score, 1990.

_____. *Charades*. Score, 1985.

_____. *Concerto*. Score, 1987.

_____. *Jubilees*. Score, 1996.

_____. *Rhapsody*. Score, 1987.

_____. *Shell Game*. Score, 2000.

_____. *Sicilienne*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

_____. *Sinfonia*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

_____. *Sonata: When Mountains Rising*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

_____. *Stargaze*. Score, 1991.

_____. *Summer Nocturne*. Medfield, MA: Dorn, 2004.

_____. *Unicorn Music*. Score, 1996.

_____. *Vision of a Peacock*. Score, 1971.

Published Recordings

The Bohuslav Martinu Philharmonic. *Music from Six Continents: 1992 Series*.
Vienna Modern Masters VMM CD 3007, 1992. Compact Disc.

Lifchitz, Max. *Max Lifchitz Plays American Piano Music*. Vienna Modern Masters
VMM CD 2002, 1991. Compact Disc.

New Century Saxophone Quartet. *Home Grown: Commissions Volume I*. Channel
Classics CCS 15498, 1999. Compact Disc.

Pollock, Stephen. *So Near, So Far*. Alanna Records ACD 6000, 2005. Compact
Disc.

Winston-Salem Piedmont Triad Symphony Orchestra. *Music from Six Continents:
1992 Series*. Vienna Modern Masters VMM CD 3013, 1992. Compact Disc.

Unpublished Recordings

Shaffer, Sherwood. *Charades for violin, tenor saxophone, and piano*. Sarah Johnson,
violin, James Houlik, tenor saxophone, and Neil Padget, Piano.
November 19, 1985. Cassette.

Shaffer, Sherwood. *Rhapsody for Tenor Saxophone and Concert Band*. James Houlik, tenor saxophone, with the United States Navy Band. 10th Saxophone Congress, 1987. Cassette.

Shaffer, Sherwood. *Sonata: When Mountains Rising*. James Houlik, tenor saxophone, and Neil Padget, Piano. February 11, 1985. Cassette.

Shaffer, Sherwood. *Stargaze for Tenor Saxophone, Narrator, and Orchestra*. James Houlik, tenor saxophone and narrator, with the Winston-Salem Symphony. February 5, 1989. Cassette.

Shaffer, Sherwood. *Summer Nocturne for Alto Saxophone and Piano*. Jonathan Helton, alto saxophone, and Valerie Becker, piano. 1982. Cassette.

Other Sources

Kalyn, James. "The Saxophone Music of Sherwood Shaffer: An Introduction Through Performance." Lecture Recital given at the NASA Biennial Conference in Greensboro, NC. April 29, 2004.

APPENDIX A

SAXOPHONE COMPOSITIONS BY SHERWOOD SHAFFER ⁵³

Shell Game (2000)

Saxophone quartet (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Baritone) (*c. 7 min.*)

Jubilees (1996)

Tenor saxophone and organ (*c. 18 min.*)

Unicorn Music (1996)

Tenor saxophone and chamber orchestra (*c. 28 min.*)

Sinfonia (1992)*

Saxophone quartet (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Baritone) (*c. 18 min.*)

Sicilienne (1991)*

Alto/Baritone or Soprano/Tenor saxophone and piano (*c. 5 min.*)

Stargaze (1991)

Narrator, tenor saxophone, and orchestra (*c. 18 min.*)

Barcarolle (1990)

Tenor saxophone and piano (*c. 7 min.*)

Rhapsody (1987)

Tenor saxophone and symphonic winds (*c. 15 min.*)

Concerto (1987)

Tenor saxophone and orchestra (*c. 25 min.*)

*Denotes works published by Dorn. Available online at <http://www.dornpub.com>

⁵³ Sherwood Shaffer. Interview by the author, 21 November, 2006, Winston-Salem. Tape recording.

Charades (1985)

Violin, tenor saxophone, and piano (*c. 16 min.*)

Sonata: When Mountains Rising (1983)*

Tenor saxophone and piano (*c. 15 min.*)

Summer Nocturne (1981)*

Alto saxophone and piano (*c. 15 min.*)

Vision of a Peacock (1971)

Actress/dancer with one alto saxophone and tape or three alto saxophones
and one percussionist (*c. 15 min.*)

*Denotes works published by Dorn. Available online at <http://www.dornpub.com>

APPENDIX B

CATALOGUE OF WORKS BY SHERWOOD SHAFFER ⁵⁴

Orchestral Works

Adonia (1959)
Concertante for Piano and Chamber Orchestra (1960)
Concertante for Cello and Chamber Orchestra (1961)
Symphony No. 1 (1961)
Concerto da Camera for Violin and String Orchestra (1964)
Symphony No. 2 (1964)
Three Fables (1965)
Rhapsody for Double Bass and Orchestra (1966)
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (1967)
Scherzo for Violin and Orchestra (1967)
Scaramouch (1968)
Four Angles for String Orchestra (1972)
Nocturne for Chamber Orchestra (1973)
Radiants (1975)
Concerto for Flute and Orchestra (1978)
Time and the River (1979)
Summerset for String Orchestra (1980)
Morning Heroes (1981)
Festival Music (1982)
Once Upon a Unicorn: Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra (1982)
Black Iris: Concerto for English Horn and Orchestra (1984)
Chamber Symphony (1985)
Concerto for Piano and Chamber Orchestra (1985)
Concerto for Orchestra (1986)
Concerto for Tenor Saxophone and Orchestra (1987)
Jongleurs (1987)
Symphony No. 3 (1987)
Symphony No. 4 (1987)

⁵⁴ Sherwood Shaffer. Catalogue of works, 2006.

Symphony No. 5 (1987)
Unicorn Songs for Low Voice and Orchestra (1988)
Spring Rounds (1989)
Canto L'Infinito for Low Voice and String Orchestra (1990)
Catherine Wheels (1990)
Stargaze for Narrator, Tenor Saxophone and Orchestra (1991)
Unicorn Music for Tenor Saxophone and Chamber Orchestra (1996)

Large Ensemble Works

Concertino for Piano, Winds and Percussion (1968)
Novas for Percussion Ensemble (1979)
Tritons for Brass Ensemble and Percussion (1980)
Palisades for 8 Horns (1982)
Songs of a Summer Bird: Concerto for Oboe and Symphonic Winds (1984)
Rhapsody for Tenor Saxophone and Symphonic Winds (1986)

Dramatic Works

Pellegrina, Opera in Three Acts (1960)
Winter's Tale, Opera in One Act (1970)
Vision of a Peacock, Masque for actress-dancer-singer, Alto Saxophone and Tape
(or 3 Alto Saxophones with Percussion) (1971)
Liang Shan, Opera in One Act (1980)
The Lady and the Unicorn, Ballet (1980)

Choral Works

How Manifold They Works, Motet for Chorus and Piano (1961)
Song of Judah for Chorus and Piano (1962)
Song of Revelation for 6 parts a cappella (1963)
Two Madrigals a cappella (1965)
Faces of Time for Chorus and Chamber Orchestra (1968)
The Asperges for Chorus and Organ (1969)

Psalm 103 for Chorus and Organ (1972)
The Mystic Trumpeter for Soprano, Tenor, Chorus and Orchestra (1979)
A Feast of Music for St. Cecilia's Day, for Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Chorus and Orchestra (1983)

Chamber Works

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano (1957)
Sonata for Double Bass and Piano (1959)
Trio No.1 for Violin, Cello and Piano (1959)
3 Dances for Clarinet and Cello (1960)
Quintet for Oboe and String Quartet (1960)
Quintet No.1 for Woodwinds (1961)
Cassation for Violin and Cello (1962)
Madrigals for Cello and Piano (1962)
String Trio No. 1 (1962)
String Quartet No.1 (1963)
Trio No.2 for Violin, Cello and Piano (1963)
Sonata No.1 for Cello and Piano (1964)
Sonata No.1 for Violin and Piano (1964)
Variations for Viola and Cello (1965)
Nocturne for Violin and Piano (1966)
Petite Suite for Flute, Violin and Piano (1966)
Serenade for Oboe and Horn (1966)
Divertimento for 2 Pianos (1967)
String Quartet No.2 (1967)
Four Quatrains for Percussion (1968)
Serenade for Flute and Guitar (1968)
Sonata for Trumpet and Piano (1968)
Quintet for Brass (1973)
Sonata No.2 for Cello and Piano (1973)
Trio for Flute, Violin, and Guitar (1973)
Caracoles for Clarinet and Horn (1974)
Night Song for Horn and Piano (1975)
Polyphonics for Violin, Clarinet, Harp and Percussion (1975)
Quintet No 2 for Woodwinds (1975)

Sonata No.3 for Cello and Piano (1975)
Music for Tuba and Piano (1976)
Serenade for Oboe and Horn (1977)
Fantasy for Bassoon and Cello (1978)
Rhapsody for Flute, Bassoon, and Harp (1978)
String Trio No. 2 (1978)
Sonata No.2 for Violin and Piano (1979)
Mandarin Songs for Solo Viola, Woodwind Quintet, Double Bass and Percussion (1980)
Constellations in an Unknown Sky for Flute and Piano (1981)
Summer Nocturne for Alto Saxophone and Piano (1981)
When to a Willow Tree for Flute and Dulcimer/Percussion (1981)
Fanfare: Knoxville '82 for Brass Quintet (1982)
Summer Fare: 3 Palindromes and Dances for Flute and 3 Percussion (1982)
Ring Around a Sundial for Flute/Piccolo, Clarinet, Cello, Double Bass, 2 Percussion and Piano (1983)
Sonata: When Mountains Rising for Tenor Saxophone and Piano (1983)
Lyric: till Morning Glories Close for Solo Double Bass, String Quartet and Percussion (1984)
Charades for Violin, Tenor Saxophone and Piano (1985)
Rhapsody for Oboe and String Quartet (1985)
Barcarolle for Tenor Saxophone and Piano (1990)
String Quartet No.3 (1990)
Sicilienne for Alto Saxophone and Piano (1991)
Windsong for Trumpet and Piano (1991)
Sinfonia for Saxophone Quartet (1992)
Jubilees for Tenor Saxophone and Organ (1996)
Shell Game for Saxophone Quartet (2000)

Solo Works

Pantomimes for Piano (1958)
Sonata for Organ (1961)
Sonata No.1 for Piano (1962)
Adagio and Fugue for Piano (1964)
Three Turns for Piano (1964)
Sonata for Guitar (1965)

Air and Rondo for Double Bass (1966)
Berceuse and Galliard for Guitar (1966)
Toccata for Cello (1966)
Caprice for Piano (1967)
Sonata No.1 for Cello (1967)
Little Organ Book (1968)
Five Causeries for Piano (1972)
Rhapsody for Cello (1973)
Canto for Double Bass (1975)
Preludes Set I. for Guitar (1975)
Sonata No.2 for Piano (1975)
Fantasy for Organ (1976)
Sonata for Harp (1976)
Sonata No.3 for Piano (1976)
Summer Solstice for Bassoon (1976)
Preludes Set II. for Guitar (1978)
A Feast of Thunder for Timpani (1981)
Runes and Dances for Viola (1981)
A Ring of Eyes for Vibraphone (1982)
In a Phoenix Eye for Flute (1982)
Lines from Shelley for Piano (1983)
Spring Sets I and II for Vibraphone (1983)
Miniatures for Piano (1987)
Sonata No.1 for Trumpet (1988)
Toccata for Harpsichord (1988)
Toccata for Harp (1989)
Sonata for Solo Clarinet (1990)
Sonata No.2 for Cello (1991)
Sonata No.2 for Trumpet (1991)
Preludes for Piano (2001)
Terzetto for 3 Oboes (2001)

Vocal Works

Collection of 20 Songs for Voice and Piano (1955-1988)

Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister for Baritone and Chamber Orchestra (1962)

Two English Ballads for High Voice and Piano (1965)

Sacra Hora, cantata for Soprano, Baritone, Viola and Cello (1966)

Songs of Theano for Soprano, Flute/Piccolo, Clarinet, Viola, Percussion and Piano (1982)

Plum Songs for Medium Voice and Piano (1984)

Unicorn Songs for Medium Voice and Piano (1988)

Appletown Ballads for High Voice and Guitar (1989)

Canto L'Infinito for Low Voice and String Orchestra (1990)