

Georges Bizet (1838 – 1875)

***Les pêcheurs de perles: Au fond du temple saint* (1863)**

One of Georges Bizet's earlier operas, *Les pêcheurs de perles* was not well received at its premiere in 1863, but this special aria from the first act has since become a staple of western opera performances.

The duet is sung by Nadir (tenor) and Zurga (baritone) when they recall falling in love with the same woman. It begins with a dialog between the two men, each describing different parts of the story. When they arrive at the climax of the tale ("Yes, it is she! It is the goddess..."), the two sing a rich, sustained theme in two-part harmony. After more dialog, the theme returns when the two vow, "to remain friends." The brilliant timbre of the trombone can reflect such magnificent moments, and the vocal quality of the instrument is highlighted when trombonists perform this kind of repertoire.

Ernest Bloch (1880 – 1959)

***Symphony for Trombone and Orchestra* (1954)**

Ernest Bloch was commissioned to write the *Symphony for Trombone and Orchestra* in 1953. The piece was completed in the U.S. in 1954, and was premiered by trombonist Robert Marsteller and the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

The piece begins with a heavy, cacophonous statement from the entire orchestra. The solo trombone appears with a distant fanfare, until it's joined by strings in a lyrical, vocal melody reaching into the instrument's highest register. Then, the orchestra responds with new material. The title of the piece (*Symphony*, instead of *Concerto*) suggests this lingering dialog between the soloist and the orchestra.

The themes introduced in the first and second movements provide almost all the material for the entire piece, but they return in ways which make the listener feel lost; harmonies seem to change on a whim, and once-grounded rhythms introduced earlier in the work are stretched or squeezed to perplex the ear.

Over the course of the extensive second movement, phrases alternate between brief, fanfare-like statements and long, meditative passages. The last movement begins with a series of terse, energized phrases, before meandering towards a serene, calm ending.

Vladislav Blazhevich (1881 – 1942)

***Concert Piece No. 5* (1938)**

Before Vladislav Blazhevich began writing for trombone in the early twentieth century, trombonists had a shortage of romantic, expressive solos created specifically for their instrument. Whether it's his numerous concerti or his etudes for solo trombone, his music resembles the powerful themes of Rachmaninoff, Rimsky-Korsakov, and other romantic composers.

Concert Piece No. 5 is a fine example of why trombonists are grateful to Blazhevich. The piece utilizes the instrument's full range of dynamics and articulations, with soft legato phrases and powerful declamations.

The piece can be divided into two parts. The first section is filled with free, flowery writing for the trombone and the piano. The final section exhibits rhythmic, blooming themes, which expand as the piece jaunts towards an energized and severe ending.

Aram Khachaturian (1903 – 1978)

***Gayane Suite No. 3: IV. Gayane's Adagio* (1939)**

Aram Khachaturian's *Gayane* was premiered in 1942 by the Kirov Ballet company. While the final act's *Sabre Dance* has become ubiquitous in modern culture, listeners tend to overlook the rest of the ballet's music, where Khachaturian's skill as a melodist shines through expressive lyricism, character, and detailed orchestration.

Gayane's Adagio is a great example of how much the composer can express with so little. The piece opens with a solo cello line, but the mood is made clear with pressing chromaticism and clever outlines of familiar harmonies. After the solo introduction, a violin joins the cello, and the two begin a dialog, each with their own counter-melody. The two lines pull and push at each other, until they find unity within a phrase of echoes. Then, the violin briefly shines alone, before the cello returns to end the piece with a deliberate, calm chorale.

As trombone and trumpet are traditionally monophonic instruments, it can be difficult to capture the full mood of a piece without additional accompaniment. Since Khachaturian is able present his powerful harmonies with just a few voices, *Gayane's Adagio* is a natural way for two brass musicians to make an impact on the listener.

Samuel Barber (1910 – 1981)

***Hermit Songs* (1953)**

Samuel Barber received a grant to write the ten *Hermit Songs* in 1953. They were premiered the same year at the U.S. Library of Congress, by soprano Leontyne Price and Barber at the piano. The lyrics, along with their eclectic tones, come from the poems of anonymous Irish monks.

Barber has composed music which seems to fit the texts perfectly. Jarring rhythms capture the religious severity of "At Saint Patrick's Purgatory," while a bouncy lilt mimics the playful nature of "The Monk and his Cat." Overwhelming harmonies reflect the sorrow of "The Crucifixion" or the pensive mood in "The Desire for Hermitage."

Barber's word painting, along with the often-syllabic nature of the songs, make this cycle a nice choice for trombonists and other wind musicians who want to explore the vocal capabilities of their instruments.

Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)

***Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978)**

Arvo Pärt dedicated *Spiegel im Spiegel* to violinist Vladimir Spivakov, who gave the premiere in 1978. The piece is one example of the composer's tintinnabuli method, which is based on the use of recurring sounds.

While we can lose ourselves in the craft of Bach, the spirit of Beethoven, or the fervor of Shostakovich, Arvo Pärt offers us another way to reach catharsis: through observing the pure, sonic nature of music. Within the tranquil piano arpeggios and enduring long tones of *Spiegel im Spiegel*, listeners can find time to bring peace to their busy minds.

In addition to satisfying the human need to be calm, this piece garners an appreciation for something we often take for granted: our ability to listen.