

Date du récital/Date of recital: January 30, 2018

Nom/Name: Christopher Maskell

Classe de/Class of: Joe Sullivan

These program notes are written by the student performing, and are presented by the student in partial fulfilment of the requirements of their course.

Ces notes de programme sont écrites par l'étudiant-interprète et sont présentées en tant que réalisation partielle des critères de leur cours.

“Twist” – Chris Maskell (b. 1994)

This piece was written with the goal of having two contrasting sections which connect to form a cohesive whole. This concept was inspired by those events in life that you figured would never happen to you – some of which I’ve experienced, both positive and negative.

To represent this, the song opens with a light, vamp-based section with a floating melody that changes into a more active line featuring saxophone, guitar and drums. To further unify the piece, soloists later improvise over both of these sections.

“Ponytail” – Maskell (b. 1994)

Dedicated to my not-so-tolerant downstairs neighbour, “Ponytail” evolved from its opening melodic statement. The rhythm of this line inspired me to set the piece in two different rhythmic feels: a slow 2/4 and a faster 3/4, linked through metric modulation. These two different grooves create variety and a feeling of openness that the whole group can explore.

Harmonically, the piece uses the blues as a point of departure before exploring other chord progressions that propel the piece forward. Also, the song’s final section features modified versions of both the opening melodic idea and its harmony before moving on to end in a different way.

“Time Away” – Maskell (b. 1994)

This piece came from the goal of having a song with no sections repeated verbatim, both melodically and harmonically. With this in mind, I wrote a constantly rising chord progression that appears in two different keys to give continuity to the song. Interestingly, it fit well underneath the melody, which I had written first.

The title takes inspiration from several moments in the piece where the rhythm section departs from straight-ahead swing to suggest the pulse in a subtler way, giving a feeling of suspension. Also, the ascending chord progression felt to me like the excitement that one gets when returning to a favourite place after a long time.

“July” – Maskell (b. 1994)

This simple, sing-song melody came into my head while walking on a beautiful day, and the piece wrote itself quickly after that. For contrast and to give the piece momentum, I paired the opening melody with a more active harmonic progression. In the song’s second section, which is more open harmonically, the rhythm section is given plenty of room to expand.

The song’s structure allows for great dynamic contrast throughout the performance – initially starting out gently and subtly, the piece can become much more active depending on the direction that soloists decide to take.

“The More I Think Of It” – Maskell (b. 1994)

Another piece that evolved from an opening melodic idea, this song was inspired by the great lyricism of my favourite ballads from the Great American Songbook. I modeled the phrasing and 32-bar song form after these great works, which have an important place in the tradition of the tenor saxophone in jazz. To put a personal spin on standard harmony, I used a few unexpected resolutions.

Written during a reflective period, I thought the song captured the feeling of thinking back on moments in life and wondering if they could, or should, have gone differently.

“Interlude” – Maskell (b. 1994)

In the jazz tradition, tenor saxophonists have often been featured in cadenzas at the conclusion of a song. With this in mind, “Interlude” was through-composed in the style of a cadenza to act as a bridge between two pieces. This piece serves as a technical challenge, while still focusing on melodic and harmonic movement in a single line. It also pulls inspiration from solo works for various instruments, including classical interval etudes for saxophone.

To expand the possibilities within a solo saxophone performance, I also implemented the use of electronic effects such as reverb, delay and loops. By doing this, I’m able play with my “echo” and accompany myself near the piece’s conclusion.

“Guesstimate” – Maskell (b. 1994)

Written for chordless trio with electric bass, this piece was conceived using its opening bass line as a starting point. While it features several different sections, the piece flows from one part to the next and aims to feel connected as a whole.

The harmonic simplicity of the improvisation section allows for exciting solos that unravel on top of a recurring bass line. Overall, the piece focuses less on complex chord progressions and more on pairing memorable, catchy melodies with feel-good grooves.

“Long View” – Maskell (b. 1994)

This piece came from an exploration of the use of augmented chords at key structural points in a song, which gives a fresh flavour to the composition and leads the listener ahead. Also, the “call-and-response” idea in the melody between the rhythm section and front line provides contrast by presenting the same melodic idea with new harmonic backing.

The combination of the deceptive harmony and the straight-eighth groove led to a feeling of openness that reminded me of looking out on a sprawling landscape – hence the song’s title.

“O.T.S.” – Maskell (b. 1994)

Initially intended to be a blues, the song’s bass line lead the way for the piece to cycle between two main keys in a different way. The large intervals in the up-tempo melody make the song exciting both for the performer and listener, and result in the piece being very “saxophonistic.” The complexity in the melody is offset by the simpler chord progression underneath, which still offers harmonic twists.

The title, short for “Off The Set,” seemed as fitting as any for a final piece in a program.