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Nom/Name : *Etienne Lebel*

Class de/Class of : *Jeff Johnston*

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This recital presents the compositions of Trombonist and composer Etienne Lebel written and arranged during his time at McGill University from September 2021 to the present day. Mr Lebel has extensive professional experience as a performer in many different genres and contexts going into his master's program. He used his time at McGill University to deepen his knowledge of jazz harmony, to further hone his skills as a player and arranger and to develop a full repertoire of new compositions. All the music of this program is a result of extensive research, experimentation through various compositional concepts and profound listening of a wide range of jazz music. Etienne Lebel's goal was to create his own rich repertoire of songs, without boundary, inspired by his favorite music and musicians. Songs that would offer him a vehicle for improvisation which would showcase Lebel's playing, and the playing of his colleagues, in different jazz styles.

## 6. AMBIGUITY

Christine Jensen helped me explore new compositional concepts to compose this piece. I wanted to integrate into a jazz composition the Kopanitsa (11/8) Bulgarian rhythm. I composed a moving bass line under a repeated suspended grip. The suspended grip allows the melodist to use minor or major thirds, and minor or major 6th and 7th which enable me to explore melodic contours reminiscent of eastern melodies. The rhythm in the B section changes to a 11/4 meter which creates a half time feel. The bass holds a pedal of F under which the harmony movement was inspired by the Lydian based voicings and functions method from Joe Sullivan's class. Then in the C section I used a harmonic progression from the melodic minor mode for a darker sound, contrasting with the previous sections of the piece. After a quick recall of the first section of the song the soloists will dare to improvise over the whole head.

## 2. ETINCELLE

I experimented as an assignment with my teacher Jeff Johnston different harmonic progressions for the blues form. One of them, which contained within it the Coltrane changes, attracted the attention of Jeff who asked me to write a head over. Because the harmony was really dense this song is meant to be played at slow tempo giving time to play nice melodies over the harmonic progression. The head was composed to be very lyrical and enjoyable to play on the trombone. The piece is in F but starts with a turnaround in C which gives the comfortable impression that the head starts on the fourth degree.

## 3. SUBSEQUENTLY NEAR US

This song was first composed for a project in Joe Sullivan's arrangement/composition class for mix wind instruments. I was imagining a melody played by the bassoon, the oboe and the flute, over a medium swing groove. I wanted something light, clownish, like what Rachel Portman had composed for *Benny & Joon* or François de Roubaix for *L'Homme orchestre*. I started jamming on the trombone and a riff came out in an unusual key for my instrument. Playing around with in G# pentatonic scale over E Lydian and then resolving in D minor. It ended up behind a very difficult head to play on trombone but with an interesting sound that sits well on a medium-up swing feel. For the bridge I've composed a kind of bluesy riff that would be repeated and modulate a semitone higher every bar or so, kind of like in a Monk song.

## 4. THE SPIRIT OF THE GHOST

After my first year of Masters program I began to listen extensively to John Coltrane, a real pioneer in many different jazz styles which makes him an essential artist for jazz studies. At that point I was mainly interested in his work after 1959. I was interested in how African music had influenced his music. I wanted to understand what modal music is, and what was his way of playing Free Jazz. The Spirit of the Ghost is directly influenced by the album *A Love Supreme* and by the song *Liberia*. The song is a tribute to the blues, an homage to the spirituality of Afro American jazz music.

## 5. LA LETTRE D'AMOUR

While impressionist classical music inspired many Jazz composers such as Billy Strayhorn, we often forget to mention the work of female French composer Lili Boulanger. Among other things, her music explores palettes of nonfunctional seventh and ninth chords. I wrote this piece at first for trombone and guitar duet. The first part of the head repeated a melodic pattern over parallel minor 9 chords. The bridge proceeds with D Locrian and C Altered alternating under a call and response chant of the trombone and the guitar. La lettre d'amour, which was first titled La lettre de mort, was inspired by Boulanger's piece called *Clairières dans le ciel*. She is one of those people who left earth too early. This song is a love letter for the loved one we lost. It's a tribute to all those people in the world who died too quickly.

## 1. FLUIDITY

This piece was composed under the supervision of Christine Jensen, arranged for a large ensemble and finally arranged again for sextet. With the supervision of Ms Jensen, I used compositional techniques from Ron Miller's book *Modal Jazz, Composition and Harmony*. The idea was to use modes from the major scale as a palette of color to compose a melody. It starts with Mixolydian sus4 mode, then alternates between Lydian and Phrygian, resolves to Aeolian and ends with Mixolydian sus4 climbing up whole-tones back to Bb7sus4. Even if the head has 32 bars, it doesn't respect the standard structure of AABA. Along the way I added different sections to the song to create more contrast and make it more fluid.

## 7. SYMPATHETIC SUITE

The Sympathetic Suite is an unfinished piece that gives a lot of space for improvisation and chaos. An attempt to create contrast between serenity and outburst.

- INSIGHT

The Insight introduces the suite with a trombone solo that was originally composed as an assignment for Marianne Trudel's composition class. It was inspired by Luciano Berio's composition *Sequenza V*, which was a tribute to the famous clown Grock. The piece calls for many extended techniques which is also a quote of the album *For Alto* by Anthony Braxton.

- SCHEMES OF TEMPTATION

The second part of the suite is a shout for freedom. A point when Charles Mingus encounters the clown and recognizes the extent of their similitude. Where intellectual constraint is demolished to allow a path for the Blues.

- THE DOUBTFUL HOUSE

The outro is an experimental attempt to recreate the vibe of Morton Feldman music into jazz. The quest for serenity, to wipe everything away by quiet and slowly evolving music.

#### 4. FORLORN LANDSCAPE

The haphazard nature of this upbeat swing is the result of a long process. The first draft of its creation happened in June 2020 during the early days of the Pandemic. A sequence of minor chords with a syncopated melody in a 11/8 rhythm. I had planned to play the piece with my Bulgarian jazz band but it was a bit too unconventional for the taste of the band. Few years later, in McGill with my combo, we played the song *Cyclic Episode* written by Sam River. That song was a model and an inspiration to finish the writing of Forlorn Landscape.