

*Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra*, by Richard Wilson

Dr. Johnson on the idea of a bassoon concerto (spurious): "Like a dog's walking on his hind legs it is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all." My reaction when asked to write such a piece was of skepticism. I worried that the bassoon, famous for its ability to blend--to become a horn, clarinet, oboe or whatever to fill out an instrumental choir--would fail to project, would fade into the wallpaper, would become the antihero in a traditionally heroic genre. Beyond this chameleonic tendency, the acoustical complexity of the instrument gives rise to fingering patterns that often impede fluency and inhibit virtuosic display.

Then there is the image problem. Operatic composers since Mozart have labeled the bassoon a buffoon and linked it to preposterous characters and situations on stage. But it is an instrument that I have always loved. It renders rhythms with particular crispness and clarity. Its plaintive, primordial voice speaks and sings of the precariousness of the human condition. I could not resist the chance to help it reach out to a larger audience.

My concerto exhibits three joined movements that are framed by music acting as prelude and postlude. The first two movements are rather fast and possess at least some characteristics of waltz and toccata, respectively. The concluding slow movement is of a lyrical nature.

Throughout, the bassoon displays a capacity for friendship. Its principal dialogues take place with the English Horn, French Horn, Solo Cello, Bass Clarinet and Contrabassoon. It is most at home among the harp and marimba. It is most threatened by the trumpets and

trombone. In the end, of course, it easily withstands their onslaughts to have, so to speak, the last word.

This work was first performed on January 28, 1984, by Imre Pallo and the Hudson Valley Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, with Robert Wagner, soloist. The following summer it was performed in Graz, Austria, at a meeting of the International Double Reed Society, by Cornelius Eberhardt and the AIMS Symphony Orchestra. Again, Robert Wagner was the soloist.

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