

Compendium of Program Notes of works for Saxophone Quartet
Traci N. Castleberry

All Quartets SATB unless otherwise noted

Absil, Jean (1893-1974)

Pieces en Quatour

- I. Sérénade
- II. Rêverie
- III. Tarantelle

Albeniz, Isaac

Three pieces for Four Saxophones

Trans. Marcel Mule

- I. Chant d'Amour
- II. Berceuse
- III. L'Été

Andriessen, Louis (b. 1939)

Facing Death (1991)

Originally written as a string quartet, Louis Andriessen's *Facing Death* used jazz great Charlie Parker as a starting point. Andriessen wrote the piece knowing it was impossible to ask a string quartet to play bebop and he also kept in mind the high tempos used by Parker which correlated to the way he lived his life--fast. Andriessen transcribed his string quartet into one for saxophones at the request of the Aurelia Saxophone Quartet.

Bozza, Eugene (b. 1905)

Adante et Scherzo (1939)

Eugene Bozza's *Andante et Scherzo* is a dedication to the Paris Quartet. The first movement begins with a beautiful tenor solo followed by the gentle chorus of its fellow saxophones. The second part is lively and engaging, following in the footsteps of many woodwind works of the time, having been prefaced by a slower movement.

Nuages

Nuages was originally written by Eugene Bozza for the Marcel Mule saxophone quartet, and has also been transcribed for woodwind quintet under the name *Scherzo*. The piece certainly making use of rapid and technical passages to represent the whirling fleetness of the clouds for which the piece is named.

Brumke, Gustav (1876-1963)

Two Quartets, Op. 23 (1908)

- I. Evening Promenade
- II. Lament

German composer Gustav Brumke was rather fond of the sound of the lower saxophone, so he used the infrequent combination of alto, tenor, baritone and bass saxophones. *Evening Promenade* and *Lament* are “Wagnerian” in style, as some of Brumke’s teachers included Humperdink and Bruch. Brumke also had the notable place in history as Germany’s first saxophonist and saxophone teacher.

Bryars, Gavin (b. 1943)

Alaric I or II (1989) SSAB

Gavin Bryars titled his saxophone quartet *Alaric I or II* after Mount Alaric in southwest France—nobody knew which of the two King Alaric’s the mountain had been named after. The two soprano saxophones in the work allow Bryars to emulate the sound of a string quartet. The piece was written when Bryars was away from any recording equipment or instruments and his scores of previously written music, so he reverted to using his memory to “glue” references to his older repertoire into the quartet. He also included difficult techniques such as circular breathing and multiphonics with the end of the piece serving as a lamenting solo in the altissimo range of the baritone saxophone.

Buckley, John

Saxophone Quartet

- I. Toccata
- II. Passacaglia
- III. Allegro Vivace
- IV. Elegia
- V. Scherzo

Saxophone Quartet was a direct result of composer John Buckley’s fascination with the sound of the saxophone quartet after attending a concert of the medium. The piece grew out of the ability of the woodwind to play rapid passages, and Buckley used this advantage greatly, creating passages that test the technical capabilities of its players. The piece contrasts with explosive and contemplative moods while the Passacaglia is primarily contrapuntal and the Elegy rather bluesy.

Carpenter, Gary

Une Semaine de Bonte

- I. Le Lion de Belfort (the Lion of Belfort)
- II. L’eau (Water)
- III. La Cour du Dragon (The Court of the Dragon)
- IV. Oedipe (Oedipus)
- V. Le Rire du Coq (The Rooster’s Laughter)
- VI. L’île de Paques (Easter Island)
- VII. L’Interieur de la Vue-Trois Poèmes Visibles (The Interior of Sight)
- VIII. Le Cle Des Chants (The Key to Songs)

Une Semaine de Bonte (A Week of Kindness) is based on a “visual” novel by German Surrealist Max Ernst. In the book Ernst meticulously superimposes bizarre animal images over other images, creating bizarre and sometimes violent scenes. The saxophone quartet reflects many of those images by using different styles such as the tango, waltz, march and a chorale.

Carter, Elliot (b. 1908)

Canonic Suite für 4 Altsaxophone (1939) AAAA

- I. Fanfare. Deciso
- II. Nocturne. Allegretto con moto
- III. Tarantella. Allegro

Cordell, Frank (b. ?-1980)

Patterns (1972)

- I. Preamble
- II. Polygram
- III. Prolation
- IV. Postlude

Clérisse, Robert (1899-1973)

Cache-Cache

Introduction and Scherzo

Sérénade Melancolique

Robert Clérisse was an avid contributor to the genre of saxophone quartets. His *Sérénade Melancolique*. The piece is a portrait of his understanding of the sonorous tones of the saxophone, and was likely first played by the quartet he founded, the Marcel Mule quartet.

Creston, Paul (1906-1985)

Suite for Saxophone Quartet

Desenclos, Alfred (1912-1971)

Quatour pour Saxophones (1964)

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Calmo-Andante
- III. Poco Largo

Alfred Desenclos' *Quatour pour Saxophones* was commissioned by the French government for the Marcel Mule Quartet. Desenclos uses various influences in this piece such as jazz from early 20th century America, George Gershwin, and fragments that reflect Darius Milhaud's *Creation du Monde*. The piece is abundant with lively rhythms and melodies typical of the French style of writing.

Donatoni, Franco (b. 1927)

Rasch (1964)

Dubois, Pierre Max (b. 1930)

Quatour (1956)

- I. Ouverture
- II. Doloroso
- III. Sprituoso
- IV. Andante-presto

Erickson, Frank

Rondino

Fontaine, Fernand-Marcel (1921-1989)

Concertino de Dinant (1976)

- I. Presto
- II. Larghetto
- III. Molto Vivace
- IV. Presto

The *Concertino de Dinant* by Fernand-Marcel Fontaine was written for the Belgian and Brussels saxophone quartets and in homage of the birthplace of saxophone creator Adolphe Sax. Each movement has a different atmosphere though the whole piece is based on the rhythms and melodies of jazz.

Forte, Aldo

American Sketches

- I. Ragas
- II. Impressions
- III. Sueños
- IV. Shamrocks
- V. Mosaics

American Sketches was originally written for the members of the Capitol Quartet who had very different ethnic backgrounds. Each movement features a member of the ensemble. The origins of the music include India, America, Honduras, and Ireland. The last movement brings the group together and brings back some of the themes from the first movement.

Foss, Lukas

Saxophone Quartet (1985)

- I. Introduction
- II. Canon
- III. Chorale
- IV. Canon B (backwards)

Saxophone Quartet was composed by Lukas Foss especially for the Amherst Saxophone Quartet during Foss' residency at the American Academy in Rome. The four movements of the piece are all played without pause. The entire piece is lively and contrasting, from an *Agitato* in the first movement to having all the players at *Niente* by the time they reach the last movement defined by the score as "Activity felt but not heard."

Frackenpohl, Arthur

Chorale and Canon

Francaix, Jean (b. 1912)

Saxophone Quartet

- I. Prelude Subito Presto

- II. Scherzo & Trio
- III. Larghetto
- IV. Piccolo Intermezzo Alla Parigina
- V. Finale

Petite Quatour (1935)

- I. Guagenardise (Allegro)
- II. Cantilène (Lento ma non troppo)
- III. Sérénade Comique (Molto vivo)

Jean Francaix's *Petit Quatour*, written when he was just 23, did not receive its first performance until the Marcel Mule quartet performed it twelve years later. The piece is a musical portrait of a lively Paris in the 1930's. The *Guagenardise* is full of dynamic contrasts, and its uncomplicated dance rhythm is reminiscent of the cancan. The *Cantilène* is performed as a trio, sans the soprano saxophone. This instrumentation of this movement reflects the serenity of the fading night. The final movement, *Sérénade Comique*, includes the four saxophones, and is full of pizzicato-like "slaps" and melodies split between the saxophones while being performed at a very rapid pace.

Glazunov, Alexander (1865-1936)

Quartet Opus 109 (1932)

- I. Allegro
- II. Canzona Variée
- III. Finale, Allegro moderato

Alexander Glazunov's *Quartet Op. 109* is considered to be the most important saxophone quartet of the romantic period. In a way, the piece is written in retrospect of all the great moments in musical history all the way back to Bach. Glazunov himself was exiled in Paris at the time of the quartet's composition, but his great humor, ingenuity and wit become evident in the piece. The first movement is dedicated to Wagner, Brahms and Dvorák. The second movement, based on a Russian hymn tune, is devoted to Schumann and Chopin while the Finale is dedicated to the great J.S. Bach.

Heyn, Walter Thomas

Presto, Presto

Howland, Russel

Quartet No. 1

- I. Movement I
- II. Movement II
- III. Movement III

Jacob, Gordon

First Saxophone Quartet

Gotkovsky, Ida (b. 1933)

Quatour pour Saxophones

Johnson, William Spencer

Impromptu

Kechley, David (b. 1947)

Stepping Out

Van Keulin, Geert (b. 1943)

Kwartet (1987)

In his *Kwartet*, van Keulin prefers to use the saxophones as a unit, staying away from the classic dialog technique used by many composers. While no one saxophone steps out as a soloist, the position of leader within the collective is the shifting factor. The opening of the piece is based on a nine note repeated motif that is passes from one saxophone to the next. The wild fusion of notes and saxophones eventually gives way to a slower, ore harmonic motion.

Keuris, Tristan (b. 1946)

Music for Saxophones (1986)

In this piece Tristan Keuris simply enjoys the pure, rich sound of the saxophones. The driving rhythms in *Music for Saxophones* are influenced by jazz and lead to the sonorous tonalities of the overall piece.

Lacour, Guy (b. 1932)

Quatour pour Saxophones (1969)

Guy Lacour wrote his *Quartet pour Saxophones* using the twelve-tone technique. The tenor saxophone, Lacour's instrument of choice, is the first to present the twelve-tone row. The piece also includes a lively scherzo and ends with a traditional rondo form.

Levine, Alexander

Faces

- I. Prelude
- II. Fugue

Llanas, Albert (b. 1957)

Contexto V (1992)

- I. Misterioso
- II. Giusto
- III. Dolente, senza tempo
- IV. Meccanico

Marshall, Jack

The Goldrush Suite

- I. Sweet Betsy from Pike
- II. The Days of '49
- III. What was Your Name in the States?
- IV. California Stagecoach

V. Joe Bowers and the California Bank Robbers

Listeners of *The Goldrush Suite* might recognize the theme to the television show “Gilligan’s Island” in the second movement. A well-known television and film composer Jack Marshall originally wrote the piece for the Hollywood Saxophone Quartet. Each movement lives up to its title. For instance, *What was Your Name in the States?* Came about because many people wanted to hide their true identities. Marshall reflects this idea by using the soprano and baritone saxophones to reflect the dual personalities.

Maslanka, David (b. 1943)

Mountain Roads (1997)

- I. Overture
- II. Chorale: wo soll ich fliehen
- III. Aria (in the style of a chorale prelude)
- IV. Chorale
- V. Aria
- VI. Finale: Alle menschen müssen sterben

David Maslanka wrote *Mountain Roads* as a cantata based on his many years of study of the Bach chorales. He includes two chorale melodies, “Alle menschen müssen sterben” (All men must die) and “Wo soll ich fliehen” (Where shall I run to?) The title from the work comes from a dream Maslanka had while writing the piece in which he was part of a crew making new roads in a beautiful mountain wilderness.

Matthews, David Richard (b. 1942)

Quartet for Saxophones

- I. Allegro
- II. Slow-Quasi Cadenza
- III. Perpetuo Motto Interotto

Mintzer, Bob (b. 1953)

Quartet No. 1 in Three Movements

- I. Allegretto
- II. Slowly
- III. Allegro

In *Quartet No. 1*, Bob Mintzer mixes the music of many great and varied composers from Vaughan Williams and Percy Grainger to Stravinsky and Copland. Then the whole piece is overlaid with Mintzer’s trademark jazz rhythms. The first and last movements are rather upbeat with the soprano getting most of the spotlight. The second movement uses space very effectively, requiring the complete concentration and awareness of the other ensemble members as they all play and rest at the same times. The second movement also features the alto saxophone in a beautiful cadenza.

Moulaert, Raymond (1875-1962)

Andante, Fugue and Finale (1907)

The *Andante, Fugue and Finale* is one of the earliest saxophone quartets that is still intact. Written by Brussels professor Raymond Moulaert, the *Andante* and *Fugue* are written in a contrapuntal style with baroque concepts. The *Finale*, however, is based on a waltz.

Nyman, Michael

Songs for Tony

- I. Aggressive
- II. Con Rubato
- III. Warm
- IV. Simply

Michael Nyman wrote his quartet *Songs for Tony* after his good friend Tony passed away from cancer. It's a minimalistic piece with each movement featuring a different saxophone. The first movement is a transcription of a piece previously written by Nyman entitled "Mozart on Mortality." The second movement is based on music from the movie "The Piano," and the third movement is a soprano solo that Nyman wrote and was saving for a special occasion.

Van Onna, Peter (1966)

The Gravity of D (1992)

In the *Gravity of D* Peter van Onna seeks and discovers a new sound for saxophone quartet. Inspired by the vocalized sounds sometimes used by flute players, van Onna uses hissing and growling sounds with the mouthpiece both on and off of the instrument. The three distinctive hissing sounds with the mouthpiece detached from the instrument are "high-articulate an imaginary I-sound (upper lip raised.) Middle-normal manner of playing (articulate imaginary o-sound.) Low-articulate an imaginary a-sound.) Van Onna builds the piece around the note D using his techniques to pull the note, hence the name of the piece.

Padding, Martijn (1956)

Ritorno (1988)

Martijn Padding bases his *Ritorno* around saxophone jazz licks written by himself, though highly influenced by jazz giant Charlie Parker. The work, in three sections, is based upon one chord which is represented melodically in the first section, firmly in the second and in the third it totally unravels into its original form.

Peck, Russel (b. 1945)

Drastic Measures (1976)

Drastic Measures was written for the Northern Illinois University saxophone studio. Since its creation, the piece has quickly become a standard in saxophone quartet literature. There are two major portions of the piece which is influenced by both jazz and pop music. The first section is very expressive utilizing the group sound of the quartet. The classic twelve bar blues appears in the second section and contrasts rhythmic and minimalistic themes.

Piazzolla, Astor (1921-1992)

Histoire du Tango (trans. Claude Voirpy)

- I. Bordel 1900
- II. Café 1930
- III. Nightclub 1960
- IV. Concert d'Aujordhui

Pierné, Gabriel (1863-1937)

Introduction and Variations (1934)

Introduction and Variations was written by Gabriel Pierné for the Marcel Mule Saxophone Quartet. The melodic introduction is interrupted twice by the theme of the rondo, and the movements are separated by two separate divertissements. In contrast, the second movement uses themes from the introduction to create a cheerful tone.

Pierné, Paul

Trois Conversations

Rivier, Jean (1896-)

Grave et Presto (1938)

Schmitt, Florent (1870-1958)

Quatour

Singlée, Jean Baptiste (1812-1875)

Quatour op. 53 (1858)

- I. Andante-Allegro
- II. Adagio Sostenuto
- III. Allegro Vivace
- IV. Allegretto

Stock, David (b. 1939)

Sax Appeal (1990)

- I. Set up
- II. Blues
- III. Sarabande
- IV. Jump

The Amherst Saxophone Quartet commissioned and performed the premiere of David Stock's *Sax Appeal*. Influenced by jazz, the four-movement piece allowed Stock to express his admiration for the saxophone. The second and third movements are connected, and the third movement, Sarabande, started out as a recorder quartet but found a life of its own in the saxophone quartet.

Vellones, Pierre (1889-1939)

Valse Chromatique

Pierre Vellones liked to experiment with the different timbres available with the saxophone, especially the unusual and the foreign. *Valse Chromatique* is a lilting example of Vellones' influence from Ravel and Debussy and his ventures into the exotic styles of music.

Ventas, Adolf (b. 1919)

Cuevas de Nerja (1978)

- I. Bulerias
- II. Guajira flamenca

- III. Nocturno Martinete
- IV. Zapateado

The five movements of Adolf Ventas' *Cuevas de Nerja* were based on five Andalusian dances.

Verbey, Theo (b. 1959)

Passamezzo (1991; rev. 1994)

A very contemplative piece, Theo Verbey's *Passamezzo* relies on the melodic ideas of a four tone theme reminiscent of early Baroque music. The forms of Chaconnes and Passacaglias are evident throughout the four-movement work.

Wilder, Alec

Sax Quartet (1967)

Wilson, Dana (b. 1946)

Come Sunday Mornin'

Come Sunday Mornin' was originally intended for the Tower Saxophone Quartet in Georgia, which is why composer Dana Wilson gave the piece a bit of a gospel feel. The images Wilson brings to life are a gospel quartet and one of a call and response theme between a preacher and his congregation.

Woods, Phil

Three Improvisations

- I. Movement I
- II. Movement II
- III. Movement III

In *Three Improvisations for Saxophone Quartet* jazz alto saxophonist Phil Woods stylishly displays his writing and improvisational skills. The first movement is hard bop oriented employing the use of dense chordal writing and features each saxophone throughout the movement. In the second movement, Woods brings out some amazing ballad writing. The third movement includes complex rhythms and time signature changes and eventually brings back motifs from the first movement to end the piece.

Author's note: This list is not guaranteed to be all inclusive or 100% correct. The author would appreciate any corrections or additions to this list at tcastleb@du.edu

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