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A reflective analysis of the practice and performance of a degree tuba recital

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“A REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PRACTICE AND PERFORMANCE
OF A DEGREE TUBA RECITAL”

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors

Taylor Hicks

University of Northern Iowa

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This Study by: Taylor Hicks

Entitled: "A Reflective Analysis of the Practice and Performance of a Degree Tuba Recital"

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University Honors

Date

Dr. Jesse Orth, Honors Thesis Advisor

Date

Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

I. Title

“A Reflective Analysis of the Practice and Performance of a Degree Tuba Recital”

II. Purpose

The purpose of this thesis document is to review and assess using research the practice and performance techniques that were utilized and developed in preparing and presenting a full-length degree recital. This thesis will also provide historical, cultural, and etymological context and examine the stylistic characteristics and playing techniques necessary in order to successfully prepare and perform the chosen repertoire in recital. Material from this thesis will act as the program notes for the recital itself on April 4 2017, while portions of the discussion on practice techniques and the challenges that each of the pieces presented will be used as the material for the short lecture that will accompany the playing portion of the recital. This thesis and recital will act as a chance to challenge myself and present new opportunities and methods of learning for myself and for those reading this thesis in the future.

III. Source Review

Each of the musical works that were presented as part of my recital stem from a unique place in tuba history; no two of the pieces are alike, and so it is important to consider the diverse backgrounds and contexts of these pieces. As part of this source review, I will not only be discussing the background of each piece, but also the challenges that were a part of the preparation and performance of each of the works in the recital.

The first piece on the program is a work entitled *Capriccio*¹, written by Rodney Newton in 1990. The piece was originally written for and dedicated to James Gourlay, a world-renowned

¹ Rodney Newton, *Capriccio*, (Hertfordshire, UK:Winwood-Rosehill Publishing, 1990).

English conductor and tubist and the current general director for River City Brass.² The title “*Capriccio*” is an Italian term that came into use as early as the late 1600s, used to describe compositions that were fugal in nature, meaning that they were composed in a way that centered around the fugal method of counterpoint. By utilizing a singular main melody that was shared between sections and repeated at irregular intervals this creates a polyphonic texture throughout the piece.³ The opening motive, seen below as image 1⁴, is a line that occurs many times throughout the piece and is Newton’s method of harkening back to the traditional capriccio that was written in a fugal style with one main melodic line being perpetually repeated.

(Image 1, below of Newton’s *Capriccio*, page 1 measures 7-13, the first repetition of the main motive)



The term capriccio was often used to describe various pieces of literature from a variety of genres: such as canzonas, fantasies, and ricercari, all of which were written in a style that was modeled after vocal imitative polyphony. The term capriccio came to be a vague musical term

² “James Gourlay, Conductor and Tuba Soloist” James Gourlay, accessed March 10, 2017, http://www.jamesgourlaytuba.com/Home_Page.html.

³ Naxos, “Capriccio;Caprice”, accessed March 11, 2017, <http://www.naxos.com/education/glossary.asp#>.

⁴ Rodney Newton, *Capriccio*.

for a lively and loosely structured musical composition that was often humorous or flamboyant in nature.⁵

Newton's *Capriccio* is an exhilarating modern adaptation of the capriccio style of composition found in the late Baroque and early Classical period. From a technical perspective the piece has a number of interesting sections. The biggest aid to practicing the material was in learning each of the main motives, as its own individual melodic line before trying to piece them together into a whole. The main challenge of preparing and performing the work is in establishing and emphasizing the character of the piece. *Capriccio* is a piece that is joyful, stubborn, playful, arrogant, and romantic all in the same piece. Much of the challenge comes from finding all the different moments in the piece where the mood and character changes and exaggerating the transition into the new character. A common technique for me to use is to create a mental story for the music, one that would be able to give a visual concept to what the music is portraying. With *Capriccio*, I imagine a young man going about his life, everything is going well. Then he spies a beautiful young woman sitting in the coffee shop across the street. From then on, the piece tells an aural story about his indecision on whether or not to go talk to her and fear and sadness over a possible rejection. The piece ends with him approaching the young woman and laying his feelings on the line, and her admitting she was going through the same difficulties talking to him.

The second piece of the recital is G.P. Telemann's *Sonata in F major* (TWV 41: F3)⁶ arranged in 1993 by Kenneth Drobnak. Telemann (1681-1767) is one of the most prolific and well-known German composers of the Baroque period. Telemann is primarily remembered for his church music, having written over a thousand cantatas and motets; however the amount of instrumental works he composed was also quite significant, including fifty concertos for various instruments as well as numerous fantasias and sonatas including the original version of *Sonata*

⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Capriccio," accessed March 11, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/art/capriccio-music>.

⁶ G.P. Telemann, Kenneth Drobnak, *Sonata in F major*, (New London, CT: Cimarron Music, 1993).

in F major written in 1734.⁷ The *Sonata in F major* is a valuable example of a Baroque sonata in terms of style and form. During the Baroque period, sonatas consisted of primarily four movement works that were slow/fast/slow/fast in terms of tempos and were typically based on some type of dance or popular song. The first movement usually was a slow and legato introduction, followed by the second movement, which was a fast upbeat movement that tended to be slightly fugal in nature. The third and fourth movements are the two that varied the most in sonatas. The third is often a slow and mournful movement while the fourth movement was often a simple and light tune more in-keeping with the dance music it was inspired by.⁸

Preparing and performing this piece included a number of hazards that do not typically occur in the preparation of modern tuba music. The biggest hurdle that I had to face was the fact that this piece was not originally written for tuba but for violin, so the style it was written in is not idiomatic to the tuba. It was a significant challenge to be able to play this Baroque violin sonata with the light and crisp sound that would be expected of the original work. In order to obtain this sound, I had to spend a large quantity of time listening to recordings of violinists playing the piece and analyzing how they approached the various runs and melodies of the piece in order to build a profile on how to recreate that sound on the tuba. Another issue with performing Baroque music as a whole is that the solo line tends to be incredibly exposed. Solo music by nature is exposed, however in typical Baroque music the accompaniment does very little in terms of providing harmonic interest outside of chords and some contrapuntal melody, meaning a melody with more than one main melodic line. I had to be exacting in my work to learn the lines, because every error or hesitation would be noticeable to the listener. The *Sonata* contained a number of technical challenges, particularly in the two fast movements. Much of the difficulty came from the frequent and often awkward arpeggios and extended eighth note runs.

⁷ Naxos, "Georg Philipp Telemann," accessed March 5, 2017, http://www.naxos.com/person/Georg_Philipp_Telemann/23879.htm.

⁸ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Sonata," accessed March 5, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/art/sonata#toc27497>.

These two patterns are what make the *Sonata* so indicative of the Baroque compositional style; however, they were originally written for instruments that do not require air to function. In order to overcome this, I had to become fluent in the progression of the patterns and to become very precise in my breath placement, so that I would have the air support necessary to make it through the longer passages.

*Relentless Grooves: Armenia*⁹ is half of the series *Relentless Grooves*, written by Sam Pilafian in 2001. The goal of my third piece is to provide the soloist the opportunity to experience music based on the music of Armenia, a landlocked country in the Middle East surrounded by Georgia to the north, Iraq to south and east, and Turkey to the west. The piece is written in four movements that were inspired by the landscape and culture that the composer, Sam Pilafian, experienced when he visited the country in 1999. The first movement, *Liberation*, is based on the Armenian countryside; rugged mountains and ancient sites come together to create the inspiration for the opening section. *Identity* draws from an ancient Armenian song that was part of the traditional wedding rituals. *Lament*, the third movement is written in the style of *sharagan*, a traditional song of a sad nature inspired by the difficult times of the Armenian people. *Kef Time*, the final movement of the work, draws from the music that would play at celebrations known as “kef” that are incredibly popular throughout Armenia.¹⁰ Traditional Armenian folk music rarely featured brass instruments, with some exceptions in more recent times when trumpet is used. Melodic lines were typically played with instruments native to the region such as the duduk. The duduk is a Middle Eastern reed instrument similar to the clarinet and recorder that has been used in Armenian folk music for over 1000 years. The duduk has a melancholic,

⁹ Sam Pilafian, *Relentless Grooves: Armenia*, (Mesa AZ: Focus on Music, 2001).

¹⁰ Sam Pilafian, *Relentless Grooves: Armenia*.

sad sound that has become synonymous in Armenia culture with the history and pride of Armenia.¹¹

(Image 2, an Armenian duduk in the key of A, courtesy of duduk.com)



Relentless Grooves: Armenia was the most difficult work to prepare out of the four for my recital. The necessary skill to be able to play the piece was significantly above where I was when I originally picked the piece. As the music that *Armenia* is based on was written primarily for reed instruments, there are a number of passages in every movement that require an immense amount of finger dexterity and flexibility in order to replicate their techniques on tuba. Range was also a critical factor in the preparation and performance of this piece, more so than any other piece I have studied. This composition also has complex chromatic passages and tricky rhythmic sections. This piece requires many non-traditional techniques, such as pitch bends passages with flutter tonguing. Finally, matching my solo part to the audio accompaniment was a significant challenge. The tracks provided are percussion accompaniment using instruments that would be used in typical Armenian folk music:

¹¹ Anastasia Christofakis, "Music that Shaped a Nation: The Role of Folk Music, the Duduk, and Clarinet in the works of Contemporary Armenian Composers Aram Khatchaturian and Vache Sharafyan," (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2015).

tambourine, shaker, cymbal, shells, and drums. The difficulty lies in the fact that there is no way to make the track speed up or slow down while it is playing. Typically, if a soloist slows down or speeds up while they are playing, the accompanist changes to match. This was not really possible with a machine, so if I lost feel of time, it would be obvious that the audio track and I were not together. Despite all of these difficulties, *Relentless Grooves: Armenia* is without a doubt one of my favorite pieces and the one I find most interesting on my recital.

The final piece on the program was *Loch Lomond*¹², a traditional Scottish folk song that is loved and cherished by the people of Scotland. Loch Lomond is a Scottish lake and ranks among the largest bodies of freshwater in the United Kingdom. The area surrounding Loch Lomond has been notorious for centuries for being a rugged and unforgiving landscape, unsuited for anything other than admiring as you pass through it to get somewhere else. It is precisely this reason why Loch Lomond is such a beautiful landscape, lush and bountiful, but also harsh and uncompromising that it is considered by many to be the essence of Scotland.¹³ The song, *Loch Lomond*, was originally inspired by the loss of many of the men in Scotland after the Battle of Culloden as part of the Jacobite Rebellion in the United Kingdom in the middle of the 18th century. As is true for many folk songs from around the world, the actual meaning behind *Loch Lomond* differs from person to person. Some scholars believe that the lyrics, especially in the chorus, refer to the fact that, after the Battle of Culloden, many of the captured Scots were taken to London as prisoners and tried for their crimes. All the prisoners faced execution, and the families came down from Scotland in order to support the Scots that were soon to die. After the execution, the families had to walk home taking footpaths all the way back to Scotland (the “low roads”); the bodies, however, were taken by carriage along the largest roads in the country (the “high roads”). This meant that even though the bodies to be buried

¹²Donald MacDonald, Mike Forbes, *Loch Lomond*, (Delewan, NY: Kendor Music, 2009).

¹³ Alan Ingram, “Taking the High Road: The Form, Perception, and Memory of Loch Lomond,” in *Reflective Landscapes of the Anglophone Countries*, edited by Pascale Guibert. (Amsterdam-New York, NY: Rodopi Editions, 2010), 120-122.

were traveling by carriage, the families reached Scotland long before their fallen kin did, hence the possible meaning behind the lyrics¹⁴ “Oh ye’ll tak’ the high road, An’ I’ll tak’ the low road, And I’ll be in Scotland afore ye, For me and my true love will never meet again On the bonnie bonnie banks of Loch Lomond.”¹⁵

Loch Lomond, despite being the easiest piece on the program is likely the one I hold closest to my heart. I got the chance to visit Loch Lomond for myself in January of 2015 as a personal extension of the Panther Marching Band’s trip to London for the New Year’s Day Parade. While I was in Scotland, I found that everyone had their own take on what Loch Lomond actually meant, from the original mourning for the fallen Jacobite soldiers, to grieving for a lost love, to remembering people that you lost track of throughout life. For the people of Scotland, *Loch Lomond* is a song of goodbyes, a song that expresses their belief that regardless of what happens in life, one day you will be able to meet again and celebrate your reunion; whether the goodbye is due to a death or simply due to people moving on to another stage of their life. It was for this reason that I chose *Loch Lomond* as the closer for my recital; not only is it an incredibly emotional and heartfelt piece, but it symbolizes the fact that I am moving on from this chapter in my life and will have to begin saying a lot of goodbyes whether I want to or not. Of the issues in the work, intonation and tuning are key; if the tuning is not locked in, it can quickly ruin the character of the work. The true difficulty in this piece lies in being able to express the fullness of the emotional content, to be able to sing through an instrument and showcase the heartbreak, sorrow, and renewal that exist in the song.

¹⁴ Liane Hansen. “Profile: Story of ‘Loch Lomond’ as told by Leslie Howard,” *Weekend Edition Sunday* (NPR), July 24, 2005, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=5f472241-3921-4d1c-a282-05c2984a5ced%40sessionmgr4008&vid=0&hid=4104&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGI2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=6XN200507231317&db=n5h>.

¹⁵ Alan Ingram, “Taking the High Road,” 123.

IV. REFLECTION

This thesis recital was designed as a way to challenge myself as a player and to force myself to grow in order to successfully perform a program with repertoire that at the time of my choosing was above my level of playing. I chose to pursue this style of recital in order to give myself a better idea of what it is like to give a professional recital performance. I am considering pursuing a graduate degree in music performance, so any opportunity to challenge myself and perform is one that I try to take. My thought process for this project has undergone a number of changes throughout the time I have been working on it. Along with my process pertaining to the project itself, my methods for practicing and for developing my musical ability have changed dramatically. In order to be able to cope with the increased workload and musical demands, I had to redesign my practice methods entirely in order to be able to be successful. With help, I developed a method that breaks down material and allows me to be able to learn and refine music at a significantly faster rate than I was ever capable of before. This new method moves beat by beat taking the material as slowly as possible and using various learning rhythms to aid in the development of competency and then speeding the tempo of the section up fractionally until it is at performance tempo. I have also begun to use various accessories such as the Berp, a resistance tool used on brass instruments, to help refine tone and pitch consistency once competency was achieved. This new method, coupled with a mindset that refused to allow errors to happen and that understood that progress might be slow, allowed me to create a much more effective and useful practice experience. The final product of this five-month project is a recital consisting of four pieces for tuba that lasted approximately an hour in length. The recital included speaking elements about the project and about the pieces, giving background and my thoughts on each of the pieces. Overall, I believe that the performance that was given the night of the recital was a moving and musically pleasing experience for the audience and myself. I was able to perform all four pieces with a high degree of musicianship and relatively few errors, something that I am very happy with. The recital has been recorded and a copy of the recording,

along with the program, program notes, and a copy of this thesis will be given to the University Honors Program for safekeeping, in the hope that someone else will be able to learn from it.

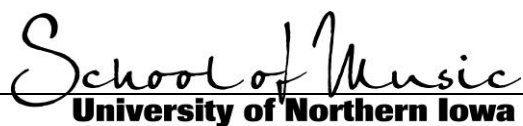
As a performer, much of how I select music and how I develop my sound is done via listening to others who have performed the music before me. I listen to David Earll, Dan Perantoni, David Zerkel, and other fantastic artists in the hope of hearing something I enjoy and work to achieve that sound. Having a recording of my performance not only lets me critique my own playing, but also acts a record of what someone in the studio achieved. This means that, in a few years, when another student in the tuba studio is working on some of these pieces, Dr. Orth can point out my recording and say, "listen to that, see what he does well or doesn't do well". As someone looking to continue on as a performer in a graduate position, this is an invaluable opportunity to showcase my strengths and work to eliminate my weaknesses. The ability to perform is essential for musicians in order to be able to grow and improve. My recital was a chance to expand my knowledge of the instrument and challenge what I had previously considered my limits. This experience especially has been life altering for my playing and myself. Without it, I would not have been pushed to develop a new way of practicing and would have continued severely limiting my potential in terms of my ability to perform and my ability to grow as a musician. Indirectly, working on this thesis recital has allowed me to compete in several competitions that I would not have competed in at my previous skill level. As a result of my work for this recital, I competed in the Great Plains Regional Tuba and Euphonium Conference (GPRTEC) Artist Competition, the Leonard Falcone Tuba Competition, and the UNI Spotlight Concerto Competition. Working on this project has challenged me and inspired me to become a considerably better player than I was at the start of this year, working on the project also allowed me to spend more time developing my own understanding of the music I was playing and the pedagogy that goes in to tuba performance.

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VI. APPENDIX A

(Recital Program, full recording of each piece is available with the Thesis, either from the UNI
Library or the University Honors Program)



Taylor Hicks, Tuba

with

Dr. Polina Khatsko, piano
Terra Hill and Sam Nau, Euphonium
and Adam Denner, Tuba

Program

Capriccio (1990).....Rodney Newton (1945-)

Sonata in F Major (1734).....G.P. Telemann (1681-1767)

Arr. Kenneth Drobnak

- I. Andante
- II. Vivace
- III. Grave
- IV. Allegro

INTERMISSION

Relentless Grooves: Armenia (2001).....Sam Pilafian (1949-)

- I. Liberation
- II. Identity
- III. Lament
- IV. Kef Time

Loch LomondTraditional Scottish Folk

Arr. Mike Forbes

About the Artist

Taylor Hicks is a senior Music Education student from the studio of tuba professor Dr. Jesse Orth. He is a member of the Northern Iowa Wind Symphony and the UNITUBA ensemble, and has previously performed in the Northern Iowa Symphony Orchestra, Symphonic Band, and Athletic Bands.

This fall, Taylor will complete his student teaching in the Quad Cities area with an emphasis in Instrumental and General music. He plans to then attend graduate school and obtain his higher degrees.

Taylor would like to take a moment to give thanks to a number of people. Firstly to his family for their never ending support and encouragement, believing in him when he didn't. Thanks to Dr. Jesse Orth, for constantly pushing him and helping him to exceed well past what he thought he could achieve. To the School of Music and all of his professors that have helped to make him the musician and educator he is today. To the UNI Honors Program and its head Dr. Jessica Moon, for allowing him to present this recital thesis. Finally, thank you to all of those in attendance, who came to support him as he finishes a milestone part of his degree.

VII. APPENDIX B

(Program Notes from the Recital, accompanied lecture given during the performance)

Program Notes

Capriccio is an elegant and upbeat piece with an ear grabbing repeated line in the solo voice. A capriccio is a style of music typically characterized by a lively, light character and a free form. It is an Italian term used to describe not only this style of music but also a style of art characterized by a fantasy elements or a mixture of real and imagined features. Newton's *Capriccio*, originally written for solo tuba and wind ensemble, features several cadenzas and romantic lyrical sections that break up the highly intense driving motion of the main motive.

The *Sonata in F Major* by Telemann is an iconic example of Baroque literature reimagined for tuba. Originally written for violin, the *Sonata* holds true to the Baroque style of the form, written in four movements slow/fast/slow/fast. The piece maintains a light, airy feel that is iconic to the violin, despite being arranged for tuba.

Relentless Grooves: Armenia, is an intriguing look into the music and culture of Armenia a tiny country in-between Turkey, Georgia, and Iraq. The piece is written in four movements that were inspired by the landscape and culture the composer; Sam Pilafian experienced when he visited the country in the early 2000s. The first movement, *Liberation*, is based on the Armenian countryside; rugged mountainsides and ancient sites come together to create the inspiration for the opening section. *Identity* draws from an ancient Armenian song that was part of the traditional wedding rituals. *Lament*, the third movement is written in the style of sharagan, a traditional song of a sad nature inspired by the difficult times of the Armenian peoples. *Kef Time*, the final movement of the work draws from the music that would play at celebrations known as "kef" that are incredibly popular throughout Armenia.

Loch Lomond, the final piece on the program, is a Traditional song from Scotland that has a wide variety of meanings. The song was supposedly written by Donald MacDonald in 1746, it is thought that the lyrics detail the feelings of the Scottish people throughout the Jacobite uprisings in the early 1700s. The iconic work features melodic and harmonic writing inspired by the serene and beautiful scenery of Loch Lomond in Scotland.