

Marcel Bitsch (1921-2011)
Concertino pour Basson et Piano (1948)

Born in Toulouse, France, Marcel Bitsch was a professor of counterpoint at the Paris Conservatoire, and an exceptionally versatile composer.

Written in 1948, the world of music was leaping into an exciting new era. Aptly reflecting the development of musical ideas at the time, this Concertino contains a range of exciting musical aspects, including varied articulation, complex rhythms, irregular phrasing, exploited tonality and many variations in dynamics, tempo and performance directions.

Fitting with the style of french impressionism, the first part the of concertino brings the audience into an impressionistic soundscape, remote and elegant, exploring new harmonic colours and drifting from previously established rules of functional harmony. Gradually, the energy of the sound world increases in vigour, culminating in a desperate exclamation on the highest ranges of the bassoon. A recitative-like cadenza follows, with much liberty for personal expression and creativity. The final section of the piece is an intense and relentless sprint. Over wide leaps and high-velocity climbs, the music restlessly rages until the very end.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741)
Concerto for Bassoon in D minor, RV 481 (c. 1720s)

Vivaldi's focus on the bassoon during his time was exceptional, as the instrument had been largely neglected by Italian composers in the late seventeenth century. His skill at writing technical passages that were simultaneously virtuosic and yet comfortable on the bassoon showcased the instrument's capabilities through dazzling figurations and melodious stretches alike.

This D Minor concerto is in the three-movement concerto structure that Albinoni introduced and that Vivaldi perfected, with fast first and third movements that exchange passages between the piano and the soloist, and a slow middle movement featuring eloquent, long-breathed melodies. Vivaldi employed the first movement of this concerto in his D Minor cello concerto (RV 406) as well, an unsurprising move (since a number of his concerti were related to each other in various ways), but one that emphasizes the ability of the bassoon and the cello alike to perform well in both the bass and tenor ranges. This concerto demonstrates the expressivity and dexterity of the bassoon through Vivaldi's exuberant but precise aesthetic.

José Siqueira (1907-1985)
Three Etudes for Bassoon and Piano (1964)

Jose Siqueira was born in Conceição, Brazil in 1918. He prided himself on his nationalistic compositional style. In 1941, he “crafted a compositional system...which he called the Trimodal System, based on the three most present scalar modes in the Brazilian Northeastern folkloric tradition.” This concept gives Siqueira’s compositions a Brazilian lilt. Siqueira said the sound created by these compositions “spoke to the soul of Brazilian music.” Indeed, the simplistic idea and feel of Brazilian folk music is present throughout the work.

The first etude fluctuates in tonality, starting with a slower, more somber tone and shifting towards a smoother, more upbeat tone as the music progresses. The second etude is a Modinha, a type of traditional folk song that is lyrical and sentimental. Originating in Portugal, it portrays an endearing and expressive longing. The third etude is written with complete contrast - interrupting the quietly introspective tone set by the previous etude with festive and exuberant energy. The music is driven forward into a sudden and triumphant end.