



CONCERTO

for Trumpet and Orchestra

LAUREN BERNOFSKY

Allegro ♩ = 120

11 Solo (optional) *mf* (b) *f* (optional)

18 Vln. 1 *f* **A** Quasi cadenza Solo *f*

30 *mp* *cresc.*

34 **B** A Tempo Tutti *f*

38 *f* *mp* *mf*

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Bernofsky's *Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra*, trumpet part, page 1; © 1997 Lauren Bernofsky
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Meet the Composer: Lauren Bernofsky Talks About *Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra & Trio for Brass*

BY MARY THORNTON

Currently serving on the faculty of the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, Maryland, Lauren Bernofsky has recently contributed two major works to the repertoire for trumpet. The most recent is her *Trio for Brass*, which adds a substantial piece to the rather limited offerings for the standard brass trio combination.

Trio for Brass received its world premiere on November 11, 2002, at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas. The performers were Mary Thornton, trumpet, Karl Kemm, horn, and Eileen Russell, trombone. This piece was commissioned with funds from a Del Mar College Professional Development Grant.

As stated in the composer's program notes:

"The piece is cast in three contrasting movements, following the traditional fast-slow-fast scheme. The overall duration is just over thirteen minutes, which makes it a relatively long piece for this number of brass instruments; since there are only three in the group, allowing one to rest results in a duo texture, which is notably thinner than a trio texture (as compared to a brass quintet, where the resting of one voice leaves us with the full sound of four others still playing.) An important consideration for music for brass instruments is to allow the players time to rest, since thirteen minutes of continuous playing is simply not possible. I made a real effort to "thin out" the texture in many places, especially in the last movement, by which time the players would of course need it the most, while also providing insurance that the players wouldn't be waiting for me in a dark alley after the concert.

I tried to create variety in the piece through different textures. The outer movements often alternate between sections of homophony, where the instruments all play the same rhythms together, and more complex-sounding contrapuntal textures. Much of the middle movement has a clear bass line, middle voice, and melody, and I wrote it as a necessary release from the harder-to-hear outer movements.

I wanted to write a piece that would be an exciting challenge for the performers and I'm sure after tonight's concert any of the players you ask would happily attest to the fact that I achieved my goal with regard to the difficulty."

Bernofsky's Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra, completed in 1998, did not receive a premiere performance until 2001 when both the piano score and orchestral score versions were presented on opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

With the composer in attendance, Mary Thornton, trumpet, and Elaine Moss, piano, presented the world premiere of Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra on July 28, 2001 in Madison, Wisconsin. The orchestral premiere occurred on August 12, 2001 at Grieg Hall in Bergen, Norway, with Gary Petersen (principal trumpet of the Bergen Philharmonic) as soloist and Kjell Seim directing the Halsnøy Summer Music School Orchestra. In each case the concerto was extremely well received by performers and audience members alike. Regarding the orchestral premiere, reviewer Espen Selvik states, "One of the pieces on the concert was an exciting first performance of Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra by the American Lauren Bernofsky. Gary Petersen was a thoroughly solid soloist in a piece which had rhythmic excitement and showed a composer who uses her technique with good sense and personal originality. A piece which ought to be of interest."

The Concerto for Trumpet is an extremely listenable piece that provides ample opportunity for the soloist to demonstrate both singing lines and fiery technique. While the first movement is based upon traditional sonata-allegro form and is fundamentally tonal, the customary harmonic relationships are not employed. Instead, the movement is structured using key areas and motivic development. The first movement also features both opening and closing cadenzas.

The second movement is fundamentally a simple song in ABA form. The orchestral score features delicate string and woodwind accompaniment. A sweeping melodic line highlights the second movement and a mute is employed to provide color contrast in the solo part.

The third movement is a mixed meter romp with an Eastern European harmonic flavor. The driving rhythms of this movement provide excitement and aid in delineating the rondo structure. The modified rondo form contains a dance-like theme returning, as one would expect, throughout the movement.

This concerto is a substantial work with meaningful challenges for the dedicated performer and it should find its way into the standard repertoire. With a piano score and orchestral score available, and an edition for wind ensemble in the works, the concerto should receive many performances in the near future. The following dialogue with Lauren Bernofsky sheds light on her approach to writing the concerto. This conversation is taken from "Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra by Lauren Bernofsky: Conversation & Analysis" by Mary Thornton which is available through UMI Publishing.

Thornton: *What inspired or motivated you to write a trumpet concerto?*

Bernofsky: My doctoral dissertation for Boston University was to be an original composition for full orchestra, and the idea of a concerto was especially appealing, since a solo instrument seemed like an easy “point of departure.” Come up with a theme for the solo instrument and then build the piece from there. I felt very comfortable writing for brass instruments by this point, and of course brass instruments work great for concertos since you don’t have to worry about them being covered up. I chose the trumpet because it’s such a brilliant-sounding instrument and also possibly because I’m a little biased toward the treble side, being a violinist myself.

Thornton: *Did you perceive or expect any particular challenges in writing for trumpet? You worked with Gary Petersen as you wrote the piece and I would be interested in what his advice may have been throughout the process.*

Bernofsky: No, I guess I’d have to say I didn’t expect any challenges. I like to think that I’m pretty well aware of the chief technical considerations for trumpet players, like allowing time for breaths, not tiring out the lip by staying too high for too long, not wearing them out by staying with one texture too long, etc. But these aren’t a big deal. I consider writing for the trumpet fairly easy. (Interestingly, Christopher Rouse commented to me that he would have found the range of the trumpet limiting as a concerto solo instrument. The context was that he’d just had Yo-Yo Ma play his cello concerto.) But I think there’s so much that can be done on trumpet. I wanted to write a piece that was challenging but in a good way. That is, not written in ways that go “against the grain” of the instrument.

And I take instrumentation very seriously. My goal for every composition is to write for each instrument as if I play that instrument. That is, to have internalized the sound, technical workings, etc. Before writing this piece I didn’t listen to a lot of trumpet music. My preparation started many years earlier with my experiences

around trumpet players and their music. One of my best buddies in high school, Rodney Mack, was a great trumpet player — and I heard him practice, talk about technical issues he was working on in his pieces (I even made up a little exercise for the tricky “lick” in the Hummel third movement), and of course perform. And there’s just no substitute for acquiring familiarity like this. Orchestration books are only the beginning. A few years before the concerto, I wrote a fairly virtu-

osic trumpet piece for Jeff Curnow (I wanted to “keep him busy”), so I had some experience in writing a challenging piece for trumpet.

Gary Petersen was invaluable during the preparation of the solo part, and he certainly “made his mark” on the piece. After writing much of the trumpet part to the first movement, he played through it and when he got to the triplets at

Letter G (m. 40), he took his trumpet off his lip and said, “Okay, now it’s a difficult piece.” I guess the notes I’d written had some nasty cross-fingerings. So I changed a few and had him try it out, and the result worked.

The first note in the solo part is the concert G below middle C, and Gary gave the terrific suggestion that I let the trumpeter “test the waters” first, as he put it. I’m always thrilled to hear about things like this—it’s my pleasure to help the performer feel more comfortable, in this case adding a few warm-up notes buried in the orchestral texture—why not? Another element in the piece that is a direct result of my meeting with Gary is the glissando at the end of the third-movement cadenza. At the beginning of our session, Gary proceeded to tune his trumpet, doing a glissando with his tuning valve. I said, “Wait a minute—what are you doing?” and he explained it.

Composers are opportunists, always looking for new sounds to use. Of course, you can’t just do a glissando anywhere, so he helped me come up with some possible beginning and ending notes that would work, and of course leaving time to get your hand back into position again—the end of a cadenza was the obvious



Premiere performers for *Trio for Brass*, L to R: Karl Kemm, Mary Thornton, Lauren Bernofsky, Eileen Russell Conce



Concerto premiere (orchestral version), Bergen, Norway, August 12, 2001. L to R: Lauren Bernofsky, Kjell Seim, Gary Petersen

choice, because the trumpet was playing alone (so the listener can better hear this subtle effect) and then the orchestra can take over, which gives the soloist time to get his hand back into place.

Thornton: *Did you have a compositional blueprint in mind or do you compose in a less structured way?*

Bernofsky: I'm very much oriented toward writing in specific forms, though I use the form as a starting point and then sometimes vary it. I often ask myself why I seem to gravitate toward established classical forms, and the reason I always come up with is that these forms work so well and to me they feel natural, inevitable. For instance, you wouldn't want to hear two slow movements in a row—that would be killer. Ending with a slow movement (especially for a concerto) seems anticlimactic to me. But a slow movement is the perfect release after an active fast movement. So what does that leave us with? A scheme of fast-slow-fast. For most of my pieces I come up with the melodic material first and then see what logical direction the piece takes me. But the form I end up with borrows strongly from traditional formal principles.

Thornton: *I think anyone listening to this concerto would agree it is tonal and yet it works around and through tonality in interesting ways. Did you consciously "choose" tonality? What do you think defines your voice? So, at this point, how would you describe your compositional style?*

Bernofsky: I try to let my composing come from my subconscious as much as possible. I write in a basically tonal style because that is what I "hear." Lucas Foss put it nicely: "Write what you love." I've never written atonal music. It's just not in me. I don't care where (or if) I fit into the history books, though I think that's where a lot of composers today have gone wrong. They're looking over their shoulder to see that what they do fits in with the "progression" of musical development. I think theory should come after the music, not before. I see myself as a performer's composer (and not a composer's composer.) Because I come from a performance background myself, I always think about how it would "feel" to play a piece. Lots of 16th notes? Maybe it's time for a break. How about some half-notes and whole-notes now. It's nicer to play variety but it's also nicer to hear variety, too. I'll probably never win a big composition competition (they're usually judged by composers looking for something shocking and new) but I seem to be appreciated by the performers. The other element that shows itself (in some pieces more than others) is my love of folk music, especially East European, Israeli, and Greek. When I was a child, my parents used to hold weekly folk dance evenings in our basement. They had a large record col-

lection of folk dance music. I was officially "in bed" for the evening, but I used to stay up, standing behind my bedroom door, and just listen. I loved the music. Mixed meters, irregular beat lengths, different scales... I don't know what piece was what, but that music, those sounds, have really stayed with me and made their mark on my music. You can hear it in the 3rd movement of the trumpet concerto, I think.

Thornton: *With a wind ensemble version of the concerto planned and the piano score available, I hope that this piece will find its way into the standard repertoire – it certainly deserves it.*

Bernofsky: Thanks. I've found writing for brass players to be very rewarding; they seem to appreciate my brass chamber music and solo pieces very much...and that is wonderful!



Concerto premiere (piano version), L to R: Elaine Moss, Mary Thornton, Lauren Bernofsky

For a complete works list and more information on the music of Lauren Bernofsky visit:
www.laurenbernofsky.com

About the author: Mary Thornton currently serves on the faculty of Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas. She also performs with the Green Bay Symphony. With Quantum Brass, she took part in Chamber Music American's Rural Residency Program, supported by the National Endowment for the Arts. Thornton holds degrees from Rice University, the Cleveland Institute of Music, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



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