

*Reprints from the*

# International Trumpet Guild® Journal

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## LAUREN BERNOFSKY AND HER MUSE: CONVERSATIONS ON THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF COMPOSING

BY JOHN CAIN

March 2012 • Page 30

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# LAUREN BERNOFSKY AND HER MUSE: CONVERSATIONS ON THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF COMPOSING

BY JOHN CAIN

**T**he name Lauren Bernofsky is familiar to readers of the *ITG Journal*. Lauren's works for brass instruments, particularly her *Trio For Brass*, published in 2009, have been gaining increasing attention. Her *Trumpet Concerto* was the subject of a detailed article in the March 2004 *Journal*. Her composition *Fantasia For Trumpet*, a piece I commissioned, was reviewed in the March 2009 *Journal*.

An accomplished violinist, Lauren has composed more than ninety pieces, ranging from her *Trumpet Concerto*, and *Saltarello* for trumpet and piano, to works for orchestra, violin, solo voice, choir, and strings. Lauren is also a familiar face at the annual ITG conferences. We begin with a discussion of Lauren's musical background, her experiences as a violinist, and her work as a composer.

**Cain:** *Would you tell the readers of the ITG Journal something about yourself and your background?*

**Bernofsky:** I was born in Rochester, Minnesota, and when I was seven, my family moved down to New Orleans (which, incidentally, felt like moving to another country). Shortly thereafter, my mother announced that my sister Susan and I would start violin lessons. I don't remember minding that my instrument had been chosen for me. So, I began studying violin at age seven and loved playing it from the very beginning. With a sister at the same technical level, I always had someone to play duets with, and we did this a fair amount, sometimes performing publicly. I practiced hard, even as a young kid, made reasonable progress, and when I was a junior in high school, I entered the local arts high school, The New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts (NOCCA). This school was a critical turning point for me, because it opened up a whole world that I hadn't even known existed, most notably the idea that I, too, could compose (I had played other people's music for years, but it had never dawned on me that I might be able to actually write music myself). I feel indebted to my music theory teacher there, Bert Braud, for putting me into his composition class. I can't say that writing my own music would have ever occurred to me, otherwise. As a kid growing up in New Orleans, I didn't have a whole lot of opportunities to play in chamber groups or a good youth orchestra, so I focused on solo playing.

While at NOCCA I also began piano lessons and I really enjoyed playing the piano, so much so that my mother once asked, "What is your major, anyway?" Not that I was all that advanced on piano at the time, but I was spending a lot of time with it because I suppose I was fascinated by it. I also did some conducting and some private jazz lessons with Ellis Marsalis (how lucky I was to have had *that* opportunity!). Unfortunately, I stopped the jazz after about four sessions, because it was simply too much to juggle with the violin, composing, piano, and conducting. But to this day I regret not having done more with it then. I have revisited this past just a bit, since, having arranged Ellis's lovely piano piece *The Fourth Autumn* for trumpet and strings.

**Cain:** *Who were your early musical influences and what did you respond to in their music?*

**Bernofsky:** I have a few musical memories dating back to my early childhood (say, ages 3 – 6). I remember hearing the second movement of Beethoven's 7<sup>th</sup> playing on my parents' record player, and I still love that movement to this day. My parents also played recordings of a lot of American folk music (Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan). Folk music in general played an important part in my musical development—my parents would sometimes take out their concertina and guitar and play from international folk music books (my favorite book of tunes was from Russia). I also heard, and especially loved, the international folk dance music that would filter up from our basement when my parents held folk dance evenings at the house. I would stay up, ear to my bedroom door, listening to the music, which I know has colored my musical language today, since I often use modal harmonies, write melodies that hover around the same few (close) notes, and use mixed meters in a dance-like way.

**Cain:** *Are there any careers other than music that you were interested in when you were in high school and college?*

**Bernofsky:** Well, no. I couldn't imagine myself doing anything else. I should say, though, the day I brought my violin to school with me (as a sophomore), to audition for NOCCA, I also brought my art portfolio. But that same day I decided not to audition for the art program; I had invested so much more in my musical studies by that point that it seemed like a more sensible choice. I've never regretted my choice, however.

**Cain:** *How many instruments do you play? Have you ever played a brass instrument? Are you a singer?*

**Bernofsky:** I like the question, am I a singer. To get back to your first question, though, I only play the violin and a bit of piano (badly). But I do use piano a lot when I compose even if I can't play it rhythmically and with the articulations I intend for the piece; I use the piano as a tool to make all the notes sound, and I sort out the rest in my head.

Interestingly, I've never even touched a brass instrument! I've learned everything I know by listening to performances, masterclasses (which are even more helpful), talking with players, and of course hearing my music played by brass players. I'm actually glad that I don't play them at all, because I play enough piano to feel intimidated, trying to write a harder piano piece than I can play myself. With brass, I have no such baggage.

I'm starting to do a bit of singing, in an unusually good church choir, and I find it great fun and excellent for my musicianship. People sometimes look down on singers, but they're missing out on an invaluable resource—the voice is the most natural instrument, unaffected by the various technical limitations of instruments. When I play, compose, or coach others, I always think back to how a good singer would sing the passage. I won't go very deeply into violin technique here, but I've noticed something that I've come to term "violin musicality." It's all the things that violinists do because it's convenient on violin, but which don't actually support the musical effect. Because I've heard so many different instruments, and singers, I think that I have a good ability to get down to the real musical meaning in a passage and know how to best bring it out. I realize I'm answering more than you asked, but I'm adding it here because it's very important to me.

**Cain:** *What do you like to do when you're not making music?*

**Bernofsky:** I have to think *very* hard about this—surely there's something I like to do, when not making music... Okay, spending time with my husband and kids, and dear friends. I also like to read and watch (non-Disney princess) movies, but I never seem to have much time for either of those.

**Cain:** *When it comes to composing music, a lot of inspiration is required. What do you think inspires you most when you compose your pieces?*

**Bernofsky:** Thinking about the person—or group—I'm writing for (their instrument, personality, technical level, tastes) always serves as inspiration for me. When I start to compose, I am hearing in my head the sound of the particular instrument or ensemble I'm writing for as I imagine the music. And I even imagine the person (or group) playing it.

Often there's a specific occasion or purpose for a piece. One of my favorite such "occasional" pieces is *The Castle-Builder*, for alto, cornet, and piano. The inspiration for this piece was a baby shower announcement! Some friends, trumpeter Dan Gianola-Norris and his wife Aja, a singer, were expecting their first child. These two are some of the nicest, warmest people I've ever encountered (on top of being beautiful musicians), and I imagined their sounds and personalities the whole time as I wrote their piece, which made the music come to me very naturally.

**Cain:** *Would you say that you do a lot of experimentation while creating music?*

**Bernofsky:** I certainly don't think about trying to be experimental, I just focus on how I'd like the music to sound. And I think most people would agree that my music is fairly conservative. I'm definitely not out to forge new territory, at least consciously. If it's innovative in some ways, great. But I'm mainly out to write something that's fun to play and sounds good (probably not very deep, but that's really the basis behind my creative motivation.)

**Cain:** *How would you describe the importance of Auditory Imagery in the composition process?*

**Bernofsky:** Well, in *my* compositional process at least, it's the single most important aspect of my composing—it's my source, my muse, if you will. Almost all of my material comes from music that "just came into my head." I do use my crafts-

manship to put it all together into a cohesive (and hopefully attractive) whole. But this is where it all starts, every time.

**Cain:** *Tell us about your collaborations with other musicians and how they have influenced your music?*

**Bernofsky:** I can't say that collaborations with others have made a mark on my musical language, but it has certainly influenced, and very greatly, how I write for specific instruments. Anyone who has played my music, and told me about it, has probably gotten a question from me about how it was to play—idiomatic? ...awkward? ...not enough time to breathe? ...too much of the same texture? I'm always looking for feedback from players, especially criticism(!), because that's the best way to improve my writing for particular instruments. A great example of how my writing has been influenced by a

player was a meeting with trumpeter Gary Peterson, who was at the time a classmate at Boston University (and is now principal trumpet with the Bergen Philharmonic). He had agreed to go over what I'd written so far of my trumpet concerto. The first thing he did after pulling out his trumpet was tune. I was always sitting in the violin section of the orchestra, so I never had the

occasion to see a trumpet player tuning. He pulled out his tuning slide, and the pitch changed. "Wait a minute," I said, "what did you just do?" He explained it. And as he did, I got the idea to write a glissando into my piece. He very carefully spelled out details like how far the gliss could go, how much time he'd need to get the hand back in place, etc. By the end of our discussion, I had a trill where the upper note would gradually flatten until it was the same as the lower note, so you now had a series of repeated notes. I ended up using this at the end of the third movement cadenza. Thanks, Gary!

I know this will make for a really long answer, but I love the story behind my solo trumpet piece, *Fantasia* (which was commissioned by you, of course). It all started with a request from you to buy a copy of my solo violin piece, *Song of the Phoenix*. This piece, in my opinion, is totally wrong for trumpet—it's like a catalog of what's not possible on trumpet (leaps all over the place, several lines of 64th notes with no place to breathe, two-note sonorities, you name it). I told you I wouldn't sell it to you, on account that you wouldn't be able to play it. But you were adamant about wanting the music. Finally, after receiving your most compelling Email message entitled "Top Ten Reasons Why Lauren Should Sell Me Her Violin Piece," I decided to let you have it, but at the following price: a recording of you reading through it for the first time. I sent you a PDF. And guess what came via FedEx three days later? I couldn't believe it (on several levels)! Even though, yes, some bits of the piece were clearly unplayable on trumpet, there were many passages that, to my surprise, were. This opened up a lot of possibilities for me with regard to what I could write for trumpet. From there, our discussions brought forth the commission to write *Fantasia*, and I used my newfound knowledge to write a piece that was quite far-reaching, technically.

**Cain:** *How does your experience as a violinist inform your work as a composer of music for brass players?*

**Bernofsky:** Great question! First of all, violinists are lucky to have a huge repertoire of great works. I have played so much very fine music, from the Bach unaccompanied sonatas to the Beethoven *Violin Concerto* (not to rub it in, trumpet players,

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**"When I play, compose, or coach others, I always think back to how a good singer would sing the passage."**

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Lauren Bernofsky

but you know what I mean). So I have been able to get very close to a lot of excellent music, and I consider these experiences to be my best composition teacher. And of course there's a great wealth of chamber music written for strings, too. I have had the privilege of playing, for instance, Beethoven string quartets. I don't have to waste any ink here explaining why these are such great music, so I'll move on to say that, when I wrote my multi-movement *Trio for Brass*, I used Beethoven as my model: for melodic inventiveness, impeccable craftsmanship with regard to form, voice-leading, clarity of the harmonies, and each part being a good line unto itself. And hopefully mine, too, would inspire joy in the music making from the players. It's a pretty tall order, of course, but that's how I make life difficult for myself.

On a more nuts-and-bolts level, it's taken me a while to overcome writing violin bowings into my brass music. Brass players, I've found, are not particularly fond of bowings. So I went from writing bowings to writing piano slurs, but now I think I've finally come 'round to writing brass slurs. I hope! But at least, going back to the previous question—I always have a brass player check it out first.

It's been said about my music that, playing it, you can tell that it wasn't written by a brass player. And it will probably

“...I believe in  
my music...”

never sound that way. But that's fine with me—as long as it's playable, I'm happy to sound different.

**Cain:** *If there is such a thing, what is a “typical” day of composing like for you?*

**Bernofsky:** First off, I should say that I only compose regularly when I am working on a piece (sometimes I will go as long as a month between composition projects). So, when I am writing something, I typically sit down to write (this is weekdays, when my kids are in school) for an hour or so in the morning, and then again late at night, for another hour or two. Other times I compose are, well, on and off all day! Driving, doing laundry, taking a walk, my mind is usually still at work, playing the music I've written so far over and over. I often come up with ideas for what to do next at the least convenient times.

An example of an inconvenient time would be driving in traffic. And, after all these years, I still don't think to bring ledger paper with me, so I'm always scrawling out staff lines on the back of receipts and such. But I guess this proves how big a part my subconscious plays in my composing: my mind is still working on it, even if I don't want to be... This often leaves me very distracted/exhausted, because, in a way, I don't get a break.

**Cain:** *How satisfying has your journey as a composer been?*

**Bernofsky:** Like other classical musicians, I sure didn't go into it for the money, but my life as a composer has been incredibly gratifying, and that's why I keep at it against the many obstacles. Sometimes the question does surface, “Why do I keep losing money going to trumpet conventions, traveling to performances, and spending so much time writing and publicizing my music with so little financial gain?” It's because I believe in my music,

and I've heard from enough people who have been touched by my music that I will always keep at it.

I once got an Email out-of-the-blue from a choral director in Australia, telling me how much she loved my choral piece, *The Tiger*, and how she looked forward to “taming the tiger” with her choir. Or the trombonist I once met at a convention whose eyes widened when she saw my nametag—she pointed

at me and said, “*You* wrote an amazing piece!” (referring to *Devil's Dermish*, which she'd recently performed). Maybe I'm deluding myself here, but I do believe that I can touch other people in a positive way and make their lives just a little better. I

once came upon a video online of a piece of mine for narrator and string orchestra, performed in Spain, with the narrator's part translated into Spanish. It was a humorous piece, and I could hear the audience laughing during the performance. Hey, if I can make people's days just a little bit better, even if for a few minutes, that has to be worth something, right? And so I persevere...

**Cain:** *How do you think music helps in balancing the mind and life?*

**Bernofsky:** I don't know, really. I mean, do you think of me as a particularly balanced person? I think I'm a pretty pointy-headed composer. I identify so closely with being a composer, I

see just about everything through that “filter.” I do think that a whole lot of life can be reflected in music, of course, and I experience many emotions through music. And I suppose I often take comfort from music. So, in that sense, music has helped me get through life.

**Cain:** *Do you have some new projects in mind? What’s next for you?*

**Bernofsky:** Whew, an easier question. I was recently commissioned to write a children’s musical based on the creation story, or, more accurately, stories—it’s for the local Unitarian Universalist Church. More like, the creation “suggestions.” I appreciate the acknowledgement of a plurality of viewpoints that is at the heart of Unitarian beliefs. I love children’s voices, and it looks to be a really fun project. My one request to the librettist was to write me in some frogs. Can you picture a chorus of little kids randomly going, “glurp?”

I also have a commission to write a piece for a middle school string orchestra, one that highlights the various sections of the orchestra. I think I’ll go for a sort of a concerto grosso form for this. Finally, one of my publishers (FJH) has asked for two new string orchestra pieces for next year’s catalog, one being a Grade 1 (very easy) and the other whatever else I like. Maybe a good idea will hit me one of these days. As I drive into a tunnel...

**Cain:** *I understand you have attended several of the annual ITG Conferences. What were some of the highlights of those conferences for you?*

**Bernofsky:** Well, the “high” part of the highlights certainly would be the sound-producing exhibit rooms. Though, I suppose that wouldn’t have counted as a highlight. I guess I’d have to say that my favorite memories are of people coming up to me, introducing themselves, and telling me how much they enjoyed playing one of my pieces. Composing is such a solitary activity, but when I hear that something I wrote has meaning for another person, and maybe even has given them some joy, well, that makes it all worthwhile. I also need to mention the friends I’ve made at these conventions. In fact, at the upcoming ITG conference in Columbus, I’ll join two that I met at earlier conferences, James Stephenson and David Cooper, to present a lecture-recital with Dave performing Jim’s and my music!

**Cain:** *Is there anything else you would like to convey to the readers of this journal?*

**Bernofsky:** There is more to life than the Haydn, Hummel, and Arutunian concertos! That was a public service announcement from your “friendly neighborhood composer.” Seriously, there’s a lot of fine music out there, and I would love to see more players (and teachers) exploring it. And commissioning more of it! You might be surprised at how easy it is to commission a composer, especially with a consortium commission, where several (or many) individuals or organizations each pitch in a little to make up the commission fee.

#### **The Subconscious Creative Process**

Regarding her creative process, Lauren made the following statement in an interview published in the *ITG Journal*: “I try to let my composing come from my subconscious as much as possible.” (Thornton, March 2004, p. 29). When I contacted Lauren in 2008 regarding a violin piece she had composed, we began a fascinating discussion of her subconscious creative process.

At that time, Lauren stated, “As for the 2nd movement of

my trumpet concerto, I said that it was composed largely from my subconscious, which is to say that I recall that movement coming very easily and I didn’t have to go back over things and change them much. It was also a very simple, straightforward ABA form, so not a complicated movement. But the music came to me very easily, and I think of that movement as sounding very ‘inspired’ (maybe other people would think differently, of course).” Additionally, Lauren and I discussed at great length her experience of auditory imagery when she composes. Although Lauren and I typically used the term “streaming audio” to refer to the auditory part of her creative process, the term “auditory imagery” is the term psychologists use to describe this experience. Intons-Peterson (1992, p. 46) presented the following technical definition of auditory imagery: “the introspective persistence of an auditory experience, including one constructed from components drawn from long-term memory, in the absence of direct sensory instigation of that experience.” (In Reisberg, p. 46)

In the psychological literature, the term “auditory imagery” can be traced back at least to the 1930s when the psychologist Carl E. Seashore discussed it in his book *Psychology of Music*. In that book, Seashore stated, “Perhaps the most outstanding mark of the musical mind is auditory imagery, the capacity to hear music in recall, in creative work, and to supplement the actual physical sounds in musical hearing.” (1938; p. 161). Seashore went on to comment that the auditory imagery experiences of composers are “...realistic, concrete, penetrating and serviceable. They have the power to hear music in anticipation and in recall... The mental hearing is frequently regarded as of larger resource(s) and possibilities than the actual hearing. It is certainly resorted to far more frequently than the actual hearing.” (Seashore, 1938; p. 167)

While auditory imagery is a topic of great interest to musicians and composers, it is also of great interest to psychologists who study sensation and perception, particularly those who study auditory imagery. A great deal of contemporary research on auditory imagery has been conducted in the past fifteen years. In their review of the literature on auditory imagery, Brodsky, Henik, Rubinstein and Zorman state that, “...musical images are generated in real time, encode fairly precise information about tempo and pitch, and contain information concerning melodic and harmonic relationships. Hence, musical images possess a sensory quality that is similar to the experience of perceiving.” (2003; p. 602)

Unfortunately, limitations of space will not allow for a more detailed discussion of contemporary research on the auditory cortex and auditory imagery in this article. However, interested readers may contact the author for a representative reference list of contemporary research in this area.

This portion of the interview focuses on Lauren’s experiences of auditory imagery.

**Cain:** *When did you first begin composing of any kind?*

**Bernofsky:** My first time composing was at age 15. I was a violin major at the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts, and our theory teacher was also a composer. He took the students who’d learned all their intervals and put us in a composition class. At first I didn’t take composing seriously, because I assumed that this is something that *composers* do, but the teacher started to really encourage me.

**Cain:** *When did you first experience the “streaming audio” process?*





Lauren Bernofsky

**Bernofsky:** Unfortunately, I can't remember how old I was, but I can tell you that the first time I composed a piece without the "starting point" of a pre-selected pitch group was when I was 17. But I can't recall how exactly the music came to me. I did work at the piano, however. The first experience I can vividly remember of what would be considered "streaming audio" happened when I was about to begin my junior year of college, so that would have been age 19. I was home for the summer at my parents' house, and I was lying in bed one night trying to fall asleep. I'd been planning to write a piece for my bassoonist roommate, and, not even trying, I suddenly heard in my head about four measures of music for bassoon of what I would later use as the beginning of my *Nightscape*, for bassoon and chamber orchestra. This would have been the first time I effortlessly "received" music, and because it was so effortless, I didn't value it enough to consider it worthy material for the basis of the piece. But I did think enough of the tune to immediately write it down on a scrap of staff paper. I purposely left the sketch on a book table in the house when it was time to leave. I hadn't realized what I do now, which is that very often the music that comes to me the most effortlessly is my best material! Anyway, my mother found it and mailed it to me. Now that the sketch had been somehow "validated" by being sent cross-country, I took another look, and decided it was worthy of being used as the theme for my piece.

I would describe that experience as being moderately vivid—the pitches and rhythms were vivid, and the music came to me in something roughly resembling a bassoon sound. The more intimately familiar I am with an instrument I write for, the more vivid the experience. At the time, I don't think I was surprised, alarmed, or feeling that anything special was

happening. I just suddenly heard a tune, and that was that.

**Cain:** Did the "streaming audio" experience continue to occur while you had trouble getting to sleep?

**Bernofsky:** The streaming audio was an effect of my being awake/alert while thinking about my intention to write the bassoon piece. Yes, I was at home, but my insomnia was completely school-related. Allow me to explain: from my first days on campus, I had trouble sleeping. Though the students at Hartt were, for the most part, interested in being students, the school is housed on the campus of the University of Hartford, which was populated, for the most part, by students who, to use the words of one of them, "came here to party. And you're not going to stop me." This was the rule, not the exception. I had to try to fall asleep every night to the throbbing of rock music bass lines, and I came to associate bedtime with anger, frustration, agitation... anything but the state of mind necessary for falling asleep.

To get back to your question, sometimes I will get up out of bed to jot something down, so I guess that this is indeed one of the times that I experience the streaming audio.

**Cain:** I wondered if it is important for you to feel relaxed before you can start composing?

**Bernofsky:** I'm usually not very relaxed when I compose—I'm usually in a sort of energized state when things are going well. If no good material is coming I just stop and try again the

**"If no good material is coming I just stop and try again the next day..."**

next day—I can't "make" the music come. Sometimes I even come up with material while there are other, audible, distractions going on. I managed to write a little cello ensemble piece, *Dinosaur Damage*, while my seven-year-old was in the

room asking me what I was doing, making noise, etc. The piece was just coming to me, so I didn't want to stop and go somewhere else.

**Cain:** Related to that, do you feel you work best at composing when you are in a particular mood, or feeling a particular emotion?

**Bernofsky:** I don't think I'm very conscious of what sort of mood I'm in—I just feel the need to get the piece written... I like to be done with things! I don't really enjoy the process of composing itself. I don't have time to evaluate what sort of mood I need to be in to compose the best—I have such limited time, I just grab what I can and see how much I can get done. So, for me composing isn't a leisurely and self-reflective process, but more of a craftsman-like endeavor. Yes, there's inspiration involved, but that's not what I'm consciously concerned with... I assume that my compositions express various emotions, but I can't describe it very well in words.

**Cain:** When composing, do you work directly from the beginning

to the end, or do you cycle among different sections of the composition?

**Bernofsky:** I definitely work from beginning to end, though very often the ending gesture of the piece will come to me a lot earlier. I jot it down and get back to where I was working, which would be from the beginning. Major revising usually doesn't improve my music much, though I certainly go over things very carefully, and many times, making small changes.

**Cain:** *Does composing become stressful as you are working on a composition?*

**Bernofsky:** Some pieces are a breeze to write. More lengthy and complicated pieces are much harder work for me, and I often run up against several "walls" during the course of the work meaning that I'll get to a place where I hit a "bump" and suddenly have trouble proceeding. Then I get frustrated—I'd been making such good progress, and now I get to a hurdle that might take a few days to get over. When I get agitated and I realize that I'm not producing anything good, I stop and come back to it in a day or two. Now that I realize that my best music is the music that comes easily and naturally, I will stop if the music isn't coming to me fairly immediately.

**Cain:** *Do you feel most comfortable composing in a particular place?*

**Bernofsky:** I definitely like privacy—so my favorite place to compose is at my electronic keyboard, with headphones or when no one else is home. I used to write whole pieces and then put them into my computer (I use Finale music notation software). Then I started putting that day's work in... and now I sometimes compose directly into the computer. But my starting point is always pencil and paper. I especially like the fact that I can see what I erased because I often decide that the original was better, anyway.

**Cain:** *Do you compose music every day?*

**Bernofsky:** My composing is usually in spells—I might write for a few weeks, and then spend a month or so on other things.

**Cain:** *How does having a time deadline affect the freedom of your creative thinking process?*

**Bernofsky:** Actually, having a deadline usually helps me, because I don't have any time to linger and question what I just did. I wrote the piece for the Dalai Lama in just five days (I'd been told about the competition just one week before the deadline). Of course, I've never had to write a truly intricate and lengthy piece for a deadline and I don't think I could produce one in a short amount of time, if needed anyway. I did write a ballet score for a deadline, but I had something like a year to write the piece.

**Cain:** *How vivid is the auditory "streaming" experience for you?*

**Bernofsky:** Interesting question. It differs—sometimes in the case of simpler orchestrations like one or two parts I will hear the exact notes. Other times I will hear some exact notes and some more general gestures. Still others, it's pretty vague, being just a gestural thing. Usually the rhythm is exact, but not always the pitches.

**Cain:** *Are you completely alert and aware of other things while the "streaming" process is occurring?*

**Bernofsky:** Yes, I'd say I am. And it's usually in spite of all the other things going on around me that I try to write down

the music. I certainly hear a soundtrack of all sorts of noises around me!

**Cain:** *Did any of your composition instructors/professors ever give you any tips on how to access your unconscious while composing?*

**Bernofsky:** No, there was never any reference to this...they stressed the conscious working-out of motives, forms, ideas, etc. My whole composition and theory training focused on an analysis of what was on the page, with the explicit assumption that the composer consciously intended it all. Of course, this is exactly how some of the modern composers I had to study wrote their pieces.

**Cain:** *Are you ever so immersed in the process of composing that you literally lose track of time?*

**Bernofsky:** I do sometimes lose sense of time, when the music is coming to me very fluently for a more sustained period of time.

**Cain:** *I was also wondering about your memory and the "streaming audio" experience. Is it a fleeting thing, or does it register in your memory so you can write down the exact music you heard later?*

**Bernofsky:** Usually my "streaming" snatches of music are not more than a measure or two. Then, after I write it down (fairly immediately, because I won't remember it otherwise), I read through what I just wrote down, and hopefully the next bar or two streams in. And so forth. If I don't write it down fairly immediately, it will probably be gone within a few minutes. However, the opening motive of the Martin Luther King song I actually "heard" one day, and I liked it enough to hold on to it for a few days before I could get to writing the rest of the piece. So I might remember an important opening motive longer, but certainly not the worked-out details of a piece. I certainly couldn't compose a whole piece in my head and then write it down, as much as I'd like to say I could!

**Cain:** *Are there any particular stimuli that trigger the "streaming audio" experience that you described?*

**Bernofsky:** Yes... the knowledge of what my assignment is for that particular piece becomes very important. For example, when I know that I have to write a piece for a certain instrument I think about the difficulty level and any other considerations,

I might spontaneously get some music streaming in, just thinking about the fact that I will be writing the piece. Once, when I was looking for a poem to set for a choral piece, I read through the Longfellow poem *Snow-Flakes* and immediately started hearing what was to be the opening motive of the piece I would write using that text. I don't think I've ever

heard a melody come to me just on its own, not attached to a player or purpose.

**Cain:** *Can you hear music in all keys?*

**Bernofsky:** I'm not firmly wedded to any particular pitch level...keys, if you prefer. So, if I hear something, I might write it down starting on a D. Or maybe a B-flat, etc. I have absolute pitch for recognizing notes played by others, but when it comes to my own hearing, I don't automatically have as accurate a notion of what a B-flat sounds like in my head. Though I will always write a melody down in a key (or range) that's good for the instrument I'm writing for.

So if I'm writing for beginning string players, I would write

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*"I don't think I've ever heard  
a melody come to me just  
on its own, not attached to  
a player or purpose."*

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## WORKS WITH TRUMPET BY LAUREN BERNOFSKY

Passacaglia (1990) for brass quintet or brass ensemble  
Suite for Brass Quintet (1993)  
Saltarello (1994) for trumpet and piano  
Of Molluscs (1995) for mezzo-soprano and trumpet  
(arranged.)  
The Duxbury Fanfare (1997) for brass quintet  
Trumpet Concerto (1998) for trumpet and orchestra or  
piano

Fanfare (2001) for elementary brass quintet  
Musica Solaris (2001) for brass quintet  
Trio for Brass (2002) for trumpet, French horn, and  
trombone  
The Castle-Builder (2007) for alto, cornet, and piano  
Dona Nobis Pacem (2008) for two trumpets  
Fantasia (2008) for solo trumpet

down a tune in D major and I'd probably hear it in what I think is D major, hearing the different color of the open strings on certain notes that I know would be played on open strings. But my inner hearing might be a little sharp or flat to my piano, even though I'm still hearing what the color of each note would be, say a note that would be played on the lowest string of an instrument I would hear as darker.

**Cain:** *Can you hear chords?*

**Bernofsky:** My chordal hearing, I'm sorry to say, is pretty limited to the basic tonal "colors" of major, minor, augmented, diminished, and seventh chords. I can usually also hear an added sixth. But beyond that, I depend on the piano.

**Cain:** *How long can you sustain the sequence you described of "streaming" one or two measures of music, writing it down, reviewing it, and then "streaming" one or two more measures?*

**Bernofsky:** I only get a few measures at a time. Then I write them down. If things go well, I'll "play" through what I just wrote in my head, and then "hear" a few more bars. This process might work for half a page of music or longer, if it's a simple tune like the Martin Luther King piece I wrote. If it's a more complicated piece, say, a brass trio, that method might only work for one measure or a line or so of music, and not with all the details of all parts. In terms of time, this process would only last a few minutes. Then I'd step back and take a more comprehensive look at the piece in its entirety.

I was thinking about the "streaming audio" issue today, and it occurred to me that I haven't been very specific about what I hear, and the amount of detail that I hear. In case it's helpful, my streaming audio is akin to when I have someone else's piece "stuck in my head." So, if you were to imagine, say, *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* in your head, this might be akin to the way I hear. It's just that, when I compose, the music hadn't been written yet.

**Cain:** *Would you experience the "streaming audio" if I were to present you with a picture of a musical instrument and ask you to compose something for that instrument?*

**Bernofsky:** No, but I would chuckle a bit. How about an inkblot in the shape of a viola?

**Cain:** *You are obviously very familiar with the trumpet, so is the "streaming audio" experience very vivid for a trumpet composition, but less vivid for a bassoon, or piccolo composition, for example?*

**Bernofsky:** Yes, I would say so.

**Cain:** *You seem to have a lot of respect and appreciation for the role of the subconscious, even beyond the "streaming audio." Is that something you were aware of at age nineteen? Or did you learn about it/observe it over time since then?*

**Bernofsky:** Only after many years have I been able to take a step back and realize the role that my subconscious plays in my

composing. Indeed, the subconscious was never addressed during any of my composition training. I just worked at my composing like I worked at anything else, and it was certainly hard work.

In conclusion, Lauren Bernofsky's experiences with auditory imagery are clearly an integral aspect of her creative process. She has described these experiences eloquently and in great detail. Lauren's creative process epitomizes the complex use of auditory imagery in her compositional work. The proof of the effectiveness of this process can be seen in the rising popularity of Lauren's music.

*About the Author:* John Cain is a licensed psychologist and is an instructor of psychology at Durham Technical Community College in Durham, North Carolina. He plays trumpet in the Durham Tech "Techtonics," a faculty-staff "Oldies" band that performs at the Community College. He also plays trumpet in a small orchestra at the church he attends. In addition to trumpet playing and the study of auditory imagery, his interests are beekeeping, exemplary teaching practices, human sensory processing, organizational consulting, and the assessment and treatment of music performance anxiety. For additional information on contemporary research on auditory imagery, he can be contacted via Email ([cainj@durhamtech.edu](mailto:cainj@durhamtech.edu)).

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For additional information on Lauren and her compositions, see her web site (<http://www.laurenbernofsky.com>).







# Fantasia

for solo trumpet

*commissioned by John W. Cain*

TRUMPET in B $\flat$  or C

Lauren Bernofsky

[www.laurenbernofsky.com](http://www.laurenbernofsky.com)

Allegro  $\text{♩} = 104$

4

*f*

*mf* *cresc.*

7 Rit. ----- ( $\text{♩} = 76$ ) Poco meno mosso  $\text{♩} = 92$

*f* *mp*

10

12

14 *cresc.* ----- *mf* *mp* *mf*

16 *cresc.* *f* *mf*

Note: Grace notes are to be played before the beat.

18 Rit. ----- 'A Tempo (♩ = 92)

*mf*

22

28 Poco piu mosso ♩ = 132 //

*mp*

32

36

*mf*

40

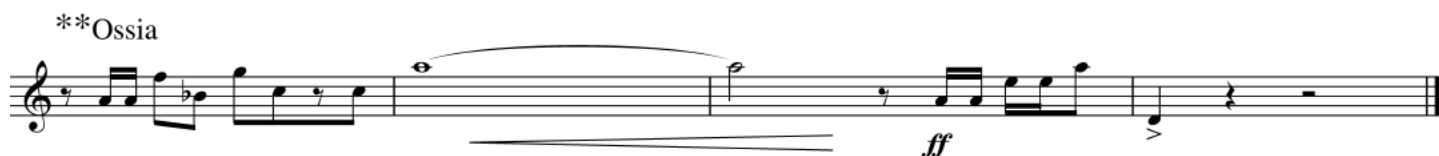
*f* *mf*

44

*p* *cresc.*

48 Tempo I (♩ = 104)

*f*



\* Optional slur -----

To download a printable PDF file of this supplement, go to  
<http://www.trumpetguild.org/journal/journal.htm>  
 (then click on the Bernofsky Supplement)

To hear recordings of this piece (including one of the composer playing it on violin!),  
 or to upload your own recording or comments, visit the Fantasia Audio Blog  
 (<http://www.laurenbernofsky.com/signup.php>). A free signup is required.