



Aesthetic and Interpretive Approaches in French Music for Saxophone. Robert Planel – Prelude et Saltarella

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ABSTRACT

Although he knows the saxophone thanks to the leadership of the orchestra, P. Boulez won't write for sax players because the instrument evokes too much *variety* and jazz, and at the Conservatory he will not be close to the sax players of the "marginal" class (to use his words) of Professor M. Mule. However, the Paris Conservatoire is an undeniable cradle of composition in terms of works including the saxophone. The number of composers who liked this instrument, students in the classes of Nadia Boulanger, mainly, but also of Olivier Messiaen, Darius Milhaud, Paul Dukas and Andre Jolivet, is impressive, so it is clear how important their influence is and the number of works dedicated to saxophone.

Keywords: saxophone, Conservatory, Paris, works, composition

INTRODUCTION

The neoclassical music of the group "of six" becomes a French language, which is also agreed by the academic composers, who have studied at the Paris Conservatoire. In the movement created by them we find groups and independent composers like Jean Francaix, Jacques Ibert, Jean Rivier, Georges Migot, all attached to a certain French tradition. Concerts are held at Triton, a venue for the broadcast of contemporary music, where Darius Milhaud, Henri Tomasi, Jean Rivier, etc. can be listened. In parallel with these trends, there are opinions that support a music that is more accessible, such as Paul Bonneau or Manuel Rosenthal [1].

The School of Arcueil is formed around Erik Satie expressing a music "of simplicity", mainly through Henri Sauguet. Another group, *The School in Paris*, is represented by Parisian composers of foreign origin, such as the Romanian Marcel Mihalovici. The group "Young France" manifests a new "musical humanism" in front of the easiness "of the six" and the Schoenbergian abstraction, especially through Andre Jolivet and the brilliant Olivier Messiaen, with a colourful and rhythmic language. The latter will not write for saxophone, considering it a symbol of "paganism", instrument of the warm and sensual nights of the cabarets [2].

REPERTORY REFERENCES FOR SAXOPHONE

Sonatina (1948) for alto saxophone and piano by Claude Pascal (born in 1921) was written for Marcel Mule. It is a graceful and elegant play, composed of one part. Thanks to an absolutely

classic writing, harmony and melodic line close to Maurice Ravel's, Pascal is part of a tradition in the French-style.

The *15 studies* for alto saxophone and piano written by Charles Koechlin in 1943 will be performed publicly only in 1962 by Jean-Marie Londeix. Designed to provide the performer with the musicality necessary to approach symphonic pages, these studies reveal a refined musicality, full of grace and sensitivity. Neither hollow, nor austere, musicality always requires a search for soundness [3].

Fantaisie-Improptu (1953) by Andre Jolivet (1905-1974) is a short play for alto saxophone and piano. After the beginning that introduces us to a familiar delightful universe, there follows a second nonconformist part, "in French style", which evokes jazz music, syncopated, articulated and spectacular.

Prelude, Cadence et Finale by Alfred Desenclos (1912-1971) is a success of the sonata genre, written for the Paris Conservatoire contest in 1956 and dedicated to Marcel Mule. One can notice the perfect mastery in terms of style, close to Cesar Franck, the harmonic abundance, a very neat melodic element and accentuation. A very dense cadence in virtuosity is assigned first to the saxophone, then to the piano, announcing an end either declaimed or meditative.

Considered as his master, Arthur Honegger, a composer of hope, the visionary Pierre-Philippe Bauzin proposes a complex and generous *Sonata* (1959), in four parts, for alto saxophone and piano. Improvised by its author for each performance, the piano part was not written and edited until very recently. Dedicated to Jean-Marie Londeix and performed in public for the first time in 1960, it is an extremely imaginative work, although with a traditional writing that requires the maximum involvement of the performers.

The *5 exotic dances* (1962) for alto saxophone and piano (there are also 8 dances for a small ensemble with saxophone) by Jean Francaix are dedicated to Mule. Humorous and malicious, these plays require musicians to play in complex rhythmic, in a clear tone, on a refined, lively and very personal harmony.

Sonatine bucolique (1964) for saxophone and piano by Henri Sauguet (1901-1989) is dedicated to Jean-Marie Londeix. In a writing in which clarity blends with gravity, both humour and serenity mix. By a measured expression, Sauguet imposes a complicity between the two performers, a relationship with the musical normality and an almost naive bucolic feeling [4]. *Gavambodi 2* (1966) by Jacques Charpentier (born in 1933) is a modern work for alto saxophone and piano, rich in melodic and rhythmic terms, which uses a Hindu way that favours a mystical and spiritual atmosphere. The work is dedicated to Georges Gourdet.

At the request of Daniel Deffayet, the pianist and composer Pierre Sancan (born in 1916) writes *Lamento et rondo* for the Paris Conservatoire competition in 1973, a beautiful sonatina in the French tradition of the first half of the 20th century. Lamento is a wide grievance that evolves into a huge crescendo followed by a rondo, dancing with an effective alternation of couplets-refrains in a 5/8 original measure.

Let's quote *Saxophone marmelade* (1929) by Manuel Rosenthal (1904-1994), a not humourless play and typical for the '20s, written for Jules Viard [5]. Also, a few characteristic short plays: *Aria* (1936) by Eugene Bozza (1905-1991); *Croquembouches* (*Cookies with cream*) (1946) by Claude Delvincourt (1885-1994); the polytonal *Danse* (1954) by Darius Milhaud or the delightful *Caprice en forme de valse* (1950) by Paul Bonneau (1918-1996) for saxophone solo [6].

SUITE POUR SAX ALTO ET PIANO – PAUL BONNEAU

The French composer, Paul Bonneau studied at the Paris Higher National Conservatoire where he was awarded the First Prize for Harmony (1937), while studying at the class of Professor Jean Gallon, the First prize for run (fugue) (1942) at the class of Noël Gallon and First Prize for composition (1945) under the direction of Henri Busser. In 1939 he became deputy director of the French Army Music, then gang master of the Republican Guard, and on November 27, 1944 he got his first appearance at the radio, then 638 “classical” music shows followed, in the next 30 years. In 1959 he formed *the Singers Les Djinn*s vocal group with which he recorded 88 works, accompanied by the Grand Orchestra of Paris. Paul Bonneau also had musical contributions to 51 French films and to a series of *short films*.

The most important works are: *Ouverture pour un Drame*, *Concerto pour saxophone et orchestre*, *Un Francais a New York* (for the orchestra, dedicated to the memory of George Gershwin), *Caprice en forme de valse* for saxophone solo, *Suite pour sax alto et piano*, 11 Ballet plays for Chatelet theatre (Ballet *Le Chanteur de Mexico* Ballet *La Toison d'Or*, Ballet *Mediterranee*, Ballet *Maria-Flora*, Ballet *Rose de Noel*, Ballet *Le Secret de Marco-Polo*, Ballet *Le Prince de Madrid*, *Gipsy* ballet, Ballet *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, Ballet *Volga*) [7].

Suite pour sax alto et piano is a work with a valuable thematic material and a high degree of difficulty, being dedicated by the composer to Marcel Mule, *the father of the classical saxophone*, nicknamed *Paganini of the saxophone*. In our opinion, the music of this work swings between the style of Claude Debussy and Eugene Bozza.

Improvisation

The first part is entitled *Improvisation* and has all the data of this style of interpretation. The form is coherent and folds on the structure: **Introduction – A – B – A' – B – Conclusion**, and the motif α , present since the beginning of the work, sketches the part, highlighting a free character, specific to improvisation, emphasized especially by the indications of movement. (*A volente; En retenant; Modere; Cede; Au mouvt; Cede; Emporte; Tres retenu*) (Ex. 4.1.).

Introducere	A	B	A'	B	Concluzie
	a a _r		a' a _r	diminuat	
m. 1-2	3-4 5-6	7-10	11-13 14-16	17-18	19-21

Fig. 1: The form of the structure

Introduction (m.1-2) describes the main motif α , characterized by an equal rhythmic drawing and a predominantly scalar melody.

Section "A" contains two exposures of the motif α (the first identical to the initial one (from the Introduction), but differentiated by the presence of the tonic-solving accompaniment

Ex. 1: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 1-6

Ex. 2: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 3-4

At first, the presentation of the motif has a certain freedom in interpretation (*A volonté* in the first measure and *En retentant* in the second measure) after which it must be measured precisely to give stability to the musical phrase.

The second exposure has a contrasting character through the indication of movement (*Au mouv^t*), tint, but also at the timber level by addressing the motif α by the accompanying instrument – piano. This motif, which combines with arpeggio figurations, generates an overlap of exceptional and binary divisions.



Ex. 3: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 5-6

Section "B" contains a new motif β with a diversified melodic line through the *legato-staccato* alternation.

The accompaniment plan is ensured by descending chromatic melodic sequences. The principle on which this section is conducted is a sequential one. In this context, we encounter a new sequencing of the motif β at a perfect ascending fifth interval.



Ex. 4: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 9-10

"A" section differs from the first ("A") only at the timber level, the motif α being exposed by the piano, after which articulation "B" is subject to the dimming procedure, represented only by the first motivational exposure, without its sequencing.

The work combines the questions of virtuosity in an efficient way – including those created by the *B flat - E flat* intervals from the super acute register of the first two measures, brought on small temporal units – with the cantability permeated by a perfect lyricism. The above-mentioned intervals are difficult to achieve by the fact that for each note the performer must press two keys with the same finger, which generates uncomfortable positions.

Note "D" of measure 13 time 2 indicates the false position C₂ because the phrase is at the end and the use of the classical position would cross the acute register with the solemn one.

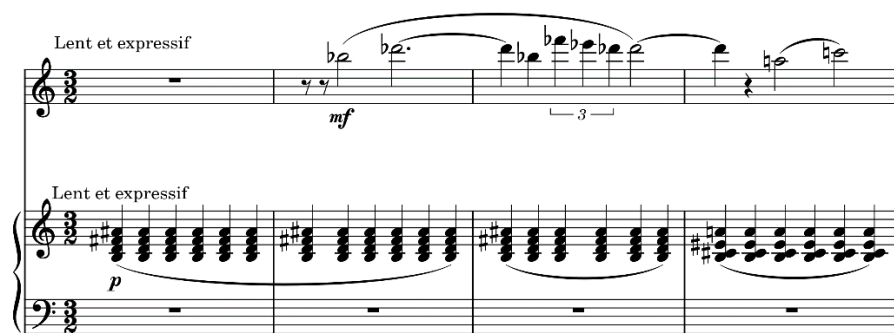
The articulations in the two measures of "B" section are *staccato* in the first part and *detache* towards the end, which must be distinguished very well by the performer, and the fluctuation of tempo in the **Conclusion** is very high, from rare in the first measure to a surprising outburst in *forte* in the last two.

The dynamics of the whole part is vividly coloured and diverse, and due to the oscillating *tempo* and rhythmic formulas, the work fully demands the technique of the soloist. Although we are not facing a very moving *tempo*, the performing problems arise in relation to the trebles that do not avoid any register of saxophone, the equality between registers and modalities of articulation of sound material with regard to the relationship between *legato* and *staccato*. In our opinion it is advisable to maintain the same manner of execution - short, firm and clear.

Another interpretative problem encountered in this part consists both in the interval structure and the difficult positions required by it (m.1-2, 12-13, 18-20), as well as in making a dynamic colouring specific to the French music of the 20th century.

Danse Des Demons

The second part, "Danse des demons", has a cursive (smooth) character that derives from the rhythmic organization, and as the dominant feature presents the thematic imitation, placed under the sign of the canon to four voices. Thus, through imitative *stretto* inputs at large sixth interval, the whole part has an asymmetrical appearance, and the melodic structure has an oscillating trajectory, dominated by small jumps and descending chromatic inserts, all of which outlining the motif α .



Ex. 5: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 1-4

A new canonical episode, which this time contains only partially the motif α (the first two measures), intervenes contrastingly through the acute register of the soloist instrument (m.25), and the path of canonical exposure follows the same pattern in all voices, with the reversal of inputs, from acute to solemn.

The supportive technique of the performer is in great demand between measures 28-32 on the intervals of perfect descending fifth. They are exposed from the medium to the solemn register, the difficulty being that the intervals must be performed in the *legato* formula, without sensing fluctuations of intensity or accents on the base note.

The expression *legato* between the 37-42 measures must be well highlighted, using a constant and present air pressure, which is fully supported by the large nuance in which the musical phrase is performed.

A new canonical approach to the main motif is comprised between measures 48-64 on two operational plans: a rhythmic-melodic *ostinato* in the solemn register plan, respectively, successive canonical exposures.

As the title, "Danse des demons" suggests, the expression to be highlighted by the soloist is a gloomy, heavy, cumbersome, framed by a smoothness and a precise pulsation, even though the *legato* is very often present throughout.



Ex. 6: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 28-31

The end of the part is carried out on the *stretto-canon* pattern, with the representation of the thematic heads in a rare tempo and a low nuance at the beginning, and at the end with a quick burst, perfectly measured and in a very large nuance.

Plainte

The third part, "Plainte" (complaint), has a form of A-B-A tripartite lid and falls under the following scheme:

A		B			A	Concluzie
a	a'	b	b' + retransiție		a + lărgire int.	
m. 1-9	9-15	16-20	21-24	25-29	30-39	40-42

Fig. 2: The form of third part, Plainte

As a distinct peculiarity it has a constant rhythmic, equal pulsation, present in accompaniment, pulsation which introduces an inner state of spiritual solitude.

A motif based on the melodic structure of the motif α (*Improvisation*) from the first part of the work, treated by descending trend sequences and then by rhythmic decrease overlaps this ostinato plan.

Since in these measures the musical discourse is exposed in the acute register and in the *legato* formula, the performer must conduct (support) the air flow very well, without fluctuations of intensity, highlighting a flowing, fluent phrase.



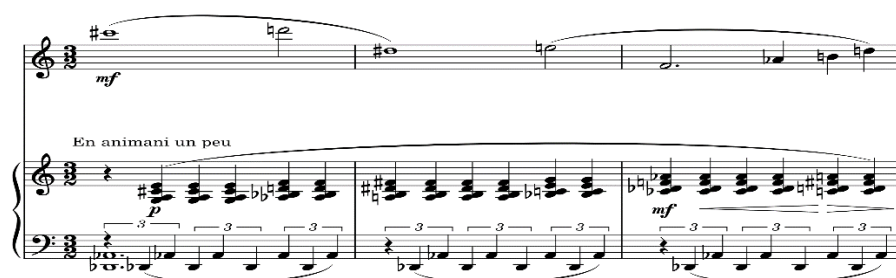
Ex. 7: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 4-7

Interesting is the taking of the motif in the speech of the accompaniment, with a contrast of register (super acute) in parallel octaves, which suggests a state of tension and strain.



Ex. 8: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 10-15

The median B segment intervenes with a harmonic and melodic contrast based on the major-minor polarity.



Ex. 9: Paule Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 16-18

A second contrast is the dynamic-agogic one, present both by intensity, provided in the score – *mf* - and by the indications of movement: *en animant peu a peu, cede, Au mouvt*, all these having a decisive role in the achievement of the expressiveness of this part.

In measure 15 we recommend *C#* note to be performed with the "complete" position, thus avoiding the intertwining of the registers or a possible failure.

By the appearance of the triolets in accompaniment, the ostinato structure knows a destabilization, but also a difficulty of performance. Thus, in the context of the binary-ternary overlapping of the piano, the saxophone imposes a new melodic line, this time fragmented, exposed by large intervallic leaps with an ascending finality of the arpeggio.



Ex. 10: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 18

The connection between the two periods (m. 16-24) makes it the main motif in the score of the piano.

Using the same melodic material, the composer resorts to a retransition to the A-strophe which is diminished in scope by the absence of the double period and contains an inner widening for the purpose of preparing the conclusion.

It is worth mentioning that, melodically, the composer resorted to a *stretto-canon* type processing of the main motif, and that binary ostinato of the accompaniment turns entirely into ternary, by inserting triolets, and even into syncopated parts, by extension (Eg. 10.).

To achieve the flow of the musical discourse in the measures 35-38, the performer will have to resort to the position *F# - TF*, and since the nuance is descending, the last note - *B* will be articulated from the fingers to add clarity, even if it has the indication of *legato* in the score. In this way, any possible sound inaccuracy favoured by the solemn register is reduced significantly.

The musical score is for Paul Bonneau's "Suite pour saxophone alto et piano", measures 30-39. It is written for saxophone alto and piano. The score is in 3/8 time and consists of four systems. The first system (measures 30-32) is marked "Au mouv" and "p". The second system (measures 33-34) is marked "mf". The third system (measures 35-36) is marked "p". The fourth system (measures 37-39) is marked "pp" and "Sans ralentir". The piano part features complex rhythmic patterns with triplets and sixteenth notes. The saxophone part features melodic lines with slurs and ties.

Ex. 11: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 30-39

The conclusion contains an ascending trajectory, with unequal leaps in the first measure, after which, in the last two, the perfect fourth interval is perfectly symmetrical until the end, in the space of the medium-acute register.

Mostly, the technical problems imposed by the part are given by the acute register in which the thematic material is performed and the closely derived positions. An essential thing that the soloist performer must consider is the one related to the colour and the sound spark which will keep its vigour, with a certain ratio to the other sounds arranged in the solemn register, as the melodic line ascends acutely or super acutely, as the case may be. This sound equality, which does not refer to intensities, but to the composition of sound, makes the greatest difference between a good and a mediocre performance, being the main asset of a consecrated saxophonist.



Ex. 12: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 40-42

Espieglerie

As can be seen from the very suggestive title, *Espieglerie*¹, but also from the *vif* composer's indication², the last part of the suite has as a dominant feature the vitality and playful aspect of the melodic motifs, due also to the diverse rhythmicity, of the 2/4 measure, of the included values of small dimensions predominantly towards sixteenth and their combinations. Formally, this part fits the same pattern, specific to the romantic miniature – the A-B-A three stanza form of lied with *Coda*, this confirming the aesthetic affinities of the composer with the classical and romantic style.

A	B	A _v	episod	Coda
a a ₁ a ₁ a ₁ '	b b ₁	a _v a _{1v} a _{1v} '	cadential	
m. 1-14 15-22 23-30 31-38	39-50 51-68	69-80 81-88 89-98	99-103	104-109

The first musical idea (a) supports the programme of the subtitle by inserting the appoggiaturas, in the exposure of octaves, followed by figurations of the arpeggio on exceptional divisions (septet) in the descending trend, with the melodic base of the dominance (D major) of the initial tonality (G minor).



Ex. 13: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 1-8

¹ Mischief – acc. to www.dictio.ro/dictionar-francez-roman

² Bright – idem

The next segment (a_1) imposes a thematic motif α , which will know a repeated approach in the double period (m.23-30) created by the composer.

To achieve playfulness, the articulations in this part will be performed shortly and evenly, even if the register swings between the medium and solemn. This is made more difficult both by the nuance performed in *piano* and by the tense outbursts at the end of the motif, which through its repetition strengthens the bright character.



Ex. 14: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 15-16

The piano accompaniment, as can be seen in the above example, has a downward trajectory, the solemn line being composed of a latent trend (which is not seen but can burst at any time), thus, the double period (a_1) fully supports the previous discourse.

At the end of A period, the performer must follow the equality of sixteenths and the achievement of the *piano* nuance on the last phrase even if there is an ascending trend.

Measure 31 imposes a contrast, but not on a thematic level, by the motivational idea β which is part of the discourse of the previous segment (m.19-20) but on harmonic and melodic plane by tonal contrast with the appearance of the homonym of the major relativism of the initial tonality, *B-flat major*.

The median section B, in the first period, is seconded, in addition to rhythmic freedom, by the composer's indications such as "plus libre" or "doux et harmonieux" which transpose the listener into an enchanting atmosphere of tranquillity and warm harmony.

These experiences become confluent by means of the motivational sequence at small downward second interval, a syncopated motif made up predominantly of contrary leaps of perfect fourth.

Ex. 15: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 43-50

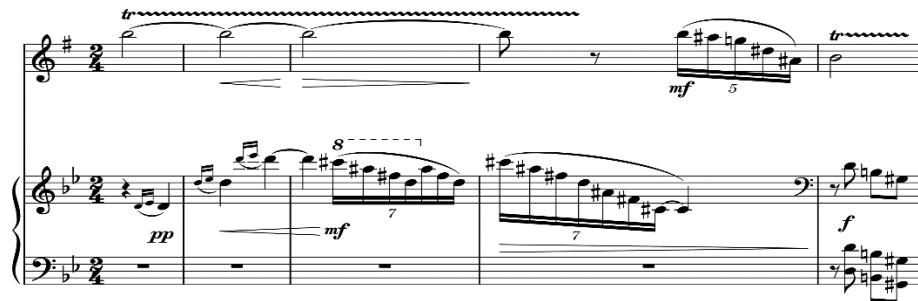
To keep the same register, it is recommended to use the fourth finger of the left hand in addition to the classical position to approach the *C#* note (ms. 50). Depending on the instrument used, other keys can be added - finger 2, 3 or 4 of the right hand, simultaneously or in different combinations – everything remaining at the free choice of the performer, who will aim to preserve the sound consistency.

The next period (*b*₁) brings again that rhythmic exaltation from the first section, having inserted certain rhythmic cells with the same structure, with the major differentiation of tonality, but also through the rhythmic complementarity of the piano score.

Ex. 16: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, m. 51-54

The compositional techniques highlight the timbral colour of the instrument and the technical possibilities of virtuosity of the performer. Thus, throughout the thematic re-exposure, we encounter the *trill* effect at saxophone, oscillating by nuance, which contains, in places, exceptional divisions – quintolet in rhythmic addition to the accompaniment, which will be perfectly integrated without affecting the rhythmic pulsation. Another element not to be overlooked is the fact that the *trill* effect in the saxophone score has a relatively long duration,

6 and a half times. For this reason, a slight hand stiffness may occur, which will certainly lead to inequality. To avoid these problems, *the trill* will have to be studied separately, in formulas of three-eighths, trioleates, sixteenths and sextuplets, from a rare *tempo* to the one requested by the composer.



Ex. 17: Paul Bonneau, „Suite pour saxophone alto et piano”, ms. 72-76

The cadential episode contains motivational inserts, rhythmic and melodic cells with specific features of the β motif. The articulations in these four measures are denoted by a dot, which means that they must be performed in a very short time, tending to the accent due to the large intervals in which the melodic line is conducted.

The coda of this part contains repeated descending chordal figurations, on the component of the chord of dominant or large seventh of the initial tonality in *G minor*.

The final cadence is elliptical by the third, thus creating the possibility of a major-minor polarity.

The nuances are varied, with surprising intensifications and decreases, on small spaces, and the rhythm has many fluctuations, mostly imposed by the composer. (*plus libres, Cedez, Au mouv^t, Pressez*).

The dynamics is specific to the period, but also to the French style, namely those accumulations in *crescendo*, after which a *piano* surprisingly appears, followed again by the *crescendo* that gives the parts a vivid and diverse colouring.

The trebles used are very extensive, from a B in the solemn style to an F in the third octave, the composer managing to exploit all the registers of the saxophone, thus requesting the technique of using the breath and all its peculiarities related to an air pressure depending on the register and the intervals of the melodic line.

Equality will also be pursued from the point of view of rhythm, whose combinations are unique, but the correctness and clarity that the French style demands in performances must also be rendered.

Analysing the articulation, it is found that it includes a very wide palette, all its forms being used, with emphasis on clear and equal performance, throughout the saxophone [9].

CONCLUSIONS

French music is going through an extremely animated period, and the saxophone will be deeply involved in all artistic changes. However, there is the presence of the continuation of the *debussist* spirit through Charle Koechlin, Florent Schmitt and Jean Cras, indifferent to the attraction of success and fashion. In parallel, there is also the spirit of the *crazy* years, with the frivolity of the "Group of the six" that breaks with romance and impressionism. Of these, Darius Milhaud and Arthur Honegger are true promoters of the saxophone. Unfortunately, Francis Poulenc will not write any notes for this instrument.

The didactic purpose of knowing the work *Prelude et Saltarella* is also emphasized in this work. Considering the degree of difficulty, it is addressed to students, but also to teachers who work in vocational education, thus being a good landmark in the development of the saxophone school.

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