

A Performer's Guide to: Leslie Bassett's *Metamorphoses*

General Notes-

American composer Leslie Bassett (1923-2016) was educated at and later taught at the University of Michigan. He studied composition with Nadia Boulanger and Arthur Honegger and won the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1966 for his *Variations for Orchestra*. *Metamorphoses* is Bassett's only solo work for the bassoon, although bassoon is included in his *Wind Music* (flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, bassoon, alto sax) and *Nonet* (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, horn, trombone, tuba, piano). *Metamorphoses* was commissioned by friends, colleagues, and students of L. Hugh Cooper, the longtime professor of bassoon at the University of Michigan. It was premiered in 1991 by Wendy Rose, shortly followed by a performance by Richard Beene. Included in the published edition are fingering and performance suggestions by Mr. Cooper, Dr. Rose, and Mr. Beene.

Each of the eight movements of *Metamorphoses* takes an orchestral excerpt as its inspiration. Rather than quoting or composing a variation, each movement invokes the original source while being an entirely new piece of music. Interestingly, the first three sources are from some of the most well-known orchestral excerpts for the bassoon: Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, and Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 4*. The other five sources are still well-known, just not for their bassoon writing: Beethoven's *Symphonies No. 3, 1, and 8*, Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy*, and Chabrier's *España*.

Throughout the piece, Bassett calls for special fingerings (marked with an asterisk) to achieve a certain color. Possible fingerings are provided at the end of the piece by Cooper, Rose, and Beene.

I. Rite of Spring

The piece begins with a quotation of the bassoon's most recognizable solo. The quotation is not exact, instead of coming to rest on an implied A tonic like the first gesture of the original source, Bassett ends the gesture ambiguously.



Stravinsky's original

Bassett's metamorphosis

This opening phrase establishes two important character traits for this movement: precisely notated rhythms and chromatic upper-neighbor appoggiaturas. Like the original *Rite of Spring*, Bassett's metamorphosis sounds improvisatory and rhythmically free—however, in both the rhythms are precisely notated and should be executed as such.

The chromatic upper-neighbor appoggiatura recurs at multiple places in this movement. Counting fermatas since there aren't bar lines, this gesture appears in the fourth beat of the movement, then right before the fifth fermata, at the fifth fermata, shortly after the sixth fermata, again two beats later, at the eighth fermata and twice more before the caesura at the end of the piece. I interpret it to be a structural gesture in this movement and try to phrase it with a similar stress and release each time. Variety is supplied by the subjective relative dissonance of how the appoggiatura is approached, and objectively by the rhythm notated.

The final gesture of the movement is a variation on this gesture. Instead of the penultimate note, a D-flat, resolving downward to a C as would be expected by the listener, it resolves upward by a major seventh to the C an octave higher. One of my goals for this movement is to make that recurring gesture clear to my listeners and set up the expectation that the final note will follow the pattern. To further develop that, I float the final high C before executing the marked crescendo.

Another important consideration for the performer in this movement is the rhythm. Since the movement is meterless, unaccompanied, and rhythmically varied with plenty of accelerandos and tempo changes, the tendency is to let the rhythm devolve into an amorphic wash. To counteract this, I suggest learning the movement with strict metronome use, without accelerandos, taking care to observe Bassett's printed tempos (or at least the relationship between them if practicing under tempo). Great care must be taken to show the difference between upbeats and downbeats, even without a meter these should be clearly audible to a listener.

For example, the gestures beginning after the fifth fermata:



Especially the three gestures B-flat to G, F-sharp to E, and A-flat to F have the potential to sound identical, however all three are situated on different parts of the beat. The performer should phrase them so that each different rhythm is clearly audible to a listener. The B-flat should lead to the G, which should have an emphasis because it's a downbeat note, then taper. The F-sharp to E should have a lightness to demonstrate that both occur on inner parts of the beat, notice the crescendo begins after the E quarter note (on a downbeat), so the E gains more presence after it arrives on a downbeat. Finally, the A-flat should have more weight than the F, there should be a slight diminuendo gesture inside of the longer crescendo so that the A-flat is clearly a downbeat. This concept can be applied throughout the movement.

At two points in this movement (immediately after the fourth fermata and immediately after the sixth fermata), Bassett uses a feathered beamed accelerando. This twentieth century notation is just an accelerando written out with a beam. To practice this rhythm, I split it into pieces, beginning with a couple quarter notes, then eighths, then sixteenths. I especially practice getting out of the rhythm, defining the B-natural, A-flat, G sixteenths as pickups to the D-flat appoggiatura and practicing them separately, leading to the D-flat. Once all of the individual pieces are together, I string it all together and smooth over the different rhythms.

There is a suggested alternate fingering for the D-natural, third note from the end. Cooper, Rose, and Beene suggest adding the low-D key to the tenor D to achieve a different timbre, and to facilitate playing if very softly. I use this along with shaping the note with a little vibrato to create the illusion that it carries over into the quarter rest as a way of acknowledging the slur that goes from the D-natural to the final high C.

II. Peter and the Wolf

Another familiar excerpt for bassoonists, even if it isn't asked for in auditions as often as frequently as others. Bassett chooses the bassoon's "Grandfather" solo for the metamorphosis. This time only the first two notes are the same as Prokofiev's original. After that, the frequent eighth note, sixteenth rest, sixteenth note rhythms tie the metamorphosis to its source.

Care should be taken throughout the movement to execute all dotted eighth sixteenth rhythms in strict rhythm. They are the prevailing rhythm and should remain angular to contrast the few odd numbered subdivisions that exist in the movement—mostly at climaxes.

The printed tempo for this movement is quarter note equals 98, while the original is usually performed in the high seventies or at about 80 beats per minute. In this way, tempo is part of the metamorphosis and should be prepared with that in mind.

An interesting side effect of Bassett's meterless writing is that he is free to beam groups in whatever way best illustrates his intention. For example, in the seventh beat of the movement, there are six sixteenth notes beamed together. Since at other places in the piece Bassett clearly labels quintuplets and sextuplets, I take this to mean he wants six sixteenth notes at the same subdivision tempo as the rest of the piece. So, I imagine that the G sixteenth note (that's tied over from the previous beat) is a downbeat, and the next downbeat is the C-sharp eighth note. The six sixteenth notes exist in an imaginary 3/8 measure.

He commonly beams eighth notes in wildly different groupings, these are clues from the composer about which notes are important. At the end of the second line of the movement, there is a beamed group of four eighth notes followed by a beamed group of two, then a beamed group of three. This succession of beamed groups occurs in the context of an accelerando. To practice my pacing for this section, I step away from the instrument (in part because the notes in question are tricky). I begin by speaking eighth notes on my favorite neutral syllable at the moment. I practice my syllables in groups of 10, trying to make an accelerando through them that is clear, and evenly paced so that the whole group seems to accelerate, not merely the last three notes. Once I can do that convincingly, I add clapping to the equation to recognize Bassett's beaming. So while speaking ten neutral syllables, I clap on the first, fifth, seventh, and tenth.

This is also a great way to internalize mixed meter passages so that they come across naturally.

At several points in this movement Bassett writes leaping gestures to and from low Bs and B-flats. Pay attention to the difference in relative volume between these two notes and virtually every other note on the instrument. To compensate, the low B and B-flats should be played slightly softer and the higher notes slightly louder.

For example, consider the first four notes of the movement. The B and B-flat will naturally want to be louder than the F-sharp and the A. However, in the first gesture, the F-sharp is the downbeat so it should be slightly louder than the B. I play the B softer and phrase through it to the F-sharp so that it is clearly on a downbeat. The B-flat on the downbeat of the third beat of the movement is accented and should be pretty loud, to prepare for its volume, I also play the A loudly and again, I phrase through it to the B-flat so that to a listener they not only sound like one gesture, but so that the upbeat/downbeat relationship is clear.

The climax of the movement occurs on the high D-flat in the ninth line. It is the highest note of the movement, the loudest marked, and except for the low B-flat and tenor D on the last line it is the longest note (not counting its fermata). This is a troublesome note for a lot of bassoonists, depending on your instrument, bocal, reed, weather (and whether or not there is sneezing kangaroo somewhere in Australia) it could be sharp, flat, bright, dull, or not speak at all. This is a great note for all bassoonists to have a wealth of fingering choices for to combat the many variables that plague it.

The fundamental fingering for high D-flat is LH 1 3 RH 1 3.

You can use the high D key, the high C key, both or neither

You can use the resonance key or not

You can add the B-flat key and pinky A-flat key together

You can add the low E key (this is my favorite for playing the note softly and flatly, although Heckel considers it the primary fingering)

That's a lot of possibilities. When seeking maximum volume and resonance, as in this case, the fingering combination that works best for me is LH 1 3 RH 1 3 with the high D key and resonance key.

The last gesture of the piece (repeated notes on a triplet and then a long note) also comes from Prokofiev's original (although on F-sharps instead of Ds). It should be played strongly accented and separated like in the original to make the connection as clear as possible.

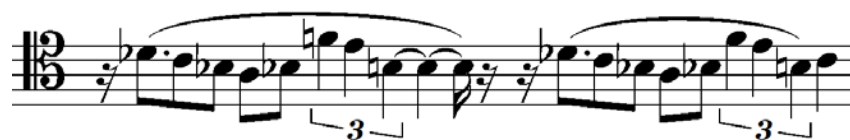
III. Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 4

This movement begins with a quotation from our famous solo at the end of the second movement of Tchaikovsky's fourth symphony. The first six notes of Tchaikovsky's original are included in mostly the same rhythm. The primary difference between the original and the metamorphosis is that the first note, D-flat, is changed from an eighth note to a dotted eighth note. This very slight change actually represents the way that most bassoonists

perform the original, with a slight tenuto on the first note. This is a signal from the composer that I interpret to mean that he has imbedded his own rubato into the music and the bassoonist should strive to be expressive without distorting the printed rhythms.

As with the previous movement, the tempo of this metamorphosis is several clicks faster than the excerpt is often played, and except for one marking “unhurried” on the fifth line, the movement is devoid of changes in tempo. This is similar to Tchaikovsky’s original where the same melody is repeated verbatim throughout the movement, variety is achieved by changing instrumentation. In the case of Bassett’s metamorphosis, only the tempo holds constant while everything else changes.

The very first phrase seems unfinished. There are a lot of tonal implications to the phrase, possible implied tendency tones that lay either ambiguous or unresolved. In Tchaikovsky’s original we have the benefit of string accompaniment to elucidate the harmonic context. In an unaccompanied work, harmony is never clearly stated, only implied. In the original, this statement is in B-flat minor, beginning with a tonic chord under the A-natural, which is an appoggiatura resolving to the B-flat, then after leaping up to the F, the F repeats and falls to a C which is part of an F major chord (V in the key). In the first statement of the Bassett, the first six notes are the same, but instead of repeating the F falls by half step to an E-natural (not part of B-flat minor) then falls to a long B-natural (definitely not part of B-flat minor). When played, it sounds as though the B-natural could resolve upwards to a C, hearing the F-E as a $\hat{4}$ falling to $\hat{3}$. However, this C resolution doesn’t occur, yet.



Bassett's original

Opening phrase with C resolution

While the opening never repeats exactly, there are several places in the movement where that motive returns at a different pitch level. These can easily be found by looking for a descending melodic line in eighth notes beginning on an upbeat. Halfway through the first line, the motive is repeated a half-step higher than the original (beginning on the D-natural), halfway through the second line, the motive appears up another whole step (beginning on the E-natural), and finally in the fourth line the motive reappears beginning on the G, a tritone higher than the original. In each of these cases the intervallic content remains the same: the second pitch is a half-step lower than the first, the third is a whole-step lower than the second, and in most cases the fourth note is a half-step lower than that. This creates a prime form of (0134), this expresses a generic relationship that can be applied to all groups, beginning with a note, moving down a half-step, then a whole-step, then another half-step.

Let's examine the case that doesn't seem to fit this (0134) model: the second occurrence of the opening motive.



The first motive

The second motive

As with Tchaikovsky's original, the first motive of the piece leads to an A-natural which is an appoggiatura to the B-flat minor harmony on beat three that is in Tchaikovsky's original and implied in Bassett's metamorphosis. When the motive is repeated only a brief time later at a higher pitch level, one might expect an exact transposition, in this case the pitches D-natural, C-sharp, B-natural, A-sharp appoggiatura resolving to another B-natural. Obviously, that isn't the case. Beginning on a D natural implies that the phrase is going to lead to the key of B minor (one half-step higher than B-flat minor) but the augmented second between C-sharp and B-flat throws a wrench into his expected course. One possibility suggested by the B-flat is that this phrase will end up in the same place as the first phrase and lead to an A-natural appoggiatura resolving to another B-flat. Again, that's not what happens. Instead Bassett further subverts the listener's expectation leaping up and eventually resolving to an A-natural.



The second motive

The second motive reduced

Once compressed to the same octave and reduced to structural pitches, the second motive more closely resembles the first motive. It still doesn't fit exactly into the same (0134) set as the original (partly because it has an extra unique pitch) but still accomplishes the same goal. It is interesting to note the different role B-flat places in these two excerpts. In the first motive it is the tonic and when it occurs on the upbeat of beat two it's just the resolution of an accented passing tone. In the second motive however it is the implied flat second scale degree, which combined with the raised seventh scale degree (the G-sharp) creates a very strong pull to resolve to the A.

That's rather a lot of theoretical breakdown for two relatively small chunks of a movement. However, this is the type of thinking, exploring the relationships between notes and what they imply, that creates a guide for the performer on how to perform. Thoughtful analysis (whether or not it is laid out in explicit terms) is essential to interpreting all music, but is especially vital in interpreting unaccompanied post-tonal music where the clues are often less clear and more desperately needed. These types of analyses can be applied throughout the piece and this genre to create a meaningful interpretation, one rooted in what was written by the composer.

Line three features another “odd” number of sixteenths beamed together, in this case ten sixteenths beamed, leading to the low D-flat half note. These should be played as though both the C-natural and D-flat are downbeats without any “bumps” arising from the habit of playing sixteenth notes in multiples of 4. The grouping that I do play does lead from the second sixteenth note since it’s higher than the first and actually begins the downward scale the phrase seems to lift up from the C before plummeting down to the low D-flat.

In line seven, a sequence of sorts begins on the C-sharp. As the sequence progresses, it accelerates rhythmically, crescendos, and adds pitches until the culmination at the end of the line on the quarter note triplet. The quarter note triplet is the return of the opening motive, now placed beginning on a downbeat and rhythmically stretched and equalized. This transforms the gesture from an anacrusis into a solid thematic statement.

From that point, the movement unwinds. Long notes prevail, the only notes longer than a half note in the movement, each preceded by a single pickup note. Remember the implied C from the first phrase that never made an appearance? Now it becomes a pedal point and the final note. The first two long Cs are preceded by a pickup A-flat then a pickup D-flat. The final C is preceded by a grace note B-flat dominant seventh arpeggio. The notes of which (with the exception of the A-flat instead of an A-natural which gives the chord a dominant quality) are the structural pitches from the opening phrase, once the notes belonging to a C major triad have been removed.

After the first fermata on the final note, *before* beginning the diminuendo, Bassett specifies that the timbre of the C should be changed to make it duller (and to be able to diminuendo more dramatically). To accomplish this, the editors suggest adding the C vent key and the low E key.

IV. Beethoven Symphony No. 3

Beginning here, the remaining metamorphoses are based on orchestral pieces that *aren’t* known for their bassoon solos. Because of this it is even more important that the bassoonist listens to and studies the original in preparing the metamorphoses.

Bassett’s choice of excerpt from Beethoven’s Third is very interesting. The Eroica symphony is full of great catchy melodies (the opening cello line is probably the most common thing that I unconsciously whistle) many of which are fast, scherzo-like melodies. Out of all the possible passages from this 50-minute symphony to incorporate into his metamorphoses, Bassett chooses a slow transition from the very end of the fourth movement. Bassett takes measures 422 through 426, changes the tempo marking from eighth equals 108 to quarter equals 132 and develops a fast scherzo movement for his piece.

Interestingly, this is the first movement of the metamorphoses to utilize time signatures—and they change frequently! Like Beethoven’s original, Bassett begins in 2/4 but moves on to incorporate mixed meter as the metamorphosis progresses. The 5/8, 7/8, 9/8, and 11/8 measures can be difficult to prepare since you can’t just leave the metronome running throughout a whole section.

To prepare these measures, I begin slowly. Again, my philosophy with slow practice is to work at whatever tempo allows you to give your complete attention to the air stream and abdominal support and not make mistakes. Even if that means a passage more closely resembles a series of long tones than a scale, that’s okay.

This combats two very common problems. First, anytime new music is being learned, you're essentially a blank slate. Every thoughtful, measured repetition lays deeper framework that will stick with you for the rest of the time you play that piece. Careless mistakes can be engrained just as easily, and often reappear at faster tempos or in times of stress (performance). Secondly, wind musicians often do very well at using a supported airstream on sustained notes, less good of a job on slower melodies, and not at all in technical passages. Beginning a piece by concentrating on the airstream in technical passages (and in your scale work) will engrain this habit for faster tempos as well.

At faster tempos it can be helpful to double tongue the repeated sixteenth note groups at the beginning of the movement (and at the recap). Even with an adequately fast single tongue, there is a strong tendency (especially at the end of the movement) to lag on the sixteenth notes, letting them slide closer to triplets. Using the double tongue (in this case I recommend a highly placed syllable, tik-kit) will also help make the sixteenth notes very short, thinking of the syllable as tik-kit rather than ti-ki will also make them consistently shorter, particularly the last note. In cases like this, where there is a short note followed by a rest, the tendency is for the last note to be longer than the first one. If the bassoonist relies on stopping that note with the air stream rather than the tongue, the since of line is interrupted, and tension is introduced to the throat in the rush to stop the note in time to be ready for the next.

To practice sections like this, I first of all practice them very legato, as a series of quarter notes. This is to practice shaping the airstream and keeping it smooth and steady throughout the phrase.

Second, I practice each beat at a fast tempo, double tongued as short as possible, with as much space between beats as necessary (at least a full quarter rest's worth).

Finally, I combine these two approaches into the printed line.

This metamorphosis is full of half step relationships that can serve as a guide to shaping an interpretation. In traditional tonal music, these are the driving force between dominant and tonic, the pull of 7 rising to 8 and 4 falling to 3 provide a sense of direction. In post tonal music, or in the case of these metamorphoses, not traditionally tonal music, these half step relationships still have the potential to provide direction, they're just not rigidly defined by one particular key.

Some specific instances of half step relationships that should be considered by the performer include:

In the opening phrase, each beat two is connected to the following beat one by either a half step relationship or a fourth/fifth relationship.

The modified return of the opening phrase at the end of the fourth line embellishes each beat with either a chromatic upper or lower neighbor

In lines five and six, the 11/8, 9/8 and 7/4 measures rise successively by half step, functioning as an inexact sequence (each measure also features a chromatic upper neighbor embellishment on the first beat).

The climactic phrase in the sixth line is a compound line of two voices, each moving by half step. B-flat to A, C to B, F-sharp to F-natural, etc.

Additionally, the movement features three long half step trills, further establishing this relationship. The first and final trills are from D to E-flat, the same as the first two notes of the piece.

V. Beethoven Symphony No. 1

For this metamorphosis Bassett chooses the main theme from the last movement of Beethoven's first symphony. Unlike the selection from the third symphony which is rather obscure, this theme repeats throughout the movement. The violins begin the melody in measure 8, immediately following the slow introduction, however the excerpt that Bassett develops comes from the second half of the melody, pick up to measure 11 through 14. The bassoon only plays the melody once in measures 246-250 and then only the second half of the melody.

For the first time in the set of metamorphoses, Bassett alters the source material immediately. Both the original statement of the theme, and when the bassoon plays it at the very end of the movement, are in C major, beginning on a G-natural. The theme is presented numerous times throughout the movement, in a variety of keys, but never in the same key as Bassett.

Bassett's metamorphosis doesn't begin with a clear harmony. In Beethoven's original, the scale begins on the dominant, and ends on the dominant. Bassett's scale doesn't fit into any clear key, the pitches G-sharp, A, B, C-sharp, D, E, F-natural could only begin to some strange major scale with scale degrees six and seven borrowed from a harmonic minor scale. By mapping the pitches to Beethoven's template (starting on $\hat{5}$ with the true tonic on the first real downbeat), Bassett's scale implies a tonal center of C-sharp. Instead we see that on the downbeat of the second measure, the anticipated G-sharp is actually a G-natural and *that* measure is in fact verbatim Beethoven (although admittedly in different metric position than the original).

Similar to the ending of Bassett's third metamorphosis where he utilized a clear dominant sonority (in that case a B-flat dominant seventh arpeggio) resolving in an unconventional way (in that case an implied C major chord). In this case, throughout the movement Bassett will imply one key and actually end up a half step away.

If double tonguing the staccato sixteenth notes in the first measure, try beginning with the K syllable so that you end up with a T on the downbeat of the second measure. Practice each beat separately often: G-sharp, A, B, C-sharp; then D, E F G to learn the grouping from the beginning. Use the second grouping (beginning on the D) as an opportunity to "retake" and reenergize the airstream to get smoothly to the end of the scale.

The long trills, B-C on the fourth line and A-B on the last line, are also timbral trills. The editors suggest special fingerings for these to accomplish the composer's desired effect.

Like the previous movement, this metamorphosis is clearly metric, and that aspect should always be reflected in performance.



In this example from the end of line 8, groups of eighth notes are slurred in groups of threes, but in a variety of metric placements. I've added up and down arrows to show upbeats versus downbeats. This is hardly necessary to do in all circumstances, but this simple notation is helpful when you need a reminder. In this passage, the eighth notes move at a constant speed, the first group should begin lightly and move to the G downbeat, the next group should begin lightly and move to the E downbeat which should rebound, the C downbeat should also be stressed then the rest of that group rebounds, the G at the end of the 2/4 measure leads to the E-flat with a light low B following.

At the end of the movement, Bassett writes an allusion to the opening: the C-sharp and D trill are from the sixteenth notes in the first measure, the G and E following them are from the second measure, as well as from Beethoven's original source. The possibility of a C major ending is suggested but foiled by the last two notes: B-flat to D-flat.

B-flat and D-flat haven't been overtly structural pitches in the movement, but they can be found in close proximity in two key places.

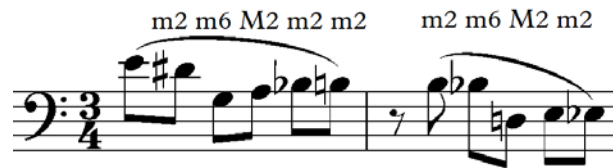
Beginning after the long timbral trill in line four, Bassett writes a very dramatic rhythmic accelerando, moving from quarter note triplets to eighths to eighth note triplets to sixteenths. This passage is heavily accented and crescendos from forte to fortissimo. The culmination of this gesture is a long high B-flat. Following the B-flat, he drops nearly three octaves to a low C-sharp for a fast-upward scale. B-flat and D-flat in close proximity, in different octaves, moving in the opposite direction as the end.

In the ninth line, beginning after the eighth note passage referenced above, the scale from the previous example returns (the scale is actually two octatonic scales together, the first measure is a C-sharp WH octatonic scale, the second measure is a D HW octatonic scale). Immediately following this C-sharp scale, a fortissimo low B-flat. This time the notes are in the correct positions relative to one another (C-sharp higher, B-flat lower) but the order is reversed.

VI. Beethoven Symphony No. 8

This excerpt comes from the third movement of Beethoven's eighth symphony. Bassett's metamorphosis is marked at 138 to the quarter, twelve bpm faster than Beethoven's original. That added speed should not get in the way of conveying an overall sense of grace like Beethoven's minuet.

The first measure (with pickups) is verbatim from measure five of Beethoven's symphony. Instead of repeating the B-natural at the end of the measure as part of a bass line, Bassett sequences the measure down exactly by a whole step. To set up this sequence, Bassett takes advantage of the rising B-flat, B-natural at the end of the measure having the same interval as the rising C-natural, C-sharp pick ups to measure one. The pattern only happens exactly once, however, in the third measure, the same intervals for the first four notes, but displaces by an eighth rest.



While this movement is marked 138 BPM to the quarter note, but should really be felt in 1, so 46 BPM for the measure (while it stays in 3/4). This is characteristic of scherzo movements in classical symphonies (like the source material) and will help the bassoonist portray the “Smooth, flowing” expressive marking given by Bassett.

Bassett begins by clearly marking phrases with slur markings and hair pins. The first two phrases should clearly be groups of two measures, crescendoing through the first measure and diminuendoing through the second. Bassett borrows from the traditional classical period sentence phrase structure. In a typical example of sentence phrase structure, there will be two two measure phrases balance by one four measure phrase. In the beginning of the Bassett, he writes 2+2+4, although the fourth measure is also a high point of the first half which immediately leads to a series of downward measures. In this style phrase structure is never cut and dry and is open to the interpretation of the performer. The first clue that implies a sentence structure is the hair pin in measure six continues through the end of the measure instead of diminuendoing like previous measures, the crescendo is even continued in the seventh bar through to the downbeat of measure nine. Regardless of how you choose to interpret the end of the sentence structure, it is clearly 2+2+(something longer than 2).

Measure 5 is in 7/8 time, but Bassett doesn't clearly notate how the eighth notes should be grouped. This gives the performer lots of options, 2+2+3, 2+3+2, and 3+2+2 are all options if we maintain the quarter note as the basic pulse. When trying to decide how to group ambiguous mixed meter measures, I start by looking for a clear group, something that I definitely want to show. In this measure, that is the last three notes, C-D-E lead very naturally into the F on the downbeat of the next measure, and since I've decided that this part of the movement is definitely moving forward, I want to harness that traditional pattern. That decision narrows the grouping down to either 2+2+3 or 3+2+2. In the former, my identified pattern is its own beat and can lead to the downbeat of the next measure. In the latter, my identified pattern begins on the upbeat of the second beat which gives it an anacrusic (pickup) quality that I like for its naturally phrasing to the downbeat of the next measure. I choose to play this measure 3+2+2 because it best accomplishes my goal for the measure, but this is an individual decision. Experiment and decide which best accomplishes your goals (recording yourself helps)!

Similar to the metamorphosis over Beethoven 3, the climax at the middle of this movement shifts from fast moving notes to longer sustained notes in the high register. To maintain the sense of forward momentum at these important places, I give each note a “bell tone” quality, like a subtle fortissimo.

This gives me the opportunity to reset each note somewhat in volume, then crescendo again. This effectively negates the tendency of long loud notes to “just sit there” and has the added bonus of increasing our apparent dynamic range—always a good thing!

After the climax in measure 21, Bassett writes a quarter note triplet passage that utilizes another common idiosyncrasy from this movement, chains of half steps. While rhythmically the notes are grouped into threes, they are harmonically and melodically grouped into twos. This tension between meter and harmony gives the passage interest and helps propel it forward toward more stable ground. Beginning in measure 23, the A-flat falls to the G, the B-flat to the A, etc. until the pattern holds on the long E-flat.

Measures 33 and 34 feature a return of B-flat 1 and D-flat 3 as from the end of the previous movement. At the end of that movement a long timbral trill from D to E-flat resolved to a G and an E, only to be thwarted in the last measure by a B-flat 1 and D-flat 3. In this movement the same B-flat and D-flat return, to be followed by a long E-flat followed by a long E. This interesting pairing and reversal is thwarted in turn in the last three measures, where Bassett writes another upward scale culminating in a long high B that seems like it should resolve upward to a C, but doesn't. The scale leading up to the high B is a C lydian-mixolydian scale, a modal scale that combines the lydian and mixolydian modes into one scale with a raised $\hat{4}$ and lowered $\hat{7}$. Instead of ending on the tonic, this scale ends on a B-natural, not a part of the C lydian-mixolydian scale. There is precedent for a scale with both forms of $\hat{7}$, referred to as the “bebop scale” in jazz, it resembles a major scale with both flat $\hat{7}$ and natural $\hat{7}$, even in that case (a lydian-bebop scale?) the scale ends before resolving to its tonic. Nomenclature aside, this is clearly not a nice neat perfect authentic cadence, the end of this movement points forward to a future conclusion.

VII. Scriabin, Poem of Ecstasy

This is likely the least familiar sources from the piece for most people. To start learning it I used the method I use for learning any new piece of orchestral music: I listened to Scriabin's original three times. Once to just listen and enjoy a new piece of music, this is an important step! Too many musicians get so caught up in the rush to learn new music, they forget to give themselves the opportunity to really experience it. For the second listening, use the score to hear in more detail and to begin tracing important lines between the instruments. Finally, listen with the bassoon part (and the score for while the bassoon rests). A lot of the material used in this metamorphosis appears in the original in some form.

Alexander Scriabin (1871-1915) was a Russian composer who composed mainly for his own instrument, the piano, and for orchestra. Early in his career he was heavily influenced by Chopin and composed in a similar style. At the end of his career he developed his own brand of atonality that was heavily influenced by mysticism and his own synesthesia which led to him creating a color-coded circle of fifths. The *Poem of Ecstasy* is a symphonic poem and is sometimes referred to as Scriabin's fourth symphony, despite not having multiple movements. The piece comes from the middle of his career and makes heavy use of the whole-tone scale and his “mystic chord” (named by a musicologist after Scriabin's death).

Along with the music, Scriabin wrote a poem of over 300 lines to accompany the piece. The poem describes a spirit growing into consciousness from dark to light. He reused this poem when he composed his fifth cello sonata, along with that publication he included four lines of the poem:

*I call you to life, oh mysterious forces!
Drowned in the obscure depths
Of the creative spirit, timid
Shadows of life, to you I bring audacity.*

The excerpt of the Poem chosen by Bassett begins in the third measure of rehearsal 9 in the bassoon part. In this section, the bassoons alternate between tremolos from A-flat to F-flat and from A-flat to F-natural. The first tremolo lasts for a quarter on beat one of the measure, while the second tremolo lasts for three beats. The tremolo section ends with the F-natural tremolos and has local resolutions to F-natural. In Bassett's metamorphosis, he reverses the two, first is the tremolo from F to A-flat, then from E to G-sharp.

Fingering suggestions for the tremolos in this movement are provided at the end, these should be followed as the tremolos are intended to have a muted, mysterious quality so even tremolos that are perfectly easy to execute with normal fingerings such as the D to E in the third line or the G to B in the sixth line have special fingerings suggested.

Bassett also suggests inserting a muting cloth into the bell to further dampen the sound and change the instrument's timbre.

Most of the tremolos occur out of rhythm. For the first two, Bassett notates them with 4" and 5" to indicate that they should last for four seconds and five seconds respectively. For the rest of the movement, he omits the double-prime symbol, but maintains the practice of marking their durations in seconds.

This is the first lyrical movement since the Tchaikovsky 4 metamorphosis. Following three fast Beethoven metamorphoses and preceding the final fast dance a respite is needed in pacing the overall piece. Until the last line there aren't any rhythms faster than an eighth note, and even then, the exact speed is subject to interpretation.

To further develop this lyrical, introspective character, I try to keep the tremolos from being too fast. With the muted bell and the instruction that some of them should be played with a loose embouchure, I play them just fast enough so that the tremolo itself—rather than the individual notes—comes through. They could easily be played too fast which would disturb the ethereal quality of the movement.

That being said, because so much of the content of the movement are long notes, the impetus is on the performer to keep phrases alive and interesting to the listener. Great effort should be undertaken from the beginning of learning the movement to exaggerate dynamics and to use vibrato to keep the color interesting and engaging.

This movement features many large leaps of dissonant intervals that have great expressive quality. To highlight these (as well as to execute them smoothly), the airstream should powerfully push through the leap while the embouchure cushions but doesn't bite, and the oral cavity and throat remain open.

Many of these large leaps still exhibit the half-step idiom we've discussed throughout the metamorphoses but spread through multiple voices. For instance, measures two through six could be reduced to two simple chromatic lines.

Original

Two voice reduction

This same concept can be applied throughout the movement, I express this in performance by crescendoing through the large leaps and saving the bulk of my tapers before rests until the very end of the note. In this way I hope to aurally connect the chromatic lines for my listeners, as well as to harness the full expressive potential of the large, dissonant leaps.

Another place that can be analyzed in this way is the phrase in measures twelve to fourteen:

This brief passage marked “lyrical,” can be reduced to a leading tone E in the key of F, resolving upward to tonic, being joined with a low dominant C and embellished with a chromatic line as well as an F-sharp appoggiatura:

Finally, to execute this passage with my chosen harmonic interpretation, as well as to portray the meter, I add a couple of small hairpins to make the voice leading clear. First, in the original I crescendo at the end of the F-sharp into its resolution to the F-natural. Second, I relax slightly at the

beginning of the F-natural as part of its tension and release gesture with the F-sharp. Finally, I crescendo slightly at the end of the F-natural quarter note on beat four into the downbeat of the next measure (which I add a mental tenuto mark to) before executing the marked diminuendo. The goal of this last one is to show that the resolution of the appoggiatura occurs on the final beat of a 4/4 measure, and not on the downbeat of a measure after a 3/4 measure of F-sharp appoggiatura.

The movement concludes with another “scale” with a beamed *accelerando* and *rallentando*. To get this scale smooth, I suggest practicing it in a regular tempo, up *and down*, so that the notes can feel completely comfortable. Practice it at varying tempos and rhythms, sometimes speeding up as you ascend and slowing down as you descend and reversed. Until playing the notes in any tempo feels effortless and natural, then practice executing the scale as a smooth *accelerando* from the low E to the D-flat before slowing down into the F tremolo.

Finally, note that this scale crescendos from *pianissimo* to *forte*, then the tremolo (which doesn’t begin immediately on the F!) diminuendos to an unspecified dynamic (I choose to diminuendo to as close as niente as I can get while keeping the tremolo supported and clear). Other than the metamorphosis movement on Tchaikovsky’s fourth, this is the only movement of the piece that ends softly, make it count!

VIII. Chabrier, España

Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-1894) was a French Romantic composer, best known for his *España* as well as several well known operas. He influenced many composers who followed him, especially those who would emerge in early 20th century Paris, particularly Debussy, Ravel, Satie, Stravinsky, and Poulenc, who would write Chabrier’s biography. *España* is part of set of the best known “Spanish” pieces of classical music that were written by French composers. Including Bizet’s *Carmen*, Debussy’s *Ibérica*, and Ravel’s *Rapsodie espagnole*. In the case of *España*, inspiration came to Chabrier after a four-month tour of Spain with his wife.

For his source material at the beginning of the movement, Bassett quotes the first bassoon part beginning in measure 9. Instead of octave C’s as in the original, Bassett drops the lower note to a low B. This syncopated gesture is common in Spanish music and permeates all of *España*, in the beginning the grace notes should be omitted so that all concentration can be devoted to showing the 2/8 motive against the 3/8 time signature. The tension between these two competing rhythmic structures is the underpinning of this style.

When the grace notes are added back in, they should be played very short and snappy, eighth notes should be played staccato except where marked otherwise.

Throughout the movement, every effort should be made to bring out the difference in style between the lyrical and staccato passages, and to highlight any place where the written rhythm/motive conflicts with the meter.

I think of the first lyrical section, beginning in measure six as a preview of things to come, it introduces that stylistic element, but doesn’t develop it, and quickly falls back into a staccato rhythm, and then the opening material returns again in measure thirteen.

In measure nineteen the lyrical passage returns and this time it develops further. Following this longer lyrical passage is a shorter passage of staccato eighths. In fact, as the first page progresses, the staccato sections become shorter and further spaced apart

Looking at the overall pacing of the movement, sections of staccato, leaping eighth notes are spaced throughout the movement, these sections derive from the “guitar” sections of Chabrier’s original. The lyrical sections have two main varieties: sections with flowing multi-octave arpeggios, and sections with neighbor note syncopations.

For the first type, consider the bassoon soli beginning in the eighth bar of rehearsal D:



Compare this with measures 56 through 63:



Hardly an exact quotation, but the passages like this in the movement (there are many easy to find examples) definitely invoke the character of Chabrier’s original, especially when paired with the more explicit staccato passages.

The other type of lyrical section in the Bassett recalls another staccato rhythm from Chabrier. In the Chabrier, the rhythm is repeated on single staccato notes, while when it reappears in the Bassett, the repeated notes are transformed into chromatic neighbor notes.

The bassoon solo at rehearsal A in the Chabrier:



The passage from Bassett beginning in measure 19:



Again, it is not an exact quotation, but there is a definite similarity in material that helps this final metamorphosis retain the spirit of its source material.

These three sections: leaping staccato octave leaps, flowing lyrical arpeggios, and lyrical neighbor note passages alternate in different combinations throughout the course of the metamorphosis and tie it closely to Chabrier's *España* and provide a cohesiveness to the whole movement.

Variety in this movement comes from unpredictable phrase lengths, I already alluded to the shrinking staccato passages throughout the movement (from the isolated one measure events in the middle of the movement until the second to last line where it returns in force), but the lyrical passages are also unpredictable. This leads to an impish, improvisatory character that the bassoonist should harness in performance. Especially since it is an unaccompanied work, there is great opportunity for dramatic lifts or changes of style when Bassett drops a phrase before the listener expects it. This final movement should above all be fun to play, and fun to listen to, and will not be effective when performed passively.

One final, large-scale performance consideration for this movement: pacing. The lyrical sections in the beginning of the movement, starting in measures 6, 19, and 36 are all marked at the same dynamic. Each builds on the previous one and seems to fight against the staccato sections, eventually displacing them completely (until the low point). To keep these interesting, I want each to be clearly louder and more present. To practice this, I play the three phrases back to back, and even just the first couple of measures of each back to back. I engrain in my practice early that each is successfully louder, and perhaps with more intense vibrato. The final one of these, measure 36, is a high B which tends to be quite high for just about everyone. This is often exacerbated by trying to play it too loudly, to combat this a very open voicing should be used to place it low, and as resonant as possible.

Unlike some of the other movements that had very clear high points or climaxes, this movement has a very clear low point: the last line of the first page and the top line of the second page (before the high B). The movement should gradually fade away on the last two lines of the first page until the third measure of the second page which should be very soft and possibly out of time (it's not marked to play it out of time, but I think it's an effective way to exaggerate the movement). After the low point, the lyrical melody comes screaming back in on another high B (be careful!), only a few lines later Bassett teases us with what seems like a return of the low point (measure 103). Unlike the previous low point which was structural to the whole movement, this one is a brief local event that serves to create space for a final crescendo to the end.

Make sure to keep disciplined body language during the empty measures in 112 and 113 to keep the audience engaged and expecting more until the final flourish. Make sure that the printed dynamic "!" for the ending is clearly audible to the listener!