

CHAPTER FOUR

SONATA FOR TRUMPET AND PIANO BY ELAINE FINE

Year of Composition: 2002

Duration: ~11 minutes

Movements: 3

Range: F3 - C6

Instrumentation: Trumpet in Bb or C, Piano

Composer Biographical Background:

Elaine Fine is a composer, violist, violinist, flutist, recorder player, and educator. She has composed over seventy chamber works, three operas, and orchestral works, and has written numerous arrangements. Fine maintains an online catalog of her work and an active blog where she shares posts surrounding a variety of topics, music-related and beyond. Additionally, Fine is on the reviewing staff of the *American Record Guide*, and has written articles for magazines including *The Maud Powell Signature* and *The Instrumentalist*. A number of her compositions are available for free online and she has composed numerous works with trumpet, including compositions for solo trumpet, two trumpet duets, chamber music with trumpet, and a work for brass quintet.⁴⁶

As a child, Fine was surrounded by music. Her mother was a flutist and her father was a violist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. When asked about the musical influence of her family, Fine said, “hearing my father practice was the best part of my childhood.”⁴⁷ Though music was a way of life during her upbringing, Fine’s parents did not push it on her and she describes her path to music as self-directed. At the age of seven, Fine had grown enough to play

⁴⁶“Elaine Fine’s Thematic Catalog: A New Twist on the Old-Fashioned ‘Thematic Catalog’ with Interactive Links,” Elaine Fine, 2022, <https://thematiccatalog.blogspot.com/>

⁴⁷Elaine Fine, email message to author, September 2, 2022.

a half-size violin and she began learning violin from an “A-Tune-A-Day” book from her father. She sang with her mother in the Tanglewood Festival Chorus and describes learning about music through singing works by Haydn, Stravinsky, Bach, and Brahms, claiming, “Being in the presence of the music of really great composers is the best way to learn about the possibilities in music.”⁴⁸ Fine earned her undergraduate degree in flute performance from the Juilliard School, also studying recorder in Vienna and baroque flute in Boston.

Fine was drawn to composition at an early age, but she hesitated to write any works of her own for several years, due in-part to the nature of popular compositions during the 1960s and 1970s, which she describes as largely atonal, serial, academic, and not pleasing to her. She recalls a memorable moment when a melody she had never heard before became stuck in her head and she felt the need to harmonize it, but wrote, “I grew up in a time when women weren’t encouraged to follow their dreams. I have to say that most of what I have done musically comes from the need to express myself and try to connect with other people. Great playing and great singing is inspiring to me, as is great writing (music and literature).”⁴⁹ Eventually, she began building confidence through writing arrangements for a string quartet of which she was a member. After spending years performing and teaching, she returned to school to pursue graduate studies in composition at Eastern Illinois University at the age of forty.

Fine describes her compositional process as organic—she tends to begin writing and, if it feels right, she will continue composing. If not, she tends to move on to the next project. Her musical phrases are largely guided by the instrumentation for which she is composing, and she particularly enjoys writing for piano, violin, viola, flute, and recorder, as these are all instruments she plays. Fine says, “music that feels good to play ends up being a better vehicle for

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

expression,”⁵⁰ and she makes an effort to be aware of the strengths and limitations of each instrument. When writing for brass, she takes endurance into account, and incorporates rests throughout her works, especially for trumpet. She utilizes brass in several of her works, including a composition for trumpet and mezzo-soprano as well as several works with euphonium. Especially when addressing challenges with balance when writing for brass, Fine has worked directly with performers to inform her compositions and ensure that the brass instrument is never overpowering the other voices. Fine’s *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano* was one of her first compositions, which she was inspired to write after listening to Raymond Mase’s album, *Trumpet Vocalise*. Since none of the works included in the album were originally written for trumpet, she wanted to compose a lyrical work in a similar style specifically for trumpet, writing the second movement of the Sonata first. When asked about any high or low points of her career, Fine said, “I have a memory like a sieve, so I manage to forget low points, and I am hoping that the high point in my career as a composer is in the future.”⁵¹

Overview of Work and Pedagogical Notes:

Elaine Fine’s *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano* is a challenging, yet approachable, work in three movements. With parts for both Bb and C Trumpet, it is accessible to moderately advanced students and addresses a variety of areas of trumpet playing. The outer movements contain more technical challenges, while the second movement offers opportunities to develop phrasing, lyricism, and pitch centering. A more advanced college student could perform all three movements as a semester project or in the context of a recital, while a less advanced student could select a single movement for a jury or studio class performance. Regardless of whether the performer chooses to perform part or all of *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano*, they may encounter

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

several challenges, especially regarding wider intervallic leaps and slurs, as well as endurance factors.

Movement one of *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano* spans the range of the trumpet, including an instance of a low F3 that requires the use of both the first and third valve slides on C Trumpet and requires practice to be performed with centered tone and resonance. Practice of Phil Snedecor's *Low Etudes for Trumpet* will greatly assist the performer in developing ease and familiarity in the low register and, depending on if the performer plans to play the sonata on Bb or C Trumpet, the etudes can be practiced on the same trumpet to facilitate transfer of approach between etudes and solo repertoire. Measures 37 through 59 of *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano* are predominantly in the lower register of the trumpet and will require diligent practice of fundamentals and etudes in the lower register. Studies from Snedecor's *Low Etudes for Trumpet* often take the performer into the mid and upper register in conjunction with the lower register and incorporate leaps and wide interval slurs. These etudes would serve as particularly effective companions to prepare Fine's sonata, as some of the main challenges the performer will encounter are addressed.

Movement one is the most demanding in terms of range and endurance, with few instances of rests spanning more than a couple of measures. In addition to practice in the lower register, isolation of the many instances of larger interval slurs and incorporation of them as exercises into a daily fundamental routine is essential. Measures 125 through 133, in particular, present significant challenges in terms of range and flexibility, also requiring the performer to have uniform articulation throughout the upper and lower register of the instrument. Measure 131 alone takes the performer from C6 to F4 and incorporates octave leaps between F4 and F5. Such a passage can be used as a pedagogical tool to teach ease in playing and flexibility

development. Guiding a student through these slurs may involve suggesting a change in vowel shape to execute them, for example, going from an “ah” syllable in the lower register to an “ee” syllable in the upper register in order to raise the tongue arch naturally and to minimize tension. Finding ways to perform movement one efficiently will be essential for having the endurance to perform the following movements.

Movement two is significantly more approachable than movement one and could be used on its own for lyrical practice, a jury piece, or as an effective practice piece on the C Trumpet. The slurred melodic lines will help the performer develop consistent air flow and centering throughout the trumpet and the coordination with the piano part will expose any intonation issues in the sustained passages, allowing the performer to develop listening and tuning skills that will be especially useful for adapting to the C Trumpet. Buzzing portions of these flowing melodies on the mouthpiece will assist with maintaining a consistent air stream throughout the registers of the trumpet, while also improving intonation awareness and centering. While movement two’s lyrical nature makes it appear much easier than the other movements, endurance can become a challenge, especially with the inclusion of several sustained passages. Few dynamic directives are included in this movement, requiring the soloist and pianist to coordinate their musical message. A student who shows strength in lyrical playing and wants to work to develop endurance and good intonation on the C Trumpet will find this movement ideal.

Movement three contains the most demanding finger dexterity requirements of the sonata, but is significantly more accessible than movement one in terms of range, endurance, and flexibility. This movement contains a narrower range and fewer leaps than movement one. It can be performed as a short movement on its own, or combined with movement two for a longer pairing that will be less of a challenge than performing all three movements together. The biggest

challenge for the performer will likely be staying strictly in time when playing the many repeated patterns of two sixteenth notes followed by an eighth note. Starting at a very slow tempo and increasing the speed by small increments with diligent use of a metronome will ensure that the performer is able to play these passages consistently in time. As this movement is simpler than the others, but still active, it would be ideal for a student starting out on C Trumpet and looking for an exciting movement that has moderate dexterity, range, and flexibility demands.

The difficulty level of Fine's *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano* is similar to the challenges presented in commonly assigned sonatas, such as Kent Kennan's *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano* or Karl Pilss' *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano*. The inclusion of a part for C Trumpet sets it apart from these selections and performing this work in its entirety is a worthy challenge for an advanced college student looking for a piece that addresses a variety of areas of trumpet fundamentals, along with beautiful melodies. The preparation of *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano*, while challenging, can help the performer improve several areas of their playing and ultimately, be rewarding.