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A Study of Lars-Erik Larsson and his Contributions to Trombone Repertoire

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**A STUDY OF LARS-ERIK LARSSON
AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO
TROMBONE REPERTOIRE**

Thomas S. Brown

March 30, 2007

**A research project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
Honors in Music, Lynchburg College 2007**

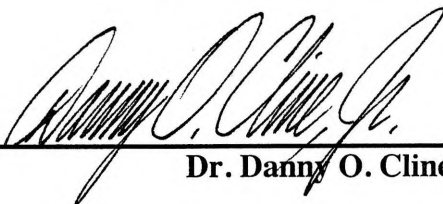
A Study of Lars-Erik Larsson and his Contributions to Trombone Repertoire

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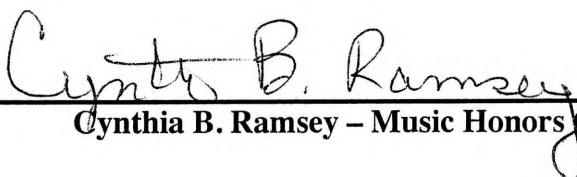
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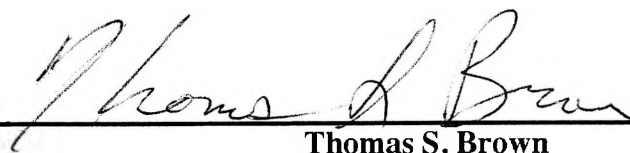


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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to gain information about Lars-Erik Larsson and his contributions to trombone repertoire. The specific problems of the study were as follows: 1) to identify and investigate Larsson's major contributions to twentieth century music; 2) to identify and investigate Larsson's contribution to trombone repertoire; 3) to analyze Larsson's *Concertino for Trombone and String Orchestra* Op. 45 No. 7 in terms of form, structure, and twentieth century techniques. A biographical overview of Larsson's life is given as background and as insight to his compositions.

INTRODUCTION

According to France (2002), Lars-Erik Larsson (1908 – 1986) was born on May 15, 1908, in Akarp, Sweden. Vinton (1974) states that Larsson attended the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, Sweden from 1925 to 1929. While at the Royal College he studied composition with Ernst Ellberg (1868 – 1948) and conducting with Olallo Morales (1874 – 1957). Bergendal (2001) notes that in 1929 Larsson traveled abroad and went to schools in Leipzig, Germany and Vienna, Austria where he studied organ and composition. While in Vienna he studied under Alban Berg (1885 – 1935), a member of the Second Viennese School, whose compositional method focused on the twelve tone technique.

According to Bergendal (2001), upon Larsson's return to Sweden in 1930, he became a coach at the Royal Theatre in Stockholm. Following this appointment he taught music in Malmö and Lund, two cities in southern Sweden. France (2002) notes that while in Lund, Larsson was also the music critic for the *Lunds Dagblad*, a local publication. Vinton (1974) asserts that in 1937 Larsson was hired by Radio Sweden, and became a resident composer, conductor, and producer. Bergendal (2001) concurs, adding that from 1945 to 1947 he served as the supervisor of non-professional symphony orchestras. Larsson remained as conductor with Radio Sweden until 1953.

Vinton (1974) reports that Larsson taught composition at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm from 1947 to 1959. According to France (2002), he also served as the director of music at Uppsala University in Uppsala, Sweden from 1961 to 1971. In 1971 he retired and moved to Helsingborg, Sweden. He continued to compose throughout his retirement until his death on December 27, 1986.

PURPOSE

With the intent of improving music pedagogy and performance, the purpose of this research is to gain information about Lars-Erik Larsson and his contribution to trombone repertoire.

PROBLEMS

The specific problems of the study are as follows:

1. To identify and investigate Larsson's major contributions to twentieth century music;
2. To identify and investigate Larsson's contribution to trombone repertoire; and
3. To analyze Larsson's *Concertino for Trombone and String Orchestra* Op. 45 No. 7 in terms of form, structure, and twentieth century compositional techniques.

THE COMPOSITIONS OF LARS-ERIK LARSSON

According to Bergendal (2001), the composition style of Lars-Erik Larsson alternated between Nordic Romanticism, neo-classicism, and twentieth century techniques. Nordic Romanticism is a style with harmonies similar to the works of nineteenth century European composers (Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827), Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849), Richard Wagner (1813 – 1883)) combined with melodic lines that are common to Nordic composers such as Jean Sibelius (1865 – 1957) and Johan Roman (1694 – 1758). Neo-classicism is a style of composition in which classical forms (sonata, concerto) are used as a framework for more modern styles of composition. Bergendal (2001) notes that two of the twentieth century techniques Larsson used were serialism and polytonality. Serialism is a style of composition that is closely related to twelve tone composition, except serial compositions are not required to

utilize all twelve tones. In contrast, polytonality is a style of composition in which two or more contrasting tonalities are used simultaneously.

Skans (1989) asserts that Larsson's *Symphony No. 1 in D major* Op. 2 was written in 1927 and 1928 as the culmination of his composition studies at the Royal College in Stockholm, before Larsson studied with Berg. According to Skans (1989), this symphony is an example of Larsson's Nordic Romanticism, stating "the style is typically Nordic and reminiscent of Sibelius among others" (p. 5). Skans also cites Lennert Hedwall (1932 -), a Swedish composer and conductor, as saying the first movement is "bright and optimistic...the lyrical sections are romantically gentle and atmospheric" (p. 5).

According to Bergendal (2001), 1932 brought about a change in the work of Larsson, presumably influenced by Alban Berg. Bergendal cites that Larsson's *Ten Two-Part Piano Pieces* composed in this year are the first examples of twelve-tone composition found in Swedish music. Larsson composed *Sinfonietta* Op. 10 for string orchestra (1932) which, according to Bergendal, is contrapuntal and in stark contrast to the romantic lyricism of Larsson's previous works. France (2002) asserts that Larsson's *Sinfonietta* was premiered at the 1934 International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) festival and was Larsson's "break into the world scene" (<http://www.musicweb...>).

According to Jacobsson (1990), Larsson composed *Little Serenade for strings* Op. 12 in 1934. Jacobsson states that this piece "followed the neo-classical current of the time" (p. 5). Rather than continuing with Nordic Romanticism, Jacobsson notes that the *Little Serenade* is more akin "to simple Haydnesque sonata form and to the instrumental serenades of the 18th century" (p. 5). Skans (1984) reports that in this same year Larsson composed his *Concerto for saxophone and string orchestra* Op. 14 for soloist Sigurd Rascher (1907 – 2001). Skans asserts

that this piece is neo-classical in style, describing it as “hearty, rhythmic, and diverting” (p. 4). According to Skans, the *Concerto* was a collaboration between Rascher and Larsson, and since “Rascher was a pioneering saxophone virtuoso and had introduced a number of highly personal tricks and devices; some of these were included in the concerto” (p. 4). Due to the difficulty of these techniques, the *Concerto* was rarely performed, and Larsson released a simplified version in the early 1980’s.

Bergendal (2001) states that Larsson finished two of his larger works, the opera *Princessen av Cypern* (The Princess from Cypress) and his *Symphony No. 2 Op. 17* in 1937. Bergendal notes that these compositions were relatively unsuccessful “and they were withdrawn” (p. 281). Skans (1989) adds that the *Symphony No. 2* was met with criticism from critics due to the conflicting thoughts of “musical policy in Germany and the Soviet Union [which] divided Swedish music critics” (p. 5). Skans adds that, after Larsson withdrew the symphony, he released the last movement as a stand alone composition titled *Ostinato* (1937). Skans quotes Larsson as being uncomfortable with larger forms of music: “In my symphonies I have said nothing special. Other people have said it much better” (p. 4).

Bergendal (2001) notes that, after Larsson was hired by Radio Sweden, he shifted his focus to composing for radio broadcast, theater, and film. It was in this period that he composed some of his best known works including *The Winter’s Tail, four vignettes* in 1937 (based on the play of the same name by William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)); *Senhöstblad* (1938); *Dagens stunder* (The Hours of the Day) (1938); and *Förklädd gud* (God in Disguise) (1940), a poem by Swedish poet Hjalmar Gullberg (1898 – 1961). Eriksson (1992) asserts that *Dagens stunder* consisted of six short movements that linked the recitation of a series of poems. According to Eriksson, Larsson chose three of these movements and released them as *Patoralsvit* (Pastoral

Suite) Op. 19 (1938). This suite, according to Skans (1984), is “perhaps the most popular twentieth century orchestral work in Sweden” (p. 4). Skans (1988) adds that the inner movement, ‘Romance,’ is “one of the most popular pieces in all Swedish music” (p. 3)

Bergendal (2001) notes that Larsson returned to independent compositions in the mid-1940s with *String Quartet No. 1* Op. 31 in 1944. In this time period he also composed his *Symphony No. 3* (1945), *Cello Concerto* Op. 37 (1947), and *Musik för orkester* Op. 40 (1949). Bergendal observes that Larsson began to use polytonalities and his style became similar to that of Paul Hindemith (1895 – 1963). France (2002) suggests that this shift was the result of Larsson’s appointment as inspector for orchestras eligible for government grants (1945). During his investigations, Larsson noticed that most of the orchestras had few modern compositions in their libraries. Larsson concluded that there were two possible reasons for this: modern compositions were too ‘*avant garde*’ or modern compositions were technically too advanced. Larsson composed *Twelve Concertinos for solo instruments and strings* Op. 45 (1953-57), among others, to fill this gap.

According to Bergendal (2001), Larsson’s style returned to the twelve-tone composition technique in 1960. Larsson developed his own variation on this technique, using stacked notes rather than series. Bergendal also observes that, over the last twenty years of the composer’s life, he changed between styles quite often. He wrote his *Lyrik fantasi* Op. 54 (1966) in a Romantic style. His compositions *Due auguri* Op. 62 (1971) and *Råd-rokoko* Op. 64 (1973) are in a neo-classical style. One of Larsson’s final pieces, *Musica permutatio* Op. 66 (1980), was composed with counterpoint.

ANALYSIS OF LARSSON'S *CONCERTINO FOR TROMBONE AND STRING ORCHESTRA* OP. 45 NO. 7

Despite Larsson's variety of compositions, the *Concertino for Trombone and String Orchestra* Op. 45 No. 7 seems to be his only piece written for solo trombone. Lindberg (1988) asserts that it was composed in 1955 as the seventh part of a series of twelve concertinos for various instruments. France (2002) notes that each concertino has a relatively simple part for string orchestra as well as a solo that is somewhat demanding for the performer. The twelve instruments which the twelve concertinos feature are flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, violin, viola, cello, double bass, and piano.

A concertino, a shorter version of a concerto, is a composition for a solo instrument accompanied by either a piano or an orchestra. Concertinos can be one movement works with three distinct sections, or a three movement work with no pauses between the movements. Larsson's trombone concertino differs from this model because it contains three distinct movements with pauses between them.

I. Movements

Larsson labels the movements in order to give the performer and audience a mental picture of what is expected. The first movement, entitled *Preludium*, or prelude, acts as an introduction to the second and third movements. Several musical elements that occur in the first movement (e.g., half step motives, ambiguous tonality) also occur in the second and third movements. The tempo, marked *Allegro pomposo*, is to be performed with a pompous or ceremonious style.

Aria, the title of the second movement, evokes the image of an opera diva singing a lyrical melody. Cole and Schwartz (2007) define aria as "a lyric song for solo voice generally

having two contrasting parts (I and II), ending with a literal or elaborated repeat of part I” (<http://www.music.vt...>). This describes the melody and expression of the second movement. The melody requires the trombonist to imitate the lyricism of the voice. The Aria is expected to be played expressively, with the notes performed in a connected, legato style.

Finale, the third movement, evokes the image of a high point and end. The tension in the music has been building for two movements. The third movement restates the themes of the first and second movements, providing melodic reinforcement. The composition concludes with a technically difficult passage, a descending chromatic scale with one note in each slide position.

II. Musical Elements

Movement I (Preludium):

The first movement is in 3/2 meter; however, the majority of this work is rubato in nature and can be taken out of meter easily. The performance score dictates the half note marked at one hundred beats per minute, but there are only a few sections in the first movement where the tempo is strictly kept. The solo trombone and piano part are mutually exclusive and interact collectively a few measures at a time. This allows the tempo to become whatever both the trombone player and accompanist want it to be. Rhythmically, the first movement is varied and contains half notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, quarter note triplets, eighth note triplets, and a few whole notes. The rhythms in the first movement become progressively more complex starting with half notes in measure five and leading up to eighth note triplets in measure seventy-four.

The melody is not an easily recognizable melodic line in the first movement. The most prominent melodic feature throughout the movement is a succession of ascending half notes.

These half notes, always three or four, outline different intervals, an augmented ninth in measures five and six, and a minor seventh in measure thirteen. This half-note motif occurs whenever the trombone enters from rest.

The harmony of the first movement consists of many chords that have little or no tonal relation. In the accompaniment parallel octaves occur in the first four measures and whenever a similar passage occurs thereafter. This movement exhibits many characteristics associated with the impressionist movement in music. Bonds (2006) defines impressionism in music as a “musical style that flourished in the period 1890 to 1920...characterized by a blurring of distinct harmonies, rhythms, timbres, and forms” (p. 677). There are examples of planing in measures four, twenty, and eighty-eight. Quartal and quintal harmonies are used sporadically throughout the movement, examples can be found in measures ninety and ninety-one. At other times the harmony consists of sustained chords underneath the trombone solo. Examples of this can be found in measures five through sixteen, and twenty-two through twenty-four.

The tonality of the first movement is ambiguous. There is no tonal center and various passages hint at tonality, but do not complete the idea or continue for long. For example in measures twenty-six and forty-five through forty-seven, the notes resemble a pentatonic scale; however, these notes do not comprise a major pentatonic scale, and the melodic line begins a new idea. Measures thirty-five through thirty-seven and forty-eight through fifty suggest a twelve tone system; however, these measures only contain ten of the twelve chromatic tones.

The texture of the first movement is largely monophonic, with the introduction and all orchestral sections polyphonic. If the orchestra is analyzed as one voice, however, and the solo as another voice, there are few places where the two interact. The orchestra plays the first four measures and then only sustained chords while the trombone plays ten measures. This is the

longest instance of both orchestra and soloist playing simultaneously throughout the entire movement. The remainder of the movement is either exclusively orchestra or exclusively soloist with perhaps a measure of overlap.

Movement II (Aria):

The second movement of the concertino is a slow movement in common time with a tempo marking of *Andante sostenuto*, to be performed slow and sustained, with the quarter note at fifty-four beats per minute. Rhythmically, the second movement is simple. The accompaniment plays quarter notes throughout the entire movement, with the exception of the first violin which sometimes performs the melody. Contrary to this simplicity, the rhythms of the melody are more intricate with some sixteenth note rhythms and minor syncopation; however these remain simple at such a relaxed tempo.

The melody of the second movement, in contrast to the first movement, is recognizable and lyrical. It begins in the solo trombone in measure three and continues until measure eleven. The accompaniment imitates the last two measures of the trombone melody (measures ten and eleven) in measures eleven and twelve, after which the accompaniment picks up the original melodic line in measure thirteen while the trombone performs a new melodic idea. These two melodies exist together until measures twenty-two and twenty-three when the trombone and orchestra switch melodic lines again. The trombone now plays the original melody and the orchestra plays the second melody. In the last three measures of this movement a melody reminiscent of the first movement occurs with five quarter notes outlining a major eleventh.

The accompaniment of this movement consists of repeated chords on quarter notes. Most of the chords are chromatic; for example the third and fourth measures contain a D major chord,

the fifth measure contains an E-flat major chord, and the sixth measure contains an E major chord. There are quartal/quintal chords in measure nineteen and chords of addition throughout the movement, usually in the form of a half-diminished seventh chord (e.g., an A half-diminished seventh chord in measure two and a D-sharp half-diminished seventh chord in measure nine).

The tonality of the second movement is as ambiguous as the first with the succession of chromatic chords emphasizing the non-diatonic tonality. Melodically, the second movement follows no set scale or pattern. At times (e.g., measures four through eleven) the movement seems serialistic, however all twelve tones are not present and several notes are repeated. These expectations contradict the rules of twelve tone composition. The first entrance of the trombone in measure four emphasizes A's, B-flat's, and an E-flat, but quickly progresses to a completely different tonality with a similar pattern. This ambiguity implies the atonality of the second movement.

The texture of the second movement is polyphonic, with the orchestra functioning as both an accompaniment and a melodic entity. In measures twelve through thirty, the solo and melodic accompaniment voice act as a melody and counterpoint. In contrast to the first movement, which has almost no interaction between voices, the second movement is full of interaction between solo trombone and orchestra.

Movement III (Finale):

The third movement is in 2/4 meter with a tempo marking of *Allegro giocoso*, to be performed in a fast and happy manner. The performance score dictates the quarter note at 132 beats per minute. This movement slows to the tempo of the second movement and changes to 4/4 meter in measure ninety-nine. After the slow section, the composition returns to 2/4 meter

and a rapid tempo at measure 110. The rhythms of this movement are complex consisting of mostly eighth-note and sixteenth-note patterns. There are sections (measures sixty through sixty-four, seventy-five through seventy-nine, and 174 through 178) where similar motives are placed on different parts of the beat, adding to the rhythmic complexity.

The melody, which is easy to recognize, is to be performed fast and light. It consists of motivic fragments and long staccato passages. Both the solo trombone and accompaniment contain the melody. The accompaniment presents the melodic statement in measure one and the solo trombone repeats this statement, entering at measure twelve. This melodic hand-off is repeated at measure 111 with the return to the original tempo. During the slow section (measures eighty-six through 110) the melody reflects the melodies of the first and second movements.

The accompaniment of the third movement is imitative. For example, in measure twelve the trombone enters with the melody, and in measure thirteen the orchestra echoes the melody contrapuntally with the trombone. This compositional technique occurs throughout the movement. Quartal and quintal chords are used sporadically. The harmony in measures eighty through 100 resembles the harmony of the first movement with sustained chords underneath the melody. In measures 100 through 110 the harmony resembles the harmony of the second movement. The difference between this section and the second movement is that the counterpoint line that was present in the second movement has been replaced by a motif that resembles the melody of the third movement. At measure 111, the harmony returns to counterpoint and imitation.

As with the first two movements of the concertino, the tonality of the third movement is difficult to establish. There are clearly chromatic passages (e.g., measure 193). One tonal device

remaining consistent in all three movements is the use of half steps between notes in the melody; however it is more prominent in the rapid passages that occur in the first and third movements.

The texture of the third movement is polyphonic with the imitation and interaction between the voices reaching its culmination in this movement. In the first movement there was little interaction between solo and accompaniment. The second movement introduced some interaction between the first violin and the solo trombone. The entire third movement contains motivic fragments, both within the orchestra and with the soloist. There are sections of this movement where the orchestra drops out for a few measures at a time (e.g., measures twenty-nine through thirty-three), but these are brief and followed by more imitation.

III. Form and Structure

I. Preludium

The first movement of the concertino is impressionistic in style consisting of a series of cadences connected by small interludes or bridges of accompaniment. There is no tonality, though semblances of twelve tone technique, pentatonic scales, as well as planing and quartal/quintal harmonies are present. The rhythms get more complex as the movement continues. This movement takes approximately four minutes to perform. A diagram of this movement is provided below:

Introduction (mm. 1-4)	A (mm. 5-17)	B(Intro') (mm. 17-20)	A' (mm. 21-29)
Cadenza 1 (mm. 29-42)	Bridge (mm. 42-45)	A ² (mm. 45-47)	
Cadenza 2 (mm. 48-62)	Bridge 2 (mm. 62-66)	A ³ (mm. 66-69)	

Cadenza 3 (mm. 69-85)	B'(Intro ²) (mm. 85-88)	Coda (mm. 89-93)	
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II. Aria

The second movement is in ABA form. There is a three measure introduction. The first section (A) starts in measure four and continues to measure twelve. The second section (B) starts in measure twelve and continues to measure twenty-three. Beginning in measure twenty-three, the third section (A') continues until measure thirty. Measures thirty-one through thirty-five constitute a coda with a motivic idea from the first movement starting in measure thirty-three. This movement takes approximately three and a half minutes to perform. A diagram of this movement is provided below:

Introduction (mm. 1-3)	A (mm. 4-12)	B (mm. 12-22)	A' (mm. 22-30)	Coda (mm. 31-35)	
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III. Finale

The third movement is also in ABA form. Beginning with a fast section, part A consists of measures one to eighty. The B section consists of measures eighty through 111. Returning to the original theme, the A' section consists of measures 111 through 194. This movement takes approximately three and a half minutes to perform. A diagram of this movement is provided below:

Exposition				
1. Theme 1 (mm. 1-28)	2. Transition (mm. 29-33)	3. Theme 2 (mm. 34-51)	4. Theme 3 (mm. 52-64)	5. Closing (mm. 64-79)
Development (Flashback)				
First Movement (mm. 80-100)	Second Movement (mm. 100-111)			

Recapitulation

1. Theme 1 2. Transition 3. Theme 2 4. Closing 5. Coda ||
 (mm. 111-134) (mm. 134-144) (mm.144-178) (mm. 178-188) (mm. 188-194) ||

IV. Conclusions

This piece, while it appears difficult, is not too difficult to perform. The first movement is the most difficult because the music itself provides little direction. Larsson left it to the player to determine how the melody should be shaped and played, basically writing a series of cadenzas with small interruptions from the orchestra. I found it difficult to make decisions concerning phrasing and pacing. This became easier when I noticed the repeated intervals of half steps, and realized the minimal role of the accompaniment (in this case it's a piano playing a reduced score).

The second movement was easy to prepare. Its melodic line makes the phrasing obvious, and the rhythms and note range is not difficult. The challenge playing the second movement is keeping the tempo slow. I have a tendency to increase the tempo beyond the intended tempo. It would be easy for me to play the second movement at 100 per minute rather than fifty-four.

The third movement appears extremely difficult. It is fast and contains complex rhythms and odd note combinations. While seemingly difficult, Larsson composed the third movement in such a way that makes it natural to play. Melodically, I feel that this movement resembles a cartoon theme song. It has a light and playful feel to it.

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