

Bassoon Music Review: The Merenzon Collection

By Ronald Klimko
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When Argentinian bassoonist **Andrea Merenzon** decides to do something it gets done! Besides her own successful performance career as a very active soloist-with many concerto and recital performances to her credit; besides her many recordings including five CD's; besides her continuing role as founder and director of the annual Buenos Aires Music Festival in July: besides her work for the IDRS-where she is currently serving on the Executive Committee as Second Vice-President and future Host for the IDRS Conference in Buenos Aires on August 10-14, 2000; she also has been a champion of the wonderful and diverse music of Latin America for many years. She has been commissioning, coercing, coaxing (you name it!) Latin American composers to write music for the bassoon since 1987, the year she returned to South America following her studies at Indiana University. The result of her endeavors is now in print. It is a compilation of twenty-plus Latin American works for the bassoon entitled the *Colección Andrea Merenzon: Obras Latinoamericanas para Fagot (Latin American Pieces for Bassoon)*, published by "Eldorado" ediciones, Edgardo Zollhofer, Editor.

Even as this review of the Collection appears, it continues to grow! The latest work, a bassoon quartet version of *Suite Argentina Para Jugar con Andrea* for bassoon, piano, and optional drums by Jorge Mockert, was performed by Andrea, **Robert Rønnes**, **Michel Bettez**, and **Carl Rath** at the last IDRS Conference in Tempe in June, and is not yet available for review. (Also, some of the more recent works, such as the *Serie Antipopular Argentina* for flute, bassoon and orchestra by Gabriel Senanes and the *Danza Urbana No. 1* for bassoon and orchestra by Eduardo Alonso Crespo, are scheduled for release on Andrea's next CD, and not yet available for review).

The individual works in the Collection are all in a price range from \$12-35 for the unaccompanied or bassoon and piano pieces; the bassoon and string works are in the \$35-40 range-complete with parts; and the *Gran Tango para fagot y orchestra* by Julio Parde costs \$60 for the bassoon and orchestral score, with the parts available for rental. According to Andrea half of the profits from the sales of the Collection are returned to the individual composer of the piece. Each work in the

Collection is beautifully bound with spiral binding, which enables them to lie open and flat on the music stand. Most of them are computer printed, but a few are in manuscript form. Almost without exception, however, they are easy to read, even the ones in manuscript. One can purchase the entire catalog for \$566, which is a bargain for University libraries. Many of the works have been recorded by Andrea herself, and I have indicated in the reviews when a recording by her of the work is available. The entire catalog is online at <www.eldorado.org.ar>, which contains samples of the first page of many of the works. Inquiries can also be made via e mail to Andrea Merenzon via her address: <Merenzon@siscor.bibnal.edu.ar> or via snail mail at Córdoba 2555 5o, 1120 Buenos Aires, Argentina, tel: (54-1) 961-5593, fax: (54-1) 961-8223.

Works for Unaccompanied Bassoon

"*Aerofagot*" by Gabriel Senanes-1989 (\$12.00)
(Recorded on *Argentinian Music for Bassoon*
Cassette tape, 1991)

This work is a hoot! It is in three movements, the first two of which don't hint at the crazy character of the last. The first movement is an atmospheric, somewhat melancholy piece in two sections-both of which reiterate around the note B. The first section gravitates around the b right below middle c and the second-a more rhythmic, recitative-like section-around the lowest B on the bassoon. The second movement (Retanqui-take it easy), is highly rhythmic and percussive in nature. Then comes the last movement, which could stand alone as a cute "encore-like" piece. It is a quodlibet full of quotations from famous works from the music literature, with a lot of musical clichés thrown in as well-usually of corny cadential patterns. It is guaranteed to bring big smiles to a musically-aware audience! Centered around the *Sorcerer's Apprentice* bassoon solo it is primarily in 3/8 time, but still manages to quote the *Till Eulenspiegel* horn solo, the famous *Rite of Spring* bassoon solo, Beethoven's *Fifth*, Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, Liszt's *Les Preludes* and the *Blue Danube* without losing its basic 3/8 tactus!! The way it sneaks from one to another is extremely humorous. I intend to use this work myself on a future program. It fits the bassoon like a glove! Technically it is only a grade III work. Although it ascends to high d2, it could be performed by a

mature college player or better without great difficulty.

Tres Momentos by Salvador Ranieri -1964 (\$12.00)
(Recorded on *Argentinian Music for Bassoon*
Cassette tape, 1991)

This is a more serious Grade IV- work, written in a modern atonal style, some improvised multi-phonics, tremolos, and improvised accelerated and decelerated rhythms. The three movement piece (fast-slow-fast) would require solid artistry to play its varied rhythm and broad dynamic spectrum effectively. The third movement in particular requires a number of tempo, dynamic and timbral changes throughout.

Works for Bassoon and Piano

Sonatina for bassoon and piano by Susana Antón
(\$20.00)
(Recorded on the CD:
Trails by Susana Anton IRCO 1998)

This is a gentle, relatively easy three-movement work of moderate length. It is written in a tonal, neo-classical style. The first movement is in a modified sonata form and has a baroque-like "spinning-out" sixteenth-note rhythmic pulse throughout. The second movement is a scherzotrio, and the last is a slow processional movement that ends quietly in d minor. It is a nicely shaped work that would only be a level III- if it did not ascend only once and by step to a high c#2 in the first movement. Aside from this it might be within the scope of a talented high-school player, but probably best be left to a more advanced player.

Dos Preludios for bassoon and piano
by Washington Castro-1993 (price unknown)

This is again a very nice two-movement work in a neo-classical style in a slow-fast format. The first movement has a number of slurred skips melodically, but would not be overly problematic at the slow tempo. The second movement features nice interplay in thematic material between the bassoon and the piano, and the themes develop nicely throughout. It is a fairly brief work-the first movement is 57 measures long, and the second 76. Ascending only to b flat 2, it is not overly difficult-probably a level III. It would make a nice recital piece, despite its fairly brief length.

A través de la ventana (Through the Window) by
Juan Carlos Cáceres (\$15.00)
(Recorded by Andrea and Maria Ines
Guimaraes, piano, on the *Fronteras Latinas CD*,
reviewed in *The Double Reed*,
Vol.21, No.1, pp.81-82)

This is one of my favorite of all the bassoon/piano works in the collection. It is in the guitar-like key of e minor (sometimes phrygian) overall and begins with an andante that soon alternates with an allegro moderato. Both of these are interrupted by a delightful allegro vivace theme that is unmistakably Latin American in flavor. After the slower music returns, this rousing theme ends the work with a nice flourish. It is probably only a 5 minute work in length, but, as in its title, it is as if one is observing different images from one's window. It is a fairly easy level III in difficulty, ascending only to a2, but would make a great final number on a recital program, or anywhere else for that matter. The style is neo-classical and decidedly Latin American and would be lots of fun to play!

Suite Argentina para jugar con Andrea
by Jorge Mockert (\$30.00)
(Recorded by Andrea, Jorge Mockert, piano, and
Daniel Verón, percussion on the Moosmann
Sampler CD, reviewed in *The Double Reed*, Vol. 20,
No. 2, p. 57, and Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 75-76.)

This is another "gem" from the collection. It is a more extensive work in 5 movements, all of which have a wonderful rhythmic, dance-like vitality to them. The style is modern, but decidedly popular and "tango-like" in nature. The writing for both instruments is excellent-highly rhythmic, but not overly demanding technically, rising only to high b2 and giving it an overall rating of III+ in difficulty. It is a delight to play because of the vitality and drive of the music. The composer uses the guitar-like keys of e minor/major for all but the last movement which starts in a minor and ends in b minor. Throughout the work there is fascinating interplay between 3/4 and 6/8 meter which contributes greatly to the dance-like character of the work. It is guaranteed that the music will have your audience tapping their feet to the rhythms of the piece. This would be a wonderful contrasting work to anyone's recital program. I recommend it strongly to you as an exciting new work for the bassoon.

Cauchemar (Nighttime) Tango for bassoon and piano by Julio César Pardo (\$15.00)

(Recorded by Andrea and Maria Ines Guimaraes, piano, on the *Fronteras Latinas* CD)

This is another excellent recital encore piece. It is a single movement (ca 3 minute) work in two sections that repeat da capo and end with a flourish. Again it is tango-like in character and fairly easy technically, a II+ to III- in difficulty, rising only to g1 in range. The first section has the bassoon soaring melodically over the ostinato piano, the second section is more rhythmic and intricate, and the work drives rhythmically to the end in a somewhat surprising coda after these sections repeat. Once again it is a wonderful character piece to contrast nicely to “classical” bassoon works. It is exciting to see pieces like this now added to the often “staid” bassoon repertoire! I recommend this work also strongly to you.

Dos Danzas Argentinas: Zamba y Chacarera for bassoon and piano by Roque de Pedro (\$20.00)

(Recorded on the *Fronteras Latinas* CD)

This is another wonderful, rhythmic potential recital piece for your next program. This one has a very nice flavor to it. The first dance is a slow Samba-very sexy-with nice interplay between the bassoon and piano. The second dance, the Chacarera, is faster and very tongue-in-cheek in character with frequent “out-of-tune-sounding” half-steps between the bassoon and piano. Again it is highly rhythmic and “toe-tapping” in its spirit and verve. The level is III+, primarily because of the rhythmic intricacies, although the range is only up to c2. Overall it is about seven minutes in length. It’s a super piece. Buy it!

Novitango (New Tango) by Astor Piazzolla (arranged for bassoon and piano by Patricia

Giannattasio) (\$20.00)

(Recorded on the *Fronteras Latinas* CD)

Once again I can’t recommend this work strongly enough! Astor Piazzolla is one of the “classic” Latin American composers, and this is one of his most popular works. It’s a beauty, contrasting fascinatingly with such divergent moods-from the exciting and dramatically driving character of the beginning-to the lovely, sensual and lyrical ending in c minor. Rarely does a bassoon get to play such contrasts in the same work! The piece is about 4’30” in length and is a level III+ in difficulty, rising only to c2 in range. Buy this one “It’s a great piece!!!”

Combinaciones: Sonatina para fagot y piano by Salvador Ranieri (\$35.00)

(Recorded on the *Latin American Masterpieces* CD)

Of all the works in the Collection, this is the only one that contains little-to-no Latin American character. It is instead a solid piece of fine contemporary music for bassoon and piano. The piece is in three movements, comprising about a 12’ 30” overall length, and is a definite Level IV in difficulty. The range is to high d2 and one is expected to have complete command of the bassoon to perform its interesting-sometimes disjunctive rhythmic and melodic style. Both the bassoon and piano parts are very demanding, but playable. The style is modern atonal, but with solid manipulation of interesting thematic material. There are a few multiphonics required, but their selection is pretty much left up to the individual artist. While the work would challenge any artist’s ability, it would be an interesting piece of solid modern music to perform on one’s recital. The three movements of the work are in the standard fast-slow-fast format, with cadenzas for the bassoon between the first and second movement, and part way into the third movement. The universal style of the piece belies its Latin American heritage, and I recommend it strongly to you as a good, solid piece of modern music.

La muerte del Angel (The Angel’s Death) by Astor Piazzolla (arr. for bassoon and piano by José

Bragato) (Price unknown)

This is a beautiful, short work which also appears below as a part of *Serie del Angel (The Angel’s Series)* arranged for bassoon and string quintet. (See below under **Bassoon and Strings**.) It is fundamentally the same music as below, except that the arranger added a slow introduction that the bassoon/strings arrangement lacks. It is a beautiful slow-fast-slow-fast work of about five minutes length and about Level III+ in difficulty, ascending to high c2. The allegro sections are very rhythmic, dramatic, and hard driving. The work comprises one movement of the three that Andrea has recorded with string quintet on the *Latin American Masterpieces* CD. For more information on the work see the review of the *Serie del Angel* below.

Bassoon with Orchestra

Gran Tango para Fagot y Orchestra by Julio Pardo
(\$60 for bassoon part and orchestral score.)

Orchestral parts available for rental.)

(First Performance by Andrea Merenzon at the Church of the Madeleine in Paris, France, on September 3, 1991 with the Orchestre Sinfonetta de Paris. Andrea has recorded it and it will be available on the CD *Argentinian Bassoon Concertos* in April, 1999.)

This is a fantastic work! It is really a strong addition to the bassoon/orchestra repertoire. The work is in three movements, fast-slow-fast, and comprises a concerto for the bassoon-complete with a cadenza in the first movement. The entire work is based on tango rhythms and it is a delight to play and to hear. The work is not overly difficult, about a Level III overall, rising only to c2 in range. It would be a wonderful alternative to any of you who have a date with an orchestra as bassoon soloist and are tired of the Mozart-Weber-Vivaldi "rut"! It is a guaranteed crowd pleaser. It looks to be about the length of a typical Vivaldi concerto-maybe a bit longer.

I recommend it strongly to you. I'd love to perform it myself-you could barely keep from dancing to the rhythms as you played it!!!

Concierto en Tango for bassoon and string orchestra by Augusto Rattembach (\$35.00 for bassoon part and orchestral score.)

Parts available for rental.)

(First Performance by Andrea Merenzon at the Church of the Madeleine in Paris, France, on September 2, 1995, with the Orchestre Sinfonetta de Paris. Andrea has recorded it and it will be available on the CD *Argentinian Bassoon Concertos* in April, 1999.)

Unlike the *Gran Tango*, this work is more serious and somber in nature. It is in three fairly short movements in the fast-slow-fast format, with a cadenza in the last movement. The style is greatly expanded tonality, but the melodic writing is not overly disjunct. Rhythmically, it contains enough complexity to qualify as a Level IV- in difficulty, with the bassoon rising to d2 in range. In this work the tango rhythms and style are not so straightforward. Generally they lack the gentle syncopation one normally associates with the tango. It is, however, a solid showpiece for the bassoon somewhat shorter in length than the *Gran Tango*, and more modern overall in style.

Bassoon and Oboe

El Firulete (The Flourish) by Mariano Mores
(arr. for oboe and bassoon by Mariano Kraus)
(\$12.00)

This is a delightful encore piece in a tango rhythm for oboe and bassoon. It is really very easy in both parts-a Level II+, rising only to g1 in the bassoon part, but f3 in the oboe part. It would be a great closer for an oboe/bassoon recital, or perhaps as a "demonstration piece" for the 2 instruments. It is quite short and written in simple da capo form. Again it is such a delight to discover all this Latin American double reed music so brand new to most of us. Another strong recommendation here for this specialized little piece!

Bassoon and Strings

La enigmática historia de amor de Bauxita y Grafito (Bauxite and Graphite's Mysterious Love Story) for bassoon and string quartet by Gabriel Senanes
(\$40)

(Recorded on the *Latin American Masterpieces* CD)

This is a curious piece. It is obviously programmatic, with the five movements: *Notas preliminares*, *Enigma*, *Historia*, *Bauxita*, and *Grafito*, each telling a portion of the "story". There is lots of tongue-in-cheek poking fun of modern music at times, judging from the way the music moves in and out of tonality. The slow first and fourth movements are balanced by the rhythmic drive of the other three. The *Historia* movement in particular has a lot of interesting Stravinsky-like rhythms. It would be a lot of fun to play. The work overall is 21 1/2 minutes in length and would be challenging rhythmically and ensemble-wise, making it a Level III+ in difficulty. Rangewise it goes no higher than b flat2 for the bassoon.

Serie del Angel (The Angel's Series): La muerte del Angel (The Angel's Death), Milonga del Angel (Milonga of the Angel), and Resurreccion del Angel (The Angel's Resurrection) by Astor Piazzolla
(Arr. for bassoon and string quintet by Gabriel Senanes) (Price unknown)

(Recorded on the *Latin American Masterpieces* CD)

This is an extensive work that comprises a real showpiece for the bassoon. The three movement work is almost 19 minutes long overall and would be a major work on one's recital program. The first movement, which is also arranged separately for bassoon and piano, begins with the allegro theme immediately (unlike the bassoon/piano version, which begins with a slow introduction), and presents the bassoon with the driving, rhythmic

theme that permeates the dramatic character of the entire movement, and contrasts it beautifully with the lyrical second theme. The second movement is a slow tango marked *Lento* and gives the bassoon a chance to sing a mournful tune in the key of b-minor. The contrasting middle section rises to the key of c-minor and the opening theme returns more elaborated in the key of f-minor to end the work quietly as it began. The third movement is quite slow in tempo and contains a basso ostinato theme that continues with little modification throughout, starting and ending in a-minor with a faster A-flat major in the middle. The movement also has an extensive cadenza for the bassoon connecting the return to the slow a-minor theme. The cadenza has a curious, almost Baroque-like quality to it. With a sudden *allegro* flourish at the end, the work ends with a veritable "Amen" plagal cadence in the key of A-major. The style is tonal, but with lots of sevenths, ninths, etc. added to the fundamentally tonal harmony. The overall

technical level is about a III+, and would require artistry as well as technique to convey its broad spectrum of emotion. Once again Andrea's commissions have given us an alternative to the usual Danzi, etc. fare of works for bassoon and strings for the next recital program! As is the case with most of the works above, one also has the opportunity to hear excellent performances of most of them by Andrea herself, on her CD's, which are available from the above addresses as well.

It was a distinct pleasure to review all this exciting new music for the bassoon. To be sure I have found many works within the collection that I hope to do myself in the future. To a non-Latin American like myself, and I am sure many of you out there as well, this Collection is a wonderful excursion into the wealth of the music of South America that presents the bassoon in a light that goes far, far beyond the few Latin American works by Villa Lobos and Mignone that we already know. Thank you, Andrea, for all of this! ❖