

# Roger Boutry and the Bassoon

## Part I: The Man and His Story

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**W**hen I decided to program Roger Boutry's *Interférences I* on a recital in April 2012, it never really occurred to me that before the year was out I would find myself sitting in the composer's Paris home, speaking to Mr. Boutry himself about his life story. But that is what happened. This article is the first in a series of three, focused on not just my own experiences with Mr. Boutry but also on sharing his extraordinary story, accomplishments, and works:

Part I) Boutry's biography and the process of interviewing him in Paris

Part II) A survey of his compositions and a look at each of his works for bassoon

Part III) A theoretical and interpretive analysis of *Interférences I*, for bassoon and piano

### Introduction

The French musician Roger Boutry has been an active performer, composer, conductor, and teacher for more than sixty years, achieving the highest levels of musical excellence in each facet of his career. Bassoonists owe a great deal to Boutry: to date, he has written more than ten works for the bassoon—a generous contribution to the repertoire.

*Divertissement*, for oboe, clarinet, and bassoon – Alphonse Leduc, 1956

*Prélude, Pastorale et Tarantelle*, for two bassoons – Alphonse Leduc, 1966 (out of print)

*Deux Pièces en Sextuor*, for wind quintet and harp or piano – Alphonse Leduc, 1971

- Interférences I*, for bassoon and piano – Warner Chappell, 1972  
*Douze Études Atonales*, for solo bassoon – Alphonse Leduc, 1972  
*Quintette*, for wind quintet – not published, 1974  
*Timbres*, for bassoon and piano – Éditions Salabert, 1980  
*Prisme*, for bassoon and piano – Éditions Salabert, 1982  
*Pollux et Saturnin*, for oboe and bassoon – not published, 2009  
*Déchiffrages for bassoon and piano* (sight-reading sketches) – not published, 1979-2010  
*Croquis*, for bassoon and piano – not published, 2013

Boutry's compositional voice is modern, unique, and accessible, combining atonal writing with familiar forms and strong thematic elements. His most popular work for bassoon and piano, *Interférences I*, has been widely performed and recorded, but most bassoonists' knowledge of Boutry and his works ends there.

### Working with Boutry

In preparation for the April 2012 recital, I began to research Boutry. It became clear that there were few sources available, that many of them were in French, and none of them concerned *Interférences I*. Yet the information I found was intriguing: it painted a picture of Boutry as an exceptional pianist, conductor, teacher, and composer who had written works for choir, orchestra, wind ensemble, chamber groups, and a multitude of solo instruments— including seven published works for the bassoon.

After the recital, I began to try to get in touch with Boutry in hopes of writing my doctoral thesis on his works for bassoon. I contacted Anne Bongrain, research director of the Centre de Recherche et d'Édition at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris, and a former student of Boutry's, who in turn offered to contact him. A beautifully penned letter arrived from the composer himself a few weeks later, thanking me for my interest in his work, and offering his assistance.

As Boutry neither uses e-mail nor speaks English, we began exchanging letters in French, and a December visit was settled upon. Trips to the mailbox that fall were always rewarding: Boutry sent many letters, recordings, scores, and concert programs to aid my research. As CD after CD arrived of works composed, performed, arranged, and conducted by him, the enormity of this man's talent (and kindness) became quite evident.

I began feverishly learning French (with little success). One of Boutry's friends in Paris is American conductor and professor Adrian McDonnell, who agreed to serve as translator for the interviews. My French-speaking sister, Ellen Bennett, also agreed to make the trip to Paris and did the majority of translating outside of the interviews.

When we arrived in Paris, Boutry and his wife Evelyn graciously offered to pick us up and take us to lunch. Over lunch, we talked about music, wine, and Boutry's past visit to my home state of Texas (he had sported a cowboy hat on his flight back to France).

A few days after our lunch together, when the Boutrys returned from a trip to Strasbourg for a festival in his honor, they invited us over for dinner with Adrian McDonnell. That evening, Boutry showed me the late **Maurice Allard's** bassoon part to *Interférences I* (the work is dedicated to Allard, who also did the first recording), the medal he won at the first Tchaikovsky competition in 1954, his father's Conservatoire diploma signed by Gabriel Fauré, and many of his own first edition scores and autograph manuscripts. He told the story of how he and Evelyn met, about his family's stay in Marseille during the German occupation of Paris during World War II, and about his friendship with painter Paul Ambille, whose works cover the walls of their home. It was an enthralling evening.



Dinner at the Boutry home

The next morning, we met at McDonnell's studio at the Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris. The next three days then followed a similar format: interviews, lunch, and then musical sightseeing. During the interviews, I was truly impressed by Boutry's willingness to let me ask question after question of him, and McDonnell's alacrity and accuracy in translating the conversation for both of us.

In the course of the three days of interviews, Boutry told his life story, complete with concert programs, certificates, and photographs, and supported by humorous anecdotes (the article of clothing that inspired him to take up conducting; an oboist who had a reed knife accident during a Garde Républicaine rehearsal then calmly left rehearsal to ride his moped to the hospital; Boutry dressing up as a matador with the other Prix de Rome fellows; and so forth).

His many accomplishments were described with modesty, his creative compositional process outlined as if it were as natural as writing his name. He analyzed each of his bassoon works, identifying the sections, themes, and counterpoint within each piece. As he considered his own works in this way for the first time, he pointed out that he does not analyze his compositions as he writes them; he simply puts the music on the page as it comes. Amidst this self-reflection, he began to categorize all of his works—not just the ones for bassoon—by his own preference for them, and continued on to define his own compositional periods for the first time.

Boutry spoke fondly of *Interférences I* and revealed that he considers it one of his most inspired works. Stories about Maurice Allard were plentiful: his affinity for whiskey and Coke; the friendship Roger and Evelyn Boutry shared with Maurice, his wife Louissette, and their dog Mila; and how *Interférences* was named and later designated "I."

At the conclusion of the interviews, I asked which of his bassoon pieces he might suggest for a lecture-recital. He immediately suggested *Interférences I*, and then his unpublished duo for oboe and bassoon, *Pollux et Saturnin*. After much thought on a final piece for the

program, he volunteered to look through his sight-reading pieces for bassoon and piano, and mail me some sketches. I was elated.

After each day's interview, Boutry would lead excursions to the different places that played a part in his life story. Everywhere we went, he was greeted with great respect, admiration, and enthusiasm.

We visited a variety of music shops, the home of Vandoren reeds, and the bar where Boutry and Allard decided to add the *I* to *Interférences* (the full story will be included in one of the two articles to come). We toured the former and current locations of the Conservatoire National Supérieur (complete with a visit to the classroom where Boutry taught harmony), and walked the same halls that Debussy and Ravel once roamed. We met with Anne Bongrain, who provided resources and photographs documenting the history of the Conservatoire and the tenure of Maurice Allard. Boutry even arranged for coffee with **Laurent Lefevre**, Paris Opéra principal bassoonist and former Allard student. Lefevre talked about studying with Allard, and about the differences in playing *Interférences I* on French and German bassoons.

At the conclusion of the trip, the Boutrys took us back to the airport. Our bags checked and tickets in hand, they waved goodbye as we went through security.

The next month, the first of Boutry's sketches for bassoon and piano arrived in the mail. Over the course of the next several weeks I received seven sketches (in French, *Croquis*): six newly composed, and one based on an earlier sight-reading sketch. On 12 April 2013, I had the honor of premiering *Croquis* and performing *Interférences I* with pianist Angela Park, and premiering *Pollux et Saturnin* with oboist **Annie Corrigan**.

I simply cannot overstate the kindheartedness of Roger Boutry. Not only did he consent to hour after hour of interviews, he welcomed me into his home and brought his stories to life by showing me around Paris. Before, during, and after the trip, he went above and beyond to supply me with resources—and even new music. To me, Boutry's warmth, generosity, and humility render his genius that much more extraordinary.



Picture taken during the interview



Conservatoire classroom

## Biography of Roger Boutry

### *Youth and Education*

Roger Jean Boutry was born in Paris, France on 27 February 1932 to musical parents. His mother, Palmyr Boutry (né Dubois), was an amateur singer and pianist. His father, Stanislas Boutry, was the principal trombonist of the Orchestre National for many years, his career having a profound influence on the young Roger.

Boutry began his preparatory Conservatoire piano studies at the age of six. By the time he was nine, his studies included trumpet and percussion.<sup>1</sup> During the occupation of Paris in the Second World War, his family relocated to Marseille where he studied at the local conservatoire from 1941–1943. Boutry was twelve years old when his family returned to Paris and he enrolled in the preparatory program at the Conservatoire National Supérieur. At this point, Boutry made the choice to forgo traditional studies and focus on piano and a career in music.

Winning a preparatory prize in 1946 for piano earned Boutry admission to the Supérieur division of the Conservatoire, where he began piano studies with Jean Doyen.<sup>2</sup> In 1948, he earned a *premier prix*<sup>3</sup> in piano and began a performing career as a soloist.

Boutry continued his hard work and the honors accumulated. In 1949, he began composition studies with Tony Aubin, and received simultaneous *premiers prix* for chamber music studies with Pierre Pasquier and harmony studies with Henri Challan. Another *premier prix* followed in 1950 for accompaniment studies under Nadia Boulanger, and yet another in 1951 for fugue and counterpoint studies with Noël Gallon.

1950 saw the start of Boutry's conducting studies with Louis Fourestier,<sup>4</sup> for which he received the corresponding *premier prix*. In 1953, Boutry took second place in the Prix de Rome competition for composition. His studies were completed in 1954, when he received his eighth and final *premier prix* in composition for his *Rapsodie* for piano and sixteen winds.

The intense course of study Boutry pursued was not common to all students at the Conservatoire; only composers destined to audition for the Prix de Rome undertook such

rigorous instruction in theory and harmony. Boutry's continued dedication to the piano and his excellence as a conductor made him unique, even among his fellow composition students.

Boutry's 1954 Grand Prix de Rome was for his cantata *On ne badine pas avec l'amour*. The Prix de Rome was the highest possible honor for a French composer, and by winning it, he joined the ranks of composers such as Berlioz and Debussy. Boutry lived at the Villa Médicis in Rome from 1955 until 1958, along with Prix winners from other disciplines (painting, poetry, sculpture, architecture). The constant exchange of ideas, talent, and "cultural eclecticism" during those years had a profound effect on young Roger Boutry.<sup>5</sup>



Fourestier conducting class 1953

While in Rome, Boutry began a lifelong friendship and artistic collaboration with painter Paul Ambille (Boutry and Ambille discovered they were actually cousins). Ambille created many paintings inspired by Boutry and his music, not only during their time in Rome but throughout his lifetime.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Boutry dedicated his *Sonate pour Violon Seul* to Ambille, incorporating his dear friend's artwork on the printed score and the CD album cover.

### ***Roger Boutry and the Piano***

From boyhood to the present, the piano has been a common thread in Boutry's career. He established excellence early as a performer and maintained a dynamic solo career from the age of twelve. Throughout his decade of diverse lessons at the Conservatoire, he managed to balance his dedication to the piano with his other studies.

Boutry's official debut as a young pianist was in 1945. His solo career expanded quickly after he was awarded the *premier prix* for piano in 1948, at the age of sixteen. Even as a teenager, reviews of Boutry's performances praised his nuance and finesse and dubbed him a remarkable virtuoso, not only representing France but the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

In the mid-1950s, Boutry toured under the management of *Jeunesses Musicales*, and competed at the first Tchaikovsky International Competition in Moscow in 1958. He prepared

and performed a number of works for the competition, including his own *Scherzo-Fantasia*, composed for the occasion. Although American pianist Van Cliburn won first prize that year, Boutry garnered one of the many other prizes that were awarded.<sup>8</sup>

By age twenty-seven (1959), Boutry had performed as a soloist with many orchestras throughout Europe, North America, Africa, Australia, and the USSR, under the batons of Pierre Monteux, Edvard Fendler, Igor Markevitch, Jean Martinon, André Cluytens, and others.<sup>9</sup> Boutry has speculated that his extensive performing career between 1948 and 1959 may have adversely affected his composing and conducting, yet he certainly appreciates the impact his performing career had on him as a musician.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Military Service***

From 1959 to 1961, Boutry served in the Algerian war as a member of the Sixth Infantry Battalion. His twenty-eight-month military service marked a complete departure from all aspects of the musical world.

### ***Conservatoire Professorship***

In 1962, Conservatoire director Raymond Loucheur appointed Boutry to take over the harmony class of a sick colleague.<sup>11</sup> At only thirty years old, Boutry was exceptionally young for a Conservatoire professor but it does not seem to have hindered his work. Boutry considers helping students discover the science of chords and the artistry of composition an especially rewarding pursuit<sup>12</sup>—many of his former students have gone on to become renowned composers, accomplished performers, and directors of Conservatoires throughout France. Boutry's affiliation with the Conservatoire also led to the composition of a great number of works, including the majority of his compositions for bassoon.

### ***Early Conducting Career***

Boutry's career as a conductor began in 1953 with engagements to conduct a concert of the Orchestre National de France as well as concerts at the Vichy Festival, including a performance of his *Le Rosaire des Joies* (for narrator, soprano solo, mixed chorus, and orchestra). That same year, he conducted Brahms' *Piano Concerto No. 1* with soloist Evelyn Ursat—who, a year later, became Madame Boutry. Boutry was invited to serve as the head of the Concert Society of the Conservatoire<sup>13</sup> in 1963, 1964, 1966, and 1967. He has since gone on to conduct several other orchestras throughout France and the world.<sup>14</sup>

### ***The Garde Républicaine***

The Orchestre de la Garde Républicaine has a long and dignified history as a part of the French military, performing at ceremonial functions and serving as a cultural ambassador for France.<sup>15</sup> The diverse ensemble performs as a symphony orchestra, a wind ensemble, a string orchestra, and in chamber groups.<sup>16</sup>

By the time Boutry was appointed to lead this esteemed group and given the rank of colonel in 1973,<sup>17</sup> he was already an established conductor, a seasoned professor, and a renowned composer. The conductors who preceded Boutry in the Garde were all wind players; as a composer and a pianist, Boutry represented a new direction for the ensemble.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Compositions***

Until 1959, Boutry's work as a pianist limited his compositional output. Nevertheless, he composed many outstanding pieces during that time.<sup>19</sup> A major turning point in Boutry's compositional career came in 1963 with the creation of his oratorio *Le Rosaire des Joies* (The Rosary of Joy), based on the poem of Marie Noël. After spending three days with Marie Noël, the music for the oratorio simply came to him in a manner unlike any piece before or since;<sup>20</sup>



Boutry en grand tenue

he completed the entire work in only fifteen days.<sup>21</sup> Boutry considers *Le Rosaire des Joies* (which that same year earned him Le Grand Prix Musical de la Ville de Paris) to be his best and most inspired composition.

In 1964, the Concert Society of the Conservatoire commissioned and premiered his *Concerto pour Orchestre*, which garnered Le Prix Georges Bizet de l'Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1967.<sup>22</sup> The following year, Boutry's work *Marche Solennelle* was chosen as the official music for the 1968 X Olympic Winter Games in Grenoble, France. The same year, he won another competition held by the Confédération Musicale de France and composed the official hymn for the organization. At French president Valéry d'Estaing's request, Boutry supplied a new harmonization of *La Marseillaise*, the French National Anthem, in 1974.

The diversity of the Garde Républicaine ensembles at his disposal and the constant stream of commissions by Conservatoire faculty were the impetus for most of Boutry's compositions between 1962 and his retirement in 1997. He composed concours pieces and short sketches for sight-reading exams for nearly every instrument.

Like few composers in history, Boutry, through the Garde Républicaine, had almost complete artistic freedom. He had access to the most talented musicians in the world and was allowed to compose, program, and conduct whatever he pleased. During his tenure as conductor and artistic director, he composed many new works for the various ensembles, often in imaginative combinations with each

other or with solo piano, including *Variations sur un Theme Imaginaire*, for piano and wind ensemble; *Trombonera*, for trombone, wind quintet and brass quintet; *Eclats d'Azur* and *Alternances*, for saxophone quartet and quintet (respectively) and wind ensemble; *Chants de l'Apocalypse*, for brass quintet, winds, and percussion; and *Métachrome*, *Evocations*, and *Tetrade* for wind ensemble.

In addition to composing new works, Boutry also transcribed many major orchestral works for wind band: Bizet's *L'Arlésienne* suites, Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and *Night on Bald Mountain*, Rachmaninov's *Vocalise*, Stravinsky's *Firebird*, Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'une faune*, and selections from J. S. Bach's *Orgelbuchlein* to name a few.<sup>23</sup>

Boutry retired from the Conservatoire and the Garde Républicaine in 1997 after a long career of balancing two full-time positions, composing, and performing. He continues to receive commissions from the Conservatoire and from organizations around the world. In 2009, he traveled to Taiwan, Japan, and the United States to perform, record, and teach master classes. In 2010, he released two recordings: an album of his works for saxophone (with Émilie Leclercq), and a collection of his works for violin (with Alexis Galpérne), playing the piano on both recordings.



Boutry conducting Queenie in a rendition of *Marche Solennelle*

In addition to his travels and recordings, Boutry actively composes—often at the request of his musician friends. Unceasingly creative, he finished his first string quartet in 2012. On occasion, he also serves as an expert for the French judicial system in the area of musical intellectual property.

### To Follow

Part II: A survey of Roger Boutry's compositions and a look at each of his works for bassoon



**Laura Bennett Cameron** studied bassoon with **Tina Carpenter** and **Richard Svoboda**, and she completed her Doctor of Music studies with **William Ludwig** at Indiana University. She performs and teaches in Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas.

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### Endnotes

- 1 Michèle Pontremoli, "Roger Boutry: Chef D'orchestre, Compositeur, Et Pédagogue" (Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1975), 3.
- 2 He also studied briefly with Marguerite Long.
- 3 At the end of each academic year, students of every discipline at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris participated in a form of final exam. For each discipline or studio, a few students with the top passing scores were awarded the designation of *premier prix* (first prize). Other students with high passing scores were awarded the *deuxième prix* (second prize), and students with satisfactory yet passing scores were given the designation of *premier accessit*. Students with scores below the level of *premier accessit* were not permitted to continue their studies at the Conservatoire.
- 4 Interview of Roger Boutry by Laura Bennett Cameron, translated by Adrian McDonnell, 12/18/2012. During the interview, Boutry told the following story: While walking with his father in the city of Deauville in Normandy, they came upon a fine sweater in a shop window. Roger Boutry commented to his father that it would be good for a conductor to wear, because it had loose, bat-like sleeves. Stanislas Boutry countered that if Roger would audition to study conducting at the Conservatoire the following October, he would buy his son the sweater. The sweater was purchased, and Roger Boutry began to practice conducting with a record player. For the audition, he conducted Beethoven's *Egmont Overture*. Before Boutry went on stage, his father tipped the stagehand to remove the conductor's stand and score, knowing his son had the piece memorized. Though Boutry admits he was stiff, the audition had a memorable moment for him: when he raised his hands to begin and the orchestra raised their instruments in unison, he was quite moved. After the audition, Louis Fourestier reprimanded the younger Boutry, saying that

- conducting from memory was a bit of a dirty trick, and unfair to the other candidates. Even so, he was successfully admitted to the conducting program.
- 5 Marie-José Chauvin, «Entretien Avec Roger Boutry,» *Le Courrier Musical de France* 25, no. 1 (1969): 7.
  - 6 Interview of Roger Boutry by Laura Bennett Cameron, translated by J. Ellen Bennett, 12/16/2012. A collection of Paul Ambille's works inspired by Boutry's work with the Garde Républicaine is currently on display at the Nolan Rankin Galleries in Houston, Texas. The collection contains paintings of various scenes of musical life: instruments and their players, rehearsals, performances, and the like.
  - 7 Pontremoli, 10-11.
  - 8 Interview of Roger Boutry by Laura Bennett Cameron, translated by Johanna Bennett and Adrian McDonnell, 12/16/2012. Although he is in possession of the certificate and medal awarded him, Boutry doesn't know exactly what prize he won, as everything is written in Russian. Interestingly, at the next meeting of the competition in 1962, Boutry's future wife Evelyn Ursat also won a prize for piano (they married in 1964).
  - 9 Pontremoli, 11-15.
  - 10 Pontremoli, 15; Chauvin, «Entretien Avec Roger Boutry,» 4.
  - 11 Arnauld Jeanclaude, "L'Orchestre De La Garde Républicaine Sous La Direction De Roger Boutry (1973-1997)" (Université de Nancy, 2005), 48.
  - 12 Chauvin, «Entretien Avec Roger Boutry,» 9-10.
  - 13 «L'Orchestre De Paris» <http://www.philharmoniedeparis.com/fr/l-orchestre-de-paris> (accessed 1/17/2013). The Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, established in 1828, had long been the premier orchestra in Paris. The orchestra was reorganized in 1967 by the French government, placed under the artistic direction of Charles Munch, and renamed the Orchestre de Paris. The orchestra has since been conducted by many renowned conductors, including Herbert von Karajan, Sir Georg Solti, Daniel Barenboim, Christoph von Dohnányi, and Christoph Eschenbach.
  - 14 Pontremoli, 19-20. Boutry has conducted the Orchestres Philharmonique and Lyrique in Paris; the concert orchestras Padeloup and Colonne; and orchestras in Belgium, Luxembourg, Japan, Taiwan, and the United States.
  - 15 Jeanclaude, 27-28; Mary Blume, "In Paris, Military Music with Strings," in *International Herald Tribune* (Paris: New York Times Company, 1997).
  - 16 Jeanclaude, 31.
  - 17 Jeanclaude, 49.
  - 18 Jeanclaude, 32-41.
  - 19 Pontremoli, 15; Chauvin, «Entretien Avec Roger Boutry,» 4.
  - 20 Interview of Roger Boutry by Laura Bennett Cameron, translated by Adrian McDonnell, 12/18/2012.
  - 21 Chauvin, «Entretien Avec Roger Boutry,» 4.
  - 22 Pontremoli, 16, 41.
  - 23 Jeanclaude, 52.