

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

INSPIRATION AND INFLUENCE:
THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL FORCES IN THE WRITING OF SIX WORKS FOR
CLARINET

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ABSTRACT

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James Taaffe Parkinson III

Master of Music in Performance

Since the clarinet was invented in approximately 1692, it has become one of the most important wind instruments in history. Composers quickly and enthusiastically began composing music for the new instrument and throughout the last three centuries, the clarinet has acquired a large repertoire of quality solo works written for it by many composers. This may lead one to investigate the reasons that prompted composers to write for the instrument. There are many possible reasons a composer may write for an instrument: He or she may simply like the sound, or there may have been a monetary influence. It may have been a spontaneous decision. The factors may be either internal or external in any case.

Six compositions were selected to be studied and performed for this masters recital program: Claude Debussy's *Premiere Rhapsody*, Francis Poulenc's *Sonata for Clarinet*, Johannes Brahms *Sonata No. 1 for Clarinet*, Rodney Rogers *Voices Rising*, Witold Lutoslawski's *Dance Preludes*, and Scott McAllister's "*X*" *Concerto*. After research on these six compositions and the composers who wrote them began, patterns emerged. It

became clear that specific forces played a central role for each of these composers in their writing of these works. Although the specific forces varied in each case, they all shared one thing in common: they were external in nature and in each case, the external force influenced and/or inspired the composer to write music for the clarinet. An examination of information obtained from various sources reveals that specific external forces influenced or inspired the six composers of this masters recital program to produce these works for the clarinet.

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The clarinet is one of the most important instruments in Western classical music. Since its invention in approximately 1692, the clarinet has quickly found an important and permanent role as a standard orchestral, wind ensemble, chamber, and solo instrument. Ultimately, it was the composers who granted this instrument its important status in the world of music through their extensive and consistent use of it in their writing of music. Some composers even favored the clarinet. For example “Brahms also had his favorite instruments. Again and again in his music, outstanding eloquent passages for the horn, the clarinet, and the cello testify to the special attraction these instruments had for him.”¹ Parts written for clarinet can be found in most major symphonies starting in the 18th century, and almost every major composer has written for the clarinet in one genre of music or another.

During the Classical period the clarinet quickly started to acquire a large amount of solo repertoire. Molter, Stamitz, Weber, and Mozart were among the first of many important composers to start, and continue, to write quality music for the clarinet as a solo instrument. As a result of those composers and the many who followed, the clarinet now has a large quantity of solo and chamber works written for it, many of which are of very high quality. With such an apparent interest in the clarinet by composers, one may start to contemplate what compelled these composers to write such compositions for the clarinet.

1. Bernard Jacobson, *The Music of Johannes Brahms*. (London: The Tantivy Press, 1977), 116.

After examining information about the composers of six works for the clarinet as a solo or chamber instrument, patterns started to emerge. Claude Debussy, Francis Poulenc, Johannes Brahms, Rodney Rogers, Witold Lutoslawski, and Scott McAllister did not simply write a clarinet piece. In each case, there were factors present other than a composer and an instrument for which to write music. It became clear that all six of these works for the clarinet were the result of external forces. An examination of information obtained from various sources reveals that specific external forces influenced or inspired the six composers of this masters recital program to produce these works for the clarinet.

Claude Debussy composed his *Premiere Rhapsody for Clarinet and Piano* between December 1909 and January 1910. Apparently, he was proud of this work and deemed it a success. In a letter to Jacques Durand, dated July 15, 1910, Debussy wrote, “The clarinet competition went extremely well and, to judge by the expressions on the faces of my colleagues, the *Rapsodie* was a success!”² Also, Debussy felt compelled to further the performance possibilities of this great work by completing a version for clarinet and orchestra in October of 1910.

Despite the success of *Premiere Rhapsodie*, Debussy wrote the work for a purpose he deplored. Debussy was born in St. Germain-en-Laye on August 22, 1862. In 1872, he started his studies at the Paris Conservatoire where he was to study for twelve years. During his time there, he was involved in many competitions and won his only *Premier Prix* in accompaniment. He also went on to win the *Prix de Rome* in 1884 with his cantata *L'enfant prodigue*. Yet Debussy felt as though these competitions did not help

2. Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*. Selected and edited by Francois Lesure and Roger Nichols. Translated by Roger Nichols (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1987), 222.

him, but instead hindered his growth. In an interview with the journal *Le Figaro*, entitled “What should be done at the conservatoire?” Maurice Leudet speaks with Debussy concerning his new appointment as a member of the advisory committee at the famous music school where he studied. Debussy explains, “. . . I am against the famous tradition of the Prix de Rome. It is aimed at the least interesting thing about the competitors-their vanity. So the Prix de Rome does no good at all. The competitors are made to do things they will never have to do in their career as musicians.”³ Debussy was also against the awards and competitions at the Conservatoire. “If there is one thing at the conservatoire that I find useless and even damaging, it’s the way in which awards are made to the students. The form that competitions take seems to me deplorable . . .”⁴ He also states, “We are creating more and more idiots through our competitions. In all professions I would say that the method is a bad one, but in art it is particularly detestable.”⁵ Debussy’s negative feelings towards the Paris Conservatoire, caused in a large part by the competitions and awards, can be summed up in his saying “for my own part, the truth is that one must escape the Conservatoire as soon as possible in order to find one’s individuality.”⁶

Despite Debussy’s strong opinions regarding the Paris Conservatory and especially the competitions held there, he ended up contributing greatly to that which he so strongly despised. Just ten months after that strongly opinionated interview with Maurice Leudet, Debussy wrote *Premiere Rhapsodie* for the Clarinet Competition at the Conservatoire as a requirement for his appointment to the Paris Conservatory Advisory

3. Claude Debussy, *Debussy on Music*. Collected and introduced by Francois Lesure. Edited by Richard L. Smith (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1977), 238.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

Committee. He also wrote a piece to accompany the rhapsody for the sight-reading portion of the competition entitled *Petite Piece*. In the case of *Premiere Rhapsodie*, it is the influence of career and politics that resulted in Debussy writing a work for clarinet that has been well-received by musicians and their audience ever since it was first played, at the competition.

Francis Poulenc was another French composer who, like Debussy, expressed in both words and music his free-spirited compositional style, which was not bound by previous rules. Yet Poulenc was influenced, and inspired, by external factors that were much different than those that affected Debussy and his *Premiere Rhapsodie*. Poulenc's Sonata for Clarinet and Piano was written under the influence and inspiration of his personal goals, his fondness for the instrument itself, and a person who he knew throughout his adult life.

Poulenc was born on January 7, 1899 and died on January 30, 1963. Throughout his life, he wrote quality chamber music, which included his first and last published works. One source of inspiration for his Sonata for Clarinet and Piano was his personal goal of writing a cycle of sonatas for the woodwinds before he died. In the mid-1950s, Poulenc suffered from depression. "He began to doubt the value of his music and he became a hypochondriac, fearing that he had a fatal cancer."⁷ As a result, he completed the first woodwind sonata in the series, the Sonata for Flute and Piano, in 1957. By 1962, Poulenc feared that his death was eminent and approaching soon.⁸ This influenced him to write his Sonata for Oboe and Piano, and his Sonata for Clarinet and Piano both in the summer of 1962. His fear that death was to come soon came true. Although he never

7. Keith W. Daniel, *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style* (Ann Arbor, MI: UNI Research Press, 1982), 50.

8. Daniel, *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style*, 55.

wrote the bassoon sonata in the little time he had left, his fear of death influenced him to fulfill as much of his goal as possible and write the clarinet sonata within the last part of his life.

Poulenc was also influenced to write for the clarinet because of his preference for wind instruments. He “. . . often expressed a preference for wind over stringed instruments, and his chamber music bears this out: only three of the thirteen works include solo strings.”⁹ Poulenc is also known for the quality of his wind writing. While his string writing has been described as “astonishingly simple,”¹⁰ “The writing for the wind instruments, on the other hand, is skillful and idiomatic from the very first works . . . Poulenc also seems to have understood how to combine winds with each other and with a piano.”¹¹ Also, within the wind instrument category, Poulenc had a more specific preference for woodwinds. “Poulenc markedly preferred woodwinds to brass, for he used the latter, apart from the French horn, in only two chamber works.”¹² Poulenc’s preference of writing for winds, and especially woodwinds, likely had a profound influence on his goal to write the woodwind sonatas, including the *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano*, before his death.

Poulenc dedicated his Sonata for Clarinet and Piano to his friend, the Swiss composer Arthur Honegger, who was born in France in 1892 and died in 1955. Poulenc became friends with Honegger in the group of French composers known as “Les Six.” The group, consisting of Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, and Germaine Tailleferre, socialized and performed regularly together

9. Ibid., 101.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 102.

from 1917 to 1921. Les Six was a strong force in the culture of France during their five years together—they reduced the influence of Wagnerism and impressionism in France, and “. . . brought music back down to earth—indeed, they traced it back to its popular roots. They helped usher in a decade of pleasure . . . and of musical and aesthetic freedom.”¹³ Although Poulenc and Honegger kept in occasional contact throughout their lives after their time in Les Six, they only got close towards the end. Poulenc states, “The paradoxical thing about it is that my great intimacy with Honegger only occurred during the last two years of his life, because he was ill. When he was ill he liked you to come and see him and keep him company.”¹⁴ Although they got along personally, their musical tastes and compositional styles were very different. Poulenc felt Honegger was too heavy and serious in his writing, while Honegger felt Poulenc’s was too light. The Sonata for Clarinet may very well reflect this. The first movement, a modified ternary form with a very slow B section, resembles the heavy and serious style of Honegger’s writing. The slow second movement was composed a few years before the rest of the sonata as a single movement work. This movement alternates back and forth between two hauntingly beautiful themes and may serve as a lament honoring Honegger. The third movement, which is free in form but closely resembles a rondo, is light, fast, and playful, representing Poulenc’s compositional style as well as the two composers’ youthful days in Les Six.

Johannes Brahms was a highly gifted and skilled composer. His musical works are unique, and although typically very complicated in structure, most listeners find them

13. *Ibid.*, 22.

14. Francis Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*. Conversations assembled by Stephane Audel. Translated by James Harding (London: Dobson Books Ltd., 1978), 108.

beautiful and easy to appreciate. But unlike Debussy and Poulenc, who disliked the idea of being confined to past compositional tendencies, “Brahms produced his works not by ignoring what his predecessors had accomplished, but by adopting from them all that he believed sound and valuable, consolidating and organizing it for his own purpose.”¹⁵

Despite their differences as composers, Brahms and Poulenc both shared a similar source of inspiration and influence in the writing of their clarinet sonatas: a person. For Poulenc, it was Arthur Honegger. For Brahms, it was Richard Muhlfeld.

Brahms was born in Hamburg, Germany on May 7, 1833 and died on April 3, 1897 in Vienna, Austria. He was a highly gifted pianist as a child, and began piano lessons with Otto Cossel at age seven. Just three years later, he started lessons with Cossel’s teacher, Edward Marxen, who was one of the most famous teachers in Germany. At age ten, he played Beethoven and Mozart in public, and at just fourteen years old, performed his own virtuoso concert, which included his own composition *Fantasia on a favorite Waltz*. As a young man of twenty, Brahms met the highly gifted composers and musicians Robert and Clara Schumann, with whom he maintained close life-long friendships. Brahms maintained a successful adult life as a composer and he produced a substantial amount of various musical works. But in 1890, he decided that he would not compose anything else, ever again. “Though it was in the summer of 1890 that he composed the buoyant G major [viola] Quintet, his friend Billroth, visiting him at Ischl in May, reported of him in a letter: ‘He rejected the idea that he is composing or will ever

15. Henry S Drinker, Jr., *The Chamber Music of Johannes Brahms* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 2.

compose anything.”¹⁶ This all changed because of a man, Richard Muhlfield, and his instrument, the clarinet.

After a year of Brahms’ decision never to compose again had passed, there is much evidence that Richard Muhlfield and his clarinet playing influenced and inspired Brahms so much that he composed four great works for the instrument. In his writing on Brahms, Daniel Gregory Mason states “The particular incitement to the composition of these last four works [for clarinet] was Brahms’ delight in the clarinet playing of his friend Richard Muhlfield, of the Meiningen Orchestra, whom he considered the greatest player on any wind instrument known to him.”¹⁷ One of these four compositions included his Sonata for Clarinet and Piano in F minor, Opus 120, No. 1. The first movement, *Allegro Appassionato* in sonata-allegro form, is passionate, serious, and dark in nature. The second movement, *Andante un poco Adagio*, is slow and serene. Its form is ternary, with the piano playing variations of the A theme in the background of the clarinet’s melody. The third movement, *Allegretto Grazioso*, is in a lively 3/4 time. This movement is light in mood, with the exception of a more serious middle section that contains the final appearance of F minor tonality. The last movement, *Vivace*, is a rondo in cut time, and ends the sonata in the lighter tonality in the parallel F major.

There is little doubt that Brahms was influenced and inspired by an external force, Muhlfield, based on further historical evidence. “During the summer of 1894, Brahms returned to the clarinet (the Trio and Quintet dating from his introduction to the instrument by Muhlfield in 1891), and composed the two sonatas [for clarinet] comprising

16. Daniel Gregory Mason, *The Chamber Music of Brahms* (Ann Arbor, MI: J. W. Edwards, 1950), 219.

17. *Ibid.*, 220.

Opus 120 . . .”¹⁸ Muhlfeld’s influence on Brahms to write the two sonatas is thought to be so strong that the sonatas have even been described as being written for “Piano and Muhlfeld.”¹⁹

Rodney Rogers is currently Professor of Composition at Arizona State University. Born in 1953, Rogers has composed music for various combinations of instruments and voice. Four of his works received their New York premiere at Carnegie Recital Hall, and performances of his compositions for winds and brass have taken place at many of the top music schools in the United States, including The Juilliard School, The Eastman School of Music, Cincinnati Conservatory, Florida State University, Indiana University, Northwestern University, Arizona State University, and many more. In 2000 his composition for solo clarinet entitled *Voices Rising* was premiered at the International Clarinet Association ClarinetFest on July 14. Like Brahms and Poulenc, Rogers was inspired and influenced to write this clarinet work by a person, in this case Robert Spring, Professor of Clarinet at Arizona State University, who commissioned the work. The fact that Rogers wrote *Voices Rising* for Robert Spring had an impact on the style of the writing. Spring is known as a highly virtuosic clarinet player and the writing in *Voices Rising* reflects that. The piece is based on an Episcopalian chant melody and alternates between extended, fast, virtuosic passages of sixteenth notes (that utilize circular breathing, a technique Spring is known for) and relatively short slow, rubato passages. The tempo, quarter note equals 132-138, remains consistent throughout the fast episodes, in which the meter changes frequently, allowing for concentrated passages of rhythmic syncopation. The main theme in the fast sections consists of two repeated notes a minor

18. Henry S Drinker, Jr., *The Chamber Music of Johannes Brahms*, 61.

19. *Ibid.*

third part, followed by sequences of cascading or rising broken chords. The piece builds intensity from the beginning all the way to the end by gradually transposing the theme into higher and higher clarinet range, as well as gradually increasing the overall dynamic levels. The piece ends brilliantly, with what could be described as a concise five bar summary of the entire work, that starts with one bar of the slower rubato style at *pp*, then moves to the characteristic fast sixteenth-notes that build broken chords, rising in sequence and building from *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, and finally *ff*. The last note is a sixteenth note, D, placed two octaves above the staff.

In addition to being influenced and inspired by Robert Spring, Rogers was also influenced by religion. The following interview with Rogers reveals how external forces contributed to his creative process:

Although Robert Spring had commissioned *Voices Rising*, did you ever have plans or the idea to write a solo clarinet work? If so, did *Voices Rising* come to resemble what you had in mind in any way?

“I had no previous plans to write any solo work for a single-line instrument.”

I believe that Spring is himself an Episcopalian. Is that why the work is based on an Episcopal chant melody? If so, did he request that be the case? If not, what inspired you to use that material?

“Yes, his background with the church was a reason. I have always liked English chant and thought this would be an interesting melody to set. I'm a member of both the Lutheran and Episcopal Church and have great respect for their musical heritage.”

How did you come to select Hymnal 1940 (out of all the Episcopalian music) as the material you used?

“I had a number of hymnals, having been an organist, and I enlarged my search to many hymnbooks, though the one I settled on was in the 1940 hymnal I had in my own library.”

Once you accepted the commission, what influenced or inspired you in the process of writing *Voices Rising*?

“I was looking for a text and tune that ‘spoke’ to me in some way. The one I chose did just that--the text was helpful in structuring the music and giving it an emotional center, while the chant melody had attributes that I could use in building the piece. Of course, it was first and foremost beautiful to me.”

In general, and/or with this piece, do you find that external sources, such as the chant melody in *Voices Rising*, or a folk song for example, inspire you to compose, or do you decide to compose first and then look for external sources of material or inspiration?

“Both ways of working have been useful to me. At times the musical ideas come first, often through improvisation at the keyboard--but only after I know what the instruments are. In this scenario, the title will come to me later and I sometimes encounter difficulty in giving it a title. It is equally common for me to find an external source of inspiration, say a phrase in a poem or a pre-existing melody. I then try to build from this initial source material. That is the case with *Voices*.”

Feel free to comment on anything else you might want to say about *Voices Rising*, concerning influence or inspiration or external factors, or anything at all.

“Your questions are very good and bring out most of what I might have to say about the piece. Your first question is one I could expand upon. I've never felt very convinced by pieces written for solo instruments (excepting keyboard and guitar, a different category). Within this genre, the Bach solos works for string instruments seem the least restricted, do in part to the skill of the composer in creating harmony and multi-voice texture. In fact, in *Voices* I took a cue from Bach and actually harmonized the melody in arpeggiated chords during lyric sections of the piece. (Messiaen's clarinet solo from the Quartet is another solo work that I find very successful.) The use of the piano was also a way to enrich the 'sound environment' of the clarinet--and of course the piano is partly responsible for creating the other voices. This is partly my response to acoustically dry rooms, which I don't like, despite the advantage of clarity. (My preference comes from my early years of performing in acoustically live churches and hearing chant in a cathedral setting).”

“One other point: Dr. Spring wanted a work that would have a dramatic and virtuosic ending. So that was really a significant aspect of my initial choices regarding the shape of the piece. I would actually like to come up

with a version that is playable by someone with a little less technical facility. I've talked with Bob about this but still have not come up with a few alternate passages. If you have any thoughts on this, please send them my way.”²⁰

The preceding interview shows that there are several external forces involved with the creation of *Voices Rising*, including a specific clarinetist and personal experience of the composer. These factors determined two of the most important components of the entire work: the selection of the hymnal, upon which the work is largely based, and the style of the writing, which is highly virtuosic in nature.

Although there is no clear evidence that Witold Lutoslawski was influenced by a specific clarinetist to write music, he was profoundly influenced by his personal experience with Polish folk music—not only in his writing of the clarinet work *Dance Preludes*, but also in his development as a composer. Born in Warsaw, Poland on January 25, 1913, he started piano lessons at age six. Lutoslawski wrote his first piano composition at age nine. In 1927 he entered the Warsaw Conservatory, and two years later he wrote his first orchestral piece *Scherzo* at sixteen years of age.

For Lutoslawski, folk songs may have been the most important element of his development as a composer. In 1947, he completed his First Symphony using post-tonal techniques that were considered standard at the time. However, he realized that the symphony's post-tonal idiom was a dead end. Like Debussy and Poulenc, he felt as though he needed to develop his own compositional style. After the *First Symphony* was completed, “he decided to start as a composer from the very beginning, as if knowing nothing about harmony, counterpoint, melodic in order to work out his own musical language. He was aware that the creation of individual methods of expressing oneself was

20. Rodney Rogers, e-mail message to author, 25 March, 2008.

the essential thing of art in the 20th century.”²¹ Lutoslawski then started to use folk songs as a starting point in his development:

“In the years after the symphony, Lutoslawski composed a range of works based on Polish folklore and with a posttonal technique, such as *Little Suite* (1950), *Concerto for Orchestra* (1950-54), *Silesian Triptych* (1951), *Bucolics* (1952), and *Dance Preludes* [for clarinet and piano] (1954), as the crowning achievement of this folk-influenced period. He joined simple diatonic folk melodies with counterpoints and harmonies that were quite often atonal.”²²

For Lutoslawski, the use of folk music enabled him to link his early methods, of which he was not satisfied, to his later methods of skillfully composing twelve-tone vertical music, of which he was very satisfied. “To some degree, that [using folk music] was a substitute technique for him. He used to say about this period that his technique was still limited, so he had to learn to compose within his limitations.”²³ Folk music gave him a basis in which to develop his own techniques. In the book *A Polish Renaissance*, a quote by Lutoslawski can be found which addresses the subject of folk songs:

“Some think that it was the pressure of the government that made me compose with folk-tunes. No! It’s absolutely not true- a sheer misunderstanding! . . . I began writing with folk stuff as a raw material as early as before the war . . . It interested me, but never very profoundly . . . It was sort of an episode. It served as something that replaced what I was not able to do . . .”²⁴

Based on the evidence above, it is clear that Lutoslawski was heavily influenced by folk melodies in writing *Dance Preludes for Clarinet and Piano*. The piece was written during the time in his life when he was developing and refining his own unique techniques as a composer, using folk music as a foundation. After using folk songs to

21. Stanislaw Bedkowski, “Witold Lutoslawski.” In *Music of the Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde*, ed. Larry Sitsky, 282-290 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc., 2002), 283.

22. *Ibid.*, 284.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Bernard Jacobson, *The Music of Johannes Brahms* (London: The Tantivy Press, 1977), 82.

write works such as *Dance Preludes*, Lutoslawski moved away from the use of folk tunes and was finally able to write music the way he wanted to, using his own techniques and different sources of inspiration. He went on to compose serial music using all twelve tones in his own unique vertical manner that was different than the horizontal tendencies of Schoenberg and Webern. Lutoslawski was able to successfully create and establish his own rules of pitch organization using chord-aggregates, strands, and other techniques that he made unique to his system of composition. Although he used modern methods and wrote serial music, “his works . . . proved that modern music need not be inaccessible and uncommunicative.”²⁵

Stanislaw Bedkowski sums up the influence of Lutoslawski on the world of music in his writing about the composer:

“Lutoslawski’s death on February 7, 1994, deprived the musical world of one of the most original composers, who, like Debussy or Bartok, created a highly individual musical style and made a very real contribution to the development of the musical language of our century by inventing and codifying some principals of a new musical system. For his genuine novelty and technical discipline in composition, mastery of form, and clarity of musical conception, Lutoslawski gained the reputation of a contemporary classic.”²⁶

Folk songs clearly influenced the writing of *Dance Preludes*, but in the case of Lutoslawski, that influence was so profound, it reached far beyond *Dance Preludes*, to the core of his development as a composer and as a human, and allowed him to realize his potential to freely compose the way he wanted, and to profoundly influence the world of music.

25. Bedkowski, “Witold Lutoslawski.” In *Music of the Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde*, 282.
26. *Ibid.*, 287-88.

Scott McAllister was born in Florida in 1969. He received his doctorate in composition from Rice University, and has since received many commissions, performances, and awards throughout North America, Europe and Asia. He started composing at a young age and wrote his first piece for wind ensemble when he was fourteen years old. In 1996, he completed his "*X*" *Concerto for Clarinet*. This work, in three movements, utilizes resonance and non-traditional trills of intervals often no larger than a quarter-tone to enable the clarinet to create a unique sound environment. Movement one contains contrasting sections that alternate between slow sections, that are ethereal and psychedelic, and fast sections, that contain extremely fast runs and intense rhythmic gestures. Movement two is a theme and variations set at a fairly consistent, moderate tempo. In movement three, the clarinet plays fast melodic fragments that resemble jazz improvisation. Elements of the first movement are restated in short fragments, and a short excerpt from the main themes of Mozart's clarinet concerto, movements one and three, can be found in measures 68-74.

Before McAllister wrote "*X*" *Concerto*, he was strongly influenced by an external force. Just as Lutoslawski was influenced by folk music in their writing of clarinet music, so was McAllister. But McAllister was influenced by a particular style of folk music that was very different: modern American rock music. The rock bands Nirvana and Alice in Chains were very popular in the United States in the 1990s. Their style of music established a genre of rock commonly referred to as "grunge," which is energetic, emotional, and at times achieves a "dirty" or "raunchy" effect through the use of heavy, sustained guitar distortion. In a radio interview with host John Clare for the weekly show

titled “Composing Thoughts,” McAllister reveals how rock music inspired and influenced him to write music such as “*X*” *Concerto*.

According to McAllister, when he finished his doctorate degree, he was a very academic composer.²⁷ But the influence of rock music would soon permanently change his compositional style. In McAllister’s case, the influence of the rock genre on his music was not entirely by his own choice. He did not develop a deep interest in it, at least entirely, by his own attractions to that style of music- he was drawn into the music by circumstance. As McAllister explains, “. . . my neighbors were building a house, and the people that were building the house were listening to Nirvana and Alice in Chains over and over and over again and I could not hear, I couldn’t compose.”²⁸ What started as a distraction from composing eventually turned into the inspiration he needed to write “*X*.”

“ . . . I took my clarinet out, put my legs up on my desk, and they were playing a Nirvana tune, uh, “*Where did you Sleep Last Night*,” on the MTV unplugged album, the last track there. And so I put that in my Finale [music notation software] and put like 20 variations of it and I just did some crazy stuff on the clarinet and then I wrote a third movement which was very inspired by Alice in Chains.”²⁹

Five of the twenty variations mentioned by McAllister above were selected as the variations used in Movement Two of “*X*” *Concerto*. After he finished the composition and his friend Paul Votapek (clarinetist in the Naples Symphony Orchestra) took the piece and surprised McAllister with a performance, McAllister saw the impact this new compositional style, inspired by rock music, could have on an audience. Of the premiere

27. Scott McAllister, interview by John Clare, November 17, 2007.
<http://www.classicallyhip.com/ct/episodes/scott.mp3>

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

of “X,” he states “. . . the first time in my life, [after] the last note, everybody in the audience just stood up clapping . . .”³⁰

Similar to the importance of folk music to Lutoslawski’s development as a composer was rock music to Scott McAllister’s. The influence and inspiration derived from his initial experience composing with rock music led McAllister to compose many other pieces inspired by rock music, including his *Black Dog Rhapsody for Clarinet and Wind Ensemble* of 2001. “. . . Since then, every year or so I’ll have a big work that’s inspired by rock, and I started thinking to myself ‘I really need to tie into my roots’ . . .”³¹ Clearly, McAllister was heavily influenced, and inspired, by the external factor of hearing rock music when he composed “X” *Concerto for Clarinet*.

Many great composers of the past and present have written quality works for the clarinet. By doing so, they have helped to establish the clarinet as one of the most important instruments in Western musical culture. We may then ask what, if anything, might have inspired or influenced these composers to write the music of the clarinet repertoire. Do the composers who write for the clarinet do so simply because the instrument exists? How do composers choose to write for the clarinet when there are so many other options? And once a composer decides to write music for the clarinet, is the clarinet itself the inspiration? Or are there external factors that influence or inspire the writing of clarinet music before the decision to write it takes place?

Examination of various available sources of information on Debussy, Poulenc, Brahms, Rogers, Lutoslawski, and McAllister reveal observable patterns of external factors influencing and inspiring these six composers to write works for the clarinet. In

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

the case of Claude Debussy, a major external factor was his job requirements. For Poulenc, it was his personal goals, his fondness for the clarinet, and Arthur Honegger. For Brahms it was Richard Muhlfeld. A commission to write a clarinet piece influenced Rodney Rogers, but the skills of his patron Robert Spring, and his religious background, provided true inspiration. For Witold Lutoslawski, folk music played a major role in his writing for the instrument. And for Scott McAllister, rock music went from being a constant distraction to a consistent source of influence and inspiration. After examining a variety of sources, it becomes clear that specific external factors influenced or inspired the six composers of this masters recital program to produce works for the clarinet.

Recital Program
James Parkinson
Masters of Music in Clarinet Performance
May 17, 2008, 5:00PM
California State University, Northridge
Recital Hall

Dance Preludes for Clarinet and Piano (1954) Allegro molto Andantino Allegro giocoso Andante Allegro molto	Witold Lutoslawski (1913-1994)
Premiere Rhapsodie for Clarinet and Piano (1910)	Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
Sonata No. 1 in f minor for Clarinet and Piano (1894) Allegro appassionato Andante un poco Adagio Allegretto grazioso Vivace	Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
Voices Rising (2000)	Rodney Rogers (b. 1953)
Sonata for Clarinet and Piano (1962) Allegro tristamente Romanza Allegro con fuoco	Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)
“X” Concerto for Clarinet (1996) Quarter = 56 To the Pines... To the Pines Quarter = 126	Scott McAllister (b. 1969)

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