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A Performance Preperation Guide to Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra (1964, Revised 2001) Composed by Thom Ritter George (born 1942)

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A Performance Preparation Guide for

Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra (1964, revised 2001)

Composed by Thom Ritter George (born 1942)

Keith Robert Rose

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By

Keith Robert Rose

2010

Dedicated to:

Jodi, my wonderful wife, who kept me going through everything, even when she was dealing with everything she had to deal with.

Christopher, my amazing son, for tolerating me having to go to classes and missing out on time with him.

Jeff Kurka, the man who kept me motivated and focused, even when I didn't want to.

Russell Houser, my fellow Graduate Student and Commander, for having a friend and competitor in classes (even though you always beat me).

Lastly, to all the family, friends, and Soldiers who supported me in this endeavor.

A Performance Preparation Guide for

Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra (1964, revised 2001)

Composed by Thom Ritter George (born 1942)

by

Keith Robert Rose, B.M.

Thesis

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Introduction

This thesis is meant to bring focus to composer Thom Ritter George and his *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* (1964). This will be accomplished by presenting background information, analysis, and performance preparation practices which in whole will serve as a reference guide for someone who is approaching the work with little or no knowledge of the work. This will serve as a blueprint to impart the origins of the work, the structure of the work through analysis, and performance preparation of the work. This composition has become a common staple of the modern repertoire for solo bass trombone. The bass trombone has evolved as a solo instrument over the last sixty years, as is proven by examining the listings of solo repertoire in Thomas Everett's *Annotated Guide to Bass Trombone Literature*. Prior to the middle of the Twentieth century, the bass trombone was utilized as an ensemble and chamber music instrument with very few solo compositions in the United States. (Everett, 1985; Thompson, 2009). From about the 1950s to the present, the solo repertoire for bass trombone has been greatly expanded by major composers including Eric Ewazen, Tommy Pederson, and David Uber. However, Thom Ritter George was one of the first composers to write a major concerto for the instrument (Everett, 1985). This paper will provide a biographical summary of composer Thom Ritter George, to include information from his personal web site, the program notes for the *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra*, as well a series of interviews with the composer. The thesis will also briefly discuss a revision of the score of *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* that was

completed in 2001 by the composer. In the final chapter, the author will provide a performance preparation guide that will include strategies, methods and practice drills to aid in the preparation of this significant composition.

Chapter One – Biographical and Historical Information

The following text is from the biography section of the personal web site of Thom Ritter George (Thom Ritter George Web Page - <http://www.isu.edu/~georthom/> (accessed June 1, 2009):

Thom Ritter George was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan where he showed an early interest in composition at the age of 10. He was awarded Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees in composition from the Eastman School of Music, studying composition with Thomas Canning, Louis Mennini, Wayne Barlow, John LaMontaine, and Bernard Rogers. Dr. George was awarded the Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Catholic University of America in 1970. He has written over 350 works from simple songs to large symphonic compositions.

From 1966 to 1970, Dr. George served as composer-arranger for the United States Navy Band (Washington, D.C.). During the period 1970 - 1983, he was Music Director and Conductor of the Quincy Symphony Orchestra (Quincy, Illinois). In August 1983, Dr. George was named Conductor of the Idaho State Civic Symphony, a position he still holds to this day. In 1983, Dr. George joined the faculty of Music Department at Idaho State University, where he is a Professor of Music Theory, Composition, Orchestration, and Music History.

George has written solo works for every instrument of the orchestra, the majority of which were composed during his time at the Eastman School of Music from 1960 to 1968, where he earned both his bachelors and masters degrees. George's first published works date from this period of conservatory study and include his *Sonata for Baritone Horn and Piano*, *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra*, *Hymn and Toccata* (band), *Brass Quintet No. 1*, *Proclamations* (band), and *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra*.

Historical Information

The historical information in regards to the work is best summarized by the following excerpt from the composer's web site (ibid):

Thom Ritter George's *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* was completed on February 12, 1964 for George's friend Robert Brawn. Mr. Brawn gave the first performance with the Eastman-Rochester Symphony Orchestra conducted by Dr. Paul White, Associate Conductor of the Rochester Philharmonic. This premiere was given in Kilbourne Hall, Eastman School of Music, Rochester, New York, on March 18, 1964.

In an interview with the composer in April, 2007, George was asked to discuss the driving force in his interest in the bass trombone. He was also asked why he chose to dedicate *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* to Emory Remington & Robert Brawn? George gave the following response:

I composed the *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* as a result of my personal friendship for Robert S. Brawn (a fellow student at Eastman) and his teacher, Emory Remington. Brawn was giving his Performer's Certificate concerto appearance with the Eastman-Rochester Orchestra and wanted a solo tailored to his special capabilities.

After this answer, the author was curious in regards to the involvement and interaction of Robert S. Brawn and Emory Remington during his time at Eastman, and if they provided any feedback to him during the compositional process. Dr. George's response:

Before writing the piece, I had several meetings with Brawn. I asked him to play representative repertoire for me, particularly the etudes for bass trombone. These were particularly interesting and opened up many technical possibilities which are not called for in the standard repertoire.

According to the archived solo recital programs by the International Trombone Association, the *Concerto* between 1973 and 1999 was performed 72 times. This proves that this is a significant work for bass trombone.

Chapter Two - Analysis of *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* (1964)

To begin the analysis of Thom Ritter George's *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* (1964), the author will insert a general analysis of the work, courtesy of the web site of Thom Ritter George.

The *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* is written in one movement comprised of four major sections. The music opens with a quiet introduction for divided strings. Here, the scale-like theme which is to dominate the score is played by the low strings. The solo bass trombone repeats and then expands this main theme. The second section is a spirited "Allegro" showing the virtuoso qualities of the bass trombone, particularly large leaps into the low range. The orchestral climax of the "Allegro" leads to a cadenza played by the solo instrument. The last measures of the cadenza lead directly to the final section, a fugue, begun by the bass trombone, answered by the instruments of the brass section, and eventually taken up by the whole orchestra.

Thom Ritter George's *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* includes multiple compositional techniques that are inherent to twentieth-century music. *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* is in a sense a modified theme and variation form, in which the variations are integral in incorporating elements of twentieth-century compositional techniques, to include octave displacement and quartal harmony. The example below shows the main theme in its first statement in the solo bass trombone part. This theme, in the key of f minor, will occur throughout the work in many different variations.

Allegro ♩ = 116

The musical score consists of three staves of music in bass clef, 4/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Allegro' with a quarter note equal to 116 beats. The music features a series of eighth-note patterns, often beamed together. Dynamic markings include *f* (forte) and *sf* (sforzando). The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

Example 2
 Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra
 First Variation, measures 20-28

Another Twentieth Century compositional tool George highlighted in his *Concerto* is the use of *glissando*, which is idiomatic of the trombone. This device is used to highlight the versatility of the instrument, as well as the performer. This can be seen in example 3.

Allegro ♩ = 116

The musical score consists of two staves of music in bass clef, 4/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Allegro' with a quarter note equal to 116 beats. The music features a prominent glissando passage, indicated by a wavy line through the notes. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

Example 3
 Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra
 Glissando passage, measures 39-43

The use of mixed meter in George's *Concerto* provides another layer of difficulty and is common in Twentieth Century compositions. This is demonstrated best in the cadenza of the *Concerto*, where the meter is in a state of fluctuation between Common Time, 7/8 time, 3/4 time, 3/8 time, and 3/8 time. Example 4 is the main section of the cadenza, where the angular melody can also be seen in its most difficult setting with skips multiple octave skips in a row and leaps of over two octaves at times.

The musical score consists of four staves of music in bass clef. The first staff is marked *Animato* with a tempo of $\text{♩} = 60$ and includes the instruction *poco a poco accel.* The meter changes from common time (C) to 7/8, then to 3/4, and finally to 3/8. The second staff continues with dynamic markings of *p*, *f*, *p*, *f*, *p*, and *ff*. The third staff is marked *Allegro molto* and features a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes. The fourth staff continues with similar rhythmic complexity and dynamic markings.

Example 4
Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra
Cadenza, measures 157-173

The use of quartal harmony and polyrhythm give this work a very modern sound. The following example from the *Concerto* shows a perfect outline of the use of quartal harmony. This is only one of many examples of quartal harmony in the work.

Fugue $\text{♩} = 108$

The image shows two staves of musical notation in bass clef with a 2/2 time signature. The first staff contains four measures of music. The second staff contains four measures of music, with the final measure ending in a double bar line. The notation features complex rhythmic patterns and intervals characteristic of quartal harmony.

Example 5
Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra
Measures 200-210

The last four measures of the work highlight both techniques used simultaneously and demonstrate the complexity of the work. The usage of polyrhythm provides a unique musical texture.

Piu mosso (Quasi presto) $\text{♩} = 72$

First system of musical notation. The top staff is Bass Clef, 2/2 time, with a *fff* dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes. The piano accompaniment consists of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a *p* dynamic and a *cres. molto* marking. The piano part features a triplet of eighth notes in the bass staff and a melodic line in the treble staff.

Second system of musical notation, starting at measure 279. The top staff is Bass Clef, 2/2 time, with a quintuplet of eighth notes. The piano accompaniment continues with a grand staff, featuring a *fff* dynamic and a quintuplet of eighth notes in the bass staff. The system concludes with a *sf* dynamic marking.

Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra
Measures 277-280

Chapter Three - Interviews with Thom Ritter George

The author was quite fortunate in being able to speak with Thom Ritter George in depth about the *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra*, in an interview conducted on April 28, 2007.

Q: What made you decide to compose solo works for all the instruments in the modern orchestra, which is a massive undertaking?

A: I decided in my early twenties to compose sonatas for all the orchestra instruments. Hindemith's example guided my thoughts on this. It was a great challenge that, curiously, no one else seems to have taken up. There are lots of sonatas for violin. But how many good sonatas are there, for example, for horn? We need more.

Q: What made you decide to compose solo works for all the instruments in the modern orchestra? Were any of these pieces (barring *Concerto for Bass Trombone*) dedicated to specific people?

A: All the sonatas were written for particular players, although a dedication is absent in the majority of cases. Everything has been played; some works just a time or two, some many times.

Q: What was your driving force to decide to compose a piece for bass trombone? Was it because it was an instrument that was not commonly composed for? How did you decide to dedicate it to Emory Remington & Robert Brawn?

A: I composed the *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* as a result of my personal friendship for Robert S. Brawn (a fellow student at Eastman) and his teacher, Emory Remington. Brawn was giving his Performer's Certificate concerto appearance with the Eastman-Rochester Orchestra and wanted a solo tailored to his special capabilities.

Q: Did you have a lot of interaction with them during your time at Eastman? Did they have any feedback with you during the compositional process of this work?

A: Before writing the piece, I had several meetings with Brawn. I asked him to play representative repertoire for me, particularly the etudes for bass trombone. These were particularly interesting and opened up many technical possibilities which are not called for in the standard repertoire.

Q: What led you to making a revision to your Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra, nearly 40 years after the initial publishing? Was it led by a change in your compositional methods, or was it due to issues that came up in performances of the work over time? Do you find that the revisions made a dramatic difference in the composition?

A: There were a several reasons I decided to make a revised version in recent times.

(1) One was that I wanted to regain control of the copyright. The story of my problems with the publisher is a long and twisted affair. I could regain control of the copyright with a revised version if the Register of Copyrights in Washington agreed that the revision was enough different from the original version to warrant a copyright. The Register of Copyrights did agree and a new copyright was assigned to the revision.

(2) I wanted to prepare a new score and set of parts using the Finale notation program. This was done. The original orchestra materials were all in manuscript.

(3) Most of all, I wanted to clear up harmonic ambiguities in the final bars of the *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra*. This passage is in f natural minor. However, in the original version, additional tones were added. This had the effect of creating more harmonic dissonance (tension) at the expense of clarity. I decided the piece would be better if it stuck to the f natural minor without conflicting tones.

(4) As I mentioned previously, none of this affects the music the solo bass trombone plays. Certain other details, such as string bowings, were also improved to make performances go better. The number of measures in the piece remains the same in both versions, and the essential content remains the same.

One thing remains to be done on the *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra*, which is to make a new piano reduction. The published reduction is correct but is fairly difficult to play. Some players have written me to say they were having trouble finding an accompanist who could handle the reduction. For the revision, I want to review the whole matter and see if I can create a more playable piano reduction without sacrificing the integrity of the music. Such a new reduction may not happen in the near future since I have several other reductions which have to be made first, to include my *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* (1997) and *Concerto for Horn* (2007). At least with the *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra*, the original reduction is available and performers can use it.

Most modern solo works that are composed for a solo instrument and orchestra will usually have a reduced score for a different ensemble, which is typically for Wind Ensemble or Concert Band. One of the fascinating aspects of *Concerto for Bass*

Trombone and Orchestra is that there is no orchestral reduction for band. The following response has been posted on the composer's web page:

There is no band arrangement of *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* by Thom Ritter George, nor has the composer authorized such an arrangement. The piece was conceived for orchestral accompaniment and is idiomatic to that medium. The balances of the orchestral instrumentation were carefully calculated to insure a successful solo/accompaniment musical relationship. There were two occasions on which the publisher agreed to having band arrangements made by military band arrangers working in Washington, D.C.

George has been vastly responsible for the expansion of the compositional limits of bass trombone repertoire. Thom Ritter George's *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* expanded how composers wrote for the bass trombone and established groundwork for consequent composers and compositions. *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* provided a starting point that influenced subsequent composers in their compositional endeavors with regards to the bass trombone. Subsequent composers cite George as an influence in their work.

Chapter Four – Performance Preparation

George's *Concerto* is a work of high substance, importance, and magnitude, requiring a great deal of preparation in order to perform the work properly. With any great solo work, there are several sections that could be described as a "pitfall waiting to happen," whether it be a matter of interpretation, a highly technical passage, or a passage using difficult compositional techniques that creates a problematic part for the player. This work presents problems that can be categorized in the following: octave displacements, large irregular intervals, musical interpretation, and ensemble sections, some of which were also examined in Chapter 2. The author will cite specific examples under each category and provide a method to improve the performance of each example.

Octave Displacement and Large Intervals

The usage of octave displacement occurs in this work multiple times. Octave displacement is defined as suddenly changing the register the instrument is playing without interrupting the harmonic motion. In this work, the octave displacement takes place by rapidly and continuously going in and out of the lower registers of the bass trombone, often into the pedal range. This difficult compositional technique occurs not only in slow passages but in the faster sections as well, highlighting the capabilities of the performer and instrument. This can be seen in examples 6 and 7.

The best way to work this issue is to break down each occurrence of octave displacement into a cluster of three notes. This cluster should include the octave displacement and the notes surrounding it. Once the clusters have been identified, the player should play the

clusters at a slow pace with no regards to a specific tempo. The reason to not regard tempo at this point is done to allow the player to find the proper embouchure settings and air quantity required for each of the three notes to speak clearly and with good tone. The goal is to achieve five consecutive iterations of the note cluster before moving on to the next step. The next step is to play the clusters in tempo, beginning at a metronome marking 60 beats per minute (quarter note=60). The player should work on the consistency of the cluster in order to begin to place it in context with the section of the work. The goal for this step is once again to achieve five consecutive iterations of the note cluster. The next step is to increase the tempo by ten beats per minute, continuing to work to achieve five consecutive iterations, continuing to add 10 beats per minute until the tempo of that section is achieved. At times, the composer uses skips greater than an octave, but the process of preparation would stay the same.

Allegro ♩ = 116

The musical score is written for bass trombone in 4/4 time, marked Allegro with a tempo of 116. It consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with a forte (f) dynamic and features a series of eighth-note clusters. The second and third staves continue with similar rhythmic patterns, marked with sf (sforzando) dynamics. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4.

Example 6
Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra

First Variation, measures 20-
28

The musical score consists of five staves of music in bass clef. The first staff is marked *Animato* with a tempo of $\text{♩} = 60$ and includes the instruction *poco a poco accel.* It features a melodic line with slurs and dynamic markings *p* and *f*. The second staff continues the melodic line with dynamic markings *p*, *f*, *p*, *f*, and *p*, ending with a hairpin leading to *ff*. The third staff is marked *Allegro molto* and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The fourth and fifth staves continue this rhythmic pattern with various dynamic markings and articulation marks.

Example 7
Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra
Cadenza, measures 157-173

Musical Interpretation

As with all solo works, a player may struggle in the process of creating a musical interpretation of how the composer intended to work to be conveyed to an audience. Some players may have the majority of their focus directed towards the more technical passages of a composition they are preparing to perform. This, of course, causes the musical interpretation to fall to the wayside. Due to the vast technical concerns of the

Concerto, the performer must remember to pay attention to the melodic ideas present.

When one analyzes the work, they will see that the entire piece is built on a foundation of a melody that occurs in multiple permutations throughout the work. It is only through the process of full analysis that the melodic intent can be gathered and then be applied in the preparation process. In the process of analyzing for melodic purposes, the performer should look for arrival points, moments of melodic or harmonic tension and release, and find places where the soloist and orchestra collaborate and a common musical idea.

Some ideas that can help performers achieve a high level of musicality can include using mental imaging to impose a scene or life moment on the work, recording practice sessions, or finding a colleague to help give feedback. This process will enhance the performance and representation of the work in a manner that the composer intended.

Ensemble Sections

It is the responsibility of the solo player to identify where the accompaniment and soloist line up in unison or harmony, work together on a common musical idea or contrast each other to create tension. A great example of this is in the fugal section, where the soloist begins unaccompanied and the accompaniment soon follows and takes over the fugal material. When the soloist is unaccompanied, they can have more presence, but need to balance with the accompaniment when the ensemble enters the fugue. When all musicians are playing together, it can create a meaningful musical experience for the audience, as well as the musicians.

Summary

Given the analysis, background information, documented impact on literature for bass trombone, as well as the author's personal experiences while preparing and performing the work, the author believes that Thom Ritter George's *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra* (1964) is one of the most significant works for bass trombone composed in the Twentieth Century. The difficulty of the work started a evolution of compositional process for bass trombone, establishing the standards for what the bass trombone was capable of. This work has been and will continue to be a staple of the repertoire for years to come.

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Curriculum Vita

Keith Rose is a native of the upper Midwest, born and raised in west suburban Chicago, and later in Southwestern Wisconsin, where he graduated With Honors from Seneca High School in 1996. Mr. Rose then matriculated to the Lawrence University Conservatory of Music in Appleton, WI, initially majoring in Music Education & Computer Science, and graduated with a Bachelor of Music in Low Brass Performance (Bass Trombone & Euphonium emphasis). Mr. Rose's primary teachers at Lawrence included C. Nicholas Keelan, David Stull, and Dr. Charles V. Guy. During his undergraduate years, Mr. Rose began his experience and education as an Audio Engineer, working as the Assistant Director of Recording Services under Downbeat Award Winning engineer Larry Darling, a founding member of the jazz ensemble Matrix. Later study in audio came from the Theater Department in later years, combining live sound and sound design with his accumulated skills as a studio engineer. Mr. Rose graduated from Lawrence Conservatory in 2001.

After graduating from Lawrence University, Mr. Rose was a freelance low brass instructor in the Appleton/Oshkosh/Green Bay area, teaching for the Appleton Area School District and the New London School District. Mr. Rose was also a freelance musician in the Fox Valley, playing for such diverse groups as principle Bass Trombone for the Oshkosh Symphony Orchestra, trombone substitute for the Manitowoc Symphony Orchestra, the Appleton City Band, the Big Band Reunion, The Great River Big Band, and as a pit orchestra musician for numerous productions. In 2002, Mr. Rose was employed by Carnival Cruise Lines Entertainment as a musician in a 10-piece showband aboard the MSS Carnival Triumph.

After Carnival Cruise Lines, Mr. Rose enlisted in the Army in October of 2002 as an Army Bandsman. Mr. Rose completed Basic Combat Training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and the Basic Music Course at the Army School of Music at Naval Amphibious Base, Little Creek, Virginia.

Mr. Rose's Army assignments include the 10th Mountain Division Band, Fort Drum, New York, the 62nd Army Band, Fort Bliss, Texas, and The United States Medical Command Band, Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

Mr. Rose began in the Masters of Music program at The University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, Texas in 2007, majoring in bass trombone performance, where he studies Bass Trombone with Dr. Steve Wilson.