Gilles Silvestrini and Art: A Look at French Impressionistic Artwork, Poetry, and their Influence on Virtuosic Etudes for the Solo Oboe.

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GILLES SILVESTRINI AND ART:
A LOOK AT FRENCH IMPRESSIONISTIC ARTWORK,
POETRY, AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON
VIRTUOSIC ETUDES FOR THE SOLO OBOE

By

Paul Alan Chinen

A LECTURE RECITAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
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GILLES SILVESTRINI AND ART: A LOOK AT FRENCH IMPRESSIONISTIC ARTWORK, POETRY, AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON VIRTUOSIC ETUDES FOR THE SOLO OBOE

Paul Alan Chinen

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Gilles Silvestrini’s compositions for the oboe have been sought after because of their virtuosic nature, a good option to test advanced oboists technical abilities and can be used as an option for an unaccompanied programmatic etude in a recital setting. One of his most famous works is the “Six Etudes for Solo Oboe,” which is a set of concert etudes each inspired and named after a specific French impressionistic painting. Oboists often play these works in competitions and recitals, however they are not often presented with any representation of the paintings to which they correspond. Many of Silvestrini’s other works take inspiration from various composers, artists, and poets. On April 20, 2019 at the Frost School of Music, I presented and performed selected etudes from his “Six Etudes for Solo Oboe,” and two etudes from one of his most recent composition, “Six Romantic Studies for Solo Oboe,” with visual aide of the paintings and reciting of poetry that correlates to each of the compositions.

Gilles Silvestrini is a living composer and oboist based in Paris, France, best known for his contemporary compositions for oboe. He also has written works for various other
instruments, chamber groups and a few concertos. Silvestrini was born on June 4, 1961 in Givet, France, a commune in northern France close to the Belgian border. Silvestrini studied oboe at the National Conservatory of Music and Dance in Paris, where he won first oboe prize in 1985. He then went on to study composition from 1986 to 1988 at the École Normale de Musique. His works for the oboe are often used for competition pieces, such as the International Double Reed Society Gillet Competition and entrance exams or auditions for some of the most prestigious universities and conservatories around the world including the National Superior Conservatory of Music and Dance of Lyon, and the Lynn University Conservatory of Music.

Over the course of this project, I interviewed Mr. Silvestrini about some of his inspiration, studied the scores, and identified specific sections of each of the etudes that clearly represent the artwork in the music to present to the audience members. Much of this project was based on personal interpretation of the works, paired with details about inspiration Silvestrini had while composing these works.

The goal of this project is to display to the audience and future performers a sense of my connection to these works, what I discovered within each piece of artwork and how they correspond to my interpretation of Silvestrini’s compositions. I hope to inspire future oboists who study or perform these works to look beyond these works as etudes, but to understand what each painting means, and how we as musicians can communicate that in a performance. This project can also serve as a performers guide to these works. It will show future performers what intricacies I have discovered within each etude that will help guide the performer to achieve an interpretation of the work that makes sense to
them with the paintings and poetry. I explored and researched each piece of artwork to gain a deeper understanding of the artwork itself as a separate aspect before I went back to the notes from Mr. Silvestrini, so I could develop my own connection between these two components.

I have always enjoyed and appreciated when any type of artist embraces cross genres and performs works with other types of art forms. In most classical training, we become accustomed to sitting on a stage and performing a piece of music for an audience who simply listens with nothing in front of them except for a program, which may include notes about the piece. I hope to bring a new appreciation and understanding for these selected works so that oboists in the future who study these works can have a deeper connection to these studies, beyond just their technically challenging nature. Following this project I hope that more musicians, composers and other artists become inspired to present and perform arts in cross genre situations.
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Chapter 1

Etude No. 1 from “Six etudes for oboe” Hotel des Roches Noires à Trouville - Claude Monet (1870)
The first etude in Silvestrini’s Six Etudes for oboe, is one of the most popular etudes for oboists and is a good introduction into Silvestrini’s composition style and music. This etude was also my introduction to Mr. Silvestrini’s work, as it was commonly asked as an audition piece for graduate school programs. When I discovered this etude, I was instantly intrigued and wanted to know more about the rest of his compositions. This etude is one of the longer etudes in the first set of six, with a performance run time of approximately 3.5 minutes. This movement is often times performed alone.

*Hotel des Roches Noires à Trouville* is a painting from 1870 by Claude Monet. The original painting can be found on display at the Musée d’Orsay, a museum located in Paris, France that focuses mostly on French art from 1848-1914.¹ The painting is a depiction of the Hotel des Roches Noires, in Trouville, France, a hotel that is still up and running today as private apartments.

Monet, one of the most well known artists from the impressionistic era, is best known for his depictions of nature. His most recognizable work being the collection of paintings entitled *Water Lilies*, a collection of approximately 250 oil paintings depicting his flower garden at his home in Giverny, France.² Although, not a depiction of just nature, *Hotel des Roches Noires à Trouville* is instantly recognizable as one of Monet’s works. Some of the characteristics of his paintings are the bright color contrasts, short squiggly strokes of the brush, and the special attention to light and shadows. The painting depicts a seaside resort, with individuals talking along the stairs leading to the hotel entrance, on the

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sidewalk in front of the hotel, flags whipping in the wind and puffy white clouds. To me this painting shows a romantic picturesque day, which would be fitting to the time Monet painted this, the same summer that he had married his wife, Camille.³

When talking to Silvestrini about this piece of art, he mentions this etude was written to be very lighthearted, evoking a sense of happiness that he saw in the painting himself. The opening motive of this etude is in the 3rd octave register of the oboe. A register that is not the most comfortable to play in especially at fast tempos, which is indicated in the score by Silvestrini. This is displayed in example 1.1. The motive is representative of the whipping flags in the wind.⁴ Silvestrini wanted to evoke the striking power of the wind that carried the flags to flight in the foreground and background, along with their bright colors representing the flags of France, America and England. When working on this etude, one of the first things I struggled with, was being able to play the opening passage in a manner that was quick and effortless. Here, I had to explore the options of various “short fingerings”, which enabled me to use alternate finger combinations to successfully play the passage at a fast tempo as indicated. Short fingerings shown in example 1.2, and are fingerings that most oboists will find useable.

³ Mary Mathews Gedo, Monet and His Muse: Camille Monet in the Artist's Life (University of Chicago Press, 2010)

⁴ Gilles Silvestrini, e-mail message to Paul Chinen, January 24, 2019.
Ex. 1.1: Excerpt from Etude No. 1, mm. 1-2, *Hotel des Roches Noires à Trouville*

Ex. 1.2: “Short” Fingering options for the opening passage

E6 - 1/2 hole, LH 2/ RH C Key

F6 - 1/2 hole, LH 2, LH Ab/G# Key/ RH C Key

To the left side of the painting, there is a small space in which a greenish, blue texture portrays the ocean. Inspired by composer Claude Debussy, and his infatuation for the sea in his work *La Mer*, Silvestrini adds a nod to this by creating his own interpretation of the waves. This is the section immediately following the whipping flags in the high register. Silvestrini uses a broken whole tone scale with very fast descending lines to create the impression of the waves. Example 1.3. In learning this section, it was important for me to bring out the whole tone scale. Silvestrini did not have much to say about this section aside from it portraying the sea section of the painting. However, in playing it, I feel as if the whole tone scale is to represent the different peaks of the waves, big or small, and the following quick notes to represent the bubbling water that comes after the waves break.
Monet liked to experiment with creating contrasts between stability and motion.

When looking at this painting, the first thing that catches your eye is probably the big American flag in the foreground and the way Monet portrays motion of the flag in the wind. If you look a bit closer, there are stationary individuals situated on the sidewalk in front of the hotel, none of whom seem to give the impression of motion. The closest to the foreground of the painting is a man lifting his hat and a woman engaging in a conversation. Silvestrini noticed this small detail and used it as the center part of his first etude. Silvestrini states in the interview “This detail is not very visible, however it illuminates well the atmosphere which reigned in Trouville: worldliness, ease, lightness. I wanted to mark this clear contrast between culture and nature.”

When practicing the work, it is obvious that Silvestrini is trying to convey the two voices. The start of this section is labeled “Capricieux” or capricious, meaning to give sudden changes of mood or behavior. Unlike the earlier section depicting the waves, I think it is important here to

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5 Gilles Silvestrini, e-mail message to Paul Chinen, January 24, 2019.
give equal attention to both voices. There is no specific distinction of what voice is a man or woman, and leaves that up to the performer. I view the slower rhapsodic ideas as the man with the top hat, and the quick, accelerating, ascending lines as a joyful woman.

Example 1.4.

**Ex. 1.4: Excerpt from Etude No. 1, mm. 28-36, Hotel des Roches Noires à Trouville**

![Excerpt from Etude No. 1, mm. 28-36, Hotel des Roches Noires à Trouville](image)

The ending section of the work is a nod to the beginning and acts as a recapitulation. The opening riff is stated down an octave and placed as eighth notes at “Largo” to portray the flags in slow motion. This opening Etude of Silvestrini’s “Six Etudes for Solo Oboe”, being his first composition published for unaccompanied oboe, is one that will likely become a standard in the oboe repertoire. It has the capacity to stand alone as a piece that would be fitting in a recital, not just as an etude to be played in practice rooms and lessons. The etude embodies Silvestrini’s style as a composer and speaks to his virtuosity as an oboist. With highly contrasting sections, and clear distinctions between voices, the performer and listener will be able to make a clear connection to the various aspects of the painting by Monet of the Hotel des Roches Noires.
Chapter 2

Etude No. 2 from “Six Etudes for Oboe” *Potagers et Arbres en Fleurs; Printemps*,

*Pontoise* - Camille Pissarro (1877)
The second etude in Silvestrini’s work “Six Etudes for Oboe,” is one that is more reminiscent of a standard etude that one would find in any etude book. It has two very clear sections, and at first look, one would think that it is simply a study on articulation, and accents, with a more recitative like section in the middle. However it is much more than just a technical etude. Silvestrini brings out the characteristics of the painting which brings this etude to life.

*Potagers et Arbres en Fleurs; Printemps, Pontoise*, translates to Vegetable Gardens and Trees in bloom; Spring, Pontoise (Commune in the suburbs of Paris, France). It is quite obvious what Pissarro was after in this painting, simply a depiction of what the spring landscape looked like in Pontoise. The impressionistic art era is easily distinguishable, and one may find it hard to determine between artists of this time, as the techniques were relatively similar. Short, quick brush strokes that come together to create a larger overarching image of landscape, and every day life rather than grand scenes. This piece of art, also located at the Musée d’Orsay in Paris was completed in 1877, the height of the impressionist style.

This etude is quite the contrast to the first etude in the work. When looking at this etude, at first glance once may think this is a literal visual representation of the painting. Each note on the first and third page is marked with either a staccato, slur or accent, making the page look very busy. With the majority of the notes in the first page having emphasis on the staccato, I immediately thought of the shorter brush strokes that make Pissarro’s style quite different when comparing it to Monet’s painting in the first etude. When performing the work, I think it is important that the performer pay close attention
to these small details that can distinguish the artist’s style’s from one another. Silvestrini does not specifically designate any importance in the style of his writing from between etudes depending on the artist, however I think it is important to showcase the different artist’s styles when performing these etudes, particularly with the paintings displayed.

Example 2.1, shown below, is the opening few lines from the second etude. Here you can see the use of the articulation markings as described earlier in the chapter.

Ex. 2.1: Excerpt from Etude No. 2, mm. 1-17, *Potagers et Arbres en Fleurs; Printemps, Pontoise*

In this writer’s correspondence with Silvestrini, he did not have as much to say about this etude as he did the first. He does mention that “Violent contrast with the bird songs which must gradually evoke a polyphony. All means are good: registers, shades, articulations.”⁶ From this, it is understood that this etude serves a purpose of developing

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⁶ Gilles Silvestrini, e-mail message to Paul Chinen, January 24, 2019.
specific aspect of technique, making it more like a traditional “etude”. For oboists, the opening section of the etude is very beneficial to work on to develop the ability to jump between registers at rapid speeds and to bring out alternating articulations (slurs, staccato and accents), at the fast tempo.

The middle contrasting section of this etude, I think most represents by the sky in the background of the painting. It is a section of serenity and calmness. Ex. 2.2 is the main idea of the middle section of this etude. Silvestrini mentions that in this section “one can imagine that the rain stopped and that immediately, in a ray of sunshine, the birds begin to sing in the excitement of the period of the nests.”

Ex. 2.2: Excerpt from Etude No. 2, mm. Potagers et Arbres en Fleurs; Printemps, Pontoise

7 Gilles Silvestrini, e-mail message to Paul Chinen, January 24, 2019.
Much like the first etude, with the conversation between the man and the woman in the painting, I found this slower middle section to have a conversational like theme to it as well. I picture the slow 5 and 6 note groupings to be the clouds and the sky, while the shorter trill and grace note passages to represent the birds chirping and flying around enjoying the sun. After the middle calm section, there is a short section reminiscent of the opening page, which quickly returns to the calm and serene, slower music to end the etude. This etude is approximately 3 minutes long, which is one of the longer of the 6 etudes. I do think this etude if programmed should be performed with a couple of the other etudes, as I feel it’s nature does not show off Silvestrini’s full capacity as a composer, and leans more to the side of being a traditional etude.
Chapter 3:

Etude No. 4 from “Six Etudes for Oboe” Sentier dans les bois - Auguste Renoir

(1874)
The fourth etude takes inspiration from another great artist, Auguste Renoir. For this etude Silvestrini chose Renoir’s piece *Sentier dans les bois* (Trail in the woods) from 1874. This etude is a bit shorter than the first two, but is not any less difficult for the oboist. With the run time of approximately 2 minutes long, this etude challenges the oboist to explore the extended range of the oboe, extreme soft dynamics, and the use of harmonic fingerings to alter the timbre of pitches.

At a first glance without looking at the name of the painting, it can be quite difficult to understand what Renoir is trying to depict. The colors are close in shade and the brush strokes are short, but more blended than the other paintings shown in the previous etudes. After looking at the painting and knowing the title, it becomes clear there is a trail and an individual walking on the path in the woods. It is very interesting that Silvestrini picked this piece of artwork from Renoir to base this etude on, because Auguste Renoir is most well known for his works that focus on portraits and candid of individuals, mostly women.

In the interview with Silvestrini, he mentions that this etude is the “heart of the collection (of the first 6 etudes). It evokes precisely a day (in the) heart of summer, when everything is on the verge of saturation…It’s a bit my portrait…(a) difficult poetic perspective.” I find his use of the word “saturation” to stand out when looking at the painting. The painting seems to have that similar saturated quality that makes it not clear to the viewer what exactly the scene is at first glance, consequently one will have to look

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9 Gilles Silvestrini, e-mail message to Paul Chinen, January 24, 2019.
closer and spend time trying to understand the meaning behind the work. When taking this idea of saturation to the music, I found it hard to find an immediate connection to what Silvestrini composed. I would’ve thought a composition that is saturated would come from an etude that is is fast, has lots of notes and is hard to tell if there is a melody. However, with Silvestrini saying that this is a bit of his portrait, the style of this etude started to make sense to me. This etude also omits bar lines, which to me says that Silvestrini wanted this to be overall one idea, with each of the sections flowing directly into the next. The opening is marked “tres doux, calme” or very sweet, calm. In the first two lines of the page there are ascending scale passages followed by short, staccato notes all at piano or pianissimo. Example 3.1. When looking at the individual in the painting, I imagined these opening lines as his first steps onto the trail, looking up and down at the trees and taking careful steps as he heads into what is the unknown.

Ex. 3.1: Excerpt from Etude No. 4, Sentier dans les Bois

The most difficult aspect of this piece is to create the idea of calm, and to keep it through the entire etude. There is only one set of notes that is marked “f”, the rest of the etude is written to be played at “mp” all the way down to “pppp” which is quite a task for an oboist to achieve. The section following these opening motives is arguably the most
challenging section in the etude. Example 3.2. Lasting only 13 notes, this line challenges the oboist to play a singing melodic line in the 3rd register of the oboe, still at the soft dynamic level. Silvestrini also writes the notes an octave lower for reference. What makes this specifically challenging is that, the fingerings for these notes are not universal from one instrument to the next, and the higher notes on the oboe have a tendency to be unstable and only respond at louder dynamics. A special type of reed, scraped and designed to play these notes at a soft dynamic would be ideal, however, if performing these etudes all together, that type of reed would not be well suited for the other etudes.

**Ex. 3.2: Excerpt from Etude No. 4, *Sentier dans les Bois***

The way that I initially approached this section was to figure out the fingerings that would work best for the notes F# and G# in the third octave. Those fingerings are listed below and are fingerings that work best on my current instrument. (Howarth XL, Ebonite and Cocobolo 2014)

F#6 - Third octave key, LH 1, LH 2/ RH 1, RH 2

G#6 - Third octave key, LH 1, LH 3/ RH 1
In the interviews with Silvestrini, I asked him what type of oboe he plays and if this had any influence on how he wrote these etudes. He responded with “The kind of oboe does not really influence my work. The 1st studies were written on a Rigoutat. "Le ballet espagnol" was finished on a Lorée. Then I always played Marigaux. The very high notes are not very easy on these instruments and that is probably why there are few very notes in my pieces.”

I found it particularly humorous that Silvestrini mentions even he struggles with the high notes and decided to explore the range but to also keep that writing at a minimum. He did not have much to say about how this section of the etude directly corresponds to anything in the artwork. I think it was just a way to include a section that would be beneficial for oboists to practice the third octave notes at a soft dynamic. This etude ends with the oboist playing an “F#5” (shown below) with the designated harmonic fingering. This adds a different tone color, and allows the oboist to play this note at very soft dynamics.

**F#5 Harmonic-** LH 1, LH 2, LH 3, LH B Key/ RH 1, RH 2, RH 3, RH C Key + 2nd Octave Key

It was difficult for me to find a meaning in this etude, and I felt a bit of disconnect with Silvestrini stating that this is the heart of the collection and that it had such a personal connection to him. After working more on this etude, I started to see a connection from the etude to the painting, however was not able to have a deep personal connection that Silvestrini did. I do think that this is the beauty of personal interpretation, where the musician can learn to understand the meaning behind the connection and create

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10 Gilles Silvestrini, e-mail message to Paul Chinen, January 24, 2019.
their own thoughts on a piece of music, which doesn’t have to be the exact same as the way the composer saw it.
Chapter 4

Etude No. 6 from “Six Etudes for Oboe” *Le Ballet Espagnol* - Edouard Manet (1862)
Of the six etudes in Silvestrini’s work, this etude is my favorite to perform, and was the easiest to understand in terms of the relationship between the music and the painting. This etude is the longest of the set, approximately 4 minutes, and is a fantastic ending to the set of etudes. *Le Ballet Espagnol* or “The Spanish Ballet” by Edouard Manet can be found on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, NY.

I asked Silvestrini in the interviews how he felt his compositions contributed to the modern era of oboe playing, and his response below was very meaningful to me, especially when working on this etude.

“… the answer belongs to oboists, students, audience... They have a didactic and pedagogic intention, but they also especially convey a poetic climate. "Etudes" does not only mean work on technique, but also artistic work, work of imagination (an aspect instrumentalists often neglect).”¹¹

If you were to go to any musician and ask them if they would think about programming an “etude” on a recital program, the answer will almost always be no, and even though Silvestrini is not the first composer to write programatic etudes, I think this is one of the few sets of etudes for oboists that have gotten major attention and are considered appropriate for a recital performance. The idea of “work of imagination” is something that Silvestrini says is neglected by instrumentalists, and I think musicians need to have the capacity to be imaginative when looking at music. Artists such as Manet all start with a blank canvas, and end up with a painting of a beautiful scene, like the dancers in *Le Ballet Espagnol*. As an instrumentalist, we are trained to follow what

ⁱ¹ Gilles Silvestrini, e-mail message to Paul Chinen, January 24, 2019.
comes on the page in front of us, and essentially follow the directions. I feel like this etude allows the musician the capacity to be free and imaginative in the interpretation of this etude. There are not many specific indication of tempi, and the entire opening or “prelude” of this etude is written almost as if it were a recitative, with scattered “accel.” and “rit.” markings throughout, leaving the oboist to decide how fast or slow this section should be played. Ex. 4.1.

Ex. 4.1: Excerpt from Etude No. 6, mm. 1, Le Ballet Espagnol - Edouard Manet (1862)

Edouard Manet, was a strong influence in the evolution from realism to impressionism. The style of his early artwork does not look similar to the other

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paintings used at in Silvestrini’s etudes. However he did seem to have an interest in painting scenes of individuals playing instruments, or dancing. Both of which can be seen in his *Le Ballet Espagnol*.

Silvestrini had very little to say about the details of this etude, aside from it being the concluding etude that wraps up the work (etudes) as a whole. He did mention in the interview that when looking at the painting, he felt that “The painting represents Spanish artists who are not yet playing and dancing. What are they doing? They look pretty awkward. Manet hardly knew Spain.”13 I think this quote sums up the entire idea behind this etude. The idea of the individuals looking awkward, Manet not understanding much about Spain but painting a scene of the Spanish Ballet. Silvestrini did not mention if he had any knowledge about Spanish ballet, or Spanish music. However, the middle section of this etude, with triplet figures, flourishing runs and syncopated rhythms, all are key identifying features of Spanish music. Ex. 4.2. The Flamenco music would be the most commonly known, and could be what Silvestrini and Manet were both trying to portray here. In the bottom left quadrant and the right side of the painting, there are two men holding guitars, a staple instrument of Spanish music. I would assume that they are playing music for the dancers, however they are not situated together on the same side of the painting, so that could raise the question of whether or not they are playing together. This could also be a factor in what Silvestrini stated looked “awkward.”

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13 Gilles Silvestrini, e-mail message to Paul Chinen, January 24, 2019.
Ex. 4.2: Excerpt from Etude No. 6, mm. 22 -48, *Le Ballet Espagnol* - Edouard Manet

(1862)

The section following this is probably what I found to be the most difficult section in this etude. If “awkward” was what Silvestrini was trying to convey in his music from the painting, this section would fit that description perfectly. As oboists, we are aware of our limited range due to the nature of the instrument, and most times we only play within a one octave range. Octave jumps, and large intervals in general are quite difficult on the oboe and being able to do that quickly poses even more of a challenge. The section marked “presto” Ex. 4.3, is a quick 22 measures of oboe acrobatics between 2 octaves of the oboe. There are leaps from C4 to C6 and E4 to E6 all at rapid speeds. This is a great way for oboists to learn how to handle large intervals, by manipulating the embouchure or using alternate fingerings to make these transitions possible at quick tempi.
To end this etude, Silvestrini writes a shortened version of the prelude, and ends with a flourish up to an E6 at “FFF”, essentially as loud as possible. I do think this would be reminiscent of a dancer finishing the routine and throwing their hand up in the air and freezing to symbolize the end of the piece.

There are two more etudes in the first set of six that were not discussed in this project that are of equal importance in the set. I decided to focus on the other four etudes due to time constraints in the performance. In addition these two are the shortest of the set and I had the least amount of correspondence with Silvestrini on these as they were designed to
be more suited for developing specific technical aspects. The titles of those etudes are listed below.

Etude No. 3; Boulevard des Capucines - Claude Monet (1873)

Etude No. 5; Scene de plage - Ciel d’orage - Eugène Boudin (1864)
Donc, ce sera par un clair jour d'été
Donc, ce sera par un clair jour d'été ;
Le grand soleil, complice de ma joie,
    Fera, parmi le satin et la soie,
Plus belle encor votre chère beauté ;

Le ciel tout bleu, comme une haute tente,
    Frissonnera somptueux à longs plis
Sur nos deux fronts heureux qu'auront pâlis
    L'émotion du bonheur et l'attente ;

Et quand le soir viendra, l'air sera doux
Qui se jouera, caressant, dans vos voiles,
    Et les regards paisibles des étoiles
Bienveillamment souriront aux époux.
The latest composition for solo oboe by Silvestrini is his “Six Romantic Etudes for Solo Oboe.” Similarly to the first set of etudes, this work is comprised of 6 short programatic etudes, that are very technically challenging for the oboist. However, unlike the first set where each etude was inspired by a painting, Silvestrini aimed here to create a “romantic language” through these, and kept these etudes closer to each other to form a cycle, and all revolving around the key of e minor. I did however notice when exploring Silvestrini’s works, that in this set, there was an etude named after a poem by Paul Verlaine and another etude that was named after a piece of art by Eugene Isabey, which will be looked at in the next chapter. The reason that I decided to take a look at this etude although not a painting, was due to the fact that this poem was written around the same time as the impressionist painters and the correlation poetry and language has to music.

Paul Verlaine was a French poet, whose work was often described as a “symbolist”, or a poet who uses subtle suggestion instead of precise statements, and evokes moods and feelings through words and repeated sounds and cadence of verse, like in music. This type of poetry that he wrote ties closely to the the style of art that Silvestrini was most inspired by. The thing that stands out most about this type of poetry is the subtle suggestion instead of precise statements. This I feel relates to the idea of some of the impressionist paintings, much like the painting by Renoir. The poem is originally written in French, and the english translation is provided in Ex. 5.1

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Ex. 5.1: English Translation of Verlaine’s Poem - Donc, ce sera par unclear jour d’été

So it will be on a clear summer day
So it will be on a clear summer day;
The big sun, accomplice of my joy,
Will, among the satin and the silk,
More beautiful still your dear beauty;

The blue sky, like a high tent,
Will shudder sumptuous long folds
On both our happy fronts that will have faded
The emotion of happiness and waiting;

And when the evening comes, the air will be soft
Who will play, caressing, in your sails,
And the peaceful looks of the stars
Benevolently smile to the couple.

Silvestrini states in the notes about this etude that it is “reminiscent of the 7th melody of the song cycle, La Bonne Chanson (The Good Song) by Gabriel Fauré, on poems of Paul Verlaine.” He did not much else to add to his thoughts about this etude except that it should depict happiness, candor and hope. With such a limited amount of knowledge on this etude, most of the interpretation for this was left to my judgment on how I could recreate these feelings Silvestrini wanted to portray in this etude.

Since I do not speak French, I do think some of the subtleties and nuance in the language may have been lost in translating this poem to English, however after reading the translation, I was able to focus on the scene that Isabey was describing, and imagined

if one of the impressionist artists were to paint the scene. I used these imaginative scenes as inspiration when preparing this etude, while keeping in mind the feelings Silvestrini was trying to convey.

This etude is short, with a run time of 2.5 minutes. At first glance this etude looks as if it would serve the sole purpose of being an arpeggio study, and could be a supplement to a technical warm up. However, varying note groupings and tempo changes add an additional factor of difficulty. The oboist must be able to make sure that the note groupings are performed as written and not rushed through. Example 5.2 shows a section in the middle of the etude that has 5 different note groupings within 7 measures.

Ex. 5.2: Excerpt from Etude No. 2 from Six Romantic Etudes, mm. 46-52, Donc, ce sera par unclear jour d’été

Throughout this etude, the arpeggios and flourishing passages are in constant motion up and down, not ever staying in one particular range of the oboe for a single measure. When working on this, I felt these passages depicted joy and happiness, moods
that one may feel on a clear summer day. There is only one very short section in this etude that is slower in tempo and marked “con grazia,” with grace. Ex. 5.3.

Ex. 5.3: Excerpt from Etude No. 2 from Six Romantic Etudes, mm. 35-39, *Donc, ce sera par unclear jour d’été*

I felt as if this section was the final stanza in the poem by Verlaine, and depicted the hopefulness that Silvestrini wanted to portray. This part of the poem describes the night coming, and the soft, calm air as the stars begin to show. It is a moment of calm where one can reflect on the day of joy and happiness. The oboist should make sure the quarter notes are full length and the use of a shimmering vibrato could portray the shimmering of the stars in the night sky.

Silvestrini mentions in the interview that “There is a poetic, emotional side in my music, but I always fear people will not fully understand if I don’t give some clues of
interpretation.”¹⁷ This statement, I feel holds especially true to this etude. If a performer had no clues of the interpretation (this etude being the moods Silvestrini wanted to show), this etude would simply be a technical study and have no emotional connection to the poem that inspired it.

¹⁷ Gilles Silvestrini, e-mail message to Paul Chinen, January 24, 2019.
Chapter 6

Etude No. 5 from “Six Romantic Etudes for Solo Oboe” - *La plage de Granville* -

Eugène Isabey (1863)
The final etude in Silvestrini’s work “Six Romantic Etudes for Solo oboe” much like the final etude of his first set, is a conclusive etude that wraps up the set as a whole. Although this etude only lasts 2 minutes long, there are no written rests, and the oboist is advised to perform this while circular breathing (intaking air through the nose while playing) if possible. Marked “Allegro furioso” or fast and furious, this etude is quite demanding and has an aggressive nature to it, with emphasis on accents, and loud dynamics.

Eugène Isabey, is not as well known as some of the other impressionistic painters looked at in this project, and the painting that inspired this etude is the earliest work of art that Silvestrini used in his compositions. I find this specifically interesting because this painting comes at the very beginning of the era of impressionism, and compared to the paintings by Monet, and Renoir, there is a distinct difference in style. The painting by Isabey, is clear to determine, and the viewer would be able to identify the scene immediately, however some of the finer details would lean to that of impressionism, such as the texture of the waves. When researching more of Isabey’s art, it was clear he had a passion for painting rough water ocean scenes with ship wrecks, and less focus on human portraits and vibrantly colored landscapes. This painting, titled “The Beach at Granville” which is currently located on display at the Musée du Vieux-Granville in Granville, France, shows a day at the beach where it seems there were women were swimming until a storm arrises and creates havoc in the sea and the individuals are trying to get to land safely. One of the most striking images in the painting is what looks to be a person
pulling two women to shore in the roaring waters. This made me feel a sense of uneasiness and struggle that I felt could be a fitting mood for this etude.

Similarly to the etude discussed in chapter 5, Silvestrini did not provide much insight as to what caught his eye with this specific painting, or go into much detail about the sections of the work and how it correlates to what he composed. However, in the notes provided with the score of the piece he writes, “…But the sea is rough and the wind so violent that the innocent moments of relaxation turn into an hysterical uproar.” I found the idea of a hysterical uproar very similar to my thoughts of struggle that I got when looking at this painting. I do think this is fitting for the etude. The opening section of this etude is marked “f” and should be played very fast. The quick direction changes display the waves pushing the women around in the water as they struggle to get back to shore. The use of accents and dynamic contrasts here create the sense of uneasiness, where nothing is steady. Ex. 6.1.

Ex. 6.1: Excerpt from etude No. 6 from “Six Romantic Etudes”, mm. 1-11, La Plage de Granville - Eugène Isabey (1863)
In this etude there is not a contrasting section where the tempo slows down or indication that there should be any alteration of color in the sound. The oboist should try to keep a steady tempo throughout and if not circular breathing, follow the breath marks that are marked in the score to have this etude be most effective. Near the end of the etude there is a fermata over one of the breath marks. I think this should symbolize a calming, possibly hopefulness that the storm will go away, however following it is a rush to the end of the etude where Silvestrini indicates “ff” for the first time in this etude and a crescendo up to the final note. Ex. 6.2. I think of this in relation to the piece of art as a reminder that the storm is not over yet and continues to create rough waves in the water.

Ex. 6.2: Excerpt from etude No. 6 from “Six Romantic Etudes”, mm. 99-109, *La Plage de Granville* - Eugène Isabey (1863)
CONCLUSION

The “Six Etudes for Solo Oboe” by Gilles Silvestrini, and the “Six Romantic Etudes for Solo Oboe” are milestone works for oboists to tackle. They some of the most difficult technically challenging pieces of music I have encountered, but after learning more of what Silvestrini intended about the art and poetry that correlates to these etudes, I have a much deeper appreciation and understand for these etudes. I think Silvestrini wanted these works to be performed all with the corresponding art and poetry as he states in the interviews “the more one is clear and helps the audience to understand the purpose of the pieces, the better it is… Experience showed me that each time I comment my pieces, give clues, the audience is quite happy about it.”  

This project has fueled me to become more interested in learning what other music there is for oboists to perform that can incorporate other types of art, bring a deeper understanding to what inspired composers to write, and how we can engage our audiences to listen and look beyond what they hear and see.

19 Gilles Silvestrini, e-mail message to Paul Chinen, January 24, 2019.
Bibliography


APPENDIX A

REFERENCE SLIDES FOR LECTURE RECITAL
GILLES SILVESTRINI

GILLES SILVESTRINI AND ART:
A LOOK AT FRENCH IMPRESSIONISTIC ARTWORK,
POETRY, AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON VIRTUOSIC ETUDES
FOR THE SOLO OBOE
OVERVIEW

- Gilles Silvestrini
- Concert etudes programatic in nature
- Each etude depicting a French impressionist painting or poem through music
- Resemblance of character pieces
- Late 20th Century composition
- Only etudes written for oboe in the Impressionistic style
- Highly virtuosic

OVERVIEW CONT.

- Inspiration of piano works by Deubssy and Chopin
- Composition of happiness
- Why etudes?
- Dedicated to Pierre Pierlot and Jacques Thys (First Six Etudes)
- Why the oboe?
- Debussy and Monet
NO. I
Hôtel des Roches Noires à Trouville (Claude Monet, 1870)

HOTEL DE ROCHE NOIRES A TROUVILLE

- Scene of a famous seaside hotel in Trouville, France
- Image of wind-whipped flag
- Happiness, ease and lightness
- Imitating piano or harp
- Broken whole tone scale
- Quazzi improv section
Excerpts from Mvt. I
NO. 2
Potager et arbres en fleurs, printemps, Pontoise
(Camille Pissaro, 1877)

POTAGER ET ARBRES EN FLEURS

- The vegetable garden with trees in blossom, spring
- Two main alternating sections
- Rhythmic opening section representing emergence of spring rain
- Contrasting section; Radiant sun and birds singing
- Contrasting color palette
Excerpts from Mvt. 2
NO. 4
Sentier dans les bois (Auguste Renoir 1874)

SENTIER DANS LES BOIS

- “The heart of the work”

- Depicts a hot summer day, child lost in the woods.

- Intimate, tragic, and sweet all at once

- Extreme high range
Excerpts from Mvt. 4
NO. 6
LE BALLET ESPAGNOL (EDOUARD MANET, 1862)

LE BALLET ESPAGNOL

• Longest of the 6 etudes, concluding etude that wraps up the whole set

• Awkward? What are they doing?

• Opening interpretive section

• Spanish music influence

• Octave passage
NO. 3
Boulevard des Capucines (Claude Monet, 1873)

NO. 5
Scène de plage · Ciel d’orage (Eugène Boudin, 1864)
Donc, ce sera par un clair jour d'été
Donc, ce sera par un clair jour d’été ;
Le grand soleil, complice de ma joie.
Fera, parmi le satin et la soie,
Plus belle encore votre chère beauté ;
Le ciel tout bleu, comme une haute tente,
Frissonnera somptueux à longs plis
Sur nos deux fronts heureux qu'auront pâlis
L’émotion du bonheur et l’attente ;
Et quand le soir viendra, l'air sera doux
Qui se jouera, caressant, dans vos voiles,
Et les regards paisibles des étoiles
Bienveillamment souriront aux époux.

NO. 5
Six Romantic Etudes - Donc, ce sera par un clair jour d’été -
Paul Verlaine

Donc, ce sera par un clair jour d'été

- "Symbolist" style of poetry
- English Translation
- Con Grazia section: Hopeful and Happiness
- Poetic side of music
Excerpts from No. 2
Romantic Etudes
NO. 6
Six Romantic Etudes - La plage de Granville - Eugène Isabey (1863)

LA PLAGE DE GRANVILLE

- Conclusive etude that wraps up the set
- Fast and furious
- Circular breathing technique
- One fermata over breathmark
Excerpts from No. 6
Romantic Etudes
APPENDIX B

E-MAIL CORRESPONDENCE WITH GILLES SILVESTRINI

AND

OTHER CORRESPONDENCE IN REGARDS TO HIS COMPOSITIONS
Gilles Silvestrini Interview Questions
PC - Paul Chinen
GS - Gilles Silvestrini

PC: How did you come across the specific artwork that you chose for the 6 etudes and the 6 romantic etudes?

GS: When I was 19, I discovered an English book called in French "Journal de l'impressionnisme" and I was at once enthusiastic about some paintings, like "Hotel des Roches Noires". I began immediately to improvise in front of the reproduction. Sometimes on the contrary, I look for the painting which corresponds with the composition in process. Same thing for the Romantiques.

PC: How much of an influence did the artwork influence your compositional techniques used in your compositions?

GS: I often a musical idea which is pushing to appear, but I need an extra-musical support (poem, painting, novel...) to give it a form and a direction.

PC: What kind of oboe do you play? Was that a factor in any of the writing you did for these etudes?

GS: The kind of oboe does not really influence my work. The 1st studies were written on a Rigoutat. "Le ballet espagnol" was finished on a Lorée. Then I always played Marigaux. The very high notes are not very easy on these instruments and that is probably why there are few very notes in my pieces.

PC: You mentioned that the 6 etudes you wrote to challenge yourself after studying at the conservatory. What did you feel was missing from what you had seen in your own studies that you added to these first 6 etudes to specifically challenge yourself?

GS: I am sorry I don't understand the question. If your question is about the challenge of the 1st studies only, my challenge was to write more "musical", poetic, colored studies than Gillet, Loyon, etc. If your question is, was there something in the 6 first etudes which I felt was missing, and I wanted to go beyond in the more recent etudes, the answer is: yes, I wanted them to be more interior, deeper, more autobiographic, less anecdotic. The form (the architecture) is also more complex and more interesting.
PC: Where did you find the poem that inspired the 2nd etude of the 6 romantic etudes? How did it stand out from any other poetry that you have read or encountered?

GS: I think I quote poems in the 4th and 6th romantic etudes. I always need to make sure I am understood. There is a poetic, emotional side in my music, but I always fear people will not fully understand if I don't give some clues of interpretation. Keat's poem explains the pain of being an adult in the world as it is, and the deep melancholy of a soul which aspires for absoluteness. In the 6th, Lamartine's poem compares the ocean with the immensity of the divine, into which all things fall and disappear. Dusk, sad cries of birds, all this evokes a deeply melancholic atmosphere. But if the instrumentist does not know about this context, there is a risk that the interpretation might come out wrong.

PC: What caught your eye about impressionist artwork versus other types of artwork?

GS: When I was young I was more easily touched by impressionist art, which is more accessible, alive, direct, spontaneous, made of emotion. Baroque art for instance was less directly accessible to me.

PC: How do you feel your compositions contribute to the modern era of oboe playing?

GS: I feel it does not belong to me to answer this question, the answer belongs to oboists, students, audience... They have a didactic and pedagogic intention, but they also especially convey a poetic climate. "Etudes" does not only mean work on technique, but also artistic work, work of imagination (an aspect instrumentists often neglect).

PC: What is your goal for oboists to get out of learning your 6 etudes and the 6 romantic etudes? Did you intend to have them played with the artwork and poetry? In the same spirit of expressing one self "beyond the notes", the more one is clear and helps the audience to understand the purpose of the pieces, the better it is. For instance: the first etudes are often played with the paintings projected in the room; The Lusiades were played with a reading of the texts by the instrumentist. Experience showed me that each time I comment my pieces, give clues, the audience is quite happy about it. This is not only true about my pieces: generally, people, even though they have access to extraordinary tools, have little time or curiosity to deepen their knowledge of the world.
Other correspondence Silvestrini shared

What was the genesis of the Studies?

At the time of the Conservatoire, it was said that I had a good technique. Unfortunately, notebooks for oboe were often very poor musically. I was a little jealous of the pianists who have in their repertoire of Studies of Chopin and Debussy. What did it take to make oboe studies interesting? They are pictorial, descriptive, naive if necessary, in any case based on an aesthetic or emotional support. As I was very in love with Monet's painting, I opened a book at random and came across "Hôtel des Roches Noires in Trouville". This painting enchanted me, I felt inspired and I began to improvise. I must say that I was very feverish, in the bliss. But I had no intention other than to please myself. I continued in the same spirit with "Boulevard des Capucines" and "Trail in the woods".

Why the name "studies"?

Initially, it was to fill a gap, to do something else than Loyon, Gillet, Debondue, etc. Each study had to target a particular difficulty, while being poetic and colorful.

Did you compose the work with the collaboration of another oboist?

I wrote these songs absolutely on my own, to amuse myself and I did not think of making them heard by anyone. Besides, if I played them before Mr. Pierlot at the class, it was for a selfless purpose.

Why did you decide to compose in the Impressionist style?

It seemed natural to associate Monet with Debussy. The first study is indeed an indirect reference to Debussy (description of waves, ranges by tone, etc.). I also thought it would be nice to give unity to the six studies. Musical unity, pictorial unity, a bit like a cycle of melodies.

What attracted you to these six paintings? And why all of a French impressionist painter?

I chose them all for love and because they seemed likely to inspire contrasting music between them. The paintings are also, although they share the same aesthetics.

Why did you dedicate these studies to Pierre Pierlot and Jacques Thys?
Pierre Perlot, because he was the first person to whom I dared to play them and because he offered to edit them, if I wrote 12 or 18. Jacques Thys, because he created them. He had a copy and wanted to create them in a solo oboe concert in the United States as part of the IDRS. He suggested that I rework them slightly for the occasion. Initially, I thought it was pure madness and they had no interest.

How do you feel about these pieces becoming famous?

At the beginning (15 years ago), a very great surprise, a joy, and ... with time, a strange half-annoyed and half-frustrated feeling, because I have written many other pieces since, which seem to me more personal, deeper, more in keeping with my personality. Are the latter therefore irrelevant? Would I be wrong about myself, or is the public mistaken?

Have you chosen the oboe because it is your instrument (the one you know and master the most) or because you believe that the oboe has more technical possibilities to represent or create certain musical effects?

At the time, I did not know contemporary music for oboe and bad some virtuoso music (Pasculli ...). I felt, however, that my instrument was very limited and I dreamed of expanding its possibilities ... but in all humility and staying in my language of the time, that is to say, very consonant.

What was an original instrumental writing for you?
Perhaps in the use of certain colors, in the imitation of certain harpistic or pianistic formulas, etc. In any case, to draw elsewhere my inspiration, it seems today "divert" the instrument, but respectfully!

What is your opinion of the relationship between the arts? Do you think it's possible to transpose a painting to music? And the opposite?
Many painters work in music. They do not try to describe the music they listen to, but they are inspired, carried by an energy that reveals them to themselves. For me, it's the opposite. I am looking for a support that will feed my imagination. As I miss nature, it is painting that acts as nature. There is always a moment in the composition where the music finds its autonomy and where the subject of departure passes in the background, almost discarded.
Some tracks on studies

What I can tell you is that these studies are the result of a great love, a great empathy, a communion with the chosen paintings. To approach these studies through a too strict analysis would be a mistake. I was 25, I was naive, innocent and I "vibrated" to the spectacle of nature. I was born in a very picturesque region and the contemplation of nature has always held a great place in my youth. I even tried painting. All that to say that the landscapes that I chose were a little in me. Nor should the descriptive, illustrative aspect be neglected.

Some tracks on studies:
1st study
Monet's painting, "Hotel des Roches Noires in Trouville", represents a luxurious hotel, famous at the time, it is represented in profile and half in the shadows. On the left, the sea occupies only a small space, but we can still see that it is green and lively. This painting is above all an evocation of happiness. The summer atmosphere is full of carelessness and energy. The multicolored flags (we recognize the French, English and American flags) flapping in the wind. It is the strength of the wind and its joy that I wanted to represent in the first acute motive. The scales by tone describe the waves while imitating the piano or the harp. This is of course a nod to Debussy, who has described the sea so much and had a home on the Normandy coast.

The central part evokes the conversation between an elegant gentleman who takes off his hat in front of young women. This detail is not very visible, however it illuminates well the atmosphere which reigned in Trouville: worldliness, ease, lightness. I wanted to mark this clear contrast between culture and nature. After Debussy, the style is now closer to Poulenc, with a lot of irony. One can imagine the light, frivolous and distinguished conversations between this estimable gentleman and the white ladies dressed. There is a false recapitulation, but it is shortened. The Gregorian motif of the coda, which is actually that of the flag in slow motion, is like a strategic means to create a surprise effect on the last eighth notes. Humor is always present.

The second study evokes a rain of spring but it is deliberately very stylized. We must accept this distance between the painting and the music. Here is the opportunity to look for formulas that are both harmonic and rhythmic capricious although based on regular modules. The "studies" aspect dominates. Violent contrast with the bird songs which must gradually evoke a polyphony. All means are good: registers, shades, articulations. One can imagine that the rain stopped and that immediately, in a ray of sunshine, the birds
begin to sing in the excitement of the period of the nests. The quintolette pattern evokes the tone of mi in great peace mode.

The third study is written in two voices. At the time, I did not know the pieces of Pasculli and I was happy to have "invented" this type of writing! ... The picture evokes a crowd that teeming despite the snow and cold. Again, contrast between nature and culture. The tone of sharp minor soil (which falls well under the fingers) evokes in addition this cold tense. I have always been fascinated by the red balloon rising on the boulevard ...

The 4th study is at the heart of the collection. It evokes precisely a day in the heart of summer, when everything is on the verge of saturation. I imagine it is noon and the heat is unbearable. The child is going to get lost in the woods. There is something intimate, tragic, sweet at the same time. It's a bit my portrait. The suracial evokes this tension which is like a cry. This study, although not very virtuosic, is however difficult from the poetic point of view.

The fifth study evokes the games of shadow and light of the painting. There is always a contrast between the threatening storm and those elegant people who are talking. Contrast between the white of the clothes and the raw light. The study is essentially harmonic, it's a little surprising. But the challenge for me was to go beyond the instrument and the clichés attached to it.

The 6th study concludes the whole, which can be conceived as a cycle, although it is a test of everything to follow. The painting represents Spanish artists who are not yet playing and dancing. What are they doing ? They look pretty awkward. Manet hardly knew Spain. Nobody in France really knew her, but she fascinated everyone. That's what I wanted to express. Here the clichés, the boilerplate formulas, are to be taken, of course, in the second degree.