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“A Voice, A Messenger” by Aaron Jay Kernis: A Performer's Guide and Historical Analysis

Pagean Marie DiSalvio

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, pagean.disalvio@gmail.com

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“A VOICE, A MESSENGER” BY AARON JAY KERNIS:
A PERFORMER’S GUIDE AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

A Written Document

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in

The School of Music

by
Pagean Marie DiSalvio
B.M., Rowan University, 2011
M.M., Illinois State University, 2013
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For my husband, Nicholas DiSalvio
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ABSTRACT

*a Voice, a Messenger* by Aaron Jay Kernis is a concerto for trumpet and ensemble comprising winds, brass, percussion, double basses, harp and piano. It is a contemporary 21st century work that demonstrates historical awareness and has the potential to become a noteworthy addition to the trumpet solo repertoire. Kernis’s work is challenging, rewarding, and tests the technical ability of the modern trumpeter’s agility and physical endurance without surpassing the instrument’s potential. In conjunction with my lecture recital, this document serves to expose trumpeters and other musicians to this new and significant composition. Original interviews with two of the trumpet soloists who championed the work, former Principal Trumpet of the New York Philharmonic Philip Smith and Principal Trumpet of the Cleveland Orchestra Michael Sachs, are included. Additional interviews with the composer and conductors who have performed the piece provide primary source material to better prepare future soloists to properly perform the piece and inspire further research. These conversations and the investigation of the significance of the shofar lead to a deeper understanding and offer more insight into the most demanding musical and technical aspects of the piece. With the perspective and historical analysis provided in this document, it is my hope that *a Voice, a Messenger* will be brought to greater light in the trumpet world and music community at large.
INTRODUCTION

Solo and chamber repertoire for any instrument is established over the course of hundreds of years. When performed frequently, pieces within that repertoire become standards which are then recorded repeatedly. Because of this trend, it is difficult for new compositions to be added to a given repertoire. Expansion of the repertoire is absolutely necessary for musicians because it allows for instrumentalists to explore new styles and techniques that were not used in the older repertoire. Music is a living, breathing, and growing art-form and our repertoire should grow with it.

While studying for my Master’s degree at Illinois State University, I was given a project that involved a search for solo trumpet repertoire by Pulitzer Prize-winning composers. I wrote about Quiet City by Aaron Copland, Sonata for Trumpet and Piano by Norman Dello Joio, and Concerto for Five Players by Ellen Taaffe-Zwilich: pieces that have become part of the standard solo trumpet repertoire. But there was another piece I discovered by a Pulitzer Prize-winning composer that was written so recently that it had not even been officially premiered. That piece was a Voice, a Messenger\(^1\) by Aaron Jay Kernis. I submitted that research project on March 31, 2013 and the world premiere of the work occurred on April 2, 2013 in a town only sixty miles away.

The world premiere was performed by Philip Smith with the University of Illinois Wind Symphony. The ensemble performed beautifully and Smith sounded like the brilliant voice, the prophetic messenger that the piece described. The adrenaline, emotional energy, and remarkable intensity of the work were invigorating. I could hear everything I had researched and everything described in the program notes. When piece came to its bombastic conclusions, I immediately

\(^1\) The title of the work is written “a Voice, a Messenger” on both the cover of the score and in the program notes written by the composer. It is often mistakenly formatted as “A Voice, a Messenger.”
leapt to my feet and excitedly gave my standing ovation, with tears in my eyes. When I looked around the room at the sizable audience I saw confused faces and very polite applause. I was thinking, “Did these people just hear what I heard? This was a masterpiece!” Chris Martin (Principal Trumpet of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra) admits that the piece is difficult to digest on the first hearing. In an interview with Jerry Junkin, Martin said “It’s the kind of piece that benefits, I think, from repeated hearings.”\(^2\) However I immediately connected with this work and decided that trumpet players need to know about *a Voice, a Messenger* in order to be performed more frequently.

This work is an important addition to the solo trumpet repertoire because it challenges every facet of the trumpet soloist. The piece requires strong endurance in order to perform twenty-five minutes of a concerto with a wind ensemble accompaniment. It is one of the very few pieces that were written for solo trumpet and wind ensemble: not simply a transcription. There are numerous technical challenges in this piece, from complex rhythms and articulations to angular passages that dance throughout the range of the instrument. The performer must be versatile in order to perform on three different instruments throughout the piece from flügelhorn to piccolo trumpet in B-flat. The soloist must have a vivid imagination and artistic prowess to interpret the many complex passages within. It is forward-looking while maintaining historical awareness of the shofar, one of the oldest forms of trumpet still in use in the 21\(^{st}\) Century. *a Voice, a Messenger* was the last piece that piece commissioned for Philip Smith before he retired as the Principal Trumpet of the New York Philharmonic. And finally, it is important to add this piece to the repertoire because it has only been performed by three trumpet players: Philip Smith, Michael Sachs (Principal Trumpet of the Cleveland Orchestra), and Chris Martin (Principal

\(^2\) Chris Martin, interviewed by Jerry Junkin, Austin, TX, November 22, 2015.
Trumpet of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra). Significantly, these gentlemen all agree that they became better musicians because of their experience with this piece.
CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

About the Composer

Aaron Jay Kernis was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1960. His father and mother were both mostly interested in popular genres of music. Kernis has said that his father listened to jazz musicians such as Sarah Vaughan, Count Basie and Ray Charles while his mother enjoyed Frank Sinatra and George Gershwin. During the summers his family would go to jazz concerts as well as a few concerts by the Philadelphia Orchestra.\(^3\) When speaking about memorable performances from his youth, Kernis mentioned the Philadelphia Orchestra playing Gustav Mahler’s *Symphony No. 3*, the American premiere of Dmitri Shostakovich’s *Symphony No. 15*, and Bela Bartók’s *Concerto for Orchestra*.\(^4\) He also recalls being moved at the young age of eight by the singing of a cantor in a conservative synagogue and claims that the emotional sincerity of the unaccompanied performance is something that he remembers today.\(^5\)

Kernis attended college at the San Francisco Conservatory and later transferred to the Manhattan School of Music. His mentors that helped shape him into the composer he is today include John Adams, Charles Wuorinen and Elias Tanenbaum. In his graduate studies at Yale University Kernis worked with Bernard Rands, Gilbert Amy, Morton Subotnick and Jacob Druckman.

In 1983, the New York Philharmonic premiered his first nationally recognized work, *Dream of the Morning Sky*. This was a tremendous event as one of the greatest orchestras in the

\(^{4}\) Ibid.
\(^{5}\) Ibid.
world was premiering Kernis’s work, and he was only twenty-three years old at the time. The New York Philharmonic performed the work in a reading rehearsal that was open to the public: part of a festival that was led by Jacob Druckman, called Horizons ’83. There were many music critics in attendance looking for the next up and coming composer to keep an eye on. During this session the conductor, Zubin Mehta, attempted to assert his dominance over the youthful Kernis by being very critical of the composition in front of the audience. Confident in his musical vision, Kernis stood his ground and did not allow Mehta to intimidate him into a different interpretation. Music critics in the audience became immediately enthusiastic about Kernis because of this heated exchange between conductor and composer. Although not all of the critics were enamored with the piece itself, they were thrilled with the maturity demonstrated by twenty-three year old Kernis; most of their articles predicted that he was a composer to watch for in the future.

This event was a turning point in Kernis’s compositional style. He began to embrace a freer form of composition that was more intuitive and perhaps more romantic. With the solidified confidence that was brought about by his exchange with Zubin Mehta, he was able to trust his own instincts that had always been beneath the surface ready to burst through the limitations he had previously provided for himself.

In 1998, Aaron Jay Kernis was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music for his composition String Quartet No. 2. His reaction to receiving the award was, of course, a joyous one. He was satisfied with his piece but he was shocked to have received the award that time. He was only

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6 John Thurmon, “Influences and musical quotation in the solo piano works of Aaron Jay Kernis” (DMA diss., Florida State University, 2014), 1-63.
8 Miller, 26-42.
9 Ibid.
10 Thurton, 12.
thirty-eight years old and was presented with one of the most prestigious music awards in the United States. It is also impressive to note that his former mentor, John Adams, was a finalist for the Pulitzer in the same year – but it was Kernis who won.\textsuperscript{11}

The Commission of a Voice, a Messenger

Philip Smith became Co-Principal Trumpet of the New York Philharmonic in 1978 and assumed the Principal Trumpet position in 1988. In the time that he had been with the Philharmonic, Smith became familiar with the compositions of Aaron Jay Kernis. Specifically, he mentioned the Horizons Festival that initially made him take notice of the composer. Smith has said that he liked Kernis’s pieces and found them very interesting to play, although they were always very challenging.

In January of 2005, the New York Philharmonic performed \textit{Lament and Prayer}, a violin concerto written by Aaron Jay Kernis. The piece featured Glenn Dicterow, then the orchestra’s Concertmaster. \textit{Lament and Prayer} was part of a group of works by Kernis in the mid-1990s that was motivated by his own reactions to war and genocide, particularly the Holocaust. The piece itself was dedicated to the 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the end of World War II and the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{12} Smith was very taken by the piece saying it was beautiful and demonstrated a serious expression of Kernis’s Jewish faith.\textsuperscript{13} Within a few weeks of hearing the performance of \textit{Lament and


\textsuperscript{13} Philip Smith, phone conversation with the author, March 3, 2016.
Prayer, Smith asked Kernis if he would be interested in writing a trumpet concerto.\textsuperscript{14} When asked why he had approached Kernis to write a concerto for him, he said,

\begin{quote}
It had been rolling around in my mind for a while, the idea of having a piece written on the thematic material from scripture in the Bible about the trumpet. . . I wondered if Aaron would be interested in hearing this, so I asked if it would be of interest to him. . . Ultimately it was something that he decided he’d like to write.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

Approximately two weeks prior to Smith’s request, the Big Ten Band Directors Association had offered to commission a piece for wind ensemble by Kernis.\textsuperscript{16} The Big Ten Band Directors Association member schools include the University of Illinois, Indiana University, the University of Iowa, the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, the University of Minnesota, Northwestern University, Penn State University, Purdue University, the Ohio State University, and the University of Wisconsin.\textsuperscript{17} At this point, Kernis was becoming overwhelmed with commissions and became worried that the trumpet piece for Smith would be delayed for an indefinite amount of time; so he decided to ask Smith if he would mind putting the commissions together to create a co-commission between the BTBDA and the New York Philharmonic. This would be the first time a co-commission would be done between the two organizations. The piece would be written for expanded orchestral winds and percussion: essentially a small wind ensemble.\textsuperscript{18} Smith and Kernis mentioned the idea to the New York Philharmonic. The orchestra accepted and was contractually guaranteed the world premiere performance of the piece.\textsuperscript{19} The commission by the New York Philharmonic was made possible by a donation from Marie-Josée Kravis and major support from the Francis Goelet Fund.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{14} Aaron Jay Kernis, phone conversation with the author, February 22, 2016.  \\
\textsuperscript{15} Philip Smith, phone conversation with the author, March 3, 2016.  \\
\textsuperscript{16} Aaron Jay Kernis, phone conversation with the author, February 22, 2016.  \\
\textsuperscript{18} Philip Smith, phone conversation with the author, March 3, 2016.  \\
\textsuperscript{19} Dr. Robert W. Rumbelow, email conversation with the author, February 23, 2016.
\end{flushright}
Inspiration and Historical Context

From the very beginning of the commission process, Philip Smith had a very strong idea about what sort of trumpet concerto he wanted Aaron Jay Kernis to create. Smith had always hoped that a concerto would be written that referred to the whole range of trumpet-like instruments that were in the Bible, such as the trumpet and shofar (ram’s horn). Philip Smith is a devout Christian and is very open about his faith. His official website features inspirational verses from the Bible as well as an entire page called “The Bible Says…” Smith has also published several books and recorded several albums that feature hymns and carols. In order to help Kernis with his research for the piece, Smith gave the composer approximately fifteen pages of biblical references.

Initially, Kernis planned to write a piece about the Apocalypse taking inspiration from the New Testament of the Bible. He did his own research through the large-scale Apocrypha and the Dead Sea Scrolls, but it was his own Jewish heritage and religion that motivated his composition. When asked how his own heritage influenced the subject matter within the piece, Kernis said:

For awhile I thought about using quotes from the Apocalypse, but my ideas became more strongly focused once I went to High Holy Days services. I went the first night that the shofar was played, and have forgotten how strongly the shofar was referred to in the text used in the service. I was deeply struck by portions of the sacred text about the effect of the sound of shofar on the onlookers. The mystery and awe at the instances of its sounding and what it signified made a very big impression on me. It was at that point that I began to feel secure that I would use quotations only from the Old Testament.

Instead of relaying a narrative throughout the work, Kernis decided that the piece would be dark and pensive. In his composition, he wanted to recreate the reflective character of the

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23 Ibid.
Jewish Days of Awe. During Rosh Hashanah, individuals are expected to look very clearly and seriously at what they had done in the past year. Of the High Holy Day, Kernis said:

One of the important aspects of those High Holy Days is to look very seriously and with focus and clarity at what you’ve done in the last year: what you did that was good, at the things that were not, people that you hurt, people that you helped. And as there were undoubtedly people that you hurt or things you did badly, you ask God for forgiveness to wipe the slate clean for your inequities for the year so you can start afresh. It’s the most serious and revealing time in the Jewish calendar.

This part of the High Holy Day is very serious in nature, but Rosh Hashanah also represents the beginning of the Jewish New Year which includes a celebratory aspect as well. Both of these emotions are captured in the different movements of a Voice, a Messenger.

During Rosh Hashanah, the central observance is the sounding of the shofar. The instrument is frequently referenced in scripture and played between various blessings within the service. There are four different calls that are performed: The Tekiah, Shevarim, Teruah, and Tekiah-Gedolah. Each call has a specific meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Call</th>
<th>TEKIAH</th>
<th>SHEVARIM</th>
<th>TERUAH</th>
<th>TEKIAH-GEDOLAH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Call to attention</td>
<td>Call to worship</td>
<td>Call to war</td>
<td>Call of peace or Shalom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>One long, straight blast</td>
<td>Three medium-length, upward wails</td>
<td>Nine quick blasts in short succession</td>
<td>The final call in which the player holds a pitch for as long as their breath holds out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic Meaning</td>
<td>Sounds of a king’s coronation</td>
<td>Sobbing cry of a Jewish heart – yearning to connect, grow, and achieve</td>
<td>Alarm – bring clarity, alertness and focus</td>
<td>Final invitation to reflection and repentance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 1: Shofar calls with description, purpose, and symbolic meaning.

26 Ibid.
Shofar Calls in a Voice, a Messenger

The instruction of playing the shofar and its specific use in the service is a tradition that has been passed down orally for thousands of years. Therefore, there are many different interpretations of what specific calls signify and how they should be performed within the service. However, the overall significance of each of the calls is consistent.

Rosh Hashanah is a celebration of the anniversary of creation, when God became King of the universe and the shofar is used as reminder of His coronation with the Tekiah call. The wails of the Shevarim call are meant to represent repentance and the anniversary of man’s first sin in the Garden of Eden. The Teruah is a call for the congregation to awake from spiritual slumber. And the final blast of the Tekiah-Gedolah is used to provoke introspection to prepare for the final Day of Judgment.

The performance of the shofar during these services is very important and meaningful for the religious ceremony; thus, a great deal of pressure is placed upon the player performing the calls. Those who are part of Orthodox Judaism often spend the month leading up to Rosh Hashanah playing calls every morning in preparation for the amount of playing they will need to accomplish during the service. According to Jewish law, the congregation is required to hear 100 individual notes played by the shofar.

There are three different varieties of the shofar used in modern religious ceremonies. The most common is the ram’s horn. It is short (approximately 12 to 14 inches in length) and made from the horn of a domestic ram. When played it creates a nasal sound that closely resembles a

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31 Ibid.
human voice when played. The Yemenite Kudu is a longer instrument (approximately 20 to 40 inches long) and made from the horn of a species of antelope called the African Kudu. These horns produce a much louder sound that resembles a modern brass instrument. The Oryx is the third kind of shofar, and is made from the horn of the South African oryx, another species of antelope. This instrument is also louder than the ram’s horn and more closely resembles the sound of a modern trumpet. Each shofar is unique. There are many variables which create this diversity, including varying shapes, sizes and even the thickness of the animal horn. These distinctions cause each instrument to have a different pitch center and different harmonic series, making the instrument challenging to handle.

An understanding of the historical and religious significance of the shofar can enhance the performance of a Voice, a Messenger. When Aaron Jay Kernis was asked how important it is for the soloist to understand the context of the piece, he said: “I think it’s important to know the shofar is playing. Those techniques were really so important in the way I thought about the trumpet part.” Although Kernis, Philip Smith, and Michael Sachs all agreed that is not vital that the soloist fully understand the meaning of the shofar, they also agreed that it would not hinder the performance. While it may not be necessary to know the significance of the shofar in Rosh Hashanah to perform a Voice, a Messenger, having a deeper understanding of the subject will enhance the artistic and emotional sincerity of the piece. This sincerity from the soloist will better convey the message of the piece to the audience.

35 Dr. Stephen David Beck, conversation with the author, February 22, 2016.
36 Ibid.
CHAPTER II: PERFORMER’S GUIDE

Instrumentation

*a Voice, a Messenger* is a trumpet concerto accompanied by a small wind ensemble. The piece was originally to be premiered by the New York Philharmonic and therefore the amount of musicians involved needed to match the smaller size of an orchestral wind section as opposed to the modern wind ensemble. Many of the woodwinds are doubling on other instruments and there is no saxophone section. When asked about the lack of saxophones for a piece written for a wind ensemble Kernis said,

Since writing for wind ensemble was new to me, I needed to soften the challenges I was facing, so I decided not to add saxophones. In addition, using saxes would make it more expensive to program the work with orchestras, and that was a consideration as well, especially due to the other deviations from the typical orchestral scoring that I chose.38

The performer must take into consideration the piece’s instrumentation when choosing to perform this piece. It should be performed as a small wind ensemble with only one player per part in order to properly balance the solo trumpet. There are many moments within the work where the orchestration is very dense and difficult to balance.

The instrumentation could prove problematic for the typical college wind ensemble. In addition to the wind players mentioned above, the piece requires three double-basses. According to both conductors Robert Rumbelow and Jerry Junkin, it proved rather difficult to secure three basses for their college wind ensembles. The amount of percussion instruments needed for this piece is tremendous. (Please refer to the instrumentation listed in the appendix.) There is a great emphasis on percussion in this piece in order to enhance the highs and lows within the piece.

38 Aaron Jay Kernis, email conversation with the author, February 21, 2016.
The soloist has an impressive list of equipment as well. The piece requires the soloist to play trumpet in C, flügelhorn and piccolo trumpet in B-flat. Michael Sachs’s interpretation uses Trumpet in B-flat as well. Two mutes are also required: metal straight mute and cup mute. The metal straight mute is used to produce clear and articulate rhythmic passages throughout the piece. Although Smith is the only performer to use a cup mute in performance, Kernis intended a “softer, rounder color here. After the premiere straight has been used but Phil felt that the change of color was important and that it would differentiate the sound of this passage more.”

Blending of tonal colors is an important aspect of Kernis’s compositions. He often combines instrumental timbres to create a new sound. For example, he often combines the sound of the oboe with the trumpet soloist in order to heighten and color the trumpet sound in *a Voice, a Messenger*. He also likes to use the horn section as a form of echo or reverberation of the trumpet soloist.

All of the conductors and soloists who have performed this piece have said that the players in the ensemble need to be very strong. In a pre-concert talk with Chris Martin, Jerry Junkin said, “No one escapes this piece unscathed in terms of demands that are placed on them.” Although this work is considered to be a trumpet concerto, it is written more like a wind ensemble piece that heavily features the trumpet. Therefore, the performance level of the ensemble is just as important as the performance level of the soloist.

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39 Aaron Jay Kernis, email conversation with the author, February 21, 2016.  
40 Chris Martin, interviewed by Jerry Junkin, Austin, TX, November 22, 2015.
Preparation

It is important to note that although a Voice, a Messenger was originally to be premiered in the summer of 2010, it was postponed because of late delivery of the score. The New York Philharmonic did not feel that they would have ample rehearsal time to give the piece a proper performance. When speaking with Rumbelow and Junkin, they both said that they needed approximately 10-11 hours of rehearsal time with their ensembles on this piece alone, without the soloist. In all of the performances that have taken place, the ensembles have had only two or three rehearsals with the soloist before the performance. In those rehearsals, it is crucial that the conductor and soloist to work together in order to maintain proper balance with the ensemble as well as to set the preferred tempi of the soloist.

The soloist preparing to perform this piece certainly requires ample preparation time. Michael Sachs was given the music in September before his performance in February, so he had plenty of time to become acquainted with the piece and build up his endurance. Sachs recommended adding a Chris Gekker’s 24 Etudes or Marco Bordogni’s Melodius Etudes for Trumpet to the player’s routine. He explained that he would start by playing three etudes at a time with a minute of rest in between. Then he gradually built himself up to four, then five etudes in a row with the one minute of rest in between. He specifically recommended these two books of etudes because they are not too long and they are not terribly exhausting for the performer to practice. The book by Gekker features many etudes that are written in different styles and genres, which Sachs claims to have been very helpful.  

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42 Ibid.
When playing a Voice, a Messenger, the performer must be careful to pace himself. The piece is a long and intense journey with a large and loud accompanying ensemble. The trumpet soloist is expected to perform on three different instruments and end the piece on the piccolo trumpet: conservation of energy is an essential part of playing this piece.

When speaking with Michael Sachs and Philip Smith about the background of the piece, they both said that while that information is not completely necessary for an effective performance, it certainly would not hinder the performer either. Having an understanding about the inspiration behind the piece could only heighten one’s artistic interpretation. Knowing which shofar calls are being referenced and understanding the religious context will help the performer better portray the characters of each movement within the piece and lead to a more satisfying performance.

**Movement I: Morning Prayer**

*MORNING PRAYER, terse and, like most of the concerto, pensive, chromatic and conflicted, calms only at the end, when a chorale-like series of essential three-note chords intervene.*

The first movement serves as an introduction to the work and creates a reflective atmosphere for the audience. The soloist performs the rhythmically complex melody in the first five measures unaccompanied. Of this movement, Phil Smith said:

It took me a while to sort of decipher out the complex rhythm. But once I sort of did that, I found that I didn’t let the complexity of the rhythm dictate things. I tried to overshadow that complexity with a calming sort of morning prayer where we meet the Lord and say, “Thank you, Lord, for this day. Thanks for waking me up and getting me started. And here’s what I need for today, Lord. How wonderful and great you are.” The adoration,

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43 Program Notes from Aaron Jay Kernis.
confession, thanksgiving, and supplication all goes on with the first prayers of the morning. That was easy to fall into.

These first few measures of the movement set the tone and prepare the audience for the mood of the entire piece (Example 1):

![Example 1: Solo Trumpet Introduction (Movement I, mm.1-11)](image)

The greatest challenges within the first movement come from the need for the soloist to have a command of its many tempo changes. Within the seventy measures of the first movement there are seven tempo changes with specific metronome markings. The majority of those tempo changes are led by the soloist; therefore the soloist and the conductor must communicate very clearly.

In measure 48, there is a fermata over a rest for the entire ensemble and the soloist. This must be given special attention, as the composer stated that he did not intend for this to be a grand pause. However the soloist may need a proper rest before he begins to play a restatement of the opening solo in measure 49 (Example 2.)
Example 2: Restatement of Opening Solo (Movement I, mm. 48-51)

From the time the soloist plays the restatement of the opening solo to the end of the movement, the entire ensemble is brought down in dynamic. Kernis uses the terminology *sotto voce*, (“quiet voice”) for the accompaniment. The soloist himself ends the movement at a very soft dynamic, essentially holding the last pitch as quietly as possible: the solo trumpet is the last voice to sound in the movement.

The first movement is to be played *attacca* into the second movement. At the world premiere performance with Phil Smith, the attacca was not observed. According to Kernis, this was because Smith needed to rest before playing the second movement, which is quite challenging in terms of endurance.44

*Movement II: Timbrel Psalm*

*The timbrel is the forbear of the tambourine, and the title TIMBREL PSALM is a play on words. Timbre (or timbral) is commonly used by musicians to denote “color” of instrumental sound. This dance-like movement is made of short phrases in a variety of timbres, much of it lightly scored and vigorous.45*

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44 Aaron Jay Kernis, email conversation with the author, February 21, 2016.
45 Program Notes from Aaron Jay Kernis
Although the composer included quotes from scripture in his program notes for each movement, he was not particularly inspired by them for his composition. However, one scripture, Psalm 150 did serve as Kernis’s inspiration for the orchestration of the second movement. It reads:

\begin{quote}
_Praise the LORD!_
_Praise God in His sanctuary;_
_Praise Him in His mighty firmament!_
_Praise Him for His might acts;_
_Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!_
_Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;_
_Praise Him with the lute and harp!_
_Praise Him with timbrel and dance;_
_Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!_
_Praise Him with loud cymbals;_
_Praise Him with clashing cymbals!
Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
_Praise the LORD!_  
\end{quote}

The title of the movement refers to the use of timbre and the timbrel, a biblical tambourine. Many different timbres are used from high pitched woodwinds to low brass to harp prepared with paper. There are many different sounds that are brought forward within this movement. There is also a consistent use of the tambourine to recall the timbrel mentioned above.

The tempo of the movement is set to begin at a tempo of quarter note = 152. In Michael Sachs’s performances, he performed the movement slightly slower, at quarter note = 144. When asked about this discrepancy, Sachs said:

There is a guy by the name of John Wooden who was a UCLA basketball coach from the late 40s through the late 70s and one of his quotes was “Be quick but don’t hurry.” In other words, you’re moving very swiftly in the second movement but everything has a chance to really dance and set. And then it’s more together. It’s got more pop and more zip to it. You want that exuberance to it. Otherwise it ends up being kind of mayhem.  

\textsuperscript{46} Ps. 150:1-6 (New Revised Standard Version).  
\textsuperscript{47} Michael Sachs, phone conversation with the author, March 3, 2016.
When listening to the recordings of the performance of Phil Smith at the written tempo compared to the slower tempo of Michael Sachs, the slower tempo does sound much less frantic. The ensemble and the soloist are given a better opportunity to establish a more comfortable dance-like feel. The movement is written in the form of a celebratory dance including many rhythms from Israeli and Semitic dances, so it only makes sense to play the movement at a tempo that creates a better dance feel throughout the ensemble.  

This movement requires the soloist to perform with a straight mute. As mentioned previously, a metal straight mute is generally preferable because of the complex articulated rhythms throughout this movement. The harp and piano are prepared with paper woven between the strings in order to blend with the sound of the muted trumpet, creating a raspy and buzzing sound throughout.

An important duet between the soloist and the first trombone takes place in measure 65. The two instruments play the same theme an octave apart, for the most part, from measures 65 to 74 (Example 3). The logistics of this duet can be very difficult, since the soloist is standing in front of the ensemble while the trombonist is, typically, sitting in the back row. Therefore either the trombonist needs to anticipate what the soloist is going to do, or the soloist needs to play slightly behind the beat in order for the duet to line up correctly.

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49 Ibid.
Beginning in measure 83, the soloist is given a cadenza (Example 4). The composer indicates that his cadenza be played in tempo at a quarter note = 138; however, the cadenza has never been performed that way. Phil Smith said:

He wanted the cadenza a certain way that was near impossible. And I had to talk to him about how I thought I could get through this and he was definitive about how he wanted it to be done. I’m afraid I don’t know exactly where he came down on this, but it got to a point where I just had to not talk to him about it and just take on the journey myself. He wrote a very complicated, very incredibly difficult cadenza in there. I felt it needed more freedom and he wanted it to be very strict in tempo.\(^5^0\)

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\(^5^0\) Philip Smith, phone conversation with the author, March 3, 2016.
Although Kernis was flexible and did not mind that Smith took time with the cadenza, he wants future performers to know that he would prefer the cadenza be performed in tempo.\textsuperscript{51} That said, neither Michael Sachs nor Chris Martin performed the cadenza that way. Sachs described his interpretation as a “recitative cadenza” in a “rhapsodic style.”\textsuperscript{52} From the perspective of the performer, the recitative style would be much easier to execute as long as the final measures are

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{51} Aaron Jay Kernis, email conversation with the author, February 21, 2016.
\textsuperscript{52} Michael Sachs, phone conversation with performer, March 3, 2016.
performed *a tempo*. Sachs recommends placing a fermata on the E-flat in the second beat of measure 97, taking a breath, then playing the following sextuplets in tempo allowing the conductor to catch the tempo and cue the ensemble for their entrance in the following measure (Example 4.1).

### Movement III: Evening Prayer

*The expansive EVENING PRAYER features flügelhorn solo. It alternates lyrical, pensive lines with ongoing development and dramatic clashes between soloist and ensemble, ending as unsettled as it began.*

Within this movement, the soloist changes instruments to perform on the flügelhorn. Kernis chose this particular instrument to recreate the sound of a cantor or a vocalist that is found within sacred Jewish music. Within this movement the soloist is performing the character of someone praying or pleading to the powers that be. Phil Smith compared the *Evening Prayer* to the *Morning Prayer* of the first movement saying: “I loved the conflict that comes about in the Evening Prayer. You’re kind of wrestling with a lot more than the calm piece of the Morning Prayer.” Where the *Morning Prayer* was a moment of being thankful and peaceful, the *Evening Prayer* of the third movement is melancholy and sounds as if the character of the movement is begging or pleading with great conviction.

The movement begins with a low brass choir comprising horns, trombones, bass trombone, euphonium and tubas playing a series of legato and heavy half notes. This sound quickly signals the audience that the third movement is of a completely different mood than the

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53 Program Notes by Aaron Jay Kernis  
second movement. The brass choir plays for the first eighteen measures of the piece until woodwinds and the section trumpets join. The flügelhorn soloist enters in measure 33.

Although the movement is written for flügelhorn solo, the soloist is indicated to change to C trumpet in measure 94 (Example 5). Michael Sachs, however chooses not to change to C trumpet but instead uses a B-flat trumpet. He also changes from flügelhorn to trumpet at a much earlier point in the movement – at measure 56. Sachs explains:

I did that for a very specific reason. I felt that bars 33-52 were very idiomatic for flügelhorn. I felt that the pick-up into bar 67 was not idiomatic for flügelhorn. It needed a little more rhythmic bite and rhythmic vibrancy to it.56

In measures 66-73 there is a succession of articulated 16th notes at quarter note = 96. Although the soloist would be able to perform this passage adequately on the flügelhorn, Sachs makes a valid argument for the earlier change to trumpet: to perform these articulations more clearly. The decision of B-flat trumpet versus the C trumpet is one of personal preference. Sachs believes that the B-flat trumpet produces a sound with “more weight and heft” giving the movement more of a

“dark, brooding, solemn sort of color.” He believed that this contrast would juxtapose well against the brilliance of the C trumpet sound in the outer movements.

This section, intended to be a second cadenza calls for the soloist to play three interjections between measures of rhythmic unison played fortissimo by the wind ensemble. The climax of the movement is introduced by a drum roll on the timpani.

The soloist alternates with the ensemble playing the cadenza unaccompanied between the boisterous measures of the ensemble (Example 6). The descriptive words “wailing” and “soulful” are used to help the soloist better understand the style Kernis was looking for. He said:

In the cadenzas I wanted to convey a sense of freedom, and, through the music, draw a particular emotional picture for the soloist. The kind of intensity I was looking for is highly vocal in quality and very much associated with Jewish vocal music, klezmer music and the emotive singing that cantors convey in sacred Jewish music. The underlying image at this moment if of the trumpet soloist turning briefly into a cantor at this high point of the third movement, and it’s this idea helped me to bring out that especially soulful quality in the writing at that moment.58

57 Ibid.
The soloist returns to the flügelhorn in measure 113 for the conclusion of the movement. In measures 118-126, the composer wrote an alternate part for the soloist to play in order to conserve energy for the next movement. The alternate part is written an octave lower than the preferred solo part. In the world premiere, Phil Smith performed the alternate part in order to give himself a rest. Michael Sachs and Chris Martin played the upper octave. Sachs says it is a comfort to have the alternate part written, but the piece is more effective when the soloist plays the upper octave.\footnote{Michael Sachs, phone conversation with performer, March 3, 2016.} In both of his performances, Sachs slightly altered the higher octave part. In measures 123-124 he played the lower E natural on the flügelhorn followed by a B in the lower octave for the long sustained pitch. This option is also written into the original solo part (Example 7).

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Example7.png}
\caption{Example 7: Alternate Solo Part (Movement III, mm.113-126)}
\end{figure}
Movement IV: Monument – Tekiah, Teruah

The music of the final movement, MONUMENT – TEKIAH, TERUAH, does not directly imitate the sound of a shofar but suggests the urgency of its call, and much of it is built on fanfare-like passages. The most dramatic of the four movements, it is made of stark contrasts, bitter harmonies, and dense textures. The chorale from the opening returns at the very end, just after the work’s most lyrical moments, and culminates in the flanking of the soloist with two other trumpets. This suggests references in antiquity to the shofar being paired on either side by two silver trumpets in New Year’s Day services in the second Temple of Jerusalem, before its destruction.  

The final movement of a Voice, a Messenger is much more interactive between the ensemble and soloist than the previous three movements. Until this point, the wind ensemble has mostly played a supportive role. Phil Smith claims that if the soloist represents a character speaking to God in the previous movements, this is the movement when God speaks back. The performers of the piece and the composer interpret the movement slightly differently. When Kernis thinks about the final movement, he hears darkness and anger at the end of the piece with the duality of the bright beauty of the solo trumpet lines. Kernis was nearly finished composing the fourth movement when his cousin, Michael Kernis, passed away from cancer a young age. Kernis was affected deeply:

As I was writing this movement I was very stricken with sadness and very angry at Michael’s death. That’s why I decided to add “Monument” to the title. The image of the gravestone, this stone tablet, this marker of death was strongly in my mind when he passed away. That implacable image definitely had a deep effect on the tone of the movement. I decided at that point to dedicate the concerto to his memory.

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60 Program notes by Aaron Jay Kernis  
63 Ibid.
Sachs and Smith, however, view the final movement as being triumphant and victorious after a battle, rather than dark and angry. Either interpretation will allow the performer to make the piece effective.

This movement contains the most blatant references to shofar calls, specifically the *Tekiah* and the *Teruah*. In the opening statement of the movement made by the trumpets of the ensemble and later the soloist, the Tekiah call is played followed by the Teruah: a single short note (half note in measure 2) followed by a flourish (triplets on beat 2 of measure 2), then the nine rapid note, although they are not rhythmically even, and finished with another flourish of the sextuplet on beat 3 of measure 3. The players should not make an attempt to resemble the sound of the shofar, but simply let the music evoke that symbolism for the audience. When the soloist joins the ensemble trumpets in measure 6, the soloist (the soloist returns to Trumpet in C for the majority of this movement) and the Trumpet 1 player ornament the basic melody of the continued introduction. These calls played are meant to perform the task of the original Tekiah shofar call: a call to worship.

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In measures 35 to 49, there is an interesting interaction between the trumpet soloist and the ensemble Trumpet 1 (Example 9). As the soloist plays, Trumpet 1 not only helps to provide an echo effect within the passage but also heightens elements of the phrase. Balance is the key to making this sound effective. If Trumpet 1 plays too loudly, he will interrupt the solo passage causing a disconnection in the melodic line; but if he plays too softly, the effect will be lost.
Example 9: Trumpet 1 Echo of Soloist (Movement IV, mm.35-49)

The texture is very dense, broad, and loud throughout this movement. The balance and clarity of the ensemble needs to be the top priority in order to maintain the effectiveness of the orchestration. The balance is especially delicate in the ensemble from measures 49 to 61. The members of the ensemble are playing different passages at the same time, and if one section of the ensemble plays over another, the effect is completely different and has a tendency of sounding like complete chaos instead of the organized chaos that is intended by the composer.

In measure 116, the soloist restates the opening theme from the first movement. The part calls for the soloist to be muted (con sord). Despite the composer’s indications, Michael Sachs does not perform this section with a mute. Without the mute, the theme is presented in the same style as it was in the first movement. Phil Smith used a cup mute in his performance of this passage. If the soloist chooses to use a cup or straight mute, it gives the impression of a reflection of the original theme, which would be just as effective. In measure 127, the soloist changes to
piccolo trumpet in B-flat. When writing the final movement of the piece, Kernis made the decision for the soloist to end the piece on piccolo trumpet because he wanted a high new color that would be heard clearly above the wind ensemble.

At the world premiere of this piece performed by Philip Smith and the University of Illinois Wind Symphony, measures 117-132 were not performed. This portion of the piece was removed for Smith’s performances, but after revising the score in 2014, Kernis added the restatement of the opening theme back into the score. According to Michael Sachs, this made the part even more exhausting to perform at the end of the piece.65

The end of the movement calls for two other trumpet players to join the soloist at the front of the stage (Example 11). Trumpet 1 and Trumpet 2 are instructed in the score to begin move in measure 96 and should be in position by measure 132 to play a trio with the soloist in measure 134. According to the diagram at the front of the score, it is preferred that the trumpets complete their movement to the front of the stage by measure 103 and if it takes longer, all movement must stop for the “quiet music” from measures 104-107 and during the “cadenza” in

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measures 123-124. Kernis specifies that Trumpet 1 should be stage right, Trumpet 2 should be stage left, and they can be in one of three different arrangements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trumpet 1</th>
<th>Soloist</th>
<th>Trumpet 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Trumpet 1</td>
<td>Soloist</td>
<td>Trumpet 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Trumpet 1</td>
<td>Soloist</td>
<td>Trumpet 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 2: Movement IV, Trumpet Stage Positions

Of the three options presented in the score, the third is the most appealing visually. It most closely resembles the image that inspired the composer to write the trio in the first place; a painting by Z. Smekhov of three priests playing two silver trumpets and a shofar closely together in the second Temple of Jerusalem to celebrate the New Year (Image 1). This position would also allow for the soloist and other trumpet players to hear each other over the dense accompaniment. According to both Michael Sachs and Philip Smith, they both had difficulty hearing the other trumpet players on either side of the stage in their performances. Although the scores calls for Trumpet 1 and 2 to allow room between them and the soloist for both visual and sonic separation, it seems more prudent to have the players in a position where they would be able to hear each other for balance purposes. The individual parts do not play in unison; however, Trumpet 1 and 2 are interactive and would benefit from being closer to each other.

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Image 1: Feast of the Trumpets by Z. Smekhov\(^6\)

\(^6\) http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/In-Plain-Language-Satan-and-the-shofar-325261
Originally the composer wanted the additional trumpets to perform from the balconies in order to surround the audience with the sound of antiphonal trumpets.\textsuperscript{68} Although it is not logistically possible for the ensemble performers to move from the stage to the balcony in the allotted time, this effect could be accomplished with extra off-stage trumpet players waiting in the wings until the final movement. The timing delay of having those trumpets in the balconies might cause concern, but this interesting possibility should not be ruled out in order to accomplish the composer’s original intended effect.

In the revisions made to the score in 2014, Kernis provided the option of using five trumpets in the ensemble for the final movement instead of three. This would leave three trumpets in the ensemble instead of one after Trumpet 1 and 2 join the soloist at the front of the stage.\textsuperscript{69} This option for additional trumpets is written as an alternate ending in the appendix of the current score. As of March 2016, this alternate ending has not been performed.

\textsuperscript{68} Aaron Jay Kernis, phone conversation with the author, February 22, 2016.
Example 11: Ensemble Trumpets Joining Soloist (Movement IV, mm.132-151)
As stated earlier, the soloist performs the last nineteen measures on piccolo trumpet in B-flat (Example 12). This requires a great amount of control and restraint on the soloist’s part. With the accompaniment of the wind ensemble being so dense in texture and the dynamic being written so loudly, the soloist may be tempted to over-project in order to be heard. However, the piece is written so that that the natural timbre of the piccolo trumpet can soar above the accompaniment without the soloist using excessive amounts of effort. When discussing methods of preparation for the piece, Michael Sachs said that pacing himself was the key to making through to the end of the final movement.

Sachs also provided some performance tips on the final nineteen measures. In measure 144, instead of playing a concert G to F-sharp, Sachs plays the lower concert C to B. He also plays the alternate part for measures 145-147, simply to provide himself a moment to rest before the end of the piece. Regarding this moment in the piece Sachs says: “See how you feel. If you’re up to it, more power to you. But that wasn’t going to be in the cards. I’m going to do something idiotic, something that wouldn’t be wise in the end. It’s not going to yield good results.”

Example 12: Piccolo Trumpet in B-flat Ending Solo (Movement IV, mm. 132-151)

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CHAPTER III: PERFORMANCES OF THE PIECE

The piece was originally intended to be premiered by the New York Philharmonic in the summer of 2010. The performance was postponed due to late delivery of the score. According to Philip Smith, when the New York Philharmonic commissions a piece, it needs to be in the library by a certain time in order for the parts to be prepared, copied, printed, etc. so that the musicians in the ensemble have an ample amount of time to prepare for the first rehearsal. Kernis submitted the piece to the orchestra movement by movement, sometimes section by section. Some of the pieces simply did not make it to the orchestra in time and the performance was postponed to the following December.\(^{71}\)

The world premiere of *a Voice, a Messenger* was scheduled to occur for the second time on December 28, 2010. The program that evening also included Antonio Vivaldi’s *Concerto in B Minor for Four Violins*, Paul Hindemith’s *Concerto for Horn and Orchestra*, Christopher Rouse’s *Oboe Concerto* and Maurice Ravel’s *Bolero*. Because of a snow storm that occurred December 26 to 27, the Philharmonic was unable to rehearse for the proper amount of time to perform the scheduled program. The works by Kernis, Hindemith, and Rouse were removed from the program and replaced with Tchaikovsky’s *Polonaise* from *Eugene Onegin*, Sibelius’s *Valse Triste* from *Kuolema*, selections from Tchaikovsky’s *The Nutcracker, Op. 71*, and Debussy’s *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*.\(^{72}\) As of March 2016, there are no known plans for the piece to be performed by the New York Philharmonic.

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\(^{71}\) Philip Smith, conversation with the author, March 3, 2016.

Since the Big Ten Band Directors Association co-commissioned the piece, one of the organization’s members took responsibility for the world premiere. Dr. Robert W. Rumbelow, Director of Bands for the University of Illinois at the time, jumped at the opportunity to discuss the possibility of performing the premiere with Philip Smith. He said:

When it became apparent that the New York Philharmonic was not going to reschedule the premiere, I had a conversation with Phil Smith about doing the premiere at Illinois. He and I had worked together before on a world premiere and a recording project. After that conversation, I spoke with other members of the Big Ten Band Directors Association regarding our availability, willingness to take it on that next season and that we had secured a date for Phil Smith already in case it worked out. This is probably an oversimplification of the process, but Aaron, Phil, and the Big Ten Band Directors Association agreed. The last permission came from the New York Philharmonic itself since it was guaranteed the premiere contractually. Aaron and Phil were the ones [who] worked with NYP officials to release their right to the premiere.\textsuperscript{73}

The world premiere of \textit{a Voice, a Messenger} finally occurred on April 2, 2013 by Philip Smith and University of Illinois Wind Symphony. Aaron Jay Kernis waited nearly four years to hear his piece performed. When asked if Kernis was happy with the premiere performance he said “Yes, it was a very important moment for me and for Phil – it had been a long journey to get to this point, after the very frustrating postponements and all the work that had gone into the piece. It also enabled me to begin the revision process.”\textsuperscript{74} After waiting all that time, Kernis still wanted to make revisions to the piece. He says that this is usually how he feels after hearing the premiere of his works. He had been through such a long process of researching, writing, and revising that by the time he did get to hear it in 2013 he was even more determined to completely finish the piece.\textsuperscript{75}

Smith had a slightly different reaction to the performance and was very critical of his own playing:

\textsuperscript{73} Dr. Robert W. Rumbelow, email conversation with the author, February 23, 2016.
\textsuperscript{74} Aaron Jay Kernis, email conversation with the author, February 22, 2016.
\textsuperscript{75} Aaron Jay Kernis, phone conversation with the author, February 22, 2016.
I would have loved to have had another performance or two. The premiere was the only performance that I got to give. It was okay, but it wasn’t perfect. In the orchestra, you would have done Thursday night, Friday, Saturday and Tuesday. You would have gotten four concerts. Unfortunately we didn’t get that opportunity.\textsuperscript{76}

Rumbelow also mentioned that he would have liked to have a second performance. He said that the premiere went well, but there would have been more comfort and greater freedom of musicianship with a second performance.\textsuperscript{77}

In September 2013, Michael Sachs, principal trumpet of the Cleveland Orchestra, was approached to perform the piece with the Ohio State University Wind Symphony under the direction of Dr. Russell C. Mikkelson. Sachs assumes that Philip Smith was unavailable to perform the piece at the time and it was suggested to Mikkelson that he perform the piece. Before agreeing to perform the piece, Sachs had asked to see the music and hear a recording. After looking over the piece and listening to the recording, he called Smith to discuss the piece:

> Phil is somebody who has been kind of a big brother to me in the trumpet world. Someone whose guidance and input I’ve always sought out. I have the highest regard and respect for Phil as a person and as a player. He’s a wonderful man and a wonderful musician. . . . Knowing how Phil felt strongly about the piece made me really want to dive into it and explore it.\textsuperscript{78}

Looking at the piece for the first time, Sachs knew that it was going to be a challenge but excitedly began preparing the work. He performed the piece with the Ohio State University Wind Symphony twice; the first performance was on the OSU campus in Columbus, Ohio on February 25, 2014, and the second performance was at Ball State University for the College Band Directors National Association North Central Divisional Conference on March 1, 2014.

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\textsuperscript{76} Philip Smith, phone conversation with the author, March 3, 2016.  
\textsuperscript{77} Dr. Robert W. Rumbelow, emailed to the author, February 23, 2016.  
\textsuperscript{78} Michael Sachs, phone conversation with the author, March 3, 2016.
Kernis was able to attend the performance at Ball State University and this performance inspired him to make a third round of revisions that were published very soon afterward.\footnote{Aaron Jay Kernis, emailed to the author, February 21, 2016.}

Sachs was invited to perform the piece again with an ensemble from the Big Ten: Michigan State University. Sachs performed the piece with the MSU Wind Symphony under the direction of its conductor, Dr. Kevin Sedatole, on October 23, 2014. He recalls receiving a positive response from the audience at all three performances. When asked if he thought the audience understood what they were listening to he said, “I don’t know what level they understood. Just from a pure entertainment standpoint, people seemed to like how the piece came across.” Of the three performances, Sachs believes his performance for the CBDNA conference was his best so far. He is also ready to perform the piece again saying that he hopes to perform with work with the Cleveland Orchestra. He also mentioned that most of the Big Ten Schools have not had the opportunity to play the piece yet.\footnote{Michael Sachs, phone conversation with performer, March 3, 2016.} When asked about recording the piece, Sachs excitedly said “Sure! Are you kidding? Of course. I’d love to do it here in Cleveland and use the concerts as the recording, but that’s my own little fantasy.”\footnote{Ibid.}

The fourth and most recent performance of the piece took place on November 22, 2015 featuring Chris Martin, principal trumpet of the Chicago Symphony, with the University of Texas Wind Ensemble and conductor Jerry Junkin. Of all the performances that the composer has heard of the piece, this was the performance that left Kernis feeling most satisfied, saying: “When I heard that performance I thought, ‘Okay, this work is finally done now. I can truly go on from here.”’\footnote{Aaron Jay Kernis, phone conversation with composer, February 22, 2016.}
After speaking with the composers, performers and conductors there are no plans for future performances or recordings as of this writing. The New York Philharmonic has not made plans, as far as the composer and performers are aware, to perform the piece. *a Voice, a Messenger* has only been performed four times since 2013 by only three different soloists.

A piano reduction of the accompaniment was written for study purposes for the performers and conductors to prepare for their performances. However, it was never intended to be used for an actual performance. Michael Sachs has performed the first movement with the piano reduction for a short recital to demonstrate the piece to students at Michigan State University.\(^{83}\) He said that it would be possible to perform the piece that way, but it would not be nearly as effective as performing with the ensemble simply because there would be so many colors and percussive elements missing. He also would not recommend playing the piece with piano as part of a recital saying, “This [piece] standing alone is enough work for one night.”\(^{84}\)

Philip Smith believes that piano reductions are very important in order for new works to be performed more often. There are concerto competitions held at universities all over the country that require students to compete with a piano reduction. If the piano reduction is not made available for the younger generation of performers, the chances of the piece being performed are wildly diminished. Smith said:

> I know that piano reductions are not fun. They aren’t fun for the composer to write, they’re usually a pain in the neck, and they’re not going to represent the piece well. But it’s just another way to at least get the thing out there to get played. I think it’s a good idea although I know that the composer will say, “I can’t express on a keyboard what I try to express in the ensemble.”\(^{85}\)

\(^{84}\) Ibid.
\(^{85}\) Philip Smith, phone conversation with the author, March 3, 2016.
a Voice, a Messenger is a piece that challenges nearly every aspect of a trumpet player. The soloist is expected to play loudly and softly, high notes and low notes, gently and aggressively. He is expected to play three different instruments. He is expected to play against and within a large wind ensemble with a plethora of percussion instruments. It is a piece that even Michael Sachs, Chris Martin, and Philip Smith had called difficult, exhausting and even impossible. But the last word they use is always “rewarding.”

Works such as this are not just for musicians like them: the “trumpet elite of America.” These pieces are for listeners, for all performers, and for young people aspiring to be like Philip Smith, Michael Sachs, and Chris Martin. When asked if this piece should be reserved for professional musicians, Philip Smith said:

No because you could say that about any piece. The challenge is that young ones come along with no fear and can do anything and so they should. That’s what presses the envelope and pushes the limit further. What’s hard for someone in one generation becomes playable for someone down the road. No, I don’t think it should be reserved. But I will say that anyone who’s going to play it will have to work hard to get it done.

And when Aaron Jay Kernis was asked how he felt about young musicians performing his piece, he said:

I’ve been writing a lot of concertos in the last five years or so. One of the exciting things I’ve found is, without even thinking about it, that the music that I write, in general, challenges performers. That’s what we composers do, what we’ve always done. We’re not happy only with what’s been done in the past, in tying ourselves to already existing levels of performance practice. We’re looking for the next challenge -but not just for the sake of the new -because we can imagine music that pushes beyond what already exists. It’s not always that we’re looking to break the sound and difficultly barrier all the time for its own sake. But we stand on the shoulders of our predecessors and can look out further. The same is true with young musicians. They learn so much from their mentors and some of the great players before them, but they build new skills that would not have been possible for previous generations – each affects the other. I’m hopeful that this work - along with the other concertos I’ve written - will sustain the interest and excitement of
successive generations of performers who won’t be put off by the initial challenges of the piece.86

When expanding the solo repertoire of an instrument, it is important to find pieces that test boundaries but do not overstep them. When contemporary composers write concerti, they can be tempted to stretch the idiom too far and the piece is performed very few times as a result. There are many challenges within a Voice, a Messenger but they are all within the realm of possibility. A solo piece such as this allows for the performer to explore all of the aspects of his playing to expand and better himself as a musician. a Voice, a Messenger is a piece that is both challenging and rewarding, and should find its place within the standard repertoire for advanced trumpet soloists.

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Jerry Junkin: Well, thank you very much for joining us at intermission. We just heard the terrific performance of the John Williams piece, “With Malice Toward None” played so beautifully by our guest Christopher Martin so it’s just fantastic to have you with us.

Chris Martin: Thank you Jerry. It’s a pleasure to be here and to play with you finally, and to play with this great band. So, it’s a great pleasure.

JJ: Well we’ve talked about this for awhile. Being able to make this happen and so I’m really glad that the stars aligned. We’ll talk more about Aaron Kernis’s remarkable piece a Voice, a Messenger a little bit later, but first for our audience I want to talk about you a little bit and just your background because for many people it’s a well-known story but for some people not so much. So we know Chris Martin as the principal trumpet of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra but obviously there’s a lot of stuff that happened to get you to that point.

CM: Without a doubt. I come from a musical family, but I come from a family of teachers also. My dad’s a band director; my uncle’s a band director. I have aunts who are all teachers as well; a choral teacher, a science teacher. My mom started as a choral teacher. So I grew up in the band world, really. My earliest memories are of hanging out with my parents at marching band practice.

JJ: Freddy Martin, who I was honored to meet for the first time just, only a few years ago--two or three years ago-- in Chicago at Midwest although having heard of him all my life just about.

CM: Not the lounge singer, the band director.

JJ: Right, well there is another Chris Martin too, but we won’t go into that.

CM: The real one. Yeah -- so I grew up in band and I grew up sort of in the drum and bugle corps world as well during the summers and I—so I sort of always knew as a kid that I would play brass because that always—I always had a love for that sound. And I started on the horn. Dad’s a horn player and started on horn, played horn for two weeks. And it just really wasn’t for me. And you know I thought -- for me just trumpet always felt like my voice and so I switched pretty quickly to trumpet and was fortunate in that I had parents who understood and were supportive of my not only practice by my desire to get better and desire to find the best teachers and to go to very expensive, you know conservatory and take out a bunch of loans and do all that stuff. Because you know
growing up in Georgia, band is huge there but there aren’t a lot of kids who were wanting to go and play in an orchestra. I had loved playing in the band and I had loved that world and still do to this day, but when I heard – I remember hearing a concert of Mahler with the Atlanta Symphony when I was about 15 and that really – that’s what shifted my focus to the orchestral world. The possibility to play this music and play these great trumpet parts. And so I was really very fortunate to have parents who would take me to such an experience and it’s really the case for so many of my colleagues and so many of your great students that having a family who is supportive and caring about what you do is really everything.

JJ: It is. And my hat is always -- every once in a while we encounter somebody who doesn’t have that situation. In a way they’re doing it in spite of -- over their parents’ objections.

CM: Which is amazing.

JJ: Yeah. And it’s always remarkable. And they have a great desire to – they’re just determined to do this. But it is easier when you have great support.

CM: It is definitely easier. And you know -- so I went to school far away. I went to Eastman in Rochester, New York. In a very cold place and great weather for practicing— that’s what I always said. And had wonderful teachers there – Charlie Guyer and Barbara Butler who have since moved to Northwestern and then now are at Rice University.

JJ: Yes, they had the good sense now to move to Texas as everyone eventually does.

CM: Yeah, everybody goes to Texas. Everybody with a brain ends up in Texas, so I’ve heard. So I had a great time there and I spent – after I finished school, I didn’t really have any options to be honest. I had gotten my Bachelor’s from Eastman. I auditioned for one school for my Master’s, that will remain nameless, and they didn’t let me in. So I had really no options when I graduated and I was just practicing and working. I played a summer festival and then was trying to just figure out what to do. I spent a very brief time, a few weeks, at the New World Symphony. And then right after that I was doing a little audition tour for myself and I ended up in the Philly Orchestra and I was in the Philly Orchestra for three years playing the associate principal. Then one of my former teachers, another of my former teachers Jim Thompson, left his principal chair in the Atlanta Symphony to go to Eastman and teach. So I auditioned and took his place there and I was in Atlanta for five years playing first trumpet. It was a great time to be in Atlanta, very exciting time. A new conductor, a new kind of resurgence in the art scene in Atlanta, especially in the symphony life there and I grew a lot as a person and I grew a
lot as a trumpet player. And it really helped to prepare me for Chicago. I auditioned for Chicago a few times over the years. It was really a case of perseverance over anything else. And I had always — you know—one of my other early memories of childhood is listening to CSO records with my dad. Listening to Herseth play and hearing a sound that I had never heard in my entire life. That a trumpet could do this – my God. So I had always wanted to do that. I had always wanted to play that way and play that music with those people if I could. And so over about six -- about five years, I took the audition—I auditioned three times for the job and then the last time I was fortunate enough to get it. And it was kind of an overwhelming experience not only to suddenly have such a position, but something that I thought about for so long and tried for --for so long was kind of surreal. But it’s been a wonderful blessing. It’s been a great – it’s a real privilege and an honor to do it. And the nice thing about it, besides playing with great colleagues there, is I get the opportunity to do things like this; to play a piece like this that’s exciting and challenging and difficult and to play with you and to play with this band.

JJ: You came to Chicago and that’s now, what, eleven years ago? Ten years ago?

CM: Yeah, almost eleven.

JJ: As we’re recording this. So it’s – there’s so much that goes into anyone’s career but we had the opportunity to talk last night that during your educational training you were telling me that really the bulk of your playing was done in the Eastman Wind Ensemble at the time you were in Eastman as -- at least in terms of ensemble work -- because of rotation systems and all that sort of stuff.

CM: And just because of sheer numbers, you know. Most of the symphony orchestra concerts at Eastman had at most three trumpets, you know. And the wind orchestra and the wind ensemble have obviously much more. So everybody, not just me, but everybody in school spends the bulk of their time playing in wind ensemble, wind orchestra. And the benefit to that is, in a way it’s the same. In a way you’re learning how to play in an ensemble. You’re learning to listen around you. Listen to your section and listen to the brass section and listen to how that fits into the context of the whole ensemble. So that’s no different from playing in an orchestra. The difference is that you’re playing a lot more notes and a lot more often and sometimes far more challenging music than, technically than you would be playing in the orchestra most of the time. So in a way it’s like a concentrated version of what you’re doing in the orchestra because you have the same listening skills you’re developing, the same sort of sense of awareness while you’re also playing a lot more notes.
JJ: Right. Exactly. I know that’s the way—and very often my colleagues that I work with in other situations will remind me why they enjoy playing in the band or the wind ensemble even when they’re playing in orchestras all the time is that they just get to play more.

CM: The same reason that many of my colleagues— we enjoy playing chamber music. We play CSO Brass concerts every year. There’s a brass quintet that plays a lot. Chamber music is always, in any form, is really interesting to me and comparing to a 110 piece symphony, wind ensemble is a chamber ensemble. And to be able to play difficult music, one on a part or even just a few to a part is even – I’m 40 now and I’ve been doing this for a long time, for decades now at this point, almost two decades professionally. Even for me, I still find my ears and my mind open every time I play in quintet. Every time I play in brass ensemble. Every time I play in a more, kind of intensive—small and intensive situation.

JJ: There’s this beautiful recording, which you were kind enough to pass on to me, that you guys made – this has just come out on Naxos label… of the Gabrieli music plus the John Williams music for brass which is, that was obviously made with your colleagues from across the country –

CM: The National Brass Ensemble

JJ: Yes -- but being able to come together. It’s a really a wonderful production, I think.

CM: It is a great group to be in for many reasons. It’s amazing players and everybody’s got chops and everybody’s on fire when they’re playing in that group. And the arrangements are great.

JJ: Fantastic arrangements by Tim Higdon.

CM: Tim did such a beautiful job. Really, a beautiful job. But the great thing about it is it’s really a labor of love. Everybody there wants to be there. Nobody playing in the group – nobody’s there for the money. It’s definitely not that kind of thing. Everybody is there for the love of it. Not only for the music and for the concert experience even just to be on the stage and playing together. It’s a unique situation.

JJ: We should turn our attention to what’s going to happen after intermission. There’s an overture of Aaron Kernis’s. But then the big piece on the program for you is his really remarkable trumpet piece, A Voice, a messenger, originally composed for Philip Smith and the New York Philharmonic winds section and the Big 10 Band Directors association had a role in
commissioning that. It’s been rarely performed. I think by my calculations it’s had three performances now. But it is quite a thorny little thing, isn’t it?

CM: It is. There’s a lot of depth and a lot of intensity. The word that keeps coming into my mind is “intensity.” Really from the very first bar to the end of the piece it never really lets up. It never relaxes. It has this kind of, there’s a nervousness and a kind of drive to it that is relentless.

JJ: There’s a fervency about it that really comes through and I know that at the time, Mr. Kernis will speak about this after intermission before the performance, but at the time he was writing the piece he and Philip Smith discussed what Mr. Smith would like in a piece and the subject of the religious aspects came up. And so clearly I think every note of the piece is, it’s nothing but sincere and really heart-felt and the sound of the shofar and all the different biblical references of use of music and trumpet in particular in the Bible is incorporated.

CM: I think that’s absolutely true. I think that comes through not only in the direct quotation of the shofar-like calls and melodies, but to me the thing about religion and the thing about spirituality is that it’s universal but it’s also unique to every individual. And I think from that perspective this piece is interesting because even though certain aspects of it and certain sounds in this world might not strike everyone as spiritual, in the end the large scale context of the piece is deeply so and universal in that way. Even though it is – similarly in trying to read the Bible or trying to understand these mysteries --many things in the Bible to many people may not make any sense but in the context of the whole work, there is an element of connection to something bigger than yourself there. And I think this piece is the same. There are so many moments when I find myself even when playing the solo I’m wondering, “Where is this going musically? Where are we going?” And then in the end you’re taken somewhere. You really are taken somewhere.

JJ: Yeah, there is no question about that and I think also the fact that-- in the context of this piece, as the listeners will hear those who have not heard the piece before—you begin on trumpet, and then you play flügelhorn, and then you end up on piccolo trumpet. So there’s even a migration just in the way the piece is written for you.

CM: Absolutely. And the nice thing about being a trumpet player is you get to play a lot of different horns. It’s good for collectors and it’s good for people with a short attention span. That’s the way I think about trumpet. You know you can own 20 or 30 or 40 horns and be considered pretty normal, actually. You can own 100 or 200 and still be like, “I can see that, I can see how that can happen.” The other nice thing about being a trumpet player is you get a lot of different voices. You have the capability to make a lot of different kinds of sound and the flügel is, of course, a beautiful sound. Popular is jazz, of
course, but a beautiful classical solo voice as well. And I think in this piece the flügel sings really beautifully. He uses it in its lower register and its upper register too and I think it’s really a beautiful kind of sound and it melds nicely with the horns and nicely with the middle winds as well. So in terms of just the scoring of the piece, I think it’s a beautiful choice in that third movement. And then the piccolo trumpet at the end just kind of gives it this searing kind of, soaring quality but also really kind of – a real intensity to finish.

JJ: And as the audience will see you’re joined by two of the players from the ensemble. Two of the trumpeters who come up.

CM: Great kids, great players.

JJ: So they end up being a trio with you at the end.

CM: And they’ve got some notes to play, those guys. They do. And they’re doing a great job. They’re doing a beautiful job.

JJ: It really is a wonderful piece. No one escapes this piece unscathed in terms of demands that are placed on them. So it’s really quite a demanding work but really rewarding music.

CM: It is really rewarding. I hope the audience... it’s the kind of piece that benefits, I think, from repeated hearings for sure but I think even on an initial hearing you get a real impact from it.

JJ: I totally agree. I do think it’s a live audience performance piece that I think the live aspect is something that, in a way, I wouldn’t say I would never want to record this piece but I don’t know that would be the ideal way to really experience it.

CM: I think it’s true of so much music actually. Recording is great and recording gives you a kind of remembrance of the live experience. But without the live experience recordings are to me are a little bit... they don’t have... they lose some of the weight.

JJ: Well, I can’t thank you enough for taking this on. We had talked about working together. So you learned this piece for this and so I can’t thank you enough for taking time off from your day job to be here with us.

CM: It’s my pleasure. I’m looking forward to the performance.
2. Aaron Jay Kernis (Email)

February 21, 2016

Pagean DiSalvio: How were you approached to write this piece in honor of Philip Smith’s 30 years with the New York Philharmonic? Did you Smith ask you, did the New York Philharmonic?

Aaron Jay Kernis: Phil Smith asked me following performances of my Lament and Prayer at the Philharmonic.

PD: How did the Big Ten Band Directors Association become involved in the commission?

AJK: Just prior to Phil’s request, the Big Ten Association had contacted me about a commission, so when Phil made his request I thought it would be ideal to put the two together.

PD: Why was the University of Illinois Wind Ensemble chosen for the premiere?

AJK: This is a more complicated answer. The initial premiere with the NY Phil was postponed – the piece had been finished late, and Phil didn’t feel completely ready to premiere it, he needed more time given the challenging solo part. The premiere was rescheduled for winter two seasons later, but then was again cancelled due to a huge blizzard that affected the East Coast. By that point, the Illinois Winds Ensemble asked if they could have the premiere. And permission was granted. Later on, when Phil retired from the Philharmonic, it had not yet been rescheduled, and I have no sense that it will be at this point.

PD: What made you want to write for wind orchestra instead of a string orchestra?

AJK: That was the nature of the commission – I had decided to go ahead for winds from the start.

PD: Is there a reason that saxophones were not included?

AJK: Since writing for wind ensemble was new to me, I needed to soften the challenges I was facing, so I decided not to add saxophones. In addition, using saxes would make it more expensive to program the work with orchestras, and that was a consideration as well, especially due to the other deviations from the typical orchestral scoring that I chose.

PD: What techniques, new to the 21st century, did you use in the composition of this work?

AJK: The main new elements was the use of the internet for research on the shofar. I used YouTube extensively, and also sent Phil many sketches in PDF format.

PD: How closely did you work with Philip Smith during the composition process? Did he help with writing for trumpet as well as providing context for the piece(biblical texts)?
AJK: Phil put together a concordance of quotes from the Bible that included members of the trumpet and shofar family, and gave me a lot of context for the work. He also commented a great deal along the way on the trumpet part, making particularly challenging aspects more idiomatic.

PD: In 2014, there were revisions made to the piece. What were they and why?

AJK: These were significant. Following the premiere I tweaked all things that had come up – balances – elements that needed to be orchestrationally strengthened – and also extended the final mini-cadenza in the last movement, solidified tempi, etc.

PD: There are very precise tempo markings (throughout the whole piece, really) – Is there any room for interpretation or is that exactly what you want to hear?

AJK: There is some room for flexibility, but by the time I got to the 2014 edition I had found the best tempo range to include. It is now very close to what I want to hear, and affects the pacing of the entire work a great deal.

PD: You also give very precise directions throughout the piece, is this to ensure that the performance will be as close to the same every time?

AJK: Exactly, but also to inform the players and conductor so they understand my intentions.

PD: Are there specific reasons why you featured the Horn section and the Oboe more often than the other sections of the ensemble? Often the trumpet and oboe play together. Is there symbolism here?

AJK: Not really. There are other symbolisms we can talk about. But the oboe blends with and heightens the trumpet tone so well, that’s why it’s a natural timbre for me to use.

Movement I: Morning Prayer

PD: There are moments when you say “con sord” and others when you specify which mute you would like to hear. Are you allowing the soloist to choose which mute they want to play?

AJK: Yes and no. When I write “con sord” I mean straight mute, but which kind of straight is variable for the performer.

PD: In measure 48, should that moment be treated as a grand pause? How large of a silence should there be?

AJK: Not a grand pause, no. But important to clear the air, allow space the next bar of solo trumpet to transition to the start of the next, final section and mood.

PD: In the Tranquillo sections, how was it decided that Philip Smith would use a cup mute?
AJK: We were looking for a softer rounder color here. After the premiere straight has been used here, but Phil felt that the change of color was important and that it would differentiate the sound of this passage more.

PD: The musical terms used such as *sotto voce* and *ma sentito*—more descriptive than what is typically given in orchestral parts. Why did you choose these terms?

AJK: Oh they’re very important to help the conductor know the tone and color of certain parts, and to help delineate what needs to be clearly heard in the texture.

PD: Attaca to movement II was not performed at the premiere. Was this a decision made for that performance, or was this a revision in the 2014 edition of the piece?

AJK: Phil just needed a moment to get ready for the next movement. It has been attacca in other performances, I believe.

Movement II: Timbrel Psalm

PD: “Straight Mute” specified at the beginning of the movement. Did you know this was the sound you wanted? Were the piano and harp prepared with paper to resemble the buzzy sound of the muted trumpet?

AJK: Definitely they were chosen as a unique color, and to match other sounds in the solo part and percussion.

PD: In the m.83 Cadenza “sempre in tempo” is written. Is this a strict instruction or room for interpretation by the soloist?

AJK: Yes. Phil tended to take extra time here for breaths. So I wanted other players to know that I intended this cadenza to be performed in tempo.

PD: At the end of the movement the trumpet is muted with a straight mute and in unison with the oboe – did you intend for the mute to enable the trumpet to blend better with the oboe?

AJK: Yes.

PD: Would it be safe to say that this movement is a “dance movement?”

AJK: For much of it yes, but not the sustained middle section...

Movement III: Night Prayer

PD: A brass choir opens the movement – is this symbolic of something?

AJK: Not symbolic, just an important compositional choice and structural device to introduce the opening melody and set up the first entrance of the flügelhorn.

PD: Is there a meaning behind the contrast of the brass and the woodwinds in this movement?
AJK: Again, not symbolic, but structural and compositional.

PD: Both this movement and the first are called “prayers.” The tuplets being played sound almost like a recitative to me, is that an influence from choral composition?

AJK: They are vocal in nature, but not choral.

PD: Did you mean for the soloist to resemble a voice? What is it saying?

AJK: That’s for the listener to decide!!!

PD: m. 102 “Wailing, Soulful” – Very descriptive. What is the ensemble wailing about?

AJK: There’s a lot in the world and life to wail about!!!

PD: m.118 There is an alternate solo option, why?

AJK: At this point in the movement, breath control seemed to be an issue aligned with range, so I wanted to give the soloist some option if they were winded at this point.

Movement IV: Monument – Tekiah, Teruah

PD: Opening trumpet announcement – is this a specific shofar call being used? Which one?

AJK: Definitely a reminiscence of the call with multiple repeated notes, also referred to in the opening of the entire work. I believe this is the Tehiah. I’d have to go back to the research to remember.

PD: Is the soloist a call as well? Which one?

AJK: Really this is a combination of multiple forms of the shofar calls, and an elaboration of the opening movement’s music.

PD: M.41 – Is the exchange between the soloist and the first trumpet meant to sound like an echo? What sort of effect do you want?

AJK: Yes and echo that also in part sets up the arrival of the two other trumpets at the front of the stage at the end of this movement.

PD: Mm.54-60 – There are a lot of notes being played at once. Was this to create an effect? Is there a meaning behind it?

AJK: This section is really one line elaborated and cut up around the whole ensemble, definitely to add to the speed and agitation of the music.
PD: When the solo trumpet is playing against the full ensemble, do you prefer that the trumpet blend with the accompaniment or soar above everything else?

AJK: It really depends upon which passage is being referred to. Some need to soar, others are more intended as obbligato passages or in counterpoint with the lines of the ensemble.

PD: Were there revisions made around measure 74? What were they and why?

AJK: There had been a question of how active the solo part should be at this point, so I believe I ultimately decided to allow the soloist to end this line with longer notes, and transition out of being the main focus in this passage.

PD: Tempo I at m. 82 – is there a specific shofar call being used here?

AJK: This is the return of the opening music of this movement, with further elaboration and ornamentation of the opening lines.

PD: M. 94 – Flügelhorn is specified, but was not played for the premiere. Was this a later revision?

AJK: Phil initially preferred to have a change of color and weight here, but my preference had always been to retain the trumpet lightness and sound. Ultimately I went with the trumpet here, and so did Phil.

PD: Is this meant to be reminiscent of the third movement?

AJK: This is a simplification of the opening music in the first movement, actually, but also suggests aspects of the third. It’s really, for me, the culminating melody of the piece, in its most direct form.

PD: With the trumpets that join the soloist at the end of the piece, you are very specific about when they should leave to join the soloist. You also provided a diagram at the beginning of the score for those trumpets. Why were you so specific about their placement? Is this symbolic?

AJK: Yes, this is symbolic. I had read that in the 2nd temple in Jerusalem (before its destruction) the three silver trumpets had been used in some special services. So I decided to reference this symbol of this unique aspect of ancient Jewish history.

PD: Why did you choose to end the piece with the soloist playing piccolo trumpet?

AJK: I wanted a new high color that would be heard clearly above the entire ensemble.

PD: The ending of the piece is generates an enormous amount of sound, what does this symbolize?
AJK: Oh, maybe the culmination of the intensity and grief of the entire work and the final movement and moments.

PD: Were you happy with the premiere performance of the piece?

AJK: Yes, it was a very important moment for me and for Phil – it had been a long journey to get to this point, after the very frustrating postponements and all the work that had gone into the piece. It also enabled me to begin the revision process.

PD: What inspired you to make revisions in 2014?

AJK: Knowing of the 2nd performance at the Regional Band Convention.

PD: Would you like for this piece to be recorded commercially?

AJK: Certainly!

PD: Would you like for this piece to become a staple in the solo trumpet repertoire?

AJK: I would love that!
3. Aaron Jay Kernis (Phone)

February 22, 2016

Aaron Jay Kernis: It’s amazing for you to get into this so deeply. It’s just fantastic.

Pagean DiSalvio: Oh, like I said the world premiere just stuck with me so much. Just the emotional intensity from start to finish was just… I couldn’t let it go! So here I am three years later writing my dissertation.

AJK: That’s fantastic. You know what I’m going to do – I’m going to just put my headphones on because it will help me to hear you a little bit. It’s just slightly rough sounding. So let me do that. And I’ve got a score just in case I need it. Okay that’s… I’m hoping that soon I’ll get a recording from Austin if they would just finish editing the video because it was so good.

PD: It was. I was actually able to catch the live-stream.

AJK: Oh wait, were you there?

PD: No, my recital was the day before so I couldn’t actually make it out there. Or no, it was the day before my recital. So there was no way I could make it all the way out to Austin that day, but I did catch the live-stream online.

AJK: Oh that’s great, so you got the idea. When I heard that performance I thought, “Okay, this work is finally done now. I can truly go on from here.”

PD: I found it pretty funny when I asked if you were happy with the premiere performance and you said, “Yes, so I could make revisions.”

AJK: That’s how it usually is. You know with premieres. I waited so long to hear this piece. I don’t think I’ve waited as long to hear a piece because of the two postponements with the Philharmonic.

PD: Right, because it was written in 2009 or you started writing it in 2009, right?

AJK: Let’s see. It was supposed to be actually premiered in 2010, in the summer. And that’s when… I was just a little bit late and Phil didn’t feel quite ready and then… so that was the postponement. I waited and then I revised it one more time for 2012 and then that was the blizzard. Yeah, and so that’s… I think that’s why because I had been through such a long process fixing the thing and then really wanting to hear it and get it feeling like it was completely done and make the adjustments. It was a long process.
PD: Wow and I’m so glad it got done!

AJK: Me too, believe me.

PD: And you said that the Big Ten Band Director’s Association was involved from the beginning?

AJK: That’s right. It was just very funny timing that like a week or two, I believe, before Phil approached me, I had gotten a call from the Big Ten to do a commission and I wasn’t sure what to do. And then Phil asked and I thought, “Why don’t I put these two ordinary pieces together?” It was definitely, as far as I know in modern times that is, the first time that the New York Philharmonic and the bands had commissioned a work together.

PD: And you had never, or at least you said in an interview at the time, that this was your first time composing for just wind orchestra, correct?

AJK: Yes, that’s correct.

PD: How did you go through this process because it’s completely different than writing for strings. The balances and everything. Was that so unfamiliar to you? Is that why there were revisions that needed to made later?

AJK: Well, the main things that were challenging were some of the instruments that I never would have written for like euphonium and having two tubas and being able to constantly switch back and forth, having more flexibility with the doubling instruments with the contrabass clarinet and all those sort of things. A lot of it was just hearing, you know I spent some time listening to more wind repertoire. And I remember when I heard the New York premiere of John Corigliano’s Circus Maximus how he’d written in his program notes how terrified he was when he was approaching band. But he just went in every possible direction at once with that piece. This piece was certainly more or less gargantuan than that. But still, it was definitely a different way of thinking about sound, about sustaining sound and letting people breathe and all that kind of thing. And I also had a lot more flexibility with the percussion. And that was another thing that was great. I chose to use instruments that I’d never used before and some techniques that I’d never used before with the steel drum and the piano with paper and those kinds of things. It also gave me some freedom that I don’t sometimes utilize in orchestral pieces.

PD: So you mentioned that Phil Smith contacted you after performing Lament and Prayer?
AJK: He didn’t perform it, but I think he heard it. Now what I forget is if it was at the same time. Or I don’t think it was the same week, but I think it was close to it. To the performance with the Philharmonic and he came to me. And he said that he had an idea that he had a very strong idea and, I hope you get a chance to talk to Phil about this because it was there from the beginning, that he always hoped that a concerto would be written that referred to the whole range of trumpet-like instruments that were in the Bible. And he initially asked me whether I would consider writing for a lot of different instruments. Whether I would have a shofar part and cornet and different piccolo of course. I just ultimately decided just to use three instruments rather than more.

PD: Well, I mean shofar would have been difficult to write for because I think every single one has a different pitch center.

AJK: Exactly and it’s so unpredictable. And so when I actually spent the time listening to shofar players I decided to use that as a core influence rather than actually... I just knew it would be... unless it was used as a sound effect... it would be difficult to use it in any kind of musical way.

PD: So I’ve been reading up about you in your biography and in various interviews and early in life you said you were interested in the Jewish traditions, because that’s your heritage, correct? So how much did that play into you deciding the direction you went?

AJK: That’s a really important question actually because when Phil sent me this material, I mean he sent me like 15 pages of references from the Bible and I was doing my own research in the apocalypse and some other... so yeah, I would guess what we would call the large scale Apocrypha and the Dead Sea Scrolls and stuff like that. I was looking for other references in other places. For awhile I thought about using quotes from the Apocalypse, but my ideas became more strongly focused once I went to High Holy Days services. I went the first night that the shofar was played, and has forgotten how strongly the shofar was referred to in the text used in the service. I was deeply struck by portions of the sacred text about the effect of the sound of shofar on the onlookers. The mystery and awe at the instances of its sounding and what it signified made a very big impression on me. It was at that point that I began to feel secure that I would use quotations only from the Old Testament. And, let’s see, and even though you’ve probably seen the program notes that have some quotations from the Bible. That wasn’t used so much, except for the second movement, the musical ideas really came before those. Those quotations were just given for the program notes to give the listeners some sense of the kind of things I’ve been looking at. The kind of quotes that had inspired me, yet they weren’t direct inspirations to the music except for the one from Psalm 150.
PD: So how important do you think it is for the soloist to understand the context of what you’ve written and, I mean, the use of the Torah or the Old Testament and the historical information…the specific shofar calls that are used. How important do you think it is for the soloist to understand those?

AJK: I think it’s important to know that the shofar is playing. And those techniques because those were really so important in the way that I thought about the trumpet part. Now the other elements, it kind was less important. I think they’re interesting. If I had made a piece that’s really about something, that’s really a story, or that’s really a particular narrative that would be more important. It’s more the overview. It’s more the context to hear these things. So I don’t think it’s vital that they go searching for that, but I don’t think it would hurt either.

PD: The piece is dedicated to Michael Kernis. Would you be willing to talk about him? How did this affect the content of your piece?

AJK: What happened is I was writing the piece… Let’s see, he passed away. He was a little older than me and he died very young of cancer and was a cousin that I was very, very close to. And I forget if I was… I think I was at the beginning of the last movement or within the last movement. As I was writing this movement I was very stricken with sadness and very angry at Michael’s death. That’s why I decided to add “Monument” to the title. The image of the gravestone, this stone tablet, this marker of death was strongly in my mind when he passed away. That implacable image definitely had a deep effect on the tone of the movement. I decided at that point to dedicate the concerto to his memory.

PD: And is part of the reason why… you had mentioned that you made use of the contrast between darkness and beauty. Did that play into your remembering your cousin?

AJK: The piece very, very well on its way before he passed away and from the very beginning of the piece I could tell that it was more of a pensive, kind of more dark, with the second movement providing some kind of relief, but for the most part the piece is very kind of weighty and very serious. And I think that was, partially that came from the significance of the Bible quotes. But I can’t… why was it… I swear from the beginning… the different prayers. That the Morning Prayer and the night prayer were more, they were just looking inward a lot and I was sort of thinking about these dark feelings about the situation in the world. And it hasn’t changed much, things have gotten worse. You know, I forget if it was after this piece… yeah, after these I wrote a cello concerto that was more, at least parts of it were much lighter and they’re not so dark. It just so happened that this piece became one of those that’s more dark. And definitely his death
played into the tone of it. Not the end, the end was already planned. I already knew, I had done a little reading and had found this information which was new to me about these silver trumpets being used in the temple that was destroyed. And so I just thought it was a really beautiful image in a way that I could use two other trumpets and bring the sound of the trumpet even more forward at the end of the piece.

PD: It definitely created a powerful image, I do remember that. That was incredible. I loved how they slowly progressed toward the center of the stage. It definitely presents this really powerful image. When I first saw the score, you were very deliberate about how you wanted them to be staged.

AJK: I will mention that originally I wanted them in the balcony. I wanted them to surround the audience with each of them in a box, like in a right and left box above the stage. And I looked into doing it with the Philharmonic and it just seemed too logistically difficult to get them up there in time and set them up and get them ready and all that, and also the potential of delay. So I decided to ultimately to do it this way.

PD: Would you potentially ever want two specific people to be assigned offstage trumpet parts or do you think it’s important to have the same people that were onstage?

AJK: I would definitely be happy to do that. In fact in the first performance, I tended to think of the limitations of the orchestra. There probably aren’t five trumpet players that are going to be available. So it was a great surprise when the band director there said “Oh, by the way do you want a couple of extra trumpet parts to play at the end while the first and second players are up front?” So that was a really nice extra thickening there of the texture.

PD: So going back a little bit to the second movement, the Timbrel Psalm. You said that you almost created this movement as a way of lightening up from all the dark pensiveness within the piece.

AJK: Yes and you were right in that it is essentially a dance movement. It wanted to emphasize rhythm rather than line, so much or rhythm and line together. It’s not a joke, but it’s an inside little reference between all of the timbre changes in the piece and the reference to the timbrel in the Bible.

PD: And the timbrel is a tambourine, right?

AJK: Right.
PD: You said that you would like this piece to be recorded commercially in the future?

AJK: Oh sure. I’m hoping eventually one of the bands will do it or someone else eventually.

PD: There was an interview done between Jerry Junkin and Chris Martin and they discussed the possibility of recording this piece or getting their recording out there, something to that effect. And they had a discussion of whether or not it would be as effective emotionally in a recording versus a live performance. How do you feel about that?

AJK: Just a few days ago, my third string quartet had its New York premiere and it had an incredibly vibrant and such a visceral and emotional performance. And one of the people sitting next to me said, “Oh I wonder if you could really capture that special live quality on a recording.” And it really, it’s often the case that live performance and the recordings are really important. They’re really important documents. Often times it’s the only way people can get to hear so much music. As good as recording technology is, it’s still not the same as being there, the sense of effort that the musicians put into it. So you know, it’s just something we manage with because recordings are so necessary but they are very different. But that certainly wouldn’t stop me from wanting it recorded.

PD: How often would you like this performed? Or do you want it reserved for the trumpet elite, who have already performed like Chris Martin, Michael Sachs, Philip Smith? Would you want this to be performed regularly by students?

AJK: I mean of course. I hope it will eventually be played by young trumpet players and ones that are heading towards being professionals. I’ve been writing a lot of concertos in the last five years or so. One of the exciting things I’ve found is, without even thinking about it, that the music that I write, in general, challenges performers. That’s what we composers do, what we’ve always done. We’re not happy only with what’s been done in the past, in tying ourselves to already existing levels of performance practice. We’re looking for the next challenge - but not just for the sake of the new - because we can imagine music that pushes beyond what already exists. It’s not always that we’re looking to break the sound and difficulty barrier all the time for its own sake. But we stand on the shoulders of our predecessors and can look out further. The same is true with young musicians. They learn so much from their mentors and some of the great players before them, but they build new skills that would not have been possible for previous generations – each affects the other. I’m hopeful that this work - along with the other concertos I’ve written - will sustain the interest and excitement of successive generations of performers who won’t be put off by the initial challenges of the piece.
PD: Actually, right before I called you I was meeting with somebody who regularly plays shofar at his synagogue. So I was wondering if I could ask you a little more about the shofar symbolism within the piece. Is that okay?

AJK: Sure. The funny thing is I’d have to pull up my notes. Let’s see if I can even find them. Just help me out. You may have more than I do. By now I’ve forgotten which are the nine repeated notes, which are the long tone separated by the… If you have the program notes, it’s in there. That’s all I would have the information from.

PD: So the Tekiah and the Teruah…

AJK: It’s the Teruah, Teruah and I think a Teruah-Tekiah…

PD: Shevarim?

AJK: Oh boy, really I’d have to look up these things. You should look them up again and then you’ll have the definition of them. Of course that was very basic. That was one of the first things that I looked into. That became very basic and I started to develop the opening phases of the piece and my approach to repeated notes and long tones and tritone and different leaps. Just as very, very basic building blocks of the opening of the piece and later on different parts, different high points and culminating points of the piece. It definitely influenced the whole trajectory of the relationship of the last movement to the first movement. So it was pretty essential but very quickly I forgot what the definitions meant.

PD: You mentioned in another interview that the calls used during Rosh Hashanah are what you used to inspire you for at least the final movement. And the Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the Jewish year, right?

AJK: That’s the very end. Right at the end of the Jewish year, Yom Kippur is at the very, very end. Rosh Hashanah preceding that. The next festival right after that is the actual beginning of the New Year. So the end of the New Year begins with looking back. And that was part of this too. That was also why the piece was pensive because I thought if it were... One of the important aspects of those High Holy Days is to look very seriously and with focus and clarity at what you’ve done in the last year: what you did that was good, at the things that were not, people that you hurt, people that you helped. And as there were undoubtedly people that you hurt or things you did badly, you ask God for forgiveness to wipe the slate clean for your inequities for the year so you can start afresh. It’s the most serious and revealing time in the Jewish calendar.
PD: Interestingly enough as I was researching shofar calls, a specific one I found the Shevarim which is three medium blasts. The description it used was “wailing sounds” and I was wondering if that was some of the inspiration for the descriptive words. You said “wailing or soulful” at some point, was that what you were going for? I believe that the Shevarim is symbolic of sobbing cry of the Jewish heart or call to worship, something to that effect. Was that part of your inspiration behind the third movement?

AJK: I think that was really, not just because I used the words wailing and soulful. In the cadenzas I wanted to convey a sense of freedom, and, through the music, draw a particular emotional picture for the soloist. The kind of intensity I was looking for is highly vocal in quality and very much associated with Jewish vocal music, klezmer music and the emotive singing that cantors convey in sacred Jewish music. The underlying image at this moment if of the trumpet soloist turning briefly into a cantor at this high point of the third movement, and it’s this idea helped me to bring out that especially soulful quality in the writing at that moment.

PD: From what I understand, there are three different kinds of shofar. There’s the ram’s horn, there’s the long curly one, then there’s a long straight one. And the short ram’s horn is said to sound more like a human voice and in the second movements there are several moments where you use triplets and quintuplets and it almost sounds like somebody pleading or speaking in a more rapid pace like they’re desperate to get something out. Is that something that you were going for in those instances?

AJK: I don’t think it was as specific as that. Definitely not in the second movement. The most obvious relationship to any shofar calls are just a couple of tri-tone leaps here and there but mostly not so much. It’s a just little bit in the cadenza, couple of very quick tri-tone leaps but for the most part no. For the most part this movement was not really about shofar music but about the Psalm 150. All of these different instruments that are brought to the forefront in that psalm in that kind of sense of dancing and celebration. And certainly the rhythm of that movement is very much associated with the mixed meters of a great deal of Israeli and Semitic music. But all the textures that I spoke about, the muted things and various percussion and all that was definitely looking like a dance movement and then the line, then the linear, then the shofar based elements. By the time I got to the second movement, I think what I did was I wrote a lot of third movement first, I believe. And I was going back and forth between that and the first movement. Then the second movement was its own thing. So what I’d like to have happen is for the movements to sort of talk to each other and the moments to get embedded in one movement and talk back to other places and kind of relate the movements in that way. So that happens a lot during this piece.
PD: I asked you about symbolism about a thousand times. Every time I appeared to be barking up the wrong tree. But you did say that there are other symbolisms that we can talk about. What are those?

AJK: The symbols are kind of in the eye of the beholder. I don’t have an objection to your finding things that you find symbolic. And for you to make relationships that maybe I didn’t see or were secondary to me, I actually find it quite interesting to see how others perceive those kinds of things. There are so many different subliminal levels that music gets created on. A lot of symbols, I think, can be perceived by theme of relationships between movements, the theme of relationships between ideas in a piece especially in one that you get to know as you have this. But that doesn’t mean that they were there for me on any conscious level or even any deliberate level. There was a lot, I will tell you something that, there was in mind. It’s not symbolic really, but one thing that was coming out of course from all that research about the trumpet is how there were, I’ll just think right now of three... there were three essential places, like three essential roles that the trumpet had in the Bible from what I remember. One was as to signal war, something related to war. And the other was to signal a, kind of a unique moment. Like I was very impressed with the moment were that I think there was a shofar at the moment when the Ten Commandments were delivered. Or at least related to Moses and the burning bush and about a miraculous mystical element. Another one was to evoke celebrations to call people together. I know there are others, but those are the three that made a big impression on me. So there are a lot of... it’s not so much a literal symbol but there are a lot of elements in that piece that call to mind, that are sort of related to war and related to a kind, especially the last movement, very much so. And if you know my earlier works from the 90s where I wrote about five pieces that were all related to war, that is what’s been an ongoing, something that I touch on from time to time now. That’s just a way some of the lines are, the ways keys dealt with that are very clangorous and very full of tension. Again, I don’t know if that’s a symbol but that’s certainly an unconscious or very conscious level that I was thinking of. And certainly when you get to the end of the last movement you have that long -- when you finally you get this kind of F major, you get the long lines of the solo trumpet. That was like. Again, it’s not a symbol it’s a structural point where I wanted to. There were a number of things that I wanted to do. One was to point out just the possibility of the same material being used as a pinnacle. As a line that lacks tension that was all about this peace or peacefulness and beauty. And I waited all that time, until so far near the end of the piece, to do that. That was a very deliberate, dramatic decision. And you can say there is a symbolism in that. Is it the symbolism that even in the midst of all this tumult and all this pain and all this war, it’s still possible to see some beauty in the world? But is the end about crushing that beauty? Or is it about just kind of portraying a very short, quick way that... I was actually thinking of the structure of the tempo at the end very much, now that you remind me. I was thinking of
the sense of answering that beauty, of the beautiful singing quality of the trumpet with this vial dark, both light and dark because it’s the whole acoustic, the whole registral picture of the band is there from the low to the top. And then it ends in a dark kind of foreboding kind of way. I think another part of it that’s tricky in a piece like this that has that title that sounds like it’s about something that sounds like there’s a narrative that you can find. And the titles of the movements and yet the music is abstract and that opens up for listeners, I think, a way of wanting to look at the music and find meaning, finding a tangible meaning in the music that may not be the same meaning that I have or that I was finding. But rather than just saying “Symphony for Trumpet and Band, Movement 1, Movement 2.” With actually no information. These titles and the title of piece give cues to how the music relates to these ideas, these verbal ideas. But that doesn’t mean that I’d want to tell you a definitive answer to what this is or what that is.

PD: Well it kind of relates back to what you were saying about the whole piece being pensive and reflective much like during Rosh Hashanah or when you’re reflecting upon or looking for forgiveness or something like that. You can’t tell me what I need to be forgiven for, or what I need to reflect upon but listening to this, maybe those symbols that I did find is me reflecting back on something. And I think that makes this piece so unique because you’re very specific about tempos and descriptions in the end there’s still room for my own interpretation or the performer’s own interpretation. Although it’s specific it still allows room for artistic interpretation.

AJK: But I have to give the performers at every section or whatever an idea of the speed of the feeling of it. And actually a lot of the process of sharing a piece is picking our tempos so that I get the right speed that I want which may be faster than what the performers can initially do and find some middle ground that is possible and can the music work.

PD: At the beginning of your score you have listed the exact times for each movement.

AJK: Oh those are all wrong. They’re totally wrong. That was from a long time ago. The reason I put that there is because the piece is longer than it was... I think I was asked for a 20-22 minute piece and then the piece, as with many of my pieces, they become what they are. And I just let them be what they have to be. But the times, I have to let the publications know being very serious about adhering close to the guidelines. That was just to kind of give people an idea.

PD: I was going to ask you about that. The University of Illinois recording was like, way off, from what was written in the score and I wondered if that was on purpose.
AJK: Also, one of the problems with using MIDI for playback and also the fact I tend to write speeds faster than what are possible until a couple of performances have worked out the good relationships. Those speeds kind of reflect what the speed MIDI tempi were and not what actually what the opening up with the breathing and taking time in a live performance would be.
Email Interview - February 23, 2016

Pagean DiSalvio: Were you familiar with the work of Aaron Jay Kernis before working on a Voice, a Messenger?

Dr. Robert W. Rumbelow: Absolutely. I knew several of his compositions as well as his Pulitzer Prize.

PD: How did you happen upon this piece?

RWR: This concerto was commissioned as a joint project between the Big 10 Band Directors Association and the New York Philharmonic. As a member of the Big 10 Band Directors Association at the time of completion, I was aware of the work and the impending premiere.

PD: How was the University of Illinois Wind Ensemble chosen to perform the world premiere?

RWR: As you are most likely aware, the premiere was supposed to be with Phil Smith and the New York Philharmonic. Unfortunately, the concert was cancelled due to a terrible winter storm and the work was not rescheduled the next season as everyone had hoped. When it became apparent that the New York Philharmonic was not going to reschedule the premiere, I had a conversation with Phil Smith about doing the premiere at Illinois. He and I had worked together before on a world premiere and a recording project. After that conversation, I spoke with other members of the Big 10 Band Directors Association regarding our availability, willingness to take it on that next season and that we had secured a date with Phil Smith already in case it worked out. This is probably an oversimplification of the process, but Aaron, Phil, and the Big 10 Band Directors Association agreed. The last permission came from the New York Philharmonic itself since it was guaranteed the premiere contractually. Aaron and Phil were the ones that worked with NYP officials to release their right to the premiere.

PD: What was your first impression of the composition?

RWR: My first impression was how inspired it was – how much Aaron had to say in the work, and how difficult certain portions were based on how much was going on at one time. Through study I gained a clarity that wasn’t immediately apparent in my first impressions. In fact, I became quickly consumed with the challenges of the work. It took a good while to come back around to the emotional side...to hear the “voice”.

PD: How informed were you about the background/subject matter of the piece?

RWR: Reasonably so. ...through communications with Aaron.

PD: Did you work closely with Aaron Jay Kernis as you prepared the piece?

RWR: Aaron was nice enough to answer any questions I had very quickly and sent me a reduced (piano/trumpet) score to help with my piano study. While I don’t exactly
remember how much we corresponded, I felt like all my needs/questions were well taken
care of...

PD: Was he very specific or flexible with the interpretation of the piece?

*RWR: Aaron was specific, very professional and very enjoyable with which to work. In
every way, I enjoyed working with Aaron and Phil. Both are significant talents and
wonderful human beings.*

PD: As this performance was the world premiere, were any changes made to the composition
while you were preparing?

*RWR: Not that I recall. It has been a few years, but I don’t remember any changes to the
score. We worked to bring forth as many details of the score as possible.*

PD: Did the instrumentation pose any challenges? No saxes, three double basses, lots of
percussion?

*RWR: Although I’d like to say “no problem,” it was a challenge to gather three double
basses due to our regular rehearsal schedule. It was tricky enough to carry one bass
player with the Illinois Wind Symphony, much less three. Somehow, we figured it out and
arrived at three. The percussion was not really a problem, but the amount of equipment
created a rather tight percussion set-up on our stage. Since there are already important
works for the wind ensemble without saxes (Schwantner for instance), the lack of saxes
wasn’t a problem...although (as a teacher) I wish those members had be able to be a part
of the premiere process with Aaron and Phil...plus, UI has a terrific saxophone studio!*

PD: How difficult was the piece to prepare for your ensemble?

*RWR: Very difficult...mostly in terms of balance, texture, and clarity within a very thick
multi-layered (at times) score.*

PD: Did it require extra rehearsals, sectionals, etc.?

*RWR: Due to the realities of UI scheduling, we were unable to schedule extra rehearsals
or sectionals. However, we did have one make-up rehearsal after losing one to a
snowstorm.*

PD: How much preparation time did you have for the piece?

*RWR: I honestly don’t recall, but it was a normal concert rotation. So, probably four to
five weeks for the entire concert (including this premiere) rehearsing twice a week. So, 8
to 10 rehearsals.*

PD: How much research/score study did you need to do to feel confident with this piece?

*RWR: I didn’t keep account of the time it took to study, but I did what it took until I felt
comfortable with everything – like all conductors.*

PD: Did you feel that having a better knowledge of the context of the piece was beneficial?
RWR: Yes – very much!

PD: How much background information was given to the ensemble? Was that helpful?

RWR: Some info was given throughout the rehearsal cycle as appropriate, and we had both Phil and Aaron for a couple of rehearsals before the premiere to share their thoughts with the student performers.

PD: How many rehearsals did you have with the soloist and/or composer?

RWR: 3 or 4 with Phil Smith and 2 with Aaron if memory serves.

PD: What kind of challenges did the many specific tempo changes present when working with a soloist and a large accompanying ensemble?

RWR: In addition to communicating with Aaron throughout the study process, I communicated with Phil Smith even more to secure tempi and other issues.

PD: What challenges arose when putting the soloist and ensemble together for the first time?

RWR: Balance and clarity of everything going on – that was the major challenge.

PD: Did you find it difficult to balance the wind orchestra and the soloist?

RWR: Yes – above.

PD: Was balance a major issue for you to make the piece effective?

RWR: Yes – above.

PD: Did you feel that blending of sound and tonal color was essential for this piece?

RWR: Absolutely. Creating the intended colors was a must to realize Aaron’s vision.

PD: Was that difficult for your ensemble to create?

RWR: In some passages, the writing took care of itself. In a few specific moments, we had to spend real time creating the proper separation or blend necessary.

PD: Which movement(s) proved to be the most challenging?

RWR: Again – this is based on long-term memory now, but as I recall Movement 2 was the trickiest for our ensemble to work with the soloist. …and the overall concentration and physical demands of the work made the fourth movement a stretch.

PD: Was it difficult to work out the staging of the trumpets at the end of the fourth movement?

RWR: We used trumpets from within the existing ensemble and brought them to the front of the stage. It worked just fine.

PD: How did you feel about your performance of the piece? What would you change if you could?
RWR: I would have loved to have had a second performance (like a professional orchestra). The premiere went very well, but there would have been a comfort and perhaps greater freedom with musicianship if we would have had a second performance of the same concert.

PD: Do you think the audience understood the emotion and intensity behind the piece?

RWR: The work is a lot to take in – even with program notes. I believe Aaron’s music spoke to our audience in a profound way. I also believe everyone would have enjoyed a second performance. There is so much in this work – like a great novel, one could easily go back to it again and again to gain more from the experience. However, in short, yes – our audience felt the emotion and the fact that they had been a part of profound art.

PD: Do you think it should be recorded? Would you want to conduct the recording?

RWR: It absolutely should be recorded! While I’d be terrifically honored to conduct this work again, there are others who would do just as good a job and lend their own special artistry. I’d like to hear multiple recordings of the work by different conductors and soloists. Although I must admit that the number of soloists willing to take on this work would be rather small. Phil was absolutely fantastic in every way – and it was perfect for him to do the premiere. I heard Chris Martin perform it with Jerry Junkin and the UT Wind Ensemble as well...and WOW again. So – in short – the standards for soloist should likely be on that level to really put this composition where it belongs.

PD: Do you think a piano reduction would be effective for this piece? Why or why not?

RWR: There is a piano reduction – for study purposes. I do not, however, believe a piano reduction would be suitable for performance. The sheer magnitude of the orchestration “soundscape” is woven into the profound nature of the work. Hearing the composition as trumpet and piano would largely strip the work of its emotional chemistry.
Pagean DiSalvio: Were you familiar with the work of Aaron Jay Kernis before you started working on *a Voice, a Messenger*?

*Michael Sachs: First of all, I knew when it was first commissioned with Phil Smith and the New York Philharmonic. I'm very good friends with Phil and he had told me about approaching Aaron Kernis about this. So I knew that this work was in progress. And I was very much anticipating it and very interesting to see what he would write for Phil, I've known some of his other works. There's a wonderful violin piece that Glenn Dicterow played that I was very taken by. I know some of his other works, if not by name, I've heard them and I like his writing very much.*

PD: How did you happen upon performing this piece?

*MS: I knew that he was writing for Phil and I knew that it was programmed a couple of times with the Philharmonic and unfortunately it wasn't able to happen because of weather or some other logistics that occurred. And I knew when Phil was playing the premiere with the University of Illinois Wind ensemble. And I had heard a recording of that and I thought it was a terrific piece and I talk to Phil a little bit about it. The way this came up, of course it was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic in conjunction with the Big Ten Band Directors Association and the Ohio State University wind ensemble was looking to perform it and I guess that Phil was unavailable and it was suggested to them to contact me for that. That's how I ended up playing with OSU and I played it in Columbus and then at Ball State for a Midwest band directors’ convention, I guess. And I also played it at Michigan State.*

PD: So you've played it a total of three times?

*MS: Yes.*

PD: That's impressive!

*MS: Eh, thanks!*

PD: What was your impression after hearing the piece for the first time?

*MS: I didn’t get to hear it live or see it live. But I’ve got a recording of it.*

PD: Did you get that from the composer or from Mr. Smith?
MS: I forget who I got it from. I believe I got it through the Ohio State University guys when they first contacted me. You know, I asked if there was a chance I could see it and listen to it first. So I saw it, I listened to it, and I also called Phil and talked to him a little bit about it.

PD: Did he have any words of wisdom to inspire you with that piece?

MS: Yeah! Look, Phil is somebody that has been kind of a big brother in a sense to me in the trumpet world. Somebody whose guidance and input, I’ve always sought out. I have the highest regard and respect for Phil as a person, as a player. He’s a wonderful man and a wonderful musician. So any chance I’ve got, I kind of bounced some things off of him. Especially since both of us are on the same kind of path and doing basically the same kind of thing. So there was always kind of an unspoken understanding between us that I knew what he was doing, and he knew what I was doing. So that was kind of a nice base line for any discussions that we ever had. I know that... part of the inspiration... you talk to Phil yourself, he’ll tell you much better than I could. I know that Phil is a very religious man and that’s a very important part of his life. I know that when he approached Aaron Kernis about writing a piece that kind of reflected how the trumpet is portrayed in the Bible and how the trumpet is portrayed in a religious sense over the many thousands of years. The type of playing... like the beginning, this Morning Prayer, it has this very song-like kind of a prayer-like sense to it. Especially at the beginning when the trumpet starts out alone and then juxtaposed against the last movement which (singing) is almost kind of a shofar call. You know, Tekiah, Teruah, those are the different shofar calls. So you know, I think... Phil wanted something that reflected the trumpet in biblical terms. I’m guessing you’re going to talk, or have talked with Phil. He can elaborate much more on his inspiration, that he was working with Aaron to write this.

PD: So when you first got to see the actual music on the page, after talking to Phil Smith and hearing a recording, the piece leaves quite the impact. When you finally got to see the music, did your eyes bulge out of your head at all? What were your first impressions?

MS: Well, I actually saw the music before I talked to Phil. To be honest with you, my initial response was “Yeah, this looks like a mouthful.” I’ve played some other, newer works. I did the US premiere of the Henze Requiem and another new piece by composer Michael Hersch in the last few years. So it looked like a mouthful, but it didn’t look anything much more insane than some other stuff that I’ve done. In knowing that Phil felt strongly about the piece that kind of led me to want to really dive into it and explore it. You know a lot of times what I’ve found is that things may look crazy on the page, but
once you dig into it you kind of see the logic to it. And once you see the logic to it, it makes a lot more sense in how you’re able to actually pull it off.

PD: Do you think this piece should be played by only “the trumpet elite,” or do you think students or younger musicians aspiring to become like you, Mr. Smith and Mr. Martin. Do you think younger people could approach this piece?

MS: This is an interesting question. Really it all depends on the level of the younger musician. When I was younger, could I have played this? By the time I was twenty-two, twenty-three? Maybe. Here we are thirty years later than when I was twenty-two, twenty-three. I’m fifty-four now. There are a lot of younger players that can pull this off and if you have the technical and musical abilities, sure, why not? If you can pull it off, why not go for it? Pieces like this, like this Michael Hersch piece I mentioned, or the John Williams Concerto, any number of newer works. The Christopher Rouse piece that he wrote for Chris Martin. This Joseph Turrin Concerto that he wrote for Phil. There are a number of things that have been written recently that are challenging to anybody whether it’s me, Phil or Chris or anybody else. But you know there are plenty students who have the technical prowess and kind of chops to be able to navigate something like this. And if they’re able to, sure why not?

PD: So how difficult was this piece for you to prepare? How much preparation time did you have when you were first given the piece?

MS: I had a pretty good amount of time. I performed this in February/March and I think I got the materials in September/October. Toward the end of the summer, it was September. So I had a good chunk of time to sit with it. And you know whenever I work on a piece, especially a piece like this I’ll look through it and try to figure out where are the potholes? Where are the spots that look like they’re going to need a little bit more examining than others? And then I start very meticulously working on it movement by movement, phrase by phrase, bar by bar. Kind of figuring out how things lay. What I need to do musically, really figuring out the architecture. The harmonic architecture, the melodic architecture and then how everything fits together. And then as I’m going along, as it’s becoming more and more a language that I’m understanding how the composer has laid the piece out. The more in-depth I get into that, the more I can see it more macro than micro. Initially I start very micro, making sure I’m getting right notes, right rhythm, anything that’s tricky I’m isolating. You know, starting to figure out what I want to do with my airstream and how I want to pace things. Obviously it’s a big piece that you want to make sure that you pace yourself appropriate. You don’t want to crank something out unnecessarily and then you’ve got nothing left for the end, which you got to have
something left at the end with the piccolo. So pacing and figuring first technically, then
musically. Just adding layers upon layers. Just going very slowly with it.

PD: Obviously you have a daily routine of when you warm up. This piece, if anything, when I
look at the music the endurance to get through the piece seems to be the biggest challenge. Did
you need to do anything like “weight-training” to get through the piece for your performances?

MS: A little bit. I mean, my routine just because of my job is based to get me in a
particular shape and in particular condition where I’m never far from being optimal. For
something like this, maybe I’d add something like Chris Gekker’s 24 etudes that has a lot
of different styles, a lot of different ranges and a lot of different component in it. You play
one, rest a minute, play one, rest a minute. Maybe start with three of those, then go to
two, then go to three. I’ve always done the same thing with the Rochut and Bordogni
trombone book no. 1 the melodic etudes. I’ll do the same thing, where I’ll play one rest a
minute, play one rest a minute. Maybe start with three of those, then go to
two, then go to three. I’ve always done the same thing with the Rochut and Bordogni
trombone book no. 1 the melodic etudes. I’ll do the same thing, where I’ll play one rest a
minute, play one rest a minute. Play like four or five of those like that with the one minute
in between. Everything is very sound based, very melodic based. It doesn’t go real high.
They’re not real long. It’s like you’re doing Charlier or the Walter Smith Top Tones or
anything like that. But it’s still it gets you thinking about your tone production,
gets your
sound happening right. It isn’t too taxing, but you’re building up and it’s all under the
umbrella of making a good sound. So the Rochut-Bordogni Melodious Etudes for
Trombone Book 1, that and the Gekker are the places I go a lot for when I’m working on
something like this to really get myself, as an additional layer of conditioning.

PD: You mentioned that you had spoken to Phil Smith throughout and he kind of led you in the
right direction when preparing the piece. Did you work with Aaron Jay Kernis at all when you
were preparing?

MS: No. With Phil it was mostly just trying to get some background information. What
was his inspiration for approaching Aaron? What was the inspiration for the piece?
What were some things that he wanted the piece to be? What the piece was and how he
carried it off. And that’s more something you just ask Phil and that’d be the easiest thing.
It was much more of an overall kind of sense of things from him. And I had not worked
with Aaron, although I did have a little bit of correspondence with him. I had some
correspondence with him September of 2013. He was in closing his revised final
movement because he had revised that movement a little bit.

PD: That’s something I’ll ask you about a little later, about the revisions that he made. You
approached Phil Smith about the background of the piece. Did you find that really helped you
connect to the music a little more and understand?
MS: Oh yeah. To understand what was the inspiration behind it. I mean any information is good information and could help.

PD: Did he tell you about the specifics of the shofar calls?

MS: Not really. There wasn’t really anything about specifics. He would talk a little bit about the pacing and we both agreed that it was a big blow. And he had mentioned about... and actually Aaron mentioned in his letter as well... Phil didn’t want to have a significant passage to play between the last movement measure 100 and the piccolo stuff. The revisions he brought back some... he was recalling the first movement.

PD: Both Kernis and Smith seem to have slightly different views of the piece. Not contrasting, but slightly different and it seems like you identify more with Phil Smith’s version of things. It’s not necessarily different versions. It just seems like Aaron Jay Kernis heard something a little more angry than what Phil Smith was interpreting. From what I understand, he wrote the piece from start to finish corresponding with Rosh Hashanah; the feeling of reflecting on your past year, the good, the bad, the ugly. And at the end, he said that he always planned for it to be this way where it’s just big, bombastic and angry. I don’t know if you could interpret as anything else, because that ending is pretty big and bold.

MS: It’s also... I forget whether Michael Kernis was his cousin or his brother that he dedicated it to.

PD: It was his cousin.

MS: His cousin passed away so it was very... the mood that Kernis put into this... you’d have to ask him... but I’m sure that, Rosh Hashanah, there’s a very reflective sort of sense about all of his.

PD: Something that I’ve found interesting, because I’ve been pouring over this score for a couple months and I wrote all of these questions asking about “does this symbolize something?” And when I finally asked the composer these questions he said, “Well, not really.” I think the whole piece the performer and the listeners coming up with their own symbols and their own interpretation much like with Rosh Hashanah. I can’t tell you what to reflect upon, you can’t tell me. Did you have personal connections that you tried to bring out?

MS: I mean everybody does. Everybody’s going to interpret things a little differently. What things mean and what they mean to you. I just thought a lot about what both of them told me their inspiration was with the piece. So I tried to bring a very distinct character to the different movements. To the various different parts and different things
about… we can go through the whole piece and I could tell you. It’s just what things are and what mood you want coming across to the listener. That could be very different things at very different moments. And I think that’s what I like about the piece is that it goes through a very wide array of characters.

PD: The first movement is very pensive reflect, the second is like a celebration, the third is almost melancholy or calming and the fourth is like angst I want to say.

MS: And the last movement is very… (singing)… that kind of stuff. (Singing) A lot of the way he slurs and the 16ths, it’s very much that kind of, I forget what the Italian… like Puccini… or Pines of Rome (singing), this kind of roman, Egyptian kind of a call. And the way he uses the trumpets in a group in the end as well. It’s kind of like these different signals. So I thought… I don’t know if I necessarily thought of it as angry. I thought of it as more celebratory. (Singing). That it’s more celebratory than it is angry.

PD: I can hear that. Almost victorious. I can hear that.

MS: And the ending, the end with this (singing), these minor third… it ends kind of… it just kind of steam-rolls you a little bit. It’s that last (singing)… Again it’s that 16th to the longer note, it’s kind of the last decree almost. The last emphatic call. And then there’s a lot of reflective stuff juxtaposed against that as well. So for me, it’s really creating those kind of moments that are one’s antithesis to the other. You have these opposites working within and kind of juxtaposed against each other.

PD: He mentioned that the ending is a contrast of darkness and beauty. And he was trying to use the trumpet soloist’s voice to represent the beauty of a vocalist against the craziness that’s happening in the ensemble. It’s just a really cool contrast that is made even cooler when the trumpets join you in the front. That’s really awesome. Now I’m going to talk about when you started actually working with the ensembles. How many rehearsals did you have to prepare it with the ensemble?

MS: I don’t know. I want to say two rehearsals and a dress rehearsal. It may have been three and a dress. I may have done like one… I think I went down to Columbus on a Monday and then another Monday… and then a Monday-Tuesday and played the show. Something like that.

PD: Did Aaron Jay Kernis have any involvement in the rehearsals at all?

MS: Not in Columbus. When we were at Ball State, he came to Ball State.
PD: Right, because I think it was your Columbus performance that he was inspired to start making more revisions, right?

MS: I don’t know. Maybe...

PD: He’s a very interesting person. It took four years to get this piece performed from when he finished the composition; it took him three years to actually hear it. And then I asked him, “How did you feel once you finally heard it performed?” And he said, “Oh it felt great! I could start the revision process.” You put so much effort into this piece and he revised it after the premiere and then he revised it again after he heard your performance.

MS: There’s a lot of balance issues that you got to take care of. That’s really the main issue, I would say, in performing this piece. That’s mostly in the second and fourth movements. The first movement isn’t too bad. It’s also about the level of the wind ensemble as well. The second and fourth movement, there’s some tricky ensemble things as well as balance things. The third movement’s not too bad. The third movement is pretty solemn for the most part except for this middle poco meno mosso thing that just kind of winds around. It’s not really that big of a deal. The trumpet’s more in the texture.

PD: When you talk about balance with the wind orchestra, did you encourage the director to make the ensemble quieter or did you decide to be big and bold as a trumpet player?

MS: Quite honestly, I didn’t have to do anything. With both Dr. Mikkelson and Dr. Sedatole, both Ohio State and Michigan State, really are really top directors and really strong wind ensembles. By the way, there is a video of the Ball State concert.

PD: I haven’t seen that one. I’ve seen the Michigan State one though.

MS: I haven’t seen that one! Nah. Let me see if I can do something real quick. Let me see if I can send this to you. The Ball State one is a little bit better. I’m not real thrilled with the Michigan State one. It was okay. I just thought I was kind of tired. I think I played something like Mahler VI the week before or something stupid. Forget the Michigan State one and go with this one. I’ll feel a lot better about it.

PD: Blending sound and tonal color is one of the biggest parts of Aaron Jay Kernis’s compositions. Did you find that difficult from ensemble to ensemble?

MS: No, these were both top wind ensembles with really strong directors. Balance issues, different color issues and blending. They took care of most... a lot of it was the two of us, me and Dr. Mikkelson or Dr. Sedatole kept collaborating. During the rehearsal they
would ask me and I would ask them. It was always very self-evident. And the students were very quick to figure out stuff on their own anyways. Some of it just a matter of, like any piece, people getting enough repetitions of it that they start hearing who plays where and who plays what and how do I fit with it. Once you kind of hear it and know where you fit, it makes everything a lot easier the more repetition you do of it.

PD: Do you think the level of the wind ensemble is almost as important as the level of the soloist, the performance level?

MS: Oh yeah, definitely. You’ve got to have a pretty strong wind ensemble to pull this thing off.

PD: I spoke to Jerry Junkin last week and he was telling me, “Nobody escapes from this piece. Everybody’s part is really wicked hard.” And he was telling me that the students even the night of the performance were still thinking there’s no way that this is going to happen.

MS: It’s tricky I mean there’s a lot of challenging stuff in this. But at the same time, once you get into the language, once you understand the character that you want to inhabit it fits together extremely well.

PD: From what I’ve noticed, everyone that I’ve talked to so far, has said that there was this moment of almost-panic thinking, “Oh my gosh, this is so hard. There’s no way this is going to happen.” And then when the performance happens, it’s like adrenaline kicks in. The ensemble is extremely focused and there’s this energy. I was actually at the world premiere in Illinois and you could just feel the vibrations in the room as everybody was playing. It was just so emotional. Did you experience anything like that?

MS: Anybody gets amped up to do something. I’m so focused on this thing to begin with that there’s always a nice palpable energy that you could use any way you want. And I usually try my darnest to focus mine in a positive way. My whole feeling is that if I’m prepared, I don’t really get nervous. I don’t really think about it. I just kind of get out there and just let it flow. I try to encourage… and I saw the two music directors do the same thing with their wind ensemble, would just encourage them to just let it flow. They know the piece. They practiced it a lot; they know what they need to do. Come out and have fun! Let the music come out of you. Don’t think too much. It’s the same with any performance that I do whether it’s a Mozart symphony or this.

PD: At the end of the fourth movement when the section trumpet players come up to join you, how particular were you and the conductor about the staging of that?
MS: The conductor... for logistical purposes, where they could get to in the time that they had to be set up, sonically balanced correctly. It kind of fell into place very quickly.

PD: When I spoke with the composer, he said that from the beginning of the composition process I knew that I wanted to end with this visual statement of the soloist playing with two trumpet players on either side. In his most recent score that I’ve been working with, he actually has a picture of what he wants. A map of where he wants the trumpet players to go and when in the piece he wants them to leave. He said that was a really important part, staging those people. When you performed you didn’t get too nitty-gritty about where they stood?

MS: It took care of itself. If I’m in the middle of the stage, one is at the far left, one is at the far right, and in the about the same place, depth of the stage. One to the left and one to the right of me.

PD: There’s this really powerful image. I don’t know if it’s from the Jewish text or Christian interpretations but there’s this image of a shofar player standing in this ancient second temple in Jerusalem and he’s flanked by two silver trumpet players on either side. And it was supposed this announcement of a prophecy or a proclamation and that’s the image that he was trying to recreate. I’m trying to remember if Phil Smith actually tried to recreate that exact painting or if they just came up and joining him on the far sides of the stage. I would be interested to see, if it were possible, to get those trumpet players right next to the soloist just to recreate the image.

MS: It’s a little tough just from a staging/time standpoint. It’s a little difficult. I think logistically we decided that. It was just an executive decision made by both directors.

PD: Aaron Jay Kernis said originally he wanted the trumpet players playing from the balconies and he said, “obviously that isn’t going to work.”

MS: That’d be nice!

PD: I asked him if he would want just two offstage trumpet players waiting for the end of the piece. And he said, ‘That’s an interesting thing to consider.” I know that he wrote an alternate ending that included two additional trumpet players. I don’t know if you have actually played that alternate ending or not, but he rewrote in 2014 for five section trumpet players instead of three for the last movement. When I spoke with Jerry Junkin he said that he opted not to do the alternate ending because the hall that they play in at UT Austin is just too small for that amount of trumpet.

MS: That’s when you got to be careful is that you don’t overload the room. It’s a very easy thing to do with this piece.
PD: You said that you weren’t as thrilled with the Michigan State performance, but you were happy with the Ball State performance. Over all how did you feel about your performances?

MS: I felt fine. This is just more of a reflection on me than it is anything. Everything I’ve played for the last 35 years, it’s extremely rare that I walk away from a performance that there isn’t something I feel I could’ve done better. That’s just me and my quest to continually evolve and try to make myself better. There are always things that I feel I could do better no matter how well. I didn’t think they went badly. I though the Michigan State performance was good, the Columbus with Ohio State was good, the Ball State was the best of the three.

PD: After watching your Michigan State performance in the third movement, you switched to B-flat trumpet.

MS: Yes, ma’am.

PD: Why did you do that?

MS: I did that for a very specific reason. I felt after playing it that the opening from bar 33 through bar 53 that flugelhorn -- that to me felt like it was very idiomatic for the flügelhorn. I felt the pickup into bar 67 was not idiomatic for flügelhorn. And I felt like it just didn’t… (singing)… it just felt like it needed just a little more rhythmic bite to it. A little more rhythmic vibrancy to it. And then the stuff a little bit later, the pick-up to 79 through 83 and also especially the interjections at bar 101 and 105 and 107 going into wherever that is, 109 something like that. Those to me, those were trumpet parts. Those weren’t flügelhorn parts. It just made more sense to me to do the beginning and then the ending from the Tempo I, what is like at 113, to do that to the end also on flügel. To do the beginning and the end on flügel, but the middle on B-flat trumpet. So I wasn’t doing it on C trumpet, I was doing it on B-flat trumpet so it had a little bit more weight and little more heft to it to kind of juxtapose against what I did, a little more brilliance with the C trumpet in the outer movements. So it gave the mood a little more of a dark, brooding, solemn sort of a color. The flügelhorn to me -- the more I play a lot of these quicker sections on flügel just sounded clumsy to me. Especially the declamatory stuff around 101 to 109. That just didn’t work for me on flügel at all. That to me was a trumpet part that needed to be a little more -- it needed to have a little more guts to it. (Singing.) You know that kind of stuff. Especially toward the end going into 109, on a flügelhorn to me with the instrumentation the way it is and the blend, you get buried. I felt with the B-flat trumpet, I had a little bit of a change to sit on top a little but more. The more I played around with tit, the more it just made sense. And Aaron was fine with it.
PD: He’s very specific about what he wants on paper, but when you want alter something, he’s like “Okay, cool.” He’s very flexible while being specific. It’s very interesting.

MS: Well the thing is that, I didn’t do it in a haphazard way. I had a very specific reason for it and I felt that I could substantiate it. And I ran it by him and he was perfectly fine with it. That’s all. It just sonically, color-wise, blend-wise made just a little bit more sense.

PD: I can see that, absolutely. When you performed the piece, you’ve done it for three different audiences. Do you feel that they understood what they were listening to?

MS: All three places liked it a lot. The response was very positive at all three performances. Whether they understood it… I don’t know what level they understood. Just from a pure entertainment standpoint, people seemed to like how the piece came across.

PD: Since you’ve performed the piece three times, would you ever perform it again?

MS: Oh yeah! I’m quite honestly hoping that I’ll be able to do in Cleveland with the Orchestra.

PD: In other interviews that I’ve done, people have said it would be really difficult to do with a professional orchestra because in those rehearsals they don’t usually dedicate enough rehearsal time to concertos?

MS: Yes and no. On the one hand, it’s true. And on the other hand, you have people at such a high level that they’ll come in prepared and they’ll be able to figure it out. But with something like this, you’d put in a little extra something to help out. With top level musicians and a good conductor you could pull this off.

PD: I keep hearing that comment, well this piece isn’t necessarily a concerto. I mean yes, it features a trumpet soloist prominently, but the entire ensemble works together. I would consider it a wind orchestra piece that features the trumpet. And I think it would be great for a professional ensemble to do it.

MS: I’m hoping we get a chance to do it. I’ve floated it by a few different places who are considering it. Just looking at the score, University of Illinois has done it. Michigan State has done it, and Ohio State has done it. But to my understanding, Indiana hasn’t done it,
Iowa hasn’t done it, Michigan hasn’t done it, Minnesota, Northwestern, Penn State, Purdue, and the University of Wisconsin has done it yet.

PD: I’m shocked that Indiana hasn’t done it.

MS: I don’t know, maybe because it was written for Phil and then Phil has since retired. If Chris is playing it or I’m playing it. And I’m sure there are plenty of other guys. I’m sure Tom Hooten and Dave Bilger, Tom Ross, I could go on and on. There are a number of guys who could the spots off of this thing.

PD: Would you want to record it?

MS: Sure! Are you kidding? Of course. I’d love to do it here in Cleveland and use the concerts as the recording but that’s my own little fantasy.

PD: Do you think it would be easier to do recording sessions versus a live recording of this piece?

MS: It depends how you do the live recording. If you talk about a live recording the way we would do which would be, you do three concerts of it, you record all three concerts, and then you have a patch session at the end if there is anything that isn’t covered in the three concerts. Usually three swipes at it and you’re going to get it.

PD: If you have the steam to get through three swipes!

MS: Oh yeah. I mean the Henze Requiem is kind of my bell-weather for this stuff. It’s basically the thing that Henze wrote for Håkan [Hardenberger]. It’s a nine movement thing for double winds, a small string group, battery of percussion, solo piano throughout and it’s basically a trumpet concerto in movements five, eight, and nine that he wrote for Håkan. It’s by the far the hardest thing I’ve ever had to learn or seen. It’s absolutely insane.

PD: How does this piece stack up against that one?

MS: It’s not quite that. As it turns out there is that and then within a very short period of time there was this Kernis piece, the Hersch piece I mentioned and another new piece by Matthias Pintscher that I played the world premiere of. And so these three new concertos that I learned within the span of about a little over 2 years. So that was kind of insane but none of them were Henze Requiem. I mean the Kernis, that stacks up. Most of the writing is idiomatic for the instrument. There’s some cross-finger stuff that makes it a little
interesting, but for the most part you just got to get it under your fingers and into your head. Then you can navigate it.

PD: Do you think a piano reduction would ever be possible or a smaller ensemble reduction of this piece?

MS: Well I have a piano reduction.

PD: I know that there’s one for study purposes. Have you played it with a piano?

MS: I did the first movement once with the piano just kind of a short recital I was doing. I just played it in Michigan State. Some people wanted me to play part of it and I just set it up with the piano for the first movement just to give them a taste. Hold on, I’ve got the piano version right here. Yeah, here’s a piano score right here. Yeah, I mean... sure you could do it.

PD: Do you think it would be as effective?

MS: Well no. Anything in a reduction setting is not going to give you the same kind of colors and the same kind of tapestry as a large wind ensemble would.

PD: Would you possibly play on a recital the piano reduction of the entire piece?

MS: Doubtful. It’s like the Williams Concerto which John actually wrote for me. They’re great pieces standing by themselves but they’re a mouthful and I don’t know if I’d want to do much else beside it. It’s kind of like someone saying would you play Brandenburg on a recital. Would I play it on its own? Sure, no problem. With something else? In the context of a recital? No, that’s a little much. This standing alone is enough work for one night.

PD: I think when Chris Martin played this with UT Austin, he played this and With Malice Towards None. I remember thinking, “Good Lord, that’s a lot of work for one night.”

MS: Well you know, he can pull it off. He’s incredible. He’s also one of the nicest guys ever too. I love Chris.

PD: There are the technical challenges of the piece, if you basically slow it down- typical practice stuff you can figure it out. Then there is the artist challenge of the interpretation. Which aspect do you think is more difficult to pull off?
MS: That’s an interesting question. And I’m going to give you a vague question, unfortunately. They’re both equally challenging. To get all technical aspects together but then not have the expression, the piece means nothing. Then to have all the expression but not have the technical foundation to express it correct will lose something in the mix as well. You really have to have both components. I’m sorry to be so vague.

PD: I think that’s the perfect answer, really.

MS: While I’m thinking about it, there’s a couple of things from a logistical standpoint you can look through the piece making sure the downbeat of bar 6 when the whole group comes in. Lining up that point, making sure you’re lining up bar 16. Making sure you’re lining up at bar 29. Just some sign posts because I wanted to make sure. The way I do the allargando going into 38, making sure that that was all there. Making sure I give a lot of space before I came in at 49 to make it really dramatic. And of course the end of the piece is a pulling away to a wisp as much as possible. For the next movement, I know he’s got it written 76 or 152.

PD: Yes and I think you took it a little slower.

MS: My target point was 144. I just felt like… I spent a lot of time with Pierre Boulez over the last 25 years. I did a lot of stuff with him and I knew him quite well. He always had a knack of picking a tempo that really just handed everything to you on a platter. You just couldn’t miss. Everything just lay in the pocket, it made it easier to be together musically expressively. It was very natural and very comfortable and yet it still had that rhythmic energy to it in the right way. He always took everything maybe a half a click slower than you think you’d need to because in a performance your adrenaline is going to be there and that’s going to kick things up anyways. But being that one click slower in your mind, it’s like… there’s a guy by the name of John Wooden who is a UCLA basketball coach from the late 40s through the late 70s. And one of his things was “be quick but don’t hurry.” And that whole idea of moving swiftly but it’s like your mind is… you’re filling out the time that you have. So that in other words, you’re moving very swiftly in the second movement but you know… (singing)… everything has a chance to really dance and set. And then it’s more together it, it’s got more pop and more zip to it which you want that exuberance to it. Otherwise it ends up being kind of mayhem.

PD: I literally listened to Phil Smith’s recording yours back to back, and I’ve got to say that your slower tempo it sounded a lot more effective because it wasn’t frantic. It was still jubilant and bouncy like a dance/celebration should be.
MS: It doesn’t get hectic. I’ll give you a perfect example with Boulez. I played Petrushka with him. I recorded it with him. And it was the first time I had worked with him. This was back in 1991. And I went to go see him before the first rehearsal and just get to know him and introduce myself, ask him if there was anything he wanted. In talking he said, “Stravinsky in 1911 wrote Allegro, in 1947 he writes allegro quarter = 116. 116 always feels a little too hectic. It gets a little too frantic. I’d rather take it at 112 and have it really set in the pocket and be rhythmically stable. That will give it more energy and have more pocket.” And that’s kind of the same manner that I went about some of this as well. That’s the way I go about a lot of things. Just moving ahead, where are some other spots. There’s this nice business in the second movement at bar 65 with the trombone. A nice little duet. And that’s something because I’m out front and they’re in the back. They have to anticipate a little bit or I have to lean back a little bit on the beats to make sure I’m with them to make sure that all works right.

PD: The Michigan recording, I remember the duet between you and the trombonist and it actually made me pop up a little bit like “Ooo, that was really nice!” In the premiere recording, the recording wasn’t that great quality wise, and I could not hear that duet pop out as much. And when I heard it pop out in your recording, I thought that was a really cool element.

MS: That to me is an important color. And then going into the cadenza, I think I did the cadenza a little differently than I remember. I heard Chris’s performances. I listened to it live. It’s not every day that I get to hear him play. We’ve done a lot of stuff together, but not every day I get to hear him play something like this. Especially a piece that I know. With the cadenza I did it a little recitative-cadenza like... (singing)... So it wasn’t just... (singing)... I did it more rhapsodic in a way. Because the bottom line is no matter what I do, if I hit... my goal is basically whatever I do going in to the two sextuplets in the second half of 98. (singing) What I do is I put a fermata on the last E-flat, took a breath and then atempo (singing). Basically with those two sextuplets, I set the tempo for 99 and the tempo that both conductors can catch. So just from a logistical standpoint, that could work. Also 94 and 95, I took those (singing). I did sort of a poco accelerando rather than just buzz the thing.

PD: I did speak to Aaron Jay Kernis about the cadenza specifically. When he originally wrote it, he intended for it to be played in tempo. And Phil Smith did not do that. And he said that he didn’t have a problem with Phil Smith slowing down.

MS: Phil didn’t do it, neither did I and neither did Chris. We all did different variations of a recitative vs. playing. Everybody did their variations a little differently.
PD: A bunch of the quintuplets and triplets and sextuplets, all of the tuplets... the way they’re written they kind of resemble a human voice, especially in the third movement. It gets more and more rapid as you get to the end of the third movement, and it almost sounds like someone begging or pleading by the end of it like you would in a final prayer. Saying “Dear God, help me!” So in the cadenza for the second movement, I definitely can hear it maybe shouldn’t be straight, same tempo the entire time. So you can get that recitative sound going on. I really like that.

MS: The way I kind of paced it like going into the end of bar 89, and then the two low As kind of as a pickup into 90 and then the end of 93 and then the two low B 16ths leading into the rip, leading into the sextuplets as a poco accelerando kind of really climaxing in the middle of 97. (singing) And then kind of setting the new tempo that way. To me, this is only my interpretation, my opinion, that to me made some sense logistically and architecturally. But you can make a case for what any of the three of us did.

PD: I think that’s what makes this piece so cool is that, pretty much if you make a reason for your choices, the piece is still going to be successful. If you mess with... some of the choices you make for the opening of the Arutunian and people play it different, you’re going to criticized and ripped apart. But with a piece like this, it allows room for a trumpet player to be an individual to make it their own. I think that’s why this piece is so unique.

MS: Quite right. And most of the end I do at about 160. And then the whole thing is just kind of like... (singing)... Very very kind of Halsey-Stevens, Copland-esque kind of a vibe to it.

PD: AJK said he wrote this movement based on Israeli and Semitic dance rhythms and you can totally hear that it’s a dance.

MS: In the third movement, the only thing I do a little bit differently is that the poco pia mosso ended measure 67, I keep that at more like 88 than 96. Again just to let it... The way the instrumentation and the way the trumpet part is kind of on the low side in order to kind of...(singing)... and then really kind of join the slurs where he’s got the lines with the slurs. I kind of what to emphasize that a little bit. And then later at 79 where he’s got the accents with the slurs. There’s some stuff to kind of show that a little bit. And then where it gets into 101 where it’s “wailing, soulful.” That I want to be really dramatic with all three of these. And then the whole ending very solemnly going down to a low G, which always feels nice. And then the last movement, just logistically making sure that you’re lining up (singing) that accent in setting bar 11 is really important.
PD: When you’re going through this piece and you’re at the eleventh hour of playing this piece and you have to switch to piccolo trumpet. Is there anything mentally or physically to prepare yourself to finish?

MS: Not so much. I just want to make sure that I don’t use too much of my tank of gas early so that I have a little something left in my tank for the end. And piccolo trumpet is like any other instrument. Just picking it up, knowing its tendencies, knowing that the response is going to be a little quicker, you need to be a little more compact with your air, a little more condensed, a little more focused, and little quicker with the air. And just making sure I don’t over blow it and making sure that I really resonate and ring the instrument properly and let the instrument do the work for me after all this other stuff to be able to ...(singing)... And just kind of just peg it over the top of everybody. It’s just fast air. Another thing I did at the end of all of this, just because of the instrumentation of things, I actually pick up to bar 146 and 146 and the first two notes of 147 I didn’t play. It’s doubled by the e flat clarinet and some other high instruments. 

PD: Did you ever give yourself a break and play the lower octave?

MS: No. It makes more sense up.

PD: Are there any other little…

MS: The only other little thing I did… I’m trying to remember… right at the end in bar 144, I think instead of playing a G to an F-sharp, I played a C to a B.

PD: Just to give yourself a break?

MS: Just to give myself a chance to play the actual notes! Picking off a G and an F sharp, I have no problem with that. But after everything, that’s a little much. That’s one of the things, see how you feel. If you’re up to it, Mazel Tov, more power to you. But that wasn’t going to be in the cards, especially when Aaron added that little bit toward the end, when he added that section back in. I’m not going to do something idiotic, something that wouldn’t be wise in the end. It’s not going to yield good results.

PD: The reason why I’m writing this paper about *a Voice a Messenger* and trying to get new music out there, I have this little personal philosophy. Solo trumpet repertoire, we have pieces that have been written for us since the days of Haydn and Hummel and even before then. But I think we often forget that because we have such a thick solo repertoire, we forget to look at 21st century composers and what they write for it. The whole philosophy of my paper and my lecture recital is about we need to keep looking towards the future at composers such as AJK and
Christopher Rouse. I keep asking the question to everyone of do they think that students should be playing pieces like this. And Aaron Jay Kernis had the best response to this…

**MS:** The best pieces from my standpoint are the ones that test boundaries but don’t overstep them. And I think what some composers and not Aaron Kernis or Christopher Rouse or John Williams… they test the limitations, but they didn’t go past them. They still did something while challenging was within the realm of what’s possible and that would also be idiomatic and sound really great on the instrument. The problem I have with a lot of composers is that they try to go beyond the spectrum of things now thinking that they need stretch the idiom. And I think that’s when composers run into problems. When they want to stretch the idiom, they end up with something that gets played once maybe never to be seen again because physically there’s only so much that can be done. There’s plenty of challenges in a piece like this, or the Williams piece or the Pintcher piece I mentioned or Rouse’s piece or Hersch’s piece that I mentioned. There’s a lot of stuff there that is extremely challenging but at the same time, it’s within the realm of possibility. It’s at the edge of it, but it’s still in the realm of possibility. So I think, there’s got to be… there’s a very delicate balance with that. I think the smarter composers create something where your challenges are rewards. And I think as long as that’s the case, that your challenges are musically rewarding and artistically rewarding for you and the audience then that’s something that’s going to have some staying power. Something that’s really going to have some longevity.

**PD:** And I think this piece is a wonderful example of rewarding challenges.

**MS:** Oh yeah! And I think it’s important that players strive for those challenges and don’t back off from them. And use those challenges to make themselves a better player. That’s why I do these kinds of things. I know that every time I do something like this it makes me a better player because I’ve got to explore all sorts of pockets of my playing and just the experience of doing that in this kind of context can only be positive.

**PD:** Do you think this piece deserves its place within the standard solo trumpet repertoire?

**MS:** Yes, absolutely. Especially trumpet and wind ensemble. There aren’t many pieces like that. You have Arutunian, you have an arrangement of Haydn, you have some newer pieces. The new David Sampson piece for trumpet and trombone. Tony Plog has a nice concerto that goes with brass ensemble. Kennan took his sonata and adapted it for wind ensemble as well. There are some really nice pieces but there aren’t a lot. I think it really hits on a combination that is really wonderful and something that I think can be cultivated even more. So again it’s not a piece that a tenth grader is going to be able to play. A pretty accomplished college student can have at it. And somebody who’s got their act together as a professional. There are people who can play this. It’s not like some of the stuff… like Håkan does some stuff where he’s the only guy on the planet who can play
this stuff. Or maybe there’s like two or three other guys who are crazy enough to give it a shot but... and that to me is the key that composers to make things that are accessible, challenging and rewarding.

PD: And like I said before I think this piece is the perfect example of that sort of piece.

MS: Yes, I would agree completely.
6. Philip Smith

Phone Interview - March 3, 2016

Pagean DiSalvio: Let me start by saying I was blessed enough to be able to be at the world premiere of this piece when it was performed at Illinois and I have been thinking about writing about this piece for like three years. It has stuck with me for that long. I thank you for bringing this piece to my attention with your wonderful performance three years ago.

Philip Smith: Well, thanks. And I appreciate the job you’re doing in putting this together. It’s another way to help get the piece out there.

PD: How did you choose Aaron Jay Kernis to write this piece for you?

PS: Ever since I had been in the orchestra, there’s a lot of new music. In fact it was when Mehta was there, we had something like the... if I remember correctly it was called the Horizon’s Festival. And Aaron was a young composer at that time and came in with some pieces that were very interesting to play. They were very challenging. I will always say that about Aaron’s work. It’s always very challenging. He’s a very serious gentleman and I can remember talking to him about some of the pieces and trying to make commentary on some of his trumpet writing and what I thought might be useful because I always saw those kind of events as the opportunity for the composer to get his piece played and be exposed in that way. But it was also an opportunity for us as the musicians to get a little insight back to the composer for some of the logistics of how he wrote for the part or something like that. But I always enjoyed what he wrote and then he wrote a piece for Glenn Dicterow. And off the top of my head, I can’t remember, but it was something like...

PD: Lament and Prayer, right?

PS: That’s it, Lament and Prayer. And I remember sitting and listening to it and reading the program notes. And I could tell that there was a serious... number one, it was a beautiful piece and number two, it was a serious expression of Aaron’s faith, of his Jewish faith. And I thought this would be... it had been rolling around in my mind for awhile had been the idea of having a piece written on thematic material from the scripture from the Bible about the trumpet. You know, the trumpet’s an instrument of war. You know the verse in the Bible that says, “If the trumpet sounds an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?” You read a lot about the trumpet in the book of Revelations about the second coming of Christ. There’s lots of things, lots of references to the trumpet or to the ram’s horn. There’s also references in the psalms where David... the psalms are full of music references and so I thought this would be an interesting thing. I wonder if Aaron would be interested in hearing this. So I asked him if that would be of interest to him. I think he felt perhaps a little overwhelmed at first with all of the scripture ideas. So I suggested that perhaps I could look them up and provide him with a list of some of these scripture references and just see what went from there. And ultimately it was something that he decided that he’d like to write. So I thought it was a neat thing. I had done something similar. Joseph Turrin, who has always been my
accompanist and composer friend, his first concerto was written on a specific verse out of the book of Revelation. So it was sort of to grow that theme even more, that’s why I went to Aaron.

PD: You said you gave him a list of scriptures. When I talked to Mr. Kernis, he told me you gave him about fifteen pages?

PS: It might have been! I don’t remember. It was a fairly extensive list of Bible verses relating to the trumpet, the cornet, the ram’s horn, or music, the flute. I was envisioning sort of a multi-movement piece or multi-episodic piece that might use the trumpet and the trumpet family in different ways. For instance, he could use the trumpet in a brash way. Maybe he could use, because the Bible does reference cornet, and I thought that maybe... we could bring in the cornet in a different way. And I could perhaps use for some of the soft flute things we could perhaps kind of pretend that the flügelhorn did that deal. And for some of the more Revelation verses about the second coming perhaps a piccolo trumpet could fly into that range. Those were all the kind of ideas that I had. Obviously the piece that was flitting around in my mind, it’s a very different piece from what Aaron wrote. That was kind of interesting to see as each movement finally found its way to me.

PD: How did you feel about the direction that he did take?

PS: That’s interesting. It became a bigger piece than I thought it would. It’s four movements. I suppose it was more dissonant; in my mind it wasn’t so dissonant. And it’s not that he’s an incredibly dissonant composer, but it was just more dissonant than I had. I had a different sound going on in my mind. And I certainly loved what he did with each movement but as I would say to him, “Aaron, each one of these movements is a major piece! I need some rest. You’ve got to writes some rests or cuts in or something or shorten it up.” And every time I said that he would say, “Well, I want to make sure that I’m using you to the fullest extent. So I’m writing like that.” And I’d say, “Yeah, but remember I need to get from the beginning of the first movement to the end of the last movement. It’s not just one movement at a time.” It was a challenge and he had specific ideas and we met various times and he would play at the piano. I remember the first time that we did that. I had been practicing my part and I just had a totally different accompaniment in my head from what he was playing. And it was kind of shocking that it took me a while to kind of get used to that. I have to say, you don’t sort of get used to when it’s a brand new piece because you can’t listen to anyone else play it. It’s kind of getting used to it as you begin to put it together. I did ask him for a MIDI, but that’s not always the greatest thing to work with. Some people have great MIDI programs and other MIDI programs are not so great. So really it wasn’t until we got to hear the first rehearsal that you kind of go Oh, now I’m beginning to see how it works and began to deal with the issues of balance and projection and stuff like that.

PD: When I spoke to him he said originally he was thinking about going the New Testament route talking about Revelation and the apocalypse and that sort of subject matter. And then he attended a Rosh Hashanah service and decided to be more pensive, more reflective with the composition. I just find that subject matter so interesting because there are just so many
interpretations with something like that. He can’t tell me what I need to reflect upon or where I can draw my emotional inspiration from to perform the piece. So you can kind of make it your own interpretation. Did you feel that way when you were working on it?

**PS:** There were different things. I remember him saying that, reflecting on the Rosh Hashanah service and the shofar and all that. I said to him I wouldn’t mind, if there are some shofar moments that you want to put into this, I’ll play a shofar. I don’t care, that’d be kind of cool. He didn’t go that direction but he did write rhythmic things and he did write things that paralleled what a shofar would do but on a modern-day trumpet. Sort of the titles that he gave the various movements certainly did help in terms of imagination. I didn’t really take it as... I definitely took more from the title of each movement. I think the first one is “Morning Prayer” or something like that. The second is “Timbrel Dance,” the third was “Evening Prayer” and the last movement, that had the reference to the shofar and the various shofar calls. I can’t remember the exact title. I wish I had the music in front of me.

**PD:** It was “Monument: Tekiah, Teruah.”

**PS:** Right, so I took my cues kind of from those little titles and various scriptures that might flow into those titles. I mean it’s very simple for me. It took me a while to figure out the rhythm of the first movement. It took me a while to sort of decipher out this complex rhythmic thing. But once I sort of did that and I found that I didn’t let the complexity of the rhythm dictate things. I tried to overshadow that complexity with a calming sort of a morning prayer where we meet the Lord and say, “Thank you Lord for this day, thanks for waking me up and getting me started. And here’s what I need for today, Lord. How wonderful and great you are. You know you, that adoration and confession and thanksgiving and supplication. That all goes on with the first prayers of the morning. That was easy to fall into. I really love the first movement. I love the second movement, the timbrel dance. Of course coming from my heritage of the Salvation Army we use tambourines in the Salvation Army and the gals usually put on a march and gals stand up in front of the band. They have a whole great ornate display of timbrel playing that goes on. And of course tambourines have sort of come back into the church in contemporary worship and dance and things like that. And of course all you have to do is read the Old Testament to get some of the various dances of the tambourines and all of that and the references to tambourine. So I could totally get into the second movement. I thought was a just great movement other than the cadenza that he wrote in there, which he wanted a certain way that was near impossible! And I had to sort of... talk to him about how I thought I could get through this and he was definitive about how he wanted it to be done. I’m afraid I don’t know exactly where he came down on this, but it got to a point where I just had to not talk to him about it and just take on the journey myself. I sort of said to myself, “this is how I’ve got to play it in order to get through it.” It may not have been exactly what he wanted I don’t know what Mike Sachs on that, but he wrote a very complicated, very incredibly difficult cadenza in there. And I felt it needed to have some freedom in there he wanted it to be very strict in tempo. The third movement, the Evening Prayer, I loved that he used “evening prayer.” I loved that conflict that comes about in the evening prayer. Kind of really wrestling with God more than the calm piece of the
“Morning Prayer.” I would have loved for that movement to be a little bit less... a little bit less. I would have loved for him to perhaps shortened up the movement or compacted it a bit. But that’s just my feeling about the movement. The last movement I thought was really cool. And I know that he wanted me to be doing more. He wanted the solo part to be much more active but I was just getting to the point where I said, “Aaron, you’ve got to give me rest especially if you want this piccolo stuff at the end because I’m just going to crash and not make it.” And so the one thing we did in various places through the piece, because there was always this conflict to make sure I could get through it and him wanting to make sure his initial ideas were still represented. What ended up happening is he would right some side parts so that I could decide, based on how I was feeling, I would have the option to take a different road, a little easier road to get to the end without crashing. That’s why when you look at the trumpet part there are few diviso parts, some ossia.

PD: I’m not sure what Chris Martin did, but Michael Sachs tries to take the top one but he said, “It depends on how I’m feeling.”

PS: The premiere was supposed to have happened with the Philharmonic and we got blizzarded out, so that premiere never happened. And unfortunately the only time I got to perform it the premiere was a one-time performance. It was a one-shot deal, whereas it would have been nice to have done it with the orchestra and have three or four shots at it and sort of get another flavor added, which is what Mike and Chris had.

PD: When the premiere with the Philharmonic didn’t work out, how was it decided that you were going to play it with the University of Illinois of all the Big Ten bands?

PS: Well, that came about because when I asked Aaron to write the piece he came, he was such a busy writer and came back and said, “Look, I’ve got these out-standing commissions that I’ve got to write. I’m afraid that this is going to be put down the line. What would you think about me writing, because I have this commission from the Big Ten School Bands... what if did the commission with the Philharmonic and this Big Ten group? And I write the piece fundamentally for expanded orchestral winds and percussion, basically writing for a small wind ensemble. And obviously we took that to the Philharmonic to see whether they were okay with it and they were, so that’s the direction that we went. So when the blizzard happened because the Philharmonic plans these things years in advance really. They’re not in one season and planning the next season. They’re in one season and planning three seasons down the road. So the opportunity to get this done with Alan Gilbert and myself, that was further down the road than the opportunity when the University of Illinois said, “We’d like to do this piece.” So that’s why we ended up going to them first because that was soonest, next opportunity to get the piece out.

PD: When you finally got to hear the piece for the first time with the wind ensemble behind you, what were your first reactions to that?
PS: There were a lot of reactions because the piece seemed to have problems in that, here we had been blizzarded out in New York and we’re booked to do this in Illinois. Lo and behold, I’m flying through New York through Chicago to go to Illinois, and there is a big snow storm and I get stranded in Chicago. So I never got to the first rehearsal, so I’m not sure if we had 2 or 3 rehearsals to get this performance out, but whatever we had one of them I wasn’t there for because I was stuck in Chicago. So consequently then we were crimped down. It might have been we had three and now only two for working rehearsals and a dress rehearsal, as I remember it. So the working rehearsal was like, “Wow, gosh gee, this is how it goes. Now we’ve got to get it right and give it a run tomorrow.” So it was all pretty frantic and now at all comfortable. And that’s not saying anything negative to anybody, it was just the circumstance. It was like whoa… this is... you get what you get. And with the conductor, the conductor’s trying to bring the band along. We’re trying to get it together with the conductor and the band. And tempi that if they’re off, the piece is so difficult that if I’m feeling like it’s going too fast, I’m screwed. It was a very unsettling situation. Yeah, I would have loved to have had another performance or two because the premiere performance, which was the only performance that I got to give, it was okay, but it wasn’t perfect. It would have been nice, like in the orchestra you would have done Thursday night, Friday, Saturday, and Tuesday. You would have gotten four concerts. Unfortunately we didn’t get that opportunity.

PD: I can’t imagine. You essentially waited four years to do this premiere and then you get snowed in Chicago. I can’t imagine.

PS: It was like the gremlins were out to not want this piece to be performed, which is kind of interesting to me. Being a man of faith, believing in purpose and believing that there is as much evil as there is good. It was kind of interesting. It was like the evil didn’t want this piece to get done for some reason.

PD: Back to the preparation of the piece, when it was originally being written, you helped Mr. Kernis with the idiomatic trumpet parts. Right? You helped him make the parts more idiomatic when he was writing them?

PS: Well, that was very kind of him to say. He would write the piece and, with all due respect to him, sometimes I found the piece to be very angular, number one and number two, not a whole lot of rest. And number three sometimes so busy I didn’t think I could get it all in so I would make various suggestions like, “I need a couple of bars here.” And so there were times when he would give me the score, and I would say “Could you take this line that you’re giving to me and give it to an orchestral trumpet line that’s not being used at that point just so I could get a bar and then just let it build up from there.” Or I might say, “Can you take this particularly angular figure and is it possible to change a note in a way so that it’s not quite so angular?” And sometimes finger-wise it would just be incredibly awkward. And I’d say, “If you just made that a natural instead of a flat, it would flow a lot better.” Many times, to my chagrin, he didn’t like that idea. I thought it would be the easiest thing to do. And to me to change one note out of a sextuplet that was flying by, nobody would know the difference in my mind. But to him, it was a wart on the wall kind of thing. So there were some things, I would say that any changes that were
made were never easy changes. They were things that he struggled with and eventually he might come around. Sometimes he would make an adjustment and sometimes he would not want it to be that way. Sometimes you ask for something to be done and at a certain point I don’t want to fight with anybody and I’m just going to have to do it my way and ask for forgiveness after the fact. It was interesting.

PD: For someone like you who has worked with composers writing for you before, how did working Aaron Jay Kernis compare?

PS: Tougher. As I said, most of the pieces that have been written for me have been by my buddy Joe Turrin. Joe and I have been a pianist and trumpet team since 1974 and Joe just knew how to write for me and so it worked. And Joe is a much more easy-going kind of guy. If I said, “Joe, something has to happen here,” He’d say “Okay no problem.” Aaron had a much more definitive idea and was reluctant to let go in my opinion. And I appreciated that, I don’t mean it as a negative. It’s just a fact. He was difficult and yet he was the nicest, politest guy. It isn’t like there was any ugliness there. There wasn’t. And I didn’t want to be ugly. It was a struggle getting to what ended up being. So that was the thing. He had distinctive ideas. Somebody once said that he played clarinet. And I can see that a lot of his writing is as if you had a woodwind instrument in your hand and you were just able to sort of key things. It was much more difficult, as I would try to explain to him. It would ask for me to jump up and down and up and down. It was just chewing me up. That’s when I would try to get things smoothed out a little bit. So that was interesting. It was a journey.

PD: When you were originally planning for the premiere, I think it was the summer of 2010. How much time did he give you to prepare this piece?

PS: Well, that was actually the problem. The original date for the premiere ended up getting postponed back to whenever this week between Christmas and New Year’s was when we got blizzarded out. And the reason for that was the piece was slow coming in. The Philharmonic, whenever they have a piece written they establish a timeline that the piece has to be in to the library by such and such a time, so the parts are prepared and copied or printed, whatever. So that the performers have ample time to learn the thing. It initially got postponed because quite honestly, it came too late. Each movement sort of came at a time. Sometimes a portion of a movement, if I remember it correctly. And the latter movements, the last two or at least the last came in very, very late. There just wasn’t even time to get this down. It just wasn’t enough time to get it prepared. So that’s why it got postponed to Christmas time, whatever date that was.

PD: Did you need to change your daily practice routine to physically prepare to play this piece?

PS: No. No, I didn’t really have a daily routine. My routine was to get up and try to do what I had to do and you’re trying to maintain yourself as a player and you’re trying to prepare and make sure that you’re able to perform the various pieces that are coming up week by week. And this is why you wanted it early because this is something you just tacked on to your practice time. You had to learn these things. And for me, my practice
time was usually after I got home after a Philharmonic concert. I might stay up from 11:30 to 1 o’clock in the morning and just practice. That was a time I could give to it, I didn’t want to be practicing necessarily overtly hard on some very contemporary piece between a morning rehearsal and night concert. And we had two of those a week. We had it Tuesday and a Wednesday where we’d have a morning rehearsal and a night concert. No, a Tuesday and Thursday. Wednesdays I would practice in the evening pretty strong because we just had two rehearsals during the day, so I could practice strong at night. But usually my practice time would be after concerts.

PD: So you’re a night owl! This isn’t too late for you at all.

PS: Yeah, I’m a night owl guy.

PD: I’m cutting into your practice time!

PS: You are, actually!

PD: Do you think having a better knowledge of the subject matter, the scriptures and the shofar, do you think that is beneficial for a performer preparing this?

PS: It can’t hurt. I don’t think that it necessarily is beneficial, it’s like... you know, it’d be like... do I have to know everything there is to know about paganism to perform Daphnis and Chloe? So I don’t think you, you just have a heart and an imagination and a desire to be expressive. And I think it’s those things within you, which every great musician has, that you can find a way to interpret that piece. But it certainly doesn’t hurt for you to have. It’s like I say, for me when I was in some of those prayerful sections or when I was shooting off the meaty shofar licks in the fourth movement, you know for me it would be a thrill for me that I could be relating that in my mind what my mind’s eye captured of those events in scripture. The same way that when I would stand up and play “The Trumpet Shall Sound.” When I would hear the chorus saying, “as in one man came death, as in Adam came death, through Christ came life,” That goes on just before the trumpet shall sound. As a Christian, as someone who believes that in a moment in our life, we will be changed. Every time I play that, I get chills that go up and down my spine because of what that means to me. Or the same way when you play the Verdi Requiem and we start into the Tuba Mirum. This is what it’s going to sound like. Is it going to be anything close to this? It’s like a wonderful song by Michael W. Smith, a Christian artist, who says ‘I can only imagine, what will it be like when I see Christ face to face. Will I fall on my knees or will I stand and raise my hand.’” So I think when you, as a person of faith, that certainly enhances... it enhanced me in that piece as it does in other pieces. That’s why I say it couldn’t hurt.

PD: Obviously it was difficult to balance with a wind ensemble behind you when you were playing for the first time. Did you feel it was difficult to blend sound and tonal color with the ensemble as well?
PS: Well, yeah. I would say that it would have been wonderful to have played this with the Philharmonic wind players. With all due respect and not being unkind in the least, the way that the Philharmonic would play Mahler VI is certainly different than the way that UGA symphony orchestra played Mahler IV tonight. So therefore to play the Kernis with really fine professional wind players would have been a very different experience than playing it with a college band. So I think that’s the statement. So it was hard because, you know, balance is tough. I felt pretty good about being able to play fairly loud, but when you got a whole roaring band behind you that’s another story. As I remember it was not a small band. It wasn’t like our Hugh Hodgeson wind ensemble that Cynthia Johnston Turner has here at UGA, which is truly a small wind ensemble. Whereas the band at Illinois was a bigger unit so balance was certainly an issue that’s for sure. The balance in terms of the performance, to be honest, it was written in such a way that it sometimes was difficult too. And I don’t know whether he thinned that our in subsequent performances.

PD: How did you feel after your performance of the piece? Were you happy with it?

PS: Relieved. I wasn’t overly happy with it. There were some things that I would have liked another go at.

PD: I’m sure that you won’t remember this; I of course did the fan-girl thing and ran up to you in the lobby saying, “This piece, this performance was just so meaningful to me!” And I just written a little paper in my Master’s about this piece. It just popped up. Somehow I wrote a paper about a Pulitzer-prize winning composer who wrote for the trumpet and this piece is the one I wrote about. And I found out that it was being premiered 45 minutes away, like 2 days after I turned in this paper. So I was already attached to it when I went to see the premiere and I was just so moved by the performance. It was just so emotionally charged. There was so much energy. I remember running up to you in the hallway and being so excited to speak to you about it. You were not nearly as excited as I was.

PS: Well, that’s just my nature. Unfortunately there’s a dark side of me which can be super critical. So if I’ve not been overly happy with a performance, I probably show that. With my performance. And I just remember thinking, “Gee, I could have done that better. I could have been better there.”

PD: I think I’ve listened to every performance of this piece. I think I’ve tracked down a recording of every performance. There’s just this emotional interpretation and understand that’s just different from your performance and I just keep coming back to it. Every time we get to that third movement, I can’t help by shed a tear. I always cry when I get to the third movement. Especially the part that says, “Wailing, soulful.” The beautiful vocal part that you’re playing versus the craziness in the ensemble. That movement of your performance is probably my favorite.

PS: Well, I appreciate that. Thank you. I would like to hear the other two. I’ve never heard the other two. I’m not even sure if I have a copy of what I did. It would be nice to hear them just to hear. I’m speaking from deep in the recesses of my mind about it.
PD: I have a copy of your performance I could send you and Michael Sachs just sent me a video of one of his performances, I could send you as well if you’d like.

PS: To be honest, I should probably ask Michael and Chris. Now Michael, did it at UT?

PD: Michael Sachs did it at Michigan State University and he did it with Ohio State University.

PS: So he has done two other performances.

PD: He played with Ohio twice and then went to Michigan. So he’s actually played the piece three times. And when I spoke to him this afternoon, he said that he’s been trying to get Cleveland to do it. And he’s been bugging a bunch of different places to play it again. And I know that he spoke to you when he started working on the piece at first. He said he looked to you like his big brother looking for advice.

PS: That was very kind. I was just the sucker who got to do it first. And then where did Chris do it?

PD: He did it at Texas with Jerry Junkin conducting.

PS: I remember Chris sent me an email. He said, “I have to play this piece. Do you have any suggestions?” and I think I sent a tongue in cheek thing to him that said, “Change pieces.” He wrote back and said, “Too late!” He was just saying it’s a tough piece and I said, “Yeah, it’s a tough piece, change pieces.” It is! It’s a challenge. That is my sarcastic humor. It is tough. It is not a piece that anybody is going to pick up and say, “This is a cakewalk.” No, you got to work really hard to get this piece down.

PD: So with that being said, do you think this piece should be reserved for the “trumpet elite,” if you will? People the caliber of yourself or Michael Sachs?

PS: No. No. No. Because you could say that about any piece. The challenge is that young ones come along with no fear and can do anything and so they should. That’s what presses the envelope and pushes the limit further. So yeah, what’s hard for someone in one generation becomes playable for someone down the road. No, I don’t think it should be reserved. I will say that anyone who is going to play will need to work hard to get it done.

PD: You said that you played it with Aaron Jay Kernis on piano while you were working on the piece?

PS: Yeah, we had some rehearsals at his place. He would sit and bang through on the piano.

PD: Do you think a piano reduction is as effective or should even be played for recital purposes? Do you think it’s possible to perform this piece?
PS: That’s something that you’d have to ask him. I know that piano reductions are always tough. I’m after Turrin to write a reduction for Chronicles and to write a piano reduction for … the Call, the last piece that he wrote for wind ensemble. Because we have competitions here at our university and our kids can’t play those pieces because they have to compete with a piano reduction and Turrin has never done that. Like I said to him just the other day, “If you don’t give me a piano reduction of these things, your pieces aren’t going to get play because I can’t get kids to play them.” So in a sense, that’s true for Aaron. I know that piano reductions are not fun. They aren’t fun for the composer to write, they’re usually a pain in the neck and they’re not going to represent the piece well. But it’s just another way to at least get the thing out there to get played. So, yeah. I think it’s a good idea although I know that the composer will say, “I can’t express on a keyboard what I try to express in the ensemble.” So he might be reluctant to go down that road.

PD: Especially with all that percussion that he used and he talks about tonal color all the time. A piano has the piano tonal color and that would be hard to recreate.

PS: Exactly.

PD: Being as familiar with the subject matter as you are, the final movement where the trumpets come out of the ensemble to join you. That final moment when I spoke to Kernis, he said that was the most symbolic thing he had written into the piece because he had seen this painting or he knew the story of these three trumpet players or a shofar and two trumpet players joining him at the Temple of Jerusalem. He was trying to recreate that image of those three trumpet players calling to the people. Do you think that it’s important to get precise staging of that moment in order to get that symbol across?

PS: Wow. I don’t know. Like I said, I didn’t have the time to play with that. I know it was a panic to get them out there and it was hard for us to play together because we couldn’t necessarily hear each other with everything else that was going on around us. So I know that was an issue as well as just the issue of having the chops, all three of us, to get through that moment. Again, because Aaron has written this incredibly taxing piece. So I don’t remember that and I don’t remember what he was asking. I don’t know whether he got the spacing that he wanted or whether he wanted more spacing. I can’t remember that.

PD: He said that the originally wanted them in the balcony but he realized that was physically impossible for them to get up there. And then I asked, would you ever want that to be an offstage trumpet part where people are just waiting in the wings and then come out? And he said, “That’s certainly something worth considering.” But then like I said, he talked about that symbol and I actually found a painting of those three trumpet players standing together and I was thinking wouldn’t it be neat to have that exact same image at the end of the piece because this painting I found depicting this story was just such a powerful image. I think to end this piece, as big and bold as the ending is, with that visual component, I think that would be really cool. I think that’s something to consider.
PS: That’s a great point. I think it would be... not impossible, if it were offstage and in the balcony. It just becomes a super event as opposed... I like the idea of being closer to be honest. And it would be good, especially with you finding the painting of that as part of the program. It pulls you to that art history thing and there is it. The recreation of the sound of what that painting meant.

PD: Do you think the audience understood the emotion and the intensity behind the piece when you performed it?

PS: I don’t know. I don’t know.

PD: Well, this audience member did!

PS: Again, I go back to where I was tonight. I’m sitting out there and I know every inch of that piece. And the gentleman sitting next to me, I could tell he was bored out of his skull. It was just Mahler chaos to him and yet to me, I hear it all because I’ve heard it and heard it and heard it. And I think that’s the advantage that I have whether we’re talking Mahler VI or the Kernis trumpet concerto. I’ve lived with it, it meant something to me, but to be someone hearing it for the first time hopefully you catch an emotion, a feeling, a tangible something and I’m sure there were some people out there going “What the heck is going on?” But then hopefully for other people, the more they get to hear... like for us hearing the Haydn trumpet concerto... we hear it a different way because we all kind of know it. That’s an open ended thing. I appreciate the fact that you said that you felt something. That there is a tangible substance, presence, emotion, feeling that was there. Because that’s what I think music should be about and like I say, maybe that was the problem. Maybe that was why the evil one didn’t want it getting performed by me. Maybe they were saying, “I don’t want that being communicated.” I don’t know. Those are all interesting questions and ideas.

PD: Do you think this piece should be commercially recorded?

PS: I think we can discuss what we’re talking about: Recorded. Are we going to talk about an aural recording or could it be a visual recording? I don’t see any reason why it can’t just be an aural recording, I also don’t see any reason that it can’t be visual as well. Yeah, I think the piece should be recorded. I think it probably will be one day. Somebody will do it.
APPENDIX B: INSTRUMENTATION

Soloist: Trumpet in C, Flügelhorn, Piccolo Trumpet in B-flat

4 Flutes (Fl. 3 and 4 doubling Piccolo)
3 Oboes (Ob. 3 doubling English Horn)
5 Clarinets in B-flat (Cl. 2 doubling E-flat Cl., Cl. 3 doubling Bass Cl., Cl. 4 doubling Bass Cl., Cl. 5 doubling Contrabass Cl.)
3 Bassoons (Bsn. 3 doubling Contrabassoon)

4 Horns in F
3 Trumpets in C (parts for 2 additional trumpets for the final 3’ of the work are found in an appendix to the score)
2 Trombones
1 Bass Trombone
1 Euphonium
2 Tubas

3 Double Basses
Harp
Piano

Timpani
5 Percussion
Percussion 1
Glockenspiel
Small, Medium Crash Cymbals
2 Tin Cans
Bongos
Tambourine
Rasp
Medium Woodblock

Percussion 2
Crotales
Medium, High Suspended Cymbals
7 Tom-Toms
2 Very High Wood Blocks

Percussion 3
Vibraphone
Small, Medium Crash Cymbals
Piccolo Snare Drum
Pedal Bass Drum
Snare Drum

Low, Medium, High Suspended Cymbals
Cymbals
2 High Triangles
Conga
Claves
Maraca

Medium Steel Drum
High Triangle
2 Medium Woodblocks
Snare Drum

Bamboo Wind Chimes
Xylophone
High Triangle
2 Medium Woodblocks
Percussion 4
Marimba
Large Suspended Cymbal
2 (high, med, high) pieces of Metal
2 Triangles
Bongos

Percussion 5
Xylophone
Medium Tam-Tam
Snare Drum
High Woodblock
Tambourine
Large Crash Cymbals
High Triangle
Bass Drum
5 Tom Toms
Maraca

Chimes
Large (Low) Tam Tom; Thunder
Sheet
Tenor Drum
Medium, High Woodblock
When Philip Smith asked me to write a concerto, he suggested as sources the appearance of trumpets and its relatives Scripture – shofar (ram’s horn), cornet, horns, etc. I developed impressions for the work while attending Rosh Hashanah services, hearing shofar in person, and rereading passages from the Torah that place these instruments in a spiritual context.

..there was thunder and lightning and a dense cloud over the mountain; there was a loud Shofar blast, and all the people in the camp trembled. Exodus

He manifested himself with the sound of the Shofar, the Lord amidst the sound of the Shofar. Psalm 47

Morning Prayer, terse and, like most of the concerto, pensive, chromatic and conflicted, calms only at its end, when a chorale-like series of essential three-note chords intervene.

The timbrel is the Biblical forbear of the tambourine, and the title Timbrel Psalm is a play on words. Timbre (or timbral) is commonly used by musicians to denote the “color” of instrumental sound. This dance-like movement is made of short phrases in a variety of timbres, much of it lightly scored and vigorous.

Praise him with the blast of the Shofar; praise him with psaltery and harp. Praise him with timbrel and dance; praise him with stringed instruments and reed. Praise him with resounding cymbals; praise him with clanging cymbals. Psalm 150

The expansive Evening Prayer features flügelhorn solo. It alternates lyrical, pensive lines with ongoing development and dramatic clashes between soloist and ensemble, ending as unsettled as it began.

The music of the final movement, Monument – Tekiah, Teruah, does not directly imitate the sound of a shofar but suggests the urgency of its call, and much of it is built on fanfare-like passages. The most dramatic of the four movements, it is made of stark contrasts, bitter harmonies, and dense textures. The chorale from the opening returns at the very end, just after the work’s most lyrical moments, and culminates in the flanking of the soloist with two other trumpets. The suggests references in antiquity to the shofar being paired on either side by two silver trumpets in New Year’s Day services in the second Temple in Jerusalem, before its destruction.

Thou hast heard the sound of the Shofar, and the alarm of war; destruction follows upon destruction. Jeremiah

a Voice, a Messenger was composed in 2010 and edited in December 2012. It lasts about 25 minutes. I am grateful to the generosity of the Big Ten Band Directors Association, Philip Smith,
and the New York Philharmonic in making its creation possible. Its dedication reads: *Written for Philip Smith, in celebration of his three decades with the New York Philharmonic; and in recognition of the generous and ongoing commitment to the creation of music of our time by that great orchestra and the distinguished Big Ten Band Directors Association.*

*In memory of Michael Kernis (1955-2009)*

*a Voice, a Messenger* was co-commissioned by the Big Ten Band Directors Association, and by the New York Philharmonic, made possible with a generous gift from Marie-Josée Kravis, and with major support provided by the Francis Goelet Fund.
May 9, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

As composer, owner and copyright holder for “a voice, a messenger” – a concerto for Trumpet and Wind Ensemble, I give Pagean DiSalvio permission to use excerpts of the work, and refer to and embed them into her dissertation.

Sincerely,

Aaron Jay Kernis
Gmail - IRB Approval for Dissertation

To: Pagean DiSalvio <pagesdi@uml.edu>
Hi, The IRB chair reviewed your email and determined RB approval for this specific application is not needed. There is no manipulation of, nor intervention with, human subjects. Should you subsequently devise a project which does involve the use of human subjects, then IRB review and approval will be needed. Elizabeth

From: Pagean DiSalvio [mailto:pagesdi@uml.edu]
Sent: Monday, April 26, 2016 4:38 PM
To: Institutional R Board <irb@isu.edu>
Subject: IRB Approval for Dissertation

Good afternoon,

My name is Pagean DiSalvio, I am a candidate for a Doctor of Musical Arts Degree and have just written my final document for my degree. My document is a performer's guide about the piece a Veil, a Messanger. My research included several interviews with the composer, performers, and conductors who have been involved with the piece. There were no experiments performed. Do I need to seek IRB approval or fill out the exemption form?

Please let me know as soon as possible. Thank you for your help.

Pagean DiSalvio

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Pagean DiSalvio has earned a Bachelor of Music Performance degree from Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey, and a Master of Music degree in trumpet performance from Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. Ms. DiSalvio has been a Graduate Teaching Assistant at Louisiana State University from 2013 to 2016 teaching applied lessons. She is currently a music educator and freelance performer in the Baton Rouge area.