

INSTRUMENTAL THEATER IN MAURICIO KAGEL'S *MORCEAU DE CONCOURS*

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## Abstract

In 1970, Argentine-German composer Mauricio Kagel (1931–2008) composed a piece for solo trumpeter with tape titled *Morceau de concours*. Both the live solo trumpet part and the trumpet part on the tape call for unusual types of instruments such as cornetto, baroque trumpet, and tromba da tirarsi. Kagel worked closely with Edward H. Tarr, a pioneer of historic brass, in creating the work. Tarr premiered and recorded this piece, but it has hardly been performed since. In 1990, Kagel revised *Morceau de concours*, eliminating the taped component. He provided two versions: one is an unaccompanied solo for modern C trumpet, and the other calls for two live trumpeters. The musical language of this revision differs so drastically from the original version, it is completely unrecognizable.

No author has written a document entirely devoted to Kagel's *Morceau de concours*. It is a worthwhile piece to explore in its own right because Kagel uses the principles of music theater to "break the fourth wall" and interrogate the idea of both the contest piece and the music contest itself. He embraces uncomfortable, corporeal truths about the reality of brass playing which are too taboo to admit on stage: brass playing is often both unpleasantly loud and tiring. He employs the crudeness of the trumpet to highlight the bravado of presenting oneself as a musical competitor.

The history of the "contest piece," as codified by the Paris Conservatory in the twentieth century, and its importance to classical trumpeters, is helpful in understanding the humor of this work. This history also clarifies the meaning of the piece and the evolution of Kagel's ideas in the decades between the two versions. The revised version exhibits enough characteristics of the genre to constitute a recognizable parody, whereas the original version aggressively negates the genre and takes a more caustically satirical approach.

The original version of *Morceau de concours* was completed while Kagel focused on highly conceptual works classified as "music theater," or "instrumental theater." Music theater trains its focus on the drama of performance itself, rather than the specific music or sounds created onstage. Where a piece like *Staatstheater* (1970) interrogates the concept of opera by negating its most integral features, the original version of *Morceau de concours* does the same for the concept of a brass contest piece.

The revised solo version of *Morceau de concours* provides genuine technical challenges for the performer, which can impress the audience if executed properly. It also includes obtrusively brash figures, a special exaggerated vibrato technique that explicitly references parody (Parodievibrato), and spoken lines that make references to an unusual instrument from the original version (slide trumpet) and animal sounds. By the end of the piece, the valiant competitor is exhausted and runs out of breath while struggling to state the title of the piece.

The revised duo version features interactions between the two performers marked mostly by sabotage with a few brief moments of cooperation. Much like in Kagel's *Match* (1964), the two players deplete themselves by self-destructively attempting to outdo each other. This version was integrated into a larger radio work titled *Nah und Fern* (1994), which shows Kagel's ability to repurpose musical material for a different theatrical purpose. In *Nah und Fern*, trumpet music is used along with carillon music as an example of sounds which helped people determine physical distance. The piece is stripped of its explicitly competitive context, emphasizing its use of recognizable signaling and fanfare figures.

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Thank you to Edward Carroll for his tireless work in advancing trumpet as an art form, especially as the director of the Center for Advanced Musical Studies at Chosen Vale. My two years there were truly formative, and this project is a direct result of what I learned from him and all the faculty and students there. Thank you to Marco Blaauw, Nicolás Bejarano, and Paul Hübner for pointing me in the right direction in my search for information on this topic.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

I first heard the 1990 solo version of Mauricio Kagel's *Morceau de concours* at the Center for Advanced Musical Studies at Chosen Vale in 2018. Marie Sophie Mathieu gave an excellent rendition of the piece in a masterclass taught by Edward Carroll, the founder of the seminar. I was happy to see a piece that encouraged the audience to laugh, and I was impressed that it still demanded excellence and ingenuity from the performer. Like much other repertoire featured at Chosen Vale, *Morceau de concours* offered challenges that I had not thought about, seemingly far-removed from those presented in standard repertoire.

I did not see the score of the piece until 2024, when I began revisiting some of the music I heard at the seminar. I was intrigued to learn that what I heard was in fact a revision, and I was surprised to find that the scholarship on the piece was confined to the field of musicology, so I am excited to make my own contribution to the literature on this piece, which is significant in several respects, in the field of trumpet performance scholarship.

The history of the original 1970 version illuminates a close relationship between the nascent historic brass movement and the European avant-garde. It also demonstrates Kagel's close study of organology and his fruitful collaborations with individual musicians. The revised version is essentially a different piece altogether, and, comparing it to the original, provides an enlightening study of Kagel's evolution as a composer. Both iterations clearly demonstrate many aspects of Kagel's personal philosophy and style. Both versions use music theater and humor to interrogate the "morceau de concours" (examination piece) and draw attention to its conventions. He pushes the boundaries of the genre, even to the point of negating it, particularly in the original version and the duo revision. Kagel deftly uses the trumpet's semiotic connotations to theatricalize its common usage in Western music. He also embraces unpleasant, corporeal truths

about the reality of brass playing, which are too taboo to admit on stage: brass playing is often both unpleasantly loud and tiring.



## Chapter 2: Mauricio Kagel's early life

Mauricio Kagel was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina on December 24, 1931. He would go on to be an iconoclastic composer who used humor and absurdity to draw attention to unexamined musical conventions. He provoked serious conversations about the context in which music is presented, whether live or recorded, and illuminated unspoken assumptions inherent in concert-hall traditions. Several aspects of his early life shaped his unique approach to music composition: his Jewish upbringing, the cosmopolitan environment of his youth, his passion for literature, and a strong suspicion of authority and bourgeois values.

At his birth, the nurse suggested to Kagel's mother that she name her son Jesus in honor of the Christmas holiday. The nurse did not know that Kagel's parents were Jewish and had left Russia after the October Revolution to escape pogroms. The Kagel family was part of a large Jewish diaspora population in Buenos Aires, which remains an important presence to this day.<sup>1</sup> Kagel has cited "the rabbinic art of aiming for a goal in a roundabout way, of concealing knowledge in enigmatic metaphors" as an artistic inspiration.<sup>2</sup> He credits the Jewish focus on ethics over "piety, confession, and trust in God" for his tendency toward skepticism and questioning.<sup>3</sup>

Kagel grew up hearing Yiddish and Spanish words interspersed with grammatical structures from Poland and Russia.<sup>4</sup> The cafés of his youth in Buenos Aires were cosmopolitan and polyglot due to the variety of cultures which had emigrated to Buenos Aires in the preceding

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<sup>1</sup> Björn Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel* (London: Routledge, 2016), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Mauricio Kagel, ed. Werner Klüppelholz, *Kagel: Dialoge, Monologe* (Cologne: DuMont, 2001), 15–16. "Und doch: Die rabbinische Kunst, ein Ziel auf Umwegen anzupeilen, in rätselhaften Metaphern das Wissen zu verschleiern, hat mich immer beeindruckt." This and other English translations in this document are the author's own unless otherwise stated.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–30. "Juden pflegen eher zu zweifeln als zu glauben, weil ihre Religion mehr mit Ethik zu tun hat als mit Frömmigkeit, Bekenntnis und Gottvertrauen."

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

decades.<sup>5</sup> Kagel's first composition teacher was Juan Carlos Paz, who established a group called Agrupación Nueva Musica. In contrast to the nationalist, anti-intellectual regime of Juan Perón, Paz's group was avant-garde and cosmopolitan. Kagel was inspired by Paz's commitment to fight the predominantly nationalist trends in South American music, and while he never counted Paz as a strong musical influence, he certainly contributed toward Kagel's irreverent view of authority and his tendency to draw on eclectic sources of inspiration.<sup>6</sup>

At the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores, Kagel had the good fortune to encounter acclaimed Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges as his English instructor in his early adulthood. Borges represents the nexus of several influences in Kagel's life. While not Jewish himself, Borges was influenced by Jewish concepts and "conceive[d] of the universe in the Kabbalistic tradition as a 'biblioteca total,' a total library."<sup>7</sup> Borges was also a committed universalist and cosmopolitan who exhorted Argentines to "not be afraid, but believe that our inheritance is the universe; we must try our hand at all topics and cannot limit ourselves to being Argentine in order to be Argentine."<sup>8</sup> Kagel had inherited his love of literature from his father, an erudite man who worked as a printer. All through his life, Kagel cited Borges as his foremost influence, ahead of any musical composers.<sup>9</sup>

Borges also exemplified the political ideas dominant in Kagel's upbringing by setting an example of how to speak truth to power. Kagel's mother admired the German Marxist revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, who advocated for a democratic approach to socialism, while

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<sup>5</sup> Matthias Rebstock, *Komposition zwischen Musik und Theater: Das instrumentale Theater von Mauricio Kagel zwischen 1959 und 1965* (Hofheim: Wolke, 2007) 33.

<sup>6</sup> Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 8–9.

<sup>7</sup> Rebstock, *Komposition*, 35. "Borges denkt sich das Universum in kabbalistischer Tradition als »biblioteca total«, als »totale Bibliothek«."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, "Wir dürfen keine Angst haben, sondern müssen glauben, dass unser Erbteil das Universum ist; wir müssen uns an allen Themen versuchen und können uns nicht auf das Argentinische festlegen, um argentinisch zu sein."

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

reviling the dictatorships of Lenin and Stalin. Kagel knew many Spanish anarchists who emigrated to Buenos Aires after the Spanish Civil War.<sup>10</sup> Despite being targeted by the Peronist administration, Borges did not bow to pressure from the regime.<sup>11</sup>

Kagel also befriended Witold Gombrowicz, a sharply satirical writer who had moved to Argentina from Poland. Bjorn Heile credits Gombrowicz for influencing “Kagel’s scepticism toward lofty ideas and bourgeois high culture, his contempt for concert hall rituals, his sarcasm and surreal wit as well as his capacity for scandal...”<sup>12</sup> Kagel described Borges and Gombrowicz as two men who came to similar universalist, anti-nationalist conclusions through opposite tendencies: “Gombrowicz and Borges did not get along well... Borges was his antipode, not his enemy... While Borges could have cultivated a lush cultural garden with his great knowledge, Gombrowicz would have opted for monoculture out of innate laziness.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Anthony Coleman, “Mauricio Kagel,” *Bomb: A Quarterly Arts & Culture Magazine Since 1981*, Summer 2004. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2004/07/01/mauricio-kagel/>, accessed April 3, 2025.

<sup>11</sup> Makoto Mikawa, “Anarchy in the Unity: Compositional and Aesthetic Tensions in Mauricio Kagel’s *Antithese* für einen Darsteller mit Elektronischen und Öffentlichen Klängen (1962),” ph.D. diss. (The University of Western Ontario, 2012), 27–29.

<sup>12</sup> Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Kagel, ed. Klüppelholz, *Mauricio Kagel: Dialoge, Monologe*, 276–277. “Gombrowicz und Borges haben sich schlecht verstanden... Borges war sein Antipode, nicht sein Feind... Während Borges mit seinem großen Wissen einen üppigen Kulturgarten hätte bestellen können, würde sich Gombrowicz eher für Monokultur entschieden haben – aus angeborener Bequemlichkeit.”

### Chapter 3: Primer on the history of *morceaux de concours*

The *morceau de concours* has its roots in the early years of the Paris Conservatory. The Conservatoire de Musique was incorporated in 1795 by combining two previously existing schools: the Ecole Royale du Chant et Déclamation and the Institut National de Musique. Its early history was somewhat tumultuous in the wake of the French Revolution,<sup>14</sup> but began to calm by the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> The *solo de concours* (exam solo) became part of the exit examination for instrumentalists in 1797. There were four possible results from an instrumental student's performance in exit examinations: first prize, second prize, first honorable mention, and second honorable mention. These awards represented the achievement of a particular level of skill, not a simple ranking of the students' performances. For example, some years saw multiple students of a given professor achieve first prize, while other years saw no first prizes awarded.<sup>16</sup>

These *solos de concours* (or *morceaux de concours* (exam pieces)) were originally composed by instrumental instructors at the Conservatory. These pieces tended to feature flashy techniques, but superficial aesthetics. In 1894, flute professor Paul Taffanel launched a program to commission French composers to write pieces that tested "the expressive and interpretative skills of concours candidates."<sup>17</sup> In 1905, Gabriel Fauré became director of the Paris Conservatory. Fauré made a conservatory-wide push to include more music from outside of France, and to allow vocal and instrumental students to explore both older historical styles and the cutting edge of contemporary composition.<sup>18</sup> He commissioned instrumental exam pieces

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<sup>14</sup> Melissa Gail Colgin, "The Paris Conservatoire *Concours* Tradition and the *Solos de Concours* for Flute 1955–1990" (University of Texas at Austin: DMA diss., 1992), 11–13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Chris Stock, "Belgian Trumpet Contest Pieces of the Conservatoire Royal de Musique Liège, 1876–1960" (University of Oklahoma: DMA diss., 2012), 12–13.

<sup>17</sup> Colgin, "The Paris Conservatoire *Concours* Tradition and the *Solos de Concours* for Flute 1955–1990," 17.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Koechlin, trans. Leslie Orrey, *Gabriel Fauré* (London: Portsdown Press, 1946), 11.

from pioneering composers such as Debussy, Ravel, and Dukas, and even wrote some himself.<sup>19</sup> The improvement of repertoire throughout the conservatory, including exam pieces, led to a revival of France's musical reputation. In the eighteenth century, French vocalists and instrumentalists were widely judged inferior to Italian vocalists and German instrumentalists, but throughout the nineteenth century, the Paris Conservatory became a model for music schools throughout the world, and French performers were held in high esteem.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike string, keyboard, and some woodwind instruments, the valved trumpet was in its infancy in the nineteenth century. When the conservatory instituted the concours for instrumental students in 1797, there was no permanent trumpet class.<sup>21</sup> François Dauverné became the first trumpet instructor at the conservatory in 1833. A variety of instruments was used in performance and instruction during this time: natural trumpet, early experimental piston valve trumpets, slide trumpet, and stopped trumpet.<sup>22</sup>

A competing instrument had been invented only about a decade earlier, in the 1820s: *cornet à pistons*. Jean-Baptiste Arban spent decades developing literature and popularizing this conical-bored valved instrument after graduating from the Paris Conservatory as a student of Dauverné.<sup>23</sup> In 1869, Arban successfully petitioned for the creation of a separate cornet studio at the Paris Conservatory.<sup>24</sup> Dauverné and Arban both wrote numerous exam pieces for their studios,<sup>25</sup> and the many theme and variation sets written for cornet by the latter are a staple of

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<sup>19</sup> Jessica Duchon, *Gabriel Fauré* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 156.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph John Caringi, "The Clarinet Contest Solos of the Paris Conservatory; with a Performance Analysis of Selected Compositions" (Columbia University: EdD project report, 1963), 193–195.

<sup>21</sup> Frank Edward Romero, "*Morceaux de Concours pour Trompette et Cornet*, Contest Pieces of the Paris Conservatory 1835–1999" (University of Oklahoma: DMA diss., 2001), 24. There were three faculty members who taught trumpet only from 1795–1800, in addition to other subjects.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 26–27.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 32–33.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–35.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Dale Olson, "The Development of Modern Solo Trumpet Literature as Traced Through the *Morceaux de Concours* at the Paris Conservatory" (University of North Texas: MM thesis, 1957), 50–51.

trumpet recitals to this day. By 1947, the distinction between trumpet and cornet was considered marginal; they used the same embouchure and valve mechanisms and played in the same register. The two classes were combined under the professor Raymond Sabarich, and his students were expected to study both trumpet and cornet.<sup>26</sup> Because trumpet and cornet solo literature was scarce, and because the instruments themselves developed alongside the evolution of the Paris Conservatory trumpet and cornet classes and their *morceaux de concours*, the pedagogy and literature from the Paris Conservatory have had a strong influence how modern trumpet is taught and now represent a relatively large proportion of academic recital repertoire.

The modern trumpet and its pedagogy continued to develop even after Gabriel Fauré's reforms at the Paris Conservatory. Maurice André, an alumnus who taught trumpet at the conservatory from 1966 to 1979,<sup>27</sup> revolutionized the modern trumpet by broadening its repertoire and reaching a worldwide audience as a celebrity soloist.<sup>28</sup> His recordings of some of the institution's *morceaux de concours* made them solo trumpet standards, including Georges Enescu's *Légende* (1906) and André Jolivet's *Concertino* (1948).

The Paris Conservatory continued to commission *morceaux de concours* most years until the 1990s, but few that were composed after the mid-1950s are still performed today. Antoine Tisné's 1976 solo *Heraldiques* was recorded by Håkan Hardenberger,<sup>29</sup> but is rarely performed. In the second half of the twentieth century, composers such as Hans Werner Henze, Robert Erickson, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Luciano Berio greatly expanded the sonic palette and technical capabilities of the trumpet beyond mid-century modern aesthetics. However, as John

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<sup>26</sup> Romero, "Morceaux de Concours pour Trompette et Cornet," 69–70.

<sup>27</sup> Romero, "Morceaux de Concours pour Trompette et Cornet," 95.

<sup>28</sup> John Wallace and Alexander McGrattan, *The Trumpet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 254–255.

<sup>29</sup> Håkan Hardenberger and Roland Pöntinen, *The Virtuoso Trumpet: Music by Arban, Francaix, Tisné, Honegger, Maxwell Davies, Rabe and Hartmann* (BIS, 1985).

Wallace writes, “Conservatories... were slow to grasp change, despite the potential of the proximity of performers to composers in their environment and their subsequent important position in the development of repertoire,” and thus, “the professional cadre idea of ‘what is good’ in trumpet playing and its players lives on.”<sup>30</sup>

Neither the original 1970 version nor the 1990 revision of Mauricio Kagel’s *Morceau de Concours* was composed for exams at the Paris Conservatory. Kagel himself never attended the Paris Conservatory, nor any other conservatory for that matter. The following pages will explore the ways in which Kagel’s compositions continue the legacy of progress embodied by the *morceaux de concours*, particularly during Fauré’s tenure as director, while also using music theater and satirical humor to critically interrogate the concept of the competitive exam and push the boundaries of what can be considered a musical criterion worthy of competition.

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<sup>30</sup> John Wallace and Alexander McGrattan, *The Trumpet*, 264.

## Chapter 4: Primer on music theater and instrumental theater

In the introduction to the 1990 revision of his *Morceau de concours*, Mauricio Kagel refers explicitly to the genre of music theater: “It is possible to perform the score as presenting a music theatre [sic] situation sui generis...”<sup>31</sup> A basic definition of music theater is “a kind of opera and opera production in which spectacle and dramatic impact are emphasized over purely musical factors.”<sup>32</sup> Pioneers of the genre pointed to a few specific works from the early twentieth century that formed the foundations of their experiments. One is *L’histoire du soldat* by Igor Stravinsky, which brought the small chamber orchestra from the pit onto the stage. Massimo Mila attributed this decision to “the intuition of a music theatre where the performance of the music, with its accompanying gestures, is a spectacle in itself...”<sup>33</sup> With the advent of mechanical recording and radio broadcasting, re-emphasizing the visual component of musical performance was an intellectual reaction to a novel, alienating commodification of music. In tandem with this critique was a new examination of unspoken, ossified bourgeois conventions of opera and instrumental music. Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht subverted the conventions of opera in *The Threepenny Opera* by using cheerful music to undercut violent lyrical themes while fragmenting the traditional narrative arc of opera into a “montage.”<sup>34</sup>

Kagel’s music is classified as experimental music theater, “an interdisciplinary practice centered on the exploration of nontraditional relationships between the fields of music and theater.” One of the most famous progenitors of this genre is John Cage, who combined “chance

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<sup>31</sup> Mauricio Kagel, *Morceau de Concours für einen Trompeter* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Clements, “Music Theatre,” *Grove Music Online*, published 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.19452>.

<sup>33</sup> Jack Bornoff, *Music Theatre in a Changing Society: The Influence of the Technical Media* (Paris: Unesco, 1968), 22–23.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Hinton, “Dreigroschenoper, Die (‘The Threepenny Opera’),” *Grove Music Online*, published 2002, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.O006155>.



procedures” with traditionally non-musical sounds from everyday objects, as well as theatrical gestures.<sup>35</sup> By staging elements not allowed on stage in more traditional music, and by emphasizing action and gesture in a setting typically reserved for pure music, the groundwork was laid for “instrumental theater,” a term originally coined by music critic Heinz-Klaus Metzger.<sup>36</sup> Kagel wrote a treatise on the genre of instrumental theater titled “Über das Instrumentale Theater.” Kagel expressed a desire to expand the awareness of both the performer and the spectator:

Until now, the interpretation of a piece of music posed problems for the musician, the solution of which was based essentially on his instrumental virtuosity and on his experience or routine. Thanks to an increased awareness of his power of decision, aroused by increasingly frequent technical and aesthetic comments, the performer is increasingly called upon to identify the multiple meanings that a work can take on in its interpretation with the multiple levels of its deep conception.<sup>37</sup>

When awareness is drawn to the context of the performance itself, it can no longer be taken for granted. Jean-Yves Bosseur writes that after experiencing works of instrumental theater that exaggerate oft-neglected elements of a performance:

...we will no longer be able to be unconscious of this phenomenon, our attention will no longer be focused exclusively on the drama that unfolds before us: of the melody interpreted by an instrumentalist, but on everything that contributes to constituting a ‘performance.’ In a way, Kagel’s work has a strong pedagogical interest: it helps us to penetrate the craft of the concert, the show, the radio broadcast or the film. Instead of suggesting a world of ideas, emotions or expressions, it allows us to participate directly in that of doing, [and] demystifies it by analyzing it.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> David Bithel, “Experimental Music Theater,” *Grove Music Online*, published 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2240884>.

<sup>36</sup> Jean-François Trubert, “Théâtre musical et théâtre instrumental,” in *Théories de la composition musicale au XXe siècle*, ed. Nicolas Donin and Laurent Feneyrou (Lyon: Symétrie, 2014), 1270.

<sup>37</sup> Mauricio Kagel, trans. Antoine Goléa. “Le théâtre instrumental.” *La musique et ses problèmes contemporains 1953–1963* (Paris: Éditions Julliard, 1963), 286. “L’interprétation d’un morceau de musique posait jusqu’alors au musicien des problèmes dont la solution se fondait essentiellement sur la virtuosité instrumentale et sur son expérience ou routine. Grâce à une conscience accrue de son pouvoir de décision, suscitée par des commentaires techniques et esthétiques de plus en plus fréquents, l’interprète est appelé de plus en plus à identifier les sens multiples qu’une œuvre peut revêtir dans son interprétation avec les plans multiples de sa conception profonde.”

<sup>38</sup> Jean-Yves Bosseur, “Dossier Kagel.” *Musique en jeu* 7 (1972), 89. “...nous ne pourrions plus être inconscients de ce phénomène, notre attention ne se portera plus exclusivement sur le drame qui se déroule devant nous, ou la mélodie interprétée par un instrumentiste, mais sur tout ce qui contribue à constituer une «représentation». D’une

One of Kagel's first major works after moving to Europe was his *Sexteto de Cuerdas*, originally scored in 1953 for flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, violin, viola, and cello, but revised in 1957 for two violins, two violas, and two cellos. This work is more serial than theatrical, and the notation is mostly determinate. It contains some elements that would portend his later techniques: for example, some dynamic markings are given as a "limit," and when so marked, Kagel permits the player to "play freely above or below it." In an interview, Kagel also claimed that his use of quarter-tones is not to "enrich the pitch series," but to "make the harmony more chromatic." Paul Attinello argues that these represent some of Kagel's first direct challenges to a particular genre: by introducing indeterminacy and prioritizing harmony over the totality of the series, Kagel is challenging the idea that all aspects of the music can or should be serialized under the command of the composer.<sup>39</sup>

Kagel began to display his religious and literary influences early on, particularly in *Anagrama für vier Gesangsoli, Sprechchor und Kammerensemble* (1958). The text for the vocal parts is derived from an anonymous medieval palindrome, "in girum imus nocte et consumimur igni" (we circle in the night and are consumed by fire).<sup>40</sup> Kagel breaks this text down into phonemes, and includes sections with no specific text assigned. He allows the players to:

speak in one or several languages (aside from German, French, Italian, or Spanish which are written in the score) and in any dialect desired. All forms of speech and tone-colour articulation used by the composer can be used in performing these added texts... It is left

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certain manière, l'œuvre de Kagel a un intérêt fortement pédagogique: elle nous aide à pénétrer dans l'artisanat du concert, du spectacle, de l'émission radiophonique ou du film. Au lieu de nous suggérer un monde d'idées, d'émotions ou d'expressions, elle nous permet de participer directement à celui du faire, le démystifie en l'analysant."

<sup>39</sup> Paul Attinello, "Imploding the System: Kagel and the Deconstruction of Modernism," in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 263–264.

<sup>40</sup> Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 22.

to the imagination of the performer to find other articulation-forms and to apply these to his own invented texts.<sup>41</sup>

Matthias Rebstock compares this textual approach to the “kabbalistic mysticism of letters and numbers,” as well as Borge’s “biblioteca total.” Rebstock includes a quote from Juan Allende-Blin who explains the kabbalistic belief that “the holy Torah was originally created only in a disjointed jumble of letters...” and took form as a sacred text only after the events happened.<sup>42</sup>

Kagel’s first true work of music theater was *Sonant 1960/...* The piece is scored for guitar, harp, double bass, and membranophones. The piece caused a scandal at its 1961 premiere, possibly due to its inaudibility. Some parts of the piece require the instrumentalists to play incredibly complex musical figures “without producing sounds, while getting as close to the strings or drum skins as possible.”<sup>43</sup> The staging of the piece, which requires performers to conduct each other and ostensibly cue each others’ entrances, appears like a rehearsal. It draws attention not just to the often-hidden process of creating a performance, but to the physical gestures of sound emission, since the audibility of the music is not guaranteed.<sup>44</sup>

Inspired by a vivid dream Kagel experienced on two different nights,<sup>45</sup> *Match für drei Spieler* (1964) typifies several themes present in other compositions by Kagel. Parallels to *Morceau de Concours* are immediately evident in the premise of the work: two cellists are engaged in an athletic competition, with a percussionist serving as the referee. The pizzicato

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<sup>41</sup> Mauricio Kagel, *Anagrama für vier Gesangssoli, Sprechchor und Kammerensemble* (London: Universal Edition, 1965), VII.

<sup>42</sup> Rebstock, 38. “...die heilige Tora ursprünglich nur in einem unzusammenstaben der Tora von der ersten Worten der Genesis bis zum Schluß des Deuteronomiums damals noch nicht zu jenen Wortverbindungen kombiniert waren, wie wir sie jetzt dort diese Worte noch nicht vorhanden, denn die Vorgänge in der Schöpfung, von denen sie berichten, waren noch nicht eingetreten.”

<sup>43</sup> Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 36.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Dieter Schnebel, *Mauricio Kagel: Musik Theater Film* (Cologne: Verlag M. Dumont Schauberg, 1970), 152.

notes at the beginning of the piece specifically invoke table tennis.<sup>46</sup> There is little victory to be had in this contest, however, particularly for the percussionist-referee. As the match mutates into a game of chance with the rolling of dice, Kagel invokes the genre of aleatoric music. At this point, the percussionist appears to make mistakes as a referee and sends conflicting signals to the competitors.<sup>47</sup> In this single situation, Kagel incorporates his fascination with onstage failure with a parody of an established genre of music.

He also creates humor by playing on audience expectations. The percussionist-referee uses a few everyday items as instruments, but two are suddenly used for their everyday purpose. At one point, the percussionist shouts “Olé!” while playing the castanets. Near the end of the piece, the second cellist appears to fall asleep or stop paying attention, and the percussionist uses a bell (marked in the introduction as “not an alarm-clock!”) to “wake” the cellist. As Björn Heile writes, “there is the pretence of using the instruments for their abstract musical function only to all the more highlight their semantic associations.”<sup>48</sup>

Kagel’s film *Ludwig van: Ein Bericht* (1970) was commissioned by the Westdeutscher Rundfunk to celebrate Ludwig van Beethoven’s 200th birthday. In it, Kagel simultaneously expresses reverence for Beethoven as part of the Western music canon and irreverence for the authority figures who claim to represent Beethoven’s vision through their interpretations. During a discussion panel within the film, Heinz-Klaus Metzger criticizes conductors like Herbert von Karajan and argues that the mid-twentieth century performance practice of Beethoven’s music is geared toward “uniform, idealized universal digestibility.”<sup>49</sup> The soundtrack consists of Beethoven’s music arranged by Kagel and performed by “a rather ill-balanced ensemble and

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>47</sup> Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 49.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Mauricio Kagel, *Ludwig van: Ein Bericht*, film directed by Mauricio Kagel (Westdeutscher Rundfunk, 1969).

played ‘scratchily’ ...”<sup>50</sup> Kagel himself stated in an interview that he designed these arrangements to reflect how it would have sounded given Beethoven’s hearing impairment, and that even in this state, the music is still beautiful without excessive polish.<sup>51</sup> Kagel’s multiple versions of *Morceau de concours* reflect this duality: in some respects, the pieces criticize the idea of pitting musicians against each other. On the other hand, the revised versions earnestly continue the tradition of creating challenging pieces for performers, which encourage them to expand their technical and expressive abilities.

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<sup>50</sup> Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 102.

<sup>51</sup> Mauricio Kagel and Felix Schmidt, *Tamtam: Monologe und Dialoge zur Musik* (München: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1975), 83.

## Chapter 5: *Morceau de concours* – 1970 version

Edward H. Tarr (1936–2020) is primarily known as a pioneer of historic brass performance and trumpet scholarship. The son of a traveling minister, Tarr lived in thirteen different U.S. states before settling in Europe as an adult. His first trumpet teachers were Don Pratt, who had studied with cornet legend Herbert L. Clarke, and Roger Voisin, principal trumpet of the Boston Symphony. His interest in musicology began during his bachelor's degree when he studied music history with Richard Murphy at Oberlin College. Tarr went on to earn a master's degree in music history at Northwestern University while taking private trumpet lessons with Bud Herseth. He then fulfilled Richard Murphy's wishes for him by obtaining a Rotary scholarship to study with musicologist Leo Schrade at Basel University in 1959. Tarr published a comprehensive book on the history of the trumpet titled *Die Trompete* in 1977, and he submitted it along with a catalogue of cornetti as his final document for his Ph.D. from the University of Hamburg in 1987.<sup>52</sup>

Upon arriving in Europe, Tarr quickly built a career of freelance trumpet playing, both orchestral and historic. Ironically, his cornetto<sup>53</sup> playing with the Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln (WDR) in 1962 soon led to deeper involvement in new music. In 1965, he and other early music specialists were approached by Mauricio Kagel to help with a commission from the WDR.<sup>54</sup> The piece was titled *Musik für Renaissance-Instrumente* and combined the avant-garde with the

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<sup>52</sup> Jeffrey Nussbaum, "An Interview with Edward H. Tarr: A Pioneer in Early Brass Music," *Historic Brass Society Newsletter* 7 (Fall, 1994), 6–7. The catalogue of cornetti in question is titled "Ein Katalog erhaltener Zinken," *Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis: eine Veröffentlichung der Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, Lehr- und Forschungsinstitut für Alte Musik an der Musik-Akademie der Stadt Basel* Band 5 (1981), <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-869194>.

<sup>53</sup> A cornetto is a Renaissance-era instrument, not to be confused with a cornet. It is carved from wood and often wrapped in leather, with finger holes configured similarly to a recorder.

<sup>54</sup> Martina Papiro, "Nicht alle sind Nachtigallen: Wilhelm Bruck und Edward Tarr im Gespräch mit Martina Papiro," in *Der Schall: Mauricio Kagels Instrumentarium* edited by Michael Kunkel and Martina Papiro (Saarbrücken: PFAU, 2009), 197.

nascent early music movement. Kagel worked individually with the musicians to find new sounds and applications for old instruments, and explored the cornetto with Tarr, who said that Kagel “wasn’t at all interested in which fingerings I used for normal scales. He was more interested in exploring the possibilities of unconventional sound production and was interested in the different tones that arise when you sing and play at the same time.”<sup>55</sup>

Tarr’s next collaboration with Kagel would be on *Der Schall* in 1968. Kagel included not just old instruments, but also conventional modern instruments and contrived instruments made of everyday items. Tarr was required to play “fog horn, spaghetti tubing with trumpet mouthpiece, straight Zink [cornetto], trumpet in C, baroque trumpet (clarino), ring-jointed plastic hose, tromba da tirarsi, short hose with plastic funnel, antelope horn, [and] various mutes and mouthpieces.”<sup>56</sup> The musicians were rarely allowed to play naturally in this piece; mutes were frequently required, and sometimes Kagel instructed the players to blow “pathologically,” create sounds that are “asthmatic,” and evoke “chronic stuttering” and “painful delirium.”<sup>57</sup> During this piece, Tarr distilled valuable advice for performing Kagel’s sometimes farcical music: “You have to know that Kagel has this Buster Keaton-like humor and that you have to serve everything very seriously and tone down the sarcastic gestures if you want it to come across musically.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 190. “Dabei interessierte ihn überhaupt nicht, welche Griffe ich für normale Tonleitern verwende. Er wollte eher Möglichkeiten der unkonventionellen Klangerzeugung auskundschaften und interessierte sich etwa für jene Differenzöne, die entstehen, wenn man gleichzeitig singt und spielt.”

<sup>56</sup> Matthias Kassel, *Das Auge hört mit: Mauricio Kagels Instrumententheater von ‘Der Schall’ bis ‘Zwei-Mann-Orchester.’* (Schliengen, Germany: Edition Argus, 2018), 101. “Nebelhorn, Spaghettischlauch mit Trompetenmundstück, gerader Zink, Trompete in C, Barocktrompete (Clarino), ringgegliederter Plastikschlauch, Tromba da Tirarsi, kurzer Schlauch mit Plastiktrichter, 20m Gartenschlauch mit Plastiktrichter, Antilopenhorn, verschiedene Dämpfer und Mundstücke.”

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>58</sup> Papiro, “Nicht alle sind Nachtigallen,” 195. “Man muss schon wissen, dass es bei Kagel diesen Buster-Keaton-artigen Humor gibt und dass man alles sehr ernsthaft servieren muss und äußerliche Gestik zurückzunehmen hat, wenn es musikalisch rüberkommen soll.”

Kagel wrote two pieces dedicated to brass players he worked with in these experiments: *Atem*, dedicated to Vinko Globokar and Tarr, and *Morceau de concours*, written for and premiered by Tarr. Like the original version of *Morceau de concours*, *Atem* features a live instrumental part (played on an unspecified woodwind or brass instrument) along with a taped accompaniment prepared ahead of time by the performer. It represents Kagel's continued experimentation with the denatured sounds of *Der Schall*, and has a distinctly theatrical setting. In the published performance notes, Kagel describes the taped portion as portraying "a retired musician [who] has been going through the same routine for years, namely keeping his instrument in top condition by painstakingly cleaning it... This musician rarely gets around to actually playing."<sup>59</sup> In the score, the performer is instructed to sit in an uncomfortably low chair<sup>60</sup> and at various points "hysterically scream" and use "defective, disturbed tongue rolling."<sup>61</sup> Near the end of the piece, the performer "in slow motion, without stopping blowing, stretch[es] out on the floor" and concludes the performance "apparently dead: with closed eyes and open mouth."<sup>62</sup> These themes of futility, exhaustion, and absurdity are explored further in both the original and revised versions of *Morceau de concours*.

### **Descriptions of unusual instruments**

The *tromba da tirarsi* is a slide trumpet originating in the Renaissance. Several of J.S. Bach's cantatas call for it by that name. The oldest surviving slide trumpet was made in 1651. Unlike a modern trombone, whose body stays stationary while the slide moves, the *tromba da*

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<sup>59</sup> Mauricio Kagel, *Atem* (London: Universal Edition, 1976), 4.

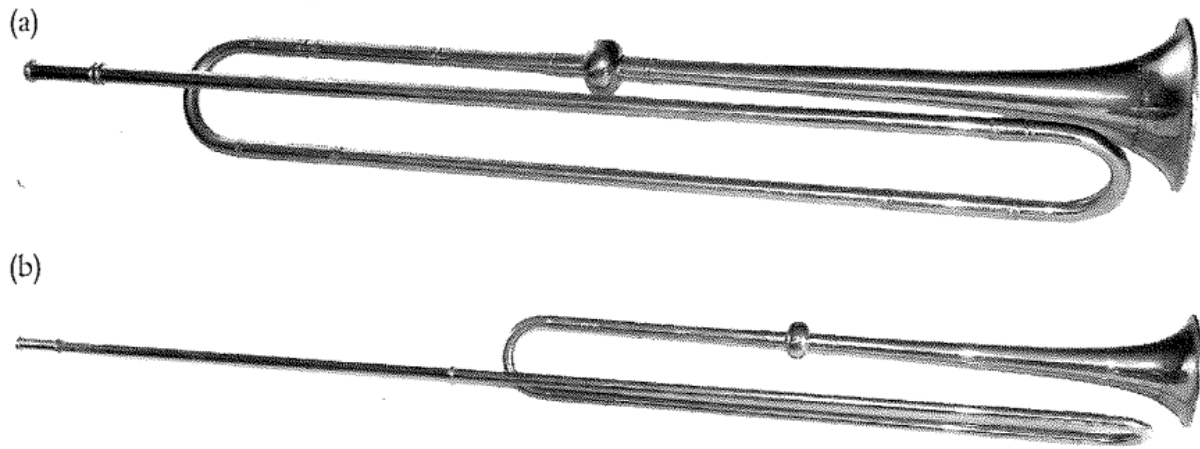
<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 11–12.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.



*tirarsi*'s slide mechanism consists of "the entire body of the instrument moving back and forth along a telescopic mouthpipe."<sup>63</sup>



**Fig. 1. Tromba da tirarsi by Matthew Parker (ca. 2010) in closed (a) and extended (b) positions.<sup>64</sup>**

The term "baroque trumpet" typically refers to a long natural trumpet with vent holes, as used in many early music groups since the second half of the twentieth century. These instruments are usually based on eighteenth-century models whose tubing is nearly twice as long as modern valved trumpets.<sup>65</sup> The first known example of holes being drilled into a natural trumpet is William Shaw's "harmonic trumpet" from 1787. There is also an instrument from 1790 by G. Haltenhof which Helmut Kirchmeyer used in a 1961 performance. It has one hole drilled roughly halfway through the length of tubing.<sup>66</sup> Otto Steinkopf and Helmut Finke seized on this concept and created a new system with three vent holes to make the close partials of the natural trumpet more in-tune and easily navigable. This system required additional coils rather than the more common eighteenth-century design of a single loop of tubing, though Edward Tarr

<sup>63</sup> John Wallace and Alexander McGrattan, *The Trumpet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 38.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>65</sup> Edward Tarr, trans. S.E. Plank and Edward Tarr, *The Trumpet* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1988), 7–8.

<sup>66</sup> Sabine Klaus, *Trumpets and Other High Brass, Volume 1: Instruments of the Single Harmonic Series* (Vermillion, SD: The National Music Museum, 2012), 250–251.

and Michael Laird collaborated to create a more historical design for the three-hole system. Laird later developed the four-hole system, which allowed for the tubing to loop only once like eighteenth-century examples.<sup>67</sup>



**Fig. 2. National Music Museum eMuseum. “Vented baroque trumpet, D, C.”<sup>68</sup>**

“Zink” is the German term for an instrument that English-speakers typically call “cornett” or “cornetto,” the latter of which is the instrument’s Italian name. The first description

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<sup>67</sup> Wallace and McGrattan, *The Trumpet*, 239.

<sup>68</sup> National Music Museum eMuseum, “Vented baroque trumpet, D,C,” Tarr Model by Meinl & Lauber, 1970. <https://emuseum.nmmusd.org/objects/10428/vented-baroque-trumpet-d-c>.

of a “Zink” dates from 1511 in a musical instrument treatise by Sebastian Virdung.<sup>69</sup> These instruments were originally carved from ivory, but later examples are made of wood wrapped in leather. Unlike the natural trumpet, the cornetto had finger holes from the beginning, configured like a recorder with seven holes total including a thumb hole. Unlike valved trumpets, the cornetto changes pitch by shortening the instrument; the instrument plays lowest when all the holes are covered, and higher as holes are opened.<sup>70</sup> The mouthpiece is incredibly small, and players often place it to the right or left of the center of the lips.<sup>71</sup>

The cornetto was most commonly used in Italy, especially Venice, between the mid-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. At times cornettists played in unison with the soprano voice in choral music, played the highest voice in trombone ensemble works, and at times they played in lieu of violin in chamber works. Most cornettos had a curved shape, but a few were straight. Some of the straight cornetti had an integrated mouthpiece and were referred to as “mute cornetti.”<sup>72</sup> Cornetto was also a solo instrument, with two sonatas composed by Pietro Baldassare. Some later uses of the cornetto include cantatas by J.S. Bach and Georg Philipp Telemann.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Sabine Klaus, *Trumpets and Other High Brass*, Vol 2. *Ways to Expand the Harmonic Series* (Vermillion, SD: The National Music Museum, 2013), 58. The treatise Klaus cites is Sebastian Virdung, *Musica getuscht*, Basel, 1511; facsimile reprint, edited by Klaus Wolfgang Niemöller, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1970.

<sup>70</sup> Klaus, *Trumpets and Other High Brass*, Vol 2, 53.

<sup>71</sup> Wallace and McGrattan, *The Trumpet*, 84.

<sup>72</sup> Anthony C. Baines, rev. Bruce Dickey, “Cornett,” *Grove Music Online*, published January 20, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.06516>.

<sup>73</sup> Klaus, *Trumpets and Other High Brass*, Volume 2, 91.



**Fig. 3 & 4. “Straight cornetto”<sup>74</sup> and “Curved cornetto.”<sup>75</sup> National Music Museum eMuseum.**

While the B-flat piccolo trumpet (with additional mouthpipe in A) is now standard equipment for professional orchestral musicians and college trumpet students, when Kagel composed the original version of *Morceau de concours*, it was a relatively new invention. The first example of a short brass instrument in high B-flat was Adolphe Sax’s piccolo saxhorn, a conical-bore instrument that Hector Berlioz used in his “Marche pour la Présentation des Drapeaux,” which was played at the 1855 premiere of his *Te Deum*. Various high trumpets were

<sup>74</sup> National Music Museum eMuseum, “Straight cornetto,” by John R. McCann, 2004. <https://emuseum.nmmusd.org/objects/14589/straight-cornetto>.

<sup>75</sup> National Music Museum eMuseum, “Curved cornetto,” by John R. McCann, 1998. <https://emuseum.nmmusd.org/objects/9790/curved-cornetto>.

designed in the keys of D, F, and G for the performance of baroque music during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but a small, cylindrical-bore trumpet in B-flat would not surface until 1905 when Mahillon manufactured one on behalf of Alphonse Goeyens. B-flat piccolo trumpet did not become a common choice for baroque music until Adolf Scherbaum used it to play Bach and Handel in the early 1950s.<sup>76</sup> Maurice André cemented the popularity of modern piccolo trumpet as the instrument of choice for mainstream baroque performance through his pioneering recordings of baroque oboe, violin, and flute transcriptions as well as trumpet repertoire in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>77</sup>

### **The relationship between recorded and performed parts**

In the liner notes for the LP recording of the original version of *Morceau de concours*, Kagel explains that in order to perform the piece, “one of the two parts is recorded on tape beforehand and at the live performance the second part is played back synchronously by loudspeakers.”<sup>78</sup> On the manuscript, arrows indicate which part is played live.

Kagel’s markings in red indicate that when Tarr performed the piece live on February 22, 1972, he suggested omitting the first 7’10” of material. The top part was to be played live from the 7’10” to 9’50”, then the bottom part from 9’50” to 14’10”. From 14’10” to the end, the top part was performed live. There are cuts marked from 12’25” to 12’45”, 15’05” to 15’10”, and 16’30” to 17’00”.<sup>79</sup>

Tarr would have had on stage his Zink, tromba da tirarsi, piccolo trumpet in B-flat, modern C trumpet, cup mute, harmon mute, and plunger mute.<sup>80</sup> In the part recorded for

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<sup>76</sup> Wallace and McGrattan, *The Trumpet*, 228–229.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>78</sup> Mauricio Kagel, *Atem, Morceau de Concours*, recorded by Edward H. Tarr (EMI Electrola, 1972).

<sup>79</sup> Mauricio Kagel, *Morceau de concours (1968–70) für einen trompeter* (Mauricio Kagel Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel), p. 1.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

playback in live performance, Tarr used modern C trumpet, baroque trumpet, B-flat piccolo trumpet, straight mute, cup mute, harmon mute, and plunger mute. Judging from the LP recording, Tarr used a baroque trumpet in the key of modern C. The LP liner notes also credit Edward H. Tarr for nafir, kindertrompete, and muschelhorn, but these are not indicated in the manuscript.<sup>81</sup> In general, the bottom part is more static and slower to change, while the top part cycles more quickly through different techniques and gestures.

The manuscript is notated without time signature or barlines. In each line of the music, minutes and seconds are marked above a two-staff system. Note lengths correspond to the length of the horizontal line attached to the note head, so durations are measured in seconds rather than beats. Kagel specifies vibrato, intervallic oscillations, and erratic wavering with squiggles, zigzags, and irregular undulations. There is only one instance of conventional rhythmic notation near the end of the piece, which is a stereotypical trumpet fanfare beamed in an unspecified compound meter.

For figures which require more moving notes, sometimes Kagel depicts them as short, contoured lines extending up or down. Some noises are given an approximate pitch by their relative vertical position on the staff, such as “Küssen” (kissing) (8’05”), “Paffen” (puffing) (8’35”), and “Fingerspitzen” (fingertips, i.e, tapping percussively on cornetto finger holes) (9’25”). Extended techniques such as flutter-tonguing and trills are notated conventionally. When multiphonics—in this piece produced by humming one pitch while playing another on the trumpet—are required, the vocal and trumpet pitches are given exactly. The onomatopoeic imitation of a locomotive is notated graphically, with a drawing of a train engine above the staff and a series of x’s and s’s to demonstrate the rhythmic acceleration of the huffing and puffing.

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<sup>81</sup> Mauricio Kagel, *Atem, Morceau de Concours*, recorded by Edward H. Tarr (EMI Electrola, 1972).

Depictions of animal sounds are notated by listing the animal in question above the staff, and depicting the contour of the sound with a squiggly line in the staff. Certain modifications to the sound, such as changing the speeds of the trills, are shown through simple written instructions (langsam-schnell-langsam-schnell, etc.).

At 6'17", the top line includes an instruction "b-" to refer to a technique first utilized in *Der Schall*, which Tarr explained in an interview:

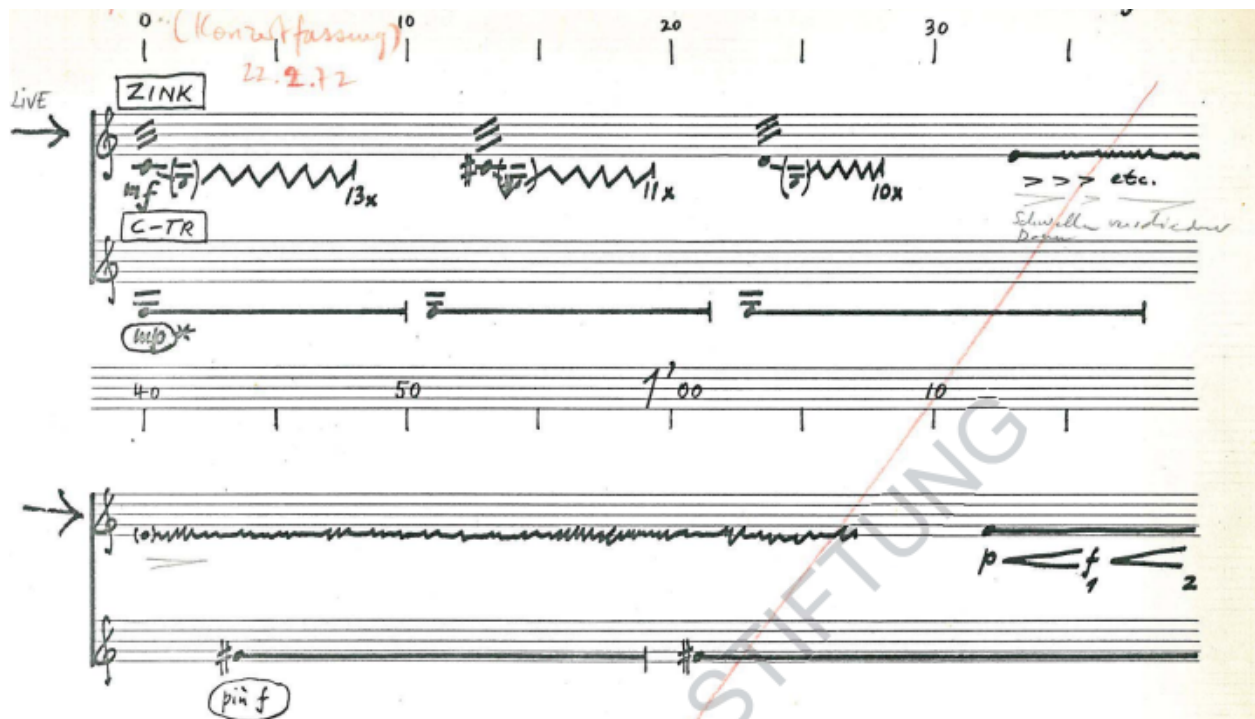
For example, I would never have thought of producing those high "falsetto" tones. These are very unstable, not blown but puffed harmonics with a "b" embouchure of the lips (for example in *Der Schall* from 15'). Once, precisely because of such falsetto tones, I ruined my embouchure for several days and was therefore unable to hit a single ringing d' at a performance of the Christmas Oratorio after the Kagel performance! (Thank God I had a fantastic colleague on the second part who saved me).<sup>82</sup>

### **How the original version utilizes instrumental theater**

The piece begins with the bottom part holding steady notes while the top part oscillates between notes either a fourth or fifth apart. For a period of about two minutes, both parts hold long tones with varying degrees of vibrato, dynamic fluctuations, and flutter tongue. Articulation is not introduced until about 2'25" into the piece when the top part (Zink) is instructed to articulate the syllables "tike" (pronounced in English as "tee-keh"). For the next several minutes, Kagel makes various adjustments while exploring "tension and relaxation of the combinations of intervals," sometimes in similar registers and sometimes in distant registers.

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<sup>82</sup> Papiro, "Nicht alle sind Nachtigallen," 190. "Ich wäre zum Beispiel nie darauf gekommen, diese hohen „Fisteltöne" zu erzeugen. Das sind sehr instabile, nicht geblasene, sondern gepustete Flageolett-Töne mit einem „b"-Ansatz der Lippen [zum Beispiel in *Der Schall* ab 15']. Einmal damals, gerade wegen solcher Fisteltöne, machte ich meinen Ansatz für mehrere Tage kaputt und konnte deswegen bei einer Aufführung des Weinachtsoratoriums einen Tag nach der Kagel-Aufführung kein einziges klingendes d<sup>3</sup> treffen! (Gott sei Dank hatte ich einen fantastischen Mitspieler in der zweiten Stimme, der mich rettete)."



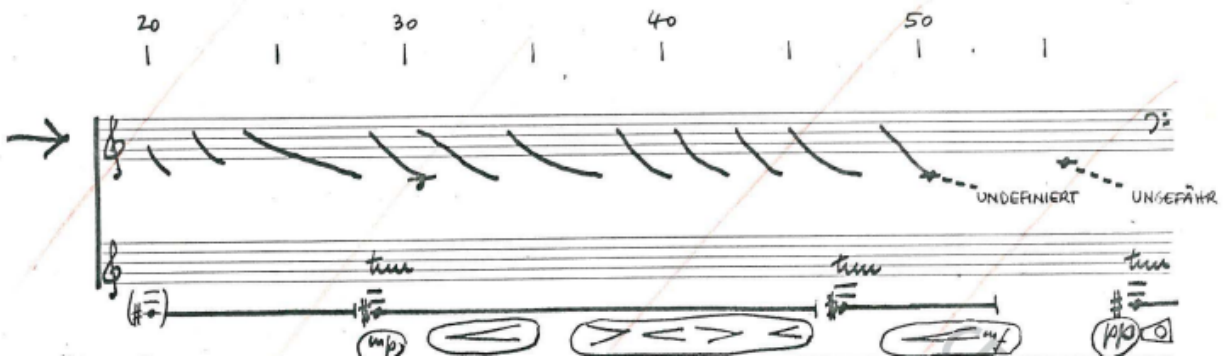
**Fig. 5. *Morceau de concours* (1968-70) für einen Trompeter. Photocopy of handwritten manuscript. Mauricio Kagel Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, page 1.**

He indicates straight mute in the bottom part at 2'52". In the top part, Kagel writes "Fingersatztremolo" (fingered tremolo) at 3'47" and gives a specific Zink (cornetto) fingering. He continues this technique for about 40 seconds before adding flutter tongue. From the first section of the piece, Kagel establishes that this "exam piece" will not be adjudicated on skills cultivated by conservative musical environments; the sonic environment is decidedly alien and static.

At 5'00", the top part introduces the first quickly moving notes in the form of chromatic scales, indicated by the instruction "chrom. Tonleitern," with several curved lines first extending upward, then turning downward after about 10 seconds. The first verbal utterance occurs at the bottom of one of these scales: "ua" at 5'12". The inclusion of unintelligible verbal content adds to the bizarre atmosphere of the staged "contest" or "examination" performance. After a while, the player of the top line seems to give up on the chromatic scales, muttering "undefiniert"



(undefined) as one trails off, and then abandoning one almost before it starts saying “ungefähr” (approximately). In the score, each of these words appears at the end of a dotted line trailing from the bottom note. They look like playing instructions, but on the LP recording, they are spoken by the performer. For the first time in the piece, Kagel addresses the theme of exhaustion and failure, but only partially. The player has not given up completely; only on the pretense of accuracy and completion.



**Fig. 6. *Morceau de concours (1968-70) für einen Trompeter*. Photocopy of handwritten manuscript. Mauricio Kagel Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, page 3.**

As the bottom part continues with long tones, sometimes trilled and sometimes muted, the top part becomes more and more unhinged, continuing with the unstable “falsetto tones,” a bout of laughter (7’30”), and a peculiar sound made by singing into the Zink, alternating between a high and low voice, and percussively closing and opening the finger holes.<sup>83</sup> The top part becomes onomatopoeic at around 8’00” with a series of kisses (Küssen) followed by the puffing of a train (Paffen (Zug)) . This charade evolves into the sound of a dog snorting and barking at around 9’00”, at which point the player trails off and utters “Ich kann nicht mehr” (“I cannot anymore”). Kagel has invoked the performer’s exhaustion once again, but nevertheless, the barking and squealing continue until the section ends with the percussive striking of the finger

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

holes.<sup>84</sup> Unusual as this section is, for the first time there is a sort of dramatic arc as the top part becomes deranged, and ultimately ends with the onstage performer abandoning the idea of playing the instrument conventionally, let alone putting any breath through it whatsoever.



**Fig. 7. *Morceau de concours* (1968-70) für einen Trompeter. Photocopy of handwritten manuscript. Mauricio Kagel Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, page 4.**

In the manuscript, there is a banjo drawn at 9'52" and a banjo chord is audible in the LP recording. It is notated above the first line, just below the timeline of minutes and seconds. Tarr is not credited with banjo in the liner notes, so this sound might have been dubbed from an external source onto the tape. The next section features the first instrument change in the top part: from Zink to baroque trumpet with plunger mute. This time, the top part maintains long steady pitches, but oscillating between closing the plunger over the bell (notated with +) and opening it (notated with ○). The bottom part is notated with a drawing of a train engine, and the

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

x's and s's notate the huffing and puffing of a locomotive engine's acceleration. There is also a tunnel drawn above the bottom part at 10:30, at which point the sound gets quieter in the LP recording. After almost two minutes of train noises, the bottom part deteriorates into "sporadische" (sporadic) noise as well as "Sprache" (speech), which in the LP recording is manifested as groans and gurgling noises emanating from the tromba da tirarsi. The disconcerting nature of this section recalls the juxtaposition of the whimsical and the grotesque in his "Repertoire aus *Staatstheater*," (1967–1970) going so far as to negate the "exam piece" just as *Staatstheater* served as the "negation of opera."<sup>85</sup>

The next section contains an absurd sort of counterpoint. As the top part plays a series of high notes with abrupt falls, each starting lower than the last, the bottom part plays upward glissandi from low notes, each one higher than the last. The top part once again ascends to an E6 before descending into low multiphonics, emulating the mooing and guttural noises of the "Kühe" (cows). The range required to play this section constitutes the most virtuosic element of the piece so far, but Kagel stages it as a sort of parody, where the coveted "high notes" completely lack the climactic energy and heroism often associated with them. In what might be the most absurd episode of the piece, the top part continues emulating cows, roosters, and insects while the bottom part whispers incoherently into the tromba da tirarsi before singing B-flat and playing E as the top part trails off with a sound described as "metallisch" (metallic).

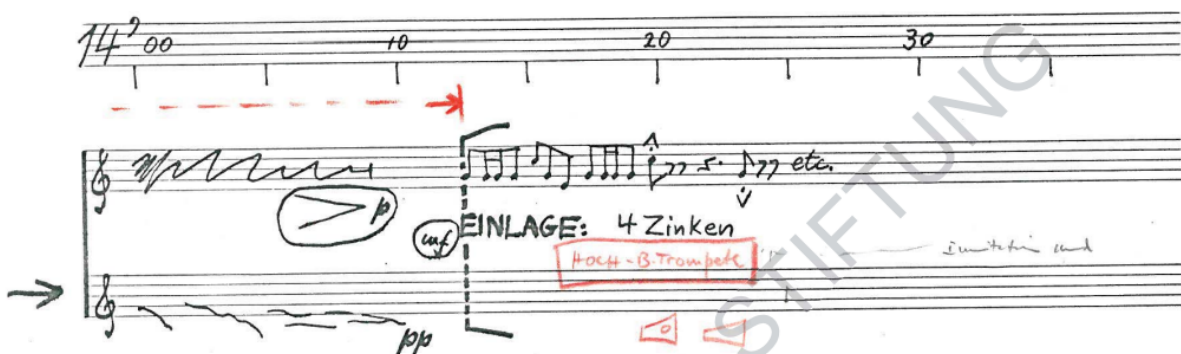
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<sup>85</sup> Paul Atinello, "Mauricio Kagel," Grove Music Online, published 2001, <https://doi-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.14594>.



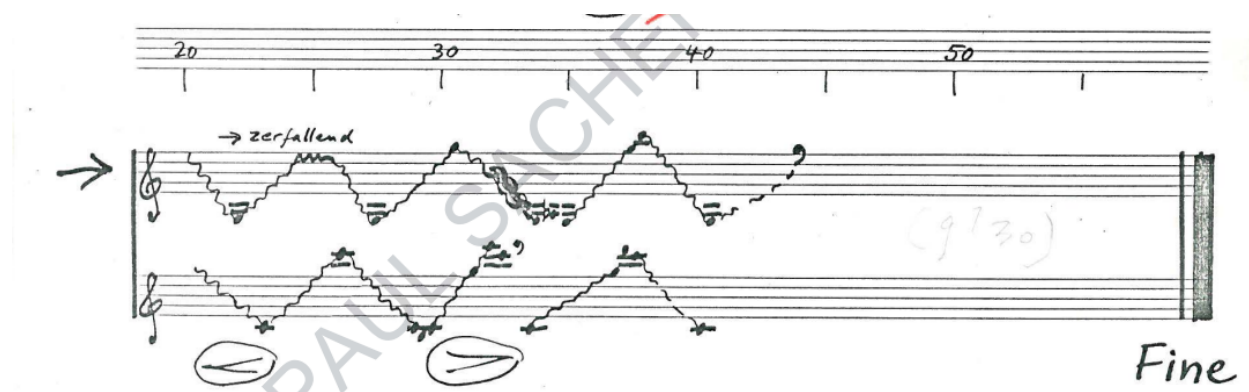
**Fig. 8. Morceau de concours (1968-70) für einen Trompeter. Photocopy of handwritten manuscript. Mauricio Kagel Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, page 5.**

The parodic heroism of the trumpet returns at 14'12", when Kagel introduces the first musical figure with clearly defined rhythms and pitches in the form of a fanfare in the top part. Curiously, it is marked for "4 Zinken" (4 cornettos), but Kagel annotated a revision to high B-flat trumpet for live performance (in red). The bottom part is empty, but a pencil marking seems to indicate "imitation," and the bottom part in the LP recording does imitate the top part.



**Fig. 9. Morceau de concours (1968-70) für einen Trompeter. Photocopy of handwritten manuscript. Mauricio Kagel Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, page 6.**

The penultimate section of the piece is scored for two high B-flat trumpets with plunger mute, but a manuscript marking indicates a change to modern C trumpet in the top line for the concert version. This section is reminiscent of the beginning with its exploration of sustained intervals and mild timbral oscillations from the opening and closing of the plungers. The final section of the piece contains more chromatic scales ascending and descending a span of two octaves (G3–G5 in the top line and C4–C6 in the top line). Both parts are marked “zerfallend” (deteriorating), and in the LP recording, the sound progressively becomes strangled and half-valved as the piece wimpers to a close, the final and culminating “failure” presaged by the previous words of exhaustion.



**Fig. 10. *Morceau de concours* (1968-70) für einen Trompeter. Photocopy of handwritten manuscript. Mauricio Kagel Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, page 7.**

Very few aspects of the original version resemble an actual French exam piece. As a competition piece, it is so bizarre, it is as if it emerged from an alternate universe in Jorge Luis Borge’s “biblioteca total.” The predicament of the competitor who cannot claim victory recalls Franz Kafka. The utter irreverence to the institution of the *concours* reflects the spirit of Witold Gombrowicz. As Matthias Rebstock says of Kagel’s works:

Kagel's theater and films are full of surreal plots and images. The speculative-fantastic nature of Borges probably influenced Kagel just as much as the surrealist metaphors of Lorca or the absurd situations into which Kafka's characters find themselves through no fault of their own but inescapably.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Rebstock, *Komposition*, 39. "Kagels Theater und seine Filme sind voller surrealer Handlungen und Bilder. Dabei dürfte das Spekativ-Fantastische von Borges Kagel ebenso geprägt haben wie die surrealistische Metaphorik von Lorca oder die absurden Situationen, in die die Figuren Kafkas unverschuldet aber unentrinnbar geraten."

## Chapter 6: *Morceau de concours* – 1990 solo revision

In the twenty years between the original version of *Morceau de concours* and its revision, Kagel's compositional style evolved considerably. He wrote one small piece for solo trumpet in the interim: *Old/New* in 1986, later recorded by Håkan Hardenberger.<sup>87</sup> The “denatured” sounds and verbal outbursts of the original *Morceau de concours* are absent in this work. Björn Heile writes that the work

is a study not only for the performer – although it is attractive as such – but also, it seems, for the composer, for it explores in almost exemplary fashion how a short melodic line can be developed through a relatively simple, progressive permutation of an opening phrase, which is arranged in a call-and-response pattern.<sup>88</sup>

Kagel's relationship with musical traditions, while still steeped in parody, became less caustically satirical. His *Third String Quartet in Four Movements* (1987) contains a variety of unusual sounds, but aligns more with pure composition than his previous works of music theater did. Heile uses this piece to contrast Kagel's old and new styles, writing that, “While the earlier pieces seem to violently negate the genre... the later composition appears to celebrate this tradition by attempting to live up to it.”<sup>89</sup>

In the revised version of *Morceau de concours*, all rhythms are notated traditionally with barlines and time signatures. Pitch is notated precisely, except on falls and glissandi. Unlike in the original version, all spoken words are notated with a precise rhythm, and even articulations are given such as accent and tenuto marks.

### Extended techniques

Kagel gives specific physical instructions for some techniques. Many passages are marked “Echo,” which is to be achieved by “muffl[ing] the bell strongly with your bare hand.

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<sup>87</sup> Håkan Hardenberger, *The Art of the Trumpet* (Decca, 2007).

<sup>88</sup> Björn Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 148.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

(The resulting sound may be slightly out of tune.)”<sup>90</sup> Sometimes this technique is required concurrent with other instructions such as hand vibrato, “Lautstärkevibrato,” or no vibrato.

“Lautstärkevibrato” is described in the score as “fast dynamic vibrato on the same note.” This term is marked at 16’30” in the original version of the piece, but without instruction except “gelegentlich” (occasionally). At m. 209, Kagel gives an additional visual reminder for the term with hairpins and a forte dynamic marking, indicating that despite the volume fluctuations, the note should remain loud.



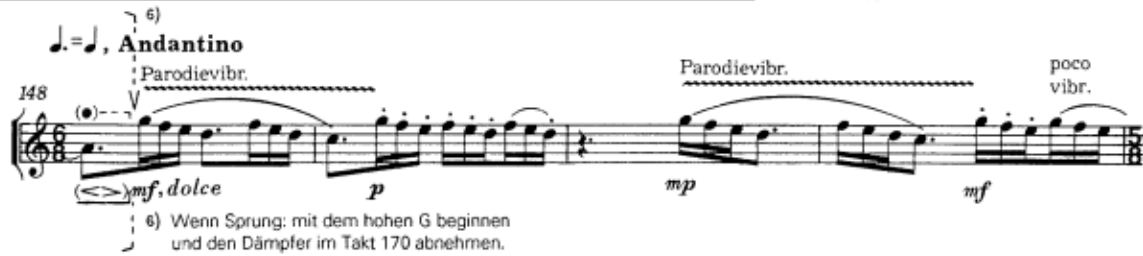
**Fig. 11. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für einen Trompeter*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 8–13.**

A unique marking in this piece is “Parodievibrato,” which Kagel defines as “exaggerated lip vibrato, at the same time wide finger vibration on the valve.”<sup>91</sup> He does not specify the speed of the vibrato. Sometimes the Parodievibrato must gradually give way to a straight tone or “ordinary” vibrato. It occurs at a variety of dynamics and is sometimes accompanied by a style marking, such as “tranquillo,” “cantabile,” or “dolce.”

<sup>90</sup> Mauricio Kagel, *Morceau de concours für einen Trompeter* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990), p. 2. “Echo: Schallstück mit bloßer Hand stark abdämpfen. (Der resultierende Ton darf leicht verstimmt sein.)”

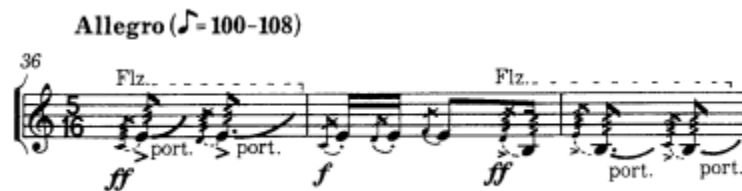
<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, “Parodievibrato: übertriebenes Lippenvibrato, zugleich breite Fingerbebung auf dem Ventil.”





**Fig. 12. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für einen Trompeter*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 148–151.**

Flutter-tonguing is notated with the typical marking “Flz.” as well as tremolo hashes on the stems of the affected notes. At times one is instructed to glissando simultaneously, either as part of a long, slow portamento vibrato, an abrupt upward rip, or a fall. In one instance, the player must immediately transition from flutter tongue to Parodievibrato without flutter tongue.



**Fig. 13. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für einen Trompeter*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 36–38.**

Multiphonics are introduced at the very end of the piece with the instruction “humming and blowing (as before: 2 different tones).” While the played note is specified, the sung note is not. The intent of these multiphonics is to denature the sound rather than to create a chord or resultant tone.



**Fig. 14. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für einen Trompeter*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 228–231.**

### Music theater in the revised solo version

In the introduction to the revised version, Kagel gives recommendations for creating a music theater presentation:

It is possible to perform the score as presenting a music theatre situation *sui generis*, if the interpreter wears a uniform. This costume could be tailored according to historical models from the 17th, 18th, or 19th century, or contemporary designs. Imaginary, invented costumes might well be effective here. In any case, the **1st trumpeter should play from memory, and the 2nd player, in the 2nd version, should remain invisible.**

On the stage: a pole, about 6 metres high, or a tightly stretched rope or cable. No sooner than bar 50, a **white flag** (either huge or tiny) becomes visible; it is raised extremely slowly, with unaccountable interruptions – as if a pulley-wheel were getting stuck. Once it has got to the top, a low-powered fan or a thin thread are used to make it flutter. From bar 229 the flag is lowered, and it disappears by bar 264 at the latest.<sup>92</sup>

By suggesting a uniform, Kagel invokes the history of trumpet as a military instrument. Simultaneously, he subverts this by suggesting the white flag of surrender. The incongruous size of the flag and the “unaccountable interruptions” as it is raised give a surreal twist to the situation. It also foreshadows the theme of failure: even the quick symbolic surrender of the performer contains a failure in its execution.

### Allusions to the examination piece, or contest piece

A recurring trope in the literature of French contest pieces is the juxtaposition of the trumpet’s characteristically confident fanfares with its capacity for lyricism. *Andante et Allegro* by J. Guy Ropartz (the Paris Conservatory exam piece in 1903) is premised entirely on this concept. Other pieces which feature this juxtaposition include the 1919 cornet exam piece *Petite*

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<sup>92</sup> Mauricio Kagel, *Morceau de concours für 1 oder 2 Trompeten (1970–1972)* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990). Bold text is as it appears in the edition.

*pièce concertante* by Guillaume Balay and the 1907 cornet exam piece *Morceau de Concert* by Jules Pennequin.<sup>93</sup>



**Fig. 15.** Pennequin, Jules, ed. David Hickman and Miriam Hickman. *Morceau de concert*. Hickman Music Editions, 2018, mm. 19–36.

Kagel takes this contrast to the extreme in the introduction of the piece. Beginning with loud scalar flourishes punctuated by flutter-tonguing and wide vibrato, a sentimental “dolcissimo” melody follows in m. 14. This alternation recurs multiple times throughout the piece.

Theatrically, this creates the impression of either a contestant desperate to demonstrate this contrast to the jury, or a jury demanding the most inconspicuous display of these qualities.

<sup>93</sup> Frank Edward Romero, *Morceaux de Concours pour Trompette et Cornet, Contest Pieces of the Paris Conservatory 1835–1999* (DMA diss., University of Oklahoma, 2001) contains two comprehensive lists of *morceaux de concours* by year: the trumpet pieces are listed on pages 107–128 and cornet pieces are listed on pages 129–148.



Fig. 16. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für einen Trompeter*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 11–17.

One of Kagel’s extended techniques heightens another contest piece trope: the call and echo. The sections marked “echo” sometimes follow loud fanfares. They often immediately repeat or paraphrase melodic segments. This particularly recalls the trumpet works of Eugène Bozza, whose *Caprice* and *Rustiques* (the trumpet exam pieces in 1943 and 1955, respectively)<sup>94</sup> use this trope extensively, but without the aid of the hand over the bell to muffle the echo.

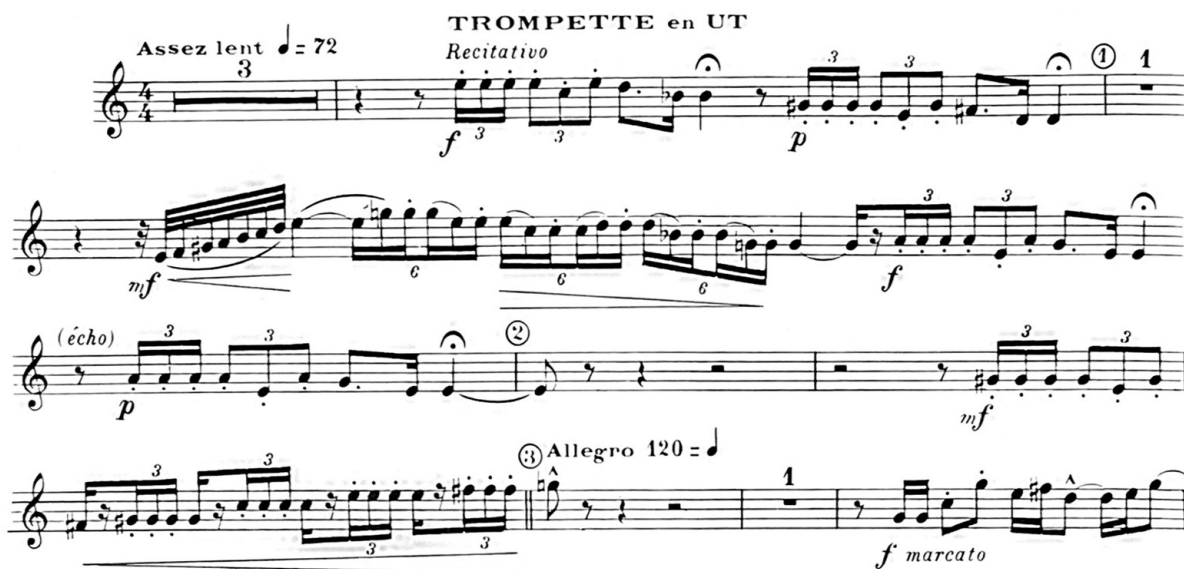


Fig. 17. Bozza, Eugène. *Caprice pour Trompette en Ut ou en Sib et piano*. Alphonse Leduc, 1943, mm. 1–13.



Fig. 18. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für einen Trompeter*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 18–20.

Many *morceaux de concours* feature sections that challenge the trumpeter's tonguing abilities. The 1906 exam piece, Georges Enescu's *Légende*, features extensive triple tonguing sections, as does André Jolivet's *Concertino* (the 1948 exam piece). Marcel Bitsch challenged the trumpeter's ability to change quickly between slurring and tonguing in *Quatre Variations sur un Thème de Domenico Scarlatti* (the 1950 exam piece).

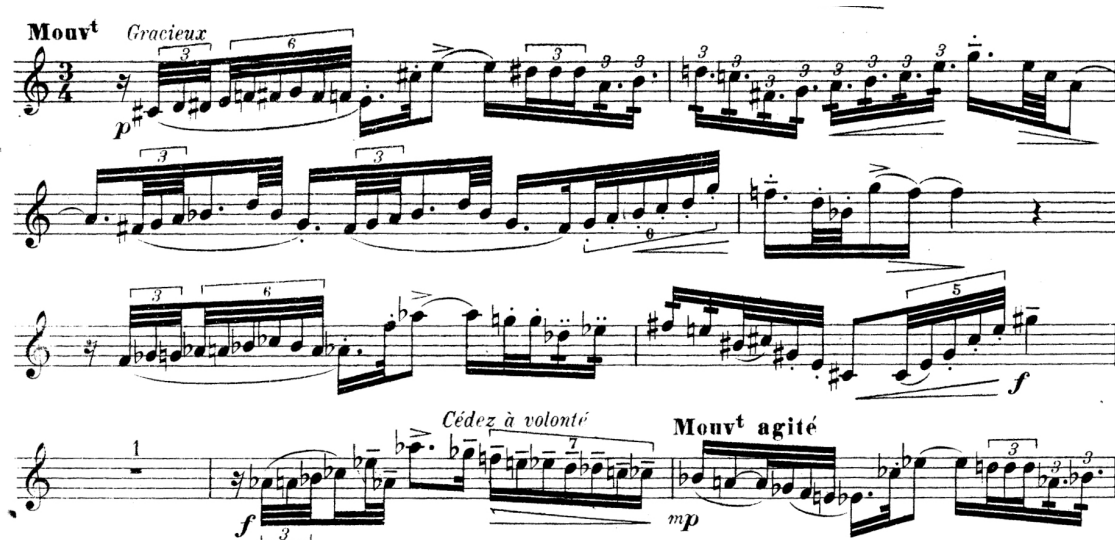


Fig. 19. Enescu, Georges. *Légende*. Paris: Enoch, 1906, mm. 20–28.

Kagel challenges the player's articulation with passages that erratically switch between triple and single tonguing (mm. 123–129) and follow complex patterns of tonguing and slurring through asymmetrical beat subdivisions (mm. 82–99).

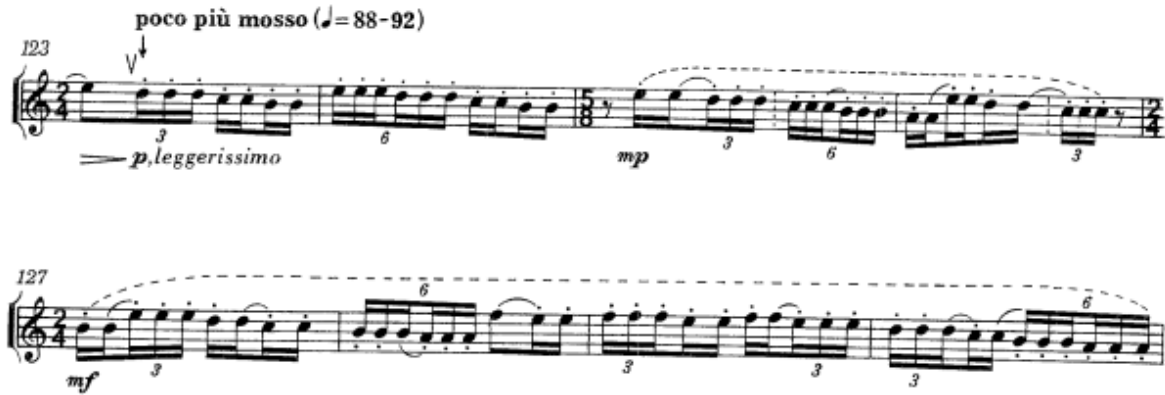


Fig. 20. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für einen Trompeter*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 123–130.



Fig. 21. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für einen Trompeter*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 82–84.

By establishing an air of familiarity, Kagel immediately sets this work apart from the original version as a continuation of the tradition rather than a negation of it. As in other exam pieces, it is designed so that earnest practice yields improvement of technique. This aspect of the revised version embodies one of Kagel’s aspirations as a composer: “The best praise I can hear from a performer is: it always gets better because the practice bears fruit.”<sup>95</sup>

### Allusions to other genres

One program note from IRCAM (Institut de recherche et coordination acoustique/musique) asserts that “references to more than one ‘trumpet’ cliché (españolade, jazz, fanfare, flag-raising, allusions to Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and *Agon*), mixed with

<sup>95</sup> Klüppelholz, ed., *Kagel: Dialoge, Monologe*, 108. “Das schönste Lob, das ich von einem Ausführenden hören kann, ist: Es geht immer besser, weil das Üben Früchte trägt.”

contemporary playing techniques, reflect an almost encyclopedic attitude.”<sup>96</sup> The piece’s opening flourish recalls Spanish bullfighting songs, such as *La Virgen de la Macarena*, or even film music inspired by such music (e.g., the main theme from Ennio Morricone’s *Fistful of Dollars*).



**Fig. 22.** Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für einen Trompeter*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 1–7.

### Allusions to historic instruments and animals

The first audible words of the piece are spoken at m. 171 when the performer calls out, “Oh, la trompette! La trompett’ à couliss’!” Invoking the slide trumpet, this measure refers directly to the original version, which included *tromba da tirarsi*. The two measures that follow have two downward glissandi from E4, which can be easily accomplished by extension of the third valve slide. Including such a passage establishes continuity between the two versions; but whereas the original version posed the inclusion of an actual slide trumpet as part of the exam, the revised version challenges the player to effectively imitate one as part of the test.

<sup>96</sup> Institut de recherche et coordination acoustique/musique, “Morceau de concours (1967–1971) pour une ou deux trompettes par Mauricio Kagel (1931–2008),” [https://brahms.ircam.fr/fr/work/morceau-de-concours#program\\_note](https://brahms.ircam.fr/fr/work/morceau-de-concours#program_note). “...références à plus d’un cliché «trompettistique» (espagnolade, jazz, fanfare, lever de drapeau, allusions au Stravinsky de *Pétrouchka* et d’*Agon*), mêlés à des techniques de jeu contemporaines, relèvent d’une attitude quasi encyclopédique.”

At m. 177, the performer half-whispers<sup>97</sup> “Trompe. Trompette marine.” The “trompette marine,” more commonly referred to as “tromba marina” or “trumpet marine,” is not a trumpet at all, but rather a string instrument. With only one or two strings, melodies were played using natural harmonics,<sup>98</sup> much like a natural trumpet. The origin of the name is unclear; there is no evidence that it was used by sailors, or that it has anything to do with the name “Mary” or “Marin” (the name of a 15th-century trumpeter).<sup>99</sup> Another name for the instrument is “nun’s fiddle,” which reflects its use in convents. Women were often prohibited from playing the trumpet even into the eighteenth century, so the tromba marina may have served as a substitute.<sup>100</sup> There were masters of the instrument, and some composers wrote solo pieces for it, but its sound was controversial. One critic described it as “a triton’s conch, capable of frightening asses.”<sup>101</sup> While the original version of *Morceau de concours* represented a vast expansion of the instruments included in an exam piece, the revision even references versions played with a bow.

The two following measures consist of alternating between G5 and F5; it does not indicate any particular harmonic series or resemble music for the tromba marina. However, the measures that follow do resemble the sound of a “trompe,” which may be translated as an elephant’s trunk. The smeared, falling high notes played “uncleanly (half valve)”<sup>102</sup> certainly evoke an elephant trumpeting. The word “trompe” was included not as a stutter or stammer; it is

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<sup>97</sup> Original German: “1/2 geflüstert”

<sup>98</sup> National Music Museum, “Tromba marina,” *National Music Museum eMuseum*, <https://emuseum.nmmusd.org/objects/15461/tromba-marina?ctx=ebac6f79a14b41b212331db51948b9ab1fb1cf3d&idx=0>, accessed March 4, 2025.

<sup>99</sup> Cecil Adkins, “Trumpet marine,” *Grove Music Online*, published 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.28494>, accessed March 4, 2025.

<sup>100</sup> National Music Museum, “Tromba marina,” *National Music Museum eMuseum*.

<sup>101</sup> Adkins, “Trumpet marine.”

<sup>102</sup> Original German: “unsauber (schleifend) spielen (1/2 ventil)”



likely the introduction of the lone animal imitation in the revised version of the work. The “trompette marine” was only a red herring.

**Fig. 23. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für einen Trompeter*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 176–189.**

After multiple physically taxing sections culminating in a flamboyant flourish with three D6's, Kagel orchestrates the sound of a trumpet player tiring beyond the point of continuing. The entrance at m. 214 sounds suspiciously like a trumpeter falling off of a partial due to fatigue. Mm. 228–235, with low quiet multiphonics, make the player sound like he or she is struggling to produce any more sound. The piece ends with one last verbal interjection, in which the performer states the name of the piece, attempts to repeat it but omits the last syllable, and finally says simply “Mor...”. The performance has disintegrated, much like the ending of the original version. Matthias Kassel points out that this final syllable is homophonic to the French word for death, “mort,” possibly tying the gesture to the “apparent death” at the end of *Atem*.<sup>103</sup> The word “con” is also a strongly offensive word French roughly translating to “idiot,” adding a profane aspect to the piece’s markedly satirical ending.

<sup>103</sup> Matthias Kassel, *Das Auge hört mit*, 81.

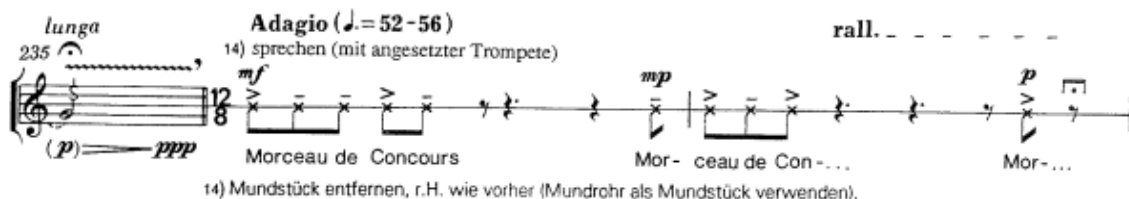


Fig. 24. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für einen Trompeter*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 235–237.

Another piece written in the same year as the revision of *Morceau de concours* is Kagel's *Konzertstück* for timpani and orchestra. The piece requires the timpanist to equip one drum with a paper head, and at the end of the piece, the timpanist is instructed to “Strike with the utmost force on the paper membrane of the VIth timp, in the process disappearing down to the waist in the body of the instrument. Freeze.” After the calamitous act of apparently destroying an instrument by collapsing into it, the player’s stillness once again recalls “apparent death.”



Fig. 25. Kagel, Mauricio. *Konzertstück für Pauken und Orchester*. Frankfurt: Litolf/Peters, 1995, m. 360.

Together, *Atem*, *Morceau de Concours* (both versions), and *Konzertstück* demonstrate an observation by Jean-Yves Bosseur:

Kagel’s output is punctuated by pieces for solo instrumentalists, all of which have in common that they are a hand-to-hand struggle between the instrumentalist and his instrument; it is perhaps these works... that best reflect Kagel’s sadistic attitude towards the musician... it is not a question, for the performer, of reproducing Kagel’s sound ideas but, based on the research he himself has carried out on a given instrument, of surpassing

his own capacities as well as those of his instrument, not only its technique but also its function, the musical role assigned to it.<sup>104</sup>

These endings steeped in musical failure are especially effective in pieces for brass and drums, which are often responsible for victorious, climatic endings in standard orchestral repertoire. On the battlefield, trumpets and drums are also essential for communication and morale. To write such ignominious events into their music acutely calls attention to their typical connotations, and challenges the musicians to explore narratives they may not encounter otherwise in standard repertoire.

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<sup>104</sup> Jean-Yves Bosseur, “Dossier Kagel,” 92. “La production de Kagel est jalonnée de pièces pour instrumentistes solistes, qui ont toutes en commun d’être une lutte au corps à corps entre l’instrumentiste et son instrument; c’est peut-être ces œuvres... qui reflètent le mieux l’attitude sadique de Kagel vis-à-vis du musicien... il ne s’agit pas, pour l’interprète, de reproduire les idées sonores de Kagel mais, à partir des recherches qu’il a lui-même effectuées sur un instrument donné, de dépasser ses propres capacités ainsi que celles de son instrument, non seulement sa technique mais aussi sa fonction, le rôle musical qui lui a été assigné.”

## Chapter 7: *Morceau de concours* – 1990 duo revision

The duo version of the 1990 revision of *Morceau de concours* was premiered January 15, 1992, on a subscription concert for Ensemble Modern at Kammermusiksaal der Philharmonie Berlin. The performers were William Forman and Michael Gross.<sup>105</sup> Kagel also supervised performances later on in the decade. On the Ensemble MusikFabrik blog, Marco Blaauw writes:

For a 1996 performance in the Cologne Philharmonie, Kagel requested the solo player to perform in an old French military uniform, on stage proudly presenting his virtuosity and self-perceived charm, the 2nd player was to lurk in the shadows, sarcastically mirroring and revealing the inner discord and distress, while a third performer tried to raise a white flag in the background. How much more “Kagel-esque” can you get?!?<sup>106</sup>

Perhaps part of the reason why the auxiliary trumpet part features a completely complementary pitch set to the solo part is to enable a sense of antagonism. The beginning opens with a dissonant minor ninth. The parts continue to have consistently dissonant relationships throughout the first part of the piece, and in m. 23, the auxiliary part interrupts a sentimental lyrical moment with dissonant multiphonics, crescendoing to a forte dynamic while the top part tapers to pianissimo.

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<sup>105</sup> Ensemble Modern, “3. Abbonementkonzert,” January 15, 1992, Mauricio Kagel Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel.

<sup>106</sup> Marco Blaauw, “Morceau de Concours,” Ensemble MusikFabrik Blog, March 2, 2012. <https://www.musikfabrik.eu/en/blog/morceau-de-concours/>, accessed March 5, 2025.

**Allegro** (♩ = 108 - 112), *sempre a tempo giusto*      **acc. . . . . a tempo**

1. Trp. (in C) *poco vibr.* *f* *ff* *fff*

2. Trp. (in C) *mf* *f* *ff* *fff*

1. Flz. *ff* *fff*

2. Flz. *ff* *fff*

**Fig. 26. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für zwei Trompeten*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 1–7.**

Starting around m. 33, however, harmonic relationships become less dissonant and the auxiliary part even leads in an imitative section beginning with the anacrusis to m. 39 while the top part plays a muted echo.

Allegro (♩ = 100-108)

meno mosso, rubato

Flz. port. port. f ff port. port. p, dolce Echo

5/16

leggiere

mf, dolce p

ancora più lento (♩ = ca. 62)

movendo

Parodie vibr. V vibr. ord.

6/16

Parodie vibr. poco vibr.

(p) mp mf f mf

Fig. 27. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für zwei Trompeten*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 36-46.

In m. 70, the two parts play in rhythmic unison for the first time, and by m. 82 they navigate complex 10/16 rhythms in tandem with mostly consonant intervals.

Moderato (♩ = 76-80) accel. - - - molto - - - (=96)

p, leggiere

10/16

p, leggiere

f

Fig. 28. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für zwei Trompeten*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 82-84.

The two parts continue to cycle through imitation, counterpoint, and synchronized passages until the auxiliary part resumes its sabotage in m. 197.

As the soloist plays one of the most graceful sections in the piece, the second trumpet part blares a dissonant flutter-tongued note, crescendoing until the soloist begins the flashiest section of the piece. At this point, the second part uses a pitch set a half step higher, exceeding the first part's D6's with D#6's.



**Fig. 29. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für zwei Trompeten*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 202–205.**

The two parts continue blasting flutter tongue notes until the end, when they both collapse into lower registers in exhaustion. The second player then inserts a harmon mute, and as the soloist pronounces the title of the piece, the second player holds a grating multiphonic on the lowest standard note on the trumpet. While the soloist sighs “Mor-...” to end the piece, the second player falls off into the pedal register very slowly and quietly. In the end, the two participants cannot sustain collaboration, and instead compete until they can neither play nor speak. Unlike in the solo version, *Atem*, or *Konzertstück*, the failure of the performer is no longer self-destruction, but destruction of fellow performers.

**Adagio** (♩ = 52-56)

19) sprechen (mit angesetzter Trompete)

*mf* Morceau de Concours *mp* Mor- ceau de Con-... *p* Mor-...

12/8

summen + blasen senza vibr.

19) Mundstück entfernen, r.H. wie vorher (Mundrohr als Mundstück verwenden).

*p* *mp* *p* *pp* gliss. molto lento

rall. - - - - -

**Fig. 30. Kagel, Mauricio. *Morceau de concours für zwei Trompeten*. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990, mm. 236–237.**

The unfortunate result of the “competition” is reminiscent of the chaos present in Kagel’s earlier work, *Match*. The tendency of competition to destroy rather than inspire, and its contamination with hierarchical worldviews, is present in both the two-trumpet revision of *Morceau de concours* and *Match*. As Björn Heile writes of *Match*:

This depiction of the power struggle is facilitated by its relevance for the social structure of music performance: whoever has witnessed or taken part in, an orchestra rehearsal, for instance, knows the complex power dynamics involved. Thus, again, the usually hidden social nature of musical life is brought to the surface, as a metaphor for the power dynamics in society at large.<sup>107</sup>

In 1994, Kagel incorporated the version for two trumpets into a radio production titled *Nah und Fern: Radiostück für Glocken und Trompeten mit Hintergrund* (Near and Far: Radio Piece for Bells and Trumpets with Background). The piece includes excerpts from the two-trumpet version of *Morceau de concours* as well as excerpts from his 1993 compositions *Fanfanfaren* for four trumpets and *Melodien für Carillon*. The trumpet music in *Nah und Fern* was recorded by Achim Gorsch, Andreas Adam, Marco Blaauw, and Markus Stockhausen.<sup>108</sup> Divorced from its live staging, *Morceau de concours* serves a different theatrical role within this

<sup>107</sup> Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 49.

<sup>108</sup> Mauricio Kagel, *Nah und Fern*, Auvidis France, 1995, compact disc.



piece. Björn Heile draws a connection between bells and trumpets as “signalling instruments which demarcate space,” so the relative loudness or softness of the trumpets gives a sense of proximity or distance. However, the trumpet pieces were not recorded in the same environments as the carillon or the non-musical noises, such as the footsteps climbing the bell tower and the jangling of keys, which are permeated by environmental sounds such as passing cars, ambulance sirens, and children at play. Heile writes that “the trumpets... present the neutral, synthetic space of the recording studio – a ‘non-space’ so to speak.”<sup>109</sup>

On December 6, 2015, the Los Angeles-based Carillon Quartet adapted *Nah und Fern* into a live performance.<sup>110</sup> Nicolás Bejarano, Cameron Kalemkarian, Lucas Lipari-Mayer, and Ethan Marks performed the trumpet parts while David Aguila served as sound projectionist, Amy Golden reconstructed the audio playback, and Brian Carbine designed the staging.<sup>111</sup> By bringing the piece into a real space with an audience, the exploration of distance moves from a private experience to a shared one. The live trumpets no longer have the “synthetic” property of a recorded sample, but are instead perceived directly, unaltered by recording processes and unaffected by the filters of recording and listening equipment. This restores some of the theatrical aspects of *Morceau de concours* as a live, standalone piece.

In interviews and within his works, Kagel often lamented that before the proliferation of recorded music, the connection between the audience and music was more organic. In a 1970 interview, Kagel expressed how this affected his compositional approach:

For a long time now, music has always been a staged event. Back in the 19th

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<sup>109</sup> Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 94.

<sup>110</sup> California Institute of the Arts, “CalArts’ Carillon Quartet Plays Kagel’s *Nah und Fern* Live,” *24700: New from California Institute of the Arts*, December 4, 2015, <https://blog.calarts.edu/2015/12/04/calarts-carillon-quartet-plays-kagels-nah-und-fern-live/>, accessed March 5, 2025.

<sup>111</sup> David Aguila, “Nah und Fern with the Carillon Quartet,” <https://www.davidaguila.com/nah-und-fern>, accessed March 5, 2025.

century music was also appreciated with the eyes, with all of the senses. Since then, with the rise of mechanical means of reproducing music through radio and records, music has been reduced to its acoustic dimension alone. What I would like is to bring the audience back to enjoying music with all their senses. This is the reason my music involves an exaggerated but direct protestation against mechanized means of musical reproduction. My goal: to re-humanize music-making.<sup>112</sup>

By staging his *Morceau de concours* as music theater, Kagel is attempting to revive an aspect of *concours* that would have been unavoidable at their genesis in the late eighteenth century: they could only be observed in person in real time, and that experience was inseparable from the music. Creating a work that requires one's physical presence to experience it fully encourages the audience to appreciate something that radically departs from typical "exam piece" offerings.

Because musical recording also created the possibility of editing multiple takes together, a new aesthetic developed of an artificial sort of musical perfection. Kagel noticed the effect this had on performers as well, and expressed concern for the ossified, perfectionistic approach to performance that was taking shape in the professional music world:

Musicians are led to study their instrument exclusively and are almost never encouraged to (re)think the organic relationship between man and instrument. In this way, they become mechanisms of interpretation. Although the aim is to dominate the instrument, to ensure maximum freedom, the result is very often the opposite: the musician is stretched towards a virtuosity that makes him a slave. A false professionalism excludes any possibility of relaxation and invention between musicians and their instruments. They cannot therefore communicate theatrically, too preoccupied by the instrument to express themselves... Asking a musician to perform any gesture is perhaps an adventure. Unfortunately, there are still many musicians for whom it is equivalent to a nightmare.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Jean-François Trubert, trans. Christopher Brent Murray, "Inventing a Genre: Mauricio Kagel and Instrumental Theater," in *Revisiting the Historiography of Postwar Avant-Garde Music*, ed. Christopher Brent Murray and Anne-Sylvie Barthel-Calvet (New York: Routledge, 2023), 76.

<sup>113</sup> Jean-Yves Bosseur, *De vive voix: Dialogues sur les musiques contemporaines* (Paris: Editions Minerve, 2010), 164. "On amène les musiciens à étudier exclusivement leur instrument, et on ne les incite presque jamais à (re)penser la relation organique homme-instrument. De cette manière, ils deviennent des mécanismes d'interprétation. Bien que le but soit de dominer l'instrument, pour assurer un maximum de liberté, le résultat obtenu est très souvent le contraire: le musicien est tendu vers une virtuosité qui le rend esclave. Un faux professionnalisme exclut toute possibilité de détente et d'invention entre les musiciens et leurs instruments. Ils ne peuvent donc pas communiquer théâtralement, trop préoccupés par l'instrument pour s'exprimer eux-mêmes... Demander à un musicien d'exécuter un geste quelconque est peut-être une aventure. Malheureusement, il existe toujours beaucoup de musiciens pour qui cela équivaut à un cauchemar."

This represents not just another impulse to “re-humanize music-making,” but also to stretch the abilities of performers. Kagel’s music provides no shortage of technical challenges. His pieces also strengthen the musician’s expressive abilities beyond the sound of the instrument and help cope with the reality that performance conditions will never be “ideal,” especially if theatrical demands are required in addition to musical ones.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

Studying the music of Mauricio Kagel has two main benefits to the performer or scholar. The music itself is complex and substantial, both intricately planned and elegantly crafted. It pushes the technical abilities of performers and tests the analytic tools of theoreticians. Additionally, the framing and conceptions of these works help musicians consider aspects of musical culture and performance conventions which they may not otherwise have considered. By “breaking the fourth wall,” Kagel adds new dimensions of musical growth: theatricality, humor, and a special attention to visual presentation.

Like other composers, Kagel sought to create novel sounds and textures. His use of historical instruments in pieces like *Morceau de concours* in the 1970s provides a valuable model for composers looking to create something new from the old, and presents a fun opportunity for performers to explore their instruments in novel ways and discover their instruments’ hidden potentials. Even in the revised versions of the piece, the way Kagel combines extended techniques expands the palette of modern trumpet sounds.

While Kagel’s music is demanding of the musician’s technique and imagination, his close study of the instruments themselves and the musicians with whom he collaborated yielded works which are largely idiomatic and satisfying to learn. *Morceau de concours* is a valuable addition to the canon of literature for trumpet recitals, whether professional or graduate-level. It provides comic relief for the audience and a novel experience for the performer.

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