

Vocalise

for Alto Saxophone and Piano

Composer: Avner Dorman

Year: 2024

Duration: 6 minutes

Orchestration: Alto Saxophone in Eb and Piano

Publisher: Lyric Row Press

Commission: This work was commissioned by a consortium of saxophonists organized by Joshua Thomas and the Assembly Quartet (Adam Estes, Jeffrey Heisler, Ian Jeffress, Matthew Younglove) as a part of the Smart Repertoire Project.

Program Note

Vocalise is meant to be a tribute to both the beauty and power of the saxophone. A “song without words,” the piece begins with a nod both to the Baroque era and to the introspective elegance of Beethoven’s Sonata no. 14 (“Moonlight”). The piano sets the stage in the opening with arpeggios reminiscent of Baroque preludes, creating an atmosphere of contemplation and reflection. Against this backdrop, the saxophone introduces a lyrical theme that serves as the emotional anchor of the work. As the tempo quickens in the second section, the saxophone and piano convey a sense of urgency and motion. Gestural phrases, characterized by rising and disappearing motifs, gradually build towards a climactic point, where the saxophone’s voice becomes more melodic and emotive. Returning to a modified recapitulation of the opening material, harp-like glissandos over scales in the piano evoke an expressive character, with scales drawn from Middle Eastern traditions. The saxophone reintroduces the opening theme, but now it appears fragmented, changed by the experiences throughout the journey of the composition. As Vocalise approaches its conclusion, a gentle coda emerges, drawing on the fading qualities, from earlier in the work. The piece avoids a “big finish” and instead concludes softly, leaving the listener with a sense of contemplative tranquility. I hope this piece can serve as a vehicle for expression and technique for saxophonists, as well as an opportunity to play collaboratively with the piano in a meaningful and

constructive way. Many thanks to the Smart Repertoire Project, led by Joshua Thomas, for allowing me to take part in this important endeavor for saxophone repertoire.

Avner Dorman

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