

Through the Lens of Emotional Intelligence... Copland Clarinet Concerto



How would I play this piece if I were playing it for Copland himself?

The Copland Clarinet Concerto is a staple in the clarinet repertoire. Every clarinetist, at some point, will come across this piece. It is a crowd favorite with its soaring melodies, jazzy flare, and fun demeanor. With this it is also a challenge for the player with large lyrical leaps, demanding articulation, and extreme ranges. As a performer, once you get past the technical challenges of the piece you may be wondering “How can I make my interpretation of this special?” The goal of this guide is to give you some tools to create an authentic and special performance experience for your audience looking at this piece Through the Lens of Emotional Intelligence.

Beyond the Notes

Written for jazz clarinetist, **Benny Goodman**:

“I made no demands on what Copland should write. He had completely free rein, except that I should have a two-year exclusivity on playing the work. I paid two thousand dollars and that's real money. At the time there were not too many American composers to pick from... We never had much trouble except for a little fracas about the spot before the cadenza where he had written a repetition of some phrase. I was a little sticky about leaving it out—it was where the viola was the echo to give the clarinet a cue. But I think Aaron finally did leave it out... Aaron and I played the concerto quite a few times with him conducting, and we made two recordings” -Benny Goodman

Copland was a lecturer and conductor in Rio De Janeiro when he wrote drafts for this piece

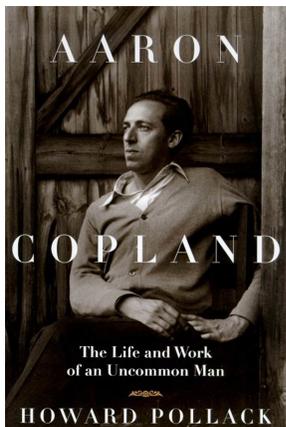
Questions brought forward by other scholars:

-Was Copland's music influenced by his Jewish background?

"The Eastern European thing was merely a matter for my parents. It was background atmosphere, but it didn't exist for me in the sense of the life that I was then living in Brooklyn. What preoccupied me was the fact that America had not found its voice as Germany and then France had in producing composers in the music world. The Jewish national aspect had never preoccupied me." -Aaron Copland

-Does Copland's music reflect on his sexuality?

"When Phillip Ramey suggest to him that the 'bittersweet lyricism' had something to do with his homosexuality, or at least with 'growing up a loner,' he simply responded, 'You might have something there.'" -Excerpt from "Aaron Copland: The Life & Work of an Uncommon Man" pg. 525



*Suggested Reading: "Aaron Copland: The Life & Work of an Uncommon Man" by Howard Pollack

YOU DECIDE!

-How did Rio influence Copland's composing of this piece? Can you identify a specific section?

-Can someone truly ignore the influence of their religious backgrounds?

-What does homosexual music sound like? Is there a distinct sound?

-Do the questions posed above influence your interpretation of the piece?

Characteristics of Copland's music:

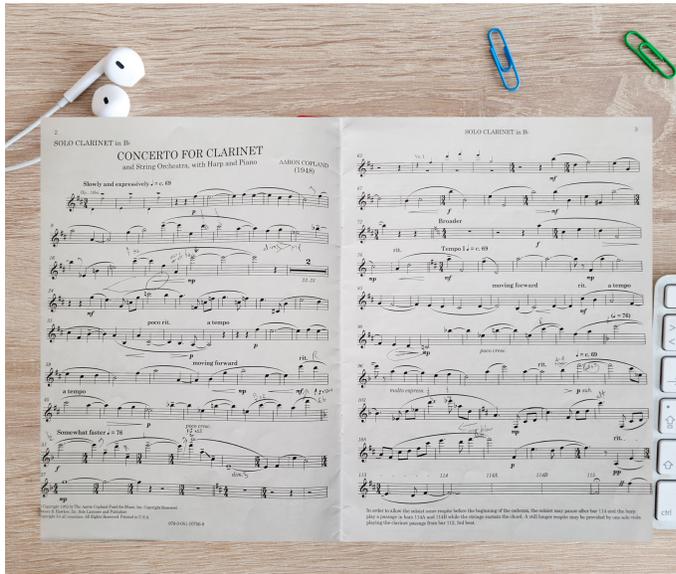
-Jazz Influence

-Sense of Space

-Broad Melodies

Score Study Time!

Pull out your score and let's get to work! From this point on we will be looking at sections of the concerto and how emotion wheels can be helpful in creating a truly meaningful performance.



Section I: Measures 1-115

-Can you connect this section with an event in your life?

-Does this section remind you of a feeling or state of being?

- What does “expressively” mean?

I like to think of space, discovery, and child-like wonder while approaching this section

Try this!

- Fill in the bubbles on the Geneva wheel of emotions rating the emotions that come to mind from this section. The further out in the circle the more intense the emotion.

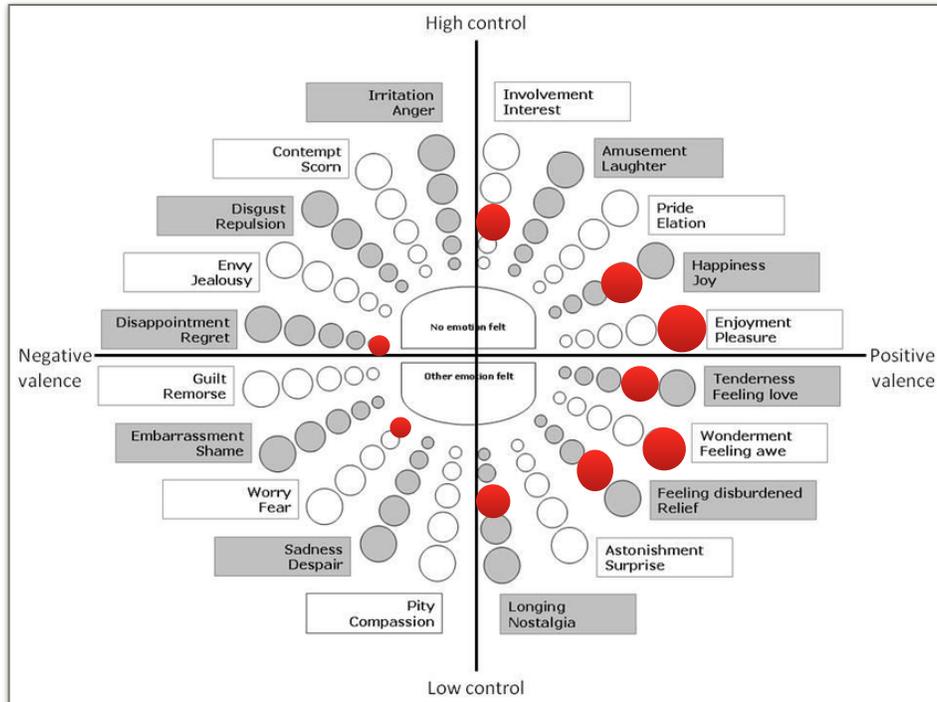
- **Think**

-Are these intensities fixed or can they fluctuate based on my audience/ performance space?

-Can these emotions and intensities change from performance to performance?

I have filled out the top one as an example, following is one left blank for you to use!

Jena's interpretation



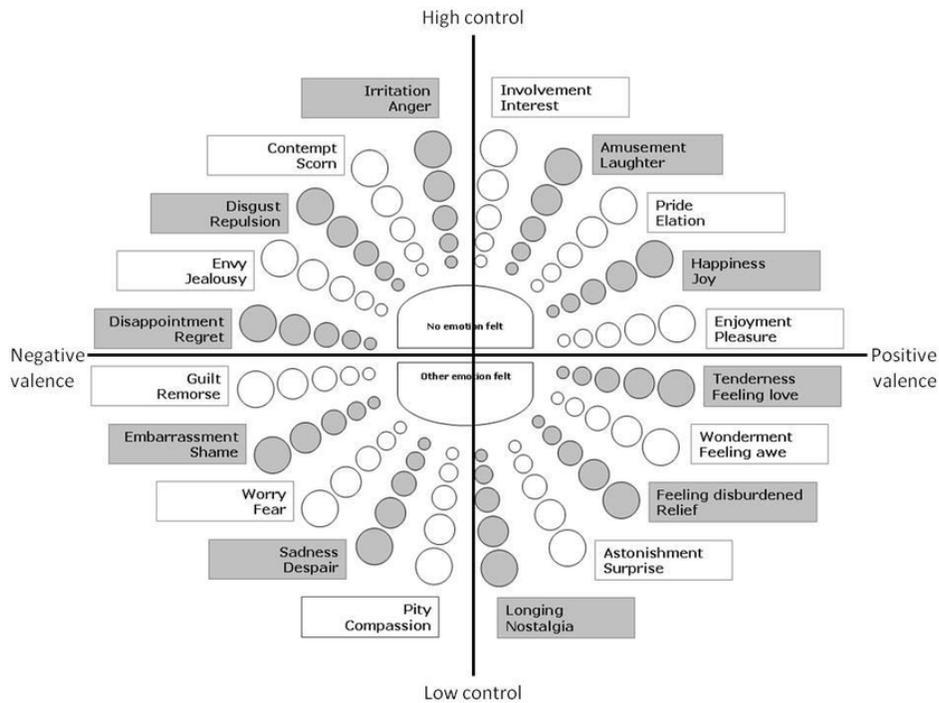
-I believe emotions/interpretation and intensities change with stage of life, location, audience makeup.

-I believe behind each positive emotion is a slight remnant of negative emotion that came from life experiences.

-I believe a truly great performer is able to tap into their own emotions while touching the emotions of their audience. This is most popularly known as vulnerability.

-I believe it's up to each individual musician on how they shape their beliefs on emotions and interpretations of pieces.

You Try!



- Fill in the bubbles on what emotions you feel or want to portray right now
- Consider how the intensity may change if you had an audience in front of you

What are three things you took away from this?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Set on a goal on how to apply this to your next practice session.

This approach can be applied to all sections of this piece



Section 2- Cadenza

-Cadenzas are typically found at the end of a piece, why would Copland include one in the first 10 minutes?

-The rest of the piece is based on themes found in the cadenza. Can you match the cadenza sections to their corresponding themes?

-Copland wrote this piece while in Rio de Janeiro, does this information influence your interpretation?

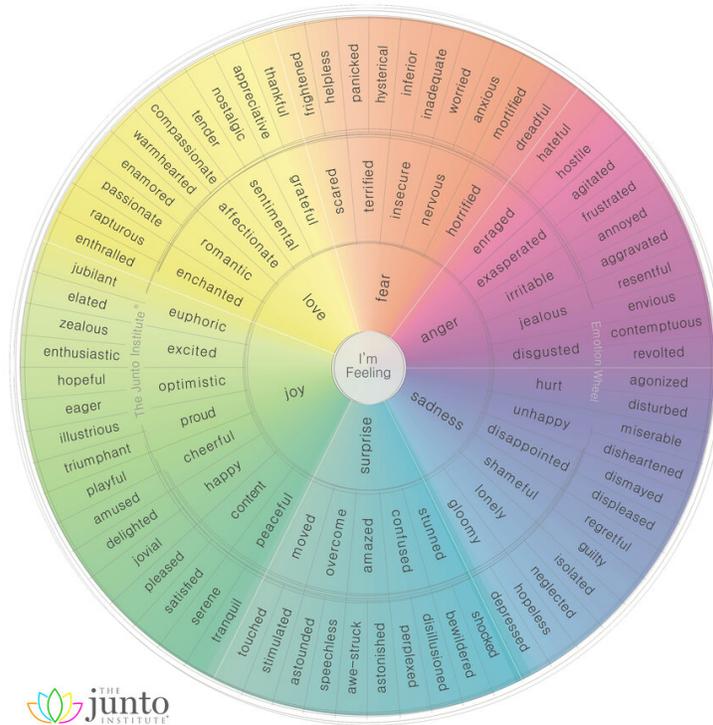
“Play the music as if you’re discovering it with your audience for the first time.” -Todd Levy

Try This!

- Choose a section from the cadenza
- Choose an emotion from the Junto’s wheel of emotions that resonates with you the most.
- See how other emotions in that color area relate to the emotion you chose.
- This can also help simplify and/or identify more specific emotions.
- Choose a different emotion and see if it changes how you play a section

Expanding our emotional vocabulary is beneficial in identifying specific emotions in a piece.

You try!



- Identify 3-5 emotions you associate with the cadenza
- How does identifying specific emotions vs looking at the big picture change your interpretation?
- How do these emotions feel? What do these emotions look like? How can you portray them?

What are three things you took away from this?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Set one goal on how to apply this to your next practice session.

This approach can be applied to all sections of this piece

Section 3- Rather Fast

- Everything found from 125 to the end of the piece is found in the cadenza. Can you identify the matching parts?
- Where can you add ornamentations (IE glissandos, swing style) to reflect the jazz influence? Is it appropriate to do so?
- Why is there a jazz influence again? (Hint: Benny Goodman)



“I always felt good about the commission and about playing the concerto with Aaron conducting” -Benny Goodman

Try this!

- Take Plutchik’s Wheel of Emotions (Check out this website to explore it more! SO COOL!!)
<https://www.6seconds.org/2020/08/11/plutchik-wheel-emotions/>
- This wheel brings forth with primary emotions.
- Choose any emotion on the wheel to portray in your playing.
- Go to the opposite side of the wheel and try playing it as the opposite emotion.
- Take 2 emotions next to each other and combine them.
- This resource is ideal for experimentation in practice and understanding how different emotions interact!



What are three things you took away from this?

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- 2.
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Set one goal on how to apply this to your next practice session.

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Take aways

- Discovering emotions and how to portray them in music is a process. Be patience and have fun exploring!
- Experiment with all kinds of emotions. You may be surprised what actually sticks to your interpretation.
- Record yourself to see how your emotions are being portrayed to your audience.
- Listen back without judgement.
- All three emotion wheels are useful in all parts of the piece

How can YOU apply Emotional Intelligence to your interpretation to create a more meaningful and impactful listening experience for your audience?

Disclaimer: This guide is meant to aid in exploring music through emotions. There are many ways to incorporate Emotional Intelligence in music. This is just one of them!



If you have any questions, comments, or feedback please email me at jenanahnsen@gmail.com. I'd love to hear how you're applying these concepts to your playing and how it's helped you!