

The comparative analysis of
Luciano Berio's *Sequenza IXa* and *Sequenza IXb*

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Abstract

Luciano Berio's *Sequenza IXb* is one of the most played unaccompanied repertoires for Alto saxophone. Understanding the history of how the piece was developed helps build the musicality for performance practices. This essay will focus on one main question regarding *Sequenza IXb*, which is "What are the differences between *Sequenza IXa* and *Sequenza IXb*?" This essay will first focus on the history of *Sequenza IX* to find out how the piece was composed. *Sequenza IX* is one of the 14 *Sequenza* compositions. *Sequenza IXa* was written for clarinet, followed by *Sequenza IXb* for alto saxophone and *Sequenza IXc* for bass clarinet. *Sequenza IXa* was based on Berio's previous composition *Chermins "ex" V* which later was withdrawn. The next section introduces the basic structural difference of *Sequenza IXa* and *Sequenza IXb*. The overall structure is almost identical, but *Sequenza IXa* is slightly longer as there are missing materials in *Sequenza IXb*. The general consideration when adapting the score from clarinet to saxophone is the limitation of the range. The range of the saxophone is smaller than the one in clarinet, so some modifications to make it easier for saxophone players to perform are assumed. To provide comfortable range for performers, lower pitch register is expected in saxophone version. Apart from the changes due to the technical aspects, changes in rhythm, dynamic and tempo are also discussed. One of the important notations only written in saxophone version is "sempre senza vibrato" which asks a performer not to use vibrato. This paper aims to explore Berio's intention of composition and revisions of *Sequenza IX* and to find what Berio expects from the performer.

Keywords: Luciano Berio, *Sequenza IX*, Saxophone, Clarinet, postmodern

1. Introduction

Sequenza IXb was composed by a postmodern composer, Luciano Berio in 1980 for alto saxophone, and this has been performed among many saxophonists including John Harle, Iwan Roth and Claude Delangle. *Sequenza IXb* still is one of the most played unaccompanied repertoires for Alto saxophone. As implied by the “b” in the title, there is *Sequenza IXa* written for solo Bb clarinet, and also *Sequenza IXc* for bass clarinet. Due to the timbre and technical differences, it is rare to have the same piece for Bb clarinet and alto saxophone. My hypothesis is that technical concessions were made including the transposition of the entire piece, note changes to a lower register, omissions of difficult passages.

Having two versions for different instruments has brought a big question “What are the differences between *Sequenza IXa* and *Sequenza IXb*?”. The general consideration when adapting the score from clarinet to saxophone is the limitation of the range, so the pitch changes are expected. Apart from the changes due to the technical factor, changes in rhythm, dynamic and tempo are also expected.

2. Comparison of *Sequenza IXa* and *IXb*

2.1 History of *Sequenza IX*

Sequenza IX is one of the 14 *Sequenza* compositions. *Sequenza IXa* was written for clarinet, followed by *Sequenza IXb* for alto saxophone and *Sequenza IXc* for bass clarinet. *Sequenza IXb*. Heaney points out that both versions of *Sequenza IX* evolved from *Chermins “ex” V*, a prototype work for clarinet and IRCAM’s Sogitec 4C computer, which was designed by Giuseppe di Giugno (P43). *Chermins “ex” V* was dedicated to a French clarinetist, Michel Arrignon, but it was later withdrawn by Berio due to the dissatisfaction of the composition. However, the melodic material from *Chermins “ex” V* was repurposed as *Sequenza IXa*.

Sequenza IXb was premiered on November 30, 1980, by John Harle in London According to Heaney, the dedication for *Sequenza IXb* can be found on pre-publication manuscripts and first edition (1980) prints of *Sequenza IXb* as Iwan Roth and John Harle. However, it is notably absent from the more common 1987 and 2005 editions.

Sequenza IXc was adapted by Rocco Parisi. The notable difference among the three *Sequenza IX* is that *Sequenza IXc*'s starting note is different from IXa and IXb. IXc starts on B in concert pitch while the other two start on E flat.

Table 2.1 Works of *Sequenza IX*

Title	Instrument	Year	Starting note		Dedication
			in written pitch	in concert pitch	
<i>Chermins V' (ex V)</i>	Bb Clarinet and digital filters	1979-1980	Unknown	Unknown	Michel Arrignon
<i>Sequenza IXa</i>	Bb Clarinet	1980	C	Eb	Michel Arrignon
<i>Sequenza IXb</i>	Alto Saxophone	1981	F	Eb	(Iwan Roth, John Harle)
<i>Sequenza IXc</i> (adaptation by Rocco Parisi)	Bass clarinet	1998	C#	B	

2.2 Basic structure of *Sequenza IX*

Regarding the basic structure, *Sequenza IXa* and *IXb* is almost identical. Heaney suggests that *Sequenza IX* consists of three sections. Section 1 begins on Page 1 until the end of Page 3. Section 2 begins on Page 4 until the end of Q. Section 3 begins on R until the end. Heaney suggests that *Sequenza IX* consists of three sections.

Table 2.2 Structure of *Sequenza IX*

(Heaney, 2023 p82)

Section 1		Beginning to the end of Page 3
Section 1	Introduction	Beginning to the fermata A on the 4 th system on Page 1
	Part (a)	Letter A to the end of Page 1
	Part (b)	Top of Page 2 to end of 3 rd system on Page 2
	Transition	5 th system on Page 2 through the 6 th system on Page 2
	Part (c)	6 th system on Page 2 through the 1 st system on Page 3
	Transition	2 nd system on Page 3 until letter D
	Closing	Letter D to the end of Page 3
Section 2		Top of Page 4 until letter R
Section 2	Part (d)	Top of Page 4 until letter H
	Part (e)	Letter H until letter N
	Part (f)	Letter N until letter R
Section 3		Letter R until the end
Section 3	Part (g)	Letter R until the 32 nd notes on the 9 th system of Page 8
	Part (h)	32 nd notes on the 8 th system of Page 8 to the F after letter V
	Part (i)	Ledger F after letter V through Page 9
	Closing	Top of Page 10 to the end

2.3 Pitch

The first difference we will look at is pitch. The range of saxophone is about two and a half octaves, but clarinet has about three and a half octaves as shown in Figure 2.2 and 2.3. Because of this range difference, note changes to a lower register are expected.

Figure 2.2 Clarinet Range

Ely, Mark C., and Amy E. Van Deuren. 2009. (P253)

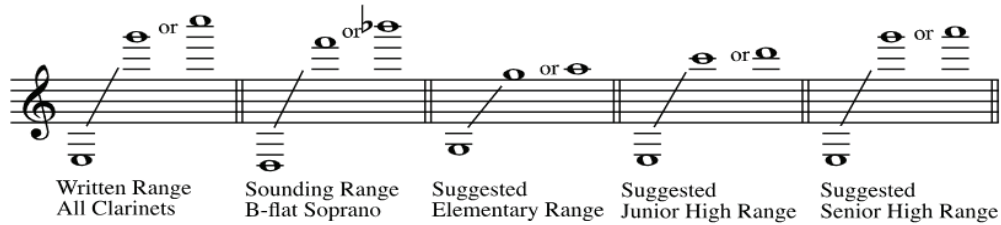
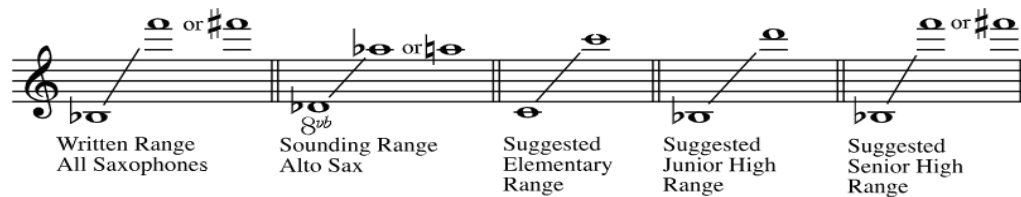


Figure 2.3 Saxophone Range

Ely, Mark C., and Amy E. Van Deuren. 2009. (P401)



The following the example of the note change from the note which was out of the saxophone's normal range to within the range. The saxophone version is written an octave lower than the original (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4

P.2 L7 – Second note D is an octave lower

Sequenza IXa



Sequenza IXb



Figure 2.5 shows the actual range used in *Sequenza IXa* and *IXb*. This shows that the range is limited for saxophone version.

Clarinet Saxophone

The lowest note for clarinet is found in P1. L1, and the highest note is found in P.7 L1 as shown in Figure 2.6.

Clarinet : P.1 L1 and P7 L1



Saxophone: P.1 L1 and P.2 L6



For this section, we can assume that those pitch changes were made to adjust the playable range for alto saxophone.

2.4 Rest

The following example is the addition of a quarter rest. According to Heaney, this is an artifact of transitional material found in Chemin “ex” V before an electronics section which was ultimately removed in adaptation to *Sequenza IX*. This quarter rest seems appropriate as it was

found in the middle of this original transitional material, and clarinetists should consider adding it to their version of *Sequenza IX* (Heaney 2023, P71). Another possible reason why Berio put a quarter rest is that a quarter rest will give ample time to prepare to play high F with ppp which requires technical mastery.

Figure 2.7

P.10 L2 – A quarter rest is added in Saxophone version

Sequenza IXa

Sequenza IXb

2.5 Vibrato

This section shows examples of extended techniques. The first one is vibrato. Vibrato is often used in saxophone performances while it is rare to see it in classical clarinet performance. According to Heaney, a saxophonist John Harle performed without vibrato to make it sound almost computer-like at a concert, and Berio apparently supported this idea.

Figure 2.8

P.1 L1 – “sempre senza vibrato” is added in Saxophone version

Clarinet

Saxophone

2.6 Dynamics

The next element is dynamics. The general perception of the dynamic is that saxophone is louder than clarinet, so one consideration when transcribing a piece for saxophone is to lower the dynamic level such as from *f* to *mp*. However, what was found in *Sequenza IX* was opposite. The following is a dynamic difference from *p* to *mp*.

Figure 2.9

Clarinet P.1 L1	Saxophone P.1 L1
	

2.7 Tempo

This section will focus on the tempo change. The generalized reasons of tempo changes when transcribing a piece to another piece is that some instruments need shorter breathing interval or need extra tempo fluctuation for expanding expressive range. The following is the example of tempo change. The tempo marking “poco rit → a tempo” is added in Saxophone Version.

Figure 2.10

P.3 L7 – “poco rit → a tempo” added in Saxophone version

Clarinet version


Saxophone version


This change does not seem related to the technical concession because of the instrumental change, but it rather seems like a addition of expressive notation. Another interesting example of tempo change is that “quarter=60 accel.” is marked on clarinet version, but it got changed to “quarter=96 rall.”. This shows the opposite tempo fluctuation, and it gives the change in momentum.

Figure 2.10 P.7 L4 – Tempo markings are different

Sequenza IXa



Sequenza IXb



2.8 Fermata

One of the unique usages of fermata in *Sequenza IX* is that Berio put duration above each fermata. My assumption is that saxophone version has shorter durations than the clarinet one. It turned out that Berio changed the durations both shorter and longer than the original notations. Figure 2.11 and 2.12 show the examples of the changes that made the fermatas in saxophone versions shorter from 8 to 7 and 10 to 5 respectively. One consideration is that the dynamic is also different between the two versions, and both of the saxophone versions have *fff*. This dynamic change could be the reason why the fermata duration got shorter.

Figure 2.11

P.8 L2 – Clarinet 8 Saxophone 7

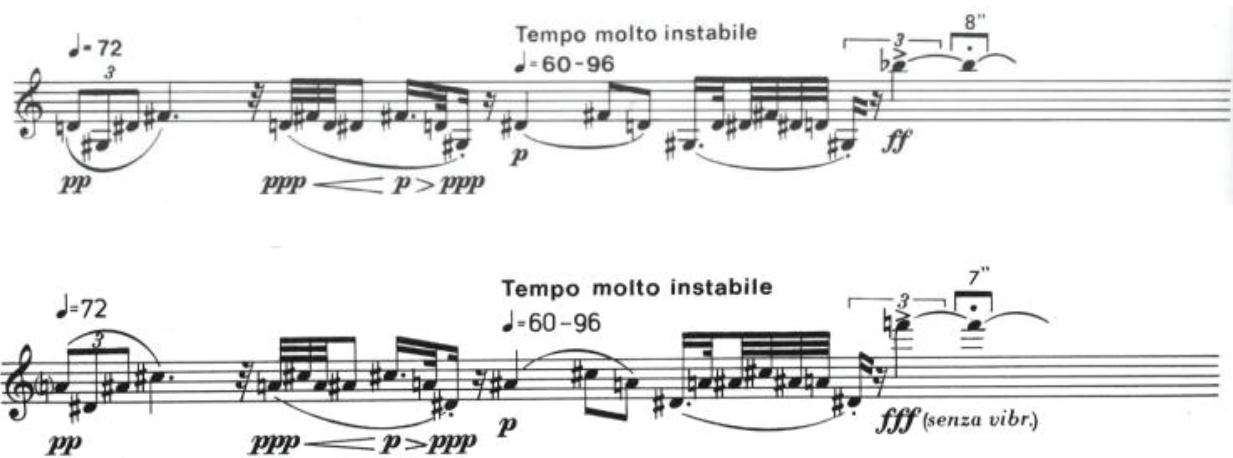


Figure 2.12

P.8 L6 – Clarinet 10 Saxophone 5



The first hypothesis was that all the fermata durations for saxophone would be shorter than the clarinet versions. However, some of the fermata for saxophone are longer than clarinet version. Also, my previous assumption about the relationship between the duration of fermata and the dynamic change does not apply in this case. In Figure 2.13 and Figure 2.14, fermatas in saxophone version have longer duration and stronger dynamic which is *fff* in this case.

Figure 2.13

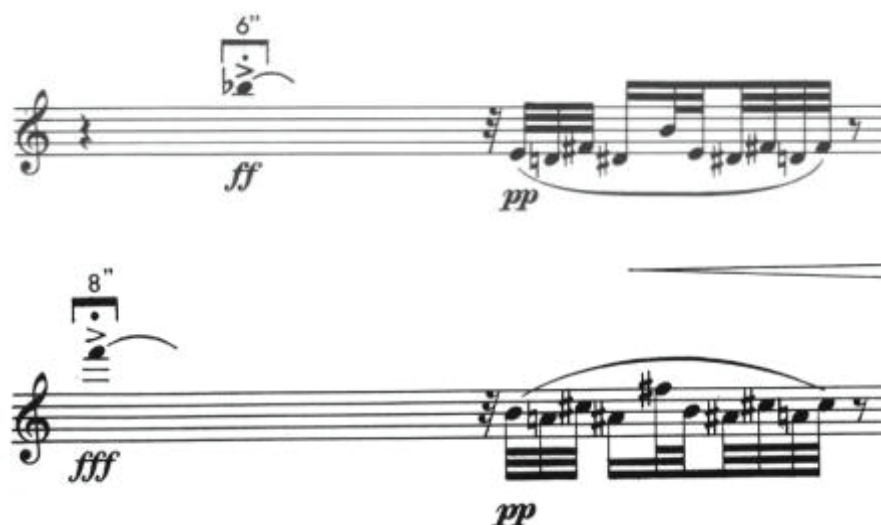
P.8 L4 – Clarinet 5 Saxophone 8





Figure 2.14

P.8 L8 – Clarinet 6 Saxophone 8

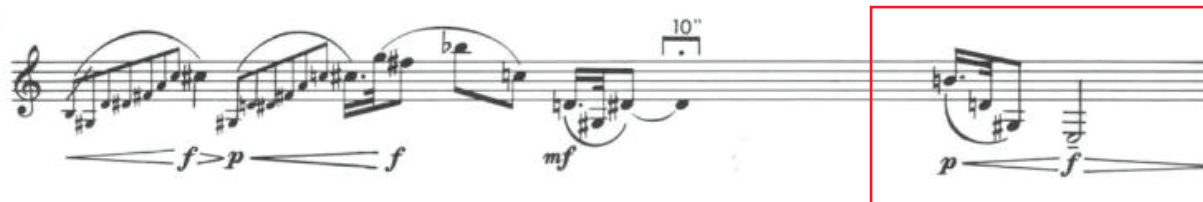


2.9 Missing materials

Apart from the above-mentioned changes, some of the notes from *Sequenza IXa* are actually missing in *Sequenza IXb*. The following examples marked in red are missing in saxophone version.

Figure 2.15 P.2 L4

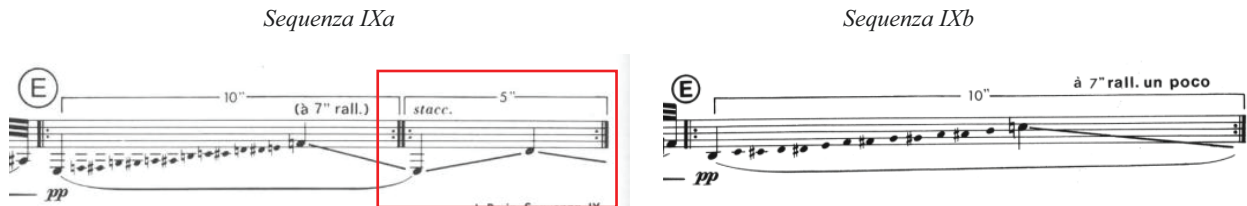
Sequenza IXa



Sequenza IXb



Figure 2.16 P.2 L4 P.3 L9



Both missing materials do not seem to be technically challenging for alto saxophone, and the reason of the omission might not be because of the technical difficulty.

3. Conclusion

Considering the difficulty and rare occurrence of transcribing pieces for clarinet to alto saxophone due to the limited range and the technical limitations, *Sequenza IX* flawlessly adapted the clarinet version *Sequenza IXa* into the saxophone version *Sequenza IXb*. The original purpose of this essay was to find numerous differences between *Sequenza IXa* and *Sequenza IXb*, but it turned out that this research emphasized the similarities rather than differences.

There were interesting changes made by Berio, and what Berio changed was not necessarily for technical concession. Berio changed the duration of fermata between the two versions, but the saxophone version both had shorter and longer fermatas compared to the clarinet version. This implies that the duration of fermata does not seem related to the consideration of technical concession. Some of the changes Berio were more related to the addition of expressive range for saxophone in dynamics, tempo and the limitation of vibrato.

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