

# Bryan Crumpler

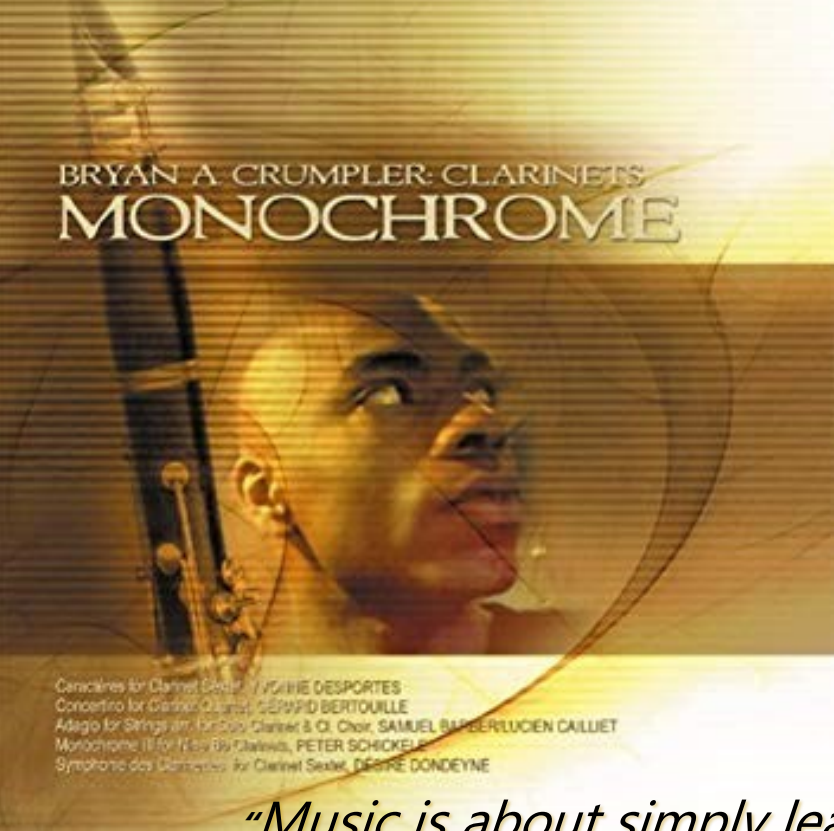
## *Using music to unite people and cultures*

Bryan Crumpler is a versatile musician—performing artist, composer, and teacher of the *E/ Sistema* method. Something of a musical chameleon, his Bryan returns to CMSCVA to play a wide range of music, from the Klezmer inspired music of Golijov, to Brahms, to his own composition. CMSCVA couldn't wait to ask Bryan about his life and career.

**CMSCVA.** *You have a wide range of musical talents - you perform, teach and composer. Can you tell us how you balance all that out, and how they fit together to make a career?*

**BC.** If I could accurately imitate ratchet claps in writing right now, I'd be clapping "LOTTA! ALL! NIGHTERS!" It really is tough to find a balance between so many interests, but acclimating to that realization is a result of many years of sacrifice, patience, planning, and persistence. I've already gotten my "10,000 hours of practice" in; therefore, many of the more daunting technical aspects of Clarinet playing are second nature to me now. So, I try to be very strategic about how to budget my time on the instrument vs. study of scores and existing recording archives. Next piece of the puzzle is to reserve my deliberate practice time to achieve concrete goals within manageable time frames for specific auditions, recordings, and concerts. Without targets in mind, all that playing amounts to just a fun pastime or hobby work. So, I bypass what I can easily sight-read without fatigue or error and really try to focus my energy on resolving major problem areas. That greatly reduces my overall practice time, keeps me from burning out too quickly, and leaves me with more time to devote to other pursuits. Teaching and composing are just a small few of those because it is very tough to balance anything without a steady income stream and support system. Jobs wholly unrelated to music, thus, are inevitable to keep bills paid where music turns up short. This kind of work is prevalent on my CV, so this life is incredibly challenging for my sleep patterns, to say the least! Hence, the all-nighters. Nonetheless, even when hypnagogia sets in, I exploit those episodes to notate the tunes that become unlocked from my imagination and develop them into compositions. I only sleep when my mind & body compels me to, and that's usually when nothing else is on my conscience for the day. All in all, it is a balance of priorities, learning when to say no, practicing self-care, dreaming, and being attuned to what inspires or motivates me most when I am active in one area vs. another. Combine that with *beaucoup*s of help I receive from family, friends, fans, and colleagues, and you have a fairly decent recipe for turning every bit of music progress into major milestones and achievements. These milestones and achievements build upon each other over a lifetime to collectively form the career.





**CMSCVA.** *What was your path to becoming a professional musician?*

**BC.** My path started as a child singing for the kid's choir at church, sometimes being all too curious what the lines, dots, and circles meant in the hymnals from which the organist always played. As I grew older, and learned to read sheet music, I found myself excelling at Clarinet and tried to be involved in as many performing ensembles as I feasibly could: school band, county/district/state honor bands & orchestras, youth orchestras, university & community wind ensembles, symphony orchestras, chamber groups. I went on to study Chemistry, Mathematical Sciences / Computer Science, and Music Performance in undergrad and grad school, all while competing and auditioning around the globe for a chance to become an internationally recognized soloist. Only upon aging out at 30 did I scale back to devote more time to teaching, foreign language work, and develop my composition skills, because worthwhile performance opportunities are few and far between.

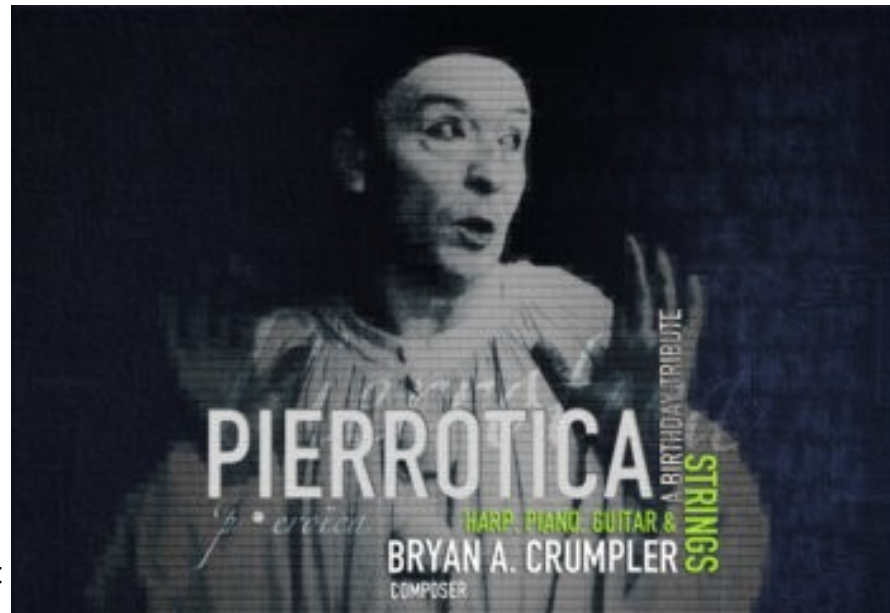
*“Music is about simply learning to be a decent human being and productive member of society.”*

**CMSCVA.** *What is the role of the musician right now in their community and in our contemporary culture?*

Ask 10 different musicians and you'll get 10 different answers. From my personal experience, however, I can state where I have found myself most needed in the community: that is, to use music to unite people and cultures; effect social change; provide a vehicle for music lovers and listeners to escape the pressures and woes of everyday life; prepare future generations for healthy outlets of expression; and develop a sense of empathy, compassion, and community in places where the life skills and social skills we humans need in order to succeed are harder and harder acquire. It is a tough role to be in, because many see music as a way of appeasing their desire for popularity or attention in some kind of spotlight that earns some folks quite a lot of money. Others see it as frivolous entertainment or, in some cases, overpriced entertainment. Sure, we all desire a feeling of accomplishment and tangible indicators of success like a high bank balance; but music is so much more about community-building, self-care, cognitive growth, insight, and neurological stimulation, learning to overcome challenges and failures, dealing with rejection and many potential “No's,” resolving problems efficiently, working well together with others toward a common goal, and simply learning to be a decent human being and productive member of society.

**CMSCVA.** *How would you describe your quintet "The Red Detachment," that will have its premiere on September 29?*

**BC.** Hard. Really hard. It may not sound like it to some, but everything about it is hard: from the flexibility of interpretation to the subliminal messaging in the writing, the engraving challenges, endurance needed to perform it, and the technical demands. It is a test of virtuosity and teamwork for everyone involved because it was commissioned for the Fischhoff competition with the request to make it so difficult that an audience would leave with the impression only a skilled few would be capable of performing it. And that is what it became: an extraordinarily challenging piece of music. It was originally a trio for Flute, Viola and Bassoon (a rare instrumentation without a canonized body of repertoire), so it was an opportunity to explore a variety of extremes and overcome a steep learning curve as a budding young composer. The net result, thus, was a work I was told was impossible to play if major sacrifices to artistic integrity were not made. Nonetheless, expanding the work to a quintet for Clarinet and strings became the resolution that allows this work to realize its debut and take on a life form of its own. What is most intriguing about this work, however, that makes it appropriate for the CMSCVA season opener is that many of its themes and motifs serve as the manifestation of musical ideas that fell upon my conscience while researching the Red Army of women, called the Red Detachment, who fought and provided intelligence, ground support, and recon during both the Chinese Civil War and 1930s cultural revolution under the Mao regime. It was conceived in 2013, just prior to when the last living original member of the Red Detachment of Women passed away. It celebrates the bravery of not only women during wartime in China, but also that of women who fight to survive and thrive in today's patriarchy. Beyond that, the work is polyrhythmic, alternating between varied and frequent time signature changes, mixed beat structures, capricious tempo deviations, and independent layers that form quite a musical lasagna. You'll hear sinister moments, happy moments, tear jerking moments, energetic and wild moments, sad moments, sneaky moments, meditative moments, and maybe even a few funny moments too. We shall see.



**CMSCVA.** *What are you enjoying listening to right now?*

**BC.** Right now? I am really enjoying the guitar works of Ivo Vollerling. He is fascinating to watch and does some really interesting things that make my fingers feel cramped at the sight of all his hand contortions. He makes such beautiful music and I like his work a lot.