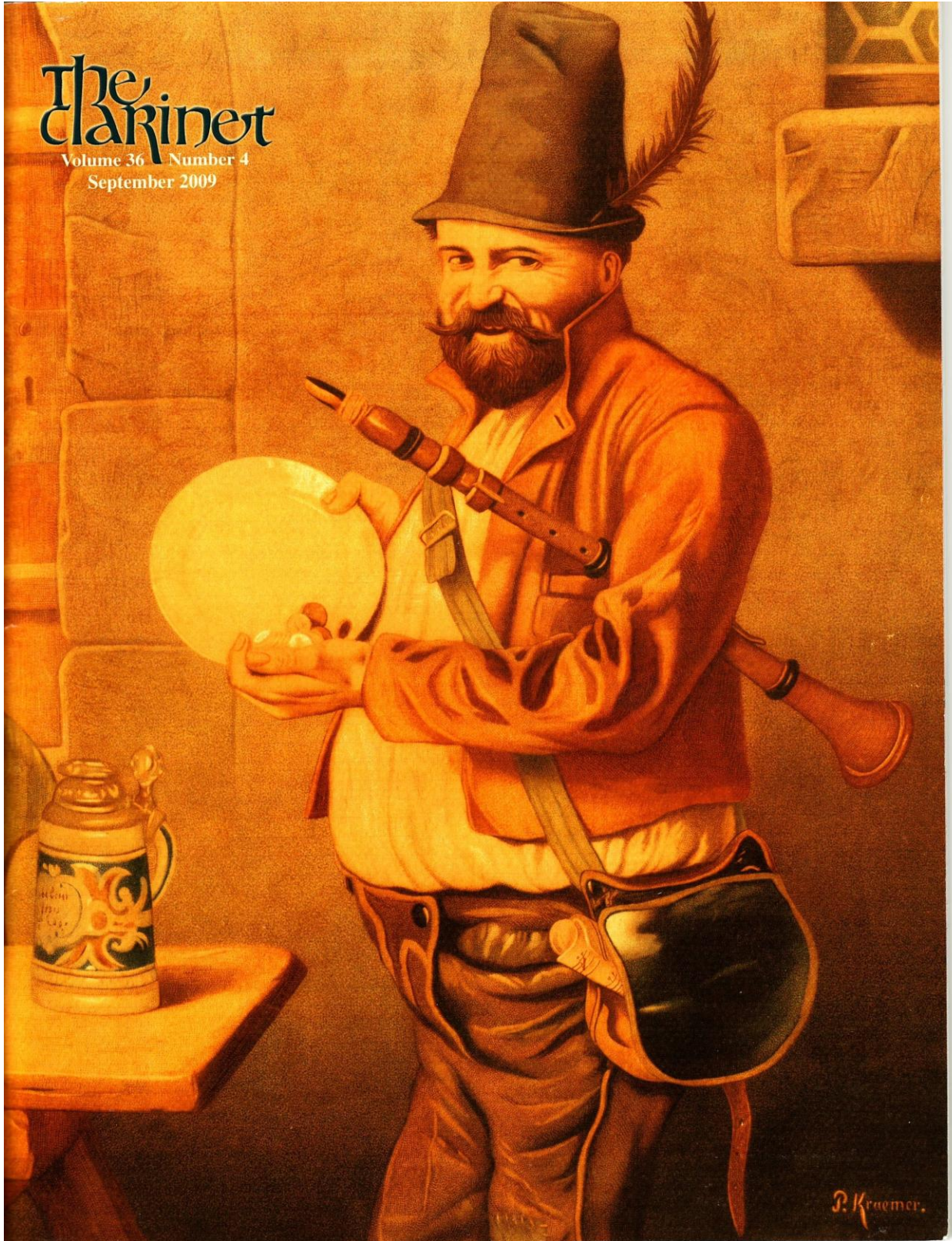


# The Clarinet

Volume 36 Number 4  
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P. Kraemer.

# the clarinet

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*Guter Lohn (A Good Wage)* by the German painter Peter Kraemer (1857–1941)

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# The Genesis of a (double) Clarinet Concerto

by Gary Dranch

When I recently performed a search in the Master Index of *The Clarinet* for articles on the American composer John Bavicchi (b. 1922), I was surprised to find that the only entry was by James Gillespie (Vol. II/2, page 26, February 1975, "The Clarinet Music of John Bavicchi"). Since I became acquainted with John Bavicchi's music, I have been mystified by the relative scarcity of clarinetists who perform his music. This neglect is undeserved, as John Bavicchi is a gifted and prolific composer of clarinet music. He has composed a total of 23 opuses featuring clarinet in solo or chamber capacity. Bavicchi's latest work, which his friend and conductor David Callahan has described as "one of his best 'songs' yet," is his *Tomorrow Will be Today, a Double Concerto for Clarinet & Mezzo Soprano with Mixed Ensembles*, opus 126 (2006). This is the story of how this composition came into existence.

## The Background

In 2000, I stumbled upon John Bavicchi's *Sonata No. 1 for Unaccompanied Clarinet*, opus 20 (1956). As was my practice to correspond with living composers, I wrote to John and was surprised to receive a delightfully inked letter (which I soon found out is his practice, preferring not to use computers), in which he expressed his delight that I was interested in his music and inviting me to meet him at his home in Newton, Massachusetts. It would take me another six years to make good on this invitation. Thus began our friendship which solidified when I performed his *Concerto for Clarinet and String Orchestra*, opus 11 (1954). He provided guidance regarding details about the score, tempos, influences of the work, and editing the recording of the work (*MSR Classics 1180*).

## First Inklings

In April 2005 I sent John an idea for a new work. I had long been fond of Lao Zi and Confucianism, and toyed with the idea of having John write me a double concerto

for clarinet and voice, where poems in the "Tao Te Ching" would form the basis of the text. In fall 2005 I performed Bavicchi's *Quintet for Clarinet & Strings, opus 109*, as well as his Opus 20, in New York City at the Donnell Library Center, which John attended. This was the first time we had met in person. I had finally begun to grasp John's compositional style of writing and his aesthetic. We continued to discuss the genesis of the double concerto. Much to my surprise, I learned John was already well underway in planning it out.

## "The Conception"

Several weeks later, John wrote to me that he had begun making plans to meet with an expert in Chinese poetry from Harvard library. He was intent on locating sources of Japanese classic poetry (which are Chinese in derivation), using the same number of syllables as those in contemporary Japanese poetic forms. The idea was to locate a volume of translations of a Japanese form, the Tanka for example, in which the English syllable accents match the Japanese accents. This way the work would be able to be performed in either the Japanese or English version, which appealed to John very much. Here is an extended excerpt from the letter John wrote me in late 2005:

*Considering the form of the piece first, naturally, I plan to use an "arch" (or "pyramid") form. Each section in the arch would deal with one of the poetic forms. If the Chinese-Japanese connection is clear rhythmically then I would use the Chinese source as the keystone of the arch. If not then the Choka, the oldest and longest of the Japanese forms would be in the keystone. So the shape of the form will be:*

A	B	C	D	CN	BN	AN
Using	Using	Using	Chinese	Choka	Tanka	Haiku
Several	Several	Choka	"Source"			
Haiku	Tanka		Poem			

*The A-Section, including the introduction (which I have just about finished) contains the "harmonic complex" upon which the whole piece will be built. The idea being that they will be used in what was perhaps the earliest "chaconne" concept – each repetition of the set of chords being a different animation, or in variation or somehow altered without changing its identity. In the later chaconne and passacaglia, of course, the melody was repeated with different variations, etc. As for the instrumentation, I am planning to set up several units which would be used as a total ensemble only in the intro, keystone, and coda. They would be used "kaleidoscopically" throughout the rest of the piece, alone, two together, varying order, three together, etc. etc. The units are – in my thinking at the moment:*

<i>I Solo Clarinet</i>	<i>IV Timpani (set of 4)</i>	<i>VII Brass Quintet (2 trumpets, horn, Trombone, Tuba)</i>
<i>II Solo Mezzo</i>	<i>V Percussion</i>	<i>VIII Vocal Quartet x 2 (SSAATTBB)</i>
<i>III Solo Piano</i>	<i>VI String Quartet</i>	

*In effect I am proposing a one-movement work of considerable size. It is going to be sectionalized by the very nature of so many short poems and groups of instruments. I am sure I will end up with the Schumann system of numbered small movements which will fall naturally into larger units, which may or may not be bridged for continuity. There is no way that I will know that ahead. So there you have it. I am working on your piece and as soon as a couple of the ambiguities discussed are settled I'll get to the final stages of putting notes on paper. By summer I will be able to increase my time available, hoping to finish in the September – October [2006] area to prepare for spring [concert]. I'm really happy having a piece like this to work on. Thank you and any comments are welcome. All the best, John."* [letter to the author, December 12, 2005]

I included this extended quotation from John's letter because it provides a detailed "window" into the thought process of the composer in the planning stages of the work. Unbeknownst to me was John's particular biography relating to Japan which he only recently clarified:

*The suggestion from Mr. Dranch to use Japanese poetry was particularly felicitous, since my personal background includes more than a year spent in the Japanese Islands during World War II. I served as a Lieutenant (JG) in the Navy at that time and 14 months of my three years overseas was spent on the islands of Okinawa and Honshu. A good portion of this was after hostilities had ended, so I had some time to observe cultural life, as decimated as it was at that time. The poetry I picked to use as text was not only haiku, but that form's predecessor the tanka, a more extended version of the poetical rhythms. Thus the poetry spanning centuries was used in conjunction with a contemporary instrument, the clarinet, as part of a two-pronged basis for a very recent musical composition.*" [letter dated 9/23/08]

Meanwhile, several months had passed without my having received news from John regarding the evolution of the concerto. This was cleared up by a letter dated March 29, 2006, from John in which he nonchalantly explained that in the interim he had undergone brain surgery:

*I'm well into your piece and am having a good time with it. The Japanese poetry put a new angle on things and I've really gotten into it. Been through literally hundreds of poems to find the ones I could use. Only one thing remains and that's a meeting coming up with an expert on Chinese poetry which was the source of the oldest form the Japanese used, the Choka. This meeting was delayed by my sojourn in the hospital for brain surgery [emphasis is the author's!] which could have had a lot of unpleasant aftermaths but which seems to have left me as I was before it – thankfully.*

John went on to discuss his plans to complete the work by the end of summer so that the work could be premiered by the spring of 2008. The result of this life-threatening event in John Bavicchi's life was that his enforced convalescence created the time for him to work on this concerto. In a letter to the author dated May 6, 2006, he wrote:

*I am working on your piece most days and feel very happy the way it is going.*

*Certainly one of the most interesting things I've ever worked on. Not teaching this term because of the hospital stay has helped things move a lot faster.*

In fact, John wrote large portions of the concerto while he was in the rehabilitation hospital. Many of the staff, John said, thought that he was crazy.

### The "Christening"

Finally, and right on schedule, John sent me the following letter, dated September 11, 2006:

*Your "concerto" is finished and I feel pretty good about it, which hasn't always been true when I finished a piece. So we'll take it as a good sign. It's just about 600 bars long and will run about 20 minutes plus – I'll time it soon.*

John included the first page of the score which he entered into the computer with the title: "What's Its Name?," and he invited me to come up with one in the near future. Then there was more discussion about plans for the eventual premiere. He concluded:

*I hope you like the piece when you get it – if not, what to do? Anyway, it was a blast writing it and I know a helluva lot more about Japanese poetry than I ever did – that's for sure.*

In a letter from the composer dated 11/23/06, the issue of what the subtitle of the work should be was resolved:

*Your suggestion to use a line from the poetry for a title got me thinking along those lines. I've decided the title is Tomorrow Will be Today, a Double Concerto, etc. I hope this is OK with you – it is philosophical enough for me and kind of a provocative title. So that gap is now filled.*

The title of the work comes from Tanka No.1 (Section No.5), where the soprano sings:

"One cannot rely on things to stay as they are – for on the morrow this day we call today will be called yesterday."

(and continuing that thought) and Tomorrow Will Be Today.

### The Blueprint

The diagram of the concerto which John enclosed is shaped like a pyramid. (See Figure 1: The "Blueprint")

The form of the work is like a palindrome. There are 18 sections in all, with six Haiku, six Tanka and one Choka, or 13 poems in all. There are five interludes. Each section has a different orchestration, with the first, last and middle movement (Choka, No. 9) containing the full complement of instruments. The clarinet plays in all but four of the 18 sections. The mezzo-soprano soloist sings in all but five of the 18 sections. The concerto starts out with a set of three Haiku which are connected to the next set of three Tankas by an Inter-

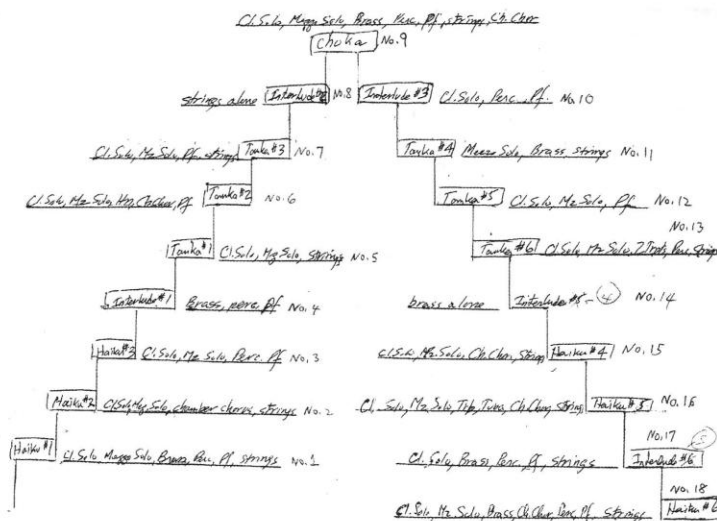


Figure 1: The "Blueprint"

lude. Another Interlude for strings alone connects to the long Choka poem. Then another Interlude connects to another set of three Tankas, followed by another Interlude with two Haikus, separated by another Interlude before the third and final Haiku which concludes the work.

The final version of the piano-vocal score arrived December 2, 2006. John also included his tentative tempo markings for the different sections. In a letter from the composer dated 12/26/06 he reiterated his belief that tempi are ultimately at the discretion of the performers:

*My metronome marks are a very precise approximation. I think I may have already told you when you did the Quintet [opus 109] that your tempi are the correct tempi – if mine happen to agree I'm delighted – but your tempi are the correct tempi, and I will tell any conductor that.*

### The “Interview”

Six years from the time John first invited me to his home in Newton, Massachusetts, I finally made the pilgrimage. (See Figure 2) He was as inviting and generous as could be. The long vaulted bar in John's basement which he made by himself, legendary in musical circles throughout New England, more than exceeded expectations. I had prepared a set of questions with which to interview John, and did this before imbibing any libations, but I found John harder to interview than I would have supposed from his writing prose style. He was much more reticent in describing his writing process in person than he had been in his letters. Nonetheless, I came away with a transcript of about 90 minutes from which some loose ends were figuratively tied, at least in my mind. Here are some of the highlights from that interview:

John was still working on finalizing the score at the time of our meeting. A vexing issue which remained was how to faithfully render the Japanese syllables for the vocal part. The reason, which was a bit confusing, is that the English was based on a translation from the original Japanese into English, rendered to approximate the correct number of syllables from the Japanese poetry. But then, using the English and translating back into the Japanese did not always work, since the literal translation did not contain the precise same number of syllables in Japanese as the English. This would eventually be worked out with the help of the Japanese poetry scholar. John also spoke about his choice of the 13 poems

he distilled from around 100, which he said were philosophically oriented. John spoke of the lack of permanence of things as exemplified in Nature. One of the Tankas is about drinking buddies who look like monkeys after drinking sake, which provides some comic relief from the rather melancholic tone of the work. I mentioned to John that there was a kind of sense in the poems of drabness, of grays and the weariness of winter, with a kind of unrelenting quality to them. John cautioned about over-using percussion, and mentioned that he hoped he hadn't overused it in the work. He decided not to use mallets since he already had a percussive piano part.

Upon my return home, I pressed John to expand on some issues I had been unclear about during our interview. He was kind enough to send me a letter on 3/20/07, in which he elaborated at great length on the harmonic structure and organizing tonal principles. John wrote that the whole work was based on a cadence formula based on Japanese pentatonic scales (both ascending and descending) – namely, the Ritusen, Ryosen, Hirajashi, Kumai, Ryokyu (Okinawa), Yusen and Imsen. (See Figure 3)

*The cadence formula is organized with the classical principles of voice leading and common tones and dissonance and resolution – and is this one:* [See Figure 4]

*I threw in a new wrinkle to experiment with. I kept 'e' out of all the chords and tried using 'e' as a resolution of the whole sections – so far I like it – we'll see whether it's 'in the flesh,' so to speak. For instance,*

*the opening page – in the piano part the four chords are: 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the complex – the roulades are the Hirajashi scale with chord 1 and the Kumai (with an F<sup>b</sup> upper neighbor with chord 2). The word “roulades” is a “flourish” – a melismatic set of the Hirajashi scale – a very extended ornamentation, etc., etc. The clarinet opening gesture is an arpeggiation (in a succession of scales) of chord 2 which the piano has just played. The string accompaniment is the same thing stressing different parts of the chord. Basically the whole piece is built this way – just meat and potatoes composing like everyone else – set up your chords and work from all of them. One place where I used the “E” resolution is measure 279 – the final chord in the complex is the resolution of the whole movement and then the brass come in with it and give vent to the ‘E’ in octaves – I think it will work well. And what I was telling you about adapting the poetry – was Haiku #2:*

<i>Kasa nugite</i>	5
<i>Muri nimo nururu</i>	7
<i>Kita shigure</i>	5

*fits the scheme perfectly – the translation I had did not –*

<i>doffing the hat</i>	4
<i>to get wet deliberately</i>	8
<i>winter showers in the North</i>	7

*So I worked on it to come out –*

<i>Doffing the broad hat</i>	5
<i>Getting wet the only goal</i>	7
<i>(Showers in the North)</i>	5



Figure 2: The author (left) with John Bavicchi (right) at his home

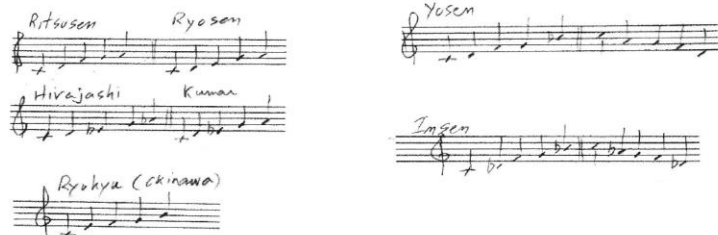


Figure 3: John Bavicchi's Japanese modes

or  
(In Winter Showers) 5

This kind of adjustment I did in several places to keep the rhythm scheme "pure."

## Dénoûement

Preparations for the premiere proceeded from this point on. This was to be a tribute to John Bavicchi on the occasion of his 85<sup>th</sup> year. The plan was to recruit as many of the composer's lifelong friends and colleagues as practical. In fact John had conceived the orchestration based on his knowledge of who could be counted upon to perform his work. The producer of the event was to be Peter Hazzard, also a composer and long-time professor at the Lawrence Academy in Groton, Massachusetts. The venue would be the Richardson-Mees Performing Arts Center on Saturday, June 7, 2008. All the works on the program would be directly or indirectly the result of John Bavicchi's 55 years of teaching other composers, including Peter Hazzard, Kenji Kikuchi, and Kenneth Pulig. The mezzo-soprano soloist was Robin Ginenthal, and the conductor was David Callahan. The live performance was recorded, and a CD was produced from it and the dress rehearsal, issued under the BKJ Publications label, and marketed via Amazon.com.

John wrote a letter in September 2008 on my behalf in which he described the process of writing and having his clarinet concerto performed as "...one of the most rewarding relationships of my musical life (and perhaps that of Mr. Dranch) has been flourishing ever since." It is incontestable that my interaction with John Bavicchi has been both personally and musically rewarding. I am most pleased that John Bavicchi produced a work of such richness and complexity. It is an extraordinary vehicle for demonstrating clarinet virtuosity

and showmanship. There is a variety of textural forms throughout the concerto that call for an array of moods and gestures: from sparse writing evocative of chamber music scoring for just voice, piano and clarinet, to a complete blanket of sound from the entire ensemble of 22.

## Conclusion

My goal has been to introduce the clarinet world to a musically rewarding and complex new double concerto. My hope is that clarinetists will embrace this work and make it part of their repertoire, despite its challenges and unorthodox instrumentation. I am looking forward to future performances of this work in the Japanese version, calling attention to the beauty of the Japanese poetry, and helping to promote East-West, cross-cultural fertilization.

## Addendum

Since James Gillespie's article was published in 1975, John Bavicchi has composed the following solo and chamber works for clarinet:

**Publisher:** BKJ Publications, Box 12 Groton, MA 01450 phone/fax: (603) 883-8230;  
**E-mail:** bkjpublications@comcast.net

Opus 71: *Four Miniatures* for woodwind quartet (flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon) (1976), (10:00)

Opus 86: *Trio* for flute, clarinet and bassoon (1983), (8:00)

Opus 87: *Concerto for Clarinet and Wind Ensemble* (1984), (16:00)

Opus 102: *Canto II for Solo Clarinet* (1990), (6:00)

Opus 106: *Infinite Patience* (1991) for mezzo-soprano, clarinet in B-flat and piano, (10:00)

Opus 109: *Quintet for Clarinet and Strings* (1995), (14:00)

Opus 126: *Tomorrow Will be Today a Double Concerto for Clarinet & Mezzo Soprano with Mixed Ensembles* (2006), (26:00)

## Acknowledgements

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## ABOUT THE WRITER...

**Gary Dranch**, a New York freelancer specializing in contemporary music, holds a D.M.A. in performance from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Dranch studied with Stanley Hasty at the Eastman School of Music. He obtained his M.M. in Clarinet Performance at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Dranch had works written for him by composers Elliott Schwartz, Daniel Wolff, Peter Hazzard and John Bavicchi. He had several solo appearances with orchestras in New York, Europe and South America, and performed at I.C.A. Vancouver, Canada, of "AMEROPA," a chamber music festival in Prague, Czech Republic. His CDs include: **The Brazilian Concerto** on the nomination list for a Grammy in 2001, **The Twentieth Century Clarinet Concerto**, released by MSR Classics in 2006, and **Tomorrow Will Be Today**, released on BKJ Publications label in 2008. He is an invited guest soloist with Filarmonica Brasov in Romania, where he performs the Nielsen *Clarinet Concerto* in April 2009.

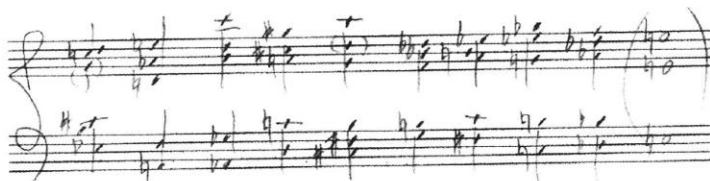


Figure 4: John Bavicchi's "harmonic cadence"