French-born Joannès Rochut (1881-1952) was principal trombonist in the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1925-1930.

Rochut was among a number of French musicians awarded posts in the symphony, having followed the famous conductor Koussevitsky from Paris. Rochut was a product of the famed Paris Conservatory, and it was there that he was introduced to Marco Bordogni's (1789-1856) vocalises, which he later transcribed for trombone. That Rochut was well-known for his lyrical playing should come as no surprise, for not only was the French lyrical style of trombone playing en vogue at the time, Rochut spent much of his time practicing vocal music, including that of Marco Bordogni.

When Rochut transcribed for trombone a number of Marco Bordogni's vocalises, he could not have imagined that some eighty years later those transcriptions would comprise what has become one of the cornerstones of serious trombone studies. Rochut's transcriptions are not only a testament to the expertise with which Bordogni crafted his études, they exemplify the timelessness that good music can enjoy, even if its original intention was pedagogical in nature. Rochut's transcriptions came to hold such a revered position in trombone pedagogy, at least in the U.S., due to several converging factors, including the rich lineage they share with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Few trombonists question the value in studying Rochut (Bordogni) études, but the études do present some pedagogical, or even philosophical dilemmas.

I remember vividly the first time I was assigned a Rochut étude (No. 2) as a young student, just getting serious about trombone. As I began to tackle my assignment, I became overwhelmed by the task at hand. Not only did the first two notes (a leap of a major sixth) present a formidable technical challenge, I had no concept of how to approach the music stylistically, let alone any concept of what a good classical trombone sounded like! I vaguely understood that I needed to play the piece smoothly, but beyond that I was at a loss. Of course, 17-year old me wasn't thinking of style, or sound in such clear terms.

At right: Don Immel
It was just that my musical upbringing, which mostly consisted of a healthy dose of classic rock, and the jazz to which I was exposed in high school jazz band, left me ill-prepared to approach a Rochut étude. Several years later my musical experience had widened tremendously—so much so that I thought I knew something about music. It was around this time that I began to question the value of logging-in so much time on études that were not originally intended for our instrument, and that were styled after bel canto arias and the like. In retrospect, what bothered me most about trombonists' general enthusiasm towards Rochut études was that many trombonists I encountered seemed blindly to assume that working on Rochut études was beneficial. For that matter, many trombonists seemed to me to know little about Rochut himself.

Over the years I have revisited the Rochut books. As I become increasingly interested in pedagogy, I have thought deeply about the potential value in studying Rochut études, as well as the dilemmas which these études present. After talking with several colleagues, I have found that my early experience with Rochut études was not unusual. This has led me to wonder whether my frustration with Rochut études was perhaps misguided. We did not listen to opera, or art song, growing up in the LaBelle household. The extent of our classical music exposure as children was the occasional famous, fun piece, i.e. Peter and the Wolf, or the Nutcracker. Attending the symphony was not an option because the ticket price proved prohibitive. So before college I had never heard a big, orchestral brass section, and certainly not solo trombone.

The problem is simple. Classical music is not present in our culture the way it was even fifty years ago. The young trombonist is faced with an even graver situation, for he has virtually no frame of reference for comparison, or standard to strive for. As my good friend Don Immel put it, "the last time the trombone was sexy was when Glen Miller was popular." Don's off-the-cuff remark hints at a serious issue for our instrument. The trombone is practically non-existent in popular culture. It is easy enough to hear voice, violin, cello, guitar, piano, even trumpet on television, on the radio, or in the grocery store. But young trombonists have virtually no point of reference other than what they encounter in school, at band festivals, or perhaps in private lessons. Certainly, most young trombonists do not have the opportunity to hear the great players of their instrument. This problem extends to the college level. Unless a student is fortunate enough to attend school in a major metropolitan area, chances are good that he rarely has heard a truly excellent trombonist in an intimate and real setting.

Many students are left to use recordings as their point of comparison. The past twenty-five years have enjoyed a major increase in the number of solo trombone recordings, and the Internet makes it possible for any student anywhere in the world to have access to great recordings of solo literature. Surprisingly, however, there are very few recordings of trombonists demonstrating the technical exercises which make up a large part of serious trombone studies, notably Rochut études. So I thought: why not record a handful of the nation's premier classical trombonists playing their favorite Rochut études?
I came up with a list of trombonists whose playing I hold in high esteem, and began to put some feelers out, sending emails and seeing what sort of interest there was in such a project. To my surprise, the trombonists I contacted were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the project. I had decided early on that it would be most sensible to record the artists on location, rather than fly them to a central location. Ultimately, I whittled the list down to five players: Ralph Sauer, Don Imme!, Scott Hartman, John Rojak, and Douglas Yeo, each of whom represents a different approach to playing the trombone. *The Essential Rochut*, as I later titled the project, was born.

Between March and December, 2007 I made several trips to record the artists, during which time, through casual conversations, I was able to gain some wonderful insight into the potential benefits of studying Rochut études, as well as some inherent dilemmas. Most of the players seemed to agree that the Rochut études are a great resource of lovely melodies, something which the relatively small trombone canon lacks. Many of us know at least a few Rochut études by heart, and it can be quite beneficial to simply play a simple song from time to time.

Scott Hartman favors using known melodies to teach what he calls "elegant" phrasing (as opposed to simply "smooth" legato playing). I mentioned the idea that Rochut études are difficult for a student whose musical/cultural upbringing does not include bel canto vocal music. Scott agreed, and added the notion that even songs as mundane as "Happy Birthday" can serve as good mediums for learning "elegant" playing, especially since they are easily memorized. Moreover, Scott pointed out that common songs usually have lyrics, and that the student's knowledge of those lyrics lends itself to a natural tendency, on the student's part, to add certain inflections, etc. This is often lacking in students' interpretations of Rochut études, since they are inherently without lyrics. The student's approach is different towards songs they know and love. On the other hand, as a student spends time with the Rochut books, the melodies become more familiar. Scott Makes a crucial point, however, suggesting that students often treat Rochut études as numbers, exercises to be mastered and played "smoothly."

Ralph Sauer approaches Rochut études like one might approach a bel canto aria, by attempting to incorporate variety into his articulations, not have every slur uniform, etc. But he cautions the student to not approach a Rochut étude stylistically with a mind towards performance practice. Rather, the student should approach a Rochut étude like a singer might approach a song, and use the Rochut études, on the whole, as a means to develop one's own style. This sort of subtlety and elegance is evident in all the trombonists I recorded for the project, and they each exhibit a unique, individual style.

Above all, it is crucial that trombonists consider the nature of Rochut études. We take them for granted as part of "what you do" to get better at trombone, rarely considering where these études came from, for what reason, and by whom. This is not to say that Rochut études must be played in the bel canto style, or that historical performance practice is essential, but rather that it is important to understand that they are not merely technical exercises to be mastered.

Rochut études are a great resource. They present a wide range of musical and technical challenges. More importantly, however, Rochut's études comprise a voluminous body of melodies which well-suit the trombone. These melodies lend themselves to the development of elegant, subtle playing which, hopefully, transfers well to other, less obviously melodic material. But it is easy to miss these subtleties. It is my hope that *The Essential Rochut* will provide students with a useful point of reference that will help them reap the full potential of Joannes Rochut's now famous transcriptions of Marco Bordogni's vocalises.

Special thanks to Presonus Audio Electronics, Andy Gorges at Royer Labs, Mike Bruce at Lucid Audio/Auricle Audio Mastering, and David Fetter.

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