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"Repertoire for a Swedish bassoon virtuoso: Approaching early nineteenth-century works composed for Frans Preumayr with an original Grenser & Wiesner bassoon"

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Conclusion

When I began my docARTES studies four years ago, my initial intention was to discover details about the history of my early nineteenth-century Grenser & Wiesner bassoon, related repertoire and the original owner, presumably located in Sweden. The road, however, did not lead to more detailed information concerning the bassoon's background as hoped, and instead my attention turned directly to the virtuoso Frans Preumayr, introduced in chapter 1, who played in the Royal Orchestra and was a well-reputed soloist, chamber musician, and military band conductor. Very little information about this key figure was available, aside from brief reports about his concert performances in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* and short biographical notes in lexicons. One of these notes, however, mentioned that a travel journal was written by Preumayr in 1829–30, and preserved in the Music and Theatre Library of Sweden. After some delay, I was fortunate enough to obtain a copy and partial transcription.

Preumayr's lengthy *Reisejournal* has in the meantime become a manuscript of greater interest and will undoubtedly be completely transcribed in the near future. While spending months translating these Swedish accounts into English, I began to feel that I was reading the diary of a dear friend, and I selected relevant passages to share, as found in chapter 2. Reading the journal entries, I commiserated with his disappointments and cheered his triumphs as he travelled to foreign centers, all the while fascinated by his reflections on daily matters and reports of musical and personal experiences. The portrait of a likeable, honest and humble musician emerged, and my greatest sympathy was captured when he described that "abominable fear", a condition known today as stage fright, sharing his open and touching testimonies about a subject surely familiar to many musicians at some point in their careers. No other such document written by a bassoonist from earlier centuries exists, to my knowledge, and it thus offers a rare insight into the life of this nineteenth-century figure.

Although I did not find any mention of fingerings or reed dimensions in Preumayr's journal, detailed accounts of performances, meetings with bassoonists, and his reactions to concert reviews served to give me very clear ideas about his concept of tone. No other concrete evidence has surfaced yet about Preumayr's personal reed-making style, but there are definite indications of his preference for a resistant, dark-sounding reed, according to his comments about tone quality in comparison to that of his French colleagues, and reports by concert critiques in Paris;²⁶² in London, meanwhile, reviewers were convinced that Preumayr was one of the greatest bassoonists alive and wholeheartedly applauded his choice of timbre, as well as his exceptional virtuosity. A good half of Preumayr's journal still remains to be transcribed, and although not equipped to carry out a modern Swedish transcription of the manuscript myself, I hope to collaborate in making a translation of it into English.

My somewhat farfetched hope that Preumayr could have played my bassoon never materialized, but the bassoonist's preference of instrument maker was found in entries of his journal, as well as on instrument orders located in the War Archives in Stockholm, and is in line with the knowledge that Grenser, Gresner & Wiesner, and Wiesner woodwind instruments were very popular in Sweden, as outlined in chapter 3. As the consistency of instruments from the Dresden workshop became more clear after examinations of numerous models from Heinrich Grenser and Samuel Wiesner, I could conclude that our instruments were most likely quite similar; this knowledge strengthened my quest in approaching the challenges found in Preumayr's repertoire and my concept of timbre.

At the beginning of the 1980s, makers such as Peter de Koningh, who produced a 9-keyed Grenser model based on an instrument located at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, began to provide bassoons for a growing market of historical instrumentalists. Instrument makers Pau Orriols and Alfons Sibila recently completed instrument copies using a combination of

²⁶² This description correlates more or less with the kind of timbre produced by a German reed style described by Rainer Weber [See chapter 3].

measurements from a Heinrich Grenser instrument and my Grenser & Wiesner bassoon. Today, dozens of woodwind builders have chosen to produce copies of period instruments based on Grenser/Wiesner models and a wide variety of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century copies of flutes, clarinets, oboes and bassoons are being offered. This is not surprising, considering the excellent reputation that the Dresdner workshop had for its production of instruments over a long period. Famous for their tonal characteristics, stability of intonation and quality of craftsmanship, the Grenser tradition extended over one hundred years and three generations and has thus been revived by contemporary woodwind makers, who influence historical performance practice today by providing musicians with replicas of these fine instruments.

Considering the implications of combining my instrument type with the requirements found in his repertoire, it is noteworthy that Preumayr performed very technically progressive compositions on an old-fashioned instrument model; he must have pushed it to its very limits.²⁶³ Composers Du Puy, Crusell, Crémont, and Brendler all took advantage of Preumayr's remarkable capabilities; an investigation of these works shows a consistent demand for an exceptional and conspicuous bassoon range.

The interpretation possibilities of articulation markings, in particular those which were notated as long-shaped melodic phrasing, were discussed in chapter 4, along with mention of an evident vocal style found throughout. Preumayr describes his own attempts to “sing” on the bassoon in his journal, revealing insight into his musical approach and an aspect that can be emulated and incorporated into performance practice of this repertoire.²⁶⁴

Although some may reason that these works were written for one specific virtuoso and therefore not probably intended for performance by anyone else, I found it difficult to accept that this sizeable collection of pieces might never be performed on historical instruments

²⁶³ See chapter 3 in this study, “Preumayr’s choice” and “An intact instrument from Stockholm”.

²⁶⁴ See Preumayr, 260–63.

primarily because of their large range, and I reflected on several different options to overcome this problem. Known as an orchestral musician and teacher, I have never considered myself a bassoon soloist, but I could not resist the challenge offered by this opportunity and began searching for means to produce the highest notes found in Preumayr's solo repertoire, describing this process in chapter 5. To my surprise, I found that it was not nearly as difficult as previously imagined, and most importantly, that this skill could be readily transferred to my students, who quickly assimilated and applied the information given to them, using various models of bassoons, reeds and bocals.

New, accurate replicas of the three original bocals from various contemporary makers proved to work excellently on my bassoon; players with other bassoon models, including original Grensers and copies made by various instrument builders, have also given positive feedback about using these replicas with their set-ups. I did not yet find any historical background information about the original C.J.F. reed makers, but speculated that they might be representative of a school of reed-making similar to Preumayr's style. Their dimensions proved to be a plausible starting point for my reed trials; I ultimately made slight modifications in these measurements after taking the qualities of contemporary *Arundo donax* into consideration. These trials successfully generated reeds enabling me to find an extended range, but I am cautious about drawing any firm conclusions based alone on these dimensions, or any single element of hardware. The ideal set-up of reed and bocal combined with an instrument and player remains clearly dependent upon personal taste and can only be arrived at by trial and error.

The outcomes of processes described in chapter 5 provided some answers to questions about reed cane and finishing methods; descriptions of physical and mental strategies of my students' experiences, all of which played vital and enlightening roles, were summarized. We saw that no single fingering functioned consistently in the same manner for each bassoon and player, but

instead learned to apply a flexible system of raising and lowering pitches with fingerings and air pressure, implementing these according to the demands of each individual set-up.

Evidence surfaced showing that the conviction of possibility is a strong motivating factor affecting the issue of range and, due to the positive results of our findings, it is expected that the last half-octave will soon become the norm for more historical bassoonists. An interesting concept emerged while learning to extend my register and experimenting with teaching methods: the powerful tool of modeling became a significant part of my pedagogical approach. Observing cases of self-efficacy also increased my awareness as a teacher of the important responsibility to encourage students to rid themselves of detrimental mental limitations.

Future research

With the unusual Preumayr bassoon trio still in mind, I plan to continue to explore the realm of *Harmoniemusik* arrangements for both small and large ensembles and hope to bring some of these works to light. For example, an arrangement for wind ensemble by Crusell of Beethoven's popular *Septett in Es-Dur*, op. 20 has captured my interest and warrants further attention.²⁶⁵ Furthermore, a large amount of unexamined material for different settings of wind ensembles exists in libraries throughout Europe;²⁶⁶ countless nineteenth-century opera arrangements are of particular interest, requiring instrumentalists to rethink their roles, as they continually switch between playing an accompaniment and solo "singing" in recitative and aria. Another topic, mentioned in the introduction, is the examination of and research about a rare nine ivory-keyed bassoon by Heinrich Grenser, intact with two bocals and two wing joints, which surfaced a few years ago and became part of a private collection in Switzerland.

²⁶⁵ Website of Beethoven-Haus Bonn: http://www.beethoven-haus-bonn.de/sixcms/detail.php?id=&template=dokseite_digitales_archiv_en&_dokid=ha:wm360&_seite=1 [accessed August 12, 2014]. "...An arrangement for eleven wind instruments by Bernhard Crusell... was published by Peters in Leipzig in 1825."

²⁶⁶ Large collections of *Harmoniemusik* arrangements are located, for example, in the Hohenlohe-Zentralarchiv, Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg in Neuenstein containing works by Mozart, Beethoven, von Weber, Rossini, Spohr, Mendelssohn, Cherubini, Donizetti, among others.

Comparisons made thus far between this one and my Grenser & Wiesner show great similarities, although constructed some twenty years apart. As some of the ivory keys were deformed and no longer functional, a set of brass keys has recently been completely, enabling the instrument now to be carefully played, albeit with its conservation being a high priority for its owner.

A third subject concerning embouchure variations has already been written about by numerous authors, including Kopp and Domínguez Moreno, and offers the opportunity to continue researching the effects of an oblique embouchure together with reeds and high-register production; this subject was too expansive to be included in my present study.²⁶⁷

Looking back over the 30 years spent with my Grenser & Wiesner, I am aware that its rich and sonorous qualities of timbre kept me continually and passionately fascinated and enabled me to perform the literature of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on one of the most excellent original bassoons available. Without it, it is dubious that I would have embarked upon research leading to Stockholm and Preumayr, which in turn led to an examination of early nineteenth-century Swedish bassoon repertoire and technical discoveries about range.

In addition to my own progress as a player, the most significant benefits acquired from these studies have been experiences which have clearly and positively influenced my teaching; the results of the many trials concerning hardware, fingerings, and physical aspects of bassoon playing, along with many important personal observations, can be implemented in my future classes, and have provided me with new areas of expertise. Enriched thus both professionally and personally, I hope that the information offered here will contribute to further research on the subject of nineteenth century bassoon repertoire, provoking discussion and inspiring period bassoonists to develop a performance practice tradition of these and other works associated

²⁶⁷ Kopp (2012), 91, 97, 140–42, 182, 184. And: Domínguez Moreno, ‘Exploring Performance Practice: Late 18th- and 19th-Century Bassoon Embouchure’, *Double Reed*, 38/1 (2015).

with the Swedish virtuoso Preumayr, thereby increasing the relatively small number of compositions available for this instrument. A recording of chamber music for winds, strings and piano with compositions by Berwald and Du Puy is included as a part of this doctoral thesis, hopefully marking the beginning of a new era of research and performance of Preumayr's repertoire with historical instruments.

Epilogue

Frans Brüggén explained in a television interview, after the first tour of The Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century in 1981:

Als je het instrumentarium uit die tijd hebt . . . dan ben je al een stuk dichterbij. . . . je bent niet gedwongen om anders te spelen, jouw instrument speelt al anders . . . dat hoef je alleen maar te doen . . . binnen de mogelijkheden en de aard en natuur van de instrument.²⁶⁸

If you have the instruments of the time . . . then you are already a lot closer. You are not forced to play differently, your instrument already plays differently . . . you only need to do that . . . within the possibilities of the character and kind of instrument.

I can still recall my great joy on April 3, 1985 in the afternoon in London, when the auctioneer closed the sale of lot 134 a few minutes after it had begun and I had the privilege to call the instrument mine. In addition to its being my long-term musical companion, I most gratefully confirm that my Grenser & Wiesner bassoon has been an unfailing and patient teacher, accompanying me on my musical adventures for the last three decades and ultimately leading me on a valuable journey into the early nineteenth-century musical world of one of the greatest European bassoonists, Frans Preumayr.

²⁶⁸ From a Dutch television interview, recorded in November 1981.

