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Giovanni Punto (1746-1803) Cor basse célèbre

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1. Context and Biography



Figure 1.1
Mosaic of Punto's portrait, logo of the Základní škola Jana Václava Sticha-Punta in Žehušice

This chapter provides an overview of the life and times of Punto in an attempt to understand some of the crucial aspects of his playing technique against the background of the developments of the horn, of society, and of the musician's profession in the second half of the eighteenth century. First of all, the instrument gets the attention it deserves. Punto enters the scene at a time when the horn has already developed locally from a signal instrument (the hunting horn) to a more fully-fledged instrument that is part of orchestras, and which is even played as a solo instrument. Most of all Punto's studies in Dresden proved to be crucial for the dissemination of a new horn type and new horn playing techniques invented by members of the local *Hofkapelle*. He was the one to spread the new style of horn playing and set the standard throughout Europe in the 33 years between his escape from serfdom and his triumphant return to Bohemia as a stage celebrity.

1.1 General development of the horn between 1680 – 1780

An important moment in the history of the horn was the visit by Count Franz Anton von Sporck (1662-1738) to the court of Versailles in the spring of 1680. At the occasion he was fascinated by the sounds of the hunting horns and left two trumpeters from his entourage, Wenzel Sweda (c.1638-c.1710) and Peter Rollig (1650-1723), behind to take lessons and subsequently bring the French horn and its playing technique home to the hunting fields and court orchestras of Bohemia. By then, the horn was already known in Germany and Bohemia, as a signal brass instrument used during hunting events. The many types of horns used in Europe prior to the emergence in 17th century France of the broad circle, or hooped, horn (on which future developments of the orchestral horn were based) are illustrated in Mersenne's *Harmonie universelle* of 1636 (figure 1.2).⁹

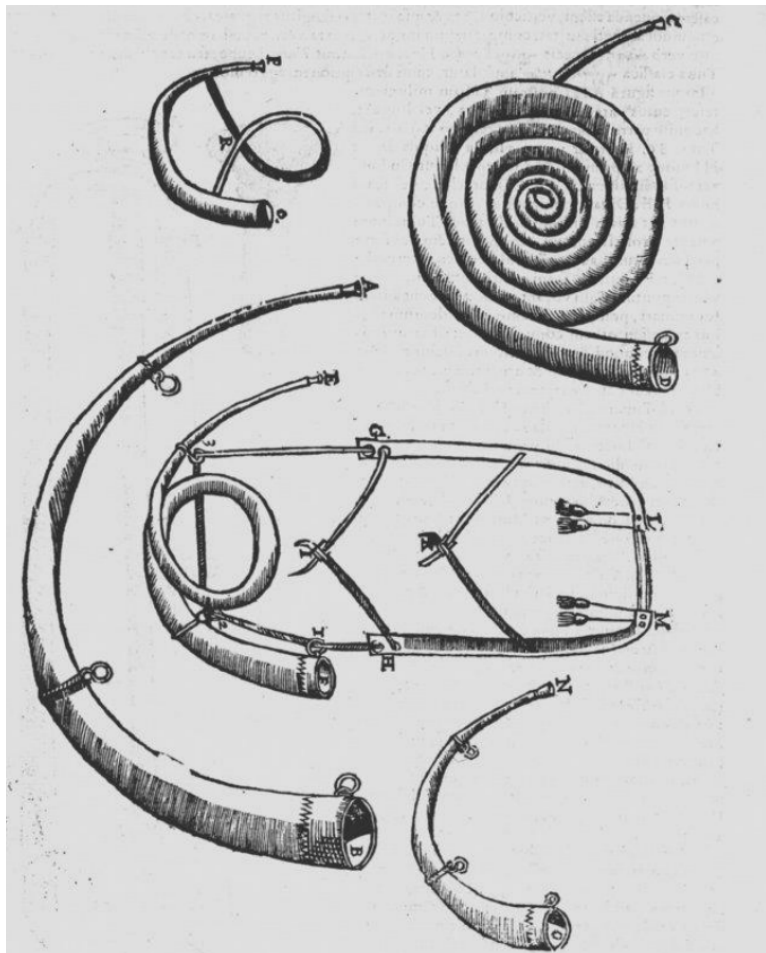


Figure 1.2
Different horn types in the chapter Harmonicorum of Mersenne's *Harmonie universelle*, 1636

⁹ Mersenne, M.: *Harmonie universelle*, Paris, 1636; 103

The fully circular horns, (*trompes de chasse*) were probably used in an orchestral setting for the first time by Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687), at Versailles in 1664.¹⁰

The appearance of the new instruments, the *improved hunting horns*, as Morley-Pegge calls them, (see Figure 1.3) is also documented by an engraving by Israël Silvestre, *Les plaisirs de l'Isle enchantée, ou les festes et divertissemens du Roy à Versailles* (published c1676), portraying a scene from the comedy.¹¹

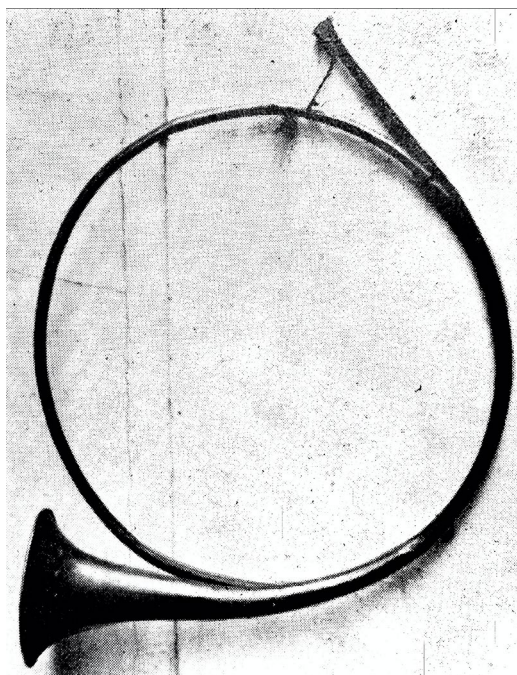


Figure 1.3
Trompe de Chasse, France, end of 17th century¹²

Lully was not the only one adding horns to the orchestra. Although the horn was still strongly associated with the hunt and offered the notes of the harmonic series only (see Figure 0.3), it began to be deployed as an instrument in mixed ensembles towards the end of the 17th century.

Around the second half of the 18th century, the horn still was most of all in use as part of the aristocratic hunting establishments. The best players, though, were drafted into their masters' house orchestras, giving impulses to the artistic development of the instrument.¹³ Critical to the evolution of its playing technique and its development into a true orchestral

¹⁰ Morley-Pegge, R.: *The French Horn, Some Notes on the Evolution of the Instrument and of its Technique*. London, 1960, second impression 1978; 16,17

¹¹ Meucci, R. and Rochetti, G.: 'Horn, History to c1800' Grove Music Online.

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000013353?rskey=1I2KIh&result=1#omo-9781561592630-e-0000013353-div1-0000013353.3> Accessed 1 April 2023

¹² Morley-Pegge, *The French Horn*, Plate II, 1

¹³ Morley-Pegge, *The French Horn*, 83

instrument were the design of a more compact and handier model and the addition of crooks, starting at the beginning of the 18th century in Austria,¹⁴ and being common by the 1740s. A crook is a piece of tubing, normally coiled, inserted between the mouthpiece and the body of the horn, or alternatively (after 1750) at the middle of the horn corpus. By changing the crook, the horn player changes the pitch of the instrument, which makes it possible to alter the fundamental note of the harmonic series.¹⁵ Between the different crooks the variation in timbre is considerable. The earliest surviving system of crooks consisted mainly of couplers, often stackable small pieces of tubing, adding length to the horn, (figures 1.4 and 1.5).

The addition of crooks made it possible for composers to expand the use of the horn in more keys during one piece and experiment with the different timbres of the horns of varying length. Already in 1724, Händel used a combination of horns in different keys in his opera *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, HWV 17, innovatively pairing two horns in A with two horns in D in the first Chorus, and two horns in G with two horns in D in the final Sinfonia of the opera.



Figure 1.4
Waldhorn by Friederich Ehe, Nuremberg, around 1730.
Now in Sammlung Alter Musikinstrumenten of the Kunsthistorisches Museum (Vienna)

¹⁴ Hiebert, T.: 'The horn in the Baroque and Classical periods.' In: *The Cambridge Companion to Brass Instruments*. Cambridge, 1997; 104

¹⁵ Baines, A.: 'Crooks, (Fr. *corps de rechange*, *ton de rechange*; Ger. *Stimmbogen*)' *Grove Music Online*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.06865> Accessed 23 May 2023

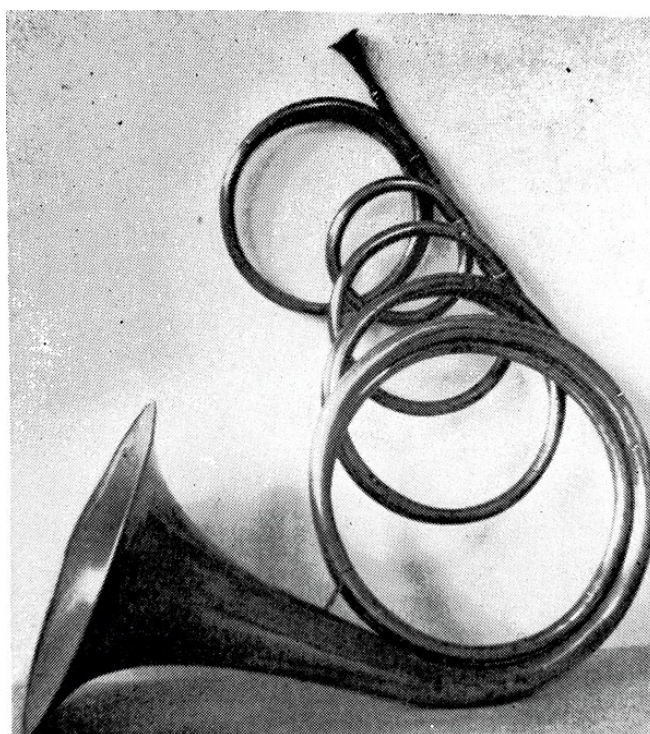


Figure 1.5
Horn with 'coupled' crooks. No inscription, possibly English, 18th century¹⁶

When using multiple couplers, the instrument easily gets wobbly and too thick to hold comfortably. Couplers were generally abandoned after 1750 (but the system continued well into the 19th century) with the introduction of a series of separate crooks to be inserted in the narrow end of the horn corpus. A customary set of crooks contained the keys of C-alto, B $\flat$ -alto, A, G, F, E, E $\flat$, D, C-basso, and B $\flat$ -basso.¹⁷ It should be noted that B $\flat$ -basso normally consists of the C-basso crook plus a one tone coupler. Figure 1.6 shows an example of an orchestral horn with the set of crooks. The C-alto crook is missing and does not seem to have been included as there is no space reserved for it in the original horn case.

¹⁶ Ibid.; Plate III, 1

¹⁷ See chapter 0 for a discussion of alto and basso crooks



Figure 1.6

Orchestral horn by Courtois Neveu Aînée, with complete set of crooks, Paris, between c1802-1809. Collection of the author

Dating from 1753 at the latest is the Inventionshorn (*figures 1.7/1.8*), developed by the famous horn player Anton Joseph Hampel in collaboration with the instrument maker

Johann Georg Werner of Dresden.¹⁸ This type of horn is distinguished by a fixed mouth pipe and different interchangeable tuning slides or slidable crooks to be placed in the middle of the body of the horn. With this innovation the instrument could be tuned more accurately. Another advantage is the constant length of the mouth pipe regardless of the crook used, making the instrument more accurate to play. The distinctive crooks lower the basic pitch from the key of E down, while from F up the inserted crooks have their own mouth pipe attached.



Figure 1.7
Earliest surviving example of an Inventionshorn, by Johann Gottfried Haltenhof
(1776, now in the Musée de la Musique, Paris) Photo: Thierry Ollivier

¹⁸ Morley-Pegge, *The French Horn*, 20



Figure 1.8

The different crooks of the Haltenhof Inventionshorn, to be inserted in the place of the tuning slide. The crooks with attached mouthpipes are clearly visible in the top row

Photo: Thierry Ollivier

The next model of a horn with tuning-slide crooks in the center of the instrument was the cor solo (figures 1.9-1.11), invented by Raoux in Paris in the years before 1780. This horn type was played by many of the famous soloists of the time, -and well into the 19th century- including Duvernoy, Dauprat and Gallay. Due to its construction with the fixed lead pipe, the cor solo responds very well to the input of the performer, but can only be played with the crooks D, E $\flat$, E, F and G. This type of horn is not suited for orchestral playing, with the lowest and highest crooks missing. In addition, changing the crooks, often necessary for orchestral horn players and virtually unnecessary for soloists, is a time-consuming affair on this instrument because the slidable crooks fit snugly into two lengths of tubing that connect them to the body of the horn. Hence the name cor solo.



Figure 1.9
Cor solo by Couesnon, with E $\flat$ crook, Paris, 1900. Collection of the author



Figure 1.10
Cor solo by Couesnon, with G crook, Paris, 1900. Collection of the author.



Figure 1.11
Complete set of crooks of cor solo by Couesnon, Paris, 1900; Left to right: D, Eb, E, F and G. Collection of the author

Developments in horn design in the 18th century were meager. A more interesting evolution was that of hand stopping, the technique that was applied first by Bohemian horn players in Dresden, during the first half of the 18th century. Since hand technique increased the number of non-harmonic notes available to horn players, a parallel can be drawn with the ongoing addition of keys to woodwind instruments in the 18th century. Like all composing instrumentalists, the horn soloists who performed their own concertos often were at the forefront of developments. In the Baroque period, the emerging extended technique of lip bending and/or hand stopping non-partials led to composers using the soloistic as well as the orchestral horn in a much more melodic way than before, most notably in the case of low horn parts. The polyphonic baroque style gradually evolved into the more monophonic classical style, with the texture of the orchestra becoming less braided. As a result, orchestral horn parts acquired a fundamental harmonic and often rhythmic function, playing the notes of the harmonic series almost without exception. Hand technique became the exclusive domain of the itinerant virtuoso horn soloist.

A hundred years after Sporck's 1680 visit to Versailles and the resulting introduction of the French horn and playing technique in Bohemia, Ernst Ludwig Gerber (1746-1819), the author of a famous dictionary of musicians, pointed out that the Bohemians' progress on the horn was unparalleled and that a musical capital like Paris itself depended on Bohemia to get good horn players.¹⁹

1.2 Jan Václav Stich in Bohemia

Punto could not have been born in a better place and at a better time to play a decisive role in the development of the horn in the second half of the 18th century. His cradle was in the middle of the horn country of Bohemia. Midway through the century when the horn underwent such profound changes, on 28 September 1746, he was born as Jan Václav Stich at the old chateau in Žehušice, near Čáslav in central Bohemia. The French horn player Henri

¹⁹ Gerber, E.: 'Horn', in: *Neues historisch-biographisches Lexikon der Tonkünstler, Zweiter Theil*. Leipzig, 1814; 281

Kling (1842-1918) mentions 1748 as the year of birth.²⁰ He probably mistakenly copied that from François-Joseph Fétis (1784-1871), the influential music critic whose article in his *Biographie Universelle* Kling quotes a lot.²¹ However, the birth certificate shows conclusively that Jan Václav Stich was born in 1746.

The chateau in Žehušice already had a venerable history, dating back to the 14th century.²² Michael Oswald, Count of Thun-Hohenstein, bought the estate in 1661²³, and it stayed in the possession of the family until well into the 20th century.

According to registry records, Jan Václav Stich's parents appeared in Žehušice in the 1730s. They became subjects of Count Thun with the whole family and with all the consequences of serfdom.²⁴ Father Václav was the personal coachman of the countess, and mother Kateřina had to work in the chateau kitchen.²⁵

The young Jan Václav probably received an introduction to music as a pupil in the local village school. Most Bohemian children were extremely well trained in music from an early age. As Charles Burney (1726 – 1814), the famous English traveling music historian, reported in 1772:

...not only in every large town, but in all villages, where there is a reading and writing school, children of both sexes are taught music.²⁶

Burney visited the village school in Čáslav, less than 10 kilometers from Žehušice, where he observed boys and girls from six to ten or eleven years old playing string and wind instruments.²⁷ The Piarist *Landschulen* (rural schools) and *Gymnasia* (colleges) as well as seminaries administered by Jesuits, offered excellent programs in music.²⁸

As Stich's contemporary and compatriot, violinist/composer Franz Benda (1709-1786) describes in his autobiography:

²⁰ Kling, H.: 'Giovanni Punto, célèbre corniste,' in: *Bulletin français de la S.I.M.*, vol. IV. Paris, 1908

²¹ Fétis, F.-J.: 'Stich, connu sous le nom de Punto', in: *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*, Vol.8. 1866-8; 285-6

²² Sedláček, A.: *Castles, chateaux and fortresses of the Kingdom of Bohemia I. Chrudimsko*. Prague, 1882

²³ <http://www.Žehušice.cz/Žehušice/hornforum/zpravy/2001-12/JVStich.htm> Accessed 6 January 2022

²⁴ Serfs were bound to land and had to obtain the permission from their manorial lords when they wanted to move.

²⁵ <http://www.Žehušice.cz/Žehušice/hornforum/zpravy/2001-12/JVStich.htm> Accessed 6 January 2022

²⁶ Burney, C.: *The Present State of Music in Germany*. London, 1775; 4

²⁷ Ibid.;

²⁸ Murray, S.A.: *The Career of an Eighteenth-Century Kapellmeister: The Life and Music of Antonio Rosetti*. Rochester, 2014; 14

....I went to the town school and learned to read, write and sing so that the first music groundwork was laid.²⁹

Next to receiving singing lessons, Stich started playing the violin and horn. Especially on the latter instrument he made promising progress, no doubt to the delight of the count. The Von Thun family was obsessed with the horn. At times in the 18th century, 6 to 8 horn players were appointed to the court of Žehušice.³⁰

As Sterling E. Murray states in his immersive book on Antonio Rosetti (c1750-1792), musicians of court orchestras were often recruited from the ranks of families of servants. In case of exceptional talent, they were sent to well-known teachers at the expense of their noble lords.³¹

That is exactly what happened in Žehušice. In 1761, Count Thun sent the then fifteen-year-old Stich, together with another young serf, the nineteen-year-old František Weisbach, to study horn with Joseph Matějka (1728-1804) in Prague and with Jan Šindelář (c.1715-c.1770) in Munich. Subsequently Stich studied (in the company of no fewer than three other horn players from Žehušice, according to the Czech musicologist Tomislav Volek),³² with Anton Joseph Hampel or Hampl (1705-1771) and Karl Haudek (1721-1802), also a former student of Šindelář,³³ in Dresden.

Although Stich was sent abroad to complete his education, all his teachers were Bohemian compatriots. Already in the first half of the eighteenth century a strong horn heritage existed in Bohemia and spread from there across Europe. The special association of the horn with Bohemian musical culture is also emphasized by Murray, when writing about the long-standing tradition of excellent Bohemian horn players in the Wallerstein Hofkapelle.³⁴

The choice for Hampel and Haudek as horn teachers in Dresden was an obvious one. Already in the first half of the eighteenth century, the Dresden court orchestra must have had a spectacular horn group, with Haudek and Hampel as the most celebrated exponents. The volume and technical demands of surviving horn parts written for the Dresden players are

²⁹ Quoted in Lee, D.A.: *A musician at court: an autobiography of Franz Benda*. Detroit, 1998; 4

³⁰ Volek, T.: 'Die Mannsfeldschen und die Thunschen Hornisten', in: *The horn in the past and present of Czech music*. Prague, 1983; 44

³¹ Murray, 95-96

³² Volek, 45

³³ Volek, 44

³⁴ Murray, 254

impressive. A striking amount of orchestral music written for Dresden by composers such as Johann David Heinichen (1683-1729), Johann Georg Pisendel (1687-1755) and the Bohemian Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679-1745), contains soloistic horn passages that testify to a high level of virtuosity.³⁵ Scores clearly demonstrate the interest of players and composers in innovative use of the high, clarino-register style for the first horn and a new, specialized style of low horn playing for the second horn. In many cases, horn parts do not merely present the second horn as the shadow of the first horn, as in so many scores from different times and places, but as an independent instrument, using non-partials and acrobatic leaps in its middle and low register. Especially the range of the low horn was extended with tones alien to the harmonic series, leading to the development of hand stopping technique. Additional horn parts by Pisendel to a 1740 violin concerto in D major by Franz Benda (1709-1786) present evidence of this new style (figure 1.12). In the score the two top staves were originally left open, and the horn parts were added in the handwriting of Pisendel, the concertmaster of the Dresden Orchestra, suggesting a collaborative experiment of him and the horn players.³⁶ The two horns start as a neighboring duo, but grow apart whenever there's a chance for the low horn to strengthen the bass line. A new texture is created, with the low horn becoming part of the bottom of the orchestra.

³⁵ Hiebert, T.: 'Virtuosity, experimentation, and innovation in horn writing from early 18th-century Dresden,' in: *Historic Brass Society Journal* 4, 1992; 112-159

³⁶ *Ibid.*: 127

Concerto. a s. 1740 in F#m del G. Fr. Benda.
Allegro ma in molto.

1.

allegro ma *n* molto.

Allegro ma n molto.
Corno I
Corno II

Grav

Viol: Conc:

Viol. Primo.

Viol: Secundo.

Alto Viola.

Baso.

Handwritten musical score for "L'Espresso" by Gioacchino Rossini. The score is written on ten staves, with the first two staves showing the vocal melody and the remaining eight staves showing the piano accompaniment. The music is in 2/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like "p" (piano) and "for." (forte). The handwriting is in ink on aged paper.

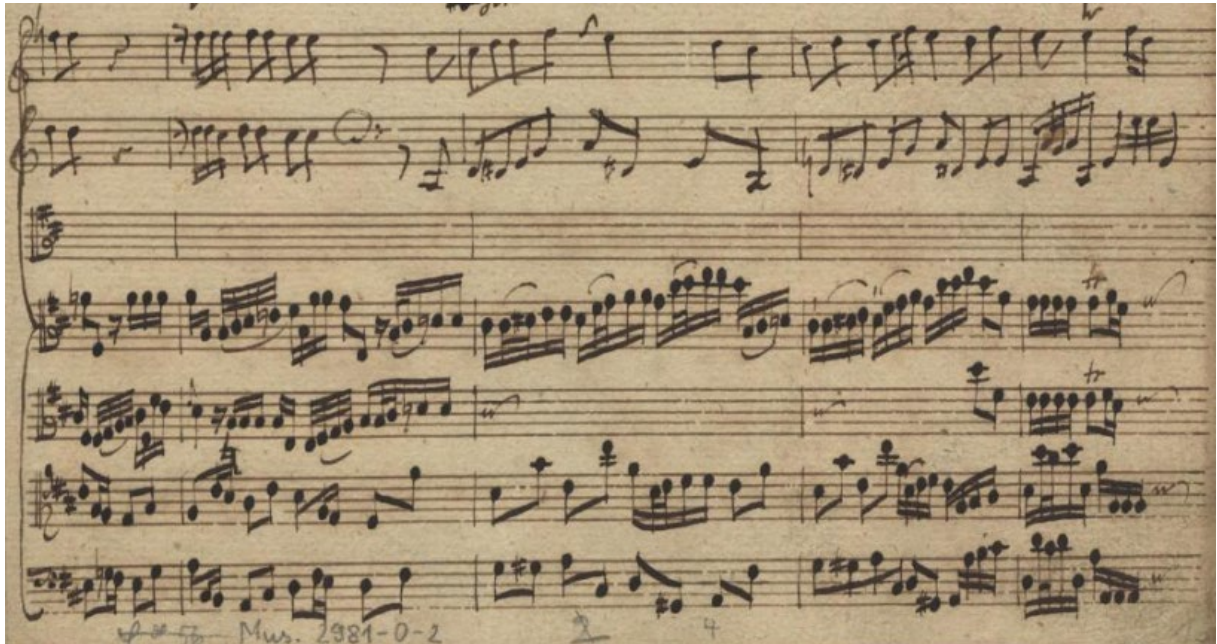


Figure 1.12

Benda/Pisendel, Violin Concerto in D. Virtuoso low register playing for the 2nd horn. Horns in D.

The exposure to this eminent quality of soloistic and orchestral performance will undoubtedly have contributed to the development of the young Stich. Meanwhile Count Thun must have been convinced that his young horn players would enrich his court *Kapelle* with new musical styles from Dresden upon return.

In chapter 2.1 I will discuss the contributions of Hampel to the development of the horn and his major influence on Stich in more detail.

1.3 Stich becomes Punto

In 1764, his education as a horn player completed, Stich returns to the estate of Thun in Žehušice. After the metropolitan Dresden, with the illustrious court orchestra where Zelenka held sway, it must have been difficult to get used again to the customs and the quality of life and music in the provincial Žehušice. Service soon became very difficult for the young, ambitious, and cheerful Stich, who was not allowed to wear a sword.³⁷ How important a sword was for young men becomes clear when Benda, in his Autobiography, describes how happy he is when he finally earns enough money to buy one.³⁸ Stich's displeasure grew, and the prospect of an international career increasingly attracted him, like so many of his Bohemian countrymen.³⁹

Four years later, in May 1768, Stich escaped, in the company of four colleagues, probably from Karlsbad, the summer residence of count Von Thun. The count immediately sent soldiers after him. The arrest warrant gives a unique description of the looks of young Stich. He would have been of average height, pale, with a flaky face (*mitler Statue, bleich und blattermaasigen Angesichts*).

Stich performed under the name of Bomba in Germany, was discovered, fled again, now to Italy, where he soon changed his name into Giovanni Punto, both severing ties with his native country and marking his new international career with a proud new name in the language of music.⁴⁰ At home in Žehušice, mother Kateřina, then Václav's widow, was sent to prison to atone for her son's disobedience, and died there five months later.⁴¹

According to Gerber, the soldiers sent after Stich had orders to smash his teeth if he refused to travel home with them. A horrifying story for any wind player.

Dem Grafen Thun war kaum ihre Entweichung hintergebracht worden, als er sogleich befahl, ihnen nachzufeßen und besonders Stichen ausfindich zu machen, und, wenn man sich seiner Person nicht bemächtigen könnte, doch wenigstens zu suchen ihm die vordern Zähne einzuschlagen.

³⁷ Gerber, E.: 'Stich genannt Punto (Johann Wenzel)', in: *Neues historisch-biographisches Lexikon der Tonkünstler, Zweiter Theil*. Leipzig, 1814; 281

³⁸ Quoted in Lee, 13

³⁹ Murray, 97

⁴⁰ At the time it was not unusual for a musician to choose a pseudonym in Italian, the language of western music. For instance, the Spanish composer Vicente Martín Y Soler (1754-1806) preferred to be called Vincenzo Martini, or Ignaz Martini.

⁴¹ Volek, 46

(No sooner had Count Thun been informed of their escape than he immediately ordered them to be caught, and Stich especially to be found, and if his person could not be seized, at least to try to break his front teeth.)⁴²

Horace Fitzpatrick, in his at times rather romanticizing book on the Austro-Bohemian horn tradition, also reports on the endangered front teeth. In what reads like an exciting script, he describes how Stich ran away to Germany, together with four other musicians, *...hotly pursued by minions of Thun, who in his fury at the loss of such a jewel from his orchestra, ordered them either to capture Stich alive or at least to knock out his front teeth.*⁴³

Volek, who had access to the archives of the Von Thun family, has read the *Haftbefehl* (arrest warrant) and did not find in it any comment about the teeth of the young Stich.⁴⁴

Both Gerber⁴⁵ and Kling⁴⁶ mention Stich's escape to the Holy Roman Empire. That sounds like a bonus ingredient for an increasingly intriguing story, the legend of the horn virtuoso. In fact, though, in the 1760's Central Bohemia was part of the same Holy Roman Empire. Howsoever, Stich eluded the soldiers and escaped into regions where Count Thun could assert no power.

Although brave and thrilling, the story of the escape to freedom was not uncommon in Bohemia at the time. Serfdom slowly ceased to exist, and musicians were subject to a substantive change of values in the musical environment with an increasing focus on the individual musician.⁴⁷ According to Czech musicologist Václav Kapsa, not all Bohemian musicians were serfs, some of them were born free or obtained freedom from their lords without major problems. In principle, serfs were bound to the estate they belonged to, and had to obtain permission from their manorial lords, when they wanted to travel. In the same context, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart officially had to request to leave service in Salzburg (and he left without permission!).⁴⁸

Jan Václav Stich disappeared from Bohemia, to be reborn as Giovanni Punto, the virtuoso horn player who would travel large parts of Europe performing as a soloist and court musician, showing off his skills with pieces he soon started to compose for his own use in the

⁴²Gerber, 'Stich', 281

⁴³ Fitzpatrick, H.: *The Horn and Horn-Playing and the Austro-Bohemian Tradition from 1680 to 1830*. London, 1970; 168

⁴⁴ Volek, 46

⁴⁵ Gerber, 'Stich', 281

⁴⁶ Kling, 'Giovanni Punto', 1066 etc.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Lee, Prologue, 8, 18, 22, 23. Benda fled from the court of Count von Kleinau. Upon return, many years later, he obtained his freedom by offering the Count a riding horse plus 200 Gulden.

⁴⁸ Kapsa, V.: personal email, 9 December 2020

fashionable Galant style that seems to have been developed to please the ever more refined aristocracy. Breitkopf's catalogue of 1778 lists pieces composed by Punto, however the majority of his works were published in the 1780s and 1790s.⁴⁹

Although bearing his name, the compositions for horn and strings, or horn and orchestra had maybe not always flown from his pen, if we are to believe his rival horn player Carl Türirschmidt (1753-1797). According to Gerber, he accused Punto of plagiarism for his first and second horn concertos.⁵⁰

Punto might have been a little too easy on the subject of attribution, he was certainly not alone. Murray found horn concertos by Rosetti in archives under the names of Punto, Carl Stamitz, Mozart, and both Joseph and Michael Haydn.⁵¹ In many cases, publishers who were after monetary gain should be held partly responsible for conflicting attributions.

1.4 Giovanni Punto in Europe, a traveling virtuoso

After his successful escape from serfdom, the newborn Giovanni Punto lived the life of an itinerant musician, an entrepreneur with a growing reputation, while at the same time finding refuge and a more stable income as a member of court orchestras.

In 1768 he obtained a short contract with the orchestra of Josef Friedrich Wilhelm (1717 - 1798), prince of Hohenzollern-Hechingen.

A longer period of stability followed, 1769-74, when he was in the service of Emmerich Joseph von Breidbach zu Bürresheim (1707 – 1774), the archbishop-elect of Mainz.⁵² This lord did allow him to travel. But his ambitions were not yet satisfied, and when he found out that a horn player could not become the concertmaster of the Mainz orchestra, and that he was still far from being recognized as a master on the violin, he soon left this court as well.⁵³

In 1772, Punto demonstrated hand stopping to an English audience on his first trip to London.⁵⁴ Although one of the first, Punto did not have the premiere. Thomas Hiebert, in an

⁴⁹ Morley-Pegge, R. revised by Fitzpatrick, H. and Hiebert, T.: 'Punto, Giovanni [Stich, Johann Wenzel (Jan Václav)]' Grove Music Online. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.22558> Accessed 6 January 2021

⁵⁰ Gerber, 'Stich', 283

⁵¹ Murray, 254

⁵² Miller, J.: The Life and Works of Jan Václav Stich (Giovanni Punto); a Checklist of 18th Century Horn Concertos and Players; an Edition for Study and Performance of the Concerto No. VI in E♭ by Giovanni Punto (Ph.D. diss.). Iowa, 1962; 39

⁵³ Gerber, 'Stich', 281

⁵⁴ Morley-Pegge, 'Punto, Giovanni [Stich, Johann Wenzel (Jan Václav)]'.

article on the Egerton Manuscript Collection,⁵⁵ and John Humphries⁵⁶ provide evidence that the technique must have been introduced in England before 1770.

The anonymous author of *New Instructions for the French Horn*, printed in the 1770s, was quite critical about the new skill:

Mr. Ponto (sic) and many others, famous on this Instrument, constantly uses this method, by which means the halftones are expressed, which is not to be done by any other method, but it is deemed by Judges of the Horn that the principle (sic) beauty, the Tone, is greatly impaired thereby.⁵⁷

Burney much later remembered how the proudly presented *new technique* sounded like someone who tries to scream in vain while having a nightmare.⁵⁸ In 1772, though, when he had a fresh memory of hearing Punto perform in Koblenz, he was less whiny and reported:

The Elector has a good band, in which M. Punto, (Ponto? [sic]) the celebrated French horn from Bohemia, whose taste and astonishing execution were lately so applauded in London, is a performer.⁵⁹

That year of 1772 Punto was much in demand as a musician on the London stages, often playing his own horn concerti. Most of the critics resort to superlatives when describing the successes of these performances.

But the concerto Punto played on the 11th of March at Drury Lane at the end of the first part of Händel's *L'Allegro ed il Penseroso*, did not meet with great enthusiasm in the *Theatrical Review*.

What this Gentleman executes with the Horn, is very surprising, but, not being suited to the genius of the Instrument, it is not productive of any good effect, when considered musically; as a matter of novelty it may surprise and please, on which account, it is worthy the notice of the curious.⁶⁰

Clearly, not everyone was won over yet by the charms of hand stopping. Still, it must have been a very successful time in London for Punto. He played one concert after another and

⁵⁵ Hiebert, T.: 'Extraordinary horn writing in The Egerton Manuscript Collection: A contribution to the history of the horn in mid-eighteenth century England', in: *Jagd- und Waldhörner, Geschichte und musikalische Nutzung. Michaelsteiner Konferenzberichte Band 70*, Augsburg, Michaelstein, 2004, 246

⁵⁶ Humphries, J.: "'This French-horn Gentleman...'" Giovanni Punto in London', in: *Historic Brass Society Journal*, volume 3, 2021, 15-34

⁵⁷ Anonymous: *New Instructions for the FRENCH— HORN, Containing the most modern and best methods for Learners to Blow*. London, c1772-9, 4

⁵⁸ Burney, C.: 'Horn,' in Abraham Rees, *The cyclopædia: or, Universal dictionary of arts, sciences, and literature*. London, 1820, 18:200.

⁵⁹ Burney, *The Present State of Music*, 74

⁶⁰ Humphries, "'This French-horn Gentleman...'", 16

already in 1773, he traveled to London again. This time he met with Willem Spandau (1741-1806), principal horn at the court of William V, Stadtholder of the Dutch Republic in The Hague. The two early exponents of hand stopping even performed as a duo, Spandau on first horn, Punto by nature on second.⁶¹ Next to performing horn concerti and the occasional double horn concerto, there were opportunities for chamber music with other famous instrumentalists like Carl Friedrich Abel (1723-1787), the composer and viola da gamba player, who, in 1764 or 1765, established the famous Bach-Abel concerts (with Johann Christian Bach [1735-1782]), and Johann Christian Fischer (1733-1800), the German composer and oboe virtuoso.

An etching by James Bretherton (c1730-1806), figure 1.13, showing Abel, Punto and Fischer playing together, is interpreted by Humphries as a possible proof of alcohol abuse by the musicians.⁶² Studying other engravings of Bretherton, it becomes clear the artist was specialized in caricatures, and one should include the drawing of these three musicians in that category.

⁶¹ Ibid. 20

⁶² Ibid. 20



Figure 1.13
Concerto Spirituale, etching of Abel, Punto and Fischer, by James Bretherton, 1773

The enormous success of Punto's solo performances was certainly not limited to London. During the years of 1776-1778, he performed on 49 occasions at the *concerts spirituels* in Paris, often playing his own concerti.⁶³

In 1778, The famous Paris horn builder Lucien-Joseph Raoux (1753-1821) made him a silver cor solo.⁶⁴ In the same year Punto met Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in Paris. Mozart wrote to his father that "Punto plays magnifique" after he heard him perform at the Concert Spirituel.⁶⁵ As Kling wrote:

Un tel éloge donné à Punto par un musicien de la valeur de Mozart, équivaut à un brevet de haute capacité.⁶⁶
(Such praise given to Punto by a musician of Mozart's caliber, is equivalent to a patent of high capacity.)

Mozart composed the now lost Sinfonia Concertante K. 297b/Anh.C 14.01 for Punto and other noted soloists (Johann Baptist Wendling, flute; Friedrich Ramm, oboe; Georg Wenzel Ritter, bassoon) who were eager to perform together.

As Robert Levin argues, the director of the *concerts spirituels* at the time, Joseph Legros (1739-1793), seems to have commissioned Mozart's symphony concertante for four winds and orchestra for two specific performances. These performances did not take place, because the parts were not copied from the score in due time.⁶⁷ Levin continues to explain that probably Giuseppe Maria (Gioacchino) Cambini (1746-1825), a composer famous for his symphonies concertantes, was the evil genius behind the delay that led to the cancellation. On May 1, 1778, Mozart wrote to his father that he met Ramm and Punto again at the Concert Spirituel when they asked him indignantly why his Symphony Concertante was not performed while Cambini's piece for the same instrumentation was on the program. The mistake, whether or not initiated by Cambini, lay with Legros, who had forgotten to have the work brought to the copyist.⁶⁸

As Fétis recalls later, his father had heard Punto in 1780 and was very impressed. According to the father, Punto had the most beautiful sound one could imagine, an extremely touching

⁶³ Pierre, C.: *Histoire du concert spirituel 1725-1790*, Paris, 1975

⁶⁴ Meucci and Rochetti, 'Horn, History to c1800'

⁶⁵ Mozart, W.A.: letter to his father, Paris, 5 April 1778

⁶⁶ Kling, 'Giovanni Punto', 1066

⁶⁷ Levin, R.D.: *Who Wrote the Mozart Four-Wind Concertante?* Stuyvesant, NY, 1988; 5

⁶⁸ Mozart, letter to his father, Paris, 1 May 1778

way of singing on the horn, and perfect precision. Father Fétis also reported the silver horn that Punto played, *...because he preferred the more pure and penetrating timbre.*⁶⁹

In 1781, Punto entered the service of the Prince-Archbishop of Würzburg, as a member of the court orchestra.⁷⁰ Punto did not stay long in lovely Würzburg, because in 1782 he was offered a position in the orchestra of the Comte d'Artois (later to become Charles X of France) who apparently adored the horn, in Paris.⁷¹ The conditions sound like a dream; the assurance of leave for solo concert tours and a lifelong pension. In 1787 the virtuoso indeed took a leave of absence to tour as a soloist in the Rhineland. As Murray writes, it was quite common that members of court orchestras were allowed occasional concert tours, while their salaries continued to be paid. This seemed to be a way of enhancing the court's reputation as a musical center.⁷²

On his third and last trip to London, 1788, Punto became a regular performer at the Pantheon Concerts, organized by the German soprano Gertrud Elisabeth (Madame) Mara (1749-1833).

Thanks to in-depth research by Humphries, we now have at our disposal several reviews from these concerts that contain a lot of information about the musician Punto and his playing style.

His performance of 28 February impressed the reviewers of both the *Morning Post*⁷³ and the *Morning Herald*.⁷⁴

The novelty of the night, and a most surprising novelty indeed, was the French Horn Concerto by PONTO, (sic) which, for rapidity of execution, taste, and softness, exceeded anything we ever heard.

...it was beyond every idea of perfection, and will amply reward for the engagement, as the many present will not be gratified with once hearing.

Punto also made an appearance in another concert series. He received outstanding reviews for his debut concerto at The Professional Concert on 3 March, with the *Morning Chronicle* describing his playing as⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Fétis, F.-J.: 'Punto', in: *Biographie universelle des musiciens, Volume 8*. Brussels, 1844; 285

⁷⁰ Fitzpatrick, 170

⁷¹ Fétis, 'Punto', 285

⁷² Murray, 102

⁷³ *Morning Post*, 29 February 1788, p. 2, col. 4.

⁷⁴ *Morning Herald*, 1 March 1788 p. 3, col. 3.

⁷⁵ *Morning Chronicle*, 4 March 1788, p. 3, col. 2.

...one of the most wonderful efforts of human excellence. The command he possesses over the instrument is truly surprising, insomuch that while he produces notes by far more sonorous and powerful (than) ever exhibited, he has the art of making it, at other times, as soft and tender as the German flutes of Florio or Tacit (sic).

The newspaper *The World* was equally astonished ⁷⁶

Punto, if it is the same Punto who was in England some years since with Sponda (sic) is much improved. The French Horn, is with him so managed, that it could accompany a Piano Passage, of a Soprano Singer in a room.

Punto was back at the Pantheon Concerts of Madame Mara on Wednesday 5 March, when things obviously did not go so well. A review following the 7 March concert, wrote that Mr Ponto's (sic) horn concerto was very superior to his performance of last Wednesday, *indeed astonishingly so, and seemed as an effort to retrieve his reputation, somewhat diminished by his first essay.*⁷⁷

The *Morning Chronicle* enjoyed Punto's performance of 10 March at the Pantheon, and called his concerto *innovative and astonishing*,⁷⁸ but the *Morning Post* was more aloof: ⁷⁹

Ponto (sic) and Fischer were much applauded, the former in particular, whose concerto on the French Horn exceeded every idea and expectation though the sounds might sometimes resemble an ill wind.

Not many horn players would like to see their tone compared to the sounds of an ill wind.

After a last concert at the King's Theatre, on 22 May 1788, Punto returns to Paris, where the French Revolution starts in 1789.

Punto's patron, Comte d'Artois, an extremely conservative nobleman, probably one of the very reasons for the French revolution, is ordered by his brother King Louis XVI to flee the country soon after the storming of the Bastille, 14 July 1789.⁸⁰

Punto, the horn virtuoso, finally manages to become violinist-conductor at the Théâtre des Variétés Amusantes in Paris, a position he held from 1789 - 1799.⁸¹ This new job did not prevent him from remaining active as a horn player, teacher, and composer. Entirely in the spirit of the French Revolution, Punto composed two short pieces for singers and large

⁷⁶ The World, 4 March 1788, p. 3, col. 2.

⁷⁷ Morning Herald, 8 March 1788, p. 3, col. 3.

⁷⁸ Morning Chronicle, 12 April 1788, p. 3, col. 2.

⁷⁹ Morning Post, 12 April 1788, p. 3, col. 2.

⁸⁰ Tikkanen, A.: 'Charles X' In: Encyclopaedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-X> accessed 10 August 2022

⁸¹ Morley-Pegge, 'Punto, Giovanni [Stich, Johann Wenzel (Jan Václav)]'

orchestra, *Hymnes à la Liberté*, during this period. The full title of a composition for three baritons (*basses de taille*) and orchestra reads: *Hymne à la Liberté en trio avec grand orchestre pour le jour du repos de la première décade de Frimaire à la fête de la raison célébrée à Rouen par ordre du consul général de la Commune le 29 Brumaire l'an 2d de la république française une et indivisible. Paroles du citoyen L'Aîné* (figure 1.14). The other Hymn to Freedom is titled: *Descends du haut des cieux: hymne à la Liberté*. (Libretto: Judlin.)



Figure 1.14
Title page of Punto's composition *Hymne à la Liberté*, 1794.

Between 1792-1795, the first edition of the *Seule et Vraie Méthode* for horn was published.⁸² Did Punto publish this *Méthode* to support his application for the position of teacher at the new Conservatoire de Paris? Constant Pierre⁸³ describes how Punto came to meet the administration of the school to ask for a job. Is that why he used the name of his former teacher Hampel on the title page? *Composée par Hampl et perfectionnée par Punto, son Elève*. It certainly was a nice application letter, addressed to young horn players and

⁸² Hampel/Punto, *Méthode*

⁸³ Pierre, C.: *Le Conservatoire National de musique et de declamation - Documents historique et administratifs*. Paris, 1900; 106

young composers, the *Seule et Vraie Méthode*, descending from the great Hampel, and perfected by his famous pupil Punto.

But the style of the music in the *Method* does not relate to the surviving works of Hampel and has strong similarities to the rest of Punto's oeuvre. Reason for me to not believe Punto and to regard the *Seule et Vraie Méthode* exclusively as his own work from now on.

The Conservatoire did not hire him, according to the documents of the administration because the school did not take any more professors.

Punto's fixed position, since 1781, in the orchestra of Count of Artois, the brother of Louis XVI, cannot have been a good condition for a career within a school founded by the French revolutionary forces.

He was passed by no fewer than four horn players linked to the *Garde nationale*, the French military force, founded in 1789 during the French Revolution. Antoine Buch (n.d.), Jean-Joseph Kenn (1757-1840), Frédérique Duvernoy (1765-1838) and Punto's private student Heinrich Domnich (1767-1844) were appointed instead of the great Punto.⁸⁴

Also in 1795, Punto published his *Étude ou Exercice Journalier*, from here called the *Daily Exercises*, a book with basic etudes for cor basse (see chapter 2.4).⁸⁵

According to Gerber, the period as violinist-conductor at the Théâtre des Variétés Amusantes was unsuccessful. Still, Punto, not yet cured of his obsession to lead (*Direktionssucht*), continues to try his luck on the violin. In 1800 he disgraces himself by playing violin in Mehul's *Sinfonie de Chasse* at a concert in Vienna. Gerber is scathing in his judgment; to his honor, one wished he would never have played it on the violin, ...*zu seiner Ehre wünschte (man) er möchte Sie nie vorgegeigt haben*.⁸⁶

Later that year Punto meets Ludwig van Beethoven in Vienna, who then just premiered his Septet op. 20 and his first Symphony. This encounter leads to one of the pinnacles in the literature for horn, although Beethoven postponed working on the promised composition until one day before the concert. On April 18, 1800, the two virtuosi premiere Beethoven's Sonata for pianoforte and horn, opus 17, in the Burgtheater, at a concert organized by Punto

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Punto, *Étude*

⁸⁶ Gerber, 'Stich', 281

for his benefit.⁸⁷ Unfortunately, Joseph Haydn, one of whose symphonies was performed in the same concert, is unable to attend due to illness.⁸⁸

A month later Beethoven and Punto perform the piece again, this time in Pest, Hungary, where a local music critic commented: *...who is this Beethoven? His name is not known to us. Of course, Punto is very well known.*⁸⁹ We can only hope Punto stayed in town long enough to read such flattering comment.

1.5 Giovanni Punto in Bohemia

In 1801, for the first time in more than three decades, Punto returns to Bohemia. No longer threatened by an arrest warrant, he plays a concert in Prague, as a soloist with orchestra, demonstrating his virtuosity in several of his own horn concertos. The *Prager Neue Zeitung* reported,

Punto received enthusiastic applause for his concertos because of his unparalleled mastery, and respected musicians said that they had never before heard horn playing like it... In his cadenzas he produced many novel effects, playing two- and even three-part chords.⁹⁰ It demonstrated again that our fatherland can produce great artistic and musical geniuses.⁹¹

A year later Punto is touring his native country again, this time with the Bohemian-born pianist/composer Jan Ladislav Dussek (1760-1812).⁹² On the 16th of September 1802 they play a concert in Čáslav, Dussek's place of birth, in Punto's home district. According to Fétis they perform the Beethoven Sonata, amongst other pieces.⁹³ What other pieces remains the question. Did Dussek write a sonata for horn and piano for the occasion? Dussek certainly did not shy away from the genre; he composed no fewer than 65 violin sonatas.

⁸⁷ Wegeler, F.G and Ries, F.: *Biographische Notizen über Ludwig van Beethoven*. Koblenz, 1838; 98-9

⁸⁸ Vignal, M.: *Joseph Haydn*. Paris, 1988; 585 The meeting did take place less than a year later, on January 30, 1801. On that day Haydn conducted two of his symphonies, and Punto and Beethoven repeated the sonata op. 17, at a benefit concert for war victims in the Grosser Redoutensaal in Vienna. Ibid. 598

⁸⁹ Morley-Pegge, *The French Horn*, 153

⁹⁰ For a discussion about producing multiphonics on the horn, see chapter 4

⁹¹ *Prager Neue Zeitung*, no. 39, Prague, 1801; 473. Quoted by Diabac, J.B., in: *Allgemeines historisches Künstler-Lexikon für Böhmen und zum Theil auch für Mähren und Schlesien*. Prague, 1815; 210-11

⁹² Morley-Pegge, 'Punto, Giovanni [Stich, Johann Wenzel (Jan Václav)]'.

⁹³ Fétis, 'Punto', 137

Presumably, Punto also wanted to shine in one or more of his own concertos. In those years it was quickly becoming fashion to arrange orchestral pieces for fortepiano. Being such a virtuosic piano player and productive composer, Dussek must have been able to arrange the relatively simple orchestral scores of Punto's concerti on the spot.

In the same year, after a short trip to Paris, Punto developed pleurisy (*Brustwassersucht*), or as Morley-Pegge calls it ...*chest dropsy or hydrothorax*.⁹⁴ Miller writes ...*fluid in the pleural cavity, then a common illness amongst wind players*.⁹⁵ Did wind players borrow each other's instruments without taking care of the indispensable hygienic measures?

Jan Bohumir Dlabac (1758-1820), a Bohemian music scholar, reported that Punto died on February 16, 1803, in Prague. Three days later he was buried at the general cemetery at *Kleinseite*, a central Prague neighborhood. On the 26th of February, Prague musicians gathered to perform Mozart's Requiem at a funeral mass organized by the Music Society of Prague.⁹⁶

His tomb was inscribed:

Omne tulit punctum Punto, qui Musa Bohema. Ut plausit vivo, sic moriente gemit.
(Punto received all the applause. As the Muse of Bohemia applauded him in life, so she mourns him in death.)

Giovanni Punto, the famous horn player with the lifelong ambition to find recognition as a violin player, who fled from serfdom to spend a life as a traveling virtuoso, receiving the admiration of courts and audiences all over Europe, was buried in Prague, less than 100 kilometers from his native soil.

Zehušice, today a village of 825 inhabitants⁹⁷, honors Jan Václav Stich as its most famous descendant. The *Czech French Horn Society of Jan Václav Stich-Punto* is based in Žehušice. Since 2016 the community is the proud owner of the *J.V. Stich-Punto bench*, unveiled under anachronistic valve horn fanfares in the open air.⁹⁸ The local elementary school is called *Základní škola Jana Václava Sticha-Punta Žehušice*. The school's logo is a mosaic of Punto's well-known portrait (see figure 1.1).

⁹⁴ Morley-Pegge, *The French Horn*, 153

⁹⁵ Miller, 45

⁹⁶ Dlabac, J.B.: *Allgemeines historisches Künstler-Lexikon für Böhmen und zum Theil auch für Mähren und Schlesien*. Prague, 1815; 211

⁹⁷ <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/population-of-municipalities-1-january-2021> Accessed 30 April 2021

⁹⁸ <https://youtu.be/h6K2-NCaQJc> Accessed 21 January 2022



Figure 1.15
Stich/Punto memorial plaque in Čáslav, close to Žehušice

For a letter by Punto to Raoux, *facteur de cors*, see Annex 1