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Giovanni Punto (1746-1803) Cor basse célèbre

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6. Critical overview of literature

The critical overview of literature in this chapter focuses on various sources that contribute to the understanding of horn virtuoso Giovanni Punto (1746-1803) and the elements of his playing that potentially contribute to a more diverse treatment of the horn in contemporary times. The sources discussed in this chapter are categorized into two sections: sources until 1850 and modern literature.

Sources until 1850

The *Seule et Vraie Méthode*, and the *Daily Exercises* were the most important sources in my quest for the sound and playing technique of Punto. Learning to 'speak' the various articulations, building up flexibility and musical imagination by practicing the embellishments in all the different variations, and gradually mastering the offered horn acrobatics, was my alternative way of studying with the maestro himself.

Texts in horn methods by (almost) contemporaries of Punto were extremely helpful and in other cases contributed to a healthy confusion. Most information found in Dauprat's comprehensive and very informative *Méthode de Cor-Alto et Cor-Basse*, I trusted because it appeared only about 20 years after Punto's death, and because it fits in with the few texts and the many études in the *Seule et Vraie Méthode*.

We have a few short and glowing concert reviews from the Prager Neue Zeitung, from which interesting conclusions can be drawn. More reviews of the London concerts have been preserved, and those provide a varied picture. Sometimes Punto had a bad day.

Charles Burney heard Punto perform on several occasions and commented on these concerts in his 1775 publication *The Present State of Music in Germany,* and in his article on the Horn in Rees's *Cyclopædia* of 1820, 18 years after the death of Punto.

In 1775 Burney remembers how Punto's taste and impeccable execution were applauded in London. In 1820 he is critical about Punto's sound in stopped notes. Reading these comments helped me nuance my opinion about Punto.

Gerber shared interesting facts about the introduction of the horn in Bohemia in the article 'Spörken' in his Lexicon, edition 1792. In the new lexicon of 1814, he devotes an article to 'Punto', being very critical about his skills on the violin in connection to his ambition to become *Kapellmeister*, which gave me a greater understanding of the character of the subject of my investigations.

An article in the *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, titled 'Punto', and another one, more than 20 years later, titled 'Stich, connu sous le nom de Punto',[261] both by Fétis, contain some not verifiable information, especially around Punto's escape from serfdom, which contributed much to the mythmaking. For an impression of the sound of the famous horn player, we must make do with Fétis' memory of an enthusiastic account of his father who once attended a Punto concert.

Kling's article 'Giovanni Punto, Célèbre Corniste (1748[sic]-1803)' lifts the myths into the 20th century by copying anecdotes (including the wrong year of birth) from Fétis, but also mentions the important historical meetings with Mozart and the frustrating circumstances that made it impossible to perform his Sinfonia Concertante in 1778.

Modern literature

'Punto, Giovanni [Stich, Johann Wenzel (Jan Václav)]', the Grove Music Online article written by Morley-Pegge, and revised by Fitzpatrick and Hiebert, offers a great starting point for anyone who wants to know more about the historical figure Punto.

The Grove Music Online article *Horn* includes the very helpful chapters *Horn, History to c1800* and *Horn, (iii) Crooks and hand technique* that most of all helped me to put my experiences with period horns and playing technique in a broader perspective.

[261] Fétis, 'Punto', 285

Anyone doing research on Punto and aspects of horn playing in the 18th century cannot ignore Fitzpatrick's book *The Horn and Horn-Playing, and the Austro-Bohemian Tradition from 1680-1830*. This title pops up in almost every article or book concerning the historical horn, and in several publications of a more general musical character. Partly due to the quality stamp of the publisher, this was considered a standard work for a long time. Problematic is the amount of highly anecdotical information, often impossible to verify. More than is desirable, the author seems to be romanticizing his subject.

A more reliable source is *The French Horn*, by Morley-Pegge. Especially the chapter *The evolution of playing technique* was very useful for my research, since it provides detailed and verifiable information gathered from a large number of sources.

I owe much to Humphries' 2000 publication, *The Early Horn: A Practical Guide*. This book delivers what it promises: concise historical information, combined with the author's hands-on experience with historical horns.
Humphries article 'This French-horn Gentleman… Giovanni Punto in London', published in 2021, is a gold mine for musicians trying to understand the life of the itinerant virtuoso Punto. Due to only flimsy evidence, I do not share Humphries' conclusions about Punto's alleged alcohol consumption.

Hiebert has been invaluable to this research. His article about horn playing in early 18th century Dresden, is thought provoking, and extremely clarifying at the same time.[262] Much of my understanding about the period horn I owe to his chapter *The Horn in the Baroque and Classical Periods*.[263]

Coar was one of the first in modern times to write about high and low horns. For me it was a revelation to read in his book *The French Horn* (1947) that the sound of the cor basse was long considered the ideal horn sound.
The paragraphs about the solo for low horn in the slow movement of Beethovens 9th Symphony (in the chapter *Beethoven – the progressive*), gave me the idea to elaborate on the solo's for cor basse in other orchestral works by Beethoven.

[262] Hiebert, 'Virtuosity,' 112–59
[263] Hiebert, 'The Horn in the Baroque and Classical Periods', 103-114

Manganaro's website horniconography.com served me extremely well in finding historical depictions of horns and their players.

Unfortunately, Branberger's book with the promising title *Jan Václav Stich - občan Punto,*[264] turned out not to be a biography, but a novel sprung from the author's imagination. The book could not be used for this dissertation.

Many articles and books helped me to think outside the boundaries of the horn player, and to nurture my understanding of 18th century music. These publications have been most valuable in this respect:

Gjerdingen's *Music in the Galant Style*, provided insights in the development of musical styles in the 18th century, and made me aware of Punto's modest but effective craft as a composer.

Rosen's wonderful book *The classical style* is a point of reference for anyone writing about 18th century performance practice. The chapter *The Concerto* served me to better understand the most ambitious vehicle of the virtuoso.

The chapter *Changes in Musical Style*, in *The Historical Performance of Music*, by Lawson and Stowell, helped me to better grasp the big developments of music in the 18th century.

Murray's magnum opus *The Career of an Eighteenth-Century Kapellmeister*, not only provides a detailed description of Rosetti's life and music, it also beautifully illustrates everyday musical life in an 18th century European court. Thanks to Murray, my image of Punto traveling from one noble household to another became much more accurate and detailed.

[264] Branberger, J.: *Jan Václav Stich - občan Punto.* Žehušice, 2012

For the chapter on horn chords or terzo suono, I made grateful use of the insights provided by Campbell in the Grove Music Online article ‘multiphonics’.
Von Helmholtz's intriguing work *Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen als physiologische Grundlage für die Theorie der Musik* offered a fascinating understanding of the experience of music, and opened up a whole new perspective for the musician I am.