

Canadian University Music Review Revue de musique des universités canadiennes

Colin P. Lawson. *Mozart: Clarinet Concerto*. Cambridge Music Handbooks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xi, 111 pp. ISBN 0-521-47384- 5 (hardcover), ISBN 0-521-47929-0 (softcover)

Lorne Buick

Volume 17, numéro 2, 1997

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1014788ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014788ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes

ISSN

0710-0353 (imprimé)

2291-2436 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Buick, L. (1997). Compte rendu de [Colin P. Lawson. *Mozart: Clarinet Concerto*. Cambridge Music Handbooks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xi, 111 pp. ISBN 0-521-47384- 5 (hardcover), ISBN 0-521-47929-0 (softcover)]. *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, 17(2), 83–86. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014788ar>

All Rights Reserved © Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes, 1997

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

Colin P. Lawson. *Mozart: Clarinet Concerto*. Cambridge Music Handbooks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xi, 111 pp. ISBN 0-521-47384-5 (hardcover), ISBN 0-521-47929-0 (softcover).

The Cambridge Music Handbooks are a well-established series, including over two dozen volumes to date, many of them no doubt familiar to readers of this journal. Colin Lawson's contribution, *Mozart: Clarinet Concerto*, is a worthy addition to the series, bringing together long-established facts with the most current research in the field in a very readable style. The book's seven chapters give a thorough background to the work, focussing on the original instrument and the evolution of the current reconstruction of the text; in both cases, far more research and speculation has been required than in regard to other works of the period, owing to the fact that neither the manuscript nor the unique instrument for which it was written has survived. Most of the information was already available, but only from widely scattered sources, many not accessible to the general reader.

Like most of the major works in the clarinet repertoire, Mozart's concerto was written for a particular clarinettist, in this case Anton Stadler. Stadler played what we now call a basset clarinet, with its lower range extended by four semi-tones to written C (sounding A in concert pitch). Thus it can be seen as a hybrid of the clarinet and the lower-voiced basset horn, usually pitched in F, occasionally in G. Stadler has been the subject of much investigation in recent years, mostly notably that of Pamela Poulin, who has been researching Stadler and his clarinets since her thesis (1977) and is currently writing his biography. One of Poulin's recent investigations turned up a concert program from one of Stadler's tours which included a small picture of his basset clarinet; this led one of today's foremost early clarinet/basset horn specialists to construct a replica based on the picture, which is quite different from surviving eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century examples (it has a bulbous bell, like a *clarinette d'amour*). The instrument is pictured in the book, along with a similar-looking one made after 1800 by Eisenbrandt which, as Lawson remarks, "illustrates the grey area between basset clarinet, *clarinette d'amour*, and basset horn" (p. 45) (it is pitched in C, with eleven keys including the four basset notes).

In regard to the text of the concerto, which was first published in 1802 in a version for standard A clarinet, there are two main pieces of evidence to aid in the reconstruction. The first is the sketch, K. 621b (consisting of 199 measures for basset horn in G); the other is a review of the first published edition (by Breitkopf & Härtel) in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of March 1802, which includes many references to the passages that had to be altered to avoid

the bottom notes which are not available on a standard clarinet. The review appears in full (in translation) as an appendix. The translation had already been published in *The Clarinet*, the magazine of the International Clarinet Association, in 1982; as one would expect, the journal has featured many articles on the concerto over the years, many of them by the same researchers who have contributed to, or are quoted in, the book.

Lawson's opening chapter sets the stage by tracing the evolution of the clarinet in the eighteenth century, along with a discussion of its earlier cousin, the chalumeau. As he points out at the outset, the coexistence of the two during that century is particularly relevant to the study of the Concerto, as Mozart so effectively contrasts the two main registers of the clarinet, still referred to today as the "chalumeau" and "clarinet" registers. (The early repertoire for the clarinet used mainly the upper register, which did not exist on the chalumeau.) From a player's perspective this is particularly instructive, as modern clarinetists tend to spend so much time and effort to cultivate a homogeneous sound between registers.

Within the limits of a short book, the next three chapters detail quite thoroughly Mozart's use of the clarinet in his earlier works; Stadler's contributions to clarinet design and performance; and their meeting and collaboration. Special emphasis is given to Mozart's increasing differentiation between the A and B-flat clarinets and his sympathetic writing for them, and to his basset horn works, many written for his fellow Masons (including the Stadlers and two other basset horn players active in Vienna at the time, Anton David and Vincent Springer). I am happy to note that Lawson includes only minimal discussion of Mozart and Stadler's financial relationship, which is more than adequately discussed elsewhere and in any case rests on a few flimsy pieces of evidence; rather, he devotes several pages to the research of Pamela Poulin and others, documenting Stadler's travels in the years following the composition of the Concerto (including its first documented performance, in Riga in 1794) and his contributions to the development of the clarinet. (It seems he was more an "idea man" than an actual maker, commissioning instruments from Viennese court instrument maker Theodore Lotz.) The section concludes with a discussion of the later use, virtual disappearance, and modern revival of the basset clarinet.

Lawson follows this with an intelligent discussion of some of the obvious problems in editing and performing a work whose manuscript is lost. He begins with a review of the evolution of the restored version, with references for further reading, then proceeds to review the primary evidence (the sketch K. 621b, and the *AMZ* review) and the conclusions drawn from it. He carefully points out areas where the reconstruction is very secure, and others where some ambiguity remains or where different editors have reached different conclusions. The last section discusses the situation of modern performers on all three types of clarinet (modern A, modern basset, or period basset; as far as I know, no one plays the concerto on a period clarinet without the basset notes), acknowledging that many players will continue to perform the traditional version while expressing a clear preference for the restored version. He also

mentions some possible modifications to the traditional version which restore the melodic contour or registration to the extent possible; a little more detail in this regard might have been desirable, especially for the legions of students who will study the Concerto without having access to a basset clarinet.

Lawson's next chapter, "Design and Structure," is perhaps more descriptive than analytical; it is detailed enough to satisfy most listeners, and will serve as a good starting point for students and those wishing to delve into more detail. There are some good insights into the interplay between soloist and orchestra, and perceptive comments on Mozart's tailoring of the key and structure to fit Stadler's unique instrument. His point about the use of the key of C major (E-flat major for A clarinet) for the second subject (as in the Quintet) is one which will not have occurred to anyone unfamiliar with period instruments, namely that it necessitates several cross-fingerings; these have a characteristic nasal sound and sometimes dubious intonation, though modern players of period instruments seem to have overcome the intonation challenges. These cross-fingered notes lend the key a different sound, apart from the musical character of the theme, again worth noting for modern clarinet players who emphasize uniformity of tone throughout the instrument. He also points out how a particular arpeggio figure that covers two octaves at the end of the first movement exposition (mm. 143–44, where it occurs in E major) expands to three octaves when it reappears in A at the end of the movement (mm. 331–33). This is one of the figures discussed in the previous chapter, where an example of a modified version of the traditional edition is given; in my opinion, a more satisfactory version is proposed by Alan Hacker in his 1974 edition of the Concerto (London: Schott).

The final and potentially most controversial chapter deals with performance practice. Here Lawson takes a balanced view, presenting both sides of various issues such as tempo flexibility, improvisation, and ornamentation. In general, he favours a more personal interpretation as opposed to "a late-twentieth-century dogma of constraint, where our own competence tends to be measured by skill at maintaining executive control at all costs, and personality is all too easily underplayed." He certainly does not advocate extended cadenzas, as have been written by various clarinetists and composers over the years, nor excessive ornamentation; his two examples (an *Eingang* to lead into the return of the second movement theme [after the pause at m. 59] and an elaborated version of that theme) are tasteful.

I would have appreciated some information about the author. One can glean from the acknowledgements in the preface that he is the proud owner of a boxwood basset clarinet, made for him in 1988 by the British maker Daniel Bangham, and that he has performed the concerto with the Hanover Band on many occasions. I also learned (from the brief review in July 1996 issue of *The Clarinet* by his colleague Albert Rice, himself a contributor to the book) that Lawson is a professor at the University of Sheffield and "one of the most respected English clarinetists of today." No doubt Lawson requires no introduction in English clarinet circles, but for the broader audience at least a brief biography would seem appropriate.

Another useful addition might have been a discography. There have been, for example, at least sixteen recordings on basset clarinets over the past dozen years; even an unannotated list would be a useful reference. Perhaps the fact that the mission statement for the series specifically mentions “concert-goer” as opposed to record-buyer is the reason for this omission. Listed in the bibliography, though not mentioned in the text, is “The Mozart Clarinet Concerto on Record” (*Clarinet and Saxophone* 14, no. 4 [1989]), by another noted British clarinetist and scholar, Jo Rees-Davies. Cambridge has recently published *The Cambridge Companion to the Clarinet*, also edited by Colin Lawson; this collection of essays includes one on clarinet recordings, but not a comprehensive discography. The standard work in this field is Richard Gilbert’s *Clarinetist’s Discography III* (Harrington Park, N.Y.: Richard Gilbert Productions, 1991, with subsequent updates).

These minor criticisms aside, *Mozart: Clarinet Concerto* is an excellent summary of, and contribution to, the state of scholarship on this important work. It will make an invaluable addition to the library of any clarinetist or concert-goer (or record-buyer!), and if I may be so bold, should be required reading for all students learning the concerto for the first time.

Lorne Buick

Barrie Martyn. *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music*. Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1995. 274 pp. ISBN 0-85967-959-4 (hardcover).

Barrie Martyn’s exhaustive study, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (Scolar Press, 1990) is widely recognized as one of the most important and comprehensive monographs on the composer’s life and works available in English. It is certain that Martyn’s latest book will occupy an even more important position with respect to Rachmaninoff’s lesser-known contemporary, Nicolas Medtner (1880–1951).

The format of the new book is basically the same as that of the first section, “Rachmaninoff the Composer,” of the earlier book: a chronological survey of the composer’s life alternates with analyses of his works interspersed liberally with musical examples. It is in comparison with the earlier book that certain limitations appear in the Medtner study. Whereas, in *Rachmaninoff*, the musical examples were typeset anew, the Medtner book reproduces excerpts from published scores; the end result lacks consistency in typeface and size from one extract to the next (compare example 51 with example 52, both on p. 88). There is evidence, too, of cutting and pasting in order that clefs, and key and time signatures, appear at the beginning of each excerpt (e.g., example 25 on p. 51).

These shortcomings, admittedly, are merely cosmetic. More vexing is the practice, evident in both books, of not identifying excerpts by measure numbers. There are times when it is uncertain whether an excerpt comes from the beginning of a piece or movement, or if it is culled from the middle or end.