

Thesis of the DLA Dissertation Work

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Richard Mühlfeld

An extraordinary talented clarinetist's career

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I. Research background

During my professional career I was always concerned with the question of which characteristics of the clarinet arouse the interest and compel the composers to enrich the literature of the instrument. Myself being an active musician, I had the opportunity to be involved in the creation and realization of some contemporary pieces and experience what the music history justified already many times, that often the personality of the performer is the key, what can open new horizons on the given instrument's approaches. The genesis of the most important works of the clarinet literature might also be bound to such fortunate meetings. Mozart and Anton Stadler's, Weber and Heinrich Bärmann's, Spohr and Simon Hermstedt's cooperation must not only be familiar in clarinetist circles.

Richard Mühlfeld (1856-1907) who I choose to be the main subject of my work is also one of the greatest artists in the history of clarinet playing. His name is also a synonym for the nascence of the late chamber music compositions of Johannes Brahms. Due to the close relationship and friendship of Mühlfeld and Brahms such base columns of the woodwind repertoire were written, as the Clarinet Trio in A-minor, Op. 114, the Clarinet Quintet in B-minor, Op. 115 and the Clarinet-Piano sonatas.

I started working with Mühlfeld when I was searching for the ideal topic for the thesis work in the Doctorate school. During my research on the topic I met with an entirely exceptional man's career. He was a clarinet artist, who was respected and honored by all from Wagner to Clara Schumann, from Joseph Joachim to Hans von Bülow. The most appealing founding in the periodical reports was the uniqueness of Mühlfeld's playing, which was different from the contemporary woodwind playing practices in expression, rather the spirit of a string instrument. All of the above made me decide to elaborate my work on the clarinetist from Meiningen, whilst also introducing him to the Hungarian readers, as the only literature for research available is in English or German language.

II. Resources

As primary resource I used the book *Richard Mühlfeld der Brahms-Klarinettist* by Maren Goltz and Herta Müller, which presents the reader up-to-date research results, as well as the documentation and critical remarks of Mühlfeld's brother Christian. Above writing his brother's biography, Christian Mühlfeld collected very accurately hundreds of concert critiques, listed all his performances, the whole repertoire and the chamber music partners during the whole career of the artist. Other resources were *Brahms Clarinet Quintet* by Colin

Lawson and *Virtuosi of the past* by Pamela Weston, which gave me the inspiration and background knowledge, elaborating in detail Mühlfeld's life, his relationship with Brahms and his influence on the period's music life.

Above the already mentioned books the online library of the Museum of Meiningen was very useful in my research process, where a number of documents and photos can be found, which I was able to use not only to make the thesis work more colorful, but also to justify my founding.

Resources in detail:

Goltz, Maren / **Müller**, Herta: *Richard Mühlfeld der Brahms-Klarinettist. Einleitung, Übertragung und Kommentar der Dokumentation von Christian Mühlfeld*. Balve: ARTIVO Music Publishing, 2007.

Lawson, Colin: *Brahms Clarinet Quintet*. Julian Rushton (szerk.): Cambridge Music Handbooks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Weston, Pamela: *Clarinet Virtuosi of the past*. London: R. Hale, 1977.

<http://www.musikgeschichte-meiningen.de/db-iko/index.php>

III. Methodolgy

My doctorate thesis is built up and divided into four main chapters.

In the first chapter I found it important to introduce the genesis and development of the clarinet, in order to place the Bärmann-Ottensteiner type of instrument used by Mühlfeld in the history of the clarinet instruments.

In the second part I would like to give an overview of the clarinet chamber music literature, mainly focused on the development in the German-speaking areas from the age of Mozart to Brahms. My main goal was to introduce the important precedents of the Brahms works, as well as to justify previous era's important clarinetist's influence on composers and by that the literature growth, similarly to the close cooperation of Mühlfeld and Brahms.

The third chapter is dedicated entirely to the biography of Richard Mühlfeld and his relationship with Brahms, with special focus on justifying my founding with contemporary documents.

In the last part of the dissertation my goal was to introduce Mühlfeld's repertoire to the reader, and through that emphasizing the creation of the new clarinet chamber works influenced and

inspired by him and Brahms. In this chapter I processed the biography and works of many forgotten composers, and their relationship towards Mühlfeld and Brahms.

IV. Results

In my doctorate study besides getting involved in the life and era of this outstanding artist Richard Mühlfeld, I was dedicated to find an answer to my question of what the unique charm was in his clarinet playing, what made such a great influence on more generations of composers.

In my opinion I was able to actualize this in my study work, because not only did I merge the available knowledge resources into one in Hungarian language within the above mentioned aspects, but also, I emphasized some parts much more than my predecessors. By this I mean the introduction of the composers working mainly in the 19th and 20th century, who increased the clarinet literature with many valuable compositions due to the relationship of Brahms and Mühlfeld. This topic in my opinion would be worth and valuable for writing an entire doctorate thesis work on. I think that, because I had the opportunity to listen to many pieces and I met interesting, but mostly precious imprints of an era, and these pieces belong to the concert stage.

V. Documentation related to the thesis work subject

In my doctorate dissertation work I examined Mühlfeld's biography and his performance repertoire. His clarinet repertoire's base was mostly pieces from the classical and romantic clarinet literature. During my career I have also played most of the solo and chamber works by Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, Spohr, Schubert, or Schumann. Similarly I have been lucky to perform the Brahms chamber music works as well – except the Clarinet Quintet –, which played a central role in Mühlfeld's life. Implementing the newly learnt composer's chamber music works into my future concert programs will be a new challenge.