

Theses of DLA Doctoral Dissertation

Gyula Molnár

The Impact of Dennis Brain
on the Development of the French Horn

Liszt Academy of Music

Doctoral School No.28

Art and Culture History

Budapest

2010

I. Background of the Research

No professional literature on the life and work of Dennis Brain is available in the Hungarian language. This topic is therefore entirely novel for the Hungarian music history. However, a considerable volume of professional literature is available abroad, especially in the United Kingdom and Japan.

An outstanding collection of literature in this field is Stephen J. Pettitt' book entitled *Dennis Brain: A biography*, which deals with the history and work of the Brain family with a focus on Dennis Brain's life. That detailed work includes a tremendous amount of data but it does not attempt to provide an analysis and assessment, and no music history context and conclusions are offered.

Further professional literature deals with the analysis of Dennis Brain's recordings, though all but a few of them involve a particular piece of music and the entire oeuvre.

Finally, I have only found literature about Dennis Brain's efforts in the field of instrument development attempts and the impacts of such development in limited quantity.

My objective is to provide an analysis of the ideas of the Brain family, and Dennis Brain in particular, regarding the French horn, presenting the music history context, the innovations and their impact on inherited traditions, and the development of the French horn as instrument in detail.

II. Sources

The prime source of information for my doctoral dissertation is Stephen J. Pettitt's work entitled *Dennis Brain: A biography* (London: Robert Hale, 1989, Second, extended edition). The book discusses major biographical events in a chronological order and attempts to present snapshots of English music scenes.

An article by Dennis Brain: "About the French Horn" in *Brass Today* <http://www.geocities.co.jp/MusicHall/1921/article4e.html> (date of publication unknown) presents his views on the difficulties of the instrument, speaks about the enhancements of technology and horn repertoire. This piece of writing has been fundamental for the understanding of Dennis Brain's views and way of thinking.

An article of Michael Meckna, "The Legacy of Dennis Brain" (*Horn Call* Vol. XXI No.2, April, 1991) inspired me to examine the work of Dennis Brain and helped me map major areas of its complex impact.

Martin J. Prowse article entitled "The Unfamiliar Dennis Brain" (*Audio Record Review*, October 1969, pp.678-9.) deals with the chamber and orchestra activities of Dennis Brain and the analysis of his world of sounds.

At the time of my meeting with Ifor James in Freiburg on 14 June 1994, following an entrance examination, I came to know about Aubrey Brain's physical aptitude test and Dennis Brain's solutions applied to the intonation problems of his horn.

The basis of the instrument background outlined in my dissertation has primarily been provided by the work of Kurt Janetzky and Bernhard Brüchle entitled *Das Horn*. (Deutschland: Schott Mainz, 1977.), in which the authors follow the technical development of French horn from ancient times through the 1970's.

The starting point for the comparative analysis has been provided by Hans Pizka's *Das Horn bei Mozart Facsimile-collection* (München: Hans Pizka Edition, 1980). Hans Pizka publishes the original scores of Mozart's works written for horn and known to us so far, and also provides details of their creation for a better understanding. I have also used the most recently published scores of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Horn Concerto in E♭ No. 2, KV.417*, (Basel: Bärenreiter-Verlag Kassel 2008, 3rd Edition) for comparison.

The recordings of the Horn Concerto analysed are the following: *Great Horn Players in Historic Recording*, Aubrey Brain, Joseph Batten (Conductor), Royal Symphony Orchestra (SOTONE Historic Records, CD 104, 2002.).

Mozart Konzerte Für Horn und Orchester Nr.1-4. Dennis Brain, Herbert von Karajan (Conductor), London Philharmonic Orchestra (LP mono, Electrola ZAX 464, EMI 1C 063-00 414).

III. Methodology

My dissertation is divided into two parts from a methodology point of view: in the first and most voluminous part, based on available

literature, I present the impact of Dennis Brain and his family on the development of the French horn. In the second part, I make a comparative analysis of recordings of *Horn Concerto in No. 2, KV.417* interpreted by Aubrey and Dennis Brain. I have examined the two parts with two different methods.

The objective of the first unit of the Dissertation is the exploration, arrangement of the literature and placing it into context as far as possible. Based on the limited number of hardly available literature, areas where Dennis Brain's impact on French horn are demonstrated. These are: the leading role of Dennis Brain and his horn player family members in English musical life, amendments made to the instrument, the inspiring effect on composers, and finally, the great number and high standard of his solo performances and recordings. The relevant music history background and instrument development directions have also been presented.

I have conducted literature search with special search words in the HighBeam online newspaper database, seeking for articles that reflect Dennis Brain's Mozart recordings in the past 10 years (1999-2010; date of search is 13 February 2010; search words: Dennis Brain, Mozart, horn). I have divided search results into three groups and assessed them accordingly (1- analysis of Dennis Brain's recordings from today's point of view; 2- articles comparing Dennis Brain's recordings to a contemporary one; 3- other analytical works).

I have made a comparative analysis of W. A. Mozart's *Horn Concerto in Eb No. 2, KV.417* played by Aubrey Brain and Dennis

Brain. I have analysed the structure and construction of the piece from a form and harmony point of view, as well as interpretation modes on the basis of selection of tempo, application of articulation, musical interpretation, style and handling of the instrument.

IV. Results

Dennis Brain, the personality selected for the subject matter of my dissertation has inspired me in my professional work with his musical intelligence, wonderful and fascinating recordings since my young years. The vast and universal recognition of Dennis Brain by the musical society has made me map factors in the background and mosaics of his complex achievements.

The Dissertation discusses the period between 1860 and 1957, though occasionally dates back to the 17th century and looks forward to the 21st century as well. In my work, I have positioned the Brain family in the music life of their era. Members of that family have, with their approach and technical skills, considerably influenced, developed and disseminated views on the French horn, the inherited Austro-Bohemian-German horn playing tradition and the French sound ideal.

Dennis Brain was in search of the ideal instrument suitable for solo work, and made a transition from *F* horn to *B* horn. He shifted from the low-sound Raoux French horn with soft tone to a wide-bore Alexander No. 90 model with higher sound, which could be blown in a "straight" manner, and that instrument has had his name since then. He realised, when amending his horn, how to avoid intonation problems. Dennis

revived the notion of solo horn player with his performances and large number of stage appearances 150 years after Giovanni Punto. He perceived the limitations of the repertoire written for French horn, and therefore inspired and asked composers to create new pieces, and occasionally took part in the birth of new pieces. The result of that effort includes Britten's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings Op.31*; Hindemith's *Horn concerto*; Malcolm Arnold's *Horn concerto No. 2*; Arnold Cooke's *Arioso and Scherzo*; Mátyás Seiber's *Notturmo for horn and strings* or Gordon Jacob's *Horn concerto*, a total of twenty-six pieces dedicated to him while alive and four dedicated to him posthumously.

We established, after the comparison of recordings of W. A. Mozart's *Horn concerto No. 2 KV. 417*, that articulation solutions were similar to a great extent, but tempo, musical interpretation and the performance style are typical to the 'over-romantic' performing style of the early 20th century in the case of Aubrey Bain's recordings, while the recordings of Dennis Brain suggest a more mature handling of the instrument, a virtuoso adherence to the tempo free of exaggerations and a performance rich in imagination.

Dennis Brain became a world known and recognised chamber and solo artist during a mere nineteen years on stage whose recordings are abiding, and his recordings of Mozart's Horn concertos are standard works for us.

V. Documentation of activities related to the subject matter of the Dissertation

- In 1980, Beethoven: Piano Quintet, Erlangen (Germany) (Jenő Nyári – zongora, Rita László – oboe, András Horn – clarinet, Faludy Krisztina – fagot, Gyula Molnár – French horn)
- In 1980, Mozart: Piano Quintet, Pommersfelden (Germany), performed with the same chamber ensemble.
- In 1994, Brahms: Trio for French horn, Rathaus Landsberg, (Germany) (Sándor Járóka – vilon, Katalin Szűts – piano)
- In 1996, Mozart: Horn Concerto in E \flat No. 2, with the participation of the Dodici Chamber Orchestra, conducted by János Dobra.
- In 2001 Richard Strauss: Horn Concerto in E \flat No. 2, (six times) performed for a youth concert series.
- In 2001, Mozart: Sinfonia concertante E \flat , KV. 297/b, (Szilárd Karvaly – oboe, Tibor Molnár – clarinet, Edina Szalai – fagot, Gyula Molnár – French horn), conducted by Ádám Medveczky, Győr Philharmonic Orchestra, in the National Theatre of Győr.
- On 21 July 2000, Britten: Serenade for tenor, horn and strings (version with piano accompaniment) (Boldizsár Keöncsh – tenor, Lillian Jászberényi – zongora), Zene Határok Nélkül ('Music Without Borders'), Balassagyarmat, Rózsavölgyi Márk Music School
- In 2001, Britten: Serenade for tenor, horn and strings. Within the framework of Győr Summer Festival, (József Muck – tenor, Gyula Molnár – French horn) conducted by Ádám Medveczky, Győr Philharmonic Orchestra,
- On 5 and 6 November 2007, we performed Heinrich Hübler's Concerto for 4 horns in Győr and Tapolca, organised by the National Philharmonic Society, conducted by Ádám Medveczky, accompanied by Győr Philharmonic Orchestra. (Ferenc Dankos, Gyula Molnár, Márton Falvai, János Szabó – French horn)
- On 28 March 2010, György Ligeti: Six bagatelles – version for wind quintet (Katalin Kovács – flute, László Lindemann – clarinet, Erzsébet Sajti – oboe, Edina Szalai – fagot, Gyula Molnár – French horn) 'Chamber Music' Season Ticket of the Győr Philharmonic Orchestra, Concert Hall of the Varga Tibor Music Institute.

CD releases:

- Michael Haydn: Deutsches Hochamt, Deutsches Lauda Sion & Magnificat – SZIF-Universitas Ltd., 1997 – Solo French horn.
- Michael Haydn: Sacred Vocal Music – do-lá studio, 2000 – Solo French horn
- Musical Treasures of the Cathedral of Győr –Antal Richter: Horn quartets – Harmonia Produkció, 2000 – Solo French horn.
- Johann Michael Haydn: In Festo Sanctorum Innocentium – do-lá studio, 2002 – Solo French horn.