

DLA doctoral dissertation theses

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The evolution, function and options for substitution of conic low brass  
instruments in the modern orchestra

Liszt Ferenc Music Academy

Art, and Art History Science grade doctoral school No. 28.

Budapest

2018

## I. Research History

My chosen topic is immense, and extremely diverse. The evolution of pre-tuba conic instruments reaches back to the 1500s, and this period in itself involves several instruments. Being an active tuba soloist, I have to comprise my concert repertoire from – not always substantial - pieces written in the 20th and 21st century. Meanwhile, as an orchestral player, I have come across several symphonic orchestra tuba parts, which raise questions about the authenticity, and even the applicability of the tuba. For these reasons I started to research pre-tuba instruments, and their repertoires. Available literature is scarce, and often too specific, examining instrument history, or construction history, instead of musical history relevant for my thesis. My experience in professional circles is that there is no clear vision of, and information on the tuba, nor its preceding instruments. Prejudice however, is plentiful. The presence of such older instruments in the modern orchestra generated questions and disputes, which could only be approached with partial information and subjective opinions, in the best case.

In most cases, conductors of symphonic orchestras are not completely aware of these instruments, and that the tuba is not meant the same in case of Ravel and Richard Strauss, or why the modern cimbasso is not really a cimbasso. During the past few centuries not only have the conic low brass instruments transformed, but the practice of music performance, and the composition of orchestras as well. It became clear that in correlation with the overall sound concept of the 19th century French and German composers, the brass instruments in symphonic orchestras were also different. I often experienced that while playing such French instruments like the ophicleide, or the French C tuba in the symphonic orchestra, my colleagues tended to try to rule these out, referring to the „modern day orchestra”. Since there are several hundred years old string instruments in these orchestras, I deemed it important to investigate what a „modern day orchestra” means. What makes an orchestra „modern”, or „current”? I trust that it will be useful to summarize all these, and to inspect the instruments in an orchestral context instead of by themselves, thus aiming to paint a comprehensive picture about the function and applicability of the serpent, the cimbasso, the ophicleide, the French tuba and different tubas in the symphonic orchestra.

## II. Sources

A rendelkezésemre álló szakirodalom egyik pillére számomra Bevan: *The tuba family* című könyvének második kiadványa volt, ami részletesen írja le a hangszerek megjelenését, fejlődését és elterjedését, de helyenként az aktualizáláshoz szükség volt a *Historic Brass Society Journalra*, ami a hangszerek történetének a kutatásával kapcsolatban esetenként naprakész kiegészítő információkkal tudott szolgálni. Heyde *Zinken und Hörner* és a *Das Ventilblasinstrument* című kiadványai nagyszerű támpontot adtak hangszerépitészeti szempontból a német hangszerekkel kapcsolatban. Jerome Wiss

hangszerépítő mester, aki nem csak felújít régi francia hangszereket de maga is készíti őket saját tervei alapján, rengeteg értékes kiegészítő információval szolgált. Patrick Wibart segítségével betekintést nyertem a francia nemzeti könyvtár archívumába, ahol kéziratokat, ki nem adott kottákat és dokumentumokat vizsgálhattam a témában. A dolgozatomban vizsgált partitúrák túlnyomó része a saját kottatáram anyagát képezi, míg Erkel kézírataiba az Országos Széchényi Könyvtárban kaptam betekintést. A mai, modern zenekar kialakulásával kapcsolatban Holoman: *Szimfonikus Zenekar* című könyve volt az irányadó, de fontosnak tartottam megszólaltatni a témában Hollerung Gábort, Hamar Zsoltot, Kovács Jánost, Kovács Gézát és Fischer Ivánt, a hazai szimfonikus zenekari zenei élet meghatározó személyiségeit, valamint Charles Kayest, aki Solti György és Valery Gergiev irányítása alatt menedzseli a World Orchestra for Peace zenekart.

The second edition of Bevan's book, *The Tuba Family* was one fundamental sources among the available literature, which gives a detailed description of the origins, development and spreading of instruments. In certain cases, the *Historic Brass Society Journal* was also very useful in adding supplementary, up-to-date information. Heyde's *Zinken und Hörner*, and *Das Ventilblasinstrument* publications supplied useful information regarding the construction of German instruments. Jerome Wiss, professional instrument-maker, who renews French instruments, and also designs and constructs his own, also supplied invaluable information. With the help of Patrick Wibart, I was able to look into the archives of the french National Library, where I examined manuscripts, unpublished scores other documents. Most of the orshestral parts examined in my dissertation are from my own archives, but I also had an opportunity to read Erkel's manuscripts at the National Széchényi Library. Concerning the evolution of today's modern orchestra, Holoman's book, *Symphonic Orchestra* was a standard source, but I also interviewed several important personalities from the Hungarian symphonic orchestra scene: Gábor Hollerung, Zsolt Hamar, János Kovács, Géza Kovács and Iván Fischer. I also interviewed Charles Kayes, manager of the World Orchestra for Peace under Sir Georg Solti and Valery Gergiev.

### III. Method

In my dissertation, the instruments appear in chronological order. I describe the instruments' evolution, function, education method, solo and orchestral repertoire. Within the repertoire, I analyze the orchestral parts, the composer's affiliation towards the instrument, when and where, in what context they used them. How the instrument in question would fit into a modern day symphonic orchestra, and how they can be substituted. In the final section I give a brief summary of current, modern brass instruments, and compare them with French and German, and old and new German instruments. Finally, I will describe the „modern day” orchestra, and highlight it's most important features and current repertoire.

### IV. Eredmények Results

The topic I have chosen has a personal aspect. I aim to resolve the anomalies I have experienced during my concert musician and instructor career, concerning the usage of conic low brass instruments in the symphonic orchestra. Also, to find the answers to the questions the topic may raise. The musical instrument history and instrument evolution history sections of my dissertation are summaries. I do not deal with exact dimensions of these instruments, which information is not essential for the practicing musician, conductors and composers. I highlight the details which are relevant from a musical point of view, and analyze these through great compositions of the given era, which pieces are still important elements of the modern repertoire. During my research, I discovered the differences that evolved between the German and the French low brass instruments of the symphonic orchestras in the 19th – 20th century, how and why the French instruments are neglected in the modern day symphonic orchestra, and what important personalities of the Hungarian Symphonic orchestra scene think about the modern day symphonic orchestra.

#### V. Documentation of related activities

Concerts and presentations on the evolution, and repertoire of the tuba, and preceding conic low brass instruments:

- Staatliches Institut für Musikforschung, Preussisches Kulturbesitz, Berlin,
- Conservatorium van Amsterdam,
- Wiener Musikakademie

Solo CD album publication with all of the conic low brass instruments, entitled (R)evolution.