

Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music

Doctoral School No. 28

(7.6. Music)

METHODS OF USING THE TRUMPET

IN THE SYMPHONIC POEMS OF

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DLA

DISSERTATION

2008

I. Premises of the research

The history of the development of the trumpet as a musical instrument is very poorly documented. Therefore I considered important to give a summarized presentation of the different methods of use of the trumpet in the different periods, using the extant literature.

The composers were always closely connected to the performers, and they composed their works in conformity with the skills of the artists and trying to maximally exploit the technical possibilities of the instrument. It was an exciting experiment for me to follow and identify the different stages in the development of my instrument, and to determine their direct influence on the composers of the respective period of time. Studying the history of the trumpet I could assess, that after different transformations made to the instrument in different periods, it was Richard Strauss who gave us the most convincing and creative example of exploiting the technical and esthetic possibilities of the trumpet. Through the analysis of the symphonic poems of Richard Strauss I shall give a presentation of the typical methods of using the trumpet.

II. Sources

The most important sources I used in connection with the history of the trumpet were „Die Trompete” by Edward Tarr, and the PhD dissertation of Verena Jakobsen Barth: „Die Trompete als Soloinstrument in der Kunstmusik Europas seit 1900”. I presented the life of Richard Strauss using the monography of András Batta „Richard Strauss” and „Richard Strauss. Dokumente seines Lebens” by Franz Trenner. Romain

Rolland's „Musiciens d'aujourd'hui” provide an authentic picture of Strauss and his role in the music of the fin de siècle. Embedded in a literary background, his critical notes give an authentic picture of the continuous development of Strauss' style and the reception of his works.

III. Method

In line with the reading of the studies and monographies I listened systematically at the music. I compared the methods of using the trumpet specific for Strauss with the methods of the earlier periods. I compared the range of the instrument, the methods of notation, the particular places, where a solo was placed, the character of the solo. I payed special attention to the role the trumpet was given in the dramaturgy of the works. By studying certain groups of instruments in the symphonic poems I could make considerations on the changes that occurred in the instrumentation style of Strauss.

IV. Results

The trumpet is an instrument with ancient traditions, it was part of the European culture for thousands of years. From the Egiptian ancient instrument to the Roman tuba and to the Barocque natural trumpet, it could bring out sounds in the system of natural overtones.

The possibility to play in the clarino register, achieved around 1560, opened the way of the trumpet to the classical ensembles as well. In the compositions of the Renaissance and Barocque the sound of the trumpet is allways associated with the light, brightness and festvity. It is called to glorify God, and to represent the heavenly and earthly power. The

Baroque era represented the golden age of the natural trumpet, used as solo and as orchestra part as well. A great number of sonatas and concertos were composed to this much favoured instrument.

In the Viennese period an important change could be observed: the trumpet was no longer a solistic instrument, but one of the most important participants of the orchestral tutti, with the role of strengthening the sound and providing brilliance to it. Being a part of orchestral tutti, and not a solistic instrument, the main register moved from the clarino almost one octave down. The composers were no longer satisfied with the natural sounds of the trumpet, instrument makers made important attempts in reforming the construction of the trumpet.

An important breakthrough was achieved with the invention of the valve in 1815. On the instruments provided with a valve, trumpet-players could play with the same flexibility in each register all the twelve keys of the chromatic scale. It is interesting to observe, that important masters of the early Romantic did not use this marvellous invention, but composed further for the natural trumpet.

The invention and spreading of the cornett drewed the attention of the composers to the trumpet, to the new possibilities achieved through the valve, and through it to a more solistic use of the trumpet.

Hector Berlioz was the path-breaker, later Richard Wagner took on the instrumentation technique of Berlioz. The great Romantics increased the number of trumpet parts in the scores, the trumpet was used in different roles. Its traditional functions: to express heroism, festivity, glory, were rediscovered, and it gained new, solistic roles, as in the overture of Wagners „Parsifal”.

The trumpet is the most important instrument to portray the funeral march in Gustav Mahler's 5th Symphony. The trumpet is the main means to express the irony and scorn by the cornett, with its virtuoso arpeggios in Richard Strauss' symphonic poem „Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche”. The „Flatterzunge” performance style was first used by Strauss on the trumpet with sordino. The trumpet gained back most of its Baroque brilliance as a solo instrument, the extreme high range became again fashionable; it had to play in the third octave: C at Wagner, D at Richard Strauss, and even E flat at Gustav Mahler.

Richard Strauss, whose orchestrations are specially brilliant, liked to use trumpets, violins and woodwind instruments in the very high range. Thus the bigger size valve trumpets in F were replaced in Strauss' orchestra by the smaller B and C trumpets, which allowed an easier bringing out of the very high pitches, and which are used in our days too.

The notation of the trumpet part was the one inherited from the Baroque era. The composers tried to place the musical material intended for the trumpet at a height, which allowed the trumpet-player to play in C major through transposition. In the Romantic compositions the tonality changes quite often, and together with it the transposition of the trumpet.

I could observe in the symphonic poems that Strauss conferred a decisive role to the trumpets next to the horns in describing wide ranges of human feelings and passions. It is most interesting that in certain compositions of Strauss all the more important themes are played by the trumpet, either solistically, or accompanying, strengthening, or playing a counterpoint to another group of instruments, mostly violins. In „Aus Italien” and „Macbeth” he uses the trumpet mostly according to the

classical tradition, however he confers more and more individual significance to this instrument. In the later symphonic poems the trumpet is a main means in describing feelings and characters: the agility and impertinence of Till or the yearning of Don Juan by the cantilenas so typical to Strauss. The solemn flourishes of trumpet evoke the glory of the withered age of romance. Meanwhile the waking to reality of the hero lost in the pipe dream of his illusions is also described by the trumpet. In „Tod und Verklärung“ and „Also sprach Zarathustra“ the use of the row of natural overtones is called to suggest a mysterious message and the immutability of the ancestral order. In „Ein Heldenleben“ the trumpet symbolizes the continuous fight of the hero (the composer) against the world. In „Eine Alpensinfonie“ the trumpet depicts the glory and the wonderful harmony of the nature. The trumpet parts of Strauss, so different in character and equally difficult concerning the technique, represent a serious challenge even for the performers of today, who dispose of modern, technically reliable instruments.

It is an interesting paradox, that while the romantic trumpet achieved a new period of flourish (after the Baroque era) in the music for orchestra, there wasn't any trumpet concert composed in this period, at least not by the important composers. Romantic solo pieces for trumpet were composed by minor composers in an „entertaining“ style.

The redescoping of the trumpet as a solo instrument was connected to the rediscovery of Bach's music in Germany specially after 1829, and the increasing performance of baroque and classical pieces. The concertante trumpet-parts and trumpet concertos of Bach, Händel and Haydn may have inspired the later composers, specially since the middle

of the xxth century, to compose valuable works – concertos, chamber music – for the new, „chromatic” trumpet. In the appendix of my dissertation a selective list of contemporary compositions for solo trumpet can be seen.

According to my opinion, the multiple use of the trumpet began in the peaktime of romanticism, and the oeuvre of Richard Strauss was determinative for the increasing of the importance and popularity of the trumpet.

V. Selective bibliography

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