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## British Clarinet and Piano Music from 1880 to 1945: An Evaluation of Performance Practice Characteristics

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Performance styles changed considerably between 1880 and 1945. The New Grove Dictionary (1980) acknowledges the importance of investigating these changes when it states that a "good performance [on a period instrument] provides a quite different aural experience from one played on modern instruments".<sup>1</sup> A greater understanding of shifting performance styles informs an historical awareness, provides insight into the intentions of the music and 'breathes life into' a modern rendition.

### INSTRUMENTAL MECHANISM

As we know most pre-1900 performers used hybrids of Müller's 13-key instrument. Müller highlighted his performance ideals (and those of the period) in the notes of his celebrated tutor of 1820: "...the player should practise using violin music, should treat the clarinet like other instruments, and should practise to become fluent in all tonalities".<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Müller included an exercise in C flat major in his 1820 tutor such was his desire that the player be proficient in all tonalities. It is reasonable to assume that despite instrumental limitations, professional players like Müller worked conscientiously to achieve technical security.<sup>3</sup>

Enough evidence exists to suggest that simple-system instrumental designs may have undermined competent performance from c.1880 to c.1945. Surveying historical reports before the introduction of the Boehm-system, British players - by all accounts - struggled to perform securely on simple-system instruments.<sup>4</sup> Oscar Street substantiates this in his article, *The Clarinet and its Music* (1916).<sup>5</sup> When referring to Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony, Street states: "...the solo in the trio...twice takes the clarinet up to G in the alt, to be played *pp*, which sometimes causes interesting speculation as to whether it will 'come out'". Later, he notes: "There are some rapid staccato passages in the scherzo of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* [Mendelssohn], one of which is described in Grove as 'almost unplayable'". Finally, Street comments on new performance expectations demanded in the works of Richard Strauss:

Of Richard Strauss it may be said that his requirements as regards clarinet-technique are still more advanced than Wagner's. There occur extraordinarily complicated passages, to be played at such lightning speed that the very mechanism of the clarinet is inadequate to articulate them. As Mr. Stutely puts it: **'You play the beginning and the end and trust to providence for the remainder!'** On the other hand, the desired effect seems to be made by such methods, for so the composer himself told Covent Garden orchestra.<sup>6</sup>

Richard H. Walthew's article entitled *Wind Instrument Chamber Music* (c.1922) also mentions the limitations inherent in these early 20th-century mechanisms. Although he does not say so, it seems that the author is referring to the simple-system:

**I hope I am not guilty of any disloyalty to these gentlemen and genuine amateurs if I say that I thought they were at times overmuch concerned with the mechanism of their instruments and the difficulties of overcoming the deficiencies inherent in them; the clarinetists, for instance, were wont to lament loudly the absence of extra fingers to bridge the gap in the middle of their instrument...(often) taking their instruments to pieces as far as possible and then putting them together again.** These artificial pre-occupations were apt, I thought, to divert their attention from the musical qualities of the works they used to practise.<sup>7</sup>

The comments of Street and Walthew confirm that the simple-system mechanism occasionally hindered fluent performance. This was particularly the case when composers such as Wagner and Strauss, originally writing

for the German Oehler simple-system instrument, expected more technical agility.<sup>8</sup>

## TONE

Because of ongoing instrumental improvements, clarinet tone was 'developing' constantly. Changes in sound were especially due to shifts in mouthpiece design and 'cut' of reed.<sup>9</sup> New mouthpiece adjustments refined and focused clarinet sound.<sup>10</sup> Together with instrumental system developments, this resulted in changing tone.<sup>11</sup> This does not mean that quality of sound became better. Technical developments since 1800 merely resulted in clarinet sound quality and character becoming more projected and forceful. The evolution of clarinet sound kept pace with shifting performance ideals.

## VIBRATO

Before 1945, few reports of clarinet vibrato appear in Britain.<sup>12</sup> Whilst most clarinetists hoped to imitate violinists, this ideal did not stretch as far as reproducing violin-like vibrato effects.<sup>13</sup> David Charlton reports that because vibrato was not widespread, national differences between clarinetists at the time were less noticeable than with oboists and flautists.<sup>14</sup> As is still the case today, French tone was characterised by a delicate, bright and reedy sound at the turn of the 20th century.<sup>15</sup> These characteristics in France gave the impression of a fast 'vibrato-like' effect. This particular French sound was not a conscious attempt to create a sound quality based on vibrato. It was a direct development of using mouthpieces with small bores and very soft reeds. This became common throughout France by the 1920s.<sup>16</sup>

This French effect did not find popularity in other European countries. Instead, the Germans and the Viennese favoured a broad style of tone and phrasing. The Germanic ideal was also the pre-eminent approach in the British Isles before 1880.<sup>17</sup> However, after this date, elements of the French school began to be incorporated into the British sound quality. These French factors were characterised in Britain by fast, light playing.<sup>18</sup>

By 1945 the British approach to clarinet sound incorporated a combination of French and German influences. Lazarus, the Drapers, Anderson and Thurston adapted these European influences into a British 'singing' style. In contrast, Kell employed a well-defined 'artistic' vibrato.<sup>19</sup> However, his freer individual approach to sound quality was not characteristic of the wider British trend. Indeed, it was a controversial exception to the rule (see later).<sup>20</sup>

## RHYTHM

An overview of period performance trends shows a swing from rigid character (c.1880-c.1900) to greater variations in tempo and the use of more rhythmic freedom (c.1900-c.1945). Probably, the inflexible rhythmic approach favoured by wind performers before 1900 evolved as a result of the strong British military band tradition, which did not allow for much artistic flair. Post-1900 performance styles were characterised by a spontaneous, less exacting approach. This loose, more expressive performance practice developed out of a well-defined Romantic idiom and an exaggerated, often overly dramatic performance style.<sup>21</sup> Robert Philip notes that this artistic freedom was characterised by a "...volatile, energetic, flexible and vigorously projected" approach.<sup>22</sup>

Overall, the late 19th - and early 20th-century interpretations are rhythmically freer and are less constrained by the need to perform precise note values. The performer was at liberty to express what might be termed an informal or even unpredictable approach.<sup>23</sup> However, this freer approach, which first appeared in the late 19th-century and continued into the 20th century, appeared to contradict the intentions of many earlier composers: for example, Charles Swinnerton Heap (1847-1900).<sup>24</sup> It could be argued that this precise expectation in performance stemmed, in the early years, from the increasingly academic background of most composers at this time (pre-1890).

Although pre-1930 recordings are rhythmically freer than earlier 20th-century examples, they usually lack energy and vitality. **This is substantiated in a 1929 review of Charles Draper's Mozart Quintet K.581 with the Léner Quartet.**<sup>25</sup> The reviewer, writing under his initials K.K., states the following:

I could not wish for anything more truly in the spirit of the music, save in the slow movement, which I find a little lacking in vital impulse. It is almost too sweet. **I do not often complain of too great insistence on *p* and *pp* shades (generally it is the other way round), but this interpretation just lacks a touch of rhythmic virility, that would have made it 100 per cent instead of, say, 95.** I notice, by the way, that the veteran critic A.K. (no relation) in the *Daily News* makes much the same point, which he has noted in the Léner's concert performances.<sup>26</sup>

An important device used to achieve rhythmic flexibility throughout the period was rubato.<sup>27</sup> This technique was initially applied to the motivic and melodic structure of a phrase in order to help accentuate the form of a work. Later this principle was developed from the level of rhythmic fluctuation of a phrase and applied to articulate the structure of whole movements.<sup>28</sup>

An examination of period recordings shows a clear development in the use of rubato amongst performers. Most pre-1910 recordings, which are primarily virtuosic and showy in character, avoid the use of rubato completely. Later recordings, by Charles and Haydn Draper, begin to use rhythmic freedom in the standard

19th-century repertoire. Unfortunately, the Drapers' use of rubato lacks the proportion of most post-1930 recordings, and in terms of post-1930 performance practice at least, is contrived. In the researcher's opinion, is not the desired one of increased expression. It results in an 'enforced' musicality.

Frederick Thurston's recordings demonstrate a progression from the early recordings of Charles and Hadyn Draper to a more integrated use of rubato. His rubato is subtle and within the phrase. He avoids dramatic use on a macroscopic structural level. Thurston's use of rubato is straightforward and uncomplicated.

Reginald Kell took the use of rubato to new levels of artistic possibility. His recordings are dominated by an almost continuous use of rubato within motives and phrases. His organic sense of line is confident, intuitive and natural. His subtle rhythmic inflections never bore the listener with repetition or commonality. The fact that he could employ such large amounts of rubato without disrupting the musical flow speaks volumes for his artistry. Norman C. Nelson describes Reginald Kell's rubato in the following terms:

**The naturalness of Kell's rubato brings to mind the best of Chopin pianists, such as Cortot, Rubinstein or Novaes. That rubato gives his playing a sense of freedom and ease and an intimate conversational quality.** Kell's rubato seems not to impose itself on the music but rather to issue from it. The critical epithets of 'mannered' or 'contrived' do not apply to it or to any other aspect of his playing.<sup>29</sup>>

#### TEMPO FLEXIBILITY AND TEMPO

Brahms insisted on great tempo flexibility. One of his most famous statements on tempo relates to the metronome. He said, "I have never believed that my blood and a mechanical instrument go together".<sup>30</sup> In Mühlfeld, Brahms composed for a clarinetist who espoused ideals of free and flexible performance tempo as well. This 'new' wind performance tradition affected numerous artists. It is clear today that the flexible approach to tempo in wind performance employed by Brahms and Mühlfeld was radical for its time. In contrast to their approach, most pre-1900 wind performances, especially in the British Isles, chose static or non-flexible tempi. This developed from a strongly militaristic culture where the clarinet functioned primarily as an important member of the marching band. **This regimented approach to tempo is exemplified in an early wind quintet performance (Haydn Draper, clarinet) of Gabriel Pierné's (1863-1937) Pastorale.**<sup>31</sup> This recording is rigid in its mechanical choice of tempi through competing sections. Only occasionally do small amounts of structured rubato arise. The lack of dynamic contrast only exacerbates the static rhythmic impression.

By the turn of the 20th century greater fluctuations of tempo within a movement began to appear. Soon the practice of using flexible tempo was institutionalised.<sup>32</sup> Reginald Kell was a leading wind exponent of this freer approach.

#### [TEMPO]

Until 1945, performances of moderate and fast movements were characterised by rapid tempi. This is confirmed in recordings.<sup>33</sup> Fast tempi in quick movements not only applied to performances of 18th- and 19th-century works, but also affected works composed in the years before the Second World War.<sup>34</sup> In the early part of the 20th century, works were regularly hastened so as to make their inclusion on record possible. However, the sizeable number of very fast tempi on later discs, which have recording space to spare, strongly suggests that this was a genuine part of the performance practice of the period. **Charles Draper's 1910 recording of the Weber Concertino is indicative of this point.**<sup>35</sup> By the final Allegro section of this work the soloist and accompanying wind-band have reached an almost unsustainable tempo, which leads the whole performance to an uncontrolled conclusion by late 20th-century standards.

In contrast, the choice of tempi for slow movements is consistent with conventional practice. Charles Draper's 1925 recording of the second movement of the Mozart Quintet K.581 confirms this characteristic.<sup>36</sup>

#### TECHNICAL SECURITY, DYNAMICS, ARTICULATION, PHRASING

Most clarinetists (even if they might not show refined artistry) had solid techniques. Again, this may have been a legacy of the British band tradition. Charles Draper's *Ye Banks and Braes* is a fine example of a virtuosic and yet secure performance from the period (pre-1925 acoustic recording).<sup>37</sup>>

In pre-1940 recordings the use of wide dynamic gradation is rare. Most artists examined before this date are inhibited and restricted in their dynamic range. The only clear exception to the rule is Reginald Kell. His mastery of dynamic contrast derived from an exceptional control of all registers. **His 1937 recording of Schubert's *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* (D.965) is a fine example of this.**<sup>38</sup>

Crisp and well-executed staccato playing is a feature of the period as a whole (1880-1945). **Frederick Thurston's energetic Bliss Quintet recording with the Griller Quartet of 1935 supplies an admirable standard.**<sup>39</sup>

The practice of melodic phrasing shifts through the research period (1880 to 1945). Early recordings, such as Haydn Draper's Brahms Trio opus 114 (1926), lacks well-balanced phrasing. Often, the first note of a phrase is accented, the flow is divided by the bar-line and the line lacks well-articulated legato contour.<sup>40</sup> The

recordings of Frederick Thurston are a definite improvement on earlier recordings by Charles and Haydn Draper in this regard. However, in performances such as Thurston's Brahms Sonata opus 120 no. 2 (c.1930) this is not always the case. In a *Gramophone* review of this recording dated 1937, the reviewer, W.R.A, writes: "I find the piano colour a little low in the softer parts; and I think, in the first movement, both artists might pull a rather longer stroke. The sense of "going" is not quite so long as I like it - the sweep of things".[41](#)

In W.R.A's and this researcher's opinion, the phrasing lacks structural understanding, the flow is disturbed and the tendency is to 'block-off' phrases. In contrast Reginald Kell's exquisite shaping and free-flowing design of phrases is readily apparent in all his recordings.

Importantly, the clearest indications of shifting expectations are located in surviving period recordings. Performers referenced within the paper include A. Proctor (n.d.), Charles Draper (1869-1952), Haydn Draper (1889-1934), Frederick Thurston (1901-1953), Ralph Clarke (1901-1985), Reginald Kell (1906-1981) and Phil Cardew (?-1960).

#### RECORDINGS BEFORE 1945

Very few clarinet and piano works by British composers were recorded pre-1945.[44](#) Known works in this category are as follows:[45](#)

- Walthew: *Four Meditations*. A. Proctor. Recorded 7 April 1935. British Library Tape No: T11579 RS.
- Browne: *A Truro Maggot*. F. Thurston with M. Foggin. Recorded 1937. Original Decca K858 // CRT-017. Clarinet Classics CC 0010.
- Stanford: *Caoine* from Sonata opus 129. F. Thurston. Recorded 1937. Original Decca 25721 (D.K. S53).[46](#)
- Lloyd: *Gigue* from *Suite in Old Style*. F. Thurston with M. Foggin. Recorded 1937. Original Decca K858 // CRT-017. Clarinet Classics CC 0010.
- Ireland: *Phantasy Sonata*. F. Thurston with J. Ireland. Recorded c.1945-48 - live studio recital, British Broadcasting Corporation. British Library Tape No: MS77W.[47](#)

Other notable pre-1945 recordings produced by British clarinetists, which do not refer to compositions within the criteria of the research, or to compositions scored for more than five instruments, are as follows.[48](#) They are included as they offer other substantive performance practice information from the research period.

- Mozart: Concerto K.622 (only Adagio). H. Draper. Recorded c.1928-29. Original Columbia BD 834. Clarinet Classics CC 0005.
- Mozart: Concerto K.622 (complete). H. Draper. Recorded c. 1929. Original Brunswick 20076 B.
- Mozart: Concerto K.622. R. Kell. Recorded 1940. Original Victor M 708 (13485/8).[49](#)
- Mozart: Quintet K.581. C. Draper and Spencer-Dyke Quartet. Recorded 1925. Original The National Gramophone Society 47/50.
- Mozart: Quintet K.581. C. Draper and Léner Quartet. Recorded 2 November 1928. Original Columbia L.2252. Re-released Retrospect Series SH 318 (1979).
- Mozart: Quintet K.581. R. Kell and Philharmonia Quartet. Recorded 1945. Columbia M 702 // Columbia DX 1187-90.
- Mozart: Trio K.498. F. Thurston with C. Long and R. Clarke. Recorded c.1931. Original The National Gramophone Society 161.
- Mozart: Trio K.498. R. Kell with L. Kentner and F. Riddle. Recorded 1941. Original Decca 9543 [D] // Columbia DX 998-1000 and Brunswick AXTL 1011.
- Beethoven: Trio opus 1 1. R. Kell with A. Pini and D. Mathews. Recorded 1944. Original Columbia DX 1164/6.
- Brahms: Quintet opus 115 (two abridged movements). C. Draper and London Quartet. Recorded 1917. Original Columbia L1219. Clarinet Classics CC 0010.[50](#)
- Brahms: Quintet opus 115. C. Draper and Léner Quartet. Recorded 1929-30. Original Columbia M-118 [LCL].
- Brahms: Quintet opus 115. F. Thurston and Spencer-Dyke Quartet. Recorded 1926. The National Gramophone Society SS-WW (11X19X).[51](#)
- Brahms: Quintet opus 115. R. Kell and Busch Quartet. Recorded 1937. Original HMV DB 3383-6. Re-released Testament SBT 1001 and Pearl GEM 0007.
- Brahms: Trio opus 114. C. Draper. Pre-1925 acoustic recording. Original Columbia Set 19.
- Brahms: Trio opus 114. H. Draper with W. Squire and H. Harty. Recorded 1926. Original Columbia 67101/3.[52](#)
- Brahms: Trio opus 114. R. Kell with L. Kentner and A. Pini. Recorded 1941. Original Decca DX 1850 // Columbia DX 1007-9.
- Brahms: Sonata opus 120 no. 2. F. Thurston with M. Foggin. Recorded c. 1937. Original Decca G-25722 // CRT-017.
- Weber: Concertino (with band). C. Draper. Recorded 1910. Original Victor 35182.
- Weber: Concertino. R. Kell with W. Goehr (conductor). Recorded 1939. Columbia 69869-D // CRT-017.

- Weber: Concerto no. 2 (abridged last movement). F. Thurston. Recorded c.1947. Original HMV c.3621.[53](#)
- Weber: *Grand Duo Concertant* (1st and 3rd movements). H. Draper. Recorded c. 1913. Original Pathé (made in Belgium, no number listed).
- Schumann: Three Fantasy Pieces opus 73. R. Kell with G. Moore. Recorded 1940. Original HMV C3170 and C3228. Clarinet Classics CC 0005.
- Schubert: *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* (D.965). R. Kell with G. Reeves and E. Schumann. Recorded 1937. Original HMV DB 3317. Clarinet Classics CC 0010.[54](#)
- Bliss: Quintet. F. Thurston and Griller Quartet. Recorded 1935. Original Decca K 780/3 [LCL]. Clarinet Classics CC 0005.[55](#)
- Holbrooke: Quintet. R. Kell and Willoughby Quartet. Recorded c.1938/9. Original Columbia LX 814/6 // CRT-017.[56](#)
- Bishop, H.: Variations on *Home, Sweet Home*. C. Draper. Recorded c.1901-03. Original Pathé Cylinder 10841. Clarinet Classics CC 0010.[57](#)
- Ravel: *Introduction and Allegro*. H. Draper. Recorded 1926. Original Columbia 67091/2.
- Ravel: *Introduction and Allegro*. C. Draper. Recorded 1933. Original Victor V 9738/9.
- Mohr, J.: *Air Varié* (with band). C. Draper. Recorded c.1908. Original Zonophone Z-046000. Clarinet Classics CC 0005.
- Frank: Suite for Two Clarinets. F. Thurston with R. Clarke. Recorded 1937. Original Decca K. 583 and 25721. Clarinet Classics CC 0005.
- Casella, A. (1883-1947): *Tarantella* from *Serenata* opus 50 (cl., bsn., trump., vln., cello.). R. Kell. Recorded 1943. Columbia DB 1304.
- Khachaturian: Trio (cl., vln., pno.). P. Cardew with E. Silverman and B. Frankel. Recorded 1932. Original TRC 14.
- Pierné: *Pastorale* (wind quintet). H. Draper. Pre-1925 acoustic recording. Original Edison Bell 515.
- Anonymous: *Ye Banks and Braes* (with band). Robert Mackenzie/C. Draper. Pre-1925 acoustic recording. Original Zonophon Serial 206.[58](#)
- Saint-Saens: *Tarantelle* (cl., fl., orch.). C. Draper. Original Columbia 3288.
- Galuppi-Craxton: *Largo and Allegro*. F. Thurston. Recorded 1937. Original Decca 25728.[59](#)

## CONCLUSIONS

Six of the seven performers listed above are known to have played on Boehm-system instruments. The instrument system used in the Walthew *Four Meditations* (1935) by A. Proctor cannot be established.[60](#) Proctor's recording is characterised by poor transitions over the register-break and limited fluency and consistency within the throat register. The performance lacks character and artistic expression. Proctor has an incongruously militaristic approach.

From the point of view of conventional 20th-century practice, Haydn Draper's *Adagio* from the Mozart Concerto (c.1928-29) has a thin and unfocused sound quality. His performance lacks uniformity between registers and he does not provide significant depth of meaning or emotion. In contrast, Charles Draper's performances exhibit more artistic freedom.[61](#) His 1917 Brahms Quintet recording with the London Quartet incorporates flexibility at emotional 'high points' coupled with balanced clarity of sound within the various registers. Indeed, Colin Lawson has called his tone "firm and direct".[62](#) Draper has an especially warm chalumeau register and in recordings like Mohr's *Air Varié* (c.1908) he also impresses with fine technical execution, solid intonation and a well-rounded staccato attack.

It is clear Charles Draper was *the* leading exponent of clarinet performance in his day. Reviews from the period quote his musical ability and popularity. His performance of the Mozart Quintet with the Spencer-Dyke Quartet was reviewed by N.P. in 1926:[63](#) "The fine art of Charles Draper, Kreisler of clarinetists, together with splendid support of the Spencer-Dyke Quartet, make this recording a veritable treasure".[64](#) A later *Gramophone* review from 1937, this time comparing Simeon Bellison's Mozart Quintet with the Roth Quartet to Draper's Léner recording (1928), is also complimentary:[65](#)

We cannot, however, give full marks to this recording [Bellison version], because the clarinet is rather too prominent, and because of some coarseness and cloudiness in the strings. Turning again to the much older version by the Lener Quartet and Charles Draper, we find that this is wonderfully good for its years, and that it cannot be easy to choose between the two versions. We certainly like Mr. Roth better than Mr. Lener as first violin, but on the other hand we prefer Charles Draper to Simeon Bellison, largely because he adapts himself better to the other players.[66](#)

Frederick Thurston was a fine technician. His Bliss Quintet recording (1935) with the Griller Quartet demonstrates noteworthy virtuosity. In this performance, the tempo fluctuates considerably. Thurston's later recording of the Ireland *Phantasy Sonata* (c. 1948 with J. Ireland, piano) demonstrates depth of character and passionate performance, which is emphasised through free use of rubato. This live studio recording shows high technical merit. Thurston is not mentioned frequently in *Gramophone* reviews, possibly because of the small number of recordings he made. However, all are favorable. Most refer directly to his virtuosity. A fine

example of this is a review of his Bliss Quintet recording.<sup>67</sup> The reviewer, Alec Robertson, writes: "A word of special praise must go to the exquisite clarinet-playing of Frederick Thurston, in whom Bliss finds his Stadler or Mühlfeld".<sup>68</sup>

Reginald Kell appears on another level in the tradition of pre-1945 British performance. His playing showed considerable individuality and artistic range, exploring levels of expression previously thought unachievable on the clarinet. His sound, based on warm vibrato, was unusual for the period and groundbreaking in its originality. He emphasised sensitive attack, especially in the high register, and employed the full spectrum of dynamic gradation.

Reginald Kell's extensive output of recordings received much coverage in *Gramophone* reviews. His Mozart Concerto performance, with Sir Malcolm Sargent and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, appeared in a 1940 edition.<sup>69</sup> The reviewer writes: "I like the recording immensely: most of all, the light, pure, sweet clarinet tone, so flexibly expressive, so poised and directed to the heart of meaning. To listen to every note's intention has been one of the best of my month's pleasures".<sup>70</sup>

His recording of the Brahms Quintet with the Busch Quartet (1937) arouses similarly high praise. Alec Robertson writes:

The finest phrasing and tone, scrupulous attention to the composer's markings, exact balance and, above all, truly profound insight into the meaning and message of the music. With all of these virtues the clarinettist, Reginald Kell, must unreservedly be associated. His instrument has never sounded more beautiful than in this recording, from the moment of his unhurried entry to the last chords. Not one note booms or has the slightest suggestion of stridency, and the *chalumeau* register is as warmly beautiful as the upper register is mellow and pure.

The reviewer continues:

Perhaps some people may consider Mr. Kell's restraint excessive, but I shall not agree with them. Where his instrument is scored for as part of the ensemble the ordinary listener might not even detect it was playing, so merged into the prevailing string tone is it. But where it has to dominate the artist is not found wanting. His approach is always thoroughly romantic, and rightly so.<sup>71</sup>

#### 'A STAR IN A DARK SKY'

No British clarinet and piano recordings were made before c.1901. This complicates the process of formulating an understanding of performance practice in the years 1880 to 1900. However, based on extant recordings it is possible to chart a relative progression of British clarinet performance practice throughout the period 1880 to 1945.

Before 1900 most clarinetists performed in military bands. Those solo and chamber music performances that took place were limited in number. For the most part, recitals were given by visiting foreign players. However, by the turn of the 20th century a new British solo tradition appeared. The recordings of Charles and Haydn Draper, Frederick Thurston and Reginald Kell are proof of this occurrence. When looked at chronologically these artists provide a clear picture of the development of clarinet performance practice after the turn of the 20th century. Charles and Haydn Draper had solid techniques. Their performances were well executed but, in terms of conventional practice, did not reflect much expressive artistry. Frederick Thurston continued the tradition established by the Drapers with regard to sound and technical security, but expressed greater emotional range. His style and approach exemplified the performance practice pre-eminent amongst most pre-1945 British clarinetists.

The progression shows a move away from accurate but inflexible pre-1900 performance practice, to higher levels of artistic freedom and individuality. This development in Britain culminated in the outstanding performances of Reginald Kell who lifted clarinet playing to new levels of expression and perfection previously considered the preserve of fine vocal, string and piano soloists.<sup>72</sup> Kell's refined artistry was unsurpassed by any other British clarinetist of the period. A review by Alec Robertson of his Beethoven recording (1944) with Anthony Pini (cello) and Denis Mathews (piano) re-enforces this:<sup>73</sup>

The performance, as one might expect, is superlatively good. The pianist has most of the limelight but the team-work is the outcome of perfect sympathy between all the players. Denis Mathews grows in stature with each recording. This time I noticed especially his pearly scale playing: but everything he does is a joy. And this is true of Reginald Kell and Anthony Pini. Lovely tone and phrasing from both. In these days when standards are not high, and many artists forget that artistic integrity is as important to them as virginity to a nun, a performance such as this shines like a star in a dark sky.<sup>74</sup>

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1. New Grove, 1980, 14, p.389.
2. Charlton, 'Woodwind and Brass', Performance Practice Music After 1600 (London, 1989), ed. Brown and Sadie, p.413.
3. Perhaps the earliest British confirmation that clarinetists encountered occasional technical difficulties in performance on simple-system instruments appears in J.A. Kappey's *Military Music, A History of Wind Instrumental Bands* (London, 1894): "There is, however, a solid reason for this multiplicity of differently pitched instruments [clarinets], namely the increasing difficulty of manipulating rapid passages in keys of more than four sharps or flats. The clarinet in C would be probably the best for all purposes, but unfortunately its tone is not nearly so rich as that of deeper pitched ones in B flat and A; hence composers prefer to score for clarinets the pitch of which their compositions are written, thereby facilitating a clean execution of passages which otherwise would be too hard, and obtaining a richer tone as well". Op. cit., p.42.
4. Here it must be remembered that although the Boehm-system appeared in Britain as early as c. 1890 most performers remained loyal to their simple-system instruments well into the 20th century. Indeed, as late as 1945 many performers still played on these 'old' designs.
5. Street, 'The Clarinet and its Music', Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association Vol. 42 (London, 1916), pp. 97,102,110-11.
6. Herbert W. Stutely (n.d.), who was a former pupil of George Clinton, was principal clarinet of the Covent Garden Orchestra at this time.
7. This article was found in John Walthew's scrapbook on his grandfather Richard H. Walthew. No date, name of author or title for the article is known but J. Walthew believes it possible that it appeared in 'Chamber Music; A Supplement to the Music Student', The Magazine of the Home Music Study Union (London, 1922), ed. Percy A. Scholes. This remains unsubstantiated, as this article could not be located in the British Library.
8. The Oehler instrument was closely based on an Albert simple-system design. It incorporated a patent C#, side B flat key, three top-joint rings and a forked-F vent. For more information on Oehler system see Baines, *Woodwind Instruments and Their History* (New York, 1967), pp. 140-42.
9. George Bernard Shaw confirms variation in tone resulting from 'cut' of reed: "...since the tone is so greatly affected by the way in which the reed is cut. I have heard in the street what I supposed to be an execrable cracked cornet, and on coming round the corner have found an old man playing a clarinet with an old slack reed as easy for his feeble jaws as the reed one cuts for a child in a cornfield. The tone produced by such ancient men and that produced by Lazarus in his best days (which was, I think, purer, if less rich, than Muhlfeld's) mark the two poles of my experience of clarinet-playing; and I have always found that in German orchestras the standard tone leans more to the man in the street than to Lazarus". Bernard Shaw continues: "...but except in the case of unusually fine players, who generally take the first chance of coming to England and settling here, the German wood wind player is content with a cheaper tone than the English one". *Music in London 1890-94, Criticisms Contributed Week by Week to the World* Vol. III (New York, 1973), p.292.
10. Robin B. Chatwin, in his 1938 article 'Some Notes on the History of the Clarinet', refers to clarinet tone development as follows: "It would seem that the tone of clarinets has continued to change. Carl Baermann, writing in 1860. comparing the French mouthpiece of that time with those then used in Germany, remarked that the former gave a soft, but rather dull and pinched tone, sounding like violin passages played on the viola. Richard Strauss wrote in 1905 that French clarinets had a flat nasal tone. "Had the French tone changed? Has it changed again since then? What also would these experts say about tone today?". *The Musical Progress and Mail* (December 1938), p.66.
11. Rendall comments as follows on tonal changes between simple-system and Boehm-system: "Tonally there has been less change than might have been expected. A general widening of the bore and an increase in the dimensions of the reed and mouthpiece have made the tone of the chalumeau fuller and freer, but have affected the upper registers considerably less". 'A Short Account of the Clarinet in England During the 18th and 19th Centuries', Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association LXVIII (London, 1942), p.63.
12. The one exception to this statement is R. Muhlfeld. His particular sound quality was often noted as being founded on a 'vibrato-like' quality.
13. It is known that until c. 1920 string vibrato was regarded as an ornamental effect. It was only employed at 'high' points of a work, often to add emotional tension. However, with the turn of the 20th century more and more players began to utilise it continuously, and today it is most rare to hear any note performed on a string instrument without an element of vibrato. Finson, 'Performing Practice in the Late Nineteenth-century, with Special Reference "to the Music of Brahms", *The Musical Quarterly* LXX No.4 (Autumn 1984), pp.468-470.
14. Charlton, op. cit., p.469.
15. This delicate, bright, reedy sound was not always the common French tone quality. Chatwin in his 'Some Notes on the History of the Clarinet' wrote as follows in 1938: "Fetis, the great French historian of music, relates that Joseph Beer left Paris in 1788, to commence tours all over Europe, and that when passing through Belgium he heard a clarinetist named Schwartz [no first names listed] who made him realise for the first time the sweetness of the tone then cultivated in Germany. Beer, who up until then had what was called the French tone, which was powerful, but rather hard, immediately decided to acquire the German tone, and in less than six months he was able to combine it with his previous ability in technique". Op. cit., (November 1938), p.42.
16. Dart refers to the modern clarinet as "less woody and chuckling than its ancestor". Op.cit., p.36.

- [17.](#) George Bernard Shaw states that "In Germany clarinet-players use reeds which give a more strident, powerful appealing tone than in England". Op. cit., Vol. I (New York, 1973), p.96.
- [18.](#) This is confirmed by John Denman when he states that "English clarinet playing ... was largely dominated by the French school". 'Denmania', The Clarinet Vol. 8/3 (Spring 1981), p.44.
- [19.](#) The only other recorded artist found to exhibit some vibrato in performance is P. Cardew (?-1960): Khachaturian Trio, recorded 1932, original TRC 14, Clarinet Classics CC 0010. Cardew's use of vibrato is here not considered significant, as he was primarily a Music Hall performer. See later in the chapter for more information on this artist.
- [20.](#) Andrew Smith confirms this when he mentions Kell's vibrato: "The vibrato, which became more pervasive as his personal playing style evolved, was always controversial, and the whole question of whether or not the clarinet needs or benefits from it remains...". 'Portraits. 2: Reginald Kell', Clarinet & Saxophone Vol. 1 11/3 (1986), p.39.
- [21.](#) These exaggerated, overly dramatic performances more often than not came from violinists, pianists, singers and not wind performers.
- [22.](#) Philip, Early Recordings and Musical Style (Cambridge, 1992), p.234.
- [23.](#) This means that on occasion performers did take 'liberties' with the notes themselves and often did not perform precise notated values.
- [24.](#) The Heap Sonata was composed in 1879.
- [25.](#) Columbia L.2252.
- [26.](#) The Gramophone (May 1929), p.534.
- [27.](#) Ignace Paderewski, a late 19th-century piano soloist, highlights the importance of rubato: "Tempo rubato is a potent factor in musical oratory, and every interpreter should be able to use it skillfully and judiciously, as it emphasises the expression, introduces variety, infuses life into mechanical execution. It softens the sharpness of lines, blunts the structural angles without ruining them, because its action is not destructive". 'Rhythm is Life', They Talk about Music Vol. 1 (New York, 1971), ed. Robert Cumming, pp.107-12.
- [28.](#) Finson, op. cit, p.473.
- [29.](#) Nelson, 'King of the Clarinet - Reginald Kell Remembered', International Classical Record Collector(Spring 1999), p.37.
- [30.](#) Philip, op.cit., p.218.
- [31.](#) Pre-1925 acoustic recording, Edison Bell 515.
- [32.](#) Charlton, op. cit., p.472.
- [33.](#) Finson states that Allegro and Presto tempos were played with "noticeable verve". Op. cit., p.474.
- [34.](#) Charlton, op. cit., p.476.
- [35.](#) Victor 35182.
- [36.](#) Mozart Quintet K.581 with the Spencer-Dyke Quartet: The National Gramophone Society 47/50. C. Draper made a second recording of this Quintet in 1928 with the Lener Quartet: Columbia 124 // CRT-017 and re-released Retrospect Series SH 318 (1979).
- [37.](#) Possibly c. 1910 (unsubstantiated). Zonophon Serial 206.
- [38.](#) Original HMV DB 3317. Clarinet Classics CC 0010.
- [39.](#) Original Decca K 780/3 [LCL]. Clarinet Classics CC 0005 (fourth movement only).
- [40.](#) Columbia 67101/3.
- [41.](#) The Gramophone (July 1937), p.65.
- [44.](#) Sadly, the R Kell recording of C. Raybould's wistful Shepherd and Forbes's (first names and dates unknown) performance of R. H. Walthew's Mosaic in 10 Pieces have proved untraceable. Although listed in the British Library archives they cannot be located today.
- [45.](#) Information on period recordings has been obtained from Gilbert The Clarinetist's Solo Repertoire. A Discography (New York, 1972) and Clarinetist's Discography (three volumes) (New York. 1991). Cloughl Cummings The World's Encyclopedia of Recorded Music (London, 1952) was also consulted. together with personal correspondence with Michael Bryant.
- [46.](#) F.G. Youens comments that "The slow movement of Stanford's Clarinet Sonata is excellently played by Frederick Thurston on Decca K853, the reverse containing Alan Frank's Suite for Two Clarinets". 'Instruments of the Modern Orchestra', The Gramophone (October 1939), p. 185.
- [47.](#) This recording falls outside the given research parameters. It is included in the main text because it is the first known recording of this work and because it shows Thurston at the height of his powers with the composer on piano.
- [48.](#) These recording lists, as far as this researcher is aware, are complete. However, it is possible that a few recordings have been overlooked.
- [49.](#) Sir Malcolm Sargent with the London Philharmonic Orchestra.
- [50.](#) This is thought to be the first recording ever made of the Brahms Quintet opus 115 (abridged).
- [51.](#) F. Thurston's 1926 rendition of the Brahms Quintet opus 115 was the first 'complete' recording of the work.
- [52.](#) Recorded at 88-rpm. [53.](#) This short recording with piano was part of a Sir Malcolm Sargent educational series introducing the instruments of the orchestra. F. Thurston's performance is here characterised by technical insecurity and limited expression.
- [54.](#) R. Kell recorded Der Hirt auf dem Felsen (D.965) a second time in 1947 with M. Ritchie, soprano, and G. Moore, piano. However, his 1937 HMV recording gained more notoriety. See post-1945 list above.
- [55.](#) F. Thurston and the Kutcher Quartet first performed the Bliss Quintet at the Wigmore Hall on 17 February

1933.

[56.](#) This recording by R. Kell of the Holbrooke Quintet was reviewed as follows: "The music falls a little strangely on the ear, but the writing is very clear and agreeable, though we cannot say yet what it still has to yield in depth and significance. Reginald Kell plays marvellously on the clarinet, and the Willoughby Quartet impress by the neatness and confidence of their performance. The recording is excellent". 'The Monthly Letter', The Gramophone (June 1939) (no page number given).

[57.](#) Such was the popularity of this Music Hall melody that Henry Bishop was knighted in 1842.

[58.](#) Robert Mackenzie is thought to have been one of C. Draper's pseudonyms - possible others include George McNiece and A. Taylor. The reasons why Draper occasionally used pseudonyms are unknown but perhaps relate to commercial and contractual conditions of some early recordings. George McNeice: Coming through the Rye, Plantation Echoes, original Regal G 6210. A. Tavor: In Cellars Cool, original John Bull 40607. Anonymous: Charlie is my name, including Verdi Introduction, Original Scottische, Sonnambula, Les Alsaciennes, Spagetti Polka, original The Gramophone Co. 340.

[59.](#) This work was composed by Baldassare Galuppi (1706-1785) and arranged by Harold Craxton (1855-1971). Possibly written originally for violin and piano, it seems that F. Thurston arranged this work in a version for A clarinet. Alec Robertson comments about this recording as follows: "Galuppi's pieces do not lend themselves especially well to the genius of the clarinet, but Mr. Thurston makes them sound delightful - his ornaments are beautifully done...". The Gramophone (May 1937), p.521.

[60.](#) A. Proctor (n.d.) may have been an amateur clarinetist. No dates or further information could be found on this player.

[61.](#) Anthony Baines states: "Especially beautiful in Draper's playing was a wonderful unity of tone, technique and musical feeling. His chamber-music recordings, made towards the end of his life, remain a rare delight and a memorial to a very great period of English wind-playing". *Woodwind Instruments and Their History* (London, 1967), p.333.

[62.](#) Lawson, *Brahms Clarinet Quintet* (Cambridge, 1998), p.78.

[63.](#) The National Gramophone Society 47/50.

[64.](#) The Gramophone (September 1926), p. 163.

[65.](#) The Russian, S. Bellison (1883-1953) recorded the Mozart Quintet with the Roth Quartet in 1937. Columbia LX 624-7.

[66.](#) 'The Monthly Letter', The Gramophone (August 1937), p.2.

[67.](#) Griller Quartet, Decca K 780/3. [68.](#) The Gramophone (November 1935), p.238.

[69.](#) Victor M 708 (13485/8).

[70.](#) 'Analytical Notes and First Reviews', The Gramophone (June 1940), p.8.

[71.](#) 'Chamber Music', The Gramophone (May 1938), p.518.

[72.](#) John Denman confirms this: "Reginald Kell played the clarinet like Kreisler played the violin, in fact, like all string players at the time: with rubato, with vibrato, expressively, freely, a step forward that many players cannot take, for tradition forbids it". Denman, loc.cit.

[73.](#) Columbia DX 1164/6.

[74.](#) The Gramophone (October 1944), p.57.