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Weber's Clarinet Compositions

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Did Weber want his Concertino or concertos played the way you have been playing them? Here is an article, written after an examination of the original manuscripts, that contains some surprises for you.

Carl Maria von Weber's clarinet works are part of the clarinetist's daily bread. Representing a happy unity of virtuoso writing with genuine inventiveness and musicality, they will maintain their rank next to the works of Mozart and Brahms as long as clarinets are played.

Written for Weber's friend Heinrich Baermann, the works are, in chronological order: a Concertino and two Concertos with orchestra, Variations with piano (all 1811), a Quintet for clarinet and strings, "Introduction, Theme and Variations" for the same combination (both 1815). The last named work has been recently published for the first time in Berlin. It may have been originally intended to be an alternate movement for the Quintet. Finally, in 1816, he completed his last work for clarinet, the Grand Duo Concertant with piano.

Friedrich Wilhelm Jaehns, in his catalogue of Weber's works (published in 1871, and comparable in scope to Koechel's well-known Mozart catalogue), says of Weber's clarinet compositions: "S All six works [the 'Introduction, Theme and Variations' are not mentioned by Jaehns] have preserved up to this day [1871] their significance for this instrument, and, thanks to their absolute -- musical -- and to their relative -- instrumental -- excellence they have withstood any change in taste. This is proven, among other things, by the new luxury edition at Schlesinger (Lienau) in Berlin, edited by Heinrich Baermann's son Carl, and grandson Carl Baermann in Munich, the former a Royal Bavarian Court Musician, a first rank clarinet virtuoso, the latter an eminent pianist, teacher at the Royal Music School. At the same time this revision became very important for these works, as it rests on the traditions which the elder Carl Baermann received from his father Heinrich about the execution of the works and about their partly distorted content in the old incorrect edition ..."

Let us elaborate on this last sentence. When Jaehns speaks of the "partly distorted content in the old incorrect edition," he apparently refers to the first edition of Weber's clarinet works. Jaehns's contention is correct insofar as these editions show many obvious misprints as well as many inconsistencies--for example, discrepancies in a recapitulation section that is obviously intended to be identical with the exposition. The Carl Baermann edition on which virtually all current editions are based tries to do away with misprints and inconsistencies, but, on the other hand, it adds dynamic and phrasing marks of which there is no evidence in the first edition. It even goes so far as to change the music at several points. These deviations were interpreted by Jaehns as "authentic" tradition. However, who is to judge what is "right" and what is "wrong"?

In the past, just as today, we encounter the phenomenon of the instrumental virtuoso who wins public acclaim by his personality and by sheer technical mastery of his instrument. He may or may not be musically outstanding. In the past, just as today, we know of composers who approved of the way certain artists interpreted their work, who even went so far as to sanction certain liberties taken by the artists. Such approval and sanction are the result of many interrelated elements, for instance, the composer's involvement in his own work, his eagerness to have it performed by a well-known virtuoso, or the virtuoso's strong personality. In no case should they be construed as establishing a final version of the work. Let us suppose that Weber, for some reason, had had his clarinet works performed by another great virtuoso of his time. No doubt the interpretation would have differed from Baermann's, and no doubt the interpretation would have many instances of this differing interpretation. Regardless of the merits of Baermann's or any other virtuoso's

interpretations, they, in turn, must not be taken as the basis of further editing and comment. This procedure would lead us far away from the composer's original intentions. Rather should every clarinetist, so to speak, be his own Baermann--the more so since the original versions of Weber's clarinet works do not call for any improvement.

How, then, shall we establish that original version? How shall we eliminate the obvious misprints and inconsistencies of the first edition without allowing any liberties. There is one way of doing it: to consult Weber's manuscripts.

According to the Jaehns catalogue the autographs, in 1871, were in the possession of the following persons:

- Concertino -- Max M. Freiherr v. Weber, Vienna.
- First Concerto -- One copy Freiherr v. Weber, one copy Carl Baermann, son of Heinrich, Munich.
- Second Concerto -- Same as First Concerto.
- Variations -- Freiherr Dr. J. Wolf von Ehrenstein, Dresden; another copy made for Grandduchess Maria Paulovna in Weimar. The latter manuscript unknown.
- Quintet -- Quintet--Freiherr v. Weber.
- Grand Duo -- Unknown.

While it was possible for me to obtain photostats of the first editions, partly from the Library of Congress in Washington and the New York Public Library, partly from the Jaehns Collection, with valuable annotations, from the Public Library in Berlin, it took some time to find the autographs. Strangely enough, I came across Weber's manuscript of the Grand Duo, marked "unknown" in Jaehns, in the Library of Congress. The autographs said in Jaehns to be in the possession of Freiherr v. Weber stayed in the family, and are today owned by Weber's great-granddaughter, Miss Mathilde v. Weber, in Dresden. Recently, I was fortunate enough to receive photocopies of the Concertino, the two Concertos and the Quintet.

The availability of these five manuscripts enabled me to continue a work started some time ago; namely, the preparation of the badly needed authentic version of Weber's clarinet works. The only manuscript of the six major works not available to this date is one of the Variations. However, on the basis of analogy with other autographs and of the first edition, it might be assumed that a fairly authentic edition can be established.

In order to point out what surprises an original edition has in store for the clarinetist, let us compare some passages of the solo part of the Concertino with a current edition (Carl Ficher). Ninth measure of entrance of solo: next to last note B-flat, not A. Fifteenth measure: no ornament. Eighteenth measure: no trill on G-sharp. Twenty second measure: no ornament. The tempo of the theme is "Andante." From then on no change of tempo is indicated up to the very last variation (6/8), which is marked "Allegro." Therefore "Poco piú vivo," "Meno mosso," and "Lento" are out. "Poco ritard," in the triplet variation has to be eliminated. The grace note in the first and corresponding measures of the following variation in sixteenths does not appear in the original. The run between the trill on G and the trill on E at the very end of the piece is Baermann's addition. In the original the G trill extends through three full measures.

The reader may himself compare the beginning of the Andante, as reproduced in this issue, with any current edition. May we draw his attention to the Alla Breve in the time signature, to the lack of dynamic markings, and to the scarcity of slurs. Obviously, this does not mean that every note that is not marked as slurred should be tongued, nor does it preclude a certain dynamic variety and expression. Weber left some phrasing and dynamic markings to be implemented by the player.

All in all, we can readily see that an authentic edition would create a new basis for the intelligent interpretation of Weber's clarinet compositions. In the case of the poor musician excessive markings will make bad things worse. The good musician will play the pieces well from the music as the composer wrote it.



A page of the original manuscript of the Concertino.