**Amand Vanderhagen and the Concept of the Clarinet Method Book**

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Joan Michelle Blazich, DMA

Although Amand Vanderhagen (1753–1822) is periodically encountered as a clarinetist and author of instructional treatises, little has been known about him and his remarkable contributions to the development and advancement of clarinet pedagogy. Amand Vanderhagen, also referred to as Amand Van der Hagen, was a Flemish musician who played in both military bands and orchestras. A professional clarinetist, he also played bassoon and wrote methods for the flute and oboe. Vanderhagen, in writing the first known published methods on the Classical clarinet, *Méthode nouvelle et* *raisonnée pour la clarinette* (1785) and *Nouvelle méthode de clarinette* (1796), laid the foundations for the establishment of “modern” method books like that of Léfèvre and Müller. Vanderhagen’s treatises are, in sharp contrast to their earlier, Baroque-era relatives, dedicated solely to the clarinet and contain lengthy discussions of clarinet fundamentals. His thorough explanations of technique are remarkably similar to many modern methods, reflecting his importance in advancing clarinet pedagogy from the Baroque to the Classical eras and establishing the concept of the clarinet method book.

The Baroque clarinet, which existed from ca. 1700–1780s, was an instrument of two or three keys, limited range, and poor usability. Treatises for this instrument often consisted of little more than rudimentary fingering charts and a few sentences of advice. For example, Joseph Friedrich Majer’s *Museum Musicum theoretico practicum das ist neu-eröffneter theoretisch- und practischer Music-Saal* (1732) offers a fingering chart and the following description of the instrument:

The clarinet is a wooden wind instrument invented by a man from Nürnberg at the beginning of this century, and is not unlike a long oboe, except that it has a broad mouthpiece. The sound of this instrument from afar is not unlike that of the trumpet and has a range from the tenor F to the second A and sometimes to the third C.

The lengthiest Baroque treatise on the clarinet, Valentin Roeser’s *Essai d’instruction à l’usage de ceux qui composent pour la clarinette et la cor* (1764), contains several paragraphs regarding the range and abilities of the four-keyed clarinet. Roeser’s observation that “many sixteenth notes in succession are not employed by the clarinet, considering that the breath must substitute for the tongue because the position of the reed is beneath the roof of the mouth” is the earliest known description of articulation and indicates that at this time the clarinet was played with the reed on top of the mouthpiece. However, Roeser does not provide specific information for learning how to the play the clarinet.

In contrast, by the 1790s the clarinet was an instrument of five or six keys, capable of playing in all genres and styles. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, clarinet treatises, from Jean-Xavier Léfèvre’s *Méthode de clarinette* (1802) to Ivan Müller’s *Méthode pour la nouvelle clarinette et clarinette-alto* (1821), offered substantial discussions of all aspects of the clarinet, from descriptions of the embouchure to the aesthetics of musical performance. What has not been previously recognized is that most Classical clarinet treatises, like those of Léfèvre and Müller, are based on those of Vanderhagen, particularly with regard to his descriptions of body posture, embouchure, and articulation. His pedagogy can be regarded as extremely advanced, even revolutionary, for the time period because Vanderhagen, unlike prior authors, gives specific, detailed instructions on how to hold the instrument, breathe properly, position the embouchure, and choose appropriate reeds. Vanderhagen’s descriptions of using syllables for certain articulations, as well as his advice on playing with the reed on top, were the most substantial writings on these subjects at this time. Although Vanderhagen’s advice to play with the reed on the top is no longer practiced, the rest of his instructions are in close keeping with contemporary pedagogy.
Vanderhagen’s *Méthode nouvelle et* *raisonnée pour la clarinette* (1785) is the first known published treatise of the Classical era for the five-keyed clarinet. Vanderhagen, after providing a clear and detailed fingering chart at its beginning, immediately presents a series of progressive articles teaching clarinet fundamentals as most current teachers would present them. He begins with body posture, followed by the embouchure, breathing, and creating a good sound, before discussing more “advanced” topics like reeds, ornamentation, and transposition. Numerous musical examples and a selection of etudes and duets are also provided. Vanderhagen’s opening remarks regarding the embouchure reflect the clarity and thoughtfulness of his teachings:

The clarinet is not a difficult instrument up to a certain point, but it is also not one of the easiest when we want to attain a certain degree of perfection. That is impossible to obtain if we do not have a good embouchure that is synonymous with a good sound. It is for this that the student must work from the beginning, for the embouchure is the basis of all wind instruments.

 Prior to this treatise, writers like Roeser provided only brief descriptions of the instrument and poorly illustrated fingering charts. Such a lack of information illustrates just how important this first treatise by Vanderhagen is because of its size and quality of content.
Vanderhagen’s second treatise, *Nouvelle méthode de clarinette* (1796), is both a continuation and elaboration of his seminal 1785 method book. The preface to this treatise indicates that Vanderhagen wrote it in response to the positive criticism of his first one. He includes several new articles at the beginning, most noticeably on learning to read music. This implies that he was now writing for true beginners rather than individuals with previous musical training. Although the format of this treatise is very similar to that of the 1785 work, Vanderhagen includes additional articles on ornamentation and note values. A considerably larger section for musical exercises now completes the method. One of the intriguing aspects of this later treatise is Vanderhagen’s advice on with which note to begin, as he encourages the beginner to begin with low F rather than open G because it allows for a solid grip and firm hand position:

I believe that I am obliged to take this position because I have found that beginning students can produce C more easily than F or E in the bass. It will therefore be good to begin with C, but it will always be preferable, in my opinion, to begin in the bass because the two thumbs, as well as the fingers, are employed, which gives a certain aplomb for holding the instrument.

By 1800 the five-keyed clarinet, while still popular, was beginning to be replaced by the newer six-keyed models. It is for this clarinet that Léfèvre wrote his famous 1802 *Méthode de clarinette*, which became the Paris Conservatory’s preferred instruction book for the instrument. Used by the Paris Conservatory until the 1930s, this method has inspired and been imitated by dozens of clarinet methods since its publication. Léfèvre, who was a contemporary performer and teacher to Vanderhagen, shows an obvious respect for him by using his treatises as a template for his own. The overall layout of Léfèvre’s treatise, from the initial fingering chart presentations to the succession of articles on essential clarinet fundamentals closely matches the organization of Vanderhagen’s *Méthode nouvelle et* *raisonnée pour la clarinette* (1785).

Close comparison of the treatises reveals that Léfèvre used *Méthode nouvelle et* *raisonnée pour la clarinette*(1785), rather than *Nouvelle méthode de clarinette* (1796), as his model because this work is both simpler and the more revolutionary of the two. It is also possible that, given the advancement of the clarinet between 1785 and 1802, Léfèvre may have regarded the 1796 treatise as useful but not as impressionable as its predecessor. Although Léfèvre does not copy Vanderhagen’s articles exactly, offering instead his own ideas and musical examples, it is clear that he used Vanderhagen’s work as the foundation for his own method.

While the pertinence of Vanderhagen’s advice to the modern clarinetist can be debated the lasting impact of his two treatises is undeniable. Remarkable for their size and content, both methods make a radical departure from prior writings of the Baroque-era. Vanderhagen, in offering a progressive series of articles and musical exercises that teach how to play the clarinet in a logical, comfortable manner, created the foundations of the modern method book. This advice and structure in these methods in turn served as the platform for Léfèvre’s method, setting into motion the creation of the “modern” clarinet method book, an instructional manual whose format remains largely unchanged to this day.

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