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Carl Baermanns Method for Clarinet: Applications for Today's Clarinetist

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The following is a transcription of a lecture presented at the International Clarinet Association's ClarinetFest® 1998 at Columbus, Ohio. The lecture begins with a performance of an abridged version of Pastoral, from Baermann's Method Opus 64, part 4.

Today, I'd like to present an overview of the history of Carl Baermann, Heinrich Baermann, his father, and Carl's Method for Clarinet. And then discuss the applications of this Method for Today's Clarinetists.

Heinrich was one of the great virtuoso clarinetists. Pamela Weston describes Heinrich Baermann in her book "Clarinet Virtuosi of the Past":

"Without the aid of sound recordings of the celebrated players of the past, it is impossible to compare and pass judgment on their respective merits in performance. Contemporary reports are our only criteria and these are regrettably fallible. The lasting greatness of a player must be estimated therefore, not so much by how they performed as by the extent of their success as a performer and the influence and effect on their playing on future generations. In comparison with the achievements of other well known player, those of Heinrich Baermann leave no doubt that he remains supreme."¹

He was born in 1784 in Potsdam.² His father was in the military. Because Heinrich and his brother Carl showed some aptitude towards music their father sent them to a military music school. Carl played bassoon and Heinrich played clarinet. Heinrich was a very hard worker. He studied at the music school with Joseph Beer, who was one of the finest clarinetists and musicians of his day.

As a young man, the word of Heinrich's talents spread through Europe, and Prince Louis Ferdinand of Berlin summoned Heinrich to demonstrate his skills. The Prince was very pleased with Heinrich and began employing him to play the Prince's original compositions.

The Prince was so pleased with Heinrich that in 1805 he sent Heinrich to a new music school for wind players in Berlin. Now Heinrich had the opportunity to study with the other great clarinet virtuoso of the day, Franz Tausch. Heinrich's talents were properly nurtured with studies along side the two great virtuosos of the day, Joseph Beer and Franz Tausch.

Heinrich's skills as a musician and his charismatic personality helped him to be a very successful "Traveling Virtuoso". He was loved by all his audiences, friends and acquaintances. He traveled through Europe and Russia on concert tours.

His close friend, composer and pianist Carl Maria Von Weber revered Heinrich. Weber was a small, sickly man. They played concerts together very often and Weber wrote many of his large works for Heinrich.

To have a clearer perspective of the artists of this day it is helpful to remember these were Renaissance men. They weren't classified then as we know musicians today, as a "clarinetist" or a "composer". People weren't put into categories as musicians today are: composer, clarinetist, flutist etc. Carl Baermann for instance, was not only a top flight performer but also an excellent teacher, instrument technician, as well as being a skilled enough pianist to compose and play works with his students.

His father Heinrich was a similar Renaissance man. Heinrich would give Weber themes to create compositions with. When Weber presented Heinrich with a composition he would tell Heinrich to make any alterations he felt were necessary because he had complete confidence in Heinrich's excellent musical judgment.

Felix Mendelssohn had a similar admiration for Heinrich and his son Carl. When Mendelssohn wrote his two Concert Stucke pieces for Carl and Heinrich to play on concert tours, he included a note for Heinrich to make any musical changes he felt necessary, meaning Mendelssohn trusted Heinrich's good musical judgment implicitly.

These were very well skilled "musicians". The word "musicians" is in quotes because in the nineteenth century this word carried stature and nobility. This was the era in which musicians were thought of as artists and not just "entertainers". Respect for these talented musicians was now growing and the public and critics were taking note.

Heinrich continued in the military. But due to the unfortunate death of his benefactor, Prince Ferdinand of Berlin, who was thrown off a horse, Heinrich finally decided to strike out on his own. The military was a hard life and he had followed in his father's footsteps long enough. Heinrich had been imprisoned as a soldier for a year, enduring a very harsh winter.

Since he had no more benefactor, he traveled to seek the assistance of the Crown Prince of Bavaria. Being impressed with Heinrich's talents, the Prince gave him a recommendation to his father, King Maximilian I at Munich.

Heinrich had been out of work for quite some time, so with much hardship, he made his way to see King Maximilian I. The King was so impressed with Heinrich's talents that he offered him a position in his Court Band. Heinrich took the position only to find that money had been squandered in previous seasons. So to make the coming season successful, the King decided to stage only two operas and to engage the very popular diva, Helena Harlas to attract a larger audience.

The season began well and as often goes in rehearsals for opening productions, people spend much time together. During this time Heinrich and Helena Harlas became quite fond of each other. But there were two problems. First, Helena Harlas was married...to the Royal Secretary General. And second she was Catholic and the Catholic church didn't allow divorces. But Heinrich, being the suave smooth gentleman he was, persuaded her to be his mistress. They had four children together, which seems quite a feat to keep such a secret from her husband. But they continued their love affair together for many years.

Carl Baermann, who wrote the famous Method for Clarinet, was the second of these children. Carl was born in 1810.³ He studied clarinet with his father since he was a young boy. When Carl was about 15 years old he traveled with his father on concert tours. This was his introduction to the rigors of the life of a traveling virtuoso.

Heinrich would travel often by horse and carriage to various cities and towns, armed with a letter of introduction and his instrument. He would settle in the town and organize a concert. Sometimes they did well and sometimes they did not. Travel was not easy and Carl realized that this life was not for him.

After numerous tours, of which one of his tours to Russia being the most lucrative of Heinrich's life, Carl decided to stay back in Munich. He had been playing in the Munich Court Band along side of his father as a substitute player. At this time he became an excellent basset clarinet player. Carl ultimately obtained a permanent post in the Band along side his father.

Carl had two other interests aside from being a virtuoso player. He loved to teach and his inquisitive mind lead him to become an expert instrument maker and technician. In 1860 Carl invented a clarinet along with the Munich instrument maker George Ottensteiner. This instrument had 18 keys. In fact this was the instrument which Mühlfeld played Brahms' compositions on. Mühlfeld, of course being the clarinetist who's playing Brahms adored.

This new instrument was very innovative for that time period compared to his father Heinrich's 6 keyed Boxwood clarinet. In fact the 6 keyed instrument which Heinrich played all his life, was the one he purchased after leaving the military. This was a present to himself for enduring all the hardships of military life.

From 1864-1875 Carl composed and compiled his Method for Clarinet. This method, Opus 63 and Opus 64, was divided into five parts. Part 1 covers the history of the clarinet and the basic rudiments of music. It is an excellent introduction to music. Part 2 contains some finger technique drills and some scales but is primarily comprised of compositions with piano accompaniment. These etudes drill the student in areas of technique as well as musicianship. They take the student through all the major and minor keys through three flats and three sharps. Part 3 is the scale book. This volume is primarily made up of scales and arpeggios through all the major and minor keys. It is still one of the most thorough technique builders available today.

Part 4, Opus 64 is another collection of musical compositions with piano accompaniments that drill the student in technical and musical matters. These drills are all ingeniously enclosed within full fledged musical compositions. Part 5 is yet another set of compositions with piano accompaniment. These pieces are portions of some of Carl's more extended compositions, including numerous concerti.

The primary application of this Method is the training of a "musician", not just a "clarinetist." It seems because of the comprehensiveness of this Method and its focus around original musical compositions, that Carl Baermann's intention in creating this Method was to produce a well skilled and educated "musician". By offering the student many etudes in the form of actual musical compositions, the students are guided through lessons in style, phrasing and general musicianship.

He's actually helping the student to learn to express their own individual voice by overcoming technical hurdles on the clarinet and having a comprehensive understanding of music in general. This is a much broader approach than just teaching the clarinet.

This concept can be applied to today's students as well. Instead of learning orchestral excerpts fully and understanding how these excerpts fit in with the whole composition, students often learn only the portions of excerpts asked for in auditions. But this type of study only teaches small segments of the music. By studying how the excerpt fits into the whole composition, the player will have a much bigger perspective of the work and music in general. And by learning the entire compositions the player will begin to understand the finer stylistic aspects of music such as the difference between a Landler or a Tarentella or the sound of different types of staccato.

Clarinetist, William Blount wrote an article in Wind Player Magazine a number of years ago called "Learning Style From Etudes."⁴ The basis of the article is that we should learn our French, German and Italian styles from the etudes we play. Etudes such as Jean Jean, Baermann and Cavallini are all important. So when we pick up a piece by Brahms we know more clearly how to approach it from our experience with the etudes. Baermann's Method is a methodical road map to overcome these barriers of technique and style.

Another analogy is learning a language. When we learn a language, we learn our vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, then we gradually learn to speak to each other in that language during the class once or twice a week. But we don't really learn to speak, dream and think in that language until you live in the country for a while and use the language constantly. Only then does it become second nature.

This is what Baermann is trying to create with his Method. He's trying to help the player to play very naturally, expressing one's own individuality through this language of music. Of the technical and stylistic aspects of music, the stylistic aspects can be almost intangible. But their impact is most definitely present to the listener. These aspects might be things like learning how to play a cadenza expressively or how to play rubato convincingly. These stylistic aspects combined with the technical preparation Baermann offers, prepares the player so their emotions and soul are revealed through the music. And thus the actual "execution" of the music really requires not much thought.

It seems that to Baermann, the goal is the "expression of the music". The technical aspects of analysis and execution are all secondary to the actual musical sounds and the emotions they produce.



Here is a musical example called "Elegy" where the student learns about syncopation. The clarinet plays on the downbeats and the piano plays on the upbeats.

The next musical example is a piece called The Savoyard's Complaint. This piece drills the problematic area of the "break", the throat A to B in the middle of the staff. This piece is from Opus 64, part 4. In his Opus 64, part 4, he focuses on "keys". But not keys in terms of tonal centers but rather the actual keys on the instrument. As a matter of interest, a Savoyard is French for a chimney sweeper. Years ago in France, they sent young boys up the chimney to clean them because the boys were small enough to fit through them.



In closing, I will play one final piece. A lively Tarentella which drills the F#/B key, second finger of the right hand.

¹ Clarinet Virtuosi of the Past, Pamela Weston, Panda Press, Haverhill, Suffolk CB9 8PR, pages 114-153

² More Clarinet Virtuosi of the Past, Pamela Weston, Halstan & Co. Ltd., Plantation Road, Amersham, Bucks. HP6 6HJ. pages 37-38

³ More Clarinet Virtuosi of the Past, Pamela Weston, Halstan & Co. Ltd., Plantation Road, Amersham, Bucks. HP6 6HJ. pages 35-37

⁴ Learning Style From Etudes, William Blount Masterclass, Windplayer Vol. 10 No. 1