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The Earliest Collections of Clarinet Music

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One of the most important music publishers of the early eighteenth century was Estienne Roger. Born at Caen in 1665, he settled in Amsterdam in 1686 and apprenticed himself to a stationer, becoming a full member of the Stationers' Guild in 1695. In 1698 appeared his first catalogue of music; by 1706 he had agents in London (Vaillant, in the Strand) and Cologne, and ten years later in Berlin, Halle, Brussels and Hamburg as well. His music catalogue of this year (1716) contained no less than 411 items of all kinds, sonatas, concertos, suites, dances, chamber music and solo music, for almost every instrument or combination of instruments then in use for amateur or professional music-making. And much of the music he sold was not listed in this catalogue: for instance, secular and sacred vocal music, operas and books about music. In addition he printed or stocked a large number of books on non-musical subjects.

This enterprising and energetic man combined in himself a rare number of differing skills, and this fact was to a large extent responsible for his very great success as a publisher. He had a sound musical sense in his choice of composers and works, knowledge and taste in the use of the techniques of layout, engraving and printing, a flair for knowing in advance what kind of music was likely to be in demand later in the season, a sound grasp of how to advertise and how to make it simple for a distant buyer to order exactly what he wanted (Roger initiated the system of publishers' numbers), and shrewd business ability as well. The output of his firm during the first twenty-five years of its existence is of the greatest importance to the historian, for it accurately reflects the development of musical taste over a large part of north-western Europe at a time when great changes were taking place in musical fashions. Indeed it is more than a mere reflection; Roger's firm played no small part in the actual formation of musical taste at this time.¹

A study of Roger's publications can be of great value, then, to the historian and particularly to the historian of musical instruments and their use. Here is an example. Among the hundred thousand or so books in the remarkable library of the Brussels Conservatoire de Music are two thin oblong volumes, 8" x 4 3/4", bearing the classmark 5606; they were once in the Westphal collection. Their title-pages read: *Airs à deux Chalumeaux, deux Trompettes, deux Violons/deux Flutes, deux Clarinettes, ou Cors de Chasse/dédiez à Monsieur Henry Iperman/Docteur en droit Civil & en droit Canon/Livre premier [second]/Amsterdam/Chez Estienne Roger & Le Cene Libraire. No. 348 [349]. Each volume consists of two part-books, named *Dessus* and *Second Dessus*; the first volume contains 34 airs, the second 44 (numbered from 35 to 78).*

Like all Roger's publications the books are undated and it is difficult to date them precisely. In 1716 Roger took the step of numbering all his stock according to the pigeon-holes in the warehouse where they were kept, and this number was not done in any in of chronological order, unfortunately. Later publications were numbered as they came off the press, so that a closer dating is possible, but any book of Roger's bearing a number between 1 and 411 is very difficult to assign to an exact year.² The present books are not to be found in Roger's catalogue of 1706, though they appear in that of 1716. The copies at present under discussion must belong to a second edition, since the imprint 'Roger & le Cene' was only in use from 1717 to 1722, but it is nevertheless safe to say that the first edition of the books must have appeared between 1707 and 1716; no copy of this first edition is known to survive, however.

No composers are named in the books; all the pieces they contain are in D major. The last two numbers of the second book are the only ones to be provided with a bass (unfigured, and printed facing the *dessus* part); this

would seem to be for kettle-drums in *A* and *d*, since these are the only notes used. The remaining numbers are unaccompanied, and the presence of a bass part in one of the *dessus* books makes it quite certain that no separate bass part-book ever existed. Both parts have the same range: diatonic from *d'* to *b''*, omitting *e'*. Occasionally *g''* # is used, and the first *dessus* once plays *a* (in the second number for two *dessus* and bass).

The music makes no attempt at being in any key save *D*, with an occasional passing modulation to *A* major, and it is filled with repeated notes and broken chord figures. This, and the presence of a *quasi*-kettle-drum part, suggests strongly that the music might have been originally intended for trumpets, mock trumpets (i.e. *tromba marinas*) or horns. But the notes *g'*, *b'* and *c''* # do not exist on any instrument of this kind with *D* as its fundamental, and no instrument with a fundamental an octave lower was then in existence as far as I know. It seems therefore that the wording of the title-pages must be taken at its face value, and that the music was primarily intended for chalumeaux or 'clarinelles'. Fiddlers and flautists would certainly derive little pleasure from playing it, and it was surely only a publicity device to include violins and flutes among the list of instruments for which the music was suited.

Here then are the earliest known collections of clarinet music, it seems. Perhaps some other member of the Society will be able to reconcile the scales given in Bessaraboff and the other textbooks on the history of musical instruments with the scales used in these little pieces; the chalumeau scale runs from *f* to *g'*, and the early Denner clarinet from *f* to *b'*, with an upper octave obtained only with some difficulty.³ The unusual spelling of the word 'clarinelle' is worth noting, perhaps; 'clarinello' is a more logical diminutive of 'clarino' than 'clarinetto,' and the latter spelling might well be only a misreading. The reference books unanimously state that the earliest use of the word 'clarinet' occurs in Walther's Lexicon of 1732.

Notes

- ¹. The standard articles on Roger are listed in O. E. Deutsch, '*Music Publishers' Numbers*' (Part II), *The Journal of Documentation*, II, 2, pp. 82-3. To this list must be added M. Pincherle, '*Note sur Estienne Roger et Michel-Charles le Cène*', *Revue belge de musicologie*, I, 2-3-4, pp. 82-92.
- ². Deutsch, *op. cit.*, has assumed that Roger began to number his editions in 1710, issuing about 50 numbers a year, so that numbers 348 and 349 belong to 1715 or so. Pincherle, *op. cit.*, gives very good reasons for supposing that the numbering of Roger's stock was undertaken once for all in 1716, and that numbers up to 411 were assigned in a completely haphazard manner, bearing no relation to the chronological order in which the works first appeared
- ³. N. Bessaraboff (now Bodley), *Ancient European Musical Instruments* (1941), pp. 97-8.