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## *The nineteenth-century clarinet and its music*

### An integrated model: Mozart's Clarinet Quintet

There are some striking parallels between the clarinet quintets of Mozart and Brahms, unquestionably the two greatest works for the medium. For example, Mozart directly anticipates Brahms in his expression of underlying melancholy, whilst integrating the clarinet with the string texture to a remarkable degree. Any survey of the nineteenth-century clarinet and its music must necessarily take as its starting point the remarkable collaboration between Mozart and Stadler, which inspired a host of other smaller pieces besides the Clarinet Quintet and the Concerto. Mozart's Quintet for piano and winds and his Clarinet Trio also feature the instrument within new genres in textures far removed from the *concertante* style which dominated wind writing of the period. The relationship of Mozart and Stadler parallels to an uncanny degree the meeting of Brahms and Richard Mühlfeld in 1891; a further link is that it was Mühlfeld's performance of Mozart's Quintet which played a major part in inspiring Brahms to begin work on his own Clarinet Quintet.

Mozart's works are of the utmost importance in the history of the clarinet's development; they represent the culmination of a century in which the instrument developed from its origins *c.* 1700 into a fully-fledged solo voice.<sup>1</sup> By Mozart's day, the cantabile possibilities of the instrument were increasingly recognised, the B $\flat$  instrument rather than the clarinet in A or C having become established as the favourite solo instrument in concertos of the Mannheim school by Johann and Carl Stamitz, Dimler, Eichner and others. The chalumeau register beloved of both Mozart and Brahms was beginning to play a significant part in solo idioms, whilst leaps became part of the vocabulary as the clarinet's potential for agility was gradually appreciated. Clarinet

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writing in concertos and chamber music belies the caution with which it was handled orchestrally as late as Beethoven's first two symphonies. In its five-keyed configuration, which by this time had become the norm, the clarinet was fluent over a large compass, though only within a limited range of amenable keys. As its lyrical qualities began to be widely cultivated, Daniel Schubart's book on aesthetics characterised the Viennese clarinet as overflowing with love, with an indescribable sweetness of expression.<sup>2</sup>

In creating the medium of the clarinet quintet, Mozart progressed significantly beyond the *concertante* idiom which had characterised the Oboe Quartet K370 and the Flute Quartets K285, 285a, 285b and 298. In these works the wind instrument assumes the role of undisputed soloist, as in the quartets for clarinet and string trio by Carl Stamitz, of which the first set of six Op. 8 was published in Paris as early as 1773. In contrast, Mozart treats the clarinet in his Clarinet Quintet as *primus inter pares*, whilst introducing virtuoso elements effectively encompassing the range of idioms cultivated by Stadler. But in chamber music for clarinet and strings from the period between Mozart and Brahms the prevailing passion for virtuosity was always liable to tilt the instrumental balance in favour of the solo wind instrument.

Although commentators have tended to focus upon Stadler's special basset clarinet (whose range extended downwards by four extra semitones), Mozart's establishment of the A clarinet as a solo instrument has attracted somewhat less attention, and this was an achievement highly relevant to a study of Brahms's Clarinet Quintet.<sup>3</sup> Francoeur's *Diapason général* (Paris, 1772) had already identified the tone-qualities of each of the nine clarinets he listed: the largest G clarinet was the sweetest, saddest and most lugubrious, whilst the highest E and F clarinets were suitable only for storms and battle. Among the common middle sizes Francoeur clearly distinguished clarinets in A and B $\flat$ . The A had a very sweet sound, much less sombre than the G and with a greater range; it was suitable for tender, graceful melodies. On the other hand, the B $\flat$  had a stronger sound, which could project and was therefore suitable for the grand gestures found in symphonies and overtures. The tone-quality of A and B $\flat$  clarinets was characterised in this way by many other writers during and after Mozart's lifetime; the A was always reckoned more gentle and melan-

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choly, sometimes even rather dull in tone. This is a feature of the clarinet which Mühlfeld must have indicated to Brahms. On the other hand, in the perception of key characteristics which were hotly debated throughout the eighteenth century and beyond, A major was usually regarded as brilliant, as for example in the second volume of Grétry's *Mémoires, ou Essais sur la musique* of 1797. Schubart's celebrated table entitled 'Characteristics of the Keys' was enormously influential on later musicians and drew comment from both Beethoven and Schumann. For Schubart, A major included 'declarations of innocent love; satisfaction with one's state of affairs; hope of seeing one's beloved again when parting; youthful cheerfulness and trust in God'. The autumnal quality which many commentators have ascribed to both Mozart's Quintet and Concerto arises in part from the use of a solo instrument which was commonly regarded as gentle and melancholy within a key which, for a variety of psychological and physical reasons, was generally thought to be brilliant and lively. Only in the nineteenth century did writers consider the implications of such a paradox for key characteristics as a whole.<sup>4</sup> In the event, the A clarinet was chosen as a solo instrument by relatively few composers between Mozart and Brahms.<sup>5</sup>

### The age of virtuosity

The early years of the nineteenth century were a glorious period in the history of the clarinet and its repertory. In an age devoted to virtuosity the clarinet achieved a natural pre-eminence among wind instruments, whilst at the same time lending an important tone-colour to the Romantic orchestral palette. Clarinet quartets and quintets continued to be popular, and were usually written in *concertante* style, with the clarinet treated as soloist. From Vienna there were quartets by Leopold Kozeluch, Franz Krommer (a total of five) and Peter von Winter, usually for B $\flat$  clarinet. One of the most integrated works is the Clarinet Quartet in E $\flat$  (1808) by Hummel, whose string parts carry much of the interest, and whose second movement is entitled 'La seccatura' ('the nuisance'), containing different time-signatures for each of the players. Of clarinetist-composers for the medium, Bernhard Crusell takes pride of place with his three imaginative quartets

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Opp. 2, 4 and 7, which achieved publication by Peters in Leipzig, no mean feat for a Swedish composer. Among clarinet quintets is the Op. 8 by Haydn's pupil Sigismund Neukomm, colourfully described by Cobbett as 'gifted with fatal fluency'.<sup>6</sup> Classical in style with some fluent part-writing, its finale comprises a set of variations on the Ukrainian folk-tune *Schöne Minke*, which became popular in Vienna c. 1818 and attracted variations in other genres by both Beethoven and Hummel. Virtuoso clarinetists played an important part in the development of the clarinet quintet, both as composers and performers. The Nuremberg clarinetist Heinrich Backofen was unusual in opting for a quartet of violin, two violas and cello, following the example of Mozart's Horn Quintet. This instrumentation recurs in the quintets by Krommer and Andreas Romberg. The latter is a substantial piece published in 1821, which transcends the vogue for mere virtuosity. As both performer and composer, Heinrich Baermann was a seminal influence upon the genre, writing clarinet quintets with virtuoso solo parts, of which Op. 23 in E flat includes an emotive Adagio long attributed to Wagner. Baermann also inspired Meyerbeer to compose his Clarinet Quintet in E flat, written in Vienna in 1813. Its central movement is remarkably evocative of the 'Sylvana' Variations Op. 33 for clarinet and piano by Weber, whose close association with Baermann also produced two concertos, a concertino and the Quintet Op. 34.<sup>7</sup>

Weber's Clarinet Quintet was to find a place in the clarinet repertory alongside the quintets by Mozart and Brahms, although it is a fundamentally different type of work, transferring Baermann's brilliant virtuosity from the concerto to a chamber context.<sup>8</sup> Technical virtuosity extends over the entire compass of the instrument, but the Fantasia movement combines an exploration of the clarinet's cantabile qualities with a wide-ranging expressive vocabulary which is overtly theatrical. Baermann's specialities of slurred leaps and fluent chromatic scales are given due prominence. The strings contribute occasional dramatic touches, and are assigned an important imitative episode in the finale. Another Quintet which retains a foothold in the repertory is Antonín Reicha's Op. 89 in B flat, dating from c. 1820. Reicha had probably heard Mozart's Quintet in Vienna before he moved to Paris in 1808 and may well have intended his own work for Jacques Jules Bouffil, professor at the Paris Conservatoire and a mem-

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ber of the wind quintet for which Reicha wrote as many as twenty-four pieces. Reicha's Quintet can hardly be compared with Weber's, though it contains some melodic, harmonic and rhythmic interest, to which the strings as well as the clarinet contribute. Another French example of the period is the clarinet quintet by Rodolphe Kreutzer.

Virtuoso chamber music for clarinet mirrored a burgeoning concerto repertory. In addition to Weber, Crusell and Spohr contributed expressive virtuoso examples, expanding the range of solo idioms in a variety of ways. The power and strength of the B $\flat$  clarinet in the vast majority of these works contrasts markedly with the effect of Mozart's writing for A clarinet; Spohr's unusual choice of the A for his Fourth Concerto in E minor evokes a quite different sound-world from other concertos of the period. In his Concerto Mozart had elevated the soloist to a position of new importance (despite the inherent sophistication of his orchestral writing), which the Romantic generation went on to exploit in their different ways. Weber's F minor Concerto was another of the works in which Brahms heard Mühlfeld; it explores a sound-world quite new at its period, blending instrumental effect with the overtly operatic.

A context for clarinet writing of a more integrated kind was the large body of chamber music for mixed wind and string ensemble, initiated by Beethoven's Septet Op. 20. The composer's eventual irritation at the work's continuing popularity has been well documented, but among its many devotees was Heinrich Baermann, who quoted the clarinet solo in the Adagio at the head of his contribution to Gustav Schilling's *Beethoven Album* of 1846, with the remark:

I was always profoundly moved when I played the above wonderful part. I thought I heard the swan song of the immortal master, and am convinced that the artist who manages to perform this beautiful motif with the intimacy and warmth which Beethoven thought and felt, will grip and inspire every listener. He will elucidate the greatness of that man who effected such indescribable magic with so few notes, and who knew how to arouse the tenderest regions of the soul.<sup>9</sup>

Schubert's Octet, another six-movement work in the divertimento tradition, was clearly modelled on the Beethoven. There were septets from this period by lesser composers such as Conradin Kreutzer and

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Friedrich Witt, as well as a minor masterpiece by the Swedish composer Franz Berwald.

Chamber works involving clarinet and piano also produced some well-integrated textures. Weber's *Grand Duo Concertant* Op. 48 of 1816 revolutionised the medium at a stroke, introducing a theatrical element to both instrumental parts and demanding from both players a great deal more than mere instrumental technique. Another significant contribution is the *Duo* Op. 15 by the tragically short-lived Norbert Burgmüller. There were also well-written and idiomatic sonatas by the young Mendelssohn and by Franz Danzi. Beethoven's Trio Op. 11 (with cello) is an important precursor of Brahms's Op. 114, and he also explored this medium in his arrangement of the Septet, Op. 38. Amongst other composers for this combination around 1810 were Beethoven's pupil Archduke Rudolph and also Ferdinand Ries. The genre survived to the middle of the century at the hands of a few minor composers, a set of three trios Opp. 56, 60 and 63 by Gaetano Corbicello being published *c.* 1840. A Trio Op. 2 in E flat by František Jan Škroup dates from 1846, contemporary with Karl Vollweiler's *Trio on Italian Themes* Op. 15. Far more significant than any of these was Schumann's set of *Märchenerzählungen* Op. 132 (1853), which follows Mozart's trio combination of clarinet and piano with viola rather than cello.

### Clarinet chamber music after 1850

During the second half of the century chamber music was still regarded by some as barely accessible to the layman: 'an appearance of being intimately familiar with it bestows an aura of an exceptional musicality and thus fosters affectation, snobbery and hypocrisy'.<sup>10</sup> Theodor Helm, who came to admire Bruckner's music in the 1880s, witnessed the first performances in 1892 of both his Eighth Symphony and Brahms's Clarinet Quintet. Describing the latter as masterly, he nevertheless wrote in the *Deutsche Zeitung* of 28 December: 'What does even the most beautiful "chamber piece" signify – a genre that is effective only in a small space and therefore addresses itself to narrow circles – in comparison with a symphony like the latest by Bruckner, whose thrillingly all-powerful tonal language ... is capable of inspiring

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thousands upon thousands who have ears to hear and a heart to hear what is heard.'

For the solo clarinetist of the second half of the century there continued an avalanche of virtuoso pieces such as operatic fantasias and pot-pourris designed to display the performer's virtuosity. But by mid-century the earlier flood of wind concertos had already slowed to a trickle. Politically, many of the small courts were being absorbed into larger duchies or kingdoms, with a consequent loss in the number of orchestras available. Socially, the clarinet was becoming more accessible to a wider cross-section of the general public, more an instrument of the drawing room or small concert hall. In terms of fashion, the musical world was by now in need of a change of colour. Hanslick may have spoken for a large element of the public when in 1870 he advised the Italian virtuoso Romeo Orsi to 'join an orchestra – that is the place where we know the value of clarinetists, flautists, oboists and bassoonists; the times are past when crowds of these wandering musicians came to give recitals on their boring little pipes.'<sup>11</sup> In *Grove's Dictionary* Philipp Spitta noted in 1889 that 'Wind-instruments are now out of fashion for concert playing, and one seldom hears anything on such occasions but the piano and violin, instead of the pleasing variety which used to prevail with so much advantage to art'. Writing in the 1940s Geoffrey Rendall was to characterise the whole nineteenth century as dividing roughly into two periods – fifty years of progress and fifty years of comparative stagnation, with a brief revival of interest in the clarinet in the 1890s. He observed that from the 1850s the wind player had been relegated to the position of inferiority in public estimation he had occupied until quite recently.<sup>12</sup>

Duos with piano from the three or four decades preceding the Brahms chamber music mainly took the form of sets of character pieces. In terms of sheer musical quality Schumann's *Phantasiestücke* Op. 73 (1849) remain pre-eminent, and they are also significant in anticipating Brahms's use of the A clarinet. There were other sets by Loewe (1850, for C clarinet), and by Gade, Reinecke, Winding, Verhey and Stanford. But the clarinet sonata enjoyed a modest revival and the genre yielded more examples at this period than is commonly realised. The Russian Ella Adaiievsky's *Sonate grecque* was written in 1880, though published only in 1913.<sup>13</sup> From Germany Richard

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Hofmann's two Sonatas Op. 48 in G and F of 1885 are now forgotten, although the ambitious Sonata Op. 38 (1888) by Felix Draesecke has recently been reprinted. There were other sonatas from Friedrich Kücken and Gustave Lange. Joseph Rheinberger published his Sonata Op. 105a in 1893, the year before Brahms's Sonatas Op. 120 were composed. From France came sonatas by Reicha's pupil Eugène Walckier (*c.* 1870), René de Boissdeffre (*c.* 1875) and in 1890 a *Sonate d'église* (with organ) by Léon Karren. The brilliant, melodramatic Sonata Op. 76 by Théodore Gouvy dates from 1882. There were several English contributions, including a Sonata in A major (1870) by Sterndale Bennett's pupil Alice Mary Smith, whose clarinet concerto was premièred at the 1872 Norwich Festival. These were written for the celebrated English clarinettist Henry Lazarus, as was a sonata by the Irishman George Osborne. A dry, unimaginative sonata by Charles Swinnerton Heap was published by Breitkopf and Härtel in 1880. Ebenezer Prout was unusual in choosing the A clarinet for his Sonata Op. 26, dedicated to Leonard W. Beddome and published *c.* 1890 by Augener. He shows considerable understanding of clarinet idioms, such as arpeggios, leaps and chromatic runs, as well as the clarinet's potential for cantabile, though the work's rather academic flavour has ensured its continued obscurity, notwithstanding an eloquent Largo espressivo in F sharp major. Significantly, Prout's work has an alternative version for viola, like Brahms's Sonatas Op. 120.<sup>14</sup> An even later example was the unpublished F minor Sonata *c.* 1893 by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.

Trios with cello were more popular than clarinet quintets. A *Terzetto* Op. 175 by Franz Hünten was published in 1851. Almost as little known today is a somewhat conservative if well-crafted trio by Louise Farrenc, published in 1861. A yet later trio from 1870 is Vollweiler's *Fantaisie on Russian Airs*. In France Vincent d'Indy's Op. 29 of 1887 narrowly pre-dated Brahms's Clarinet Trio, as did Emil Hartmann's Serenade Op. 24 of 1890.<sup>15</sup> Activity in the field of the clarinet quintet had apparently by this time slowed to a trickle. Ludwig Pape had an Adagio published in 1863, the year also of the Clarinet Quintet Op. 44 in B flat by the violin virtuoso Theodor Täglichsbeck.<sup>16</sup> Much of the clarinet repertory mentioned above proved worthy rather than enduring, and thus the stage was set for the Trio, Quintet and Sonatas



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composed by Brahms in the 1890s to make an incalculable contribution to the revival of the clarinet's profile as a solo instrument.

### The development of the clarinet

As we have already noted, the five-keyed clarinet became established as the standard instrument in Mozart's day, though whether this was the configuration favoured by a virtuoso such as Stadler has not yet been firmly established. Though a sixth key is known to have been added to the clarinet as early as 1768, the most celebrated advocate of an additional  $c^\sharp/g^\sharp$  key was Lefèvre, whose 1802 tutor noted that without such a mechanism  $c^\sharp$  was virtually indistinguishable from  $d'$ . In general players remained suspicious of extra keywork, because of the increased risk of leakage. However, increased musical demands upon the clarinet brought new attempts to render the instrument more flexible. There were important developments in England and in France, whilst in Germany an anonymous writer in 1808 remarked in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* that at least eight keys were necessary to avoid dull and unusable notes. Baermann employed a ten- (later a twelve-) keyed clarinet, whilst Crusell purchased an eleven-keyed model from the great Dresden maker Heinrich Grenser. Spohr specified in the preface to his First Concerto what extra keywork was necessary for the solo instrument, aiming by the use of a thirteen- rather than a five-keyed clarinet to free himself from the traditional restrictions of the genre. Most significantly, in 1812 the player-inventor Iwan Müller presented to a panel at the Paris Conservatoire a new thirteen-keyed  $B\flat$  clarinet which he (somewhat rashly) claimed was omnitonic. He was doubtless most disappointed that the judges, including the composers Cherubini and Méhul, rejected the new clarinet on the grounds that the exclusive adoption of a single instrument (and consequent abandonment of A and C clarinets) would deprive composers of an important tonal resource. Significant in relation to the chamber music of both Mozart and Brahms is the adjudicators' continued differentiation between the tone-quality of clarinets in  $B\flat$  ('propre au genre pathétique') and A ('propre au genre pastoral'), adhering to the earlier perceptions of the instruments we have already noted.

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Despite this setback, the clarinet promoted by Müller proved to be very influential. It remains the basis for the modern German clarinet today, following interim developments by Sax, Carl Baermann and Oehler. Müller designed larger and more even-sized toneholes in the lower half of the instrument, giving a warmer sound at louder dynamic levels. Unlike some other makers, he was careful to vent the extra holes and to give special consideration to the acoustical placing of all the holes, together with convenient associated keywork. His newly designed keys had a hollow cup soldered to the end, in which was fixed a cushion-type pad of kid leather stuffed with fine wool. For the first time in its history, each tone hole on the clarinet was counter-sunk, having a rim for the pad to rest on; this has remained an important feature of clarinet design ever since.<sup>17</sup> Müller expressed confidence that this design would prevent leakage from the extra mechanism. In 1817 he invented the metal ligature to secure the reed, intending to replace the practice of tying it on with waxed thread or silk cord; curiously, Germany is virtually the only place in the world to have resisted this development to this day. Müller is also accredited with inventing the thumb-rest for the right hand, now universally adopted.

The move to larger toneholes exacerbated acoustical problems in the right-hand area of the clarinet, which Adolphe Sax alleviated by adding rings (or *brilles*), which allowed the three uppermost fingers effectively to control four toneholes. Excellent instruments based on this model were manufactured in Brussels by Eugène Albert and then his sons; imported into England in large numbers these so-called 'simple-system' clarinets were displaced only in the inter-war years.<sup>18</sup> In Germany the clarinet continued to develop. Richard Mühlfeld used the system developed by Carl Baermann, which in essence was Müller's model with a number of additions.<sup>19</sup> Sax's right-hand rings were supplemented by a left-hand set, but the principal enhancement was the provision of alternative levers and touch-pieces, to aid technical fluency. After Baermann the instrument was modified principally by the Berlin clarinetist and maker Oskar Oehler and his design constitutes the modern German clarinet; it has few differences in fingering from its predecessor, but considerably more toneholes to provide a complex network of venting.<sup>20</sup> As Nicholas Shackleton has observed, it is only recently that theoretical understanding has been