Historical Clarinets in Mozart's Lifetime The Instruments that Served as an Inspiration for K.622

Doctoral student **OLENA OȘVAT**
National Academy of Music "Gheorghe Dima", Cluj-Napoca

Abstract

The end of the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th century mark the most important and sudden evolution of the clarinet due to three phenomena that contributed to its development and popularization: the evolution of the Classical and early Romantic musical styles, the emerging of the modern concept of the orchestra, and the development of the clarinet's technique and tone due to the combined effort of performers, composers and instrument builders. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart made use of the clarinet in his lyrical and symphonic music, but also in chamber and solo works which today represent the apogee of classical clarinet repertoire and an essential contribution to the clarinet's technical evolution. This research attempts to understand the circumstances under which Mozart became an important promoter of this instrument, and to depict the characteristics of the various types of clarinets he would have listened to during his lifetime. Thus, starting with his first contact with the clarinet in Salzburg, and taking into consideration his travels to London and Mannheim, I have reconstructed his intersections with different clarinet players and their instruments, and interpreted the effect they had on his work.

Keywords: clarinet, basset clarinet, clarinet concerto, historical clarinet, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Anton Stadler

Considering that the history of the clarinet begins in Nuremberg around the year 1700, it is considered a relatively new musical instrument in comparison to other woodwinds. The end of the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th century mark an important

and sudden evolution of the clarinet, due to three phenomena that contributed to its development and popularization: the evolution of the Classical and early Romantic musical styles, the emerging of the modern concept of the orchestra, and the development of the clarinet's technique and tone. The combined efforts of composers, performers, and instrument builders led to the transformation of the two- or three-keyed baroque clarinet into an instrument that offered a lot more flexibility. As a result of technical improvements, starting with the year 1770 the five- and six-keyed clarinet was present in every major cultural centre in Europe and North America. Following the musical demands of early Romantic repertoire, at the beginning of the 19th century the clarinet suffered considerable modifications to the size of the bore and the holes, the location of the keys and their mechanism, and the design of the mouthpiece; these were intended to result in a more penetrating, clean and controlled sound, providing better intonation and balance between registers.

The second half of the 18th century was a period of continuous experiments in the construction and technique of the clarinet. Some of these eventually resulted in significant, permanent changes, while others were abandoned, but during this period Europe had four important clarinet schools, each of them with their own instrumental design and technique (Germany, Austria, France and England). Intense research of the Classical repertoire, concert reviews and patents, along with thorough analysis of surviving clarinets, has led to the identification of specific characteristics of the instruments used in each of these geographical areas. The clarinet's popularity across the continent is strongly connected to the popularity of opera and chamber music, and considerable advances in accessibility regarding instrumental music.

The Classical Clarinet – Construction Details

Historical clarinets of the Classical period were made of wood, usually ebony (*Diospyros ebenum*) or boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*), but in rare cases they were made of ivory or brass. The building material has an important impact on the sound quality and reaction speed of the instrument, as does the diameter of the bore, the thickness

of its walls and the grade of smoothness of the bore's surface. The sound and intonation are also influenced by the position, shape and diameter of the holes. Classical clarinets usually have round holes which are equal in diameter apart from the hole meant for the right index finger, which was made smaller to achieve correct intonation.

Specific technical data allows us to discover further significant changes in the construction of the clarinet. Beside the transition from the Baroque clarinet to the Classical five- and six-keyed instrument, one of the big changes that led to more virtuosity and flexibility for performers was the establishing of the position of the clarinet players' hands on the clarinet around the year 1760. The right hand was placed on the lower joint and the left hand on the upper joint, evidenced by a hole designed for the thumb of the left hand which allowed better fingerings and more precision. The keys belonging to classical clarinets were usually shaped as triangles or trapezes and had leather patches glued on their lower side, while the upper side was often decorated or stamped with the builder's mark. The round or oval-shaped keys, seen in modern clarinets, became customary much later.

Clarinet mouthpieces were made of boxwood and were slightly different in shape and size compared to modern mouthpieces. Circular carvings allowed the player to tie a string in order to secure the reed to the mouthpiece. A clear depiction of a clarinet mouthpiece and reed of the Classical period can be found in Jean Baptiste Robinet's encyclopedia[1]. The first mouthpieces ever built were not separated from the barrel, the first singular barrels appearing later than 1780. An extended comparison between measurements of Classical mouthpieces according to their geographical provenance has been made by Albert Rice[2], and this also contains data on the reeds of the period. Rice's data is precise, but the variance of the recorded measurements means that it is difficult to establish standardized ones.

The biggest concern of clarinet builders in the 18th century was the adjustment of the perfect twelfth between the chalumeau and clarion registers, obtained by pressing a key with the thumb of the left

[1] Jean Baptiste Robinet, *Suite du recueil de planches*, Pancoucke, Stupet, Brunet, Paris, 1777, Lutherie pl.4.
[2] Albert Rice, *The Clarinet in the Classical Period*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003, p.20.

hand and thus opening its assigned hole. The adjusting of the intonation of this interval was initially made by subtle modifications brought to the ends of the bore: historical clarinets of the early Classical period often show a very steep angle between the lower joint and the bell, an obvious attempt to correct the intonation of the intervals between the registers, whereas some clarinets of the first decades of the 19th century even have the conic shape starting right below the hole designated for the right ring finger. Other attempts to control the intonation between the registers include the insertion of a metal rod in the register hole, variations in the diameter and curvature of the barrel, and changes to the shape of the mouthpiece.

During the first decade of the 19th century instrument builders started to add various keys to the clarinet, primarily to facilitate the performing of tremolos, trills and legatos, but also in order to improve tone quality and intonation. Having said this, the most popular clarinet in Europe essentially remained the five-keyed one until 1811 (an exception to this being English clarinets of the time, which added a sixth key for tremolos between the notes A and B), when the clarinet player and inventor Iwan Müller (1786-1854) built a thirteen-keyed clarinet that allowed the performer to easily play in any key.

One very interesting invention of the second half of the 18th century were the *corps de rechange* (in German *Mutation*), separate joints containing two additional holes which allowed the player to change the instrument's tuning (usually from Bb to A). Considering the fact that this type of practice was quickly abandoned, it has been assumed that the intonation was poor.

Research of historical clarinets only really started late in the 20th century, and even today it remains a challenging field influenced by many variables. For various reasons, surviving historical clarinets have been subjected to many repairs and modifications, which makes it difficult to determine their original state. The most common modifications that can be observed in historical instruments are: shortening of the bore in order to change the tuning, changing the diameter or shape of the holes to obtain improved intonation, and adding various keys in order to play Romantic or Modern repertoire. Although experts in the field advise extreme caution when analyzing

historical clarinets and interpreting the results[3], a vast quantity of data about clarinets from the Classical period has been collected from clarinets in the collection of Sir Nicholas Shackleton, a geologist, paleoclimatologist and amateur clarinet player, who owned a collection of over 800 clarinets. He was adamant that a lot of good Austrian clarinets, contemporary to Mozart or Beethoven, were later repaired and modified in order to prolong their lifespan[4].

Clarinets in Mozart's early life

Eric Hoeprich states that Mozart's first contact with the tone of a clarinet would have most likely happened during his childhood in Salzburg, hearing a variety of marching bands performing on the streets[5], a theory which is sustained by documents proving the acquisition of two- and three-keyed clarinets played in these bands.

Mozart's first documented contact with the clarinet was in 1763, when, on the road back from München, he made a stop in Mannheim. Clarinets had already been introduced to the orchestra in Mannheim, as its director at that time was Christian Cannabich (1731-1798). A year later, Mozart copied and arranged one of Carl Friedrich Abel's (1723-1787) Symphonies (K.18), in which two clarinets are part of the orchestra, but Mozart's first original work with clarinets is the Divertimento K.113, composed in 1771 in Milan.

In 1777 Mozart wrote a letter to his father telling him about a quintet he had listened to in München: two clarinets, two oboes and a bassoon had played one of Joseph Fiala's (1748-1816) works[6]. During the same year Mozart traveled to Mannheim again, and the impression that Cannabich and the orchestra in Mannheim made on Mozart became obvious in his *Parisian Symphony* K.297/300a which

[3] Albert Rice, *The Clarinet in the Classical Period*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003, p.24.

[4] Nicholas Shackleton, "The development of the clarinet" în *The Cambridge Companion to the Clarinet*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p.505.

[5] Eric Hoeprich, *The Clarinet*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2008, p.100.

[6] Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Briefe*, Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum, Bibliotheca Mozartiana, Salzburg, 1777-10-12 and 1777-10-03.

premiered on the 18th of June 1778. In this work the woodwinds' contribution balances that of the strings, the orchestra is larger than in his previous works, and it contains two A clarinets. In December 1778 he wrote to his father with enthusiasm about the wonderful effect of having clarinets play in the orchestra[7].

Clarinets and clarinet players in the orchestra in Mannheim

In 1748 Jean le Riche de la Pouplinière hired two clarinet players, Gaspard Proksch and Simon Flieger, for his Parisian orchestra. It was this orchestra and these two players that Johann Stamitz (1717-1757) listened to during his stay in Paris (1754-1755), and the latter presumably composed his clarinet concerto (considered to be the first solo concerto for the clarinet) for Gaspard Proksch. Clarinets were subsequently introduced to Mannheim in 1758, and in 1759 two clarinet players were officially listed on the orchestra's payroll[8]. The clarinet players that Mozart heard in Mannheim were Czechs: Jacob Tausch and his son Franz, Johannes Hampel, and Michael Quallenber.

Franz Tausch (1762–1817) was a well-known clarinet player to whom the beginnings of the German clarinet playing style have been attributed, he was the teacher of a famous generation of clarinet players such as Heinrich Baermann (1784-1847), Bernhard Crusell (1775-1838) and Simon Hermstedt (1778-1846). In 1792, after one of Anton Stadler's concerts, the review in *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* compared Stadler to Franz Tausch, praising Tausch's tone quality[9]. Franz Tausch was a member of the court orchestra in Berlin for a long period of time, and his musical works offer researchers useful information about historical clarinets, especially about the positioning of the reed used at that time.

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[7] Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Briefe*, Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum, Bibliotheca Mozartiana, Salzburg, 1778-12-03.
[8] Albert Rice, *The Clarinet in the Classical Period*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003, p.150.
[9] Pamela Poulin, "The Basset Clarinet of Anton Stadler" in *College Music Symposium*, vol.22, nr.2, p.76.

Up to the middle of the 18th century the reed was positioned on the upper part of the mouthpiece, below the upper lip, as opposed to modern clarinet playing where the reed lies below the mouthpiece, on the lower lip of the performer. Tausch's compositions encompass a wide range of large leaps, as well as repeated notes in a fast tempo which would have only been possible to play with the reed placed below the mouthpiece. When we combine this information with reviews of his playing and his warm tone, we are led to believe that he was one of the first performers in this part of Europe to use today's standard reed positioning. Another of these performers was clarinet virtuoso Joseph Beer (1744-1812), whose adoption of the positioning was influenced by listening to a German clarinet player named Schwartz[10]. Leopold Mozart advised his son to contact Beer, who was already a famous solo player in France and was frequently invited to play at the Concerts Spirituelles in Paris. Mozart refused, saying that Beer had a bad reputation and wasn't respected enough[11].

In 1781, when Mozart composed *Idomeneo* for the orchestra of Mannheim, which had by that time moved to München, Jacob and Franz Tausch played five-keyed clarinets in Bb with *corps de rechange* for playing in A, and clarinets in C with the option to play in B[12]. It can be assumed that these were also the instruments that Mozart had previously heard in Mannheim.

Context to Mozart's collaboration with Stadler and Lotz

All Mozart's work written in Vienna which involves the clarinet is to be associated with Anton Stadler (1753-1812), to whom he was also bound by a long friendship. Before Mozart's arrival in Vienna, Anton Stadler and his brother Johann had played at the Kärtnertortheater, at the imperial court, and for various members of

[10] François-Joseph Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, Firmin Didot Frères, Paris, 1866 , p.297.
[11] Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Briefe*, Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum, Bibliotheca Mozartiana, Salzburg, 1778-07-09.
[12] Albert Rice, *The Clarinet in the Classical Period*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003, p.137.

the nobility. A letter written by Stadler to the Oettingen-Wallerstein court states his intention of getting hired there. It also describes the trios that he performed on the basset horn together with his brother and another clarinet player named Griesbacher[13].

From 1781 the Stadler brothers became permanent musicians in the orchestra of the imperial court. At this time the clarinets bought for them were made by Theodor Lotz (1747-1792), an instrument builder based in Vienna and Bratislava[14].

Lotz was a clarinet player, composer and instrument builder. In 1772 he performed clarinet solos at the *Tonkünstlersozietät* and, three years later, he composed 67 works for Nikolaus Eszterházy's wind orchestra. In 1783 he left the service of Prince Joseph Batthyány in Bratislava, where he had played the clarinet and the viola, and moved to Vienna. In 1788 Lotz received the title *k.k. Hofinstrumentenmacher*, as is marked on the stamp used on his instruments. Lotz, Stadler and Mozart belonged to the same masonic lodge.

The only surviving Lotz clarinet is now in Geneva. Dated 1790, it is a five-keyed clarinet in Bb made of boxwood, with ivory rings which can be found at two of the joints and surrounding two of the holes. The lower keys have a metal rod attached to them to reduce the sideways movement of the keys, which was new type of mechanism at that time. Today, Lotz is considered a visionary regarding the instrument's construction: his metal rods and details such as the replacing of certain wooden components with metal ones had become customary a century later, his *corps de rechange* had holes with different diameters in order to improve intonation, and the makers' stamps on each part of the instrument (clearly meant to be aligned) suggest the reed was placed below the mouthpiece, resting on the lower lip of the performer. The mouthpiece itself has a longer opening than other German or English mouthpieces, and the bore's diameter is larger than that of other contemporary instruments at 15-15.05mm, helping to produce a warm and even tone at a surprising volume.

[13] Pamela Poulin, "The Basset Clarinet of Anton Stadler" in *College Music Symposium*, vol.22, no.2, p.69.
[14] Eric Hoeprich, *The Clarinet*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2008, p.103.

The basset horn and the basset clarinet

One of Theodor Lotz's great achievements was the considerable improvement of the basset horn, an instrument which was becoming more and more popular at that time. Virtuosos of this instrument, like the Bohemian players Anton David and Vincent Springer, were frequently performing in Vienna and were most likely heard by Mozart. The basset horn is present in Mozart's works starting with the year 1783.

The basset horn was an instrument tuned in F that appeared around the middle of the 18th century and became popular because of its exotic appearance. Its tone is faded and less penetrating than that of the clarinet, but its range is wider, reaching a minor third lower. Unfortunately, clarinet players gradually stopped playing the basset horn because of its exaggerated and extremely uncomfortable size. There are few instruments of this type left and even fewer performers willing to make the enormous physical effort required to play them.

Initially the basset horn was curved, sickle-shaped, but Lotz changed this. His instruments had two straight bores held together at a 120-degree angle by an ivory joint. Lotz's basset horns had eight keys, more than the clarinets at that time.

The basset clarinet is an instrument similar to the basset horn but its keys corresponding to the lower register (notes below the clarinet's E) are placed on the backside of the instrument. Basset clarinets dated before the one used by Anton Stadler have an angled body like basset horns and resemble the clarinet d'amour because of their long metallic necks and their pear-shaped bells.

The term "basset clarinet" was first used by Jiři Kratochvil in 1956. Kratochvil and Milan Kostohryz were two clarinet players whose independent research, in 1948, came to the conclusion that Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto* (K.622) had been composed for a clarinet with additional keys and extended range, thus the rediscovery of the basset clarinet had begun. Lower register chromatic fragments in Mozart's original version of the concerto and his *Clarinet Quintet* (K.581), which are impossible to play on a regular A clarinet, show that Stadler used a basset clarinet with significant improvements made by Lotz. By 1788 Lotz had already built basset clarinets specifically

for Stadler, clarinets in Bb or A with built-in extensions for the notes D and C in the lower register, and in 1790 Lotz added extensions for the notes D# and C# so that Stadler was able to play the *Concerto in A major*.

The instrument used by Stadler in his performances of Mozart's works is described in newspaper articles and concert reviews. The comparison between Tausch and Stadler in *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* mentioned earlier also reveals that the author of the article had never seen a clarinet with so many keys before[15], which confirms Lotz's innovation, and Ernst Ludwig Gerber writes about the Stadler brothers, stating that Anton Stadler had an instrument which played a third lower than normal[16]. Additionally, a poster of one of Stadler's concerts in Riga, in 1794, pictures the instrument he played, although the sketch is not very accurate and the instrument appears to have been shrunk in order to fit on the page; another inaccurate detail is the position of the reed, which the sketch presents as on the upper side of the mouthpiece even though it is widely known that Stadler definitely played with the reed below the mouthpiece. On the other hand, the keys on the backside of the instrument, pressed with the thumb of the right hand, are accurately depicted in the sketch. A letter written by Stadler in 1795 to Daniel Shiite, the director of the theatre in Bremen, shows that Stadler placed an order for a similar instrument with the instrument builder J. B. Tietzel[17], but unfortunately no Tietzel instrument survives. The small number of works composed for the basset clarinet suggests that only a few performers were interested in playing this instrument.

Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A Major K.622

The concerto was finished in 1791 and premiered in Prague, after which Anton Stadler toured Europe playing it together with other

[15] Pamela Poulin, "The Basset Clarinet of Anton Stadler" in *College Music Symposium*, vol.22, no.2, p.76.
[16] Ernst Ludwig Gerber, *Historisch-Biographisches Lexicon der Tonkünstler*, Leipzig, 1792, p.556.
[17] Albert Rice, *The Clarinet in the Classical Period*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003, p.73.

works for the basset clarinet. The original score of the concerto was lost and the oldest score available for research today is a printed version, with sections modified in order to make it playable on an A clarinet.

The work was first published in 1801 by Breitkopf und Härtel in Leipzig. A year later, three more publishers released their editions of the concerto: Jean André, Sieber and Pleyel. Original versions of these editions exist today in libraries and personal collections in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. From the time of the first publication to the present day, over 20 editions of Mozart's concerto have been released, with newer versions tending to have far more dynamic and articulation indications than the older ones.

Jiři Kratochvil, George Dazeley, Ernst Hess, Alan Hacker and Joel Sheveloff are amongst the people that worked on the reconstruction of the original score, in which the fragments in the basset register are in the F clef. The full reconstructed concerto for the basset clarinet was published in 1977 by Bärenreiter in *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe.* In order to reconstruct the original score, three sources have been consulted and studied: an earlier incomplete sketch of the concerto written for a basset horn in G, the first editions mentioned above, and a review in *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in 1802. The dynamics and articulations in the Bärenreiter reconstruction are a combination of the information found in all three sources.

The sketch for basset horn in G can now be found in a private collection in Winterthur, Switzerland, it comprises 199 bars and was dated 1791. Bassoons and other instruments are missing, as is a title, but the solo part remains intact. It appears to have been composed on two different occasions judging from the two types of ink used. A section of the sketch written in the second, newer, type of ink probably reflects Mozart’s intention to transpose the solo part for a basset clarinet in A: the passage in question (actually bar 180 of the first part of the concerto) has the bass line a major second higher. Furthermore, the three notes below the clarinet’s range (D, C# and C), present on multiple occasions, could only have been performed on an instrument with basset keys (the previously described keys on the back of the instrument).

The anonymous review in 1802 praises the concerto in every manner possible, but suggest that its technical difficulty level is very high. The first part is described as brilliant, displaying all known playing techniques and tone colours of the clarinet. The second part, the *Adagio*, is presented as touching and the third one, *Rondo*, appears to have noble jokes as a main characteristic. The writer of the review mentions the fact that the performer would need a clarinet with an extended range to play this concerto and he enumerates the musical fragments, present in all three parts of the concerto, that have been transposed an octave higher in order to be played on a regular A clarinet[18].

Whilst being extremely grateful to the editors that made it possible for performers around the world to play the concerto on modern day instruments, clarinet players everywhere acknowledge the fact that having the original version at hand can help with the interpretation of the work. It is because of this that Alan Hacker's edition, where basset notes are written in small print underneath the clarinet version, has proved a most valuable tool in performing the work.

A very interesting, but controversial version of the concerto is the one edited by Pamela Weston, based on her studies of an arrangement made by Gottlieb Schwencke. A catalogue containing a list of Schwencke's posessions, made for an auction after his death, establishes that he once owned a manuscript of Mozart's concerto, increasing our interest in his arrangement, which was published by Böhme in Hamburg between 1799 and 1805. If Schwenke made his arrangement based on the manuscript, and not on the printed editions, it would naturally contain a lot of useful information, so Weston's edition, which is heavily ornamented and even has many added notes, might just be the closest version we have to the classical performance practice.

In 1998, a detailed list and comparison of all editions of the concerto was presented at *Clarinetfest* by Keith Koons, professor at the University of Florida. It was subsequently published in *The*

[18] *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, vierter Jahrgang, Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig, 1801-1802, p.408-413.

Clarinet, and can be consulted by anyone who has doubts about aspects of interpretation, or who wishes to inform themselves before choosing a certain edition.

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