

Bruce Dickey

EXPLORING NEWLY DISCOVERED LATE WORKS FOR CORNETTO FROM BRNO (CZECH REPUBLIC)



In 2018, together with Linda Pearse, I visited Brno following up on a tip from Howard Weiner that there might be unknown music for cornetti and trombones in the Moravian National Library. What we found there was extraordinary: some 40 works with cornetto from the mid 18th century and beyond. In September 2021, I finally had a chance to perform some of this amazing music in the *Abendmusiken* series in the beautiful Predigerkirche in Basel, with Jörg-Andreas Bötticher leading a stellar group of singers and instrumentalists. Brass players were:

Clarini: Jean-François Madeuf, Olivier Mourault, Nikolai Mäntarri
Tromba: Matt Gajda
Cornetto: Bruce Dickey
Trombones: Simen van Mechelen and Catherine Motuz

Over the course of the last year, I have managed to find wide interest in this music. As a result, we will present the program (with a somewhat different lineup of singers and instrumentalists) as the opening concert of the AMUZ series in Antwerp (Belgium) on September 8, 2023, and for a concert in the MA Festival in Bruges in August of 2024, where we will probably produce a CD for the label Passacaille. In addition, we will perform



the program, with a still different line-up of forces, in the summer festival of Early Music Vancouver in late July, 2024.

The so-called Rusmann Collection housed at the Moravian National Library comprises music collected by a series of chapel masters at the St. James Church in Brno, the largest city and capital of the ancient Land of Moravia. The Czech system of Lands, of which there were five, was abolished in 1949, but in the 18th century the Margraviate of Moravia was a Crown Land of the Lands of the Holy Roman Empire. The population of Moravia, and particularly of Brno, included a large number of German speakers until they were expelled in 1945. The spiritual home of these German-speaking residents of Brno was the city parish church (*Stadtpfarrkirche*) of St. James.

The status of *Stadtpfarrkirche* meant that all the affairs of the church were overseen by the city council: repairs and building, parish management, and the operation of

Figure 1 (above): Rehearsing in the Predigerkirche, Basel; Figure 2 (below) St. James' Church, Brno, exterior.



the musical chapel. It also meant that it was the richest church of the city and the one with the most important musical chapel. The city council placed severe conditions on the selection and duties of the chapel master (*Regenschori*). A magistrate recruited a suitable candidate for the post whose qualifications and duties included having had experience at the Cathedral of Brno or “in an important church of the Viennese school.” The chapelmaster would then have to supply his own music for the choir, either by composing it or by acquiring it from a church of the “new Viennese school.” The music he acquired or composed was to be kept free of charge in the church’s archives, and surrendered to the church upon the appointment of a new chapel master.

A list of the chapel masters from the beginning of the 18th century through the first decades of the 19th includes, not surprisingly, many German names:

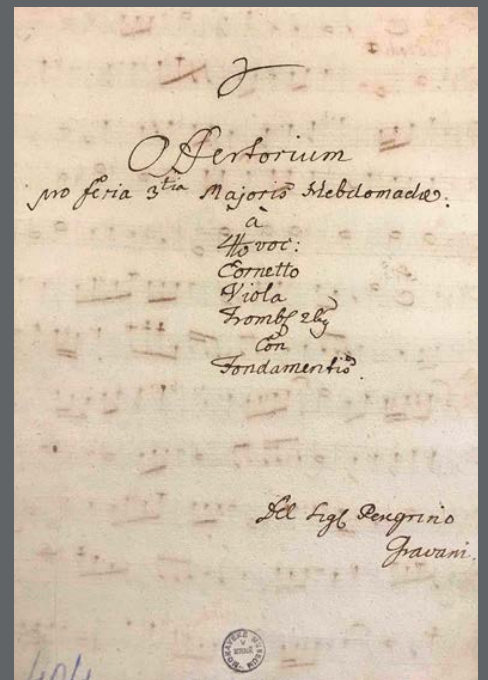
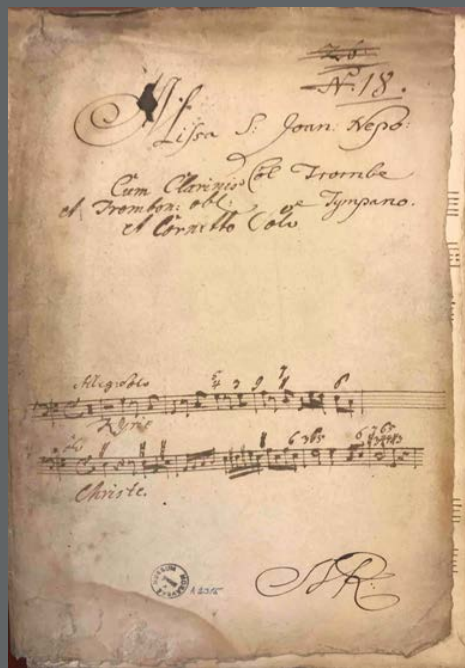
- Georg Ignaz Graf—until 1711
- Johann Adam Schneider—until 1715
- Mathias Franz Altman—until 1718
- Ferdinand Altman—until 1721
- Matheus Rusmann—until 1762
- Peregrinus Gravani—until 1815

The centerpiece of our Basel concert was a Mass in the hand of Matheus Rusmann, dedicated to St. John Nepomuk. Though the librarian assured me that the author was unknown but “surely one of the ‘great Viennese’ masters,” the composition was attributed, according to a 1763 inventory, to Antonio Caldara. Looking further, I discovered that a *Missa sanctificationis S. Joannis Nepomuceni* by Caldara was performed in Prague in October 1729 as part of the celebrations for the canonization of Nepomuk. I cannot be sure this is the same work, but it seems to be preserved, along with 10 other Masses of Caldara, in the library of the monastery of the Knights of the Red Cross in Prague, currently unavailable to all researchers. Though the attribution to Caldara therefore remains tentative, it seems plausible. The manuscript in Brno is in the hand of Matheus Rusmann and bears his initials, placing it of necessity between 1722 and 1762, and thus fits perfectly the Caldara attribution. If the attribution is correct, it is, to my knowledge, the only surviving work of Caldara with cornetto obbligato.

John of Nepomuk was a 14th century Bohemian martyr who became the patron saint of Bohemia and Moravia. The story of his martyrdom involved the schism of the Catholic church at that



Figure 3 (above): Cornetto part from *Missa sanctificationis S. Joannis Nepomuceni* attr. Caldara; Figure 4 (below left): Title page of the same; Figure 5 (below right): Title page of the *Offertorium* by Gravani.



time. Nepomuk followed the Archbishop of Prague in favoring the Roman Pope, while King Wenceslas of Bohemia favored the Avignon branch. When Nepomuk, as vicar-general of Saint Giles's Cathedral in Prague, confirmed the Archbishop's candidate as Abbot of the territorially important Abbey of Kladruby, Wenceslas ordered him thrown off the Charles Bridge into the Moldau. By virtue of this method of martyrdom, Nepomuk has also become a protector from floods and drowning.

He is celebrated in the entire region, including Vienna. Musical performances in his honor were spectacular and often involved water elements such as barges.

The scoring of the Mass includes two violins with extensive and elaborate figurations, three clarini, a lower trumpet (*tromba*), tympani, a cornetto, two trombones (alto and tenor), violone, and organ. The parts for the four concertato singers (SATB) include indications for solo

and tutti. The cornetto part is marked 'solo' and the trombones 'concertati.' Indeed, while the trumpets serve to punctuate grand tutti moments, the cornetto and trombones are fully integrated into the solo vocal parts, playing expressive *sinfonie* and *accompagnati* for vocal solos and duets throughout the Mass. While the trumpet ensemble securely anchors the C Major tonality at all major tutti points, episodes with the three other 'brass' instruments venture into a wider variety of tonal areas, tending at times toward sharps, with a striking shift to E Major at the *Christe*, after the trumpets have ended the Kyrie securely in C Major. In the *Credo* the cornetto and trombones establish an affect of mystery and wonder at *Incarnatus est*, and the strikingly poignant *sinfonia* in C minor pushes the cornetto to its tonal limits. It is impossible to overestimate how extraordinary this is. Such a concerted use of cornetto and trombones would be exceptional in any period but in 1730 (if the attribution to Caldara and the consequent dating is correct), it is astonishing and a revelation about how long these instruments continued to have an important continuing use not only in Moravia, but probably in the entire Viennese hinterland.

Other works in our concert included a fascinating setting of *De profundis* by the little-known Jakob Wachter, an *Offertorium*

by Peregrino Gravani for 4 singers and 4 *colla parte* instruments (cornetto, alto and tenor trombones, and violone), and a *Miserere a 4 vocibus* by "Sig. Zany," almost certainly Marc Antonio Ziani, a Venetian opera composer who became *Hofkapellmeister* to Leopold I in Vienna in 1700. Gravani is a particularly interesting figure because after being named chapelmaster at the St. James Church in 1763, and being much enthralled by the music of Haydn and Mozart, he continued to write *colla parte* for cornetto and trombones well into the second half of the century.

This pocket of cornetto playing in Brno in the mid-18th century is a revelation, but raises many questions as well. Who were the players for whom these incredible parts were written? Does the presence of flats in the key signatures of many of these pieces indicate the use of the cornetto muto? Was Brno unique in this instrumental usage, or is it simply typical of other towns in the Viennese hinterland? Why are there no parts for bass trombone (or even bassoon), with the bass parts being played on organ and violone or just organ? I hope to continue this exploration with another journey to Brno and an article for the HBS Journal. ■

Bruce Dickey



Figure 5: The organ in St James' Church, Brno.



Figure 6 (above): Portrait of Nepomuk by Jose de Paez c. 1770; Figure 7 (left): *The Martyrdom of Nepomuk* by Szymon Czechowicz (1689-1775)