

Salon Music

by Renée Allen

Salon music was a term originating in France where, after the Revolution, music concerts were no longer under a royal or church monopoly, but brought into homes as domestic, social events for citizens. Previously, musical training was available through the Royal Conservatory in Paris, where, starting at the age of seven, children were chosen from across France for having a good voice and being able to carry a tune. They were trained in *solfège*, harmony, and theory before learning the piano and developing the voice, after which they studied a string or wind instrument. At the age of 14, these accomplished students were then sent throughout the country as music teachers to train others.

With the downfall of the monarchy, music education was available for all. Aside from being versed in poetry, literature, and art, proficiency in music was considered an integral part of a good education. The salon was a private place where music and culture was experienced and shared in domestic, bourgeois circles. Pianists, singers, and violinists were the performers of choice, and programs tended to be a potpourri of musical moments written for different instruments with piano accompaniment – unless a virtuoso was booked for the evening. Although opera houses existed in major European cities well before the 19th century (*Opéra de Paris* was founded in 1669), it was only after the Revolution that large concert halls and larger opera houses were built to create a space for the increasing number of interested listeners.

The salon concerts could differ in quality. Virtuosi such as Chopin, Liszt, or Paganini could be heard, but also the venues offered an opportunity for the wives and daughters of the rich, or perhaps even the dilettante host or guest, to perform, thereby raising their social prestige. The salon concerts were quickly adopted in Germany where performers such as Clara Schumann were often heard, but also less talented beautiful young women, who were easily pardoned if performances were not up to the highest level. These concert events were depicted in literature, sometimes with a sarcastic note:

The talent of the Röderlein sisters is truly not the least; I have been here five years and a teacher in their home four and a half years and in this short time, Miss Nanette manages to sing a melody that she has only heard ten times at the opera and rehearsed with piano ten times at the most so that it is recognizable, and Miss Marie gets it by the eighth time, even when she often sings a quarter tone lower as the piano, with such a cute face and rose lips, it is possible to tolerate in the end.¹

It was the express wish of the listeners to be moved, to feel the connection of the music with the soul (*avec l'âme*), often resulting in tears. The romantic era stressed sentimentalism as an authentic source of aesthetic experience and brought with it a wish to experience the fine arts through awe, beauty in nature, or exalted music. Whereas the romantic was defined by feeling and longing for the intangible or unattainable, an illusory sentimental world was created in the salons of the bourgeoisie.²

Several types of music were standard for these concerts: virtuoso works displaying high technical proficiency, sentimental long-lined melodies such as elegies, nocturnes, and romances, character pieces (often with special muted effects), and variations on well-known traditional songs or arias taken from popular operas or operettas of the time. Many of these pieces could be performed on different instruments and some of the arrangements were written for interchangeable instruments (i.e., cello, viola, or horn).

Often the works were simple enough to allow the listener the possibility to reconstruct the experience by playing the pieces at home. An example of one of the most popular character pieces of music is the “The Maiden’s Prayer” for piano solo by Thekla von Badarzewska. First published in 1859, it appeared in more than one hundred editions for different instrumentations and was widely sold.³ There were enormous amounts of published music from the 19th century, their covers often adorned with beautiful woodcuts, that either did not pass the quality test of time or were lost in the world wars.

Robert Schumann’s *Träumerei*, written out of love for Clara Schumann, created a hit that filled the requirements for a salon piece: as well as being easy to play, it touched the listener (this work can still be heard today in any home with a piano). When Schumann first used the term salon music in 1837, he was not necessarily referring to something negative as he recognized one should compose light elegant music for the salon. It was later that Schumann wrote about the difference between *echte* (authentic) and *schlechte* (bad) music, a recurring theme in musical circles. Serious music was defined as containing original and new ideas, while composers of light or trivial music were looked down upon because they borrowed themes or wrote only to have an emotional effect on the listener. Despite this, it had its role in society:

By all means curse bad music, but don’t despise it! The more often one sings or plays bad music (and more passionately than the good), the more one gradually fills up with the dreams, the tears of the people. Therefore, it should earn your respect. It may rank very low in the history of art but it is immensely important in the sentimental history of civilization.⁴

The Horn in Salon Music in France

How did the horn fit into this salon scene? In 19th-century France, there were parallel classes for natural and valve horn (Gallay/Meifred) at the Paris Conservatory. The horn was always seen a noble instrument because of its connection to the hunt and its favored key of F major that, according to the German theorist Johann Matthesson, was considered to depict the best virtues in common man. Horn players such as Dauprat





and Gallay wrote many works to display their own virtuosity (as well as the talents of their students) that were performed in salons.

Perhaps the most famous horn player on the international salon scene was Eugène Vivier (1817-1900) who studied at, but never graduated from, the Paris Conservatory. Gifted with a beautiful tone and a singing style, he based his career on his ability to sing in the horn and create chords, claiming to be the eighth wonder of the world. Above all, he was a practical joker and buffoon who created an indispensable place for himself in high society with his ability to enliven gatherings with his humor. Rossini dedicated his *Prélude, Thème, et Variations* to Vivier, who said he received this honor because he was able to heal Rossini of influenza by making him laugh to the point of tears. (Vivier is a character who will require his own article.) I have not found confirmation that Vivier ever performed the Rossini work. He said in his autobiography that he would have to practice vocalises and long tones in preparation of a performance.⁵

Messa di Voce

It was Vivier's remarks about vocalises and long tones that caught my eye, this being a subject of great interest to me as an Alexander Technique teacher. Over many years, I researched historical methods and texts about musical medicine in the effort to understand how the breath was historically taught and used. Almost all methods of the Paris Conservatory of the 19th century, whether written for strings, winds, or voice, start with the same exercise: a *messa di voce* or long tone with *crescendo* and *diminuendo* on a middle c.

Manuel Garcia began teaching voice at the Paris Conservatory (1830-1848), and continued in London (1848-1895) at the Royal Academy. He was the most important vocal teacher of his time and was convinced of the central role of the *messa di voce* in training the voice, as was his celebrated father of the same name who schooled him in the Italian vocal style. Luigi Cherubini, who became director of the Paris conservatory in 1822 wrote:

Self confidence is necessary to avoid fear or embarrassment in the presence of an audience. But, one can only obtain this precious advantage through the means of long study in the *solfèges* and vocalises of the great masters, that always end by giving a facility and security in the execution [of music].⁶

In his *Method* for horn, Louis-François Dauprat suggests practicing *solfèges* from the *Singing Method of the Conservatoire* in different transpositions on the horn. These exercises, although difficult, contain what I consider all the necessary elements to develop musical expression. First of all, there are always rests between the phrasing, allowing time for the breath to return noiselessly and with ease. Secondly, they all have a piano accompaniment, allowing the student to work on intonation and ensemble playing. The first *solfège* is peppered with *messa di voce* on both long notes and phrases. The third exercise shows the *crescendo-diminuendo* patterns in the first four bars and occasionally later in the first half of the exercise, and Nr. 21 has *messa di voce* printed explicitly on the long tones. In all the other *solfèges*, there are no dynamic markings. I assume that

the style of fluctuating dynamics, being an integral part of the education, was so taken for granted – that it is not repeatedly printed.

F.M. Alexander

Like Garcia, F.M. Alexander (1869-1955), an Australian actor, was interested in the “how” of voice production and use of the breath. He was known for 17 years as “the breathing man” before officially presenting the F.M. Alexander Technique and his discovery of the “primary control”⁷ to the world. In one of his early articles he writes: “After (respiratory) reeducation, new habits give full control, leaving the whole mental power free for devotion to intelligent interpretation of song or speech.”⁸

F.M. Alexander claimed not to be introducing a new method of breathing, but only explaining the natural use of the breath and how to return to its proper use. He achieved this not through breathing exercises but by consciously learning to stop bad habits involving “end-gaining” – the will to achieve, which causes undue tensions. Inhibiting these habits allows the body to return to its natural alignment, freeing the breath to be used to its full potential. (The changes the body undergoes by dropping the concept of taking in air and returning to a passive inhalation as a result of an active, controlled exhalation, is another topic for a future article.)

A.E. Fischer – Bremen

It was shortly before the turn of the century (1896), when a collection of salon music for horn containing all of the typical genres and entitled *Solo Buch für Waldhorn*, was published by A.E. Fischer in Bremen, Germany. A. E. Fischer, father of Carl Fischer,⁹ ran the largest and most successful music store in Bremen. In the center of the old city, Fischer published and sold sheet music, repaired and sold instruments, and spun strings for keyboard and string instruments. Fischer's publications were mostly operetta arias and light, popular music, ideal for salon concerts.

A.E. Fischer sold the publishing part of his business to Benjamin Verlag in Hamburg in 1924 and his three sons Carl, Hermann, and Emil created a company with shareholders. They started their business with a capital of 30 million Marks, proof of the popularity of Hausmusik in Bremen. In 1936, during the Nazi regime, the Benjamin publishing company was expropriated and the music and original plates were sent to Simrock in Leipzig. They were stored in a warehouse that was bombed during the war, so that all the original plates were destroyed by fire and lost.

Salon music was still popular in the 1920's, but in the 1930's, the Fischer brothers tell of the influence of the national socialist movement on their business in reports to their shareholders:

1932: Professional musicians, who are the main customers, do not have enough money due to falling wages to buy new instruments or accessories, even when the need is there.

1933: It is difficult to see just when the sale of musical instruments could come alive again, and one cannot say when Hausmusik will regain its honor.

1934: A slight increase in income is achieved through the sale of drums and piccolos and the growing



need for repair of brass instruments as a result of the national movement.

1936: The musical instruments needed for the military through the formation of the party require cheap prices to remain in competition so that, under these conditions, it is not possible to stay in business.

1937: Closed.¹⁰

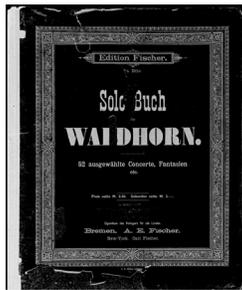
Music in Bremen

The merchant city of Bremen, aside from being known for the *Bremer Stadtmusikanten* story, has a long history of cultural support of music. Established in 1838 and comprised of wealthy upper class sponsors, the *Philharmonische Gesellschaft Bremen* was a society created to support classical music in Bremen. Next to the standard repertoire of Beethoven, Brahms, or Bach performed in concerts, it was the publishing companies themselves that organized the performances of lighter works during the summer months, to promote and sell their editions.

The Bremen opera orchestra had no work from May to October and, during this time, performed operettas in the Tivoli Theater, a building that was lost in bombing during the World War II. Their performances, at 19:00 and afterwards, were followed by concerts known as *Nachtmusik*. Although Fischer had large advertisements in these programs, it was Praeger & Meier, another Bremen music publisher, who opened the first concert agency in 1869, and who was responsible for the organization and ticket sales in response to the growing public demand.

Solo Buch für Waldhorn

The *Solo Buch für Waldhorn* contains 52 works and was published without accompaniment. There is a mix of works



for natural and valve horn from mostly little-known German composers. In the virtuoso genre one finds works such as the *Concertino* from Lindpainter, the *Elegie und Rondo* of C. G. Reissinger, the *Introduction und Rondo* of Kalliwoda op. 51, or the Eisner *Scene und Aria*, op. 10. Imbedded within the collection are Schumann's *Adagio and Allegro* and von Weber's *Concertino*, the only standard

repertoire. These works, like many in the collection, cover the era when the transition from natural to valve horn was still fluid.

Surprising additions are works for Bass Horn or Horn such as *Auf den Lagunen* composed by Ludwig Wiedemann (?-1900) or *Nocturne und Fantasia aus Lucia di Lammermoor* by Christian Rummel (1787-1849), both requiring a light, virtuoso technique on the horn. This technique is an extension of the natural horn virtuoso style carried over to the valve horn. Again, the prerequisite of a mastery of the *messa di voce* is essential to give life to this music and dictates the performance style of all the works in the collection.

A true gem is found with the *Elegie* by Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst (1814-1865). Ernst was a student and then rival of Paganini, following the master on his tours, booking the hotel room next to his so as to be able to hear him practice and copy

his technique. Ernst often booked concerts in the same towns shortly after Paganini recitals and the critics said of Ernst that he performed with more heart. He is known in the violin world mainly for his variations on the *Last Rose of Summer*, which remains one of the most difficult works written for violin, requiring incredible technical skills to perform. His *Elegie* for violin is almost forgotten now although it was a huge success during its day – it was arranged in solo versions for all the string instruments as well as a quartet version. Louis Spohr composed a long solo violin prelude for the piece and there was also a version for brass instruments played by the celebrated Distin family in England. Arranged for horn, it can be performed with the original piano accompaniment for violin and is a welcome addition to the horn repertoire.

Decidedly written for natural horn is the first movement of Jacques-François Gallay's (1795-1864) first concerto, included as a shortened version, as well as a cut and different version of his lesser-known composition *Le Baiser*. Henri Lübeck also wrote *Le Congé (Abschied)* specifically for natural horn, complete with descending chromatic scales and the use of a mute for echo passages!

Equally valid and interesting repertoire by Louis Scharr and Louis Curth is also present. Although these names did not retain notoriety, they can be found in the list of musicians who performed in the Bayreuth orchestra. Scharr was a horn player from Wiesbaden and was in Bayreuth in 1896 (the year of the Fischer publication), as well as Curth, who was a cellist listed as performing in the orchestra during first performance of Wagner's *Ring*.

M. Carl seemed to be the house composer/arranger for Fischer Verlag. He is represented with four works, all arrangements or paraphrases of popular melodies such as the *Lorelei* or *In einem kühlen Grunde*. His name can be found in many arrangements for different wind or string instruments with accompaniment in the Fischer publications, but he was so inconsequential that I could not find his first name, and so he remains M.! Despite this, his *Lorelei* remains a lovely melody and the use of both stopped and muted sounds makes the work interesting.

Friedebald Gräfe (1840-1880), who composed a popular trombone concerto, is represented with an arrangement of a very popular folk tune, *Drunten im Unterland*. The text of this still known melody (recognized by German grandmothers) spoke of the differences between the folk living in the north and the south, the former being rich and cold, the latter poor, but happy and warm in the heart. Interestingly, the text does not refer to the north as in Hamburg and the south as in Stuttgart, but refers to the Schwabians living to the north and south of the river Neckar. This song was parodied in Berlin in the 1930s changing the text from *Drunten im Unterland es ist so fein* to "under the undershirt it is so fine...." This melody was so popular it remains in song collections in Germany to this day.

Perhaps a third of the volume is comprised of shorter pieces for early valve horn with titles such as *Im Norden, Im Süden* (A. Neibig), *Frühlingszauber* (J. Grimm), or *Mein Herz gehört Dir allein* (G. Kunoth). Although these works obviously require accompaniment (there are bars of rests in the parts), there is no offer made to sell the piano part as with the longer works. In fine print at the bottom of the page, the piano accompani-



ments are offered ranging in price from 0,80 to 3 Marks, and most works suggest an orchestral accompaniment as well for one Mark more!¹¹ Fischer must have had a print on demand system.

Much research was required to find the accompaniments to perform some of the music in the collection. I had the great fortune of being able to buy a single F. Uhlmann Horn (from the collection of Ulrich Hübner) built in 1896 in Vienna with a second engraving reading A.E. Fischer, Bremen. It was a common practice for the music stores to order instruments from well-known makers, then to engrave them with their own name or logo before reselling them. Later I found other horns with Fischer engravings, but these were purely models for band or military instruments with none of the finesse of the Uhlmann horn with its engraved silver wreath on the bell. The Uhlmann horn also needed intense restoration before being able to produce a warm dark flexible sound in all registers.



Reconnecting the Fischer horn with the Fischer music is, for me, the culmination of a life-time of research, practice, and work with the F. M. Alexander Technique that resulted in a CD recording to be released in the spring of 2020. Zvi Meniker is my musical partner on the piano, playing a Streicher grand piano, built in Vienna in 1857. In search of new colors, I had a brass mute made by Michael McElhinny, then had it covered in leather, which is used in Lübeck's *Elegy*. The works chosen were selected to create a historical documentation of salon music in all its genres, performed in a style, as I understood it through research and personal experience, with the intention of touching the listener.

Renée Allen was born in Montreal and has been living in Germany since 1982. After playing over 100 operas in the Mainz and Stuttgart theaters, she specializes in historic performance practice with renowned European ensembles, and can be heard in over 100 recordings. She is a teacher of the F.M. Alexander Technique since 1993 and has taught natural horn in the Musikhochschule of Freiburg, Leipzig, and Würzburg. (www.accessing-inpiration.de)



Notes

¹Hofmann, E.T.A., *des Kapellmeisters musikalische Leiden*, München, Winkler Verlag. 1960. Translation by the author.

²Salmon, Walter, *Haus und Kammermusik*, Leipzig VEB Deutsche Verlag für Musik 1969.

³Riemann *Musiklexicon*, Hausmusik, Mainz, Schott, 1959

⁴"In Praise of bad music" Marcel Proust, 1896. Translation by the author.

⁵E. Vivier, *Réminiscence*, Nice Imprimerie Ventre Frères, rue de la Préfecture, 1899. p. 27.

⁶*Méthode de Chant suivie de Vocalises des Grands Maîtres de l'École Italienne, avec Acc.t de piano facile, adoptée par le Conservatoire par A. Andrade*. 3rd edition, 1845, Paris, A. Brullé, Éditeur, grande Galerie des Panoramas, 16 A.B. 89, Lettre de Cherubini. Translation by the author.

⁷Primary control is the head/neck/back relationship whereby the head, directed by thought, leads all movement.

⁸F. M. Alexander, *Introduction to a New Method*, 1906, Articles and Lectures, Mouritz, London, 1995, p.48.

⁹Carl Fischer Music, established 1872 in New York.

¹⁰Bremen Stadtarchive, 4.75/5 Fischer Verlag Bremen AG 1924-1937.

¹¹Ausgabe mit Pianoforte M. 2.-; Ausgabe mit Orchester net M. 3.-

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