

THE INSTRUMENTS OF THE ST. WENZEL CHURCH IN NAUMBURG

Schryari, crumhorns, pommers, dulcians, recorders, cornets, trumpets and trombones

In 1657, the vocal music director in the St. Wenzel Church in Naumburg on the Saale river, the choirmaster Andreas Unger, drafted a will, according to which his extensive collection of music supplies and instruments should be inherited by the church. That happened already in the following year.

It was often the case that a choirmaster passed his sheet music or instruments on to his church. However, the richness of the Unger's collection was unusual. In the first half of the 17th century Naumburg could not compete with Leipzig or Freiberg in Saxony, but was still a major centre of music culture. The music in the St. Wenzel Church, which was largely subordinated to the city council, competed to some extent with the music in the Cathedral. In those days, urban music culture was mostly the church music culture; accordingly, the choirmasters were called »music directors« of the city where they worked. They held musical events also on secular occasions. Here, as in the divine service, the main focus was on the vocal music, but in most cases numerous instrumentalists joined the vocalists.

Unger's inheritance included 53 wind instruments and 10 string instruments, namely two »five discant violins«, »four violas and tenor violins« as well as »one bass violin«. A list of instruments in the St. Wenzel Church of 1728 includes, apart from the Unger's heritage, four German shawms, three pommers and two cornets; all of these instruments were acquired in 1663. The wind instruments have probably not been used at least since the first decades of the 18th century: they no longer met the demands of the modern world. Probably they were only kept because one shied away from revealing their destruction; the reason behind this could have been the devotion to the founder. There was hardly any historical interest; a church magazine was suitable as a curiosity cabinet only to a limited extent. In addition, the instruments embodied no luxurious craftwork.

Things were quite different in regard to stringed instruments: On the one hand, they were universal and offered the player more opportunities to adapt to the taste of a new era; compared to the crumhorn or recorder player, violinist could produce the sound more freely, compared to the ancient trumpet player he could virtuously make music in any situation. Also the absolute and the relative attunement were less fixed.

On the other hand, certain parts of stringed instruments could be replaced; this was done since about 1770, among other things to reinforce the sound and extend the pitch range. As the ancient stringed instru-

ments can thus be used until today, it is not surprising that around 1890 only the wind instruments – useless for the normal practise – were sold from the St. Wenzel Church; the buyer was the Prussian Ministry of Culture, which acquired them at the price of 4.000 German marks for the former collection of ancient musical instruments at the Royal College of Music, the today's Musical Instrument Museum of the State Institute for Music Research, Prussian Cultural Heritage. The intellectual basis for this offered the historicism, in particular the growing interest for old music in the 19th century, which finally led to renewed appreciation of ancient instruments.



Pommer family © MIM, photo: Harald Fritz



The stringed instruments of the St. Wenzel Church, of which only »23. a viola. 24. a small violoncello. 25. a bass violon« appear on the list of 1728, were probably handed over the musicians in 17th or 18th century. Unger's instruments, which he might have purchased since about 1630, are equivalent to the types of instruments largely described by Michael Praetorius in the second volume in his *Syntagma Musicum* in 1618. Although all the instruments of the choirmaster were probably used in St. Wenzel Church at the same time – probably except for those which were first and last purchased – the historical development of each type, as already indicated in connection with the stringed instruments, was very different. Crumhorns and schryari – the latter are called »cry arias« in the Naumburg records – lost their original timeliness. The sound of these instruments is produced, like in the modern oboe, by the vibrations of a double reed enclosed by a windcap. The wind player can thus not hold the reed with the lips; they cannot influence the vibrations and therefore the tone and volume. Certain rigidity of the tone induced in this way as well as the nasal sound colouration met expectations of the musicians of the higher social classes in the course of the 17th century less and less. Due to their larger fingerholes, the wider sound outlet and the conical hole, the schryari sounded stronger and harsher than the crumhorns. However, a comparatively quieter and softer sound formed to some extent a guiding principle of instrument making in the 17th and 18th century. It is reasonable to assume here among others a social reason: The higher social classes distanced themselves with the soft sound of their instruments from the music exercise of lower social classes. This is partly the reason why schryari lost its importance.

»Pommer« means according to Praetorius an instrument family with double reed; the reed is conical, a windcap is usually omitted. The high instruments of this family were also referred to as »shawms«, according to the lists of the St. Wenzel Church dated about 1720 and 1728. Here they are mentioned with the addition of »German«, probably to differentiate them from the French oboe, which was modern in those days and came from the shawn. The pommers originally sounded like the schryari. Praetorius compares the sound of the shawm with the cackling of a goose. This sound was among other things due to the fact that the wind player vibrated the reed more or less freely in the mouth cavity, thus using it to a certain extent as a windcap. However, the absence of a real windcap meant that a change of the sound was already possible through the playing technique; the lips could hold the reed. Actually the oboe has been developing from the discant pommer (the shawm) relatively continuously. The pommer was often played with pirouette, i. e. with a wooden top part which forms a small disc above. It served as support for the lips so that the player could often use the windcap. The ending of the lip-ring was one of the steps on the way to the oboe: Due to holding



Dulzians family © MIM, photo: Jürgen Liepe

the reed with the lips, the sound was mild and could be shaped, an articulation of the melody was possible, and the pitch range expanded by overblowing. The dulcian (at that time already called »bassoon«) was the youngest of the wind instruments from St. Wenzel after his invention: It was built around the middle of the 16th century. Its sound was probably inherently softer than that of the pommer; this suggests the name which comes from the Latin »dulcis« (sweet). The bell was narrower than in the pommer, a lip-ring was missing. In contrast to the previously treated instruments, it is common to regard the dulcian of the period around 1600 and the modern bassoon as the same type: The changes made to the instrument in the course of time are felt less as fundamental innovations but rather as nuances. A type of instrument that, according to the understanding of the 18th/19th century, was not capable of development is the recorder: The fact that the airflow first passes through a channel, limits the influence of the wind player on the sound formation and thus the expressivity of the instrument. Recorders of the 16th or 17th century, like those from Naumburg, sound slightly darker, less »solo« than those from the time of Bach and Telemann.

It is not very easy to understand why the cornets fall into desuetude in the 18th century. The conical instrument that was made mostly of wood was played like a trumpet, the sound could be modulated. The cornet could be played melodically from a upwards, the trumpet, by contrast, only about from c². The reason was that the cornet had finger holes, while the wind player could produce only the so-called natural tones on the trumpet. Probably the nasal sound has also played a role in the disappearance of the cornet. Mattheson mentions the technical difficulty: »The hard cornet ... is extremely difficult, probably most difficult to play among all instruments.« As a powerful wind instrument with the pitch below that of the ancient trumpet, the cornet could be replaced by the oboe, whose sound gradually changed from the vocal colouring »ä« to »i«. And it was easier to play than the cornet. Already in the 16th century wind players sometimes placed double (oboe) reeds on their cornets. 1765 a town musician from Stade was accused of using the oboe instead of cornet to avoid the difficulties of use: »... however plaintiff takes all sorts of liberties and ... uses oboe instead of cornet ...« To play from the church steeple – i. e. for relatively simple wind music from ancient tradition – the cornet was used until the 19th century.

From Unger's time until the beginning of the 19th century construction of the trumpet changed only in details. There was a tendency to increase the bells. The demands on the trumpet decreased in the second half of the 18th century: previously the instrument was used to play virtuosic melodies; this was done, as has been mentioned, by using the harmonic series. A change in each produced tone was effected by the lip tension. The natural tones are close to each other only at the top of the scale so that trumpet melodies were always played in this register. Such solo performance of the trumpet fell gradually into desuetude after 1750. To enable melodies in the lower register, the keyed trumpets were developed at the end of 18th century and the valve trumpets (patent for valves 1814 Blühmel and Stölzel) at the beginning of the next century.

However, the slide trumpet developed already in 1400 allowed playing in the low register:

The instrument could, depending on the melody, be extended or shortened using the movable tube which was inserted into the trumpet at the end of the mouthpiece. The slide trumpet from Naumburg is, as far as we know, the only remaining trumpet of its kind. Fast tempos were difficult to play on such instruments because large movements were needed almost with the whole trumpet.

Things are different with the trombone: Here you only need to operate the u-shaped slide; and as the player thus extends the two tubes simultaneously, their movements are shorter. From all types of the wind instruments of the St. Wenzel Church the trombone continues to live with the slightest changes until today. The church originally had eight trombones; only one of

them came to the museum. Its bell was lost during the World War II. The remaining slide and the information in the catalogue of the Berlin museum of 1922, however, show how much the trombone itself has changed since the 17th century: The ancient instruments had a far narrower diameter, the sound was quieter and slighter. This was particularly important in the ancient church music, where the focus was often on the transparency of a blend of multiple equal melodic lines. The clarity of the trombone sound from the 16th to the 18th century was substantially due to the mouthpiece; the flat shell, the sharp edges on the transition in the tube caused a light tone even in relatively quiet play.

As all these instruments came to us from a church, they were used in the secular world as well, e. g. in wedding celebrations or in the domestic music. Schryari and pommer are today popular again not least because of the austere colour of their sound. According to recent research, also the crumhorns not always sounded as gentle, as one often believed: This is not least a question of reeds, of which very few have survived to date. Obviously they were related to those, which are used, for example, for the shawms (Pifferi) of Italian folk music up to the present day. Recordings with such instruments show in a way the revival of the Naumburg instruments.



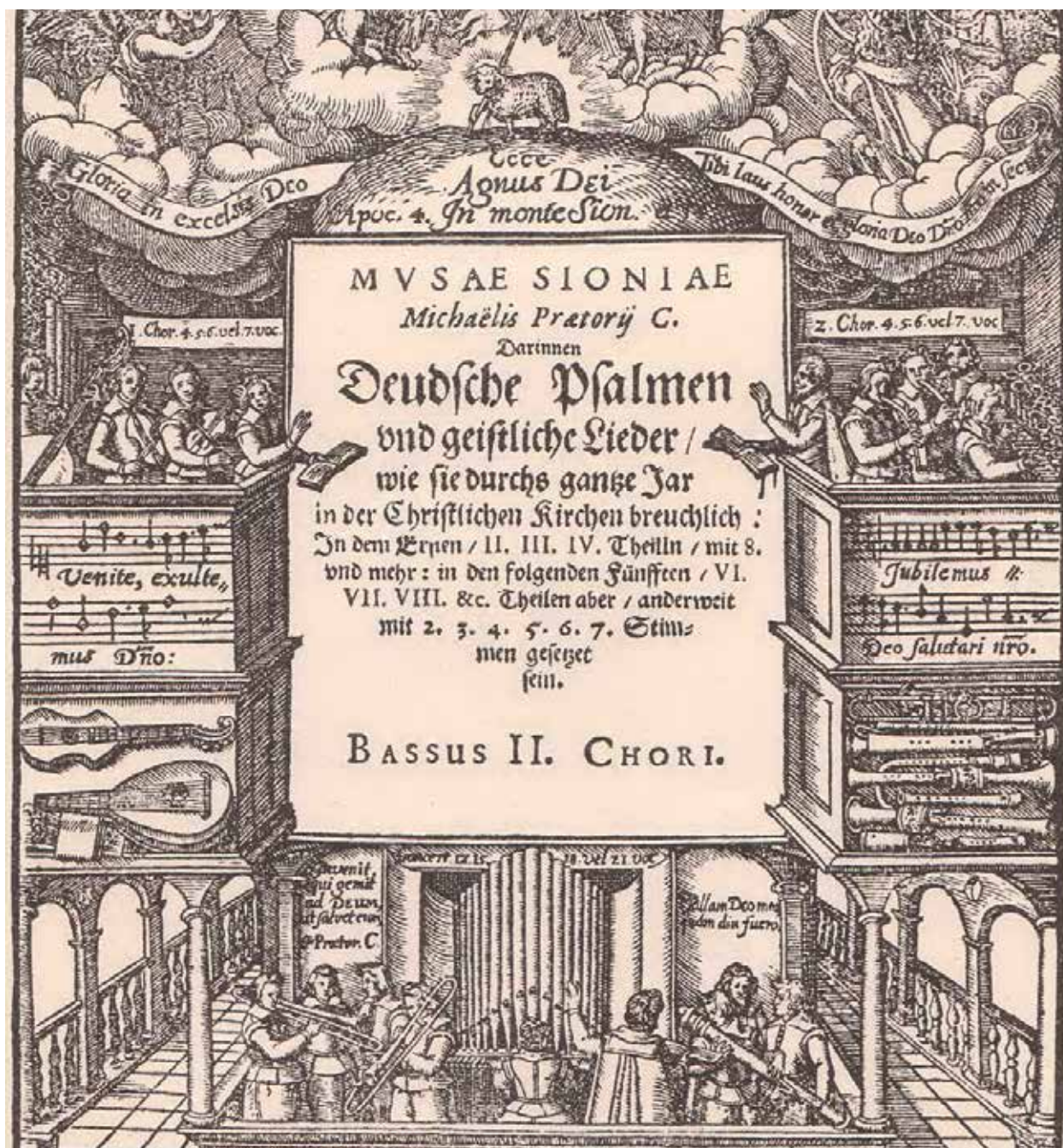
Crumhorns © MIM, photo: Jürgen Liepe

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CD: Klingendes Museum 12. *Die Blasinstrumente aus der St. Wenzelskirche in Naumburg*

Historical wind instruments from Naumburg – role models for instrument makers since the beginning of the historical performance practice – resound with other historical instruments. A special and for conservation reasons rare sound experience. With richly illustrated 35-page booklet.

Dieter Krickeberg: *Die alten Musikinstrumentensammlung der Naumburger St. Wenzelskirche im Spiegel ihrer Verzeichnisse*. In: *Jahrbuch des Staatlichen Instituts für Musikforschung Preußischer Kulturbesitz* 1977, Berlin 1978, p. 7–30.



Title page for Michael Praetorius' »Theatrum Instrumentorum seu Sciagraphia« from the second volume of the three-volume book »Syntagma musicum« (vol. 2, Wolfenbüttel 1619). Multi-choral music in a church. © bpk

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