

THE HISTORY AND PRACTICE OF PERFORMANCES OF RICHARD STRAUSS'

CONCERTO NO.1 FOR HORN, OP.11

CREATIVE PROJECT, 3 CREDIT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTERS OF MUSIC

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MUNCIE, INDIANA

DECEMBER 2012

Introduction

The first Horn Concerto, Op. 11, of Richard Strauss is one of the most well-known pieces in horn literature. Finished when Strauss was only eighteen years old, it remains a staple in the horn repertoire. The concerto was written between 1882 and 1883, and a piano reduction version was premiered shortly after its completion by Bruno Hoyer in Munich. The orchestral version was premiered on March 4, 1885, by Gustav Leinhos with Hans van Bülow conducting the Meiningen Orchestra, of which Leinhos was principal horn. The work was dedicated to Oscar Franz, a well-known horn player and composer of the time. Strauss himself created both the piano and an orchestral versions, with the orchestral score calling for solo horn, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.¹ He composed the work while enrolled as a philosophy student at Munich University, during which he completed two other concerti, opus 6 for cello and opus 18 for violin. The horn concerto is the only one of his concerti from that period that remains in the standard repertoire.²

It seems only natural that one of Strauss' first concerti would be one that featured the horn, because his father, Franz Strauss, was the principal horn player of the Munich Court Orchestra. Richard would have grown up with the sound of his father practicing in their home. Franz also wrote some pieces for the horn, including a concerto. Richard would at times accompany his father for his performances of the great horn concerti of Mozart, or Beethoven's *Sonata*. Richard highly regarded his father's playing, saying in his

1 Michael Steinberg, *The Concerto: A Listener's Guide* (New York: Oxford, 1998.)

2 Bruce Chr. Johnson, "Richard Strauss's Horn Concerti: Signposts of a Career," *The Horn Call* 12, no.3(October 1981): 59.

Recollections and Reflections, “I can still remember very well what a profound impression my father's inspired reading of the F major passage in the adagio of the 'Ninth' made on the Munich public.”³ Franz was one of Richard's earliest teachers and was very strict with him. Richard recalls that his father was quick-tempered and believed in very strict rhythm. He would often complain that Richard rushed, yelling “Why this Jewish haste?”⁴ It is interesting to note that even with his father's influence, Richard dedicated the orchestral version to another horn player, however, the piano accompaniment version is dedicated to his father. According to Alan Jefferson, the elder Strauss felt that the work was “totally unplayable.”⁵

The title of the concerto indicates the expectation of a Waldhorn, the valveless instrument used by orchestral musicians before the invention of the valved horn; the Waldhorn is also known as the hand horn. When the work was written, valved horns were already very common, and many of the technical passages would be practically impossible on a hand horn.⁶ However, the notes and harmonies contained in the work do allow it to be played on the hand horn, with few chromatic tones and following the chord tones of the Eb key. This gives the work the same kind of character and feeling as Mozart's horn concerti, which Strauss heard his father play during his childhood. The range of the Strauss concerto is a complete three octaves, which also covers the entire range of the older instrument. The fact that the work is written for Horn in Eb also points

3 Richard Strauss, *Recollections and Reflections*, ed. Willi Schuh, trans. L.J. Lawrence (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1949), 130.

4 Ibid, 129.

5 Johnson, “Richard Strauss's Horn Concerti,” 28.

6 Ibid, 59.

towards a valveless instrument, though few have played the concerto on hand horn.

Modern players read an edition of this concerto written for horn in F, the most commonly used valved horn. Alan Jefferson, in *The Life of Richard Strauss*, wonders whether having Waldhorn in the title of the concerto was actually a joke between Richard and his father. The original German title of the piece is *Konzert fuer Waldhorn mit Orchester oder Klavierbegleitung, Op. 11*.⁷

The Concerto

The work is divided into a classical three-movement form, with the traditional tempos fast-slow-fast. The movements are all connected, with seemingly no break between them. No *attacca* is specified in the score, but the movements continue directly after one another. The first movement, marked *Allegro*, does not follow the standard sonata-allegro form typical of most classically-styled concerti. It instead involves a series of themes that are all related to one another and occurring throughout the piece.⁸ The opening theme, seen in example 1, occurs three times during the piece. (All musical examples with horn are written for horn in F.)

Example 1 Richard Strauss, *Horn Concerto No. 1*, Op. 11, mvt. 1, mm 1-5



In the first movement, it appears at *fortissimo*, while in the third, at *pianissimo*. In the second theme, Strauss puts the ability of the performer to the test, with long sweeping

⁷ Alan Jefferson, *The Life of Richard Strauss* (Newton Abbot, U.K.: David & Charles, 1973.)

⁸ Michael Kennedy, *Richard Strauss* (London: J.M. Dent, 1976.)

legato lines spanning up to two octaves, written *piano*. Several times throughout this second theme, high concert Eb is written, a note that Franz Strauss deemed unplayable at his old age. After the exposition and the resulting accompaniment break, Strauss changes key suddenly, and the dynamic returns again to *fortissimo*. With a heroic gesture, example 2, Strauss changes the key to G minor, if only temporarily.

Example 2 Richard Strauss, *Horn Concerto No. 1*, Op. 11, mvt.1, mm. 76-77



After this heroic gesture, Strauss again calls for the performer to play long legato lines at a softer dynamic, requiring absolute breath control. These long lines lead to a crescendo and the key of Ab Major. The rhythm, which up to this point was fairly slow and homogeneous, suddenly changes to a triplet theme, seen in example 3. This theme marks the beginning of the development section, and modulates constantly, from G Major to Bb Major and then to Eb Major, when the theme returns to the home key, with another heroic gesture, example 4, leading to the final ii-V-I chord progression.

Example 3 Richard Strauss, *Horn Concerto No.1*, Op. 11, mvt. 1, mm. 109-111



Example 4 Richard Strauss, *Horn Concerto No. 1*, Op. 11, mvt. 1, mm. 125-126

Horn

The second movement, *Andante*, continues directly from the first movement, with no break in between. Strauss transforms the accompaniment from common time to $\frac{3}{4}$ time seamlessly, leading from triplet theme to triplet theme, seen in example 5 and 6.

Example 5 Richard Strauss, *Horn Concerto No.1*, Op.11, mvt. 1, mm. 162-163

Piano

Example 6 Richard Strauss, *Horn Concerto No.1*, Op.11, mvt. 2, mm.1-2

Piano

He also modulates the key from the original key of Eb Major to Ab minor. The first theme in the second movement again puts the performer's breath control to the test, with more long *pianissimo* lines. He compounds the difficulty of these lines by again going to the high concert Eb in the first movement. In the following accompaniment break, Strauss uses rising triplet chords to go from minor to major, from Ab minor to the key of B Major. *Pianissimo* goes to *fortissimo*, and the theme changes from sad to triumphant. Again, Strauss uses long sweeping lines to challenge the performer. This triumphant

theme does not last long, only eighteen measures, after which Strauss returns to the original key of the movement, Ab minor. There is a short repeat of the first theme from the beginning of the movement, and then Strauss does something completely unexpected. Four bars from the end of the movement, he suddenly puts the melody in the key of Cb Major, in example 7, the enharmonic key of B Major, the key from the theme in the middle of the movement, only to bring it back to the key of the concerto, Eb Major.

Example 7 Richard Strauss, *Horn Concerto No.1*, Op.11, mvt. 2, mm. 106-112



Again, there is no break from the second movement to the third movement.

Strauss begins the third movement with first theme from the first movement, example 1, which he uses to go from common time to 6/8 time. With this time signature and the style portrayed throughout the rest of the movement, Strauss takes a look back to the third movements of the Mozart horn concerti that he grew up listening to. When the solo melody comes in, it does so with a kind of hunting call in triple time. Broken up into four-bar phrases, the melody crescendos upwards towards a high Eb after four phrases. This brief introduction is followed by an accompaniment interlude that continues the theme. In the sweeping legato lines of the second theme, Strauss changes the tone of the movement completely. With the accompaniment playing constant triplet eighth notes, the solo melody slows down its rhythmic pulse to almost all dotted quarter notes and dotted half notes. The phrases also increase in length, now eight or twelve measures long

instead of four, again requiring a great amount of breath control from the performer. This same rising and falling motive continues for almost a hundred measures, when it is suddenly interrupted by the opening theme of the concerto, done quite differently this time around, in *pianissimo* in the key of F Major, seen in example 8.

Example 8 Richard Strauss, *Horn Concerto No.1*, Op.11, mvt.3, mm. 120-124

Horn

pp

un poco calando

Strauss returns to the second theme of the movement, but written a whole step lower in the home key of Eb Major. This leads to the return of the first theme, with four-bar phrases leading to the high Eb once again. Strauss again suddenly goes into common time, with a triumphant theme that spans over two octaves. This theme slows down the pace of the movement, before the coda brings back the tempo to a frenzied pace. Strauss returns to triple time and the hunting theme from the beginning of the movement, though considerably different. Strauss uses short two-bar undulating figures to propel to the end, where he has the performer go all the way to the high Eb again, then down over two octaves to a low Bb, then up two octaves to another Bb, followed by three notes down to the Eb tonic of the concerto, seen in example 9.

Example 9 Richard Strauss, *Horn Concerto No.1*, Op.11, mvt.3, mm. 285-289

Horn

f

ff

Performance Practice

The *Horn Concerto No.1*, Op.11 is an often performed, with almost every horn student studying it at some point in time during their lessons. One way to prepare this piece is to listen to recordings by prominent artists in order to discover how the masters play the work. Several artists are very well known for their solo abilities with great recordings: Dennis Brain, Barry Tuckwell, and Radek Baborak. Listening to the differences and similarities in these recordings is a great tool to understanding the traditional performance practices over the last sixty years, for the three recordings span from 1956 to 2010.

Dennis Brain, a British horn player, is considered one of the most influential horn players of the modern era. In his short life, he recorded most of the modern repertoire, and many of his recordings are considered to be the standard for horn players. He recorded all four of the Mozart horn concerti, both Strauss horn concerti, and the little-known Hindemith horn concerto. Hindemith composed his only horn concerto for Brain, and Benjamin Britten also wrote his *Serenade for tenor, horn, and strings* for Brain. There are many other works that had been written for Brain, showing just how influential he was during his short life. He played principal horn with many of the great orchestras in England, including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Brain died tragically at the age of thirty-six in a car accident, but his abilities as a horn player are still renowned for their musicality and grace.⁹ The recording used of Brain performing the Strauss concerto is from 1956 with the Philharmonia Orchestra with Wolfgang Sawallisch conducting.

9 Stephan Gamble, *Dennis Brain: A Life in Music* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2011.)

One of the reasons why Brain's recordings are so influential is the fact that he follows the score most of the time, while including some of his own personal flare that defined him as a great horn soloist. He is also well known for his sound, because he used a custom Alexander Bb horn, which gives a considerably different sound in the low register.¹⁰

On Brain's recording of Strauss' horn concerto he has moments of deviation from the score that are examples of his soloistic flare and add interest to the piece. In the opening of the first movement, the tempo is denoted as 112 beats per minute to the quarter note, however most horn players, including Brain, disregard this tempo marking in the opening theme, treating it like a cadenza. The conductor takes the opening accompaniment considerably faster than that, but as soon as the horn plays the second theme, the tempo returns to the intended one. The rest of the movement rarely differs from the score. In the B Major section of the second movement Brain chooses to increase the tempo, adding excitement, only to slacken back to the notated tempo when the theme returns to Ab minor. The third movement is where Brain truly breaks away from the score. In measure 80, marked *energico*, Brain increases the tempo significantly. Also, when the first theme from the opening of the concerto returns, Brain crescendos on the last note, seen in example 10, in contrast to example 8.

10 Ibid

Example 10 Richard Strauss, *Horn Concerto No.1, Op.11, mvt.3, mm.121-125*

In the coda, Brain also proves just how virtuosic he is, taking it at a blistering tempo of 172 beats per minute to the dotted quarter note. He ends the work with a flourish, slowing slightly on the last four notes of the concerto.¹¹

Barry Tuckwell is considered by many to be the successor of Dennis Brain. Born in Australia, Tuckwell moved to England in 1950 to study with Brain. Five years later, he became the principal horn of the London Symphony Orchestra, where he began to make most of his recordings. He is most well known for his technique:

The leading horn player of his generation, Tuckwell has an outstanding ability to make light of extreme technical and musical difficulties. His use of a large-bored modern Holton double horn gives his playing great presence, contrasting strongly with some of his predecessors who used the lighter-toned french horn.¹²

The recording of the concerto studied is an early performance with the London Symphony Orchestra, with Istvan Kertesz conducting.¹³

Tuckwell is known for his large sound, and he uses it in his performance of this

11 Richard Strauss, *Horn Concerto No. 1*, Op. 11, from *Richard Strauss: The Two Concertos*, Dennis Brain (horn), Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by Wolfgang Sawallisch, EMI Classics B000002RP0, 1990, compact disc

12 Niall O'Loughlin, "Tuckwell, Barry," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed October 14, 2012,

13 Richard Strauss, *Horn Concerto No. 1*, Op. 11, from *The Art of Barry Tuckwell*, Barry Tuckwell (horn), London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Istvan Kertesz, Decca B000E5L8AC, 2006, compact disc.

Example 12 Richard Strauss, *Horn Concerto No.1*, Op.11, mvt. 3, mm.270-273, Barry Tuckwell's version



The third performer is considered by many horn players to be the greatest at this time. Born and taught in Czechoslovakia, Radek Baborak is the former principal horn for the Berlin Philharmonic, a position he held from 2000-2010. He is a prolific recording artist with over twenty recordings of well-known and little-known horn works. He retired from Berlin in order to become a full-time soloist, and has been the featured soloist for many great orchestras, including the Berlin Philharmonic, the Royal Philharmonic, and the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra.¹⁵ The recording used is from 2010 with Yu Kosuge at the piano.¹⁶

Baborak's recording from 2010 is the most recent under review and is the only to feature the piano accompaniment instead of the orchestral accompaniment. Baborak shows his Eastern European roots by playing the work with a slight vibrato, a technique typically not used by horn players from Western Europe and the Americas. In the first movement, Baborak starts with the slower pace indicated in the score, and also uses rubato through the exposition, with its long sweeping lines. In the triplet section, he keeps an almost regimental tempo, without the rubato heard in the Tuckwell recording. In the second movement, Baborak follows the written tempo, but changes the rhythm of measure 56, choosing a dotted rhythm instead of the straight sixteenth notes, with the

15 "ABOUT : Radek Baborák," Radek Baborák, Accessed October 14, 2012.
<http://www.baborak.com/en/about/>.

16 Richard Strauss, *Horn Concerto No. 1*, Op. 11, from *Richard Strauss: Horn Concerto No. 1*, Radek Baborak (horn), Yu Kosuge (piano), Octavia Records B004FYLR50, 2010, compact disc.

control and spans over three octaves. Many soloists have played and recorded the work of the years, and recordings by Dennis Brain, Barry Tuckwell, and Radek Baborak either have or will stand the test of time as the great recordings of the concerto. There are many ways to play and interpret the concerto, and these great artists can give students a good start on their own interpretations. This concerto has been played many times over the years, and is sure to continue to be played for many more.

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