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Wernich Days: the hook harp, this unknown lady

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Report

“Wernich Days: the hook harp, this unknown lady”

International conference

Civica Scuola di Musica “Claudio Abbado “

in collaboration with Musik-Akademie Basel, Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, Civico Museo degli Strumenti Musicali del Castello Sforzesco, Milano

28 February, 1 and 2 March 2023

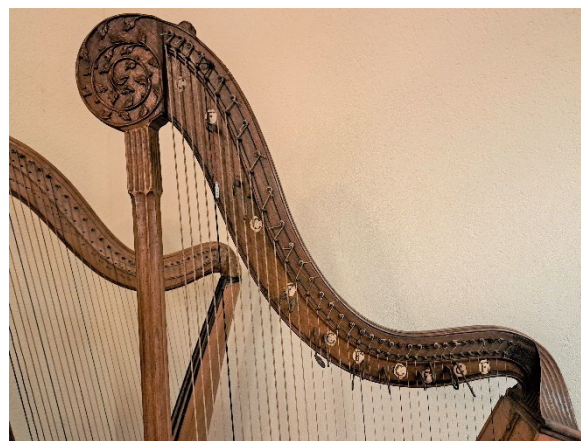


Figure 1 – Cerruti's hook harp, 1799, ©Museo degli Strumenti Musicali inv. 298

PRESENTATION

Following a symposium devoted to harps in German speaking countries (Davidsharfen) in the spring of 2022 in Basel (*Schola Cantorum Basiliensis*), the fruitful collaboration between Mara Galassi and Heidrun Rosenzweig, has continued this winter with the aid of Véronique Musson-Gonneaud (harpist and musicologist, Iremus, Paris), Flora Papadopoulou and Vera Schnider (new teachers of the Schola Cantorum and Musik Akademie Basel), with the organization of a three days symposium on hook harps. Claus Huettel, Dario Pontiggia (harpmakers), Barbara Leitherer (baroque dance teacher from the Schola Cantorum), and the students in bachelor and master from both schools, joined enthusiastically the project.

ABOUT WERNICH AND THE MAIN SOURCES ON HOOK HARPS MUSIC AND ORGANOLOGY

The focus of these study days was Johann Carl Gustav Wernich's „*Versuch einer richtigen Lehrart die Harfe zu spielen, wobey die Grundsätze nach welchen dieses Instrument erlernt werden muss mit der grössten Deutlichkeit und solchergestalt vorgetragen werden dass der Liebhaber desselben eine hinlängliche Geschicklichkeit darauf erlangen könne*¹“, major source on the manufacture, development, repertoire and playing technique of this instrument, published in 1772 in Berlin.

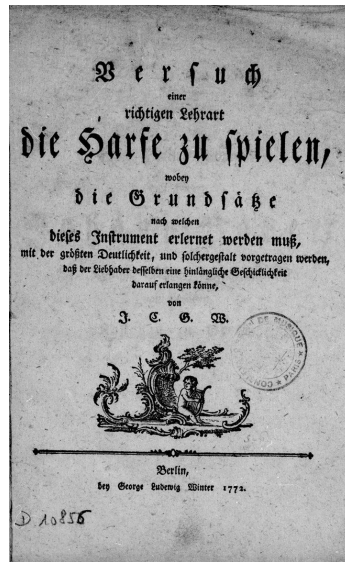


Figure 2
Wernich, « Versuch... », 1772
©Bibliothèque nationale de France

The three rich days of conferences and workshops examined, in addition to the rigorous study on Wernich's fundamental essay by Heidrun Rosenzweig, other main theoretical and practical sources which describe the hook harp in the second half of the eighteenth century : F. W. Herbst (1796), A. W. C. Saal (1799), J. G. H. Backofen (1801) A. G. Heyse (1803), J. Wenzel (1808).

Heidrun Rosenzweig gave a particular attention to the first known manuscript aimed for hook harp, which was recently discovered by Ewa Hauptmann-Fischer from the University of Warsaw, *Fundamentum Speciat* by Gaietano Schega² (1763). The pieces of this manuscript were transcribed by Céline Pasche and played by the students.

These days were also an opportunity to study closely the harps preserved at the *Museo degli Strumenti Musicali del Castello Sforzesco di Milano*, in particularly the remarkable harp signed by the Cremonese luthier Cerruti, in 1799 (see Figure 1), that Dario Pontiggia described focusing on several technical questions on hooks and stringing.

¹ Johann Carl Gustav WERNICH, [Essay on a correct method of playing the harp, where the principles by which this instrument must be learned are presented with the greatest clarity and in such a way that the Amateur can acquire sufficient skill on it](#), Berlin, 1772

² This manuscript has recently been discovered

For the occasion, the Castello hosted an exceptional concert, played by the students of both music institutions, dedicated to the solo and chamber music repertoire for the hook harp: Fattscheck, Kirchhoff, Backofen, Koehler, Gebel, Gluck, Graun, Lidarti, Mozart, Pius Hancke, Schega and Saal. This concert gave a glimpse on the richness of a this hardly known and very unexpected repertoire peculiar of such apparently simple instruments: in fact, a hook harp is a harp with a single row of strings, to which a few hooks are attached and manually turned to produce semitones.



Figure 3 – Students concert with dance at Castello Sforzesco, 01/03/2023
©MaraGalassi

This kind of study days and meetings are a new form of work and collaboration: standing between the scientific symposium , too often reserved for researchers in musicology, and the musical training courses, too often concentrated on questions of interpretation. They propose a new scientific approach allowing all the actors of early music to search, test, confront, experiment, exchange, and also change opinion if needed.

The ethic of these days is to develop a scientific approach within the musical practice itself.



Figure 4
Copy of Eisenach hookharp by Claus Huettel at Castello Sforzesco
©VeroniqueMussonGonneaud

A COMMON INSTRUMENT IN GERMAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES DURING THE 18th AND 19th CENTURY

Task of the conference was to try to better know hook harps, their use and repertoire and their specific technical aspects of construction. One important point is that of understanding the setting, shape, material and working mechanism of the different types of hooks, because the semitones produced by them, ancestors of today's levers, appear in many ways rather approximate.



Figure 5 -one hook
©SuenYeGabriel



Figure 6 - Mara Galassi showing the hooks on the screen
©SuenYeGabriel

The historical harpmakers Claus Huettel and Dario Pontiggia who were present, shared their research on the subject and accepted the confrontation with the musicians and researchers.

Several aspects that are traditionally devoted to instrument making as, for example, the question of the setting of the hooks, require experimentation, research on extant instruments, practice, knowledge of theoretical texts, as well as the musician's intuition, and not only the know-how of harpmaking.

Hook harps were contemporary of the first pedal harps, and of chromatic harps with multiple rows of strings. Less expensive they were also simpler and with more limitations. However, they were very common in Central Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, as witnessed by the many instruments that have been preserved..

Approaching the repertoire of these harps is a challenge for today harp players, because not all the alterations are displayed, and the realization of semitones requires practical skills that are nowadays lost.

Nevertheless, Saal, in his "XXV Stücke für die Harfe ohne Pedal"³ provides either in his introduction as well as in the music score interesting practical hints for the use of the hooks. The Basel student Henriette Urban showed some samples from this book.

However, Heinrich Backofen explained in 1801 :

*"Most harp compositions appear in France, these are without exception set for the pedal harp, because there, the hookharp is hardly known by name, and these composers can therefore not be blamed. However, it is unforgivable with ours, who know very well that against one harpist [who] has a pedal harp, there are perhaps twenty who only have hookharps. This is why there is so little market for harp compositions in Germany, and why harp playing is so weak everywhere, because every harpist composes or arrange his own music."*⁴

³ Anton Wilhelm Caspar Saal, [XXV Stücke für die Harfe ohne Pedal](#), Hambourg, 1799

⁴ Backofen, [Anleitung zum Harfenspiel](#), 1801 (1st edition) : „Die meisten Harfencompositionen erscheinen in Frankreich, diese sind ohne Ausnahme für die Pedalarfe gesetzt, weil man dort die Hakenharfe kaum dem Namen nach kennt, und diesen

The question of the connections between these different types of harps was developed in the lecture given by Véronique Musson-Gonneaud. Claus Huettel has shown in his very informative slide presentation that the amount and variety of hook harps preserved in museums anyway testifies the importance of these instruments in the 18th and 19th centuries.

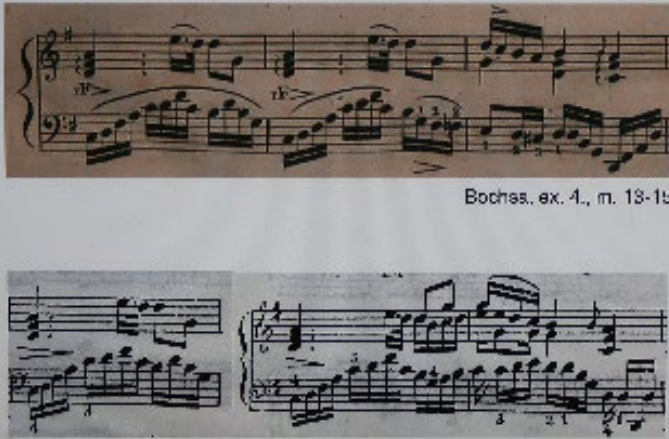
REVIVING HISTORICAL HOOK HARPS PLAYING TODAY

Despite the limits of the instruments, it is clear that the musicians of the time were skilled at adapting the music they wanted to play, by taking advantage of all the possibilities of their instruments, even if it meant rewriting inadequate passages.

The analysis and comparison of Backofen's arrangements with the original works of Bochsa, Pleyel or Mozart, that Vera Schnider magnifically presented, gives insights for arranging pieces originally composed for the piano or the pedalharp into hook harp in our turn.

If there is a lesson to be learned from these historical practices, it is undoubtedly that we, musicians of the 21st century, must also follow this way!

alterations: recomposing slightly



The image displays two musical scores side-by-side for comparison. The top score is from Bochsa's 'Étude pour la harpe', measures 13-15, showing a complex texture with many notes and some 'rk' markings. The bottom score is from Backofen's 'XII exercices d'après Bochsa pour la harpe à crochets', measures 13-15, showing a simplified version of the same passage with fewer notes and some fingerings (1, 2, 3) indicated.

Bochsa, ex. 4., m. 13-15

Backofen, 1. Übung, m. 13-15

Figure 7 – One example from Vera Schnider's lecture : comparison between Bochsa's "Étude pour la harpe" and Backofen "XII exercices d'après Bochsa pour la harpe à crochets"
©VeraSchnider

Tonsetzern kann also kein Vorwurf gemacht werden. Unverzeihlich ist es aber bey den Unsrigen, die doch wohl wissen, dass gegen einen Harfenspieler, der eine Pedalharfe besitzt, vielleicht zwanzig [kommen, die] nur blos Hakenharfen haben. Daher kommt der wenige Absatz der Harfencompositionen in Deutschland, und daher allenthalben so schales Harfenspiel, weil jeder Harfenist sich selbst seine Musik componirt oder arrangirt."

Furthermore, as Flora Papadopoulos showcased in her talk, the study of prints and manuscripts containing ensemble music with obligato (hook) harp, allows us to identify certain melodic elements and harmonic patterns in the harp parts. During her workshop the students were called to use them to recreate a convincing thorough bass realization to a menuet by C. Ph. E. Bach.



Figure 8 – Flora Papadopoulos’s talk

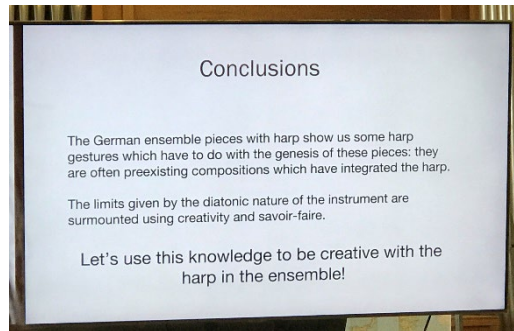


Figure 9 – About music, one conclusion among others from Flora Papadopoulos’s talk@FloraPapadopoulos

In this context, reconstructing and resituating and re-contextualising the fantastic adventure of the many performances of Gluck's Orfeo, as presented by Mara Galassi, completely changes the way of approaching the various versions of this major work of the repertoire, created in Vienna in 1762 and then performed for about 25 years throughout the whole Europe.

For the first time in modern times a hook harp, played on stage by Margherita Burattini, from the Civica Scuola di Musica di Milano, was “gloriously” used at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice for the Vienna edition of Gluck’s Orfeo.



Figure 10 – Gluck’s Orfeo, Orchester La Fenice, direction Ottavio Dantone, Venezia, Italy, in April and May 2023.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of these rich days, is without a doubt, that musicians, musicologists and harpmakers should keep working hand in hand. Unfortunately, opportunities are often lacking.

These days in Milan, like those in Basel the year before, are a model not only for the development of the practice of historical harps, but also for the development of musical education at the professional level.

At a time when early music is becoming more and more institutionalized, we must value and transmit this spirit of rigor, humility, research and sharing because, in the end, it is creativity in our relation to the music of the past that is at stake.

Many thanks to Claudia Caffagni head of the *Early music department of Civica Scuola di Musica "Claudio Abbado"*, as well as to the *Musik-Akademie Basel* and the *Civico Museo degli Strumenti Musicali del Castello Sforzesco di Milano* for giving us the opportunity to organize this symposium. We all hope there will be more in the future!

Special thanks to Mara Galassi and Heidrun Rosenzweig, who spare neither time nor energy, to work for more than thirty years to develop this spirit in the historical harp world.



Figure 11

Sun Ye - Claus Huettel, María Rosa Navas Pérez, Mara Galassi, Heidrun Rosenzweig, Flora Papadopoulou, Véronique Musson-Gonneaud, Henriette Urban, Margherita Burattini, Céline Pasche, Anna De Rogatis, Melina Perlein-Féliers, Teodora Tommasi, Priscila Gama Santana, Annelise Ellars, Julian Becker, Ieva Baublyte, Barbara Leithere

Recall of the programme

• **Thursday 28 february – Castello Sforzesco Ballroom**

10:45 am, [Dario Pontiggia](#) (Harpmaker): guided tour of the harps of the musical instruments collection, by the luthier, with particular reference to the Cremonese harp 'Cerruti'.

03:30 pm, [Concert by students from the Civica Scuola di Musica Claudio Abbado di Milano and Schola Cantorum Basiliensis.](#)

• **Wednesday 1 March - Auditorium Villa Simonetta**

9:15 am, [Claus Huettel](#) : 300 years of European hook harps. Characteristics of early and late models

10:20 am, [Mara Galassi](#) : *Arpe a uncini nel Museo degli Strumenti Musicali di Berlino*

10:40 am, [Véronique Musson-Gonneaud](#) : *About Hook harps in France*

11:15 am, [Heidrun Rosenzweig](#) , with illustrations on several harps by Milano's students : *Gaietano Schega, Fundamentum (1763): First known print of music for hook harp: What does it teach us? How does it sound?*

01:45 pm [Heidrun Rosenzweig](#) : *J. C. G. Wernich, Attempting a correct way to play the harp (Berlin, 1772). On the traces of his concepts, completely translated into English and garnished with his musical examples*

05:00 pm [Claus Huettel](#) : *Early hook harps and their hook systems - Workshop*

06:00 pm [Barbara Leithere](#) *Dancing a Menuett - Workshop*

▪ **Thursday 2 March - Civica Scuola di Musica Claudio Abbado**

09:30 am, [Heidrun Rosenzweig](#) Hook harp technique and use of the hooks from sources of J. G. H. Backofen A. G. Heyse and A.W.K. Saal and Wenzel - Workshop and round table

11:15 am [Vera Schnider](#) : Backofen`s transcriptions from pedal to hook harp

12:30 am [Flora Papadopoulos](#) : Basso continuo and obbligato parts for hook harp (I part)

02:30 pm [Mara Galassi](#) , with musical examples on several harps by Milano's students : *La parte obbligata nell'Orfeo di Gluck: pedali o uncini?*

03:30 pm [Flora Papadopoulos](#), Basso continuo and obbligato parts for hook harp - Workshop

[Véronique Musson-Gonneaud](#), 21/05/2023