

Jules Demersseman

Luc
Vertommen



Steven Mead's new solo CD 'Virtuoso Music For Brass - the complete works for euphonium by Jules Demersseman' was released on 1st November. There is huge public interest in the CD due to the great historical significance of the music contained on it.

For over 150 years Demersseman's music lay virtually unknown in the library of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. He was a friend and confidante of Adolphe Sax the famous instrument maker. The music scene in the early part of the 19th century in Paris was a vibrant one and

Demersseman was there as a flute virtuoso and teacher at the Paris Conservatory. He was also known as a composer and turned his extraordinary genius to writing for brass for an instrument that Adolphe Sax had just developed, the trombone with six independent valves! The instrument itself had a relatively short lived career and just a few specimens survive in the Brussels Instrumental Museum. The 11 pieces on the disc should be of interest to low brass players everywhere, as they are great fun to listen to and even more fun to play. The composer wrote both pieces for conservatory use and in the genre that we now call theme and variations. His music predates Arban's famous work that is to be found in his Grand Method and it is also more varied and challenging, especially in his choice of keys! He thought nothing of writing for a Bb instrument in four and five or six sharps. Being a flute player, I suppose he didn't care!

The recording of these works was a real joy, especially as Steve was once again able to team up with Tomoko Sawano. The instigator of the recording - the Belgian, arranger and conductor Luc Vertommen - was also in attendance, perfecting his published editions of the new works that accompany this CD. The CD was recorded at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester.

Jules-Emile Demersseman and his music for trombone with six independent valves

Biography

Jules-Emile Demersseman (1833-1866) was in his time a remarkable flautist and noted composer. Today this little known composer is only 'famous' with flute and saxophone players and his name is even not mentioned in most reference books. He

was born in Hondschoote (north of France) on the 9th of January 1833. In October 1844 he was accepted, at the age of eleven, to the Royal Conservatory in Paris. He studied solfège (class of Alexandre Tariot), flute (Jean-Louis Tulou), harmony (class of Coulet) and counterpoint and fugue (Aimé Ambroise Leborne). From the exams of 1845 he gets a mention for solfège and becomes the first prize for flute at only 12 years of age. The year after this he gets his first prize for solfège. In 1852 Jules gets an award for counterpoint and fugue and was admitted to the preparatory test for the Prix de Rome. A year later he was allowed to



compete.

The reputation of Demersseman as a flute virtuoso started to develop in 1856 during the Concerts-Musard and would develop later during the concerts in the Paris Casino (organised by Jean-Baptiste Arban) and those in the 'Champs-Élysées'.

The music press was very inspired by his playing: according to Reichert: 'Nous ne connaissons rien de plus délié, de plus complet et de plus chantant' (we know nothing more refined, more complete or who can sing more on his instrument than Demersseman). According to Fétis: 'Son talent était à la fois très fin, très brillant et très distingué' (his talent was alternating between highly refined, extremely brilliant and very distinguished).

This honourable composer would probably have been better-known if he had not died at the early age of 33 on the 1st December 1866. He died in Paris, presumably of tuberculosis.

Demersseman as flute soloist

In his day, Demersseman was the most famous flute virtuoso in Paris. He quickly earned the nickname 'The Paganini of the

Flute' or 'The Sarasate of the Flute'. He was destined to become the first superstar flautist, but for only a few years. The comparison of Demersseman with Paganini was apt. Like Paganini, Demersseman was not only a dazzling performer, he was also a composer.

His talent as flautist was outstanding and very subtle, quickly gaining a reputation as a virtuoso. In the book 'Taffanel: Genius of The Flute' by Edward Blakeman, Taffanel is quoted as having made these remarks regarding a performance by

Demersseman: 'Demersseman was display, and display was Demersseman...'

However, he was not considered for a professorship at the Paris Conservatory since he, influenced by his teacher, did not want to decide in favour of the modern type of transverse flute designed by Theobald Böhm. One can only speculate whether Demersseman's dismissal played some role in his early demise. This well-known event in his life was a defining moment in his career - but it tells us a lot about his fiery, stubborn

temperament.

Demersseman as composer

Despite his premature death, Demersseman left a quite remarkable output. He composed most of his works for his own instrument, a great many works for flute and piano and also some in the bigger musical forms (such as the three Sonatas for flute and piano).

Like Paganini, his works are much more than mere show-off pieces for his fabulous technique. Demersseman was a composer of remarkable gifts. His natural ability to spin delightful and mysterious melodies was matched by a mastery of compositional techniques. His is superbly crafted music, bustling with enthusiasm and joy. Many of his works (of which there are a substantial number considering his short life) have a particular fascination and memorable quality. They are all for flute and piano, but they include some substantial forms. His piano parts are usually sophisticated and sometimes quite complex. Demersseman would undoubtedly have gone on to compose in larger forms, had he survived to a ripe old age.

As a composer he was first noticed thanks to his well crafted fantasies for flute and the test pieces for the Paris Conservatory in the period 1865-1866: Marche des Géants, Andante religioso opus 43 (dedicated to his teacher Tulou) for flute and organ and the Serenade opus 48 for clarinet and piano. His Fantaisie sur un theme original for saxophone and piano was one of the first original works for saxophone. His Premier Solo de concert opus 19 for flute and piano is in the standard repertoire of every flautist. Probably the best known of his works today is his Solo de Concert Nr. 6 op. 82 which remains a staple of the romantic flute repertoire.

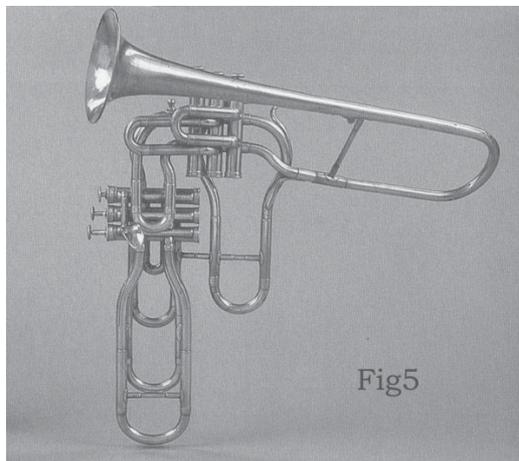
Besides music for his own instrument Demersseman composed a lot of works in other genres. His operetta La Princesse Kaïka was first performed in the small theatre of the Folies-Nouvelles on the 6th of May 1859. Soon after this premiere more of his orchestral works were performed during the concerts at the Paris Casino (the overture Les Génies, Overture de Jubel and a Fantaisie sur une mélodie de Chopin) and also some of his melodies were sung. Historically the most important are the works he composed for the new instruments developed by Adolphe Sax. He became a close friend of Sax and a lot of his new music was published by Sax.

Demersseman's collaboration with Adolphe Sax

Saxhorns and saxophones

Adolphe Sax (1814-1894) was born in Dinant and got his first musical education from 1828 at the 'Ecole Royale de Musique' (the predecessor of the Royal Conservatory) in Brussels. At an early age he already showed an interest in the instrumental making factory of his father Charles-Joseph Sax (1790-1865). In 1842 Sax moves to Paris at the request of General de Rumigny, who wanted to polish the diminishing French military bands and was fascinated by the Austrian and Prussian military bands. When Sax arrives in Paris he first worked on the fanfare band instruments, which leads to patenting the saxhorns in 1843. Adolphe Sax brought order in the chaos of the brass instruments by developing and building his family of saxhorns and saxotrombas. By building instruments with uniformity in the build, a beautiful and homogeneous-sounding family of mellow sound brass instruments was born. The saxhorns (developed for the French military bands) formed the basis for the British brass band and have their regular place in wind and fanfare bands.

In 1847 saxhorns were first used in the Paris opera. Sax becomes the responsible for hiring extra musicians for the opera and he becomes the leader of the 'fanfare'



(banda) of the Paris Opera.

In his patent from the 21st March 1846 Sax explains his intent by the development of the saxophone: 'No single brass instrument sounds sufficiently strong when performing in open air; thence in such circumstances only the combination of different brass instruments are used in the wind bands. On the other hand everybody knows that string instruments have no single effect when used in the open air because of their relatively small sound; this makes them incompetent for use in open air. My attention was attracted by these imperfections and I looked for a middle to fix them. I designed an instrument that could be compared by the nature of his sound to the string instruments but that has more power and intensity. This instrument is the saxophone.'

From 1857 till 1870 Sax was professor for the military musicians who received lessons at the Paris Conservatory for two years in different disciplines of harmony and composition (Emile Jonas and François-Emmanuel-Joseph Bazin), cornet (Joseph Forestier), saxhorns (Jean-Baptiste Arban) and trombone with six independent valves (Antoine-Guillaume Dieppo).

The trombone with six independent valves

Introduction : the different valve systems

Another more significant development in brass instrument design which occupied the inventor at that time was the question of intonation when two or more valves are used in combination. It will be readily appreciated that, as the first valve brings into use additional tubing calculated to lower the pitch of the tube by two semitones, no intonation problems should arise with either the open or the valved note. Similarly, with the second and third valves when used independently, lowering the pitch by one and three semitones respectively. Difficulties arise when more than one valve is depressed at a time. With the smaller instruments the discrepancy is

scarcely perceptible and is corrected instinctively by the ear and lip of the player or thanks to a trigger. Sax himself patented in 1843 a kind of trigger on the main tuning slide, called 'compensateur'. Instruments of the tenor, bass and contrabass registers do experience real tuning difficulties too great to be adjusted by other than mechanical means.

From about 1850, many correcting devices were made and patented. They were of varying degrees of efficiency, none being entirely satisfactory until the appearance in 1874 of David James Blaikley (1846-1936). Blaikley's 'compensating valves' automatically brought in extra tubing when valves were used in combination. His system of compensating valves was patented in 1878. This is probably the best and most elegant system yet devised, for with no more than three pistons fingered in the normal manner theoretical tube lengths are brought into circuit automatically whenever the valves are combined.

Sax tackled the problem in his own individual way with a basically simple idea. He completely re-thought the idea of valves by developing the system of six independent working tubes with their own harmonics. This system was already developed by John Shaw in 1824 but it was Sax who perfected it.

The principles and the working of the independent valves

The slide trombone had remained practically unchanged in principle for more than 300 years. Yet, particularly in the 19th century, many makers saw the slide as something old fashioned and inefficient which ought to be superseded by the valve. The biggest reaction against the valve trombone came, and still comes, from the players themselves. This is not the usual conservative opposition to change and few would disagree that the executants are right in generally preferring the magnificent slide instrument with its open tone and capacity, in common with bowed instruments, of sounding every graduation of pitch within its compass. Sax was no exception in this trend of thinking. He made both slide and valve trombones, sometimes attaching a single valve to the slide instrument to extend its compass to the fundamental having all the potential inherent in the present-day tenor-bass model. In addition, he made a trombone with a slide and three valves which could be played in either method or both combined.

In his quest for good valve intonation, Sax looked to the seven slide 'shifts' from which, using the harmonics produced from each, the slide trombone gets its full chromatic compass. The tuning of each note is always capable of being perfect

since the slide may be placed with the most minute precision in the position to give this result. The inventor then built a trombone with a fixed length of tube calculated to give the notes of the seventh, or most extended position. With the addition of six valves which would always be used independently and never in combination, he devised a system whereby each valve would cut off a portion of the tube in lengths to correspond exactly with the seven positions of the slide. By obviating the need for the operation of more than one valve at a time, accurate tuning of each note was achieved.

The tube of the entire instrument was bent in a practical fashion to allow three horizontally placed valves to be fingered with the right hand in the usual way, with the remaining three valves arranged vertically in front of the player for which he would use the left hand. The complete instrument aroused a good deal of interest but never gained general acceptance. Players preferred the intimacy of the finely adjustable simple slide to this complex piece of mechanism. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the trombone with six pistons à tubes independants was capable of being much more facile in execution than the ponderous slide. Musical exercises were written which, it was claimed, were impossible to perform in anything in brass but a six-valved instrument. The technique, though, was quite different from that of three and four valve instruments with the usual descending valves. Considerable

mental dexterity was required from the player; the least hesitation in selecting the correct valve could result in faulty intonation or performing disaster.

Historical evolution

In 1857, with the help of Gevaert, director of Music at the Academy and a loyal supporter of Sax, the instrumentation of Sax Fanfare Band in Paris Opera was changed to include the six-valved instruments. The score of Ambroise Thomas's *Hamlet* contains a fine trombone solo in the first act. Sax saw this as a showpiece for his new instrument and had it played on the six-valved trombone. Ambroise Thomas is reported to have extolled the instrument as 'the latest of the most admirable of M. Sax's inventions which seems destined to revolutionise the family of brass instruments'. Also in Brussels Opera the trombone with six independent valves made by Mahillon and Lebrun was used, sounding especially good in cheerful passages with grace-notes in *La Bohème*.

The ultimate failure of the instrument cannot be attributed in any way to Sax's enemies. It lay in the fact that players

simply did not like playing it. Victor Mahillon sums up the position: "The system is perfect if we consider only the theoretical side. There is not a musician who does not jump at first sight, but on the practical side it presents difficulties." Sax managed to retain his six-valved trombone in the Opera fanfare band for many years.

Inspired by the use of these unusual trombones by specialists in the Brussels Opera, the orchestra of the late Henry Wood had a set made by the Belgian firm of Lebrun and brought them to England early in the 20th century. A thorough trial



in the Queen's Hall Orchestra, however, did not reveal them to be the trombones of the future, at any rate for British players.

Adolphe Sax the music publisher

From 1858 till 1877 Adolphe Sax was also active as music publisher. Sax mainly published works which were specifically written for his new instruments. In his catalogue we find music for saxophone, saxhorns and music for various instruments with valves. The composers in his catalogues are almost all friends and colleagues as teachers at the Paris Conservatory where they all had a solid reputation as instrumentalists: Jean-Baptiste Arban (1825-1889), Hyacinthe Klosé (1808-1880), Jerome Savari (1819-1870), Jean-Baptiste Singelée (1812-1875), Jules Demersseman (1833-1866) and Emile Jonas (1812-1905).

With his new works, Sax did with his friends and composers the same as Franz Liszt did for piano builder Erard and Frédéric Chopin for Pleyel. Sax surrounded himself with some people who through their new music made publicity for Sax's new instruments.

Also music for instruments with six independent valves could be found in his catalogue. Jules-Emile Demersseman

composed almost the entire output for trombone with six independent valves.

After his bankruptcy of 14 May 1877, his catalogue was sold to J.Kugelmann. The fund Sax-Kugelmann was bought by Margueritat. Later the fund Sax was forwarded to the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris.

The works for trombone with six independent valves

The works that Jules Demersseman wrote for the trombone with six independent valves could be easily subdivided into two main categories: the typical exam-pieces (Solo de Concert) and the themes and variations usually based on well known operatic themes.

Both the typical exam-pieces and the themes and variations breathe the Parisian musical taste of that era and the influence of the romantic movement and salon music. Romanticism was the avant-garde of this period and Paris was the centre of this movement. The aim of Sax was to get his new instruments known outside the military world. The repertoire (from the easy exam pieces to the highly brilliant fantasies) was adjusted to the taste of the Parisian public of that era and its main purpose was to convince the audience of the Parisian salons. The musical salons were the ideal profile for the upcoming upper class of industrialisation: the bourgeoisie from the industrial and banking world made Paris very rich.

Salon music was a popular genre and most of the salon music was piano music in the romantic style, mostly played by the composer during the so called 'salons'. Besides violin virtuoso Paganini, Paris took the attention of a whole new generation of pianists who could charm both the concert public and the public of the salons (Kalkbrenner, Thalberg, Czerny and the two most famous virtuosos, Chopin and Liszt).

Mostly these instrumental pieces are rather short and focus mainly on the virtuoso possibilities or the emotional expression of a certain sentimental character in music. Usual sub-genres within salon music are the opera-paraphrase or fantasy, where well-known themes from a famous opera form the basis for the composition and the musical character-pieces where a certain situation is depicted in music. The music therefore must be seductive, whimsical, spontaneous, pleasing and happy to gain its place within the Parisian bourgeoisie, where music was a status symbol for their place at the social ranking. The preference in music goes to the pittoresque, sometimes even to the more exotic taste. Above all this instrumental music breathes a lot of brilliant and virtuoso playing.

The 'Solo de Concert'

The first kind of pieces wanted to strengthen the link between the pedagogical and the teaching process to becoming a professional. The many Solo de Concert were mostly written for the competitions at the Paris Conservatory and are a mosaic of the many technical difficulties and virtuoso effects a student should master. These works usually give a good impression of the technical possibilities of the instrument: the use of the instrument from the lowest to the highest notes, arpeggios, technical scale exercises and chromatic runs that all illustrate the technical level of the performer. There are also various passages where the sound quality and intonation are tested. Contrasts between legato and staccato playing are also tested a great deal. Different forms of articulation are a regular part of this Gradus ad Parnassum, the summary of what a player should know on the technical and musical side of his instrument.

Sax used his influence to have his six-valved trombones and saxhorns tried out in the band of the Garde Républicaine and the Guides. The Gymnase had its classes in military music transferred to the Conservatoire and the six-valved system was included in the syllabus, as it was at the Brussels Conservatoire under Henri Séha.

The professor at the Paris Conservatory from 1836-1871 was Guillaume Dieppo (1808-1878). It is certain that until 1870 the study of the trombone with six independent valves was obligatory. It was Dieppo who introduced the works by Demersseman at the Conservatory. Also his student Paul Delisse (1817-1888), who succeeded him as teacher from 1871-1888, used works by Demersseman, as they were at the Gymnase musical militaire (1836-1855) and later at the Classe militaire du Conservatoire (1857-1870). In the period 1863-1895 works by Demersseman were chosen as test pieces at the Paris Conservatory more than 18 times.

The repertoire used in Paris served also as an example for other Conservatories around France and abroad. This can be seen by studying the repertoire used at the Brussels Conservatory in the period 1877-1914. From 1887-1826 Henri Séha (1860-1941) was teacher in Brussels. Séha studied in Paris in the class of Paul Delisse and worked closely with Arban and Adolphe Sax. Together with Sax he worked intensively on the acoustics of the lower brass instruments. Séha introduced the works he had studied in Paris in Brussels. His student Estévan Dax (1888-1956), who became professor for trombone in Brussels in 1941, published a few works for trombone with six independent valves under the title Dix

Grands Morceaux pour trombone - some of these titles had not been published by Sax in Paris before.

The Themes and Variations

The Parisian public was completely captivated by opera in this period. Opera was the most important romantic genre and the most popular form of entertainment during the nineteenth century which attracted a lot of foreign composers (mainly Italian) to Paris. The main influences were the operas by Luigi Cherubini and most of all the success of Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Seviglia* in 1819. Rossini's influence in Paris would remain during the following decade where he would rewrite some of his earlier operas to fulfil the taste of the Parisian opera public. He also developed his grandioso style of operas as *Le Comte Ory* (1828) and *Guillaume Tell* (1829) which were a role model for the lighter operas in France. The influence of his *Guillaume Tell* was enormous, as were the later works of Meyerbeer and his French epigonists Halévy and Auber. They were all a model for the spectacular 'grand opera' with a lot of emphasis on grand scale opera - spectacular effects and a lot of emphasis on brilliant vocal parts, splendour and magnificence (with luxurious costumes) and an important part for large-scale orchestral effects and ballet. The 'grand opera' dominated Paris from 1820 till 1850.

Also, the instrumental music was influenced greatly by the opera. Like his contemporaries Sarasate and Paganini, Demersseman composed a lot of fantasies on well known opera tunes. In order to capitalise on this, instrumental composers vied with each other to write the most brilliant opera fantasies. They chose the tunes and let their imagination take flight. Some composers were content merely to select tunes and connect them with some source. Others, like Franz Liszt and Jules Demersseman, plumbed the depths with musical psychoanalysis. In all there was ample room for brilliant virtuoso display.

Demersseman's themes and variations on well known opera tunes are based on:

Don Juan – W.A. Mozart
William Tell – G. Rossini
L'Âme en peine – Fr. von Flotow

Also his fantasy on *Le Désir* (Beethoven), his introduction and variations on *Le Carnaval de Venise* and his *Grande Fantaisie dramatique* are themes and variations in the style of opera with virtuoso recitatives, cadenzas and arias. His themes and variations are comparable with those written for cornet by Jean-Baptiste Arban (1825-1889).

Why the music of Jules Demersseman was completely lost and forgotten and has the quality to be played again more often...

In Adolphe Sax's time he and some of the leading composers of his time thought that his invention of the trombone with six independent valves would revolutionise the entire family of low brass instruments. Combining this idea with his newly invented saxhorns, Sax thought that with this combination of perfect intonation (which posed a lot of problems with the low brass instruments at that time) and virtuosity, the new trombone with six independent valves would soon be used in favour of the old slide trombone. However, history teaches us that the system of compensating rather than independent valves developed by Blaikley was favoured.

Instruments developed in this 'compensating system' were favoured by players since then because of the better intonation and the equal sound quality during the different registers when using valves.

The age of instrumental development in Paris was also the golden age of grand opera and salon music. The trombone with six independent valves was extensively used both in the opera (both as solo instrument or to add an extra colour in the 'fanfare' (banda) led by Sax. Also the instrument was taught by experts at the important Conservatories.

An entire repertoire was composed for this new instrument by then Belgian, now French born, flute virtuoso Jules Demersseman (1833-1866) and published by Sax. Demersseman died at an early age and after Sax's bankruptcy the music for those new instruments was almost completely forgotten although played very often before almost as standard repertoire for the instrument.

It seems that after all these years the euphonium is the natural heir for this music. It is non idiomatically written in romantic and virtuoso style by a flute virtuoso of his time. It is difficult, charming music designed both to entertain the Parisian public of that era or to be used by students at Paris Conservatoire to become 'masters' of their instrument.

Surprisingly enough, the same repertoire composed at the same place for another relatively new instrument (the Arban pieces) were used as the standard repertoire for most brass instruments since then. Isn't it time to have a look at Demersseman too?

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