LUTE MUSIC IN THE AREA OF CONTEMPORARY SLOVAKIA IN THE PERIOD OF RENAISSANCE JEAN BAPTISTA BESARD - THESAURUS HARMONICUS

The article analyses the issue of occurrence of lute music, its repertoire, players, and composers connected with the area of Slovakia in the age of humanism.

1. Introduction

Lute played an important role in the history of the European musical culture of the 16th and 17th centuries. It influenced some processes of musical history to a considerable extent, e.g. stabilization of tonality, development of variety principle, formation of suite and development of note writing. In our musicology literature there are not many works to be found that would deal in detail with the occurrence of lute music in Slovakia or individual relics related to this kind of music. Some mentions about lute music in Slovakia can be found in compilatory/synthetical works of František Fagiba [1], Richard Rybarič [2], Ladislav Kačic [3]. Antonín Horéjš[4] and Marta Hulková [5] make analyses of lute relics in the area of Spiš region. Ingeborg Šišková [6] brings scientific elaboration of the transcription of the lute tablature in Slovakia. Péter Király [7] ranks among the experts abroad dealing with study of lute play in the area of the former Hungary. Foreign lexicons also cover the issue of lute play.

2. Lute music in the area of contemporary Slovakia in the period of renaissance

During the period of Renaissance in the area of present-day Slovakia significant economic, political and cultural changes were happening and they resulted in better conditions for the development of musical culture and the occurrence of lute music accordingly. The evidence of this are also some references about activities of some lute players of European dimension like Hans Newsidler or Bálint Bakfark [8]. The highest level of musical life was reached together with Bratislava in towns of Eastern Slovakia - the extent of music collections of Levoča and Bardejov confirm this.

[5] In literature we can find information about an early existence of music for this instrument from the 1st half of the 16th century. Several significant people - lute players of that time - are related to Slovakia, Bratislava is stated as a birthplace of the Newsidler brothers, Hans (1508-1563) and Melichor (1507-1590), German lute players acting in Norimberg. In 1530 Hans Newsidler moved from Bratislava to Norimberg where he published a few tablature books for six-course lute. Despite his numerous stays in Vienna during his journeys across Europe, there were no traces left of him in Slovakia. We can assume that he gained basic musical education in Bratislava, which can be proved by the existence of lute playing in this town in that period. A Hungarian poet, Sebestyén Tinódi (1505-1556) was another lute player, a creator of a historical song and the author of the collection Cronica. In 1544 he stayed in Trnava as well as in other parts of Slovakia. Tinódi ranked among the musicians (lute players) wandering around Slovakia and with his singing accompanied by lute revolting against the Turks [1]. Some connections between Slovakia and Bálint Bakfark (1507-1576), one of the most important lute players in the 16th century, have been made in literature. He was active in the noble courts of Europe. František Zagiba [1] traces back his stay in our area, his visit to Trenčín and possibly giving concerts in 1566. Lives of these three personalities of lute music are closely connected with the period when in Slovakia - in contrast to the past - there were many major political, industrial and cultural changes. With the oncoming reformation the gregorian chant ceased to be the object of interest and attention was shifted to spiritual songs and secular music. These tendencies were best demonstrated in three regions - Bratislava in the west, Kremnica and Banská Bystrica in central Slovakia and Spiš region and Bardejov in the east. In the inventory of an evangelical church in Bratislava there are two compositions from 1651 where lutes are mentioned in consort music. [9] On the basis of this we can come to the conclusion that lute music existed in this town. In towns of eastern Slovakia the musical life reached the highest level, together with Bratislava. The evidence of this is the scale of Levoča’s and Bardejov’s collections of music of 16th century.

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and 17th centuries. Among numerous printings and manuscripts of sacred characters predominantly, also some relics of secular instrumental music were preserved from those times. Among them three printed lute tablature books, too [5] Two of these - Wais- sellius’s Tabulaturbuch from 1592 [10] and Besard’s Thesaurus harmonicus from 1603 [11] have been preserved until today. About the last Phales’s printing Lucaulatum theatrum musicum from 1568 [1] we can learn from literature [1]. The occurrence of these pieces of art witnesses the presence of brilliant players among nobility or townsfolk of whom we can claim that they reached the same level as the European ones. We do not have much knowl- edge about the way of education of lute playing as well as of edu- cation of professional lute players in this area. We know that in Banská Bystrica Gerle’s lute book from 1546 was used, which is a part – as Marta Hulková claims – of music collection of the library of Johann Dernschwam. The library is currently archived here. Besard left Augsburg shortly after publishing Novus partus on 1th September 1617.

Tablatures from Besard’s collection which were not attributed to other authors, may not have been written by Besard himself as he was considered to be more a publisher and an elaborator. His authorship of majority of works that are connected with his name is uncertain as well. Jean Baptista Besard was also the author of books and writings concerning music like De modo in testudine libellus [11] that is a part of Thesaurus He is the author of Ad artem which is a revised edition of De Modo.

Some other documents written by him are: Mercurio Gallobelgici from 1604, which is the collection of historical documents, Antrum philosophicum in quo pleraque arcana physica quae ad vulgariores humani corporis affectus currandos attinent, which is a large compendium of medical knowledge of that period.

4. Thesaurus harmonicus

The original of this precious document is a part of Levoča’s collection of music and is in the depository of the Evangelical Church under the signature S157, new signature is 7A. It is also available in the form of a microfilm at The Institution of Musical Science of Slovak Academy of Science (SAV) in Bratislava. The musical print Thesaurus harmonicus divini Laurencini Romani, Koln 1603, contains 405 compositions in French lute tablature in ten books, from which probably 46 works are Besard’s, 4 preludes, 3 phantasies, 6 caniones gallicae, 9 passamezo, pavane hispanica, bergamesca, 4 galiards, 14 allemandes, courtant de guerre and 3 ballets.

Besard’s lute music is not of extraordinary quality. Short pre- ludes win the audiences over mostly with their improvisational quality while long passamezo - variations consist only of many mechanical cumulated reversed chords. Compositions are charac- terized by very difficult technique of play. Frequent and extreme change of positions, fast passages, nervous rhythm, unusual touch sequences as well as expressive disonancies show that Besard was a pupil of the great Italian lute virtuoso Laurencini. Thesaurus, European anthology of lute music which includes nearly complete


He was born around 1567 in Jussey or Besancon, and died after 1617. He studied law and theology at a university in Dôle and graduated there in 1587 in civil and ecclesiastical law. From 1587 to 1592 (or 1596) he stayed in Rome where he probably studied medicine and learned to play the lute at Laurencini [13]. On 13th May 1592 Besard was matriculated at a university in Heidelberg. No later than from March 1597 he was active in Koln where he tutored at least 20 students of lute. In summer or autumn 1597 he was not successful in applying for the position of a lute player in the court of the landgrave Moritz Hessen in Kassel. From October 1600 to March 1601 he worked as a lute teacher in Koln. In February 1602 in Besancon he married Péronne Jacquot. She came from an aristocratic family of lawyers. In 1603 in Koln Besard published – at his own expense – lute anthology Thesaurus hamon-
sequencing of lute music, preludes, phantasies, intavulations of madrigals, psalms and chansons, songs accompanied by lute, dance forms like passamezzo, galliard, allemand, courant, branl, contains apart from known pieces also compositions of unknown composers. *Thesaurus* was used by lute players from all Europe as a source of a new repertoire as well as a textbook and a manual. The repertoire collected by Besard in this work emphasizes lute encyclopaedic knowledge of that period. As the most appreciated lute player of his time he considers, apart from his teacher Laurencini, a Frenchman A. Francisque whose collection *Tresor d'Orpheé* is similar to *Thesaurus* [14]. A Norimberg editor of the large lute anthology *Testudo Gallo-Germanica* from 1615 G. L. Fuhrmann was in personal contact with Besard which is evidenced by Besard’s vote of thanks and a high number of concordances between Fuhrmann’s publications and *Thesaurus*. Another model for this collection are also publications of Pierre Phalese [13].

In the introduction Besard deals with the typology and classification of various forms. In case of e.g. galliard, which Besard dedicated one whole book, he differentiates dance form with a periodical structure and stylized galliard with variation forms. *Thesaurus* with 14 Besard’s compositions in the 7th book was the most important source for allemand at that time.

5. Conclusion

In the end we can conclude that musical life in Slovakia in the period of humanism – even if little later – tried to keep up with the development of trends in European secular music which is proved also by the existence of some precious documents of lute music of that period in this area. It is also recorded in primary and secondary sources. At the beginning of the 17th century Jean Baptista Besard was considered the best expert at the technique of lute playing. Along with the stated historical facts Besard is presented as a well educated man in more fields which only confirms the ideal of a man of those times.

References