



Julius Weissenborn (1837-1888)

Today Weissenborn is a household name to every bassoonist worldwide, primarily on account of the two books of etudes which are studied by every beginner on the instrument. His Tutor for the instrument has similarly been revised and reissued many times. All three of these publications have remained in print ever since they first appeared in the 1880s.. Their high calibre is however hardly surprising when we consider his career to have been something more than that of an orchestral player and conservatoire teacher. It is possible now to identify him also as an ambitious choral conductor and composer of large-scale works for the church, for orchestra, and for military band which enjoyed local esteem. This is thanks to recent discovery of a number of the composer's unpublished manuscripts

and personal documents which were brought in the 1930s to England by his grandson and have recently been acquired by William Waterhouse, London.

Weissenborn's early success as a player was in part due both to his father and his elder brother being professional bassoonists. Johann Weissenborn (1788-1865) was 'Musikus - Fagottist' in Friedrichstanneck in Thuringia (which then belonged to the principality of Altenburg), where Julius was born 13th April 1837. His brother Friedrich Louis (1813-1862) had already in 1835 been appointed to the Leipzig orchestra; here he played bassoon until 1855, appearing with them as soloist eight times between 1837 and 1849, and switching to viola until his retirement in 1860. Julius doubtless already at a young age learned much from both of them: he also took composition lessons from a teacher in Leipzig to whom he dedicated a youthful four-part *Lied Weine nicht* dated 30th Sept. 1852. Further compositions and transcriptions for orchestra are dated from Rostock in 1854, from St Gallen in 1855/56, and from Eisenberg and Düsseldorf in 1856, indicating that he was gaining professional playing experience in these towns. In 1856 he succeeded in obtaining a remarkable

appointment for one aged only 20 - that of principal bassoonist in the Leipzig orchestra as successor to Carl von Inten. Here his orchestral duties included playing in church and at the opera as well as in the concert-hall. Two years later on Jan 14th 1860 he got married. In August of the same year he obtained glowing testimonials from two distinguished conductor colleagues. These were Julius Rietz of Dresden and Moritz Hauptmann of Leipzig, and they both testified in glowing terms to his capabilities as all-round musician - not only as artist bassoonist but also as composer and arranger. It is evident from these documents that Julius was anxious at this time to secure an appointment as choral conductor; however it would appear that these ambitious plans came to nothing.

In 1869 he appeared for the first time as bassoon soloist with the orchestra; further solo engagements were to follow in 1876 and 1879. In 1874 a major work for soloists, chorus and orchestra - *the cantata Die Drei*, to a text by Lenau - was premiered at a Matinée in the Gewandhaus Hall, where it was well received in the local press; this was followed in June of the succeeding year by the *motet Herr, neige deine Ohren*, which was premiered in the

Thomaskirche. This had been preceded in April by a performance of his *Fest-Marsch* in the Stadt-Theater.

Although by this time Weissenborn was an experienced composer of works for orchestra, military band and choir, it was not until 1882 that his music was commercially published for the first time. There were perhaps two reasons for this: his motet had been performed in the Thomaskirche for the second time in June, and he was appointed that year to a newly created teaching post for bassoon at the Royal Conservatorium of Music. Three works were published, allotted the opus numbers 3, 4 and 5 (he had earlier published as op1 a Masonic Hymn at his own expense). The *Romanze op3* for bassoon & piano and the *Motette op5* were issued by Robert Forberg, while the set of *Six bassoon trios op4* was published by Merseburger, who had recently published a substantial trio by the prolific organist August Bergt (1771-1837). The performance on 21st May 1882 in the local Central Hall of his three so-called *Humoristische Stücke (Humorous Pieces)* for trio doubtless prompted Carl Merseburger, a Leipzig publisher specializing in teaching material, to commission a work of comparable scale from the newly

appointed professor. A study of the autograph of this work reveals it to be an assemblage of pieces written over a period of time. *The Polka* (#3) had originally been written for piano twenty years earlier for the golden wedding of the composer's grandparents in Tanneck, according to a manuscript entitled *Großvaters Goldenes-Hochzeitstänzchen* dated June 16 1863. The imposing *Serenade* (#1), written in the academic style adopted by Weissenborn for his more serious output, is written on paper of different format to that of the others and may be presumed also to date from an earlier period. Once this had been adopted as opening movement, the earlier title of *Humoristische Stücke* was no longer appropriate. They thus appeared simply as *Sechs Stücke für drei Fagotte op4*.

In 1887 he retired from the orchestra, having completed 30 years of service. However before this he had evidently been devoting much thought and effort to his professorial duties. This is revealed by his plan to create a large-scale *Tutor in three parts*: the first would comprise practical instruction, the second two sets of etudes, and part three a set of some 18 *Studies for Tone and Performance with Piano Accompaniment*. This ambitious concept he sadly failed to realize,

for reasons that can only be surmised today; most of what survived was divided between four different publishers. In the event the tutor designed for part one appeared already in 1887 as *Praktische Fagottschule / Practical Bassoon-School* published by Forberg. The two sets of etudes were published the same year as op8.1 and op8.2, this time by Peters (it should be pointed out that their edition of the second set, reprinted countless times and still in general use, seriously undermined its value by omitting the vital superscripts, omitting ten of the original sixty, transposing six, and destroying their logical ordering by key and difficulty). Of the contents of part three, in 1888 Forberg issued *6 Vortragsstücke op9*, Breitkopf & Härtel issued *3 Vortragsstücke op10*, while a little later Merseburger published *Capriccio* as op14. A remaining set of 5 *Kleine Stücke* of beginner standard, which had remained in manuscript, were issued in 1994 by Hofmeister.

On 21st April 1888 Julius Weissenborn died at his home in Leipzig, just one week after his 51st. birthday. He left behind a legacy of significant value to successive generations of bassoonists worldwide.

by William Waterhouse

Julius Weissenborn (1837-1888)

I had thought of Weissenborn as mainly a bassoon pedagogue until I played his bassoon trios several years ago. They are beautifully written, a joy to play and fun to listen to. It made me realize that Weissenborn was a gifted composer as well as teacher. I am always looking for works for my students to play, and I discovered his *Arioso* and *Humoresque* work very well for beginning student solos. I was very happy to discover the complete set of *Six Recital Pieces, opus 9* while the Detroit Symphony was on tour in Europe several years ago and sought out his other works. The *Capriccio* is a stand-alone work that is the most bravura on this recording.

I am grateful to the eminent bassoon scholar, William Waterhouse of London, England for providing me with his latest biography on Weissenborn and copies of the *Romanze, Op. 3* and *Three Recital Pieces, Op. 10* that have been out of print for many years. I would also like to thank my accompanist, Michele Cooker for all her help in putting this CD together and to Juan de Gomar and Kristen Sonneborn for giving up their valuable time in beautiful Jackson Hole during the

Grand Teton Music Festival under trying circumstances to record the trios. My wife, Treva Womble, was a great help in the recording studio listening and helping with keeping the music honest!

Weissenborn is a full-blown romantic composer and I hope you enjoy this neglected music as much as I have enjoyed rediscovering it.

Robert Williams, August, 2004





Michele Cooker, piano

Partner to many distinguished musicians, Pianist Michele Cooker has performed on concert series and participated in festivals in the United States, Canada and Mexico. She has appeared on PBS and has recorded numerous programs broadcast live for WFMT-Radio in Chicago and the CBC in Canada.

In addition to bassoonist Robert Williams, Ms. Cooker collaborates frequently with members of the Detroit Symphony and faculty at numerous universities and conservatories throughout the Midwest. In addition, she serves on the board of directors at the Kerrytown Concert House in Ann Arbor, where she is director of the outreach program and maintains a private teaching studio. When not playing her piano she can be seen taking care of her five Schnauzers or making outrageous rock gardens.



Kristen Sonneborn, bassoon

Kristen Sonneborn joined the Naples Philharmonic Orchestra as principal bassoonist in 1995 after playing assistant principal bassoon with both the San Antonio Symphony and the Florida Symphony. She holds a B.M. degree in performance from St. Olaf College where her teacher was Charles Ullery and obtained her M.M. degree in performance from the University of Southern California where she studied with Norman Herzberg. While in Los Angeles, Sonneborn was an active freelance musician in area orchestras and studios, playing for various composers including Lalo Schifrin and John Williams. In 1990 and 1991 she was a fellowship recipient to the Tanglewood Music Center where she performed under Seiji Ozawa and Leonard Bernstein. Since 1993, she has spent each July as a member of the Grand Teton Music Festival Orchestra.



Juan de Gomar, bassoon

Juan de Gomar, contrabassoonist / bassoonist with The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, joined the faculty at Kennesaw State University in 2002. Prior to coming to Atlanta, he held the same position with the Oregon Symphony for almost 17 years. Originally from Detroit, Michigan, Juan studied at Wayne State University with Robert Williams, Principal Bassoonist of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and he received his bachelor's degree from Temple University, where he studied with Bernard Garfield, former Principal Bassoonist of The Philadelphia Orchestra. Juan has performed with many music festivals throughout the state of Oregon and nationally, including Grand Teton, Aspen, and Interlochen. He was also a member of The Bassoon Brothers, a musically challenged bassoon quartet made up of the bassoon section of The Oregon Symphony. The quartet's CDs *Wanted* and *Captured* on

Crystal Records exemplify the group's low-down playing and bass behavior. Juan has also recorded with ASO, OSO, Oregon Bach Festival, and The Third Angle New Music Ensemble.



Bassoon and Piano works recorded at Solid Sound, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Eric Wojahn, Recording Engineer and Treva Womble Producer

Bassoon Trios recorded at Walk Festival Hall, Teton Village, Wyoming, Richard Mintel, Recording Engineer

All works edited and mastered at Solid Sound by Eric Wojahn

Cover photo of three Meissen "Affenkapelle" Monkey Band Bassoonists from the collection of Robert Williams.



Robert Williams, Bassoon

Robert Williams has been Principal Bassoonist of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra since September of 1974. Prior to that appointment he was solo bassoonist with the Winnipeg Symphony, Winnipeg CBC Orchestra, Colorado Philharmonic and Tucson Symphony. He has also played summer engagements with the Minnesota Orchestra and Boston Symphony at Tanglewood.

Williams also plays in the Grand Teton Music Festival, Cut Time Players, Neo-Bubonic Bassoon Quartet, DSO Bassoon Quartet and Woodwind Quintet. He has been on the music faculties of the Aspen Music School and Festival, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Wayne State University, the Grand Teton Orchestra Training Institute, Claremont Music Festival and the Utah Music Festival.

Williams can be heard on all of the DSO recordings conducted by former Music Director Antal Dorati, including the award winning Rite of Spring and on recordings led by Neeme Järvi. Fox Products released the new Neo-Bubonic Bassoon Quartet recording in 2003.

A native of Tucson, Arizona, he graduated with honors from the University of Arizona and did post graduate work at the University of Southern California. His major bassoon teachers include Wendal Jones, Leonard Sharrow and Norman Herzberg.

Williams plays on a Fox model 601 bassoon, # 30,000 built in South Whitley, Indiana in 2000.

ROMANZE OF WEISSENBORN

Music of Christian Julius Weissenborn for Bassoon and Piano and Three Bassoon Trios

Robert Williams: Bassoon; Michele Cooker: Piano; Kristen Sonneborn: Bassoon; Juan de Gomar: Bassoon

WORKS FOR BASSOON AND PIANO

Six Recital Pieces, Opus 9

- | | |
|--------------|-------|
| 1. Arioso | 20:14 |
| 2. Humoreske | 2:10 |
| 3. Adagio | 1:57 |
| 4. Notturmo | 4:52 |
| 5. Scherzo | 6:17 |
| 6. Ballade | 3:18 |
| | 1:40 |

Three Recital Pieces, Opus 10

- | | |
|--------------------|-------|
| 7. Lied ohne Worte | 17:09 |
| 8. Romanze | 5:05 |
| 9. Elegie | 6:06 |
| | 5:58 |

10. Capriccio, Opus 14

6:58

11. Romanze, Opus 3

6:36

THREE BASSOON TRIOS FROM OPUS 4

12. Polka

"Tea dance in the little country manor"

3:16

13. Scherzo Alla Mazurka

"Dance in the village pub"

4:51

14. Turkish March

"Midnight parade of the Guard"

3:25

Total Time 62:29



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All works except trios are published by Rob. Forberg, Musieverlag.

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