

Amilcare Ponchielli's *Capriccio*

By Sandro Caldini

During the beginning of this year I had the opportunity to stay in touch with the Ricordi Music Archive and, for me, it was really a great chance to check Amilcare Ponchielli's manuscript of *Capriccio for Oboe and Piano, Op.80*.

Ponchielli (1834-1886) was a very famous opera composer, Verdi apart, and a composition teacher at the Conservatory of Music in Milan (among his pupils there were Puccini and Mascagni). He wrote only a few chamber works but one of the most performed is the *Capriccio for Oboe and Piano*. I think the overwhelming majority of oboe players know this fine work that was published by Ricordi in 1889, three years after the composer's death. Moreover, I remember that in 1990, I had the chance to play this work many times and I understood that the *Capriccio* contained many misprints, especially regarding the phrasing, slurs and dynamic marks. So I wasn't really surprised on seeing the manuscript. There are many mistakes in the scores on sale.

The explanation of these differences is related to the death of the composer from a pneumonia attack during the beginning of January, 1886, when he was in Milan. Of course he hadn't the occasion to proof-read the *Capriccio*. Another possibility is that the Ricordi company sought to exploit the name of Ponchielli so as to put on the market many of his chamber works not yet published.

Another interesting feature of the *Capriccio* is the similarity with the *Piccolo Concertino Op.76 for Oboe and Piano*, written by Ponchielli when he was thirteen years old. The *Piccolo Concertino* is a work now available from Breitkopf & Härtel (Musica Rara collection n.MR2257) and it is preserved in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz (manuscript n. 1813.69); it was written on the 14th of February 1848. The handwritten bears these words:

"Piccolo Concertino, dedicated to his dear school friend Cesare Confalonieri and composed by Amilcare Ponchielli."

Dear Confalonieri,

This is a little musical work of mine that I dedicated to you. I hope that you will not refrain from accepting it. I greet you in haste and remain your dear friend,

Amilcare Ponchielli

Here, the 14th of February 1848 begun at 3 p.m. and completed at 7, during the private lesson".

This *Concertino* could be divided in five parts at least: a short piano introduction (Andantino) leads to an oboe cadenza that introduces an operatic "romanza" (Andantino); then an Allegro for piano alone introduces an Allegretto (for oboe and piano); the work ends with a typical "cabaletta" (Finale) in which we curiously find five low B flats in the oboe part !!!

The *Capriccio* is, of course, more articulate but at the same time we find the piano introduction (Allegro non tanto), the oboe cadenza, the operatic "romanza" (Andante), the virtuosic Finale. It is worth reading what Martin Furber wrote for the program notes of an ASV CD on which **John Anderson** plays the *Capriccio*: "The *Capriccio*, a piece that mixes soulful melody with jaunty high spirits, demands both musical sensitivity and dexterity. The work progresses by way of an entertaining series of twists and turns, one moment elegant, another gay. There is a cheery march and occasional agitato flurries (moments of restlessness). The finale, in the style of an operatic *Cabaletta*, is something of a showstopper and stretches the soloist to the very limit of expressive and technical ability".

The *Capriccio* was also dedicated to the oboist **Cesare Confalonieri** (1831-1902), a pupil of **Carlo Yvon** (1799-1854) and oboe teacher at the Conservatory of Music in Milan as well as oboe solo at La Scala Theater. Besides Confalonieri was really a close friend of Ponchielli as these two works for oboe and piano testify. In fact, the manuscript bears these few words :

Capriccio per oboe composto e dedicato all'amico Confalonieri Cesare.

(Capriccio for oboe composed and dedicated to my friend Confalonieri Cesare).

Now we could cast a glance at the modern editions of the *Capriccio*. There are three: Ricordi, McGinnis & Marx and Molenaar. The first two are the same edition. In fact, the McGinnis & Marx is a photocopy of an old Ricordi edition (cfr. the edition numbers and the page lay-out). They contain a lot of minor mistakes and a lot of misprints. Especially the bars nn.6, 14, 52, 56, 66, 67, 97, 98, 106, 121, 133, 157-159, 173, 175, 176 and 205 are very different in the original hand-

writing. The Molenaar edition is, in my opinion, a revised Ricordi edition and it is more distant from what Ponchielli wrote.

The length of the Capriccio is 223 bars. Let us see now the most important mistakes :

Bar n.6-piano (right hand) - the 3rd crotchet is a chord(B flat, D flat and F); the Ricordi score bears only an F.

Bar n.14-oboe cadenza - the 6 groups of 32nds are without slur and accents; moreover there is no fermata on the 1st E natural.

Bar n.52-oboe part - slurs contain mistakes: the first two 16ths are slurred with the last group of 16ths in the bar n.51; then the E and the F, the B flat and the A, the G sharp and the A, the D and the C, the B natural and the C are all slurred two-by-two.

Bar n.56-oboe part - the same as above.

Bar n.66-piano (right hand) - the chord is B flat-C-E instead of C-F-A. **Oboe part** - the 3rd group of 16ths is E-D-D flat-C

Bar n.67 - this bar exists in two different versions with different piano accompaniment. **Oboe part** - the 9th semiquaver is a quaver (!) , so there is no C !

Bar n.97-oboe part - there is a dotted Bb (minim) and a crotchet (G over the staff)

Bar n.98-oboe part - in the first half of the bar there is a minim (G over the staff)

Bar n.106-oboe cadenza - after the first fermata, there are 4 crotchets (no quavers); then there is no descending arpeggio but a chromatic scale that ends on the E (without fermata!) and no grace note before the low D.

Bar n.121-piano part (right hand) - the 3rd tremolo is F-C and C (instead of D)

Bar n.133-piano part (right and left hands) - tremolo instead of repeated chords

Bar n.157-oboe part - the variation begins with A-low E-G-low E. Moreover there is no grace note !

Bar n.158-oboe part - no trill over the F

Bar n.159-oboe part - no trill over the first G

Bar n.173-oboe part - see bar n.157

Bar n.174-oboe part - see bar n.158

Bar n.175-oboe part - the 1st group of semiquavers is G (over the staff) and without trill) -F-high C-high B flat ;the 2nd group of semiquavers is high D-high C-high B flat-high A; the 3rd group of semiquavers is high C-high B flat- high A-G (over the staff). **Piano part (right hand)** - the 1st chord is C-F-C instead of C-F-A

Bar n.176-oboe part - the 1st group of semiquavers is middle C-middle D-middle C- middle B flat

Bar n.205-piano part (left hand) - the 1st note is a crotchet, the 2nd crotchet is a tremolo. **Piano part (right hand)** - the 2nd crotchet (chord) is a tremolo; there is not the octave D in the triplet.

Conclusion - I hope that this short research helps all the instrumentalists interested in this delightful work for the oboe. But we can now ask ourselves: who was the proof-reader and why did he change what the composer wrote ?

Sandro Caldini was born in 1958 in Arezzo, Italy. He studied oboe with Federico de Sanctis at the Conservatory of Music in Florence and graduated in 1983. He also studied chamber music with John Blakely and English horn with Geoffrey Browne. In 1985, as an English horn player, he won, together with his brother Fulvio, the 1st prize in chamber music at the International Music Competition in Stresa. From 1982 to 1984 he has been playing as solo oboe of the Chamber Orchestra of Florence and in 1989, he taught at the Federal University in Rio de Janeiro. He collaborated with Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Corale Coradini, G.A.M.S. orchestra, Ensemble Art et Jeunesse and Minimal Ensemble playing in Italy, Germany, England, Sweden, Brazil and U.S.A. In 1992 he qualified as oboe teacher in the Music Academy and taught at the Conservatory of Music in Milan and Cagliari; he is now teaching at the Conservatory of Music in Udine. He is a member of IDRS and BDRS and collaborates with some magazines such as Toscana oggi, I Fiati, Double Reed News, The Journal of IDRS and The Double Reed. Since 1993 he has been publishing, as editor, Pasculli's and Vivaldi's works for the Musica Rara and Breitkopf & Härtel. He recorded a CD for the Ariston label.