

Book Review: *Curtal, Dulcian, Bajón: A History of the Precursor to the Bassoon*, Maggie Kilbey, St. Albans, 2002, ISBN 0 9543492 0 2

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Kudos go to Maggie Kilbey, who has written a significant book about the early development of the bassoon's predecessor, the one-piece curtal. This well-written and well-researched book fills a void in the literature about the bassoon's precursor.

Kilbey writes about the curtal (the English name for the one-piece predecessor to the bassoon which is commonly known by its German name *Dulcian*). Her original concept was "to compile a complete guide of all extant curtals and all known references to their use." This proved to be too comprehensive to be practical, especially regarding known references. Her book does index all known extant curtals; however, the chronological and repertoire sections are representative rather than all-inclusive.

Kilbey divides the book into three parts: Part I – History and Repertoire, Part II – Location of Extant Instruments, and Part III - Appendices. Part I covers the history and repertoire of the curtal, including an overview of how the curtal and the *bajón* were constructed. Of particular note, Kilbey approaches the history and repertoire by region, hence the title of her book. The curtal was most commonly referred to as the *fagotto* in Italy, the *curtal* in England, the *bajón* in Spain and Latin America, the *Dulcian* in Germany and Northern Europe, and the *fagot* in France and the Low Countries, and Kilbey dedicates a chapter to each region. Each chapter is subdivided into sections that cover: the use of the instrument in the region, a chronology of references, repertoire, and instrument makers. She supplements the text extensively with high quality black and white pictures and drawings (147 in all)!

The sections covering the use of the curtal are generally brief, but nevertheless contain useful information. It is interesting to note the diverse use of the curtal in different regions. For instance, the *bajón* was "...used almost exclusively in the church..." and was commonly used by nuns in convents to replace the bass voice.

The references are fascinating (and sometimes humorous) to read. Kilbey clearly lists dates and locales, describes the historical context when appropriate, and includes in the references instrument purchases and inventories, art work, books, compositions, correspondence, advertisements, dictionaries and audition advertisements. Of particular interest was a reference to an elderly *bajonista* who, in his 70s, received payment from the Granada Cathedral Chapter not to play the *bajón*!

The repertoire list includes useful biographical information including the composer's date and location of birth and death, and often the occasion for which a piece was written. Although not exhaustive, the list is substantial (especially the German and the Spanish and Latin American sections). Kilbey provides somewhat sparse, but valuable and concise information about instrument makers, including their marks and a list of each maker's extant instruments.

The strength of this resource is in its extensive coverage of the *bajón* and its use in Spain and Latin America, the expansive reference lists, the complete index of extant instruments and the appendices. The list of extant instruments is filled with useful details. The list includes the location of the instrument, a detailed description of the body and keywork, a photo or drawing of the instrument, and in some cases, a bibliography. The appendices include an index of curtal/dulcian/*bajón* players, and a chart of historical events from 1525 - 1750.

Kilbey has made an important contribution to resources about the historical development of the bassoon. *Curtal, Dulcian, Bajón: A History of the Precursor to the Bassoon* is excellent as a stand alone reference or as a supplement to the sections on early music in Langwill's *The Bassoon and Contrabassoon* and Joppig's *The Oboe and the Bassoon*.

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