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JOHANN PEZEL: STADTPFEIFER-COMPOSER

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

From the fourteenth century through the seventeenth century there existed, principally in Germany, a branch of music called tower music. Small bands of wind players called Stadtpeifer (literally, town pipers) were hired by towns to perform concerts from town hall towers, take part in religious and municipal ceremonies, play at town dances, and entertain at various social events.<sup>1</sup> Initially, tower music in medieval times was a function of trumpeters to signal townspeople of imminent danger. This use of trumpeters playing from towers still exists today in Krakow, Poland.<sup>2</sup>

The two most perilous dangers to towns of medieval Europe were hostile and invading armies from without and fire from within. High walls were constructed around cities to impede assaulting armies and towers were built within cities for watchmen to locate and report fires. Türmer (tower watchmen) of small towns communicated enemy and fire danger to the populace by sounding a bell from their tower positions. In larger cities this information was signalled to centrally located bell ringers by trumpeters placed in high towers. This civic security function of trumpeters sounding alarms from towers is the beginning of one of the most important extra-court

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<sup>1</sup>Homer Ulrich, Chamber Music (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Don Smithers, The Music and History of the Baroque Trumpet Before 1721 (Letchworth-Herts: Aldine Press for Syracuse University Press, 1973), p. 130.

musical activities in the Baroque era, that of municipal music.<sup>3</sup>

As medieval towns and cities came to rely more on the sounding of trumpets for warnings of fire and other hazards, rules had to be made to prevent false alarms and misinterpretations of unofficial trumpet playing. In 1372, Paris police regulations stated that unofficial trumpet blowing after curfew was a crime, except at weddings. In 1604, Cologne law forbade trumpet playing after dark.<sup>4</sup> Elaborate rules concerning wages, training, morals, and job rights were established for the Türmer trumpeters (and later the stadtpfeifers) via the guild system, i.e., unionism.

As in other craft guilds of medieval Europe, a prospective tower musician started as an apprentice, then after five years moved to journeyman, after which he graduated to master. Master trumpeters had special privileges and received higher wages. They attained phenomenal skill playing the trumpet and were used in civic and church orchestras to play extremely high and difficult music such as found in Johann Sebastian Bach's B Minor Mass.<sup>5</sup>

Duties of the Türmer became more formalized in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and their quasi-military function was altered to provide musical entertainment for official city proceedings. With this change the number of town musicians expanded to as many as six or seven. Ensemble performances from city towers were limited, but the use of a single trumpeter as tower watchman persisted into the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Smithers, pp. 116-119.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>5</sup>Sidney Finkelstein, record jacket notes for Tower and Festive Music of the Seventeenth Century, Gunther Schuller, conductor (EMS-7).

<sup>6</sup>Smithers, p. 121.

The stadtpfeifers of seventeenth-century Leipzig stand out as being the most remarkable town musicians of all time.<sup>7</sup> Leipzig in the last half of the seventeenth century was a busy, proud, and colorful town. Although suffering from the devastations of the Thirty Years War, Leipzig maintained itself as a renowned commercial center. Devoutly Lutheran and thriving in the pageantry of the Baroque era, Leipzig sustained many brilliant festivals centering around religious celebrations, academic ceremonies, civic holidays, and weddings. As an aid to this devotion and pageantry the town council had, since the beginning of the seventeenth century, authorized a town orchestra of seven players.<sup>8</sup>

The town orchestra consisted of two groups, three Kunstgeiger (violinists) and four stadtpfeifers. The stadtpfeifers also had an assistant (apprentice) who helped out when a fifth player was needed. The two groups played together only once a week, on Sunday, when the cantor at St. Thomas' Church called upon them to assist with the music during the service. The rest of the week they went their separate ways. Like the stadtpfeifers, the Kunstgeiger were governed by rules of the music guild.

Of the two groups, the Kunstgeiger occupied a definitely inferior position. They were less skilled, poorly paid, and allowed to participate only in relatively unimportant festivities. The stadtpfeifers were a very privileged group. They were extremely contemptuous of the Kunstgeiger, even though most stadtpfeifers were, at one time, Kunstgeiger themselves. The musical pre-eminence of the stadtpfeifers resulted from their partici-

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<sup>7</sup>Smithers, p. 123.

<sup>8</sup>Mary Rasmussen, historical notes for Sonata No. 2, by Johann Pezel, edited by Robert King (North Easton: Robert King Music Company, 1957), inside cover.