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### BOURDON MUSIC IN SWITZERLAND

Note 1/ Bourdon = long, unchanged stable tone as an accompanying voice /early more-voice/

2/ By the conception "bourdon music" is always meant the bourdon folk music in the following treatise. In the Middle Ages, bourdon was much used in the artificial music; there was an instrument with a bourdon practically for every instrumental family. In the further development, the bourdon almost disappeared from the artificial music and became a typical factor in the folk music.

Unfortunately, there is very little known about the origin of the Swiss folk music, so that much of the following reflections wait for scientific researches. In any case, what is nowadays generally considered the Swiss folk music is hardly 100 years old. It was mostly written for business reasons, just for the tourists. In order to justify the conception "folk music", it had to be classified into various time phases, similar as it is the case of the artificial music. It is not enough just to speak about "folk music", it is necessary to differentiate for ex.: the folk music of the Middle Ages, of the Renaissance, of the Baroque and the young style etc., as various periods, styles, instruments etc. left their traces behind.

All verbal traditions preserving folk music melodies can be dated back only with difficulty and in contradistinction of the folk songs, there had been practically none before 1800. "Appenzeller tanz: Ich staig uff einem fyhenbaum" from the Sa-medan lute tabulation, dated 1563, definitely did not provide much of the folk music and dance - it is alleged to have been a lute accompanying voice. Besides these historical conceptions, naturally even the geographical conceptions play their part; no doubt, Switzerland was always much influenced by other cultures and countries /four languages, mercenariness etc./. In any case,

it is absurd to speak about the old Swiss folk music, as the borders and the nationality to the Swiss alliance had changed all the time. No doubt, a Genevian feels rather to be connected with the French culture and music, than with that of an Urner farmer. It seems to me, that people from St. Gallen are more cultural related with the south of Germany, than with the region of Tessin etc. Regarding all these observations, it seems that the proof of genuine Swiss bourdon music is very difficult to be stated, even if not out of question. Yet, there are some criteria for the presumptive old melodies: a slight tone range /small melodical steps/, mostly two-parted melodies without any change in the key. The most important is to have a certain feeling and auditory experience in what is "suitable for bourdon".

The airs of the pipers from the Valley d'Anniviers - Wallis /"Pfeiferweisen aus dem Val d'Anniviers"/ by Hanns, noted down in Gand, are the most typical and most original, after all. Besides above mentioned criteria of the bourdon music, these dances show also the so called "Alphorn - Fa" in the key of a half-tone quarte-major, that gives them an individual mythical character. If this key proves a high age of the melodies, it is difficult to say. This quarte-major by an open fingering of the transverse flute, could also be explained by another key than that of diatonic basic key. In any case, there is also one of these dances /Magali/ in the south of France, but with a normal key.

Besides these dances collected by Hanns in Gand, there are further "bourdon suspicious" traditional art pieces in the canton of Wallis. There are a few dances showing considerable age also in the cantons of Waadt, Jura, Bern, Schwyz /Muothatal/, Appenzell and Tessin.

The old pipers' marches known for ex. from the Basle carnevals, or from the provincial localities are a further study-source of the old Swiss music. Although these marches originated mostly from so called "Pipers' orderlies of the Swiss allied troops" in 1919 /Pfeifer Ordonanz für die Eidgenössischen Truppen/, they seem to be much older /perhaps 17th, event. even 16th cent./ as to their character.

Besides these dances and marches, there is a further possibility of tracing the old pieces of art by means of a folk song. Many old folk songs have very interesting melodies so that they could be re-arranged for instrumental compositions without any difficulty. No doubt, it was so practised at one time: to a dance melody a text was found and thus as a song it was traditionally preserved, or to a slow song a quicker instrumental part was added. In many old song texts /especially in those of shepherds' or Advent songs/, there are musical instruments as bagpipes, pipes, shawms, hurdy-gurdy mentioned, or there are some references that the song should be accompanied by bagpipes quints.

Taking all together, it should be once more pointed out: the whole material is possible to be approached only on the basis of practise. That means, one has to dispose of a great auditory experience, to know the instrumentary of the old music, to try out the melodies, eventually to make the instrument by oneself and to assess the possibilities or trickness of these instruments.

## BAGPIPES IN SWITZERLAND

### IN GENERAL

Conception /by J.H. van der Meer/ :

"The bagpipes are an aerophone with one or more sounding pipes provided with a single or double-reeds, or partially single-reeded or partially double-reeded.

The pipes sound by means of air from the bag-shaped reservoir which is pressed by the left arm of the player. This reservoir is filled with air either directly by the player by means of a blow pipe, or indirectly by means of bellows."

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We are sorry to say, that we know very little about the tradition of this nowadays almost forgotten folk musical instrument which is ranged to a group of bourdon instruments. Yet, the names of some musicians are known /from the bagpiper Hans Gantner,

the "king" of the musicians in Bern 1507, depicted on a pipers' fountain in the street Spitalgasse, up to Hans Schwarz, the bag-piper from Appenzell, who was executed as an alleged incendiary in 1577/. There are also a few descriptions /though not very flattering/ about the use of bagpipes in our Alps.

In the 15th century, the bagpipes were even introduced into Swiss troops, but at the beginning of 16th century, they were driven out by more louder instruments as the transverse flutes and the drums. That proves that our bagpipes of 15th and 16th centuries, were never so loud as the Scottish bagpipes known at present.

Towards the end of 16th century, the information is scantier: it seemed that the instrument almost died out in many regions. Only the beggars or wandering students played it. Some choir court manuals in Bern canton show that the bagpipes were a very popular and extended folk musical instrument still up to 17th and partly even up to 18th centuries. Recently, there are even some reliable references to the individual occurrence of bagpipes in various remoted localities /Wallis, Tessin Valley and in inland of Switzerland/ still up to 19th century.

The Swiss bagpipes are relatively well evidenced in contemporary illustrations. The musical instruments can be practically found in all old illustrated chronicles /Schilling, Schodeler etc./, and also on many old churches, castles, houses, fountains, bridges, and portals in the whole of Switzerland. Further documents could provide the hitherto existing surnames as "Pfeiffer, Pfiffer, Phyffer, Pfiffner, Dudler, Dudli etc. /family coat-of-arms, family chronicles, family trees/.

#### TYPOLOGY

In the main, there are three types of bagpipes known on the territory of present Switzerland :

- 1/ The bagpipes with a clarinet /single-reeded/ melodical pipe and with one separate clarinet bourdon.

/Type a./δ according to the typology of J.H.van der Meer/

In Switzerland, this type occurred in the first place in 14th century /for ex. Maness song manuscript/. It is a document of further development of the type a./α bagpipes with one clarinet pipe/. The stock to the melodic pipe is carved in a shape as an animal head; the bourdon /a little longer than the melodic pipe/, seems to be inserted in the very same "animal" stock. The melodic pipe is partly provided with a horn funnel.

- 2/ The bagpipes with an oboe /double-reeded/ melodic pipe and with one separate clarinet bourdon.

/Type c./α according to van der Meer/

This type was extended all over Switzerland up to 15th century and partially still up to the beginning of 16th century. It was known as "piva" in the Tessin canton. These bagpipes were individually played still up to 18th - 19th centuries. Tessin was always cultural related to the North Italy, where this type of bagpipes originated.

The melodic pipe is conical with a protrusive funnel. The "piva", however, had a pear-shaped funnel in 18th - 19th centuries. The bourdon is two-pieced, cylindrical with a protrusive funnel. While at the oldish types the bourdon was one and a half, or twice as long as the melodic pipe, at the younger "piva" it was approximately of the same length.

- 3/ The bagpipes with an oboe melodic pipe and with two separate clarinet bourdons.

/Type c./ε according to van der Meer/

In Switzerland, this type was extended at the end of 15th century /individually/ up to the half of 18th century. The greatest prosperity of this type /and the bagpipes in Switzerland in general/, was at the beginning of 16th century, where the most frequent illustrations and descriptions could be found.

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BAGPIPES ACCORDING TO THE ILLUSTRATION  
 "DANCE OF THE DEATH" BY NIKLAUS MANUELS /about 1519/.

Reconstructing these bagpipes, I could rely only upon the illustration "Dance of the Death" /Totentanz/. On one hand, it made me a lot of troubles, on the other hand, it gave me the possibility to reconstruct this instrument relatively unrestrained.

So I made the melodic pipe with a rather narrow cone /influenced the loudness/, that enabled playing also half-tones by fork finger position, although the pipe was originally only diatoned. In the funnels of the bourdon pipes, I built in a closing device, that could explain the function of the elongated cut out slits /notches/. Besides, I provided the big bourdon pipe with an additional tuning hole, so that two various tones could be played, if need be. Both the bourdon pipes are inserted into the same common stock, though it cannot be explicitly seen in the illustration.

The keys F/ G/ C/ follow from the references of the usual key of that time. Yet, I decided for a modern tuning A = 440 Hz, just for practical reasons /consonance/, in my reconstruction.

Description:

Tone range and tuning: big bourdon F/with an additional hole/  
 small bourdon C  
 melodic pipe f - g<sup>1</sup>

Fingering : the same as at the old straight flute.

By fork fingering position the following half-tones can be played: gis, h, cis, dis, fis.

Key : By fork fingering position and with a additional bourdon hole the following tones can be played:  
 F-major/ f-minor/ C-major/ c-minor/ G-major/ g-minor/

Length of the pipes : melodic pipe 385 mm  
 big bourdon cca 720 mm  
 small bourdon cca 600 mm

Material : box-tree or cherry-tree /ebony/, goat leather

The melodical pipe is conical with a protrusive funnel, sometimes decorated with elongated cut out slits. The bourdons are two-pieced, cylindrical outlined and the strengthened tuning cylinders are turnered. The funnels are either protrusive or bottle-shaped. Some of these Swiss bagpipes are showing the most striking signs. They are the elongated cut out slits in the funnels of the melodical pipes, in the bourdon funnels and in the tuning cylinders.

The small bourdon is as long as the melodical pipe, the big bourdon is about a quarter longer than the small one. This is a consequence of the tuning with the basic tone and the quit in which this type considerably differs from the Celtic bagpipes.

The only typical Swiss element of these otherwise identical extended bagpipes on the whole German speaking territory /Germany, Flanders and the Netherlands/, are these elongated cut out slits. I have not yet found a reliable explanation for this typical decoration element. It may have some connection with the slit clothes /slit pants or slit jacket sleeves/ of the Swiss mercenaries, which were in fashion in 16th century. If these elongated slits in the funnels had some technic-musical function, it is a question. The tone of the bourdon pipes changes only insignificantly owing to these slits.

On the contrary, it could be possible, thanks to these cut out slits, to fix in the bourdon funnel a steady closing device with a stopper. /Just in the way, as it was hypothetically realized according to the "Dance of the Death" by Niklaus Manuels, in my reconstruction/. I am sure, these slits were just a decorative element in the melodical pipe funnel. The funnel, as a tone producing part of the melodical pipe, was free of any vent holes. Naturally, the same goes also for the tuning cylinders in the bourdons. Their function with vent holes would be impossible. Other typical national or regional elements /for ex. the bellows, additional bourdons, possibility of over-blowing etc./ remained unfortunately, abstained from the Swiss bagpipes. In later centuries, when in other countries such development became evident, our bagpipes vegetated just as beggars' instrument in a few remoted localities.

## FURTHER RECONSTRUCTION

Up to present, I have reconstructed the following Swiss bagpipes in my workshop:

The bagpipes of the Pipers' fountain /Pfeiferbrunnen - Bern 1507/  
 Urs Graf / Basle 1525/  
 Piva /Maggia 1528/

Description :

Range of tones and keys : bourdons eligible in F and G  
 or C and G  
 or G /Piva/

: melodical pipes eligible:

in f /range f - g<sup>1</sup>/  
 in g /range g - a<sup>1</sup>/

Material : wood - exclusively cherry-tree, apple-tree, plum-tree, box-tree, yew-tree.

Leather : goat or sheep /hand-sown/

Note. One of my reconstructions /Swiss bagpipes according to the "Dance of the Death" by Manuels/, was taken in possession by the Swiss Regional Museum in Zürich in 1982. Since the time, it is displayed in various exhibitions.

/Archives No. LM 63 139/.