

THE CORNETT IN 17TH CENTURY SLOVAKIAN REGION: ITS EMERGENCE AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the development, period occurrence and use of the cornett in the Slovakian region during the 17th century. Following a short introduction to the general history and construction of this forgotten Renaissance instrument, this presentation uses region-specific sources to illustrate the cornett's practical function in this period and locale. While not one of the several hundred surviving instruments originates from Slovakia, several secondary sources paint a vivid picture of its use in the region. The research presented here includes: period inventories of musical instruments found in former times in church collections, municipal account books with recorded costs of music performances, regulations for *Stadtpfeifer* [town pipers/waiters], and also musical treatises and encyclopedias, e.g. *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* by I. A. Comenius. The role of cornett players in the musical life of the area, as well as the level of their skills, is also discussed. The paper also looks at local repertoire specifically scored for this instrument as well as originally intended either for violin or voice and continuo, which indicate the cornett as an alternative. Finally the paper will present a comparative analysis of selected works by Samuel Capricornus and Daniel Speer (composers living in Slovakia for several periods of time) that include the cornett in the instrumentation, as examples of different approaches to the instrument's usage.

Keywords: Cornett, Slovakia, Stadtpfeifer, Samuel Capricornus, Daniel Speer

INTRODUCTION

The history and development of instruments is determined by various factors spanning from needs of interpreters to trends and preference of listeners. For similar reasons, some instruments (like the cornett) vanished and became generally unknown. At its heyday - the first half of 17th century - the cornett was the instrument of *Stadtpfeifer* and according to various treatises was generally to be considered quite difficult. The body of cornett begins as two matched pieces of wood, according to French theorist Mersenne, fruit woods were preferred. Each half is carved with curved channel, glued together, formed by hand planes and rasps. Finally it is wrapped in leather or parchment to ensure a strong and airtight join. The bore begins narrow at the mouthpiece end and tapers outward toward the far end. The outside has an octagonal cross section, which makes handling the unwieldy body a slightly more ergonomic prospect. The cornett has six finger holes and one thumbhole of roughly equal size and spacing. Cornett mouthpieces are fairly small in diameter, they usually have relatively sharp rims and are made from horn or ivory. Few original mouthpieces have been preserved, but if modern practice is any indication, its shape was in general based upon the personal preference and ergonomic needs of the player, e.g. teeth position, thickness of lips etc. Various shapes and depths of the inside cup tend to have a larger impact on

the resulting sound - e.g. shallow cup will produce sharper, harsher sound compared to deeper cups, which typically have a smoother and softer sound.

The origins of the instrument remain unknown, but the first examples, straight versions in fact are seen in German *Stadtpfeifer* tradition brought to Italy at the end of the 15th century, where they were often performing with trombones.¹¹ The earliest depiction of a curved cornett can be found *Opera intitulata Fontegara* (1535, Venice) by Silvestro Ganassi. However it is not until ca. 1600 that we see the first detailed, clear illustration of curved cornett in *Il Dolcimelo, Libro terzo* (ca. 1600) by Aurelio Virgiliano, including a fingering chart.

Even though the cornett is eventually developed into a full family of instruments ranging from bass to *cornettino*, there are no records of that family ever being used as an "unbroken" consort. The usual ensemble involves a treble cornett on the top part and trombones covering the remaining parts. The reason for such arrangement was probably the less pleasant, more diffuse sound of the lower cornetts, especially the tenor, which led Michael Praetorius in his *Syntagma musicum De organographia* (Wittenberg, 1618) to advise the use of trombones instead. The treble cornett on the other hand is often praised and found to be similar to human voice. The most famous reference to the sound of the cornett comes from Marin Mersenne *Harmonie universelle - Livre V - Des instruments á vent* (Paris, 1636) poetically describing as "a ray of sunshine piercing the shadows". However a very different opinion comes from the earlier writer Vincenzo Gallilei, who as a renaissance humanist championed pure human voice in sacred music. In his treatise *Dialogo della musica* (Florence, 1581) he criticized the use and sound of cornetts as well as trombones mainly in church, calling them noisy instruments good only for battle or hunting purpose.

It is known that the use of cornetts spanned across whole Europe though the end of the 17th century, when its glory began to fade. There are many discussions concerning disappearance of cornetts and it is difficult to say what the particular reason was since it's rather a combination of several factors. The cornett was considered, according to period writers, a very difficult instrument to play, and so very reliant on a tradition of high quality teachers to pass the technique on to further generations. An unexplainable decrease in quality of cornett playing towards end of the 17th century, evidenced by reviews of terrible public performances of *Stadtpfeifer* contributed to its demise. Another factor were musical tastes and modification to instruments, such as the violin and later the oboe, which had already by mid-century largely supplanted the now old fashioned cornett.

CORNETT USAGE IN THE SLOVAKIAN REGION

Due to the active migration across of nations, whether caused by religion or economic situation, various cultural influences were transferred throughout the Europe. This was also the case in the western part of the Habsburg Empire and it's how the *Stadtpfeifer* tradition reached the territory of present Slovakia in particular. The problem is that we can't tell exactly when the first cornett players appeared in here. The reason is overall lack of information which we must derive from various secondary sources.

The important question is: Were town pipers using the cornett as one of their instruments? Analogically, since *Stadtpfeifer* in Germany and Italy as well as in other

parts of Europe were playing them, it is very likely to have been the same in Slovakian cities. However there is a response to this question among the secondary sources. Due to issues with the professionalism of *Stadtpeifer*, which seems to have been quite a usual problem, cities prepared contracts in which players were required to declare responsibility for instruments and equipment they use in the course of their everyday work.

One such regulation comes from Bardejov (1655) and includes the list of instruments in the fifth point: “*All musical instruments: drums, trumpets, trombones, cornett and the like, church tower and all that belongs to the city government, is supposed to be diligently preserved. All of these items are supposed to be returned (if requested by the director). If something is found to be damaged I (the player) agrees to fully repair or refund the item.*”^[3] A similar document *Working conditions and duties of town pipers* from Levoča (ca. 1675-1678) also mentions the cornett in reference to town pipers: “*Master of pipers is due to play cornetts, trombones and other instruments, for which he receives 3 florins per week, from which he is also supposed to provide for his students.*”^[4] From the documents it is apparent, that town pipers were probably not in possession of their own instruments, but used instruments belonging to city. This hypothesis is also supported by other documents. Probably the earliest note about cornett in Slovakia comes from a municipal book of accounts from Levoča. Listed among the expenses and salaries of 1627 there is an exceptional note, which mentions that city has lent 6 florins for town piper M. Ander to buy “1 Zinck”. Another document *The List of instruments written by Cyriak Jarošek* from Spišská Nová Ves (cca. 1633) mentions eight musical instruments belonging to city, which are supposed to be used and preserved by the *Stadtpeifer* and it also includes: “*Einen Zincken mit silber beschlagen unten und oben*”.^[2] According to all of these records we can conclude that it's likely that the actual instruments used by town pipers were sponsored in those particular cities did not belong to them personally. However we can't be sure it was common practice in other cities since they all had individual way of self government. We also can't be sure if the account record from Levoča is actually a listing the full price of instrument, but at least it can give us an insight on the price of period cornetts.

Because the *Stadtpeifer* originally served simple functions, as signalling danger or marking the hour, it's easy to underestimate their importance and skill level. They were in fact highly rated musicians with very good salary. In the beginning of 17th century, their numbers were fewer and their quality increased and for these reasons they came to know as “*Kunst-pfeifer*”. According to Ernest Zavarský in Kremnica one could even differentiate between specialists for each instrument and “*even in 18th century, pipers are often called “cinkenists” [cornettists in period Slovak language]*”. Even though the cornett was used for a long time in Kremnica, Classical tastes eventually saw it replaced by clarinets and oboes.^[5]

Inventory lists of sheet music and musical instruments from churches and monasteries provide important evidence about repertoire and musical activities of these institutions in various cities. Even though these listings of instruments consist of very brief notes, they can help us deduce some background information. The earliest inventory list including cornett is from the Lutheran church in Bratislava (today The Holy Saviour Church - Jesuit Church) created in 1651. It is limited just to simple note “*Ein altes cink*”. The later inventory list from the same church created in 1657 references “*1 cornetto*”, this time using Italian name of the instrument. We can't tell if

it's meant to be the cornett from 1651 list or it is new one, since it's not called old anymore. However in later inventory list from 1718 the instrument is no longer mentioned.^[6]

Since only Bratislava (among all royal municipalities in Slovakian territory) is known to have had the cornett present in inventories, we can assume that when cornetts or other wind instruments such as trombones were needed, the *Stadtpfeifer* were present. This practice is thought to have been common around Europe. So even though we don't have any record about cornetts from other Slovakian cities, they were most likely present as well. In some cities, where we don't have records on instruments used by town pipers, we find cornetts in the inventory lists of monasteries, particularly those of Piarists. The first one comes from Prievidza where are two cornetts mentioned in lists from 1690 and 1693. The record from 1690 is "*Item Cornet*" and from 1693 "*Cornet, seu Cinczk*". Apparently both the Italian and German term were used in the Slovak adaptation. The second list comes from Podolíneč and it includes records from 1691 up to 1702. An interesting fact is that instead of just simple note that two cornetts were present, it includes a note about use of these instruments - "*pro instructione puerorum*". In general, period music education in Slovakian region was aimed to learn mostly choir singing. For learning an instrument one must have to be a pupil of master *Stadtpfeifer* or take private lessons. Due to this note we can assume that Piarists were probably teaching cornett, at least at Podolíneč.

Besides of inventory lists, some information can be found in theoretical treatises from central Europe - particularly in didactic texts of Ioannes Amos Comenius. The most typical example is his well known illustrated encyclopaedia *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (1658, Nürnberg) - written in Sárospatak (today in Hungary) between years 1653 - 1654. However a four language version (Slovak, Latin, German and Hungarian) of this encyclopaedia was also printed and published by Brewer printing house in Levoča 1685. The chapter on musical instruments is depicting list the main musical instruments of the period including curved cornett (as number 27). In the list Comenius provides terminology for instruments in four languages. He chooses the term "*Lituus*" as the Latin name for cornett and systematically uses this term in his other didactic texts in Latin, where he describes it as an "*instrument similar to horn, which sounds high*".^[7] However *Lituus* is known from the times of Roman empire as a long and curved military brass instrument - perhaps the curved shape and mouthpiece was inspired the name. In German Comenius uses the term "*der Zinke*", instead of the correct form *Zinck*. As a German name for the cornett he also adds a term "*Krumhorn*" in brackets, which is particularly confusing since the *Krumhorn* is a reed instrument, a different family than the cornett. We can speculate that the cause of this confusion may be *Musica Getuscht* by Sebastian Virdung, since Virdung tends to put up crumhorns and cornetts into same category based on the finger holes, and that treatise was probably a source for Comenius. Furthermore in the Czech (or Slovak) language Comenius use two terms: "*Cynek*" derived from German *Zinck* and "*Kornet*" derived from Italian *Cornetto*, from which we can assume that both versions were known and used in Slovakian territory in 17th century. All these factors contribute to the terminological inconsistencies found in inventory lists even within the same institution.

CORNETT REPERTOIRE FROM SLOVAKIAN REGION

Inventory lists are also a useful tool in reconstructing the period performance practice and repertoire. We can find good amount pieces where the cornett is obligatory, some where it is specifically recommended, but also where it could be (and usually was) used without any indication. Exploring the whole repertoire for cornett found in the inventories of the area is far beyond the scope of this paper. Here we focus on a few specific examples which call for cornett, from various parts of Slovakia.

Often in the introductions of printed polychoral music we can find clear instructions how instruments are meant to be used as, for example, *Psalmen Davids* by Heinrich Schütz. However in some polychoral composition we find brief instructions in the scores. In one such composition from the Bardejov music collection: “*Alleluja. Zur Ehren unsern Gott*” by Matthäus Appeles von Löwenstern, we find a similar indication “*corneto et voci*” between other passages marked “*sola voce*”. Such indication is not used very often since employing instruments to double or even replace voices was common practice at this time. Instruments could possibly have been used freely, depending on the situation, without any records of doing so.^[8]

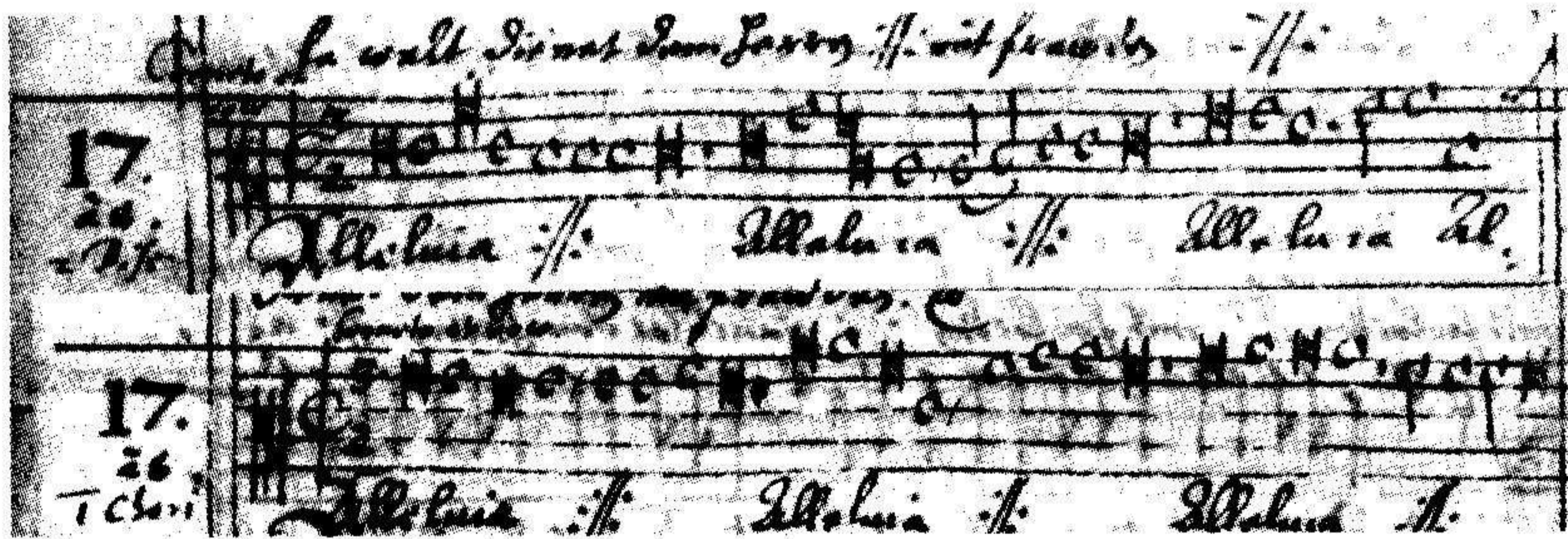


Fig. 1: Bardejov music collection: sign. Ms. mus. Bártfa 2, koll 2 Fol. 7 & 35 - polychoral composition “*Alleluja. Zur Ehren unsern Gott*” by Matthäus Appeles von Löwenstern with the indication to use cornett to double voices.

Using cornett in Corelli’s trio sonatas appears not to have been common at least in Italy. In fact in previous decades cornetts could often be found alternating with, or in place of violins, but it became less usual in the latter part of the 17th century. It appears that practice of using the cornett in this way was sustained for a considerably longer time in the Slovakian region than in for e.g. Italy. One such example can be found in the 1st violin part of *Sonata a tre* by Arcangelo Corelli from the music collection of Pruské. Even though Corelli’s music is specified for the violin, in the cover of the part book we can find an additional handwritten indication “*Cornetto Imo*”.^[9] We must conclude that in Pruské at the very least, this tradition remained and the cornett was still an important instrument in musical practice.

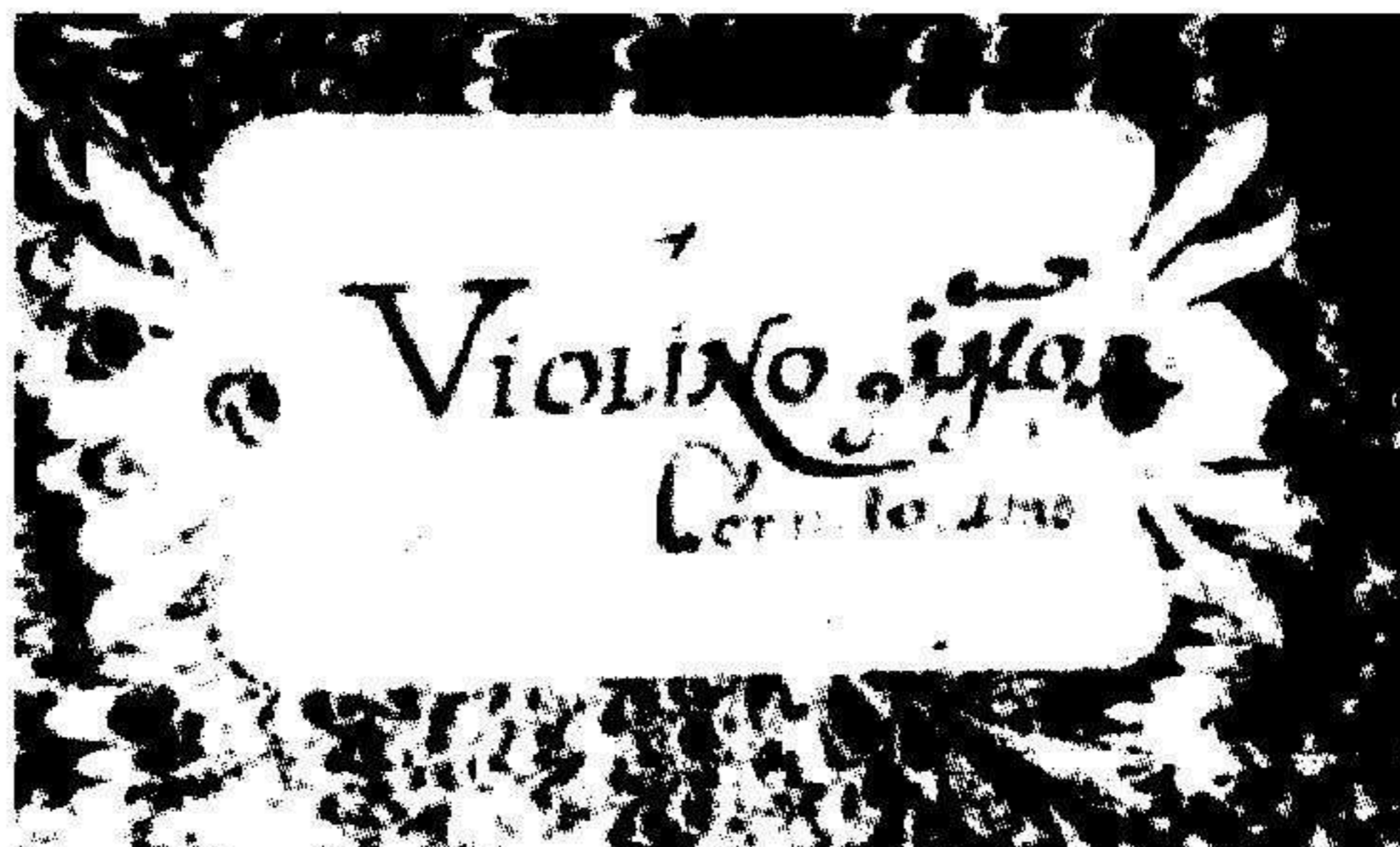


Fig. 2. Pruské music collection: cover of the 1st violin part of Sonate a tre (Roma 1685) by Arcangelo Corelli with the indication to use cornett as an alternative instrument.

Among the 17th century composers working in the Slovakian region, only two are known to have composed specifically for cornett: Samuel Capricornus and Daniel Speer. Capricornus was musical director at the Lutheran church in Bratislava between years 1651 and 1657. Since Capricornus was attuned to new musical trends in Italy, he drew inspiration from imported printed music published mainly in Venetian printing houses. The other important source for Capricornus was Vienna, especially works of Giovanni Valentini and Antonio Bertali. These composers wrote abundantly for cornett, and the parts were very virtuosic and tended to push the instruments to its limits.

Of Capricornus' compositions which include the cornett only one, *Judica Domine*, from the collection *Opus Musicum*, is available as a critical edition. Here it is used together with the violin and two soprano voices. As we compare all these parts, we find out that they share the same characteristics. Both vocal and instrumental voices are composed whether in imitative polyphony or are lead in parallel thirds mostly in figurations. Voices often enter the musical structure in the form of dialogue, imitation or they begin parallel to each other. About halfway through the piece, an instrumental interlude reveals the most about what is specifically required of the instrumentalists. While *Judica Domine* is less rhythmically demanding than Capricornus' other compositions for cornett (such as *Bonum est confiteri* and *Surrexit Pastor bonus* from the collection *Scelta Musicale*), being usually no more than a flow of 16th notes (or semiquavers), the range reaches up e'' , the very top of the instrument. Because of this, it's worth considering that it may have been intended to be played on the *cornettino* instead of treble cornett, as it was increasingly common in Germany in the latter part of the century. The interpretation is supposed by the fact, that cornett in *Judica Domine* never plays below g' , even while imitating the soprano voice (which does go below g').

When Capricornus arrived in Stuttgart he came in to conflict with local organist Philipp Friedrich Böddecker. This dispute included a complaint by Böddecker's son David, who was a local cornett player, that Capricornus required him to play "*so hohe und schwere Stuckh*" on *cornettino* (*quart zinck*). To this Capricornus responded that David Böddecker is playing on cornett as on a cow horn and it is sounding: "like a female dog giving a birth".^[10] These quotes serve as evidence that Capricornus was composing very difficult pieces, mostly for *cornettino* and that he had quite high standards. Since these disputes happened directly following his arrival from Bratislava, where he was composing cornett parts in the similar manner and he is not known to have been complaining about musicians, it begs the question: Was there a good cornett

player (or more) in Bratislava that we don't know about? Obviously, inspiration for such difficult pieces was brought from the nearby Vienna court and its musicians and composers. However it's generally questionable if Bratislava interpreters to perform his pieces or the pieces present in inventory list of music and musical scores, since there is, until now, a lack of evidence about specific cornettists.

On the other hand, Daniel Speer, other 17th century composer who came to the Slovakian region from Silesia, wasn't composing difficult cornett parts. According to his travel book "*Ungarischer oder Dacienscher Simplicissimus*" where he described reality of eastern part of 17th century Slovakia, he was studying to be a *Stadtpfeifer* in the city Sabinov and later became a field military piper. For this reason we assume that he had personal experience with playing cornett, even though it does not appear so often in his compositions. We can find a chapter on the cornett in *Grundrichtiger Unterricht der musikalischen Kunst oder Vierfaches musikalisches Kleeblatt* (Ulm 1697). Here among some brief instructions and well known fingering chart he includes didactic pieces for two cornetts and trombone. The parts are generally easy with range spanning from g' to b". Compared to pieces by Capricornus, there are not such florid figurations or 32th notes (demisemiquavers). There are also simple dynamic marks (*piano / forte*) included in the pieces, which are not otherwise common in cornett music of this period. However these characteristics can be explained by the didactic purpose of these pieces.

Beside of *Kleeblatt*, there are also of Speer's compositions with cornett in *Recens fabricates labor* (1685), however they are not very different from each other in style. In *Sonata á 4* Speer scores for cornett or trumpet, which hints at another cornett alteration. Even though their basic sound is more or less similar (high pitched sound), the trumpet was used mostly in the ceremonial style "*con trombe et tympani*" and the cornett in the combination with voices or in consort with trombones.

CONCLUSION

We have used secondary sources to deduce the history of the cornett in the Slovakian region in the 17th century, such as regulations for town pipers, records of buying and lending instruments, inventory lists of instruments and repertoire for the cornett. Unfortunately there are no period cornetts preserved or found in the area of modern-day Slovakia.

According to those sources, we can assume that cornett entwined in the in musical life of the region. It was mostly used by town pipers as was common practice in whole Europe. It's known that these musicians were not just playing signals from the city tower, but they participated in other musical productions such as church music and civic ceremonies. The importance of *Stadtpfeifer* tradition is evident throughout various Slovakian cities due to the high salary those musicians were receiving and it's possible that they did not own their own instruments (including cornetts), but rather borrowing them from the city with a full responsibility. We can only speculate on how these instruments came to lost.

The other important presence of cornett is recorded in inventory lists of instruments from Lutheran and Catholic churches and in the Piarist monasteries. In some of those Piarist monasteries, particularly in Podolíneč, young boys could receive their own experiences by studying to play cornett.

The cornett repertoire found in Slovakia is evident within the inventories of musical scores. The local compositions for cornett include pieces by Samuel Capricornus and Daniel Speer. In case of Capricornus (particularly regarding his pieces composed in Bratislava) the actual cornett parts are rather difficult to play and despite of indication to use "*cornetto*" it's better to use small *cornettino* instead. The violin part of *Sonate a tre* by Arcangelo Corelli, from Pruské collection of music, with indication to use cornett as an alternative instrument implies that cornett was sustained in instrumental practice in Slovakian area in times, when other instruments, such as oboe or violin, were taking its place elsewhere.

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