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“Answer, Echoes, Answer”¹. The Challenges of Muted Horn Passages in Solo Repertoire of the 1820s

This paper explores the presence of muted horn passages in early nineteenth-century solo repertoire, focusing on works by three German composers: Friedrich Starke, Louis Schlösser and Franz Lachner. These pieces pose both technical and interpretive challenges, particularly regarding the practical use of mutes on the natural and/or early valve horn. Through organological and aesthetic analysis, I argue that these passages reflect a Romantic topos associated with the sublime as represented aurally by the sound of the alphorn – invoking natural echoes, silence and emotional responses. Drawing on performance practice, literary and tourist descriptions of Alpine experiences, I propose interpretive strategies that embrace rubato, silence and theatrical pacing to render these muted effects. Ultimately, I suggest these moments are not anomalies but meaningful aesthetic choices embedded in the cultural context of the 1820s.

The background to this paper is a conundrum that arose for me recently. Ahead of the 2020 Beethoven festivities planned to mark the 250th anniversary of the composer’s birth, I had been investigating the repertoire for horn and piano duo in order to develop a programme with the working title “Not the Beethoven Horn Sonata”. The impetus for creating such a programme had come from my frustration at the over-dependency of natural horn players on this one, admittedly significant piece in our repertoire. If you hear one Classical piece performed on the natural horn, it is more than likely going to be the Beethoven *Sonata in F* Op. 17. There are good reasons for this, such as the tonality of the piece being F, which makes it less daunting to perform for inexperienced players or beginners on the natural horn, as it can be played in any other solo key, such as E^b. Conservative concert promoters and audiences also have a hand in the ubiquity of this piece, favouring works by composers they know over lesser-known composers.

Beethoven reportedly composed the sonata in something of a hurry. Ferdinand Ries recounts the composer in essence completing his homework the night before submission.² To my mind,

1 Tennyson 1866, p. 79.

2 “Die Composition der meisten Werke, die Beethoven zu einer bestimmten Zeit fertig haben sollte, verschob er fast immer bis zum letzten Augenblick. So hatte er dem berühmten Hornisten Ponto versprochen, eine Sonate (Opus 17) für Clavier und Horn zu componiren und in Ponto’s Concert mit ihm zu spielen; das Concert mit der Sonate war angekündigt, diese aber noch nicht angefangen. Den Tag vor der Aufführung begann Beethoven die Arbeit und beim Concerte war sie fertig.” (Wegeler/Ries 1838, p. 82). English translation: “Beethoven almost always postponed the composition of the majority of his works due by a certain date until the very last moment. He had, for instance, promised Ponto, the famous horn player, that he would compose a sonata (Opus 17) for piano and horn and would play it with him at a concert given by Ponto. The concert with the sonata was announced, but the sonata was not yet started. On the day before the performance Beethoven began the work and had it ready for the concert.” (Wegler/Ries 1988, p. 71).

the *Sonata* feels as if Beethoven has patched together a work which incorporates the ‘party tricks’ or tropes for which both he and Giovanni Punto, the horn player for whom he wrote the work, were famous, such as the swift arpeggios and factitious notes associated with the virtuosic low horn idiom and the rapid chord passages in the piano part. However, in comparison to the *Grand Sonata* Op. 34 of the aforementioned Ferdinand Ries, performing the Beethoven *Sonata* sometimes feels like rummaging in a toy box, taking each toy out one by one, showing it off to its greatest effect and then moving on to the next.

My aim with this new programme was to demonstrate that there is much more to the early-nineteenth-century repertoire for horn and piano from Beethoven’s circle, to contextualise the Beethoven *Sonata* and to advocate for more regular inclusion of these other works in our performances.

As I drew together repertoire, three of the works considered, the *Adagio und Rondo* Op. 105 composed by Friedrich Starke in 1821, the *Concertino for horn and piano*³ Op. 16 composed by Louis Schlösser in 1825, and the *Introduction et Variations* Op. 12, composed by Franz Lachner, also in 1825, posed a particular question, in that all contain particular markings for muted horn.

While the use of mutes in brass instruments has been known since the fifteenth century,⁴ it is not at all common to see markings for muted horn until we reach later periods and composers such as Wagner, Strauss, Mahler, Ravel and Debussy. Not only is it unusual to see such markings, but also the physical act of inserting and removing a mute necessitates a certain amount of time which needs to be factored into any performance, and one would hope equally factored into any compositional decisions.

A muted effect can be made in one of four ways on the horn:

1. Using a transposing mute.
2. Using a non-transposing mute.
3. Hand-stopped.
4. Half-stopped, sometimes known as an echo.

By placing the mute in the bell of the instrument, or by using the right hand to ‘stop’ the bell, the pitch is lowered. The note descends to a pitch a semitone above the harmonic below. When gradually stopping the horn, you can hear the pitch being lowered, but the interval by which each note is lowered is different, dependent on its place in the series.⁵

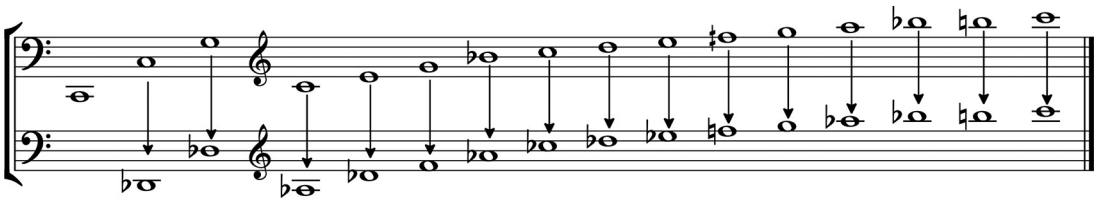


Fig. 1 Harmonic series and the resulting notes when stopped.

A transposing mute lowers the pitch of the instrument in the same way as the hand. When using a transposing mute with a valve horn, the player has to transpose what they are playing in order for the notes to be at the correct pitch. The natural horn creates its chromatic notes by the use of the hand in the bell thus making transposition to mitigate a pitch shift problematic.

3 This *Concertino* is published in three versions: (i) horn and orchestra, (ii) horn and string quartet and (iii) horn and piano.

4 See Downey 1993, esp. p. 309 and fn. 36, p. 324.

5 See Merewether 1978, pp. 40f.; Campbell/Greated 1994, pp. 400–403.

Non-transposing mutes would have to extend beyond the edge of the bell in order to affect the timbre but not the pitch. This would be very cumbersome and impractical. The solution is known as 'end correction'; mutes that fit within and up to the edge of the bell have an inner shaft, effectively extending the instrument.⁶

The challenge of inserting and removing a mute is discussed more in orchestration treatises than in pedagogical works for the horn. One late twentieth-century source advises:

Normally a couple of seconds of rest must be allowed to give the player time to pick up the mute with the right hand and insert it, and another couple of seconds, later, to remove it and put it down. If necessary, the mute can be held on a strap around the wrist, in which case it can be inserted or removed in as little as half a second.⁷

This contradicts a view from earlier in the same century which suggests that a seamless segue from open to muted is viable:

Nothing is more easily or more quickly accomplished than slipping the mute into the bell; the performer does not so much as interrupt his playing, for, while holding the Horn with his left hand, he slips in the mute with his right.⁸

For performers, a pragmatic solution to the challenge of muting the horn can be to use the right hand to stop the instrument:

Horn players often ignore the direction to play with mutes, preferring the less bothersome and quicker hand stopping. In their defense it must be added that the practice is abetted by composers who are indifferent to the distinction between the two effects.⁹

When fully stopping the horn, the player transposes everything a semi-tone lower to accommodate the changing pitch that results. Despite this being an option, it is clear from a number of sources – for example Widor – that the effects of stopping and muting, whilst similar in timbre, were notably different. Attitudes towards the distinction between the effects of muting versus hand-stopping the horn vary enormously, as do opinions on whether the mute is to be used in order to alter the dynamic of the horn and make the instrument softer, or instead to actually change the timbre of the instrument. Louis-François Dauprat indicates that it is used to make the "effect of pianissimo"; however, "this foreign body changes the quality and timbre of the tones". Dauprat further argues that "two horns at a distance and hidden, will produce a better and more natural effect than that which comes from a piece of wood, pasteboard or elastic rubber inserted in the bell of the instrument", thus suggesting that the main aim of mutes during his era was to create the sonic effect of horns being played at a distance, rather than a different timbre.¹⁰

6 For illustrations of transposing and non-transposing mutes, see Morley-Pegge 1960, p. 142.

7 Stiller 1985, p. 35.

8 "Rien de plus facile, de plus rapide que de glisser la sourdine dans le pavillon; l'exécutant ne s'interrompt pas même pour cela: il tient l'instrument de la main gauche et place son appareil avec la droite" (Widor 1904, p. 67; English after Widor 1906, p. 58).

9 Piston 1955, p. 236.

10 "On en obtient, sans doute, un effet de pianissimo qui peut surprendre; mais ces corps étrangers, unis à l'instrument, changent la qualité des sons, leur timbre [...]. Quand on a eu besoin de cet effet [double-écho], on a vu que deux Cors éloignés et cachés produisaient un effet meilleur et plus naturel, que celui qui vient d'un morceau de bois, de carton, ou de gomme élastique uni à l'instrument." (Dauprat 1824, Vol. 2, pp. 151f.; English after Coar 1952, p. 87).

Widor stipulates that mutes be used “for all *pianissimo* effects”, with “*cuivré* (with a +) [used] for stopped effects *forte*”.¹¹ This contrasts with Gaston Borch’s view of the mute not being used “to soften its tone, but to give it a distinct color, thin, nasal”. Borch recommends the use of the mute as “very effective in *forte* (*f*) or *fortissimo* (*ff*), expressing horror, or imitating a chime.”¹²

A further option on the horn, sometimes known as the echo, is to lightly half-stop or three-quarter-stop the bell of the instrument. This results in the pitch of the instrument being lowered by a semitone, which requires the player to transpose the music a semitone higher.¹³ Due to the pitch shift that results when stopping the horn for the echo effect, such passages are only feasible on the valve instrument, as it is able to create any note as either an open or a stopped note.

In 1840, Joseph-Émile Meifred, a pioneer of the early valve horn, recommended lightly stopping notes on the new valve instrument in order to perform a repeated phrase as an echo, instead of using “the old mute” which he said had been “totally abandoned”.¹⁴ Oscar Franz describes the echo as “one of the most charming effects which a skilled Horn Player can employ.”¹⁵ The relative merits of the mute versus the hand was much debated, with some, like Borch, viewing the hand as preferable due to the timbral differences that resulted: “An echo reproduces the tone faithfully, only softer, but the mute of a French Horn completely alters its tone-color.”¹⁶ Gumpert was much more negative about the use of the hand: “A stopped note will always sound squeezed, whereas one played with a mute will have a gentle colour.”¹⁷

An approach to muted passages

My initial training as a modern horn player had engendered in me the belief that mutes need to be inserted with maximum speed and minimal fuss (‘à la Widor’); that the goal was always an adept use of the mute in order not to disturb the flow of the music. However, with the three pieces considered here (Starke, Schlösser and Lachner), I could not envisage how this approach would be viable, nor how it would best serve the music. How could I interpret the markings for the use of the mutes in such a way that would work musically?

In recent years, a number of researchers have engaged with the wealth of information we have from early recordings and have demonstrated findings that lead us to question our twentieth-century metronomic approach to pre-twentieth-century repertoires.¹⁸ Aspects of earlier performance practices such as the asynchronicity or dislocation of lines, metric rubato and tempo modifications, which to fresh ears may seem idiosyncratic, eccentric or even sloppy, are beginning to be explored in performance by HIP practitioners.

My initial solution to the tempo challenges of these muted passages was to embrace a fluidity of tempo that I hear in early recordings. One feature of many early recordings is dramatic changes in tempo that are not notated in the score, and which can be heard between disparate themes or motifs, for example between a first and second subject in a sonata. As some of the

11 Widor 1906, p. 60.

12 Borch 1918, p. 22.

13 For the use of this technique, see the famous “en echo” passage (starting three bars before the *Légèrement retenu* marking) in Dukas’s *Villanelle* of 1906.

14 “[...] la main, dans cette circonstance, remplace l’ancienne Sourdinne, aujourd’hui totalement abandonnée.” (Meifred 1840, p. 5 and p. 75. Translations by the author if not otherwise stated).

15 “Einer der reizendsten Effecte des Waldhorns, den geschickte Bläser gern anwenden, ist das ‘Echo’” (Franz 1906, p. 58).

16 Borch 1918, p. 22.

17 “Ein gestopfter Ton wird immer gequetscht, dagegen ein solcher mit Sordinen geblasener zart klingen.” (Gumpert 1879, p. 63).

18 See e.g. Peres Da Costa 2012; Philip 2004.

muted passages in this survey, for example in Starke's *Adagio und Rondo*, appear almost to be an interruption within the work, it felt rational to embrace this interruption further and to step away from any desire on my part to demonstrate a swift, elegant use of the mute, and instead purposely take my time over these passages. I wanted to challenge my own notions about tempo and pulse in line with what we can hear in many early recordings.

I wish to propose a very specific solution to these muted passages from the 1820s, one that is derived from a source that I found myself exploring for the first time and that takes me into particularly apt territory for a conference organised by the Hochschule der Künste Bern.

In my view, these works all exploit a particular topos that was popular in the early nineteenth century and which the horn is well suited to emulate, namely the alphorn and the music of the *ranz des vaches*, a music and an effect considered so nostalgic, so affecting, so Swiss that people were warned not to play such music within earshot of Swiss mercenaries abroad as it supposedly risked prompting them to desert.¹⁹ Hand in hand with the specific effect of the alphorn call come both the silence of the mountains and, ultimately, the echo in reply.

These alphorn calls are distinct from other types of horn or trumpet music such as the night-watchman's call, the trumpet or bugle call, the post horn or the music of the hunt.²⁰ The alphorn call is "flowing and peaceful" and uses repeated "short motifs with long held notes at the end of a breath".²¹ The music is normally harmonically simple, as the instrument is restricted to the notes of the harmonic series. The effect of the echo is one that can be heard in music throughout history, but in the early nineteenth century the alphorn became a sonic symbol associated with the sublime, with man calling out to Nature in the mountains, and Nature answering back.

During the early nineteenth century, Switzerland became a favoured tourist destination, its majestic landscape an inspiration to artists, writers and musicians. A trip to Switzerland became essential; Johannes Bürkli warned that it was "as though a crime to die without having seen Switzerland".²² Alphorns were brought out and demonstrated to tourists who experienced the instrument being played in the wild, into a silence which would eventually return an echo bouncing back off a mountain, or perhaps a reply from another distant herdsman.

The sound of the alphorn became a romantic topos throughout the arts for a *locus amoenus*, a paradisiac landscape often tinged with nostalgia or homesickness. The sound world of the alphorn is an idealised place of safety or comfort: when you sound the horn, you know that eventually the reply, from Nature, will return.

The reply from our fellow man is notably less reliable. For example, when no reply comes to the plaintive cor anglais representing one of two shepherds towards the end of the *Scène aux champs*, the third movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, the effect is unsettling and ominous.

19 "J'ai ajouté dans la même Planche le célèbre *Ranz-des-Vaches*, cet Air si chéri des Suisses qu'il fut défendu sous peine de mort de le jouer dans leurs Troupes, parce qu'il faisoit fondre en larmes, désertir ou mourir ceux qui l'entendoient, tant il excitoit en eux l'ardent desir de revoir leur pays." ("I have attached here the celebrated *Ranz-des-Vaches*, this Air so loved by the Swiss that it was forbidden on pain of death to play it among the soldiers, because it caused them to give up their arms [recte: break into tears], desert or die when they heard it, arousing in them such desire to see their homeland again.") (Rousseau 1768, p. 317; English after Jones 2014, p. 186).

20 Ibid., p. 24.

21 Ibid., p. 25.

22 "Gleich als ob es ein Verbrechen wäre zu sterben, ohne die Schweiz gesehen zu haben" (Bürkli 1793, Vol. 1, pp. i–ii; English after Ozturk 2012, p. 80).



Fig. 2 Frontispiece to Kuhn 1818.

The music of the alphorns and the *Ranz des vaches* or *Kühreihen* were performed in a slow manner, without artifice. Gottlieb Jakob Kuhn, the author of the collection from which our image of the alphorn player is taken (Fig. 2), described the calls thus:

You cannot get the right idea of the effect produced by the *Kühreihen* unless you have heard them in the mountains themselves. [...] The **solemn silence of nature** that surrounds it makes the heart receptive to all that is simple and natural; it proves to be a gentle and melancholy sensation and only heard like this is it possible to appreciate the full merit of the *Kühreihen*.²³

Tourist books describe the playing of the alphorn and pay a great deal of attention to the pacing of the call versus the response, with comments on how several seconds go by before the call returns.

Upon the slope in front of the Wetterhorn is usually stationed one who blows the *alpine horn* [...]. The traveller should on no account omit to stop and listen. **A few seconds after the horn has ceased**, the few and simple notes of the instrument are caught up and repeated by the echoes

23 “Der Kühreihen, so wie überhaupt der Gesang unsrer Bauern, will schlechterdings aus einer gewissen Entfernung gehört seyn [...]. Die feyerliche Stille der erhabenen Natur von welcher man umgeben ist, die das Herz öffnet und für alles Einfache, Ungekünstelte so empfänglich macht, die sanfte süßwehmüthige Stimmung, in welche man sich hier unmerklich versetzt sieht, dieß alles muß dabey seyn wenn ein Kühreihen uns entzücken soll.” (Kuhn 1818, pp. ii–iii. English after Jones 2014, p. 21, fn 37). Bold type by the present author.

of the vast cliff of the Wetterhorn, and **return to the ear refined and softened**, yet perfectly distinct, as it were an aërial concert warbling among the crags.²⁴

The Alhorn [...] is often sounded from the opposite slope while tourists are passing. Its simple notes are reechoed **a few seconds later** from the precipices of the Wetterhorn, the effect of which is extremely pleasing.²⁵

Some comment on a faster response, but the idea remains of something that lingers:

In the sward was stationed a man and some boys with a horn. [...] He must have practised long to emit such a flow of mellow, sonorous sounds from so unmusical-looking an instrument. The notes died away in softest cadence, which notes were taken up by the mountains and reverberated by them again and again. We had scarcely a moment's interval to remark on their sweetness, when the rocks echoed the same notes in fainter strains, another pause and we heard their vibrations still lingering among the cliffs till they expired in but a musical sigh.²⁶

Nature was a major force in the Romantic imagination. The eternity of Nature contrasted with the finitude of human life. Majestic, and at times foreboding mountains – and in particular the Alps – inspired musicians and composers such as Franz Liszt who, in 1837, summarised these feelings:

The lordly majesty of the Alpine lands is perhaps too great for our own littleness. Man feels himself oppressed by such greatness. The eternal existence of the glaciers warns him of his own transitoriness; the undisturbed purity of the snow is a silent reproach to his own sullied conscience. The masses of rock hang menacingly above his head, the somber green of the fir trees, the harsh air, the terror of the avalanche, the incessant rumbling of the abyss – all are austere symbols of a destiny working itself out, yet always threatened in the shadows by a cruel blow of fate.²⁷

Franz Schubert wrote to his brother in 1825 describing his travels to Salzburg and the nearby Berchtesgaden Alps:

The mountains appear higher and higher; the Untersberg, with its ghosts and legends, particularly peers above the rest like magic. [...] The sun darkens and the gloomy clouds lower over the black mountains like children of the mist; but they touch not the peak of the Untersberg – they glide past him, as though afraid of its dreadful inmates. [...] The Untersberg, with its attendant mountains, becomes gigantic; its majesty seems almost to crush us.²⁸

24 Murray 1838, p. 80. Present author's bold.

25 Baedeker 1863, pp. 148f. Present author's bold.

26 Morrell 1998, p. 64. Bold type by the present author.

27 “Les contrées alpestres, si grandes, si majestueuses, le sont trop peut-être pour notre petitesse. Leur grandeur écrase l'homme plutôt qu'elle ne l'élève. La permanence des glaciers l'avertit trop de son instabilité; la pureté immaculée des neiges éternelles est un reproche muet à sa conscience ternie; les masses de granit suspendues sur sa tête, la sinistre verdure des sapins, un rude climat, les terreurs de l'avalanche, et la voix ininterrompue qui gronde au fond des abîmes, sont d'austères symboles d'une destinée qui s'accomplit, toujours menacée dans l'ombre d'une fatalité irrévocable.” (Liszt 1838, p. 294; English after King 1945, p. 408).

28 “Die Berge steigen immer mehr in die Höhe, besonders ragt der fabelhafte Untersberg wie zauberhaft aus den übrigen hervor. [...] Die Sonne verdunkelt sich und die schweren Wolken ziehen über die schwarzen Berge wie Nebelgeister dahin; doch berühren sie den Scheitel des Unterberges nicht, sie schleichen an ihm vorüber, als fürchteten sie seinen grauvollen Inhalt. [...] Der Untersberg mit seinem Gefolge wird riesenhaft, ihre Größe will uns fast erdrücken.” (Kreißle 1861, p. 41; English after Kreißle 1869, Vol. 2, pp. 47f.).

And in 1829 Robert Schumann wrote to his mother from Bern:

[T]here is an immense charm in distance alone; and this very feeling, and the presence of the old classic mountains, gives rise to a hundred other poetical sentiments [...]. Man is not so unhappy as he imagines, for he has a heart which always finds responsive echoes in Nature. [...] do not mourn for me if I am crushed by an avalanche, or fall into a glacier, or am struck by lightning; for it would be a finer, nobler death than dying on a sick-bed.²⁹

These reactions to the grandeur of nature as seen in the alps can all be summarised by the key Romantic concept of the ‘sublime’. The debate surrounding the aesthetic notions of ‘beauty’, ‘pleasure’ and the ‘sublime’ was driven by the work of mid-eighteenth-century philosophers such as Edmund Burke³⁰ and Immanuel Kant³¹ and led to a shift in thought from the Enlightenment psychological aesthetic to the Romantic metaphysical aesthetic.³² Nature provoked feelings in man and, whilst these feelings might include delight in its beauty, man also experienced more troubling emotions such as fear of the power of Nature, awe at its majesty and even loneliness in the face of it, all of which could also give pleasure.

An appreciation of solitude and silence in Nature, the wonder and terror felt in recognising the smallness of man in comparison to its magnitude, evoked sensations of the sublime. The eternal silence of the mountains heightened an awareness of the brevity of life. The theoretician of landscape painting Carl Gustav Carus advised: “Climb to the topmost mountain peak, gaze out across long chains of hills [...]. There is a silent reverence within you; you lose yourself in infinite space; silently, your whole being is purified and cleansed; your ego disappears. *You are nothing; God is all.*”³³ All of these reactions to Nature were summarised perfectly in one image, namely the famous painting *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (*Wanderer above the Mists*, ca 1818) by Caspar David Friedrich, the teacher of the aforementioned Carus.

The accounts of tourists, including composers and other artists, in which the silence of the mountains is emphasised, has encouraged me actively to incorporate silence into my interpretations of the muted passages in these three works. I would like to suggest that in the use of alphorn-esque writing, the use of timbral effects and the experience of silence are all part of the composer’s intention to provoke in the audience the emotions associated with the sublime. Whether the audiences that heard these works in performance would have personally experienced alphorns ‘in the wild’ is thus somewhat redundant, as is whether these calls are authentic alphorn calls. Instead, what is important is that audiences would have instantly recognised the effect being employed and that sensations of the sublime were being evoked.

29 “[...] da auf meine Duplik dann der Reiz der Entfernung und der Gegenwart auf alten klassischen Bergen ist und dies Gefühl schon hundert andere poetisch erregt [...]. Der Mensch ist nicht so unglücklich wie er denkt; er hat sein Herz, das sein schönstes Echo in der Natur findet. [...] und verschüttet mich eine Lawine oder stürz’ ich in eine Alpe oder vom Blitze, so beweine mich nicht; denn ich stürbe schön und größer und frischer, als auf dem Krankenbette.” (Schumann 1829, pp. 71–73 and 75; English after Schumann 1888, pp. 69–71 and 73. See also King 1945, p. 405).

30 Burke 1757.

31 Kant 1764.

32 Dahlhaus 1989.

33 “Tritt denn hin auf den Gipfel des Gebirges, schau hin über die langen Hügelreihen [...] – es ist eine stille Andacht in Dir, Du selbst verlierst Dich im unbegrenzten Raume, Dein ganzes Wesen erfährt eine stille Läuterung und Reinigung, Dein Ich verschwindet, *Du bist nichts, Gott ist Alles.*” (Carus 1831, p. 29; English after Carus 2002, p. 87).

Examples of muted passages for horn in solo writing ca 1820–1825

The image shows a musical score for Louis Schlösser's *Concertino Op. 16, Adagio*, bars 16–29. The score is written for Horn in Eb and Piano. The Horn part consists of a series of open harmonic notes, some marked 'Echo.' and others 'pp Con Sordini'. The Piano part provides accompaniment with various textures, including a 'cresc.' section and a 'Solo' section. Dynamics range from pp to ff.

Fig. 3 Louis Schlösser: *Concertino* Op. 16, Adagio, bars 16–29 (Schlösser 1825).

Born in Darmstadt in 1800, Louis Schlösser moved to Vienna in 1822 where he became acquainted with Beethoven. In 1825 he moved to Paris to study violin with Rodolphe Kreutzer and composition with Jean-François Lesueur, eventually returning to Darmstadt. The *Concertino* dates from 1825, the year of his arrival in Paris, and was dedicated to the horn player Dauprat.³⁴ There are three versions of this work: for horn with orchestra, for horn and string quartet and for horn and piano. The muted passage here comes from the slow movement and is essentially the same in all three versions, bar the different instrumentation of the accompaniment.

This is the most accessible of the three works we shall examine here. The echo/*con sordino* notes are all open harmonics. Given that this work was composed for the natural horn, it would not be feasible to use hand stopping in order to create a *con sordino* effect, as this would alter the pitch of the notes. This suggests that a non-transposing mute was the intended solution.

In the opening of the Adagio section, Schlösser creates a stormy build-up prior to the horn calls and responses. Storms are the typical precursor to such an effect, as can be seen in the storm scene of Rossini's Overture to *Guillaume Tell* in 1829, which is followed by a cor-anglais imitation of the *ranz des vaches*. In the *Concertino*, the horn player has to alternate echo or *con sordino* passages in response to the open calls.

The horn player, pianist and composer Friedrich Starke was born in Elsterwerda in 1774. Starke's military service and musical roles in various parts of Saxony make it unclear as to when he eventually settled in Vienna, where he studied with Johann Georg Albrechtsberger.³⁵ Like Schlösser, he was on familiar terms with Beethoven. A famous anecdote concerns Starke visiting Beethoven for breakfast with the intention of playing the *Sonata* Op. 17 in F with the composer. Starke encountered every natural horn player's nightmare: Beethoven's piano was a semitone flat. Thankfully he had arrived with an E crook that would make the sonata playable, but Beethoven declared that the "effect would be spoiled" and instead transposed the piano part up a semitone.³⁶

34 Schlösser 1825.

35 *OeZ* 1836, p. 57.

36 Nohl 1877, p. 145. Translation after Forbes 1967, p. 526.

Fig. 4 Friedrich Starke: *Adagio und Rondo* Op. 105, bars 184–199 (Starke 1821).

The muted passage in Starke's *Adagio und Rondo* Op. 105 of ca 1821 interrupts the Rondo. Again, there is a stormy build-up prior to the muted passage. And again, the horn alternates between echo/*con sordino* and open. As is common for compositions of this period for horn, Starke also gives an alternative version for cello. Even accounting for the fact that the cello passages in the treble clef are intended to be played an octave lower than written, the cello version still exploits the upper range of the instrument, and I believe that Starke intends this to create a special timbral effect.

These timbral effects are not restricted to just the horn and cello. Starke is better known for his contribution to Viennese piano playing than to the horn repertoire; around the same time as this *Adagio und Rondo*, he also published his *Wiener Pianoforte-Schule* Op. 108.³⁷ Starke's piano had five pedals, and in the muted passage in the *Adagio und Rondo* he includes directions to alternate between the second pedal, the *Fortezug* or forte pedal, and the fifth pedal, the *Pianissimozug*. In the stormy section prior to the muted passage, Starke apparently contradicts his own advice from his *Pianoforte-Schule* in which he recommends that the *Fortezug* should be used only in slow passages with relatively static harmony; he especially recommends it for “pastoral, tender and melancholic arias, romances, religious compositions and all the soulful passages where the song flows slowly”. Whilst this description does not seem appropriate for this tempestuous passage, such a description is perfect for the alphorn-esque passage that follows, as is Starke's recommendation of the *Pianissimozug* for “distant play, or echo”, thus encouraging all three musicians, be they horn player, cellist or pianist, to exploit special timbral effects.³⁸

³⁷ Starke 1820.

³⁸ *Fortezug*: “Ueberhaupt darf man sich dieses Zuges zum Forte nur bedienen in gleichförmiger Harmonie Folge [...] in Pastorale, zärtlichen und schwermüthigen Arien, Romanzen, religiösen Compositionen, und überhaupt in allen gefühlvollen Stellen, wo der Gesang langsam dahin fließt”. *Pianissimozug*: “es lässt sich durch diesen Zug ein entferntes Spiel, oder Echo, sehr gut darstellen.” (Starke 1820, Vol. 1, p. 16).

“Answer, Echoes, Answer”

[illegible]

Fig. 5 Franz Lachner: *Introduction et Variations* Op. 12, var. 4, bars 1–17 (Lachner n.d.).

In the previous two extracts, we have highlighted the inclusion of musical effects associated with the alphorn, such as stormy accompaniments, horn calls and their echoes. Our final work here, Franz Lachner's *Introduction et Variations* Op. 12, composed in 1825, is even more explicit in its association with Switzerland, given that it takes as its theme the Swiss folksong *Guggisberglied* ('S isch äben e Mönsch uf Aerde, Simelibärg).³⁹

Das alte Guggisberger Lied.

Vortrag, gehalten an der Jahresversammlung der Schweiz. Gesellschaft
für Volkskunde in Schaffhausen, Sonntag, den 12. Mai 1912.

Von Dr. Otto v. Greyerz.

's isch ä - ben e Mönsch uf Är - de, Si - me - li - bärg! 's isch
ä - ben e Mönsch uf Är - de, Si - me - li - bärg! Und
ds Vre - ne - li ab em Gug - gis - bärg, und ds Si - mes Hans Jog - ge - li
ä - net dem Bärg, 's isch ä - ben e Mönsch uf Är - de, dass
i möcht bi - n - ihm si.

Fig. 6 Das alte Guggisberger Lied (Greyerz 1912 p. 193).

39 For the history of the *Guggisberglied* see Greyerz 1912.

Whilst the introductory Andante contains passagework strongly redolent of alphorn calls, the alternating open and muted passages of variation 4 are less evocative. As with Starke, an alternative version for cello is offered, but, unlike Starke, in this key variation Lachner writes a distinctly different part, opting for a more syncopated, scalic and arpeggiated variation that yet again exploits the high register of the cello.

Unlike the earlier two pieces discussed here, there is a further challenge in the muted horn part in that it includes a number of non-harmonic notes such as the written B[♯], E^b and F (notes created normally by the use of the hand in the bell) at the same time as the performer is required to mute the instrument. A similar passage, containing non-harmonic notes in addition to the indication to mute the instrument, can be found in Beethoven's *Rondino* in E^b major, WoO 25. In the case of the *Variations*, this challenge might actually be redundant, given that Lachner composed this work for the early valve-horn player Édouard-Constantin Lewy. It is thus possible that this work was not composed for the natural horn. The use of valves would immediately nullify the challenge of muting chromatic, non-harmonic notes, and also offer up a solution for the alternating open and muted passages by potentially suggesting the use of the hand for the muted passages, rather than a physical mute.

The date of composition of these *Variations* – 1825 – situates it in a period when, as Christian Ahrens points out, “one cannot say with certainty whether the works had been especially composed for the valved horn”.⁴⁰ However, a review from 1826 does state that Édouard-Constantin Lewy played a set of variations by Lachner on the “newly-invented Viennese chromatic horn” at a concert in Stuttgart that year, so it is reasonable to assume that the work in question was this same set of variations.⁴¹

Despite the evidence that these *Variations* were most likely written for the early valve horn, the horn part of this work is written in an idiom that is very typical for the natural horn. For example, there are no notes below the sixth harmonic that are more than a semitone away from an open harmonic (see, for example, the end of variation 1 in Fig. 7).



Fig. 7 Franz Lachner: *Introduction et Variations* Op. 12, var. 1, bars 1–18 (Lachner 1825).

Perhaps Lachner took a pragmatic approach when composing these *Variations*, creating a piece that could work on the nascent valve horn (an instrument promoted by the Lewy brothers) but that was equally playable on the natural horn, which was the more dominant instrument of the period. Franz Schubert adopted a similar stance when he wrote for the early valve horn in his *Auf dem Strom* D. 943.

⁴⁰ “Allerdings lässt sich nicht mit Sicherheit sagen, ob die Werke speziell für das Ventilhorn komponiert worden waren” (Ahrens 1986, p. 28; English after Ahrens 2008a, p. 22).

⁴¹ “[...] auf dem neu erfundenen Wiener chromatischen Horne” (Anonymous 1826, col. 461).

In order to perform these *Variations* and navigate the challenge of the muted passage on the natural horn, one needs a mute that has the capacity to alternate between being both a transposing and a non-transposing mute. Such a mute might well have existed since 1795, as Gassner credits Carl Türirschmidt with having invented just such a mute in that year – one capable of “producing the semitones quite purely on the instrument”. However, this could conceivably also have been a mute that was used in lieu of the hand, i.e. specifically to create ‘semitones’.⁴² The story of Türirschmidt’s mute is repeated in Ledebur’s 1861 *Tonkünstler-Lexikon* as a means for the performer to play the “half or stopped notes as safe and pure as with the hand”.⁴³

In 1856, Bernsdorf stated that horns and trumpets were the only wind instruments that used “ein mechanischer Dämpfer”, the horn mute being a cloth-covered hollow ball of cardboard, roughly six inches in diameter, with an open tube which fitted into the bell of the horn. By means of a wire, which would protrude from the lower side of the sphere, a disc in the cavity of the ball could be operated to mask the tube, thus enabling the horn player to stop the notes whilst simultaneously muting the instrument.⁴⁴ Morley-Pegge credits Frölich with a description of a similar mute able to alter the pitch of the notes:

[A] hollow papier mâché ball, about six inches across, with an open neck to be inserted into the bell of the horn. Inside this ball was another covered with leather and with a cord attached to it which hung down from the bell. With this the neck could be more or less fully occluded at will, in the same way as by hand stopping.⁴⁵

Fitzpatrick erroneously conflates Bernsdorf’s description with the earlier references to Türirschmidt’s mute, even going as far as to declare that his “reconstruction in seasoned acacia wood” was made “to Thürirschmidt’s [*sic*] specifications as quoted by Bernsdorf.”⁴⁶ Bernsdorf makes no mention of Türirschmidt, and describes a mute in keeping with the “Sordine für das einfache Horn/Sourdine pour le cor simple” as illustrated in Adam Wirth’s 1877 *Horn-Schule*.⁴⁷

An even earlier account of a mechanical mute exists from 1738 at the Gotha Hofkapelle. Ahrens cites a receipt from the Gotha court metalworker that describes the metalworker having made mutes for the duke’s horn players “so that by pushing a lever they can mute the tone or sound by means of some springs”.⁴⁸ This description is insufficient to determine whether the mute affected the pitch of the notes, and whether it was used as a means to create non-har-

42 “1795 erfand er einen Dämpfer (Sordin), vermittelt dessen man auch die Halbtöne ganz rein auf dem Instrumente hervorbringen konnte.” (Gassner 1847, p. 849).

43 “Im Jahre 1795 erfand er eine Sourdine (Dämpfer), vermittelt deren man die halben oder gestopften Töne eben so sicher und rein, als mit der Hand nehmen kann.” (Ledebur 1861, p. 610).

44 “Unter den Blasinstrumenten wird nur beim Horn und der Trompete ein mechanischer Dämpfer angewendet. Bei ersterem (dem Horn) besteht er gewöhnlich aus einer meistens mit Tuch überzogenen hohlen Kugel aus Pappe, ungefähr sechs Zoll im Durchmesser, an welcher sich ein offener Schlauch befindet, der in den Schalltrichter paßt; innerhalb der Kugel ist ein Draht mit einer Scheibe angebracht, durch welche die Höhlung des Schlauches verdeckt werden kann, damit der Hornist trotz des Dämpfers auch die Töne stopfen kann, zu welchem Behufe auch der Draht mit einem Handgriffe versehen ist, der aus der untern Seite der Kugel hervorragt.” (Bernsdorf 1856, pp. 646f.).

45 “Später machte man die Sordine gewöhnlich aus einer hohlen Kugel von Papiermaché, im Durchmesser ungefähr 6 Zoll, mit einem offenen Schlauch oder Zapfen, der in den untern Theil des Horns eingeschoben wurde. Um stopfen zu können, hatte man innerhalb desselben einen Draht mit einer daran befestigten, mit Leder überzogenen Kugel angebracht, durch welche die Höhlung des Schlauchs, nach Bedarf mehr oder weniger, gedeckt werden konnte.” (Frölich 1886, p. 225; English after Morley-Pegge 1960, p. 140).

46 Fitzpatrick 1970, p. 175 and p. 178, fn. 1.

47 Wirth 1877, p. 6.

48 “[...] daß man durch einen trücker [Drücker] vermittelt einigen federn den Thon oder Laut dämpfen kann” (Ahrens 2008b, p. 322). See also Ahrens 2007.

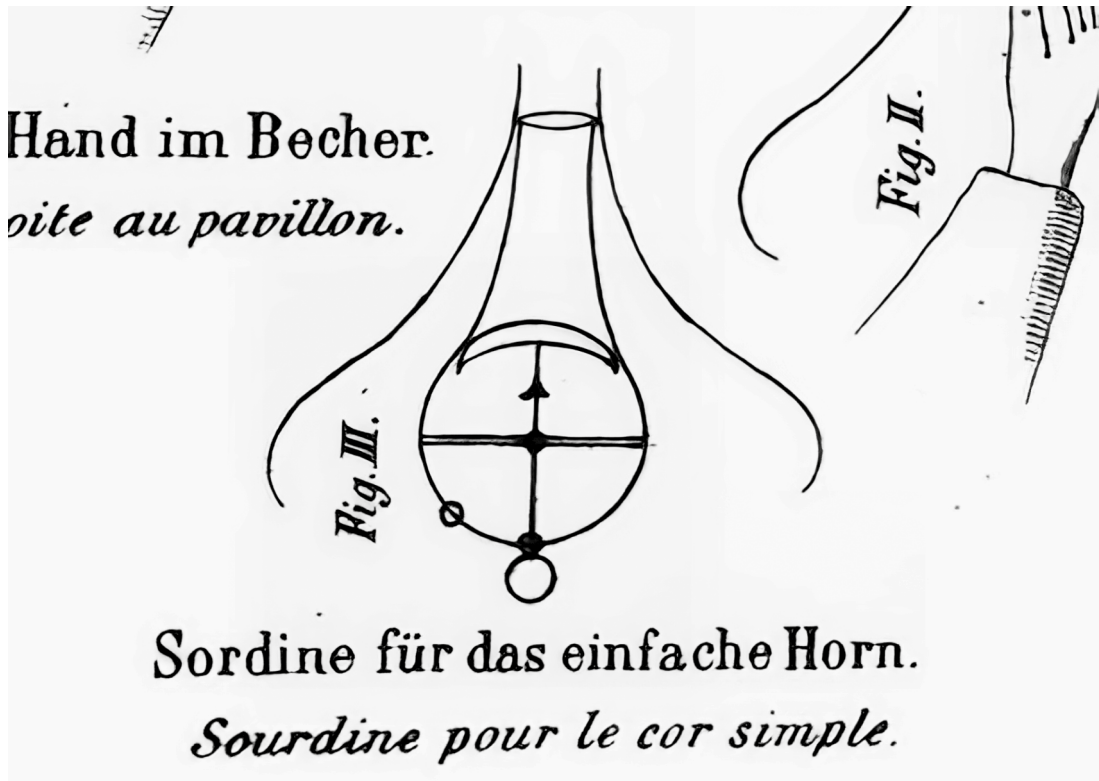


Fig. 8 “Sordine für das einfache Horn/Sourdine pour le cor simple” (Wirth 1877, p. 6).

monic notes. However, it does demonstrate a certain level of inventiveness and technical skill as regards mutes in the eighteenth century.

Conclusion

In the three pieces I have explored here, it appears that the composers are using the topos of the alphorn in order to evoke the feelings associated with the sound of the instrument. Regardless of whether they quote directly from the known alphorn repertoire of the time, the setting of these ‘calls’, after stormy passages in the pieces by Starke and Schlösser, and within an overtly Swiss composition in the Lachner, are enough for the composers to signal that this is the effect that they are referencing.

A number of other works from this period emulate the sound of the alphorn, yet were composed for instruments other than the horn. These compositions also use special timbral effects associated with the specific solo instrument in question. For example, Pierre-Joseph-Guillaume Zimmerman’s *Second Piano Concerto* Op. 13, dating from 1823, features the alternate use of the grand pedal and simultaneous use of both the grand pedal and the ‘jeu de buffle’; Bernhard Romberg’s pre-1828 *Concerto Suisse* for cello incorporates harmonics, and Gustavus Valentin von Holst’s 1823 *Fantasia Tirolese* for harp requires the performer to play closer to the sounding board and to use newly invented swell-box louvres.⁴⁹ The use of the mute with the horn is in keeping with these special timbral effects.

For performer/researchers such as myself, I believe that there has been an over-reliance on the ‘low-hanging fruit’ of research possibilities afforded to us by organological and pedagogical sources. The physical experience of working with an instrument offers much information but

⁴⁹ Zimmerman 1823; Romberg 1826; Holst 1826.

it is easy for our modern mindsets to overrule the inherent evidence of this resource. Whether we are dealing with methods, treatises, critiques or other accounts of performances in earlier eras, textual sources can be contradictory and notoriously difficult to interpret in a way that will enable us to determine the performance practices of their time.

In exploring these three works I have investigated how the organological demands of inserting and removing the mute co-exist with the musical demands, and have found the accounts of Swiss tourists, artists, composers and philosophers of the period to be essential in shaping my interpretations. For me, exploring these non-musical accounts, and especially exploring the experience of listening – also listening to silence – has afforded me a new understanding of these works that I also believe has enabled me to achieve a more coherent interpretation of them.

The time needed to put the mute in or take it out means I have to slow down. I have to engage with the stagecraft necessary to make my movements match the atmosphere of the music. I have found the use of papier-maché mutes, based on the descriptions given above, to be beneficial on account of their lightness. But most importantly, I am required to pace myself in order to emulate these tourist book descriptions, to take the ‘few seconds’ before the reply, safe in the knowledge that any tension created by those few seconds will be relieved when the response ultimately comes.

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