

The name of this composer, an oboe virtuoso and excellent pianist, seldom appears on concert programmes, and yet he left a large, often first-rate oeuvre. Beside several oboe concertos with large orchestra and variously scored chamber music with oboe, this includes 3 symphonies, 2 ballets, piano music, a horn sonata, and a flute concerto. Many of these works are lost or remain undiscovered. We are therefore delighted to present new editions of two wonderful quartets for oboe and string trio (see also: Friedrich E. Thurner: Quartet in g minor, Amadeus BP 2804).

Friedrich Eugen Thurner was born on 9 December 1785 in Montbéliard, where his father Anton Thurner – one of the leading flautists of his time – had taken up a post as cabinet secretary and chamber virtuoso to the art-loving Duke Friedrich Eugen von Württemberg. At the age of four our Friedrich Eugen lost both parents, and he was taken in by an uncle in Cassel, a music lover whose home was frequented by the very best musicians. Here the talented child enjoyed a comprehensive education that included piano and flute lessons, and his playing of both instruments soon attracted a lot of attention. At twelve he switched from flute to oboe, “maintaining that this was the most difficult instrument of all and that only with this could he acquire greatness and thus pleasure.” At sixteen he went to Munich for further studies under the famous oboist Friedrich Ramm and capellmeister Franz Danzi, gaining a diploma in performance. Here the first works of the young composer became known to the public. He went on to make the acquaintance of Beethoven in Vienna, and to play in orchestras in Braunschweig, Cassel and Frankfurt on the Main – where he found Louis Spohr, a longtime friend since the Braunschweig years.

From this time on, sadly, he began to show signs of a serious, recurrent and worsening mental illness, which forced him to give up his orchestral post. During periods of respite, he continued to tour with great success in Europe, and composed numerous works that he dedicated to his patrons and supporters.

He spent the last eight years in an institution in Amsterdam, where he died in 1827. To quote Spohr: a great musical genius,

prevented by his unfortunate illness from developing to the full.

He handled his instrument with a bold magnificence that was unequalled at the time and may well remain so. His tone was strong and full, yet could sink to the most dulcet pianissimo, while always keeping a certain freedom and nobility. He laughed at difficulties, had no equal for power, and his cantabile was soulfully expressive. He performed his own compositions with a magical bravura that enraptured every listener.

This quotation is taken from his detailed 1827 obituary in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, which also reveals a captivating, dazzling, yet ultimately tragic biography.

The source for our new edition is the first edition from 1818, whose title page reads:

QUATUOR | brillant | pour | Hautbois | ou Flûte | avec Accompagnement | de Violon, Alto et Violoncelle | composé | par | EUGENE THURNER. | Oeuv. 33 – Pr. 20 gr. | À LEIPZIG | Chez Fred. Hofmeister | 537.

Some obvious errors and inconsistencies in the source have been corrected, partly thanks to parallel passages. A few editorial suggestions appear in small print or brackets. For the rest, we have followed the parts of the first edition.

Kurt Meier

It is a joy to be able to introduce to oboists two quartets by Friedrich Eugen Thurner; next to Mozart's brilliant masterpiece, they are among the best works written during the 18th/ 19th century for our instrument in this scoring.

In the long list of composer oboists such as G. B. Sammartini, A. Besozzi, J. G. Janitsch, J. Fiala, G. Ferlendis and J. C. Fischer, Thurner, with L. A. Lebrun, is one of the most fascinating figures. The two very different quartets, stylistically close to Beethoven, Spohr and even Schubert, display a highly original, individual composer of great expressive power and skilled craftsmanship.

I am convinced that these two works will soon become an indispensable part of our instrument's chamber music repertoire, and am already looking forward to further publications of works by Friedrich Eugen Thurner.

Heinz Holliger