

“A reflection on virtuosity based on Iwan Müller’s Quartets for Clarinet and Strings”

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In the first half of the 19th Century the clarinet went under a major set of changes and developments, in particular by the hands of Iwan Müller, who created a 13-keyed instrument and composed music in the brilliant virtuoso style of the time, with the purpose of showing the height of technical difficulties that he could overcome with his invention.

Back then, his music was indeed extremely demanding, and virtuosity was also a part of the expression used willingly by the composer, but the clarinet developed further, becoming a very different instrument in its modern version, making me question is the virtuosity as part of expression still present in this music, and to what extent?

To investigate this question, I will study the clarinet part of two Quartets for clarinet and strings by Müller on a modern instrument and on a 13-keyed instrument, comparing the experiences through the use of a “fieldwork” diary and recorded voice notes. To design this phase, I will follow the principles of autobiographical design, a method particularly used in Human-Computer Interaction research.

As a possible outcome, I expect to provide the conceptual tools to other clarinet players in order to approach critically the virtuosistic repertoire they play, and an input to reconsider our approach to this type of music and the “heritage” it brings. Another consequence could be the development of a method that can be applied to other pieces of music or other authors for similar purposes.