

## BOOK REVIEW

by Maurice F. Powell

### Clarinet Virtuosi of the Past by Pamela Weston

Let me say straight away that this book is to be thoroughly recommended. Every clarinetist, whether student, amateur or professional should read it for the wealth of information to be found in its entertainingly readable pages; future writers on the history of the clarinet will be indebted to Miss Weston, and will use her book as the basis of their researches. Other writers have mentioned eminent virtuosi in general books on clarinet history - notable amongst whom are Oskar Kroll : 'The Clarinet (1968) and F.G. Randall' : 'The Clarinet' - but as the sleeve-note and preface remind us, very little has appeared in print about these men who devoted their lives to the perfection of their art. Miss Weston asks, and answers many basic questions: What sort of people were they? Under what conditions did they work? What, where and how did they play? What instruments did they use? Famous artistic collaborations: Mozart and Stadler, Weber and Barmann, Spohr and Hermstedt and Brahms and Muhlbach, form the backbone of clarinet history, and Miss Weston has uncovered much new material concerning them.

Lesser-known and important, but hitherto shadowy historical figures are brought to life; early performers and experimenters such as the elusive Mr. Charles, 'The Sponsor of the Clarinet';

Johann Christian Denner, the inventor of the instrument; the early virtuosi, Beer, Tausch (founder of an important academy of wind instruments in Berlin in 1805); obscure musicians such as the Finn, Bernt Crusell, a fine player, a talented composer of clarinet music, but also of songs based on his national sagas, and a translator of opera librettos for the Stockholm opera; Schubert's clarinettist Count Troyer, and Friedlowsky, one of Vienna's most respected musicians for whom Spohr wrote his Octet op. 32; and many more besides right up to the 'British Heritage' and 'the most celebrated of English clarinettists', Charles Draper.

Miss Weston does not attempt to discuss the music that her virtuosi played, and more often than not, wrote, except in a general way, although a great many little-known concertos, pot-purris, variations and fantasies are mentioned. In this respect her book bears comparison with other standard works on famous virtuosi; Franz Farga's *Violins and Violinists*, and Harold C. Schonberg's *The Great Pianists*. Miss Weston has clearly conducted her researches well, and has gone to great pains to obtain little-known contemporary sources: clarinet tutors and instruction books, rare dissertations, letters, photographs, lithographs and caricatures, but the basis of her inspiration is her long experience as a performer and teacher, and the tremendous enthusiasm she has for the clarinet and clarinet lore. The chapters on 'Paris, scene of inventions' are especially informative, and Miss Weston obviously has a great affection for the great Heinrich Barmann, whose achievements, she says, leave no doubt that he reigns supreme. His wonderful playing inspired no less than three major composers to write for him: Weber, Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, and the training he gave his son, Carl, and the method the latter wrote, has become the basis of modern clarinet teaching.

Each chapter has its own useful bibliography, and there is a general bibliography and list of significant recordings at the end of the book.

The book is published by Robert Hale & Co., 292 pages, 32 plates, illustrations in the text, price : \$5.00.