

## FRANÇOIS RENÉ GEBAUER'S *50 LEÇONS POUR LA TROMBONNE BASSE, ALTO & TENOR*: THE EARLIEST BOOK OF ÉTUDES FOR THE TROMBONE

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Several years ago, while writing my article on André Braun's *Gamme et Méthode pour les trombones*,<sup>1</sup> I transcribed and translated the following short paragraph found at the end of Braun's text:

Note: There is a very useful work that can be used following this method. It is entitled 50 Easy and Progressive Lessons in the Most Common Major and Minor Tonalities. Composed by F. Gebauer, it includes six pieces or trios for three trombones.

At the time I did not give much thought to the implications of these few lines. After collecting additional bits of information about Braun and his method during the ensuing years, however, I recently decided to publish an update on my research. (See the preceding article in this issue.) It was while going through my material that I realized that if Braun's *Méthode* was the earliest modern trombone method, Gebauer's volume of *50 Leçons* was surely the earliest book of trombone études. So inspired, I was able to find a copy of Gebauer's work after a short search.

François René Gebauer was born on 15 March 1773 at Versailles as the son of a military bandsman. He received musical instruction from his brother Michel Joseph Gebauer and learned bassoon with François Devienne. From 1788 he was a member of the band of the Swiss Guards at Versailles, joining the band of the National Guard in 1790. After playing in various Parisian orchestras during the 1790s, he became a member of the orchestra of the Opéra in 1799 or 1800. From 1795 to 1802, and again from 1824 to 1838, he was professor of bassoon at the Conservatoire. He died in Paris on 28 July 1845. Gebauer was a prolific composer, especially of music for woodwind instruments. Three of his brothers were also active in Paris as wind players (oboe, horn, and flute) and composers at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth.<sup>2</sup>

The title page of Gebauer's étude book reads (Figure 1),

Sequel to the Method for Trombone  
by Braun.  
50 Lessons  
for the bass, alto, & tenor trombones,  
including  
27 pieces for the bass trombone,

7 pieces for the alto trombone, 10 pieces for the tenor trombone,  
 &  
 6 trios for the 3 trombones,  
 composed by  
 F.R. Gebauer

As is obvious from the heading, Gebauer's *50 Leçons* were intended from the outset to complement Braun's *Méthode*. Therefore this collection, like the method, was probably first published between 1795 and 1797 by Jean-Georges Sieber. However, as with Braun's book, the original Sieber edition of Gebauer's volume has not yet come to light. The copy I was able to locate is a French-German reprint issued in October 1820 by Johann André,<sup>3</sup> who was also the publisher of a French-German edition of Braun's *Méthode*.<sup>4</sup>

The "lessons" or exercises are arranged in progressive order of difficulty. The first is entirely in whole notes, the second adds half and quarter notes, eighth notes are introduced in no. 12, and so forth. As in Braun's *Méthode*, the emphasis here is on the bass trombone, with more than half the exercises devoted to it. Moreover, the section dealing with the bass trombone is also where the basics are covered: The tonalities, which range from E $\flat$  Major/C Minor to A Major, are named at their first appearance, and the corresponding étude is preceded by a short *prélude* consisting of the important tones of the key (Figure 2). Sometimes the purpose of the exercise is stated: No. 2. *Exercice sur les Gammes* (scale exercise); No. 4. *Exercice avec des liaisons* (exercise with tied notes); No. 11. *Exercice pour les notes pointée* (exercise for dotted notes); No. 13. *Exercice pour chanter sur l'instrument* (exercise for singing on the instrument); No. 20. *Exercice pour les triolets* (exercise for triplets—actually 6/8 time!); No. 21. *Exercice pour l'étendue de l'instrument, et pour se familiariser avec les demi-tons* (exercise for the complete range of the instrument, and for familiarity with the semitones), (Figure 3), etc. The last étude for the bass trombone (no. 27) consists of a theme with two variations. The compass of the exercises is *F - f'*, with an *E* in two of the *préludes*.

After seven pages of bass trombone études come three each for the alto and tenor trombones, with seven and ten études respectively. These exercises are also ordered according to increasing difficulty, although only in terms of note values: The first étude for the alto trombone already ascends to *d''* (Figure 4)! The tessitura of the alto trombone exercises is *f - e $\flat$* "; that of the tenor, *B - g'* (Figure 5).

The final six "lessons" are trios for alto, tenor, and bass trombones. Here, everything presented in the preceding études is brought together and a few new things added: long and short appoggiaturas, dynamics, fermatas, crescendos and decrescendos, and, of course, ensemble playing.

The first trio is a transcription of the motet *O Salutaris hostia* by François-Joseph Gossec (Figure 6). The impetus for this transcription, and possibly even for the inclusion of trios in the étude book, was undoubtedly a performance of this piece by three horns at a concert given on 20 November 1793 by the band of the National Institute of Music. On the day after this concert, François René Gebauer was one of thirteen musicians appointed to the faculty of the National Institute, the predecessor of the Paris Conservatoire.<sup>5</sup>

Except for the Moravian trombone choir repertoire, these six trios are the only existing examples of trombone ensemble music from the second half of the eighteenth century. Indeed, they were the first pieces for this formation to appear since the publication a century earlier, in 1697, of the two sonatas for three trombones in Daniel Speer's *Grundrichtiger Unterricht*.<sup>6</sup>

André Braun's *Gamme et Méthode pour les trombones* was the first modern trombone method. In combination with François René Gebauer's *50 Leçons pour la Trombone Basse, Alto & Tenor*, it can surely also be considered the prototype of the modern complete method for the trombone as developed during the first half of the nineteenth century by Sturm,<sup>7</sup> Cornette, the Vobarons, and others.<sup>8</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Howard Weiner, "André Braun's *Gamme et Méthode pour les Trombones*: The Earliest Modern Trombone Method Rediscovered," *Historic Brass Society Journal* 5 (1993): 288-308.

<sup>2</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Gebauer (i)," by David Charlton.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication, 9 January 1999. I am indebted to the firm of Johann André, Offenbach am Main, for providing me with a copy of Gebauer's *50 Leçons* and for permission to reproduce several pages of it here.

<sup>4</sup> Weiner, "André Braun," 291.

<sup>5</sup> David Whitwell, *Band Music of the French Revolution*, *Alta Musica* 5 (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1979), pp. 61-54.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Speer, *Grundrichtiger Unterricht der musikalischen Kunst oder Vierfaches musikalisches Kleeblatt* (Ulm, 1697; facsimile rpt., Leipzig: Edition Peters, 1974), pp. 225-31; Modern edition, ed. Anthony Baines (London: Musica Rara, 1964).

<sup>7</sup> Sturm, *Méthode complete pour les Trombones Basse, Tenor et Alto* (Paris, before 1826). Apparently the second oldest modern trombone method, Sturm's *Méthode* has not yet come to light. It was issued by Philippe Petit sometime between 1816, when Petit established his publishing house, and 1826, when it was listed in the *Catalogue des Ouvrages de Musique composant le Fonds de Ph: Petit*. [Facsimile in *Cinq Catalogues d'éditeurs de Musique à Paris (1824-1834)* (Geneva: Minkoff, 1976)]. It is described there as *Méthode complete pour les Trombones Basse, Tenor et Alto, contenant un abrégé clair des principes de la musique, quatre tablatures, une explication du mécanisme de l'instrument et l'indication du pincer des lèvres, 36 leçons pour le Trombone Basse, 12 pour le Trombone Tenor et 32 pour le Trombone Alto*.

<sup>8</sup> See Benny Sluchin and Raymond Lapie, "Slide Trombone Teaching and Method Books in France (1794-1960)," *Historic Brass Society Journal* 9 (1997): 4-29.

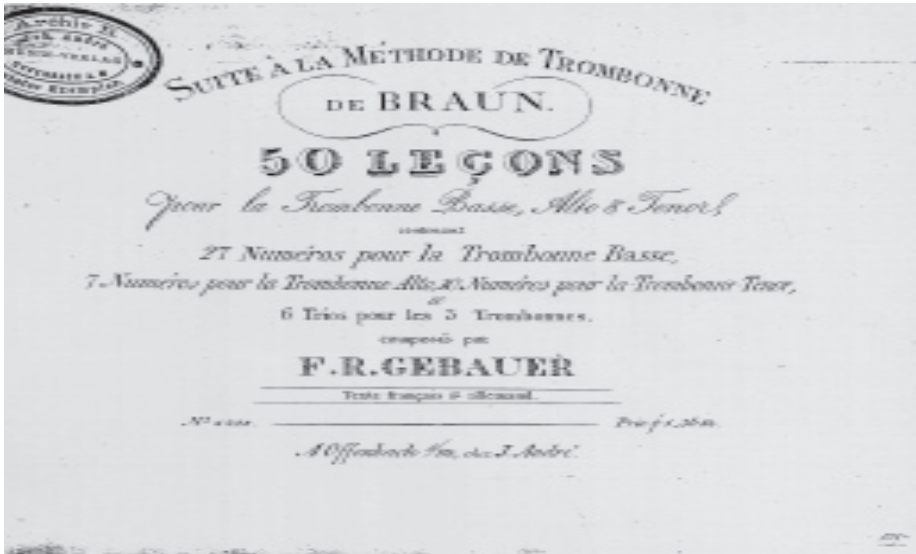


Figure 1  
Gebauer, *50 Leçons pour la Trombonne*  
(With the kind permission of Musikverlag Johann André, Offenbach)

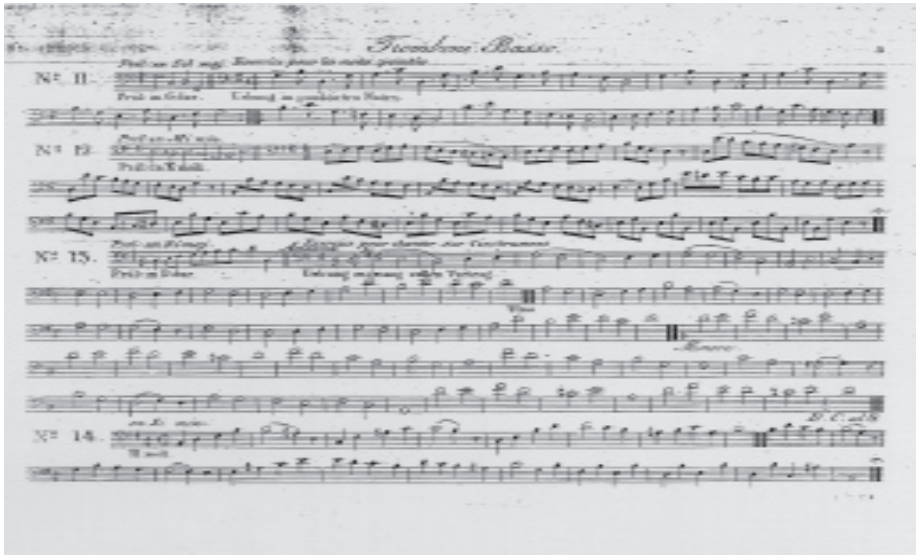


Figure 2  
Gebauer, *50 Leçons*

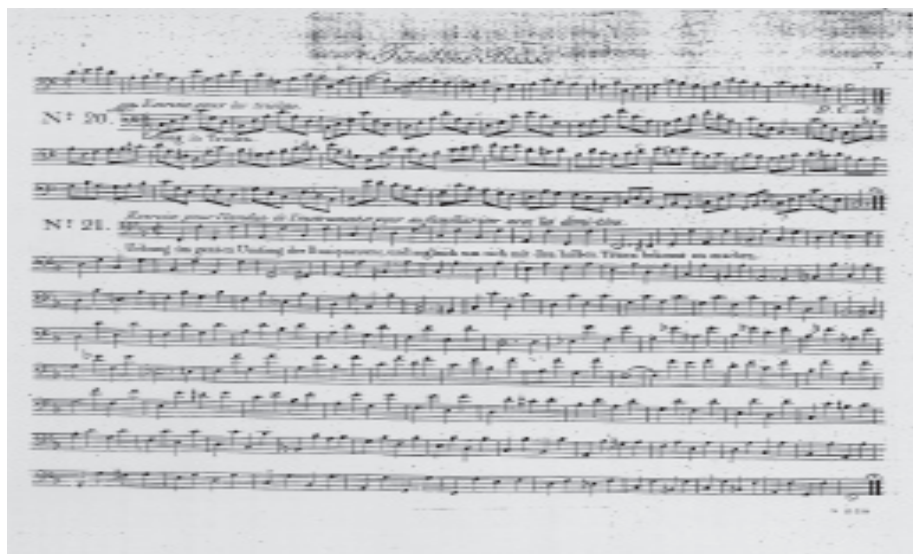


Figure 3  
Gebauer, *50 Leçons*

Figure 4  
Gebauer, *50 Leçons*

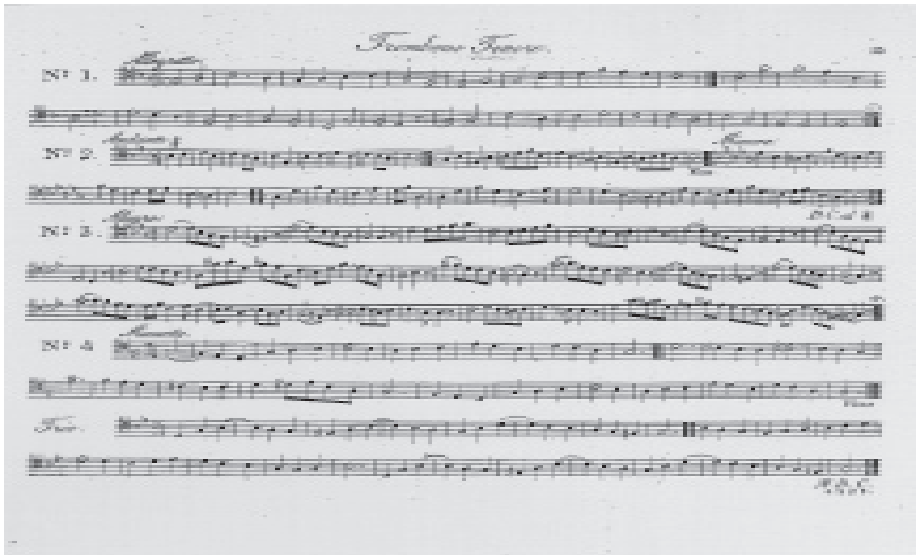


Figure 5  
Gebauer, *50 Leçons*

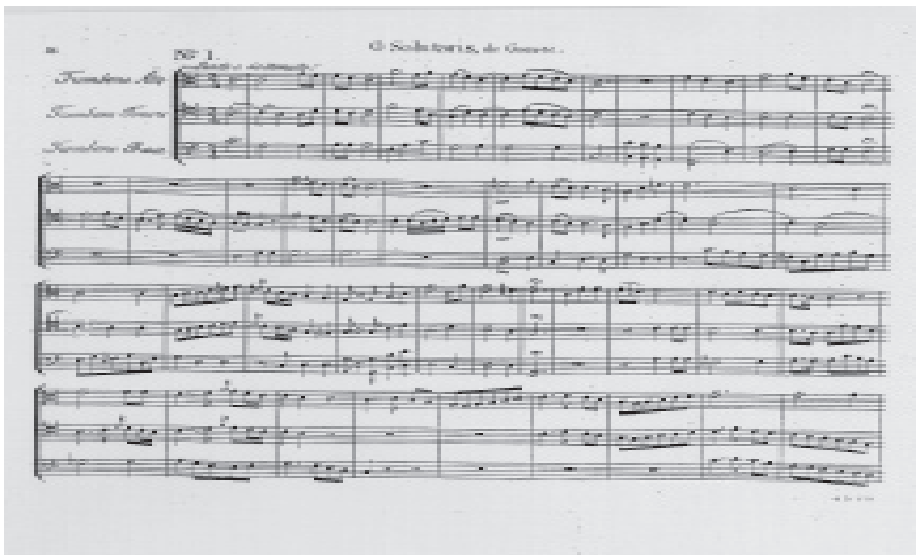


Figure 6  
Gebauer, *50 Leçons*