

MY LIRA STORY

With this double CD I am celebrating three anniversaries; 75 years of life, 40 years of active, practical, dealing with the *lira da braccio* (only 36 with the *lira da gamba / lirone*) and 25 years of working on my scientific *Lira* project. Here is my *Lira* - story:

In the mid-1970s, after I first encountered/met the concept of performance practice in Copenhagen and began collecting data on various combinations of instruments during the Renaissance, every now and then the name of a hitherto to me unknown string instrument appeared: *lira*. Somewhat later it became clear that at that time there were even (at least) two *liras*, *lira da braccio* of a smaller and higher register and *lira da gamba* (also known as *lirone or arciviolata*) a larger one with a slightly deeper register.

Since I am a graduate violist, who at that time (mostly as a self-taught) already played the viol (viola da gamba) quite well, I was equally intrigued by both instruments. In 1977 in York, I met Robert (Bob) Hadaway, British maker of viol, harp and other historical percussion instruments, and asked him to make a *lira da braccio* for me - an original that is kept, what the coincidence: in the collection of original instruments in Vienna, the city to which I will move in 1983 and work there for 17 years. The instrument was finished in 1981, and I (after a "simulation" made a month or two before on my medieval *vielle*) really started to play it "immediately"... The same summer I presented it at the musicological symposium in Poggio a Caiano, near Florence .

This sudden success prompted me to immediately order from Bob a *lira da gamba / lirone*, which was finished three years later but I finally got it "in hand" and began to study diligently only in 1985. As in the case of the first *lira*, original of this instrument is kept in the viennese collection of early musical instruments ...

In the meantime (1983) Mira Valenta (my then wife and part of "Duo Pomykalo" and later co-founder and co-leader of our viennese early music (EM) "Ensemble Lyra Wien") and me moved to Vienna.

Already in 1986 I recorded on the *lira da braccio* my first CD (devoted to the music of Swiss composer Ludwig Senfl) with the viennese ensemble "Clemencic Consort" (with which I performed, toured and recorded several CDs from 1983 until 2004) and soon with both *liras* started to perform a series of concerts or recordings of that ensemble as well as our "Ensemble Lyra Wien."

Meanwhile, in the late 80s and 90s, in addition of recording several CDs with the "Ensemble Lyra Wien" I played one or (of course alternately :) both *liras* three times for interludes of *La Pellegrina* (once in Siena and twice in Geneva) and with *lirone* performed Monteverdi's "*Orfeo*" at the theatre "La Fenice" in Venice.

25 years ago, in 1996, I started "officially" working on my scientific project dedicated to both *liras*, on which (although it was "officially" completed in 2001) in a way I am still working ... As part of the scientific work on the project, I pursued a kind of practical musicological "laboratory" and to that gave a series of lectures with concerts for students, professors and colleagues at the universities of Vienna, Innsbruck, Zurich, Geneva, the Museum of musical instruments in Leipzig, various symposia at the Sorbonne, Zagreb, Florence and the Summer Academy for EM MAGUS, on the island of Hvar in 1997.

The highlights of my musical career (apart from the 21 year of collaboration with Rene Clemencic and a very successful work with our own "Ensemble Lyra Wien") were an unforgettable collaboration with the Italian ensemble "Micrologus" and the Swiss "Daedalus", but most of all a

duet with German lute player Hans Brüderl and my solo recitals in Vienna, Florence, Zadar and Zagreb.

ABOUT INSTRUMENTS

Both *liras* are among the most important, least known and least used instruments of the EM in its present-day revival... While seven stringed *lira da braccio* served primarily to one's own accompaniment of the singing and rather seldom to accompany others or to play in the ensemble, the *lira da gamba* began as its bigger "sister" (having more - between 9 and 18 strings, larger body and somewhat deeper timbre) as an accompaniment to somebody's own singing and became later (during the 16th and the entire 17th century) an essential *continuo* instrument, with which the musician could accompany soloists or an ensemble alone or in association with another string or plucked tenor or bass instrument.

As in many other cases, today's performances of EM favorise some and ignore other very important aspects of early performance practice. One of them is the unbreakable link between music and poetry, which experienced its apotheosis precisely through the activity of numerous *cantori ad lyram* (improvising singer-poets who accompanied themselves on the *lira da braccio* and later the lute) in Italy during the late 15th and first third of the 16th century.

I don't want it to sound like self-praise but simply as a fact; until just a few years ago, I was one of the few EM specialists who sang to my own accompaniment on the *lira da braccio* (and medieval *vielle*) and *lirone* and was the only one who was able to play both instruments on the same level - as a soloist or in a small ensemble, all the way to the late Renaissance/ Early Baroque orchestra. Only recently, this has finally changed and I hope and believe that this trend will continue in years to come.

Although a lot has been done by my (female and male) colleagues of my and younger generations, which has brought a little more light to the technique of playing and reconstruction of a possible repertoire on both *liras*, it still remains for the youngest musician to go even further and one day successfully revive the real improvisation on those special but (partially) still with mystery wrapped (draped, veiled?) instruments.

Igor Pomykalo, Birkfeld December 2021