

## Lecture WCF June 2021

“If I Were A Bell...”

### Performing The Repertoire Of ‘The Great American Songbook’ On Carillon

#### Introduction

This presentation is about the practice of *ex tempore* arranging and performing the repertoire of *The Great American Songbook* on carillon.

The *Great American Songbook* does not refer to any actual book or specific list of songs. According to the Great American Songbook Foundation, the *Great American Songbook* is “the canon of the most important and influential American popular songs and jazz standards from the early 20th century that have stood the test of time in their life and legacy. Often referred to as "American Standards", the songs published during the Golden Age of this genre include those popular and enduring tunes from the 1920s to the 1950s that were created for Broadway theatre, musical theatre and Hollywood musical films”.

The list of songs in the Great American Songbook includes haunting songs like *If I Were A Bell*, *All The Things You Are*, *Blue Moon*, *I Got Rhythm*, *My Funny Valentine*... They are melodies that are part of many people's musical memories and that deserve a permanent place in the repertoire of every carillonneur.

According to me, there is a curious similarity between the Great American Songbook and the eighteenth-century carillon books in terms of (the composition of) the repertoire, the use of the songbook/carillonbook and the performance practice.

#### Repertoire

From earlier research, it became clear that the eighteenth-century carillon books are simply collections of ‘popular’ music - dances, popular songs etc. -, comparable with our contemporary songbooks. They do not contain any music that was specifically composed for the carillon. These eighteenth-century carillon books clearly reflect the varying tastes of audiences from one region to another. I would like to point out that carillonneurs also selected melodies and themes from keyboard compositions by composers such as Couperin, Fiocco, Raick, De Fesch... They chose these melodies because of their popularity and fame. These melodies were also re-pinned on the barrels of the automatic carillons where they resound like a real list of 'hits', often over many decades. *La Follia*, *Une Jeune Fillette*, *Bergamasce*, *L'Angloise* ... to just name a few.

The cover of the de Gruyters' carillon book (Antwerp, 1746) clearly shows the broad repertoire that was played:



- a melody with letters beneath, indicating the bass notes (and suggesting chords)



'Menuet' – Berghuys, Booklet 47, n. 4730 (775-1835)

- a melody with a bass



'L'Amour discret' – De Prins, no. 19 (c 1781)

- a melody with a bass and a harmonization



'Andante' de Gruyters, no. 49

This transcription in de Gruyters' carillon book is based on the original edition from 1730 (Brussels):



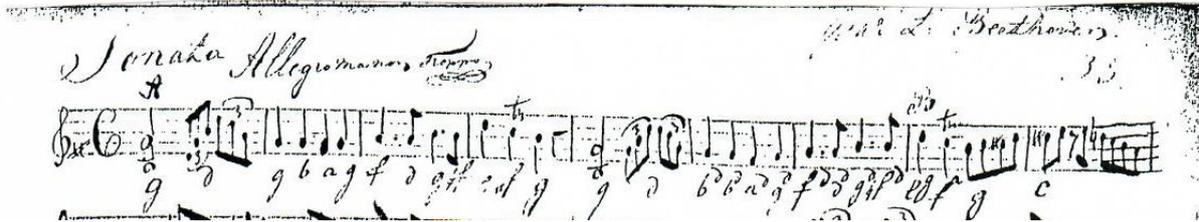
The notation in the Berghuys' booklets in particular looks surprisingly 'modern' and is reminiscent of the notation in many twentieth-century songbooks.



'Prelude To A Kiss' – Duke Ellington

One thing is clear: it's all about the melody!

A typical example is the Sonata in G by Ludwig van Beethoven, which can be found in the Berghuys booklets. Here too, only the melody is noted with only letters, indicating the bass notes.

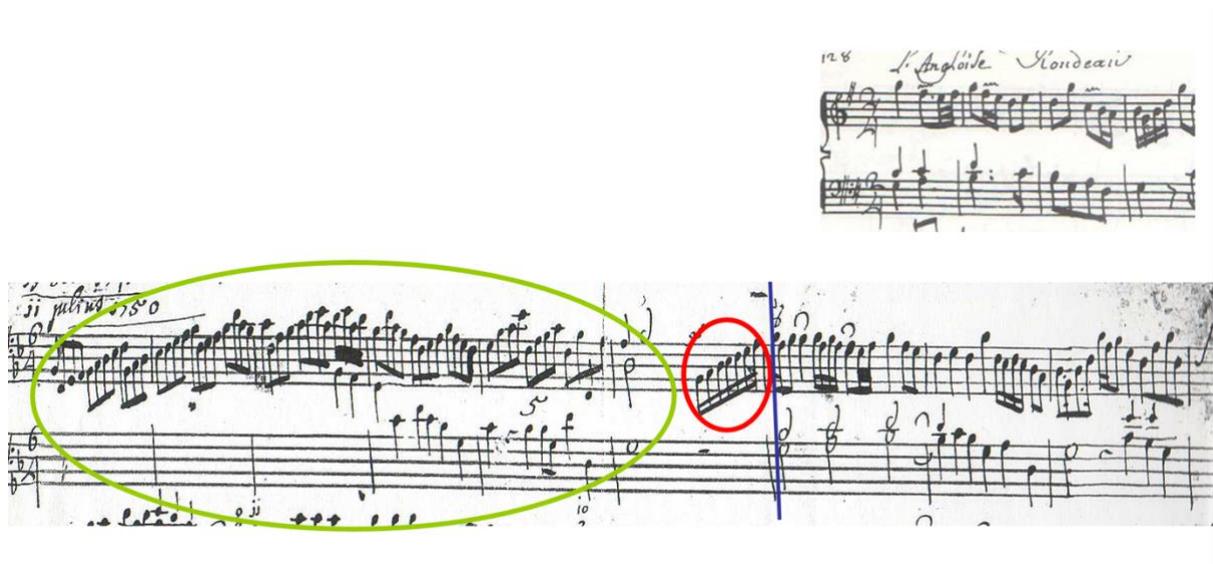


*Allegro ma non troppo – Sonate in G – Ludwig van Beethoven / Berghuys*

### Performance Practice - Eighteenth -century Carillon Books

Eighteenth-century carillonneurs spontaneously adapted these melodies to the requirements of the carillon. From my research, it became clear that their performance also consisted of *ex tempore* melodic embellishment, of changing the harmonic texture and the bass line, and of adding improvised introductions (preludes). I would like to remind you that these insights emerged from an comparative analysis of the re-pinning manuscripts with the pieces in the carillon books. In other words: the barrels of the eighteenth-century carillons did act as giant CD players, playing the popular repertoire of their time. They also inform contemporary carillonneur-researchers about the performance practices of their eighteenth-century colleagues.

As an example, I show you the beginning of Fiocco's L' Angloise as noted in de Gruyters' carillon book and in his re-pinning manuscript:



The conclusion of the research project was that **the performance practice of eighteenth-century carillonneurs was a mix of *ex tempore* transcribing, arranging and improvising.** It is, as I like to call it, 'real musicianship' that, as it became clear from my PhD-research, was also a common practice in the seventeenth century, be it that other practices were used, in particular the *ex tempore* playing of intabulations, including the art of playing diminutions.

### **Performance Practice - The Great American Songbook**

Contemporary musicians – very often jazz performers - who explore the repertoire of the Great American Song Book, **apply the exact same performance practices as carillonneurs in the eighteenth century:** they also add intros, vary the melody, adapt chords, change harmonic progressions ...

The Gruytters' carillon book has now been replaced by one of the many songbooks such as *Hits for Buskers*, *The Real Book* etc. Here, too, it is all about the melodies that belong to the collective musical memory of many. *Andantes* and *arias* become haunting *ballads*. *Allegros* and *gavottes* become *swinging standards*...

Moreover, a thorough analysis of the musical parameters (melody, rhythm, harmony, structure) of the standards in The Great American Songbook shows that there are striking similarities with the pieces in the eighteenth-century carillon books.

Within the scope of this lecture I would like to focus mainly on the harmonic aspect. In the eighteenth century, the so-called Classical Western Harmony was fully developed within a context of concepts such as key - major & minor - functional harmony (development of tensions between chords via tonic, subdominant and dominant) and modulation (as ordered via the chromatic scale in the circle of fifths). This classical harmony structured the music through cadences and harmonic progressions and sequences. At the same time it formed the underlying basis from which melodies arose and with which they were strongly connected.

Essentially, the songs from the Great American Song Book are still based on this Western Classical Harmonic model. A theme like *Fly me to the Moon* is based on the same harmonic sequence as the middle movement from De Fesh's *Gavotte* from the Gruytters' carillon book.

The image displays two systems of handwritten musical notation. Each system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The notation is written in black ink on aged paper. The first system shows a melodic line in the treble staff and a harmonic accompaniment in the bass staff. The second system continues this musical piece, showing similar melodic and harmonic structures. The handwriting is clear and legible, typical of a manuscript or a printed score from an older book.

Handwritten musical notation for 'Fly me to the Moon' by Bart Howard. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two staves. The top staff has a treble clef and the bottom staff has a bass clef. Chords are written above the notes: Am7, Dmi7, G7, CMaj7, C7, FMaj7, Bø, E7, Ami, A7(b9), Dmi7.

'Fly me to the Moon' – Bart Howard

'Double' = 18C Improvisation...

Handwritten musical notation for 'Double' = 18C Improvisation. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The notation is highly complex, featuring many beamed notes and accidentals, indicating a fast and intricate improvisation.

Chromatic (chord) progressions as they appear in e.g. the beautiful *Andante* by Fiocco can also be implied in the beginning of *Ain't misbehavin'*.



*'Andnate' – Fiocco – de Gruyters*

Verse  
Medium Swing (♩ = ♩)

C C#°7 Dm7 D#°7 C E7#5

1. No one to talk with, all by my - self, no one to walk with, but

F Bb7 C A7 Dm7 G7

I'm hap - py on — the shelf. Ain't mis - be - hav - in', I'm sav - in' my love for

*'Ain't Misbehavin' - Fats Waller / Harry Brooks*

**The Great American Songbook on Carillon**

To be able to work creatively with the repertoire from the Great American Songbook as a carillonneur, a thorough knowledge of this Western Classical harmony is necessary. Added to this are some aspects that are often used such as the Turn around and Chord Substitution, especially Triton Substitution.

From an analysis of the melody, in combination with an insight into the harmonic structure (as noted via the chord symbols), the carillonneur can perform a song in the same way as he would perform pieces from the eighteenth century carillon books: he usually starts with an intro - which, like the *versteken* of the Gruyters, is based on harmonic clichés above which a characteristic motif from the melody sounds - and then brings the melody with a bass line, supplemented with a coloring harmonic tone, here and there, after which he improvises over this basic material (melodic, harmonic). This 'improvisation' is essentially no different from what the eighteenth-century carillonneur did with his 'songs': adding decorations to the melody (e.g. passing notes, grace notes, appoggiaturas, ...), varying the bass line and the chords, rhythmic variations etc.

In the same way that carillonneurs from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could learn and practice how to play diminutions, how to improvise on the basis of partimenti or how to

deliver a basso continuo ex tempore, carillonners who want to work with the songs from the Great American Songbook can also practice patterns that allow them to vary melodically over typical harmonic progressions, such as the II-V progression.

Essempio de sexta.

Essempio de settima.

Essempio de settima.

*Il vero modo di diminuir - Girolamo Dalla Casa (1584)*

## DAVID LIEBMAN II/V7/I PATTERNS

CHANGE OF SEQUENCE

$E_{b7}$   $D_7$   $D_{b7}$   $A_{b7}$   $G_7$   $C$

$A_{b7}$   $G_7$   $G_{b7}$   $D_{b7}$   $C_7$   $F$

Of course, the carillonner must take into account the idiomatic characteristics of his instrument. Chords and harmonic progressions are, on a carillon, displayed much more effectively in a horizontal, linear way than in a vertical, chordic way. In other words: a carillonner is best inspired by Bach's Partitas for solo violin or the compelling guitar improvisations of Joe Pass, rather than by Bach's Harpsichord Suites or Bill Evans' genius piano improvisations.

*Joe Pass - Stompin' at the Savoy*

*Bill Evans - How My Heart Sings*

In any case, it appears that the Great American Songbook enables carillonneurs to enlarge substantially their repertoire. By doing so, they can replace or complete the Gruyters' carillon book with The Great American Songbook. Each carillonneur can compose his/her own Great American Carillonbook, in the same way as de Gruttyers, De Prins, Dupont or Berghuys did. Starting from their own collection of haunting melodies, they can play creative ex tempore performances 'to the delight of all'.

Antwerp, April 15, 2021