

***Birbynė*, traditional Lithuanian hornpipe**

According to the system of classification established by the Lithuanian instrumentologists of the 20th century, the Lithuanian woodwind *birbynė* is considered to be a musical instrument of the clarinet family.

In the 19th century this wooden aerophone received attention from ethnologists and researchers of various countries' folk musical instruments (George Heinrich Nesselmann, "Wörterbuch der littauischen Sprache" (1850), Eustachy Tyszkiewicz (1869), Adalbert Bezenberger (1882), Fridrich Kurschat (1883), etc.). However, in Lithuania *birbynė* – as an instrument in its own right – drew attention only when in folk music it had almost been replaced by the clarinet. In the first half of the 20th century, *birbynės* were still played by shepherds and old men who remembered the end of the 19th century when many folk musicians played dances, rounds and other melodies with *birbynė*. In the 1930s and 1950s, scholars not only reflected on the history, classification, and methodology of the instrument, but also discussed how to expand its technical capabilities to make it suitable for stage performance. Lithuanian ethnographers (Juozas Žilevičius, Zenonas Slaviūnas-Slavinskas, Povilas Samuitis, Algirdas Vyžintas, Romualdas Apanavičius, etc.) wrote about the variety of names for *birbynė*, its classification and opportunities for application.

Birbynė's origin is inseparable from the historical and cultural context of Lithuania and other countries. Therefore, it is helpful to look at the early sources of written Lithuanian language.

The first references to *birbynė* can be found in the 17th–18th centuries. The continuity of the instrument's name and its varied constructional evolution are demonstrated by synonymous equivalents – such as *dūdelė* (reed), *vamzdis* (pipe), *švilpynė* (whistle) – found in the ancient Lithuanian written sources. According to Lithuanian musicologist Kamilė Rupeikaitė, the identification of Lithuanian instruments in historical sources is complicated by several factors: the same instruments could have different names based on regional language traditions, or the same name could mean different variants of the same instrument (the name *birbynė* could also refer to two types of aerophones – the whistle and the tongue reed). For example, in the beginning of the 17th century, Konstantinas Sirvydas produced the first Lithuanian vocabulary "Dictionarium triumlinguarum" where he used names of instruments already familiar to readers to describe other musical instruments: the Polish word *fletnia* (Latin: *fistula*, *canna*) was called *pipinė*.

Pilypas Ruigys was the first to use the name *birbynė* in his vocabulary "Littauisch-deutsches und deutsch-littauisches Lexicon" (1747). He described the instrument as a reed (whistle) made out of straw or feather without detailing its construction. However, in a much earlier manuscript of The Bible translated by Königsberg's Evangelical Lutheran preacher Jonas Bretkūnas (1590), we can find a list of thirteen instruments used in Lithuania, *Nomina instrumentorum musicorum, quorum usus in Lithuania*.

There, among such woodwind instruments as *trūba* (German: *Posaune*), *wamsdis* (German: *Pfeiffe*), *tutukles* (German: *Die litauische Duden*), *duda ragine* (German: *Eine grosse Sackpfeiffe*), he mentions *surma* (German: *Schalmei*) – a woodwind reed instrument. This may be the first historical reference to the wooden reed aerophone in Lithuanian written sources. We can only guess if the *surma* he mentioned in 1590 had anything in common with the local instrument *birbynė* and whether it had a single or a double reed, but it is obvious that these types of aerophones were played in Lithuania since the 16th century.

The German equivalent of Bretkūnas' *surma* is *schalmei*: an aerophone that has a double reed. According to instrumentological interpretation that became widely accepted in the middle of the 20th century, this instrument is separate from clarinet family of single-reed-

instruments. Linguistically, the name of this instrument comes from the term *Shawm* which originates from the Latin word *calamus* (English: *shalm*, *shalmie*, *schalmuse*; French: *chalemie*; German: *schalmey*) and, according to the Honrbostel-Sachs classification, the term *Shawm* was used to describe both single and double reed aerophones.

Lithuanian instrumentologist Romualdas Apanavičius classifies the Lithuanian *birbynė* based on its construction and its use of the reed for sound production. The first type includes *birbynės* made out of straw, feather or bark, with single or double reeds not separated from the frame. The second type is comprised of *birbynės* that have a whistle inserted in the frame and a cut single or double reed. They are usually made of an alder bark (twisted into a cone-shaped tube) or an animal horn where a wooden whistle with a single reed is inserted. *Birbynės* that belong to the third type have a single clarinet-style reed that is attached to a whistle with a fine string. They can also have a clarinet-style whistle inserted into the frame and an animal horn attached to the opposite end of the instrument.

Comparing similar wooden reed aerophones that existed in various parts of the world (Central Asia, Balkans, North Africa, etc.) and *birbynės* of the first type (which are classified as idioglottal type clarinets with the reed cut inside a frame of a pipe), the latter were used as pastoral instruments similarly to *chalumeau*. In fact the description of the *chalumeau* in Pierre Trichet's manuscript "The Treatise on Musical Instruments" (circa 1640) is very similar to the description of *birbynė* (*chalumeau* – a simple reed made of wheat stem with a tongue cut in its top part).

The above-mentioned *birbynės* of the second and third type can be classified as *heteroglottal* clarinets that have a mouthpiece attached to the frame. Instruments distinguished from this group are the ones that have an animal horn attached to the end of the reed. Similar reed aerophones (reed with a horn) were known in Europe in The Middle Ages and in Scotland, England (*Stock-and-horn*), and Wales (*Pibgorn*) up until the 18th century. Instruments that belong to this group are still being played in the Baltic countries and Iberian Peninsula.

The *birbynės* that are used to play the 17th century music in this album are an improved version of the third type of Lithuanian *birbynė*. This instrument became suitable for professional use in the middle of the 20th century due to the efforts of Lithuanian masters Pranas Serva and Povilas Samuitis. The chromatic range of this soprano melodic instrument is a–e³. Currently the *birbynė* is made of maple, apple or pear tree wood. A clarinet reed is tied to a whistle with a string and a cow's horn is affixed to the frame. In its appearance and construction, *birbynė* is similar to the improved version of the *chalumeau* used in the 17th–18th centuries. *Birbynė* has a remarkably large dynamic range and wide breadth of timbre. This instrument can sound like an oboe, cornet, recorder, clarinet, saxophone, or even a trumpet. The emergence of the improved version of the *birbynė* attests to the organic and continuous process of this instrument's transformation. It uniquely links the past with the present.

Sources:

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