## Musical Times

Double-Tongueing and the Oboe Author(s): Denis H. R. Brearley Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 92, No. 1302 (Aug., 1951), pp. 352-353 Published by: <u>Musical Times Publications Ltd.</u> Stable URL: <u>http://www.jstor.org/stable/936332</u> Accessed: 02/12/2013 23:31

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*Musical Times Publications Ltd.* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Times*.

http://www.jstor.org

more than a hundred concerts. He was every-where acclaimed by the public as a brilliant virtuoso-conductor; but, surprising as it may seem, it was fully recognized not only by critics but by orchestral players that his methods of preparation and a conspicuous lack of musicianship rendered his conducting decidedly erratic. He was in truth a successful empiricist. It was said of him, indeed, that at fifty he began to learn things about music that a student is expected to know at eighteen. He acquainted himself with a new score by having it played over on the piano and rehearsing his gestures to the music thus heard. His conducting was often unreliable; he sometimes emphasized a wrong beat and in a performance of the 'Forest Murmurs' from 'Siegfried' he was convicted of giving faulty cues. Naturally, he was constantly at loggerheads with units of his orchestra and their acquiescence was due only to the fear of dismissal. Despite these shortcomings he was able to obtain the most astonishing effects, especially in orchestral tone-production, and he has been described by Neville Cardus as 'an artist in musical sonorities'. Becoming a widower in 1942, he founded an educational institution in his wife's memory. During his twentieth American season (he was now naturalized) he was given a testimonial banquet in New York by a number of the most representative American composers.

There can be no possible doubt that his virtues as conductor altogether outweighed his defects; but one is inclined to believe that his supreme service to music was his amazingly successful choice of new compositions which he believed to be worthy. He was the fortunate possessor of a gift for backing the kind of musical dark horse that was capable of proving a winner.

## Double-Tongueing and the Oboe By DENIS H. R. BREARLEY

**TISTORY** repeats itself; historians repeat each other'; an old gibe with enough truth in it to make us smile. Alas, the second half of it is applicable to many a writer on musical matters, and in particular to many writers on musical instruments. All of them repeat the undeniable truth that the oboeist cannot 'doubletongue', and most of them gravely explain that it is 'because of the position of the reed in the mouth', which I believe to be quite erroneous. If it were possible to hold the reed in quite a different position in the mouth from the usual one, the oboeist would still be unable to double-tongue. The earlier editions of the 'Oxford Companion follow the tradition, but in the latest edition the 'small size of the reed' is put forward as an additional explanation. I believe it contains the germ of the truth, in highly concentrated form, and indeed I believe that Dr. Scholes has made the addition in accordance with a suggestion made by me in a private letter. But let us now examine

the matter a little more deeply. What is ' tongueing'? It is the process whereby the player of a wind instrument repeats a note, or plays staccato notes, or indicates by a fresh attack' the commencement of a new phrase. The process, on the oboe, is as follows: the tip of the player's tongue closes the orifice in the reed through which air must pass to set up the necessary tone-vibrations, and the player then produces from his chest air at a pressure appropriate to the degree of loudness or force of attack which the music requires. At the appropriate moment he withdraws the tongue, allowing the air under pressure to pass through the reed and produce tone-vibrations; and at the conclusion of the note or phrase he may either replace his tongue on the orifice, thus shutting off the supply of air, or may release the wind-pressure by free exhalation. will be noted that the operative part is not the darting forward of the tongue onto the reed but the withdrawal of the tongue from the reed. The process is similar to pronouncing the sound 'T', with the tip of the reed taking the place of the back of the upper gum.

Now, there is a limit to the speed at which a player can repeat this process. If an oboeist can play repeated notes in this way at much more than eight to the second he has a very 'good tongue', and envious colleagues will say that he has a tongue like an alarm-clock. But composers frequently require wind instruments to play repeated notes faster than this, and those instruments which can do so have adopted the process of ' double-tongueing', whereby repeated or staccato notes can be played at about twelve or fourteen to the second. It is done as follows: alternately with each T of the single-tongueing, the player pronounces a K or G, which releases a gush of air to the sound-producing apparatus with results, when skilfully done, indistinguishable from those of a T. The process is usually described as 'saying tucker-tucker'. tucker-tucker '. This double-tongueing is possible and indeed not difficult on the flute and all brass instruments. Many clarinettists and bassoonists can also do it satisfactorily. Oboeists find it quite impossible (though they cannot usually explain why) and consequently in quick repeated wind chords it is always the oboeists who are accused of being sluggish.

The essential difference between the instruments which can and those which cannot double-tongue lies in the amount of opposition which the wind has to overcome after passing the tongue. In the flute and brass the wind has a clear channel; the brass player can blow a chestful of air down his instrument in a second or two if he wishes, the flautist doesn't have to blow down a hole at all, the clarinet and bassoon have a smallish but sufficient orifice through which wind can pass at a moderate rate of flow, but the oboe has a minute slit through which the air must be painfully forced. An oboeist who has sustained a note for many bars of adagio breathes out at the end of it, in an ecstasy of relief at relaxing the intolerable pressure in his chest. An oboe reed has an elliptical slot about 7 mm. long, which, when ready for use but not actually in use, is about 1 mm. wide in the centre, tapering down to nothing at each end. When the reed is pressed between the lips in playing the width of the opening is about halved. The

area of the orifice does not then exceed 1.5 sq. mm. —a mere pin-prick compared with a trumpet mouthpiece, and much smaller than the orifice of a clarinet or bassoon reed, small as these are.

Imagine an oboe-reed in the mouth of a player who tries to say 'tucker' twenty times in three seconds, with his lips firmly round the reed to prevent leakage of air at the corners of the mouth, and considerable air-pressure exerted by the diaphragm. The first step in the double-tonguethe T-suddenly uncovers the reed orifice, with the effect of an 'attack', and allows some air to pass down through the reed and set it in vibration. The amount of air thus released is minute and will make absolutely no measurable reduction in the pressure within the player's mouth and chest. The orifice is not then re-closed by the tip of the tongue, as it would be in single-tongueing; instead, the air-pressure is cut off at the back of the mouth by the back of the tongue, as a preliminary to the production of the sound K. The completion or 'explosion' of the K releases or indeed forces into the already air-filled mouth a comparatively large volume of high pressure wind-much more than the reed-opening can possibly accept in a small fraction of a second, and much more than it ever in fact does accept from a T. (The T, of course, merely metes out air from mouth to reed, and cannot, as a K does, increase the air-pressure in the mouth.) The whole process is repeated at the rate of six or seven ' tuckers ' to the second, but, before even one second has expired, either the player's cheeks will be blown out or the air will force its way out round the sides of the reed (in either case destroying control of the reed) or, if the player imposes iron control on lips and cheeks to prevent this, the pressure in his mouth very quickly increases until it is equal to the pressure in his chest, when it becomes impossible to pronounce a K at all. A little experimenting with the mouth firmly closed will show this to be true, and the minute size of the orifice of the reed gives exactly the same practical effect as a firmly closed mouth.

The orifice in a clarinet or bassoon reed is a safety-valve just large enough to obviate these effects by releasing surplus air from the mouth before the latter is overcharged, and consequently the player can, with practice, acquire this most useful technique. But the oboeist must produce each tongued note by a separate to-and-fro motion of tongue on reed, and no amount of practice will make double-tongueing practicable for more than perhaps a single 'tucker'. And the true reason, I believe, is here expounded for the first time.

## The Musician's Bookshelf

## Schubert.' By Alfred Einstein [Cassell, 25s.]

This is no critical biography in the accepted sense; nor does it follow the customary pattern of 'Life-Works', a division which while admittedly artificial, has at any rate the advantage for the general reader of an orderly and systematic presentation. But Dr. Einstein is not writing for the general reader. He addresses himself to those who know and love their Schubert, and who wish to understand him better and to know more about him'. Nor is this enough: his reader must be 'musical but at the same time something more than musical'. 'In order to understand genuine music', Dr. Einstein postulates, 'one must be not only musical but *instinct* with music. There is a world of difference between the two'. To allow myself a short digression, do these concluding sentences of his Foreword not also apply to writers on music? One of the worst evils that has befallen this branch of writing is that many of its present practitioners, far from being ' instinct with music', are in a deeper sense unmusical and even antimusical, as witness the flood of articles and books now published which, when they are not complete rubbish, combine shallow snap judgments with an ill-considered and often puerile application of philosophical and psychological propositions under whose deadly weight the intrinsic significance of music qua art is completely smothered. Thus, a book like Dr. Einstein's must strike the discriminating reader like a broad shaft of light piercing through a tenebrous atmosphere.

Into its making have gone solid scholarship, the life-long experience of an acute and sensitive musical mind, and that intuition which only results from an intimate and loving knowledge of the music. What Dr. Einstein set out to do was to make us a witness of Schubert's *creative* development, to show us the unfolding of one of the most profoundly musical and fertile minds. In that sense the book is true *musical* biography. Yet it is more than that: it is a great scholar's *Bekenntnis*, a 'confession ' of what Schubert signifies for him, and I can do no better to indicate the nature of this 'confession ' than quote from the last page:

He is one of those composers who, like Mozart and Beethoven and yet more positively than either of them, take no thought of the morrow, who follow unreservedly and without heed a single impulse-to create; who, in their music, findpartly of their own free will and partly out of sheer necessity-the only means of meeting the challenge of human existence and of the universe. But he is not a typical Romanticist like all the other composers who came into the world during the twenty years which followed his birth. . . . He is without spiritual discord; he still has the honesty and courage to express the full sensuousness and richness of life. He is a romantic Classicist and belongs in the great company of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. He does not suffer from that "ineffectual exaggeration" with which Grillparzer reproached German Romanticists and which equally applies to their poetry and to a substantial part of their music. He left no successor. The feeling that he inspires in later ages is an infinite longing for a lost paradise of purity, spontaneity and innocence.

Given the author's approach to his subject and the kind of reader he has in mind it will be no surprise, perhaps, to find him eschewing analysis in the ordinary sense, though his assertion that 'it is in the very nature of an analysis that it is of no assistance to someone who does not know the work in question, and that anyone who knows the