



The Tone of the Baroque Oboe: An Interpretation of the History of Double-Reed Instruments

Author(s): Josef Marx

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JOSEF MARX

The Tone of the Baroque Oboe

An Interpretation of the History of Double-Reed Instruments

At the end of his excellent article *The English 2- and 3-Keyed Hautboy*¹ Mr Eric Halfpenny reproduces some hitherto unknown statements concerning the tone quality of the oboe at the end of the seventeenth century. John Bannister is found to say in 1695 that the oboe '... with a good reed ... goes as easie and soft as the Flute [recorder]'. This has been wisely printed in italics. But even in bold-face it would not suffice to unlodge the widespread conviction, shared alike by professional and layman, scholar and student, that the oboe of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a primitive, coarse and loud instrument. In his important book on wind instruments² Mr Adam Carse broaches this subject, when speaking of the tone of the eighteenth-century oboe, by saying that 'there is no reason to suppose that it was coarse and strident as is often suggested', and he adds a quotation from C. L. Junker's *Musikalischer Almanach* of 1782 to the effect that this instrument is suitable for expression of 'soft, tender and mildly sad feelings'. The late Professor L. Bleuzet, in his article on the oboe in the *Encyclopédie de la Musique*,³ contributed another little known quotation from the end of the eighteenth century from the pen of the Abbé de Pures: 'The oboes have a tone of great quality and when played as they are today at Court and in Paris, they leave little to be desired. . . .'

That these little-known contemporary testimonials fail to influence our deeply-rooted misconceptions is essentially due to two reasons. First and foremost must be considered our ever present feeling of cultural progress. The application of this emotion to music in general has been discussed delightfully by Mme Wanda Landowska in the opening chapter of her book *Musique Ancienne*⁴ under the heading *Le Mépris pour les Anciens*. The application of such contempt to oboe playing in particular can be observed quite frequently. Hawkins,⁵ for instance, writes about Giuseppe Sammartini:

... He was a performer on the hautboy, an instrument invented by the

French, and of small account, till by his exquisite performance, and a tone which he had the art of giving it, he brought it into reputation. . . . As a performer on the hautboy, Martini was undoubtedly the greatest that the world had ever known. Before his time the tone of the instrument was rank, and, in the hands of the ablest proficients, hard and grating to the ear. . . .

Burney can be found to express similar feelings about Johann Christian Fischer. As late as 1823 we find the same sentiment uttered by the renowned oboist Wilhelm Braun in an article called *Reflections Concerning the Proper Treatment and Method of Playing the Oboe*:⁶

In former days, about thirty or forty years ago, hardly anything was known of the present-day manner of playing the oboe. The masters, who in those days distinguished themselves on this instrument, seemed less concerned with expressing sentiment through their play, than with impressing with the forwardness of their rendition, by their sharp, shrill tone, their marked staccato, and the like. Especially distinguished in this manner of performance was Besozzi, the first oboe of the Royal Saxon Court Orchestra in Dresden. My father, J. F. Braun . . . in those days went from his native city, Cassel, to Dresden, to have further instruction on the oboe from Besozzi. He had to submit to his teacher and to accept his style of playing; but he soon recognized that this could not be the right manner, that the oboe could accomplish things more beautiful and noble. He therefore did not continue these studies and created himself a new and utterly different method.

This is the same Carlo Besozzi, second generation member of the renowned family of oboe virtuosi, of whom Burney⁷ had written:

After this Signor Besozzi played an extremely difficult concerto on the hautboy in a very pleasing and masterly manner; yet I must own that the less one thinks of Fischer, the more one likes this performer. However, I tried to discriminate and to discover in what each differed from the other: and first Fischer seems to me the most natural, pleasing and original writer of the two, for the instrument, and is the most certain of his reed; which, whether from being in less constant practice, or from the greater difficulty of the passage, I know not, more frequently fails Besozzi in rapid divisions, than Fischer. However Besozzi's messa di voce, or swell, is prodigious; indeed he continues to augment the force of a tone so much, and so long, that it is hardly possible not to fear for his lungs.

His taste and his ear are exceedingly delicate and refined; and he seems to possess a happy and peculiar faculty of tempering a continued tone to different bases according to their several relations. Upon the whole his performance is so capital that a hearer must be extremely fastidious not to receive from it a great degree of pleasure. . . .

Even in our own day this feeling persists, and many commentators have referred (and justly so) in the same terms to the art of Mr Leon Goossens.

The second reason is an historical bias which includes a false understanding of the properties of the old swallow-tail reeds as well as a general confusion caused by the various meanings of the word *Hautbois*. This term, as will be shown, refers to the instrument in question only from the second half of the seventeenth century on. Before that time it denoted several shapes and incarnations of the shawm family, including the *Rauschpfeife* (*Hautbois de Poitou*), and especially the discant *Schalmey*, which, according to Praetorius (1615), sounded like the screeching of geese. This confusion of two chronologically consecutive types of instruments has been the downfall of not only specific historians of the oboe such as Bridet⁸ and Bleuzet, but also of general historians, scholars and editors of reference works who certainly ought to have known better. Their common stumbling block is a statement of Mersenne⁹ (1636) that the *Hautbois* were favourite outdoor instruments because 'of the loud noise they make as well as their ability to blend well, since they have the loudest and most violent sound of all instruments, the trumpet only excepted'. Considering the time at which this was printed, it could not possibly refer to an instrument which was not developed nor tentatively tried out in the orchestra till a good twenty years later. Nevertheless, myth and misinformation enter the most common standard texts and from there are ineradicably disseminated into the heads of the many who consult them. A few examples should suffice.

In *Orchestral Wind Instruments*¹⁰ Mr Ulric Daubeny writes:

According to Mersenne such an instrument was shriller than all others with the exception of the trumpet, and this state of affairs was little, if at all, improved even so late as Mozart's time. Mozart used clarinets whenever they were available for he is said to have remarked that the 'impudence of tone' of the oboe was so great that no other instrument could contend with its loudness.¹¹

Dr William H. Stone, writing for *Grove's Dictionary*, described the old reed and its coarse tone. 'The effect of 26 such (oboes) as in the first Handel celebration, against about forty violins, is difficult to realize.'¹²

E. Prout, in *The Orchestra*,¹³ claimed that:

it is worthy to mention that the tone of the oboe in the last century, as used by Bach and Handel, differs essentially from the modern instrument. At that time, the reeds used were much broader than those of the present day, the result being that the tone, instead of being, as now, like a silver thread in the orchestra, was fuller and more nasal, not unlike the musettes that are to be heard sometimes in the streets, associated with the Tyrolean bagpipes.

The *Harvard Dictionary of Music*¹⁴ informs us over the name of William D. Denny:

It should be noted that the oboes of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were much more strident and piercing in sound than the modern instrument, a statement which is even more true of the still earlier instruments.

That the number of mediocre players of the instrument at any time overwhelmed that of the artists cannot, of course, be denied. But as long as we reserve for ourselves the privilege to judge the violin by the playing of Heifetz and the 'cello by that of Casals we must extend the same courtesy to the instruments of previous times. The schools away from France must certainly have been more primitive in the beginning, than those in contact with the men who first developed the instrument within the orbit of the French court. This may explain a statement such as that of the conservative Bonanni,¹⁵ who wrote as late as 1722: 'More grating to the ear and more noisy than the recorder is the sound of the oboe, an instrument of modern invention.' Even later than that, in 1737, the brothers Stössel¹⁶ seem to be reporting hearsay rather than personal familiarity when they write:

The Hautbois is a musical instrument, or French Schallmey-Fife, which is blown by means of a mouthpiece made of cane; it has a very penetrating, hard sound, but requires much wind.

Things were different at the Frenchified court in Hanover. Mattheson visited it in 1706¹⁷ and was impressed by its 'select band of oboists', the same group which produced as outstanding a player as Johann Ernest Galliard and which seems to have inspired Handel to write some oboe solo works. The cosmopolitan city of Hamburg must also have had good oboists, a fact reflected in the beautiful oboe obbligati in Keiser's operas early in the century, as well as in his pleasant, though now unknown, oboe solos.¹⁸ These two schools are responsible for Mattheson's account of the oboe of 1713:¹⁹

The practically reciting oboe . . . is to the French, and lately also to us, what in Germany the Schallmey used to be . . . though their construction is slightly different. The oboe, next to the German flute, resembles most the human voice, when it is artfully played and handled like the voice. . . .

We find this description again, almost verbatim, in Eisel's *Musicus Autodidactus* of 1738.

All discussions of the oboe in the early eighteenth century agree in this one point, that the instrument was a recent invention by the French. It is the word *invention* which is our most important clue and which

constitutes the starting-point of an investigation of our subject.

With the beginning of the Baroque period a complete re-alignment of musical instruments took place. The appearance of the *dramma per musica* at the end of the sixteenth century represented a new concept of music-making and brought about the cultivation of the solo voice and the solo artist. The Renaissance ideal of group performance and group sound was replaced by an interest in the personality of the individual artist as manifested in his individual performance. This new vocal ideal had an immediate effect on instrumental requirements and, early in the seventeenth century, instruments that had been playing vocal parts for some time began to acquire specific vocal characteristics. Many instrumental types were discarded and only those remained that had an acceptable indoor sound, that were accurately controllable in pitch and dynamic, and that could attain the personal attributes inherent in the solo voice. Within three decades the prototype of the violin was developed, and the viols, as well as the many plucked string instruments, started their gradual descent into oblivion. Of the woodwinds only the recorders and bassoons could pass the test. All the capsule and pirouette instruments, the families of shawms and krumhorns, died out.

Neither the Orient nor the European Middle Ages and Renaissance had been able to develop a discant double-reed instrument capable of producing a controlled sound. The reason for this lies in the manufacture of the reed with no tools other than a sharp knife. We are certainly safe in assuming that the reeds of the Renaissance were considerably thicker than those which we make today with the aid of esoteric precision tools which cut the cane to a minimum thickness of about .012" before the scraping knife touches its surface. A reed which is thick, especially at the sides, cut from a stalk of cane of small diameter, as required for a treble instrument, would have an opening extremely difficult to manage with the lips. This problem is solved by the use of the capsule, as in the krumhorn, which enables the player to set the reed in vibration without touching it with his lips. The Oriental oboe is played with a reed of a ribbed, soft, celery-like material considerably less rigid laterally than the *arundo donax* which grows in Southern Europe. This reed is very thick but very pliant. Its opening does not contain an outward resistance like the European reed, and the slightest pressure of the lips would close it. The reed is therefore placed entirely inside the mouth and the player steadies his lips against a disc, often a coin with a hole in the centre, which is placed between the top of the instrument and the bottom end of the reed. The pirouette; which makes the mouth into a *quasi*-capsule, represents the same

principle applied to a reed which is probably more delicate than that of the capsule instruments, though still not fine enough to be controllable by the lips. With all of these instruments pitch and dynamics, and above all timbre, are uncontrollable except as to their interrelated changes with different air pressures. Thus the development of the pirouette instrument may be interpreted as an advance in the technique of reed making.

There has been much controversy as to the origin of the bassoon and its relation to the bass pommer. Sachs,²⁰ and after him Carse,²¹ have insisted emphatically that these two instruments existed independently of each other side by side and that it is not the case of one growing out of the other. Sachs emphasizes the difference between the two instruments especially in the matter of the pirouette and the free-blown reed. But did the bass pommer really have a pirouette? Everyone who has written about this instrument insists that it does, but every picture of the instrument as shown by seventeenth-century writers, such as Praetorius, Mersenne and Kircher, and by Diderot in the eighteenth century, depict the instrument with a free-blown reed and with no trace of a pirouette. If the bass pommer originally had a pirouette it seems to have lost it during the sixteenth century. Such a development is very plausible indeed if we consider that the reed of a bass instrument is cut from a stalk of cane of much greater diameter than that of a treble instrument. Such a reed does not exert a great outward pressure at the tip of the reed (which is the effort of the natural material to revert to its original shape) and players must have discovered that they could easily control such bass reeds directly with their lips and thus improve the quality of tone while gaining control of pitch and volume. After this discovery the bass pommer was no longer an adequate instrument to translate the inherent possibilities of its reed into musical sound. Improvements on the instrument itself were undertaken at the end of the sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth centuries²² and many experiments were made in supplying a new body, both cylindrical and conical, to the bass double reed. These experiments are represented by the large number of known bassoon-type instruments of that period, such as the racket, dulzian, curtal and fagott proper.²³ This bassoon now joined the small number of 'complete' instruments (those able to play all notes in all dynamic shades) such as the sackbut, the cornetts and (to some extent) the recorders, and these alone are the instruments which continued to be used in the music of the seventeenth century. As *Chorist Fagott* it took its place in the choir-loft because it was the only woodwind instrument suitable for the task of helping the singers unobtrusively to hold their pitch, more flexible than

the sackbut and the cornetts which had been used for this office.

So important a change in instrumentation should leave its mark in the music of the period. Not only do we find the bassoon entering the ranks of the melody instruments in the early Baroque period, but we can go as far as to say that it is practically the only reed instrument used in the first half of the seventeenth century, and, with the recorder, the only woodwind.²⁴ The earliest use of the bassoon in chamber-music seems to be the Opus 1 of Biagio Marini,²⁵ *Affetti Musicali* (Venice, 1617). This large collection of many chamber works contains two sonatas with bassoon, *La Foscarina*, 'Sonata a 3 con il Tremolo [preceding Monteverdi], Doi Violini o Cornetti, e Trombone o Fagotto', and *La Aguzzona*, in which the bassoon is partly used as a solo voice. Marini's Op. 8 of 1629 contains two sonatas 'per 2 Fagotti o Tromboni grossi'. The bassoon became so esteemed as a melody instrument that it soon began to replace the violin in the trio-sonata, as in the seventh sonata of Dario Castello's *Sonate Concertate in stilo moderno* (1621), for two bassoons and violins, or in Giovanni Battista Buonamente's 4. *Libro di varie Sonate* (1626), as well as his sixth collection of 1636. The first solo music for the instrument seem to be the études and variations for bassoon and figured bass included in Bartolomeo de Selma e Salaverde's *Libro de Canzoni Fantasie et Correnti* (Venice, 1638).²⁶ The author was bassoonist to Archduke Leopold of Austria. Matthias Spiegler's *Olor solymnaeus nascenti Jesu* (1631) contains duets and trios with bassoon. Significant are Massimiliano Neri's *Sonate e Canzoni a 4* for church and chamber, also playable as duets or solos, for two violins, viola, gamba or bassoon, and figured bass (Opus 1, 1644) and his Opus 2, *Sonate a . . . 3*, also with alternative bassoon as solo instrument (1651). The same year we find Philipp Friedrich Böddecker's sonata for bassoon and figured bass, and, in 1662, bassoon parts in the trio-sonatas of Philipp Friedrich Buchner.²⁷ Musically the most important work of this kind is Johann Rosenmüller's *Sonata 2* for violin and bassoon with figured bass (1682). As an orchestral instrument, the bassoon appears in the music of Giovanni Gabrieli before 1613. In his *Syntagma musicum* (1619), Praetorius suggests an orchestration for use in the two choir-lofts of St Mark's Cathedral of Lassus' ten-part motet *Quo properas*. In three variations he uses a concertino of two recorders, two trombones and bassoon. In the same year Heinrich Schütz uses two, in 1621 three, and in 1625 five bassoons. Three bassoons are also found in the Sinfonia of Staden's *Seelewig* of 1644.

We can easily understand that the desire must have arisen to make so useful and grateful a medium as the double reed available to a

treble instrument. Within the new alignment of instrumental values only two instruments in that register were left, the cornett, limited by its extreme difficulty of execution, and the recorder, limited by its small tone even for the reduced requirements of those days. The experiments in the direction of a free-blown treble reed instrument therefore represent a progress in the skill of reed-making rather than in that of instrument-making. Only after such a reed was developed did work begin, slowly enough as it were, to improve the instrument proper.

It is not surprising that these experiments were made at the French court by the musicians of Louis XIV. Nowhere else was there so large a band of wind players in so secure and remunerative a position. Krumhorn and bagpipe, bassoon, shawm, fife and drum, trumpet and trumpet marine, serpent, sackbut and cornett were the instruments which were cultivated by all and which had their definite places in the various rituals of the court—rituals so static that even the obsolete krumhorns were still used as late as 1730, it seems. Woodwind virtuosi could find positions in several groups: the chapel, which used such windst as serpens, bassoons and bass krumhorns, the chamber, and above all the *Grande Ecurie*, the band under the auspices of the Master of the Grand Stable of the King. Later in the century were added the *Petits Violons de la Chambre du Roy* which employed two oboes and two bassoons, and after 1654 woodwinds were called upon for Lully's ballet performances and finally for the evenings of opera at the *Académie Royale de Musique*. Every musician was expected to play almost every instrument, wind and string, and positions, which were purchasable and hereditary, were acceptable in several groups simultaneously.

The chief berth for wind players was the elaborate organization of the *Grande Ecurie*²⁸ which was divided into five corps: (1) The Trumpets; (2) The Fifes and Drums; (3) The Violins, Shawms, Sackbuts and Cornets; (4) The Krumhorns and Trumpets Marine; (5) The Oboes and Musettes de Poitou. It was in the last three of these that double-reed players were welcome. In the second half of the century the third one developed into the famous 12 *Grands Hautbois*, who, as we know from the existing picture of their service during the coronation of Louis XV, consisted of ten oboes and two bassoons. The lists of musicians which still exist show an abundance of names of famous families of French seventeenth- and eighteenth-century instrumentalists, mostly virtuosi who specialized in the genteel recorder or the fashionable bagpipe (musette): Brunet, Destouches, Philidor, Philbert, Hotteterre, Piesche, Descoteaux, Chédeville. One of the chief attractions of a position at court was the close social proximity with

the king and the nobility. Louis himself was best man at the wedding of the charming, popular recorder-player, Philbert, to the widow and murderer of his unfortunate ex-colleague, the bagpiper Jean Brunet. Descoteaux (François Pignon, 1640-1723), the beloved master of recorder players, philosopher and plant breeder, who was painted by Watteau and immortalized as *L'Amateur de Tulipes* by La Bruyère, often dined in his garden with Molière, Racine, Despréaux and Lafontaine, arguing over Descartes. Most of the Philidor family²⁹ had close contact with the king, especially André, the music librarian, and his son Anne, godson of the Duc de Noailles, who was often asked to play the oboe for the king and to sing duets with him, and is known on one occasion, at the apartment of Mme de Maintenon, to have been honoured by having the aged king sing for him an aria which had not been performed since 1655, almost sixty years before. The Hotteterres and Chédevilles were well known to the nobility as favourite teachers of the bagpipe and recorder.³⁰

It is within this group of men that we must look for our inventor of the oboe. It is possible that early in the century the reed had been sufficiently improved to be free-blown, though the resulting instrument may well have been little better than its predecessor, the treble shawn, and not yet an oboe proper. Carse³¹ has so interpreted a picture in Mersenne, 1636. The accompanying text, however, makes this picture quite ambiguous and no explanation of such an instrument is given, though a further discussion of the Hautbois de Poitou is promised for the next chapter, which is devoted to bassoons instead. It is quite possible that the illustration in question only serves to illustrate the usual shawm as seen without the pirouette. Till more evidence of such an instrument is found we have to leave this question undecided. Without a doubt the search for a more controllable instrument was hastened by the musical demands of Lully, that malevolent and most stimulating tyrant and genius of organization who began to make his musical abilities felt in 1653. Those most likely to have occupied themselves with these problems are the various members of the Hotteterre family, whose activities in the field of instrument-making are well documented, and who likewise seem to be responsible for the introduction into France of another treble wind instrument, the transverse flute. In our attempt to identify the inventor of the oboe we are helped by several new sources. Writing in approximately 1700 about the oboe, James Talbot³² speaks of 'the present French Hautbois not 40 years old & an improvement of the great French hautbois which is like our Weights'. Since Talbot's sources were John Bannister, who in 1695 wrote the first tutor for this instrument, Paisible and la

Riche, two French oboists who are still under the influence of practically the first generation of oboists, we can accept this statement as being reliable. A second document, which confirms several of our conjectures, though it is not historically acceptable in a scientific sense, is nevertheless of value because it represents the tradition of the period and is still close enough to it for this tradition to be accurate. It is a letter³³ by Michel de la Barre, the famous flautist, who had served in the Hautbois de Poitou corps of the *Grande Ecurie* band between 1702 and 1705 and thus had personal contact with the court musicians. This letter was written in 1740 and claims to represent research done in the archives of the 'chambre de comptes':

Mais son [Lully] élévation fut la chute totale de tous ces antiens instrumens à l'exception du hautbois, grâce au Filidor et Hauteterre, lesquels ont tant gâté de bois, et soutenu de la musique qu'ils sont enfin parvenue à le rendre propre pour les concerts. Dés ce temps là on laissa les musettes aux bergers, les violons, les flûtes douces, les théorbes, les violes prirent leur place, car la flûte traversière n'est venue qu'après.

There remains for us to find out which members of these two families were in the service of the court around 1660. Among the Hotteterre, our most likely choice falls on Jean I, the father of the main branch of the family, who died sometime after 1676. He entered the service of the king in 1650 as Hautbois de Poitou and he is recorded to have performed at court under Lully, with two of his sons, in *L'Amour Malade* of 1657 and *Alcidiane* of 1658, and again in *Les Noces de Village* of 1663. Jean was an outstanding instrument-maker and recorders bearing his signature still can be found in various collections. Charles E. Borjon, in his *Traité de la Musette* (1672), speaks of the Hotteterres as being the best bagpipe makers:

The father is a man of a unique talent for the making of all kinds of instruments of wood, ivory and ebony: bagpipes, recorders, flageolets, oboes, krumhorns. . . .

Jean's three sons must also be considered. Which two of the three, Jean II, Nicolas I and Martin, are supposed to have played with their father in 1657 and 1658, we do not know. Perhaps we can eliminate Jean II who entered the king's service officially in 1662 or 1663. Very little is known about him because he did not distinguish himself in any way as a musician, nor is anything known about his making any instruments. Nicolas joined the royal band in 1662 and remained as member of the Twelve Grand Oboes till his death in 1694. He was active as an instrument maker and is included in Borjon's panegyric. The third son, Martin, is first heard of as participating in Cavalli's *Serse* in 1660. He joined the *Grande Ecurie* in 1664. He earned great

fame as a bagpipe virtuoso, an instrument which he improved greatly. He is remembered also as the father of the most famous member of the family, the flautist Jacques Hotteterre le Romain. Although all three of these brothers, but especially the latter two, were active at court at the right time, and had the qualifications as instrument makers, we must rule them out because of their age at the time in question. It was customary to introduce one's sons to the court music from the age of eleven or twelve so that they could enjoy a long, and thus more lucrative, career in the king's service and it is obvious that the Hotteterre brothers who played the ballets from 1653 on could not have been much older. The main period of their activity is considerably later. This leaves Jean Hotteterre père as the man singled out in de la Barre's letter.

No written record exists which tells us authoritatively about the change of the name Danican into Philidor. Tradition has it that the first member of the family known to have been a musician, Michel Danican, was so named by Louis XIII after a Sienese oboist Filidori who had charmed the court a short time before. Nothing seems to be known about this Filidori, and he was certainly not an oboist in our sense of the word, as is claimed by every reference work which mentions him. Neither was Michel Danican a virtuoso on an instrument which had not yet been invented. Just what instrument Filidori actually played, if he existed at all, and in what way Michel distinguished himself, aside from being, as was customary, a performer on all winds, we do not know. Our interest lies in his two sons, Michel II and Jean. Of these two we can eliminate the latter. Jean joined the Fife and Drum corps in 1659, also playing krumhorn and trumpet marine, but he in no way distinguished himself except for the three things he left behind him: a group of dance-tunes, and two sons, André, the oldest, becoming a famous oboist and music librarian to the king. Michel II, however, is of interest to us. Entering the *Grande Ecurie* as Krumhorn and Trompette Marine, and serving till his death in 1659, he is the only one of the family active at the period and qualified to have been the one referred to by de la Barre as co-inventor of the oboe.

On the strength of this identification we can now venture a few deductions. Of the two men, only Jean Hotteterre is known to have made instruments. The idea then suggests itself that Michel Philidor did the actual work on the refinement of the reed and then sought the help of Hotteterre, the best wood-turner in the king's service, to construct an instrument to match it. If we earlier assumed the date 1660 on the strength of Talbot's tentative forty years, we must now set this back somewhat, since Philidor died in 1659. This is borne out by

a musical analysis of the works of Lully by Henri Prunières,³⁴ who is led to believe, without, unfortunately, stating his reasons, that the *Ballet de L'Amour Malade* (1657) already used oboes in its *Concert Champêtre de l'Epoux*, as well as in the Overture. To determine the instrumentation of Lully's scores is a very complicated and often impossible task. Only rarely are instruments mentioned outright. Generally the orchestration has to be reconstructed from the names of the participants which we find in the original libretti, and since nearly everybody played nearly every instrument it is not possible to make these reconstructions conclusive. There is no reason whatever to reject the assumption that the oboe was first tried out in public in this work, played, as we have seen above, by its inventor Jean Hotteterre with his two sons, Nicolas and Martin. Prunières also suggests that oboes played in *Un Charivari Grotesque* of *Le Mariage Forcé* of 1664, the same year in which we find the first actual mention of the oboe in a Lully score: the ballet *Les Plaisirs de L'Isle Enchantée*, containing a *Marche de Hautbois pour le Dieu Pan et sa Suite*.

We can be sure that in the first decade of the oboe much experimentation with improvements in reed- as well as instrument-making took place. The Hottetterre sons naturally adopted the invention of their father, as did the Philidor clan (André played the oboe in the beautiful *Concerts Royaux* of Couperin), as well as the recorder players, Desco-teaux and Philbert, and the bagpipers, Brunet and Destouches, Piesche father and sons—we find them all playing the oboe among whatever other instruments were required in the performances of Lully. That Lully was the spirit behind, and godfather to, the invention of the oboe can no longer be doubted. He gave the instrument and its inventors the chance for public appearance, he scored for it in his ballets and later in his operas, he wrote marches for a quartet of four (two sopranos, tenor and bass—probably bassoon), and he used it in the Te Deum of 1677. In 1670, one year before Cambert's *Pomone*,³⁵ which is given by most texts as the first use of the oboe in the orchestra, Lully permitted himself a little joke on his band of oboists. Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* ends with a *Ballet des Nations*, an extravaganza of strange national costumes, customs and dialects. The very last scene is ushered in by a Menuet played by the orchestra to the entrance of two *Poitevins*, in the traditional costumes of Poitou, who have their say about sky, foliage and love to the tune of the ditty just played. Then, as a finale to the whole performance, comes another Menuet, which in the libretto of the original performance bears this instruction: *Second Menuet pour les hautbois de Poitevins*. Once more the Hotteterre and Philidor (Nicolas Hotteterre and one Philidor, probably young

André, are mentioned in the libretto among the eight musicians taking part in this scene) haul out their old-time reed-pipes, never to use them again. In all later editions of Molière's play the direction refers to plain oboes.

We have come far afield from our original discussion of the tone quality of the old oboe. But we have a complete picture now which makes it easier to accept our premise than just the evidence of quotations from a few obscure writers. We have seen that the oboe was specifically constructed as an improvement over the earlier reed instruments so as to be admissible to the gentle tone of noble music making. A soft and beautiful sound was the aim of all this experimentation and its admitted success means that this aim had been reached. We have even further proof of this from the pen of a most respected witness, the dramatist Philippe Quinault, and indirectly, once more, by Lully himself.

On January 12, 1674, at the *Académie Royale de Musique*, Lully performed his opera *Alceste*, a tragedy by Philippe Quinault. The evening began with an allegorical Prologue by various Nymphs as well as the attributes of *Glory* and *Pleasure*, accompanied by an orchestra of strings, trumpets and drums with a woodwind section of five oboes, bagpipes and bassoons. A Ritournelle, performed on the stage by this band of woodwinds garbed in appropriate costumes, introduces a duet between *La Gloire*, soprano, and *La Nymphe de la Seine*, contralto.

Que tout retentisse,
Que tout reponde à nos voix
Que tout fleurisse
Dans nos jardins et dans nos bois
Que le chant des oiseaux s'unisse,
Avec le doux son des hautbois.

To prove the point, the five oboes at this moment chime in with what is perhaps the first lyrical duet written for this instrument:



Because they are accustomed to the elegantly narrow and thin reed of the modern oboe, many writers, by associating the reed with the elegantly thin and silvery tone of the modern instrument, have felt convinced that the old instrument, which used a thick and squat reed, must have had a clumsy and violent tone. Several pictures of the old

reed exist, often in great detail, as in Kircher and Mersenne, and it is without a doubt short, wide, thick and less delicate than that used today. But there exists no expert who can tell by looking at it what any reed sounds like. Up to the sixteenth century all treble reeds were small replicas of the bass reed. These bass reeds were essentially the same in shape as are the bassoon and contra-bassoon reeds of today, and so the treble reed copied its swallow-tail shape and its properties. When this reed was perfected and the oboe designed for it, the swallow-tail shape remained. Not till the middle of the eighteenth century were experiments made to change its shape towards the narrow and thin reed of today and remnants of the old triangular shape have not entirely died out yet in some localities of Europe. There is no reason whatever to assume that a short, thick, triangular reed is necessarily coarse and strident. The greater thickness of these reeds is to some extent balanced by the lightness of the material of which the instruments were made, which did not by any means create the resistance to the reed which the modern grenadilla-wood oboe does. Nor does the shape influence the quality of tone. It controls the production of overtones and it is due to this shape that the highest note of the oboe for over one hundred years was the harmonic d'' , which could not be surpassed though no other key is necessary to produce any note above it. These high notes caused difficulties at first, an indication of which we find in the fingering chart of Freillon Poncein's oboe method (1700).³⁶ From b'' onwards the fingerings given are those of the fundamental a semi-tone above the note desired. This compensated for the flatness of the overblown high notes. Eight years later the fingerings given by Jacques Hotteterre are those of straight octave harmonics.

On the subject of the old oboe reed one source of endless confusion has been the quotation from Hawkins, to the beginning of which we had occasion to refer above. The whole of it must now be considered:

As a performer on the hautboy, Martini was undoubtedly the greatest that the world had ever known. Before his time the tone of the instrument was rank, and, in the hands of the ablest proficients, harsh and grating to the ear; by great study and application, and by some peculiar management of the reed he contrived to produce such a tone, as approached the nearest to that of the human voice of any we know of. About the year 1735 an advertisement appeared in the public papers, offering a reward of ten guineas for a hautboy-reed that had been lost. It was conjectured to be Martini's, and favoured the opinion that he had some secret in preparing or meliorating the reeds of his instrument, though none could account for the offer of a reward so greatly disproportionate to the utmost conceivable value of the thing lost. It seems that the reed was found, and brought to the owner, but in such condition as rendered it useless.

Revived by Frank Kidson, the gist of this tale entered *Grove's* second edition in 1906, face to face with Dr Stone's reproduction of the battered reed of Rossini's oboist. From there on it spread to lesser sources and it still serves an unimpeachable proof of the inferiority of sound of the early oboe.

The Public Library of Minneapolis, Minn., owns a set of Hawkins' *History*, the last two volumes of which contain little slips of paper with contemporary comments. At my suggestion, one of the library staff made a study of these marginal notes which revealed that the original owner of this copy had been Redmond Simpson, son-in-law of the violinist Matthew Dubourg. W. T. Parke, in his garrulous *Musical Memoirs*, mentions that Simpson was sub-treasurer of the Society of Decayed Musicians. 'That gentleman, as a performer on the oboe, was highly estimated before Fischer arrived in England.' According to Burney, Simpson and Vincent belonged to the old generation of English oboists who used old English instruments, which accounts for their waning success in the face of the performances of Fischer. Simpson had once been considered one of the finest English oboists and had been the teacher of the renowned oboist John Parke, the elder of the two Parke brothers. The Minneapolis Hawkins later came into the possession of William Hawes, conductor of the first London Performance of *Der Freischütz*, who signed his name to the fly-leaf and carefully affixed Simpson's little slips of paper to the corresponding text with sealing wax. Opposite the Sammartini legend we find this note in the shaky hand of an old man:

Martini outlived the late P. of Wales a short time, and was succeeded as Harpsichord Master to the Princess Dowager, by Paradies. Martini set the Birth Day Ode for 1747 for Dubourg, who was then in a violent fever. Mr Nicolai has it.

in the note which says a reward of 10 Guineas reward was offered for a Hautboy reed that had been lost. it was the upper joint of his Hautboy, for which he was inconsolable 'till he got one that suited him. the later was purchased at his sale by the late D. of Ancaster for 20 Guineas who gave it to me. it is still in my Possession.

NOTES

¹ *Galpin Society Journal*, II, pp. 10-26.

² Adam Carse, *Musical Wind Instruments* (1939), p. 132.

³ A. Lavignac (ed.), *Encyclopédie de la Musique* (2me Partie, vol. 3), p. 1535.

⁴ Wanda Landowska, *Musique ancienne* (1908).

⁵ John Hawkins, *A general history . . . of Music* (1776), V, pp. 369-371.

⁶ *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (Leipzig, 1823), vol. 24, no. 11.

⁷ Charles Burney, *The present state of music in Germany* (1773), 2, p. 45.

⁸ A. Bridet, *L'éducation du Hautboïste* (1928).

⁹ Marin Mersenne, *Harmonie Universelle* (1636), p. 301.

¹⁰ Ulric Daubeny, *Orchestral Wind Instruments* (1920), p. 40.

¹¹ It would be unfair to make Père Mersenne even remotely responsible for all of this. The average concert-goer's knowledge of Mozart's music would preclude such a statement.

¹² This has been omitted in the 3rd edition (1927).

¹³ E. Prout, *The Orchestra* (1897), p. 114.

¹⁴ Willi Apel (ed.), *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (1944).

¹⁵ Filippo Bonanni, *Gabinetto armonico* (1722).

¹⁶ Johann Christoph and Johann David Stössel, *Kurzgefasstes Musikalisches Lexicon* (1737).

¹⁷ Johann Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte* (1740), p. 195.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁹ Johann Mattheson, *Das Neu-Eröffnete Orchester* (1713), p. 268.

²⁰ Curt Sachs, *Real-Lexicon der Musikinstrumente* (1913).

²¹ Adam Carse, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-3.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Lyndesay G. Langwill, *The Bassoon* (1947).

²⁴ Specific mention of other reed instruments is very rare throughout the seventeenth century. A few can be listed here: Hermann Schein, *Banchetto Musicale* (1617); a Suite for 4 Krumbhorns. In 1619, in a work to be discussed later, Praetorius suggests a concertino of Piffari and 4 Tromboni against 5 Viole da Braccio. The 2 Hautb. called for in 1628, in Orazio Benevoli's gigantic score of his Salzburg mass, do not represent, as has been claimed by, for instance, Bechler and Rahm, *Die Oboe* (1914), the first use of the oboe in the orchestra; this is one of the rare instances in which the treble shawm is used in church music. The defects of this instrument would be less apparent in an orchestra of this magnitude—this applies also to Praetorius' use of the Piffaro—and in any case for most of the time they are used in unison with the cornetts. From the second half of the century we find an anonymous manuscript in the Kassel Library of 4 Sonate a 5 Bombardini, Johann Petzel's *Bicinia variorum instrumentorum . . . cum appendice a 2 Bombardinis vulgo Schalmeyen e Fagotto* (1674), and J. C. Horn, *Parergon Musicum* 6. Theil . . . mit zwey Chören, auf Violen, Cornetten, Schalmeyen, Flöten etc. . . . (1676). The source for most of these, as well as the bassoon music listed below, have been C. F. Becker, *Die Tonwerke des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts* (1855), and Ernest H. Meyer, *Die mehrstimmige Spiel-musik des 17. Jahrhunderts* (1934).

²⁵ Dora J. Iselin, *Biagio Marini* (Diss. Basle, 1930).

²⁶ L. G. Langwill, *op. cit.*, p. 12. One variation is reprinted in A. Lavignac (ed.), *op. cit.* (Partie I, vol. 4: Rafael Mitjana y Gordon, *La Musique en Espagne*, pp. 2086-7).

²⁷ This list of composers who used the bassoon in various concertini is necessarily incomplete but should suffice to give an idea of the universal acceptance of the bassoon in the seventeenth century: Albrici, Arnold, Denmark, Förster, Hoefer, Kindermann, Knüpfer, Krieger, Nicolai, Pez, Petzel, Poglietti, Pohle, Scheerer, Speer, Schwartzkopff, Theil, Thieme, J. G. Trost, J. K. Trost, Valentini (before 1649), Weckmann, Wieland. In religious music

the bassoon was used in: J. A. Herbst, *Loblied* (1637); J. J. Harnisch, *Calliope Mixta* (1653); M. Cazzati, *Motetti e Himni a voce sola con 2 Violini e Fagotto ad lib.* (1658); J. M. Gleton, *Expeditionis Musicae* (1667–1670); J. M. Caesar, *Missa Brevis* (1687).

²⁸ J. Ecorcheville, 'Quelques Documents sur la Musique de la Grande Ecurie du Roi' in *SIMG*, II, pp. 608ff.

²⁹ Ernest Thoinan, 'Les Phildor' in *La France Musicale* (1867–8). These articles are not by A. Pougin as claimed in Eitner.

³⁰ Ernest Thoinan, *Les Hotteterre et les Chédeville* (1894).

³¹ Adam Carse, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

³² Anthony Baines, 'James Talbot's Manuscript' in *Galpin Society Journal*, I. Also Eric Halfpenny, 'The English Debut of the French Hautboy' in *Monthly Musical Record*, 79, no. 908.

³³ J. Ecorcheville, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Henri Prunières (ed.), *Oeuvres Complètes de J. B. Lully* (1932).

³⁵ The date is 1671 and not 1659, the year of Cambert's first dramatic work *La Pastorale*, as given by Sachs, Geiringer and others.

³⁶ Freillon Poncein, *La Véritable Manière d'apprendre à jouer en perfection de l'hautbois* (1700). Ecorcheville has pointed out that the instrument depicted in the fingering charts is not an oboe and has a pirouette. This is certainly true and confusing, because the instructions given in the text leave no doubt that a free-blown reed instrument is intended: 'You must . . . take half of the cane of which the reed is made with the two lips and hold it in the centre with strength, tightening as you go higher, and giving more and more air, which must be accomplished without grimaces and disturbances in any part of the body.' Similar instructions can be found in many methods of the oboe prior to the invention of the octave keys. On the modern instrument the procedure should be exactly the opposite.



The following corrections to Mr Hubbard's article on 'Two Early English Harpsichords' arrived after JOURNAL III had gone to press.

Page 13: the second sentence should read 'The use of oak is not typical of Flemish practice in harpsichord construction even at this early period, and, in this case, must be regarded as an English feature'.

Page 15, line 3: for 'sharpness' read 'harmonic development'. In the section on this page headed RANGE, the last sentence should read 'The two most likely limits to the compass follow: C to e''' (four octaves and a third); B, to d''' (four octaves and a fifth: the lowest octave is a short octave, and the lowest sharp is divided, giving an actual range of G, to d''' with G♯, B, ♯ and C♯ missing)'.

Page 18, line 9: add a superscript ⁵ to the word 'third', referring to an additional footnote. This reads '⁵ To avoid ambiguity it should be stated that the writer considers the shorter of the two long courses to be the first, the course half its length to be the second, and the remaining long unison course to be the third'.