



# *Outstanding Oboe*



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BEST LOVED  
classical oboe music

## Outstanding Oboe

### Best loved classical oboe music

Enticing oboe repertoire featuring some of the best-loved concertos, quartets and sonatas of Bach, Handel, Mozart, Albinoni and others.

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| <p><b>[1] Johann Sebastian BACH (1685–1750)</b><br/>Concerto for Violin and Oboe, 4:38<br/>BWV 1060 – I. Allegro<br/><i>Christian Hommel • Lisa Stewart</i><br/><i>Cologne Chamber Orchestra</i><br/><i>Helmut Müller-Brühl (8.554602)</i></p> | <p><b>[9]</b> Allegro non molto 3:32<br/><b>[10]</b> Larghetto 3:25<br/><b>[11]</b> Allegro 2:43</p>  |
| <p><b>Tomaso ALBINONI (1671–1751)</b><br/>Oboe Concerto in D minor, Op. 9, No. 2 12:58<br/><i>Anthony Camden • London Virtuosi</i><br/><i>John Georgiadis (8.550739)</i></p>   | <p><b>Alessandro MARCELLO (1684–1750)</b><br/>Oboe Concerto in D minor 11:21<br/><i>Stefan Schilli • Cologne Chamber Orchestra</i><br/><i>Helmut Müller-Brühl (8.551077)</i></p>  |
| <p><b>[2]</b> Allegro e non presto 4:30<br/><b>[3]</b> Adagio 5:21<br/><b>[4]</b> Allegro 3:03</p>   | <p><b>[12]</b> Andante e spiccato 3:28<br/><b>[13]</b> Adagio 4:08<br/><b>[14]</b> Presto 3:42</p>  |
| <p><b>[5] Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756–1791)</b><br/>Oboe Concerto in C major, K. 314 – 6:00<br/>III. Allegro<br/><i>Martin Gabriel • Vienna Mozart Academy</i><br/><i>Johannes Wildner (8.550345)</i></p>                                    | <p><b>[15] Alessandro BESOZZI (1702–1775)</b><br/>Oboe Concerto No. 1 in C major – 7:53<br/>III. Allegretto<br/><i>Anthony Camden • City of London Sinfonia</i><br/><i>Nicholas Ward (8.554772)</i></p>                                 |
| <p><b>[6] Francis POULENC (1899–1963)</b><br/>Oboe Sonata, FP 185 – 5:03<br/>I. Élégie: Paisiblement<br/><i>Olivier Doise • Alexandre Tharaud (8.553611)</i></p>   | <p><b>[16] Domenico CIMAROSA (1749–1801)</b><br/><b>arr. Arthur BENJAMIN (1893–1960)</b><br/>Oboe Concerto in C minor – III. Siciliana 3:00<br/><i>Anthony Camden • City of London Sinfonia</i><br/><i>Nicholas Ward (8.553991)</i></p> |
| <p><b>[7] George Frideric HANDEL (1685–1759)</b><br/>Oboe Concerto No. 3 in G minor, 2:03<br/>HWV 287 – IV. Allegro<br/><i>Anthony Camden • City of London Sinfonia</i><br/><i>Nicholas Ward (8.553430)</i></p>                                | <p><b>[17] Camille SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921)</b><br/>Oboe Sonata in D major, Op. 166 – 2:23<br/>III. Molto allegro<br/><i>Charles Hamann</i><br/><i>Stéphane Lemelin (8.570964)</i></p>   |
| <p><b>[8] Robert SCHUMANN (1810–1856)</b><br/>3 Romanzen, Op. 94 – No. 3, 4:17<br/>Nicht schnell<br/><i>József Kiss • Jenő Jandó (8.550599)</i></p>  | <p><b>[18] Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART</b><br/>Oboe Quartet in F major, K. 370 – 3:18<br/>II. Adagio<br/><i>Max Arlved • Elise Batnes</i><br/><i>Dimitri Golovanov • Lars Holm Johansen</i><br/><i>(8.557361)</i></p>                       |
| <p><b>Antonio VIVALDI (1678–1741)</b><br/>Oboe Concerto in A minor, RV 461 9:40<br/><i>Stefan Schilli</i><br/><i>Budapest Failoni Chamber Orchestra</i><br/><i>Pier Giorgio Morandi (8.550860)</i></p>   | <p><b>[19] Nikolay RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844–1908)</b><br/>Flight of the Bumble-bee 1:26<br/><i>Ivan Paisov</i><br/><i>Natalia Shcherbakova (8.570596)</i></p>  |

### **[17] Saint-Saëns: Oboe Sonata in D major, Op. 166 – III. Molto allegro**

Like his compatriot Poulenc, Camille Saint-Saëns composed an oboe sonata toward the very end of his life. It was a time of rapidly changing musical styles to which Saint-Saëns responded with a series of three sonatas. The *Oboe Sonata in D major* is marked by its spare, almost austere neo-Classicism, its third movement full of refinement and clarity.

### **[18] Mozart: Oboe Quartet in F major, K. 370 – II. Adagio**

It was, once again, Friedrich Ramm who – as in the case of the oboe concerto – provided the virtuosity and musicality to premiere Mozart's *Oboe Quartet*. It was written in 1781 in Munich, where Mozart had gone to put the finishing touches to his opera *Idomeneo*. Ramm had been a prestigious member of the Mannheim orchestra which was, in the words of one awed visitor, the English music historian Charles Burney, 'an army of generals'. Now Ramm was in Munich, performing as principal oboist in the orchestra of the Elector of the Palatinate, and it seems overwhelmingly probable that his

string colleagues in that premiere were drawn from the Elector's orchestra as well. Ramm's lyricism and tonal beauty were spurs to Mozart. In this work he creates a rich tapestry of the subtlest of chamber interplay. After the perfectly calibrated Classical first movement, and before the high spirits of the *Rondo* finale, comes the exquisitely poised slow movement. Time seems to stand still here, though the movement is not in itself particularly long. But there is such a rapt intensity to the oboe's aria, and the supporting strings provide so consoling and warm a cushion, that it seems far longer than its mere 37 bars' length. It is a miracle of compression, a miracle of beauty.

### **[19] Rimsky-Korsakov: Flight of the Bumble-bee**

This famous showpiece comes from the opera *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* where it forms a short interlude in the third act in which various orchestral sections contribute. However it has been arranged for a variety of instruments, in which a performer can demonstrate the considerable virtuosity necessary to surmount its dazzlingly fast intricacies.

Jonathan Woolf  
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was Bach by this *Oboe Concerto in D minor*, published in 1717 (and over the years sometimes mistakenly attributed to Alessandro's brother, Benedetto) that he transcribed it for solo harpsichord. The work is suffused with harmony and gracefulness, a beautiful balance that allows, in the central *Adagio*, the solo oboe to spin so seductive and beautiful an aria that the oboe soars and spirals into the sky of its own song. After this the finale releases cheerfulness and high spirits in an effortless and joyful way. It is surely no coincidence that the city that built the first opera house should have produced so many composers who used instrumental forces in so sincere and vocal a way as this.

**[15] Besozzi: Oboe Concerto No. 1 in C major – III. Allegretto**

The Besozzi family had an illustrious musical pedigree and was famous throughout Italy and beyond. Carlo Besozzi was an oboist and composer and his *Concerto No. 1 in C major* is a fine example of his Classical style, its *Allegretto* finale revealing richly contrasted themes, a glamorous cadenza, and plenty of opportunities for agile virtuosity.

**[16] Cimarosa, arr. Benjamin: Oboe Concerto in C minor – III. Siciliana**

Attributions, misattributions, arrangements and simple mistakes have been rife in the history of some of these works, as we have seen, and the same is true for this one. For many years this work was known as 'Cimarosa's oboe concerto, arranged by Arthur Benjamin' as if Benjamin had edited the work for performance from an existing work. In fact the 'Oboe Concerto on themes of Cimarosa', to give it the correct name, was brought to life in 1942 by the eminent Australian-born composer as an orchestration of some of Cimarosa's harpsichord pieces. Benjamin preferred to imbue the work with a Baroque ethos, even though Cimarosa had been born in 1749 and so post-dated the style (in fact he died a few years after Mozart). However one views this, Benjamin has crafted a lovely work, full of high spirits, great warmth, with a grave Introduction prefacing a faster movement and then the wondrous *Siciliana* third movement, a distillation of the slow dance, which the oboe projects with quiet dignity and eloquence.

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If you've ever blown through blades of grass you will have some idea of the sensation produced and the sound that emerges – a magical buzzing that vibrates on the lips. It's not at all dissimilar to the theory of playing the oboe, and in fact it may have inspired the Ancient Greeks in their use of the instrument called the aulos, which we now think was an early oboe, with what is called a double-reed. The Romans had their own type of oboe as well, called the tibia. Developments throughout the centuries led to a wide variety of reed instruments but in the Baroque era, a number became obsolete. The old shawm, which was often identified as an oboe, lost its place. A poem of the time celebrates the oboe because 'it can be played in church, at home and on the battlefield – everywhere that matters' – whilst the shawm was a 'rural' instrument only fit to be played in a village. In fact certain technical advances in construction had meant that the oboe could be used indoors, unlike the shawm which retained its rustic, folk-like outdoors role. The distinction came about because makers of instruments had now become specialists. Like Italian violin makers in Cremona, there were oboe-making specialists in Nuremberg, London and Amsterdam. Greater professionalism and specialism led to

competition. Older instrument makers and their now suddenly old fashioned and crudely made instruments looked very amateur; the more elegant sounding oboe was now the natural instrument to be taken into orchestras.

This period coincided with the rise of the oboe as a solo instrument. It's unclear precisely how the shawm became the Baroque oboe but it was in France that the transformation became complete. Here the 'hautbois' (in English, 'high wood') properly emerged. The English pronunciation of the word was 'hoboy' and around 1770 it became known formally as an 'oboe'.

Though it rose to prominence in France, Italy proved the finishing school for the oboe. Venice had the first opera houses, and it was Venetian composers who first sought to provide the oboe with a suitable stage. Some, like Vivaldi, tended to see the oboe as a reed version of the violin, and despite his beautiful writing there was nothing automatically different about the oboe concertos he wrote – different from his violin concertos, that is. In fact he sometimes designated both concertos for the same work. Albinoni was different. He responded to the effortless-sounding, aria-like quality of the oboe 'in flight'; he used his operatic background to fashion ravishing arias

for the oboe to 'sing' in slow movements. What he did bears out Charles Burney's comments on hearing the great Italian oboists Alessandro and Paolo Besozzi; 'So much expression! Such delicacy!' What we respond to most in Baroque oboe concertos is, of course, the sprightly fast movements, the intricate technical challenges, the interplay of strings with oboe. The tunes are often graceful and majestic. But above all it is the slow movements where the oboe most shines. Here, it sounds released, able to spin an unending stream of exquisite song. Those composers who thought of the oboe in terms of the human voice, still make the greatest appeal to listeners today. It must have been a remarkable sight for early listeners, seeing – and hearing – an instrument that was once thought of as a rustic plaything now being employed as a refined, songful medium for some of the richest and most beautiful melodies of the day, in some cases comparable to the loveliest arias to be heard in contemporary opera.

When Venetian composers began writing for the oboe they looked on it as a new and exciting voice. It had a clear and penetrating sound, and was capable of considerable virtuosity. It seems to be the case that the oboe at this period was not quite as penetrating as today's instrument, with a softer quality, and that tonally things were very much influenced by the use of boxwood to make oboes.

Today, more often than not, granadilla is used, also called African Blackwood, though the rosewood is also used. Holding the instrument toward an audience however meant that the sound carried well. It also had quite a powerful sound. In a book published in 1695, *The Sprightly Companion*, the instrument was praised for being 'Majestical and Stately, and not much inferior to the Trumpet.' Given the disparity in volume between a brass instrument and a woodwind, this was high praise, and evidence of how far, and how quickly, the oboe had impressed itself on composers and listeners alike. There are always variables to consider, of course, in the oboe's sound. It's largely to do with the reed and how it performs, which is why oboists are so punctilious about their reeds. Humidity, with rises and falls in temperature, will affect the clarity of the sound and the pitch, so oboists need to apply considerable care to their instrument.

Oboists are the mechanics who service their own instruments. They are also creators of their own personalised reeds – which they scrape and fashion into the 'ideal' one to produce a beautiful tone. If you meet an oboist going about his or her professional business you will be amazed to see the kinds of portable gadgets they carry with them; knives, obviously, to trim, but also sharpening equipment such as stones, and a cutting block on which to cut the reed tip. There's also the

controlled, with an especially lovely *Sarabande* slow movement. The finale is a delightful dance, with the oboe leading, and picking up on the orchestra's hints with infectious verve.

### [8] **Schumann: 3 Romanzen, Op. 94 – No. 3, Nicht schnell**

In a move that seemed to hearken back to older practice (but which was also eminently practical), Robert Schumann authorised that his three *Romanzen* could be played by oboe and piano – the primary inspiration – or alternatively violin, or clarinet, and piano. The set was written in 1849, an important year in Schumann's development. Here the oboe takes on an almost 'legendary' quality, which would not be surprising as the composer was immersing himself at the time in the world of myth. This, allied to Schumann's huge interest in expanding the sense of colour available to him, gives the three pieces a suggestive power. The composer was a famously literary man and it's certainly quite possible in the third of the set to imagine a rich scene setting – the oboe here seems to speak in a gravely antique way, and the central passage seems to be forlorn.

### [9]–[11] **Vivaldi: Oboe Concerto in A minor, RV 461**

This may well be the last of Vivaldi's oboe concertos, and it's certainly one of the most popular. There have been many arrangements over the years for other instruments. Those for violin, clarinet and even soprano saxophone are the most well known, and attest to the charm, melodic inspiration and warmth of the work. The outer movements are driving and exciting and frame a central slow movement that sees the oboe arch its lyrical lines over a simple orchestral accompaniment. Like Albinoni, Vivaldi was a skilled operatic composer and one can hear how aria-like his melodies were. The soloist's elegant pirouetting in the faster music does suggest why Vivaldi sanctioned the use of the violin in so many of his concertos.

### [12]–[14] **Marcello: Oboe Concerto in D minor**

Yet another of the amazing roster of Venetian composers was Alessandro Marcello (1684–1750). In addition to his great musical accomplishments he was also a fine mathematician and philosopher. He was born the year before the illustrious Johann Sebastian Bach and, indeed, so taken

[5] **Mozart: Oboe Concerto in C major, K. 314 – III. Allegro**

Like Bach's *Concerto for Violin and Oboe*, Mozart's *Oboe Concerto* has an interesting if confusing history, as it's also well known in the version for transverse flute. The oboe part was rediscovered in 1920 in Salzburg and it became clear that, despite the habit of transposing works from one instrument to another when they were composed, the oboe version was the original. That, at least, was one theory. Others have wondered whether there might not be other explanations, given that the flute and oboe versions are somewhat different. It was written for Friedrich Ramm, a famous player of the time, in the Spring or Summer of 1777, which was Mozart's 'mid period', and it is full of lovely tunes and a great deal of charm, even if the slow movement calls for real skill because of Mozart's use of a high register. Abdominal muscles need to be in peak condition. The *Allegro* finale offers the most high spirited and infectious fun and it's no wonder that Ramm liked the concerto and played it so often that Mozart referred to the work as 'Ramm's warhorse'.

[6] **Poulenc: Oboe Sonata, FP 185 – I. Élégie: Paisiblement**

A 'born composer' in the words of his friend Arthur Honegger, Francis Poulenc died unexpectedly having just completed his *Oboe Sonata*. Dedicated to the memory of Prokofiev this late work shows Poulenc's powers of sophisticated simplicity in which the oboe's melancholic voice perfectly fits the opening movement's peaceful elegy.

[7] **Handel: Oboe Concerto No. 3 in G minor, HWV 287 – IV. Allegro**

Handel's prodigious gifts embraced most forms of composition. The best known of his concertos are those for organ. Indeed his *Organ Concerto in G minor, Op. 4, No. 3* sports a particularly delicious melody that he himself had recycled more than once throughout his career. It made its first appearance as the finale of the *Oboe Concerto in G minor*. It's a work that, when published (as late as 1863), was dated to around 1703, though there seems to be no other confirmation of this assertion. But if this is so, it would find Handel in Hamburg, writing a hybrid work, mostly Italian in style but still with French movement names. It's a compact work, assured and

scraping plaque, a tiny steel plate to use when scraping, a trusty mandrel – which is a steel rod to hold the reed – and many more gadgets and essentials, such as pliers, scissors, thread, rulers, and canes. They all fit in portable cases. And yet, of course, no matter how they craft the reed, and how similar the actual oboe itself, it is impossible for any two oboists to sound the same.

It's true, however, that the oboe has suffered for its perceived difficulty. When musical instruments are being handed around in school classrooms the oboe is certainly not the first to be claimed; guitars, flutes, recorders and violins get the prize there. Partly it's because it takes quite a lot of study to gain control over the embouchure – how to hold the instrument in the mouth. Also, like all instruments, initial sounds are not promising. But with good study and dedication, excellent results can be achieved, and oboists are in demand in quite a few areas of music making, from chamber ensembles, to studio bands, and even having a place in some jazz performances.

What composers soon grew to appreciate was that the increasingly narrow bore of the oboe allowed the player, and especially the virtuosos among them, to play much higher than before. If they were able to maintain breath control and ensure that pitch didn't sag, then they were able to play with a

steady tone in a way that was both beautiful and astonishing. During the Classical period, the upper register was more and more used by composers. When Mozart heard Carlo Besozzi, a famous player of the instrument and a descendent of the Besozzi brothers Charles Burney had heard, he wrote; 'Words fail me to describe his precision and the extremely pure tone he preserves in the most rapid runs and jumps.' It is clear from this that Besozzi was a technician of the highest quality and he ensured that his lip control, or embouchure, was in perfect working order. But there was more to him than this. What all great oboists possess is the ability to spin lines seamlessly, as if possessed of an unending supply of air. It makes them seem superhuman sometimes. Mozart noticed that Besozzi could 'sustain his notes and his power to increase and decrease their volume, without introducing even the slightest quiver into his very pure tone.' The phenomenon he described is one of the things that makes the instrument so special – the ability of the player to produce, under considerable facial pressure, a steady, unbroken stream of unwavering tone.

The sound of the oboe is melodic and expressive, and it has a supremely human, speaking quality. It's essentially sweet. Its cousin, the somewhat larger (and lower in pitch) cor anglais, or English horn – though as the old joke goes, it's neither English nor

a horn – makes a more obviously melancholy sound, more plangent and sad. It's an irony that often the first time people hear an oboe is when an orchestra is tuning up, because it's the oboist's responsibility to sound the 'A' and then the orchestra tunes to it. An example of an oboist's nightmare occurs in the (possibly apocryphal) story of the conductor who asked the oboist to sound his A on a particularly cold morning. The poor man quacked his note and then his pitch wobbled through his entire range, like a duck skating on ice. The conductor turned to his players with a shrug and said; 'Take your pick!'

Of course there are differences between oboe makers, and national characteristics apply. There is a Viennese oboe, for instance, that is very reedy in the middle register and more powerful than many others. Its particular characteristics are probably related to circumstances; it needed to be louder to compete in the larger symphony orchestras. Much of the fascination with this remarkable instrument is that the smallest differences can create a widely differing sound. The more you scrape away at the reed, the more different the sound will be. If you scrape in a 'V' fashion the sound will differ from a 'U' shaped scrape. In the first case you will get a more woody sound, in the second a sweeter one. These specifics are a long, long way from the days of the pastoral shepherd and his rustic shawm!

And they are not the kind of thing you will think of when you hear an oboe played in performance, either as a solo, chamber or orchestral instrument. The greatest composers always give the oboe space to breathe, and its plaintive sound emerges over the orchestra's supportive cushion of sound like a song. In Beethoven's opera *Fidelio*, for instance, there is a beautiful consolatory solo. Schubert wrote an exquisite solo for oboe in the slow movement of his *Ninth Symphony*. Maybe one of the most beautiful of all solos for the instrument comes in the slow movement of Brahms' *Violin Concerto* which offers a summation of all that is glorious about the instrument: the individual, plangent tone, an ability to spin seemingly endless lines, a likeness to the human voice, its songful, aria-like quality, and innate ability to move listeners, and its strength to rise above the orchestra whilst retaining a struggle-free serenity and sweetness of sound. In all these ways the oboe is a joy, and an inspiration.

**[1] J.S. Bach: Concerto for Violin and Oboe, BWV 1060 – I. Allegro**

There are few finer examples of the vocalised interplay of the oboe and another solo instrument than in this concerto for violin and oboe. Though the work now exists only in a version for two harpsichords, and it was long thought that this was the original and

the violin and oboe work a copy, it is now strongly believed that the harpsichord version is actually an adaptation of the violin and oboe original. Bach stresses exchange, intertwining and conversation over sheer dexterity, allowing the two voices to float through and around each other in a display of the utmost beauty and security. In this first movement one notices how carefully Bach has established the echo effects between the two instruments, and how subtly they are deployed to increase the sense of dialogue. There is also the way Bach allows the two voices to emerge from the orchestral sound world. It's almost as if he were allowing the two to emerge from the orchestra's texture and then gently returning them. This ability to blend the solo roles with that of the supporting orchestral forces gives the work a supreme sense of depth.

**[2]–[4] Albinoni: Oboe Concerto in D minor, Op. 9, No. 2**

Despite its origins in France, the oboe was to flourish most spectacularly in Italy and nowhere more so than in Venice. Vivaldi, the Red Priest, wrote concertos for oboe but they were largely little different from his

violin concertos. Indeed he sometimes specified the instrumentation of such works to be played on violin or oboe. It was left to Tomaso Albinoni, an almost exact Venetian contemporary of Vivaldi (though there's no indication the two men knew each other) to take the evolution of the oboe concerto one important stage further. For Albinoni, the oboe was a truly independent instrument, one capable of all the beauty and allure of the human voice, and his concertos became almost operatic in their lyricism. Significantly, his wife was a singer. His concertos were the first of their kind to be published by an Italian composer and his Op. 9 set followed in 1722. Those for oboe are even more magnificent than the earlier set, and of them No. 2 is the most deservedly popular. It is everything a great concerto should be: in the now standard fast-slow-fast formula, the first movement is full of charm and excitement, and the last has plenty of room for echo or imitation effects and counterpoint. But it's the slow movement that is the most astonishing – over simple accompaniment the oboe soars, singing its song like an operatic soprano. One is even tempted to think of a text – love, loss, longing – so perfect is it.