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Metamorphoses After Oboe:

An Examination of the Evolution of Oboe Part Writing Through Music History

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Masters Lecture Recital

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Throughout Western music history, the oboe has served as one of the primary members of the orchestra. From its beginnings in the Baroque consort to the modern day orchestra, the instrument's story is one of unique ups and downs between being a staple and being a necessity. Though the instrument has weathered much through Western music history, it has endured and evolved into the instrument that is so familiar today. What is not as familiar, however, is the progression the oboe took to get to its modern iteration. The modern oboe represents years of development, both technologically and musically, on the part of oboists, instrument makers, and composers alike. This lecture aims to expose this progression, showing the changes the oboe both inspired and absorbed within the framework of Western music history.

The likely origin of the oboe was in 1657 at the French court under Lully.[1] Lully introduced the oboe as an eventual replacement of the shawm, participating in the same role in the consort: playing "marches, dance suites, and ceremonial music."[2] Very early on, the oboe began picking up theatrical connotations, as Lully used them frequently on stage during pastoral scenes.[3] It was common to see oboes used to help represent a simple and innocent shepherd's life on stage; a representation of peace to contrast the trumpet, which was the personification of glory, heroism, and battle.[4] Despite this association with peace and the pastoral, the oboe was quite loud, with the ratio of oboes to violins varying anywhere from 1:1 to 1:11.[5] In the Baroque ensemble, the violin and the oboes were partners in all things, often doubling lines or performing similar leadership functions for

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[1] Janet K. Page et al., "Oboe," *Grove Music Online* (.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Geoffrey Burgess and Bruce Haynes, *The Oboe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004) 39.
[5] Page et al., *Oboe*.

their respective groups; strings for violins and winds for oboes.[6] An example of this can be found in the manuscript of Handel's *Judas Maccaebus*.

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With the top two lines being the oboe parts and the bottom two violin parts, it is easy to see the correlation these two instruments had with each other, as the first oboe and first violin parts nearly double each other. Interestingly enough, the oboes also provide reinforcement to the sopranos in the oratorio.

This association with the human voice is what began the oboe's extensive Baroque solo repertoire. According to Geoffrey Burgess and Bruce Haynes, "This was what the hautboy did best, and the reason it had been created: to convey the emotional force of words and to move its listeners."[8] Much in the way that the violin was dominating as a soloistic instrument, the oboe quickly captured the ear of many composers. One such composer was Tomaso Albinoni, who wrote several concerti for the oboe during his lifetime. Albinoni is an interesting case, as he wrote both operas and instrumental works simultaneously throughout his career.[9] From the perspective of this

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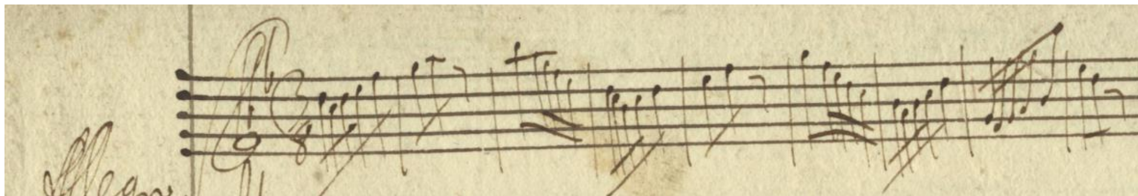
[6] Burgess and Haynes, *The Oboe* 29.
[7] George Frideric Handel, *Judas Maccabaeus, HWV 63* (Louisville: Ricasoli Collection at the University of Louisville Music Library; c. 1750-1799).
[8] Burgess and Haynes, *The Oboe* 28.
[9] John E. Solie, "Aria Structure and Ritornello Form in the Music of Albinoni," *The Musical Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (1977) 34.

lecture, this puts him in a perfect position to either confirm or reject the notion of correlation to the human voice. While arias and concerti in the Baroque period share much in common, including a basic ritornello format, they are still separate genres for the most part. The oboe concerti of Albinoni, however, differ in that they do emulate a vocal aria structurally. John Solie in an article for *The Musical Quarterly* writes,

> The concertos with oboes, however, begin in a way which suggests that Albinoni may well have had arias in mind when composing them. Were the voice in his elaborate orchestral arias replaced by an oboe, the music from the beginning through the ritornello in the dominant key could not be distinguished structurally from the oboe concertos of Opera 7 and 9.[10]

While other instruments struck out with their own timbres, the oboe retained a strong connection to the human voice: a connection we will later see extends far into the 19th century. Of course, much like a Baroque aria, it was expected that the concerto instrument also ornament the piece, bringing the performer to the table as a creator as well as a vessel for the piece. Below is a fragment of a violin concerto by Albinoni.



[11]

It is clear that Albinoni did not write any dynamics or even articulations in the passage. While articulations can be found in other parts of the same work, no dynamics exist in the piece. Indeed, the oboe concerto I have prepared for this lecture only contains editorial suggestions of dynamics and articulations. Therefore, it was up to the performer to determine what dynamics, articulations, and embellishments to use. Keeping the harmony

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[10] Ibid., 45.

[11] Tomaso Albinoni, *12 Concertos À Cinque, Violin Concerto Op.7 no. 10* (Dresden: Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden.

in mind, it was considered appropriate to add mordents, trills, and even turns and passing notes.[12] This remained true for orchestral music as well, as evidenced by the Lully fragment above. There are no dynamics or articulation marks whatsoever, suggesting a similar attitude toward the performer as more than just a vessel. In order to demonstrate one such possibility for an aria-style, embellished concerto, I shall now play Albinoni's Concerto in D major, Op. 7 No. 6. As this piece is incredibly repetitive, inspired as it is by vocal arias of the time, I've elected to make extensive usage of passing tones and turns throughout the main melody of the piece. Additionally, I've used mordents and inverted mordents more often than trills in order to keep a sense of lightness through the piece, as I viewed them more appropriate than trills.

Of course, these conventions of the Baroque period did not disappear overnight with the death of Bach and the beginning of the Classical era. Instead, the Classical era reinforced much of the oboe's previous connotations in symphonic works. With the expanded orchestra of the 18th century, featuring the oboe at any time suddenly became more of a difficulty due to the changing technology of the instrument. According to Bruce Haynes, "Although the Classical oboe looks at first sight like a Baroque oboe, its smaller bore and tone-holes represent a sharp break with the past…"[13] It was this smaller bore that led to a significantly tamed sound produced by the oboe. Haynes characterizes it as "narrower and more focused" and "softer, especially in the upper register."[14] The changes in the oboe's technology were likely brought about by changing attitudes toward

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[12] Elizabeth Walker, "An Introduction to Baroque Ornamentation," *Pan: The Journal of the British Flute Society* 32, no. 4 (12, 2013), 34-37.
[13] Bruce Haynes, "Mozart and the Oboe," *Early Music* 20, no. 1, Performing Mozart's Music II (Feb., 1992) 43.
[14] Ibid.

the instrument, noted by the introduction of the clarinet. In fact, Haynes points out that Mozart himself considered the clarinet a direct replacement for the oboe, especially as it was a doubling instrument for oboists as it was introduced.[15] He writes, “By the end of Mozart’s life the clarinet was on at least an equal footing with the oboe.”[16] As the popularity of creating an even tone color throughout the orchestra increased, the dominance of the oboe and, in particular, its partnership with the violin slowly began to fall out of place.[17] By the height of the Classical period, the correlation between the violin and the oboe had all but fallen apart, as the violin parts increased in complexity while the oboe parts began to take on a more harmonic function as a whole.[18] The oboe was not without its shining moments in the orchestra, however. As the oboe had a near monopoly on the pastoral and dance from the previous era of music history, it was still often used as such as evidenced by its extensive usage in minuet movements such as Haydn’s 96th symphony or Beethoven’s 6th Symphony (also titled “*Pastoral*”). Beethoven, however, took the storytelling capacity of the oboe and added a new dimension to it: that of speechless grief. In the opening of the second movement of Beethoven’s 3rd Symphony, *Eroica*, we are treated to a funeral march, as is marked in the score itself.[19] After an introduction by the violins, the oboe has this now-famous solo:

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[15] Ibid., 47.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Page et al., *Oboe*.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ludwig van Beethoven, *Symphony no. 3, Op. 55 "Eroica"* (London: Cianchettini und Sperati; 1809).
[20] Ibid.

This small move by Beethoven, rather unprecedented in any work leading up to it, sent shockwaves through history that still resonate today, as we will explore later on.

First, however, we must address the growing issue surrounding solo repertoire for the oboe. Despite the oboe's popularity in the Baroque period, the oboe began to lose favor among composers for new works. Haynes writes for *Grove*, "Despite the popularity of these forms [quartet and quintet], the quantity of new compositions for solo hautboy was on a steady decline in the second half of the century."[21] In fact, the oboe's lack of repertoire is most prevalent in the concerto genre, where only the Mozart Oboe Concerto, K. 314 survives as the only piece written by a major composer in the time period. The concerto, originally written for the oboe but later transcribed for the flute and the oboe manuscripts lost, is in a Classical sonata form. The sonata form has ancestry in the binary of the ritornello form used by Albinoni's concerti. Despite this ancestry, there is little in common between the two pieces, especially with how they were written and intended to be played. Firstly, we see an amazing jump in the virtuosity of the oboe, with very complicated rhythms and notes extending above C above the staff. Mozart composed this concerto for the oboist Giuseppe Ferlendis, the principal oboist at Salzburg, but the Mannheim oboist Friedrich Ramm made it his "war horse."[22] Ramm continually impressed Mozart with his virtuosity and, especially, his range on the oboe. The Mozart Oboe Quartet was likely written with Ramm in mind, as Mozart continually uses E, E-flat, and F above the staff throughout the piece. Given the range of most parts written for the oboe at this time, it is highly likely that Ramm was the only oboist able to play the

[21] Page et al., *Oboe*.
[22] Haynes, *Mozart and the Oboe*, 43-50+53+55-57+59-63.

piece for quite some time.[23] One thing that was held over from the Baroque to the Classical era was the oboe's connection to the voice, though it was significantly weakened. Because of the open tone-hole nature of the instrument, the scales of the instrument were uneven. This unevenness was used to "give the effect of singing a scale using different vowels for each note" by composers, Mozart included.[24]

Moving past the virtuosity of the piece, we can see the clear division between Baroque and Classical in the composer's direction of the piece. Gone are the ambiguous dynamics and articulations, as shown in the facsimile page from the third movement below.

[23] Ibid., 47.
[24] Ibid., 50.

Konzert in C für Oboe und Orchester KV 314 (285^d): Eine Seite (Beginn des dritten Satzes) der Stimme *Oboe Principale* aus dem handschriftlichen Salzburger Stimmenmaterial (Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum Salzburg). Vgl. Vorwort und Seite 119–122, Takt 1–64.

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Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum. Online Publications (2006)

[25]

Here we can clearly see articulation markings throughout, as Mozart makes it clear that specific sections are to be played staccato or legato. Dynamics are also present

[25] Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Konzert in C Fur Oboe Und Orchester KV 314* (Salzburg: Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum Salzburg; 2006).

throughout the part, though they are not particularly extensive. Furthermore, the clear indications of trills on specific notes and grace notes indicate the disappearance of performer-added ornamentations. Instead, each movement has a traditional concerto cadenza moment, where the orchestra hovers on a dominant pitch before the oboe provides the development to the resolution free of any restrictions by the composer, save for the starting and ending key areas. To demonstrate the changes in the solo repertoire, I will now perform the exposition of the Mozart Oboe Concerto in C major, K. 314.

The introduction of the Romantic era to Western Music meant a strange dichotomy for the oboe. On the one hand, the technological changes to the instrument were at their greatest, eventually morphing into the oboe we use today. On the other hand, however, the repertoire became even more limited than it had been in the Classical era. The main impetus for the changes in the oboe were from the symphonic standpoint, as the demands of the early 19th century exceeded the capabilities of the Classical oboe.[26] By 1830, in fact, "each of the orchestral woodwinds had keys to give a complete chromatic scale without excessive use of fork or half fingerings."[27] It was during this period that experiments began to form and various instrument makers deviated from each other in the most extreme ways possible. Robert Howe writes about the unpopular, but influential Boehm system oboe: "Playing experiments…show that these oboes are loud, and bright beyond what modern taste can accept; their timber is the antithesis of Berlioz's 'fragile being'."[28] While the Boehm flute became standard, oboists struggled to find a balance with the loud and brash Boehm oboe and the limited Triebert Systeme 3 and 4

[26] Haynes, *Mozart and the Oboe*, 48.
[27] Robert Howe, "The Boehm System Oboe and its Role in the Development of the Modern Oboe," *The Galpin Society Journal* 56 (Jun., 2003), 27.
[28] Ibid., 34.

instruments.[29] It was only much later, following the innovations of Loree, Triebert, and Barret that the oboes popular today began to emerge.[30]

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Triebert Système 3 Oboe by Mahillon
Late 19th C.

Triebert Système 4 Oboe by Triebert
Mid 19th C. after 1843

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Anne Deknock, "Mahillon Oboe in C," http://brusselsmimoboecollection.kcb.be/site/assets/files/5857/3645.1700x0.jpg.
[32] Anne Deknock, "Triebert Oboe in C," http://brusselsmimoboecollection.kcb.be/site/assets/files/5866/ld0061.1700x0.jpg.

33 34 35

Triebert Système 6 Oboe by Albert
End of 19th C. before 1918

Systeme Conservatoire Oboe by Lorée
1909

Boehm System Oboe by Sax
End of 19th C. beginning of 20th C.

The differences between these oboes is quite clear as time goes on. The Système 3 and 4 oboes still employ cross fingering as evidenced by the two tone holes in the G

[33] Anne Deknock, "Albert Oboe in C," http://brusselsmimoboecollection.kcb.be/site/assets/files/5818/1991_068.1700x0.jpg.
[34] Anne Deknock, "Lorée Oboe in C," http://brusselsmimoboecollection.kcb.be/site/assets/files/5809/1983_021.1700x0.jpg.
[35] Anne Deknock, "Sax Oboe in C," http://brusselsmimoboecollection.kcb.be/site/assets/files/5807/1981_002.1700x0.jpg.

position. The Boehm oboe uses many key configurations that the Système 6 and Conservatoire later adopted, but is closer in length to the Système 3 and 4 oboes with a wider bore than any of the other oboes shown here. This was responsible for the loud and brash sound produced. The Système 6 still uses many open tone holes with key rings rather than keys, as the Conservatoire uses, but the key configurations are very similar, at their basics. Both the Système 6 and Conservatoire oboes are longer and have smaller bores than the other three oboes.

With the rapidly changing technology of the oboe, it would stand to reason that some of the instrument's previous connotations held over all the way from the Baroque period would have been lost, but that is not the case. Instead, the influence of Beethoven loomed over much of the 19th century and brought about similar writing for the oboe. Burgess and Haynes write, "In the symphonic realm, Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony exercised a decisive influence on the pastoral of the Romantics."[36] This sort of influence can be easily seen throughout the Romantic era, in such pieces as the third movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*.[37] Berlioz himself wrote regarding the oboe:

> Candour, artless grace, soft joy, or the grief of a fragile being, suits the hautboy's accents; it expresses them admirably in its cantabile. A certain degree of agitation is also within its powers of expression; but care should be taken not to urge it into utterances of passion – the rash outburst of anger, threat or heroism; for then its small acid-sweet voice becomes ineffectual, & absolutely grotesque … The theme of a march, however manly, grand or noble, loses its manliness, its grandeur, and its nobility, if a hautbois deliver it.[38]

[36] Burgess and Haynes, *The Oboe*, 217.
[37] Page et al., *Oboe*.
[38] Hector Berlioz, *A Treatise on Modern Instrumentation and Orchestration* (London and New York: Novello, Ewer and Co., 1882), quoted in Page et al., *Oboe*.

Berlioz's placement of "candour" and "artless grace" on the oboe's characteristics falls right in line with the Baroque idea of the oboe's pastoral quality: that of an innocent shepherd, perhaps.

Beethoven's reach certainly extended further than just the pastoral. As was mentioned earlier, Beethoven's 3rd symphony made waves that resonated throughout the Romantic era. Burgess and Haynes note, "Oboe solos such as…the Funeral March of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony continued to occupy the thoughts of those who dreamt under their boughs."[39] Though the initial idea of using the oboe for the march may have come from Baroque traditions of oboes playing ceremonial marches, the resultant effect was that the oboe had been forever linked to the idea of melancholy; a sort of quiet and speechless grief. This is further supported by Burgess and Haynes as they note the usage of the oboe throughout Wagner's *Lohengrin*: "…she [Elsa] sings ['My unfortunate brother!'] to the falling line of her leitmotiv in unison with the oboe: unspeakable loss is given verbal form."[40] On the opposite end of the spectrum, Wagner also uses the oboe with Elsa to show the Romantic ideal of *sehnsucht*, or intense longing, "Elsa's fantasized desire, first represented by the disembodied sound of the oboe, becomes manifest in the person of Lohengrin. Just as her voice is amplified by the oboe, Elsa is herself fulfilled and transcended in the person of Lohengrin."[41] Though most scholars and, indeed, most composers view the oboe as being against Romantic ideals of expression, it enjoyed a

[39] Burgess and Haynes, *The Oboe*, 225.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

special place within the orchestra,[42] even being noted by Richard Straus: “no other instrument could reveal the sweet secret of love’s innocence in such affecting tones.”[43]

The technology of the instrument at the time, however, meant that the “affecting tones” needed to be about the only thing playing, at the time. “By the mid-19th century the oboe had lost the dynamic power of the hautboy, rendering it unsuited to military and ceremonial music, while in the orchestra it fought a losing battle against the increasing power of the brass and string sections.”[44] Truly, the oboe was fighting against forces it could not possibly compete against for much of the 19th century, forcing composers to either ignore it or treat it with extreme care in their orchestration. “Cantabile became the oboe's characteristic mode of expression: according to the French oboist Henri Brod, ‘great composers use the oboe soloistically only in melodic passages, and most often in slow tempos’.”[45] This can be easily seen in one of the most famous Romantic oboe solos, the second movement of Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony, shown here.

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[42] Ibid., 130.
[43] Richard Strauss, quoted in Page et al., *Oboe*.
[44] Page et al., *Oboe*.
[45] Ibid.

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II.

Andantino in modo di canzona.

Flauto I.

Flauto II.

I. SOLO.
semplice ma grazioso

Oboi.

p

Clarinetti in B.

Fagotti.

Corni in F. 1.2.

Corni in F. 3.4.

Trombe in F.

Timpani F, C, A.

pizz.

Violini I.

p

pizz.

Violini II.

p

pizz.

Viole.

p

pizz.

Celli.

p

Contra-Bassi.

Andantino in modo di canzona.

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[46] Pyotr Tchaikovsky, *Symphony no. 4, Op. 36* (Moscow: P. Jurgenson; 1880).

Here we can see the complete quieting of orchestral texture in order to let the oboe sound be heard. The only group playing are the strings, excluding the basses, and they are even playing pizzicato downbeats, leaving the remainder of the empty bar space for the oboe to fill as much as it can.

Because the oboe was seen as too quiet, it was often seen as limiting, especially in solo genres. "That few prominent composers produced solo or chamber music for the instrument was perhaps due at least in part to the limited range and expressive capabilities of the oboe relative to other instruments: it was considered unequal on its own to the aspirations of Romantic expression."[47] To truly understand the lack of soloistic oboe works in the 19th century, we can turn to Joyce Ann Sidorfsky in her study of 19th century oboe works: "Of the large number of major composers active during the nineteenth century, only Robert Schumann wrote solo literature for oboe."[48] On the opposite end of the spectrum, Burgess and Haynes offer this fact: "The surviving solo and chamber repertoire for hautboy – up until the shift to the keyed oboe around 1800 – includes something over 10,000 pieces. These are works officially for hautboy – works that mention the instrument, for instance, on the title page."[49] To make matters worse for the oboe, it gained a reputation of being temperamental and difficult to play, leading many amateurs away from it.[50]

Most of the pieces written for the oboe during this time period were written by oboists themselves; usually for their own usage.[51] In some cases, this can lead to less-

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[47] Page et al., *Oboe*.
[48] Joyce Ann Sidorfsky, "The Oboe in the Nineteenth Century: A Study of the Instrument and Selected Published Solo Literature" University of Southern Mississippi), 317.
[49] Burgess and Haynes, *The Oboe*, 58.
[50] Ibid., 126.
[51] Page et al., *Oboe*.

than-desired results, as Sidorfsky points out, "Much of the music [of the 19th C] is stylized, written in theme and variation form on operatic, familiar, or patriotic airs and having questionable musical value."[52] The pieces appearing during this time for the oboe are highly specialized, meant for virtuosic playing at every level, with most pieces using the full range of the oboe up to a high G above staff.[53] During the latter half of the century, the technicality of the pieces do diminish significantly.[54] This is, perhaps, due to the diminishing power of the virtuoso. While the oboe was increasingly ignored in favor of more popular instruments, such as the clarinet and the flute (and even these were not as popular as string and piano combinations), "the travelling virtuoso oboist became all but extinct."[55]

The amateur oboist was a rare animal indeed, though amateur musicianship in the Romantic period was flourishing with the rise of a wealthier middle class and less expensive instrument production process. Due to the oboe's reputation, even the most notable composition for the oboe, Robert Schumann's *Drei Romanzen*, was "marketed as equally playable on violin or clarinet, as a commercial precaution by the publisher to insure sales."[56] *Drei Romanzen* are very difficult to play on the oboe, as Schumann still applied his Romantic ideal of long phrases that, in terms of breathing, do not particularly suit the oboe well. They do not represent, however, the virtuoso ideas presented by many artists in the same period, despite the great range taken by the piece.

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[52] Sidorfsky, *The Oboe in the Nineteenth Century: A Study of the Instrument and Selected Published Solo Literature*317.
[53] Ibid., 316.
[54] Ibid., 314.
[55] Burgess and Haynes, *The Oboe*, 128
[56] Sidorfsky, *The Oboe in the Nineteenth Century: A Study of the Instrument and Selected Published Solo Literature*91.

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As can be seen in the first edition of the piece, the oboe is required to maintain very long phrases that run between *forte* and *piano* while also traversing the range of the oboe between the E above staff and the C-sharp below the staff. While this can, to some degree, be considered virtuosic in a way, it exemplifies a simpler form of long, lyrical phrases consistent with many of the Romantic era's ideals. In order to properly express the significance of this piece, I will now play it for you.

In the 20th century, as music began fragmenting in many different ways, the life of the virtuoso did not improve. Instead, as noted by Burgess and Haynes, "The orchestra remained the oboe's principal arena of activity. The availability and stability of orchestra appointments tended to draw musicians away from pursuing solo careers; this was particularly the case with the oboists."[58] Many things changed for music in the 20th century, but the role of the oboe within the orchestra did not change all too much. It retained its association with the pastoral and retained much of its association with dance movements, as shown in pieces like Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin*. Also, according to Burgess and Haynes, "The association of treble double-reed instruments with

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[57] Robert Schumann, *Drei Romanzen, Op. 94* (Berlin: N. Simrock; 1851).
[58] Burgess and Haynes, *The Oboe*, 170.

melancholia, dejection and alienation continues through the Modernist period."[59] The greatest changes of the period truly came out in the solo literature, where the oboe experienced a sort of reawakening. Nora Post writes in her article for *Perspectives of New Music*,

> For reasons of interest primarily to the specialist, the oboe was, for the most part, overlooked as a solo instrument during the nineteenth century. In contrast, the twentieth century has witnessed the development of a sizable solo and chamber repertoire. While the technical demands made by many early twentieth-century composers were fairly conventional, others sought deliberately to transgress the boundaries of the idiomatic.[60]

Though the oboe saw a little lull in the virtuosic writing of the 19th century toward the latter half of the century, the reawakening was caused by virtuosic oboe players, for whom many of the pieces were written. The most notable would be Léon Goosens, whose "silken tone of his playing, his supple phrasing and control of vibrato"[61] inspired numerous composers to write music for him. It is due to virtuosi such as Goosens that composers began to call on new and extended techniques for the oboe, such as fluttertongue in *Octandre* by Varèse[62] or a crescendo from *piano* to *fortississississimo* in three beats.[63] More prominently, the Oboe Concerto by Richard Strauss was found to be extremely challenging, even by the man who inspired Strauss to write it in the first place, Philadelphia oboist John de Lancie.[64]

The connections between the previous areas of music history do not stop there, however. The Strauss concerto, though written well into the middle of the 20th century, is

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[59] Ibid., 243.
[60] Nora Post, "Varese, Wolpe and the Oboe," *Perspectives of New Music* 20, no. 1/2 (Autumn, 1981 - Summer, 1982), 134.
[61] Page et al., *Oboe*.
[62] Post, *Varese, Wolpe and the Oboe*, 138.
[63] Ibid., 136.
[64] Burgess and Haynes, *The Oboe*, 211.

often considered to be a Romantic work, at least in style, as it "looks backwards to the 'golden age' of pre-war Europe."[65] With many of the movements of modernist music branching into "neo-Baroque" and "neo-Romantic" music, it is impossible to ignore the connections between pieces such as Walter Piston's Suite for Oboe and Piano, which is modeled after a dance suite (Prelude, Sarabande, Minuetto, Nocturne, Gigue), and many of the works and functions of the oboe in the Baroque era.

Perhaps the most significant work written for the oboe in this era, however, is Benjamin Britten's *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*.[66] The six short pieces each come with a small inscription atop the page to give insight into the character the piece represents. As Burgess and Haynes point out, "each piece showcases a different aspect of the oboe's character within a fascinating compositional metamorphosis."[67] The pastoral is reflected in the first movement, *Pan* whose inscription reads, "who played upon the reed pipe which was Syrinx, his beloved."[68] The third movement, Niobe, represents the oboe's melancholy aspect: "who, lamenting the death of her fourteen children, was turned into a mountain."[69] These images can not possibly fail to bring to mind clear connections between their subjects and the theatrical qualities the oboe has held on to throughout musical history. I will now play two selections from Britten's *Metamorphoses*: *Pan* who played upon the reed pipe which was Syrinx, his beloved and *Phaeton* who rode upon the chariot of the sun for one day and was hurled into the river Padus by a thunderbolt.

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[65] Ibid., 213.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Benjamin Britten, *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Op. 49* (London: Boosey & Hawkes; 2000).
[69] Ibid.

Although the oboe had a very solid start in both orchestral and soloistic literature, it is very plain to see that two types of oboes emerged in music history: the orchestral oboe and the solo oboe. Each type took a different path that ended very much in different places.

The orchestral oboe began as a leader in the orchestra, rivalling even the violins. Soon after, in the Classical era, we saw its power diminished as musical tastes pushed it toward a quieter and softer dynamic. Once the Romantic era was upon us, the oboe evolved into its current form and was easily overpowered, but highly prized for its ability to convey emotions such as love, longing, and grief. In the modern era, we saw little change, as the oboe maintained the same course it had begun in the Romantic era. The solo oboe began much in the same way as the orchestral oboe: as an equal to the violin and, furthermore, directly compared to the human voice. It did not lose those qualities as it went into the Classical era, though its importance began to wane. It waned even further for the Romantic era, where the sound, dynamic level, and necessity to breathe made it more-or-less unsuitable for long and lyrical passages favored by the Romantics. However, it made a comeback in the 20th century as virtuosi such as Léon Goosens inspired composers to begin writing for the instrument again. Throughout both of these, the oboe maintained its relationship to the pastoral, speechless grief, and the dance as evidenced by works throughout Western music history that exemplify this. It is a bit of a joke to say that “when the oboe plays, someone has either died or fell in love” but, given the journey we have taken today, it may not be as difficult to believe.

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