

DAS OBOENSEMBLE IN DER DEUTSCHEN REGIMENTSMUSIK UND IN DEN STADTPFEIFEREIEN

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THE OBOE ENSEMBLE IN GERMAN MILITARY AND CITY MUSIC UP TO 1720

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It is a little known fact that the oboe and bassoon developed as solo instruments preceding their now well-known soloist-virtuoso status of the High Baroque and Classical periods. The areas of court, military, and city music deserve special attention, for here the members of oboe ensembles were joined together in "Hautboistenbanden" which had special responsibilities and social status as befitted performers of High Baroque "entertainment" music.

The schalmei (shawm), whose use in military music of course went back much further, was used in the Brandenburg-Prussian army for the first time in 1646 four schalmeis served under the Great Elector--two schalmei, one alto pommer and one bass dulcian. This arrangement is typical until the 18th century as well in the bodyguard of the Prince of Zeitz. Von Fleming wrote this in 1725 about reed instruments in the army: "The schalmei are still in use; only four men are used: two descants, one alto and one dulcian."

In the second half of the 17th century the French developed the oboe from their schalmei. Developments were made in fundamental points and it was thenceforth called the "hautbois" by the French. For the reed instruments, the decisive step in development was made at the same time as modifications in recorders (Block- and Querflöte) and in bassoons. These developments brought these instruments into use in "Art" music. The oboe and bassoon were now more flexible than their forerunners, less through the insignificantly narrower bore as through the modified form of the bell and the reduction of the tone hole size and especially through the embouchure by which the tightly stretched lips grasped the more refined reed and could thus better modulate the tone.

Since only the instruments of the two reed families with the greatest potential for development continued to be made, some range was lost. Because of the considerable and

unwieldy length, the lower-pitched instruments of the pommer family were always less flexible from the point of view of technique and sound than were the higher-pitched members, whereas with the higher-pitched dulcian instruments, different problems were encountered; it was more difficult to build the smaller doublebore instruments, their range was narrower and their sound and intonation worse. So in the 17th c. people returned to the most successful members of the instrument families which had been developing in the meantime these had already been built in their best forms as the first examples in their classes: in the Middle Ages the schalmei, then the alto pommer, and in the 16th c. the dulcian as a bass instrument.

Since the tradition of ensemble structure according to instrument families was still alive, and the double-reed instrument families of oboe and bassoon are closely related, a new ensemble with two oboes, alto oboe, and bassoon arose from these two groups. This corresponded to the ensemble with two schalmei, alto pommer and dulcian which was already common at the beginning of the 17th century.

At the court of Louis XIV, mostly marches, dance tunes, and airs were played with the new oboes in the above mentioned arrangement, with, however, a doubling of the voices. In the 1680's French oboists with their new instruments and their ensemble structure came to Germany most of them as court musicians. Up to that time the oboe was unknown in French military music. Later however, the oboe made its appearance there, after the French oboists had become familiar with the German schalmei in the army.

An account from the year 1690 runs: "A few years ago, French schalmei players, known as 'hautboisten' became known and were used in battle." In 1681, "four German schalmei players" and a "French hautbois" played in the infantry regiment of Anhalt-Dessau. Whether he played the principal voice or whether he was intended for the instruction of the descants, or both, is not known. In 1695 in the army of the Bavarian Elector Maximilian Emanuel II, the infantry regiments had progressively changed to six oboists; however, the old schalmei ensemble was retained until the middle of the 18th century. Von Fleming wrote in 1726: "The regimental pipers were for a time also called schalmei pipers, and at the time such instruments which gave a clear tone were played in front of the regiment so as to encourage the ordinary soldier all the more. Subsequently they were, however, difficult to play, and at close range unpleasant to the ear, so instead of the German schalmei [\[1\]](#), the French oboe became popular, and is now used almost everywhere."

Later, until the second half of the 18th c., there were six regimental oboists in Prussia, Bavaria, and Austria, according to von Fleming:

"Subsequently however, the oboe came into its own, so now there were six oboes, since the oboe sounded not so harsh as, but much sweeter than the schalmei. In order to improve the harmony even more, there were now two descants, two taille, and two bassoons," so that it is clear that "oboe" had become the generic term for the instruments from descant to bass, just as later "Hautbois" is strictly a military term. "Taille" refers in this context to the alto oboe. In a bill from the instrument maker Jacob Denner to the Göttweig Monastery (Kloster Göttweig), "bassoon" was written in beside the bass oboe and also beside the bass members of the blockflöten and chalumeaux, as almost always the "bassoon" as the bass member of an oboe ensemble was distinguished from "fagott", the bass member of an ensemble which included strings.

An original composition "for Oboists of the Court and Battlefield, arranged for four or more instruments playing" is "Die Lustige Feldmusik" by Johann Phillip Krieger, written in 1704 for two oboes, alto oboe and bassoon. With six voices, it was necessary to double the two oboe voices or the first oboe and the bassoon. Two other works for oboe ensembles, whose arrangement is known, but whose music is missing, are the "Ouverture a 4" for "two oboes, one taille and one bassoon" by P. Wieland (ca. 1700), and the "Ouverturesuite a 4" by Ph. Heinrich Erlebach (1657-1714) for two oboes, taille, and bassoon. The pitch distribution of such a four-voice piece corresponds to a piece for instruments of the violin (not the gamba!) family and thus enables the same music to be played on different instruments -- an important circumstance for the oboists.

The Sonsfeld music collection in the possession of the Prussian General Friedrich Otto Freiherr von Wittenhorst-Sonsfeld (1678-1755) contains almost exclusively works from the early 18th century, in which several oboes and bassoons are required, in most cases accompanied by a trumpet. The six part-books of the manuscript collection bear the initials G. v. L. which very probably can be taken to mean that they once belonged to the Prussian General Georg von Lilien. A further notation on the part-books specifies under the respective instruments, the reed instruments first: Hautbois I. . . Hautbois II. . . Hautbois III. . . Taille . . . Bassoon I. . . Bassoon II. . . It therefore has to do with ouverturesuites and concerti, in most of which a trumpet plays above an oboe ensemble movement. For the vast majority of 52 works, no composer is given. The most common arrangement is trumpet, three oboes, taille, bassoon (or two bassoons). Occasionally two violins or two horns are added, or the taille is left out; in one case even two flutes and two cornets are combined with two oboes and two bassoons, in exceptional cases there are only reed movements without trumpet.

About 1720 a six-voice movement with two oboes, two horns and two bassoons made its appearance, indicating an exchange of tenor oboe for the horns. The earliest surviving infantry marches are written for this arrangement. This was the arrangement until the end of the 18th century, notably in Telemann's Suite in F, in Haydn's Divertimenti Hob. II No. 7, 15, and 23 and Mozart's Divertimenti KV 213, 240, 252, 253, 270 and 289. The four-oboists band which made its debut at the Dresden Court Festival in 1719 had a simple four voice arrangement with three reed-players and one horn. Even before 1719 J. G. Store had written a march for two oboes, horn and bassoon. Von Fleming writes: "In the Royal Polish and the Elector of Saxony's infantry it is arranged that with the six oboists yet two horn players must join, which produces a right pleasant harmony."

Later the horn was joined by the clarinet which was invented at the beginning of the 18th c. The usual arrangement in the second half of the 18th c. then was: two oboes, two clarinets, two horns and two bassoons. The Mozart Serenades KV 375 and 388 and Haydn's "Feld-Parthien Hob II 4143 were intended for this arrangement. In the *Musikalischen Lexicon* by H. Chr. Koch (1802) is found the heading, "Hoboisten, hoboistenchor". The entry reads: "A beautiful wind music consisting usually of two oboes, two clarinets, two horns and two bassoons."

To this Von Fleming adds: In the Royal Prussian and Brandenburg Elector's regiments, a trumpeter on foot instead of a horn player goes ahead," which, incidentally indicates the social decline of the formerly privileged trumpeter.

The oboists who were on the staff of the infantry regiments, played most importantly in the personal service of the commanders, who, in Brandenburg-Prussia until 1707 and even later, paid them out of their own pockets. Von Fleming writes about this service: "Every morning in front of the commander's quarters, the oboists play a morning song, a march which he likes particularly, an entree and two minuets which he is particularly fond of; and in the evenings this is repeated, or whenever the officer has guests or calls an assembly, and they listen to violins and cellos and sweet flutes and other instruments. . ."

Military oboists came mostly from the "Stadtpeifereien" (henceforth translated as "town musician groups") and played many other instruments, and were frequently interchangeable (einsetzbar). Occasionally they even appeared in court chapel music ensembles. This is mentioned, for example, in 1704 at Sonderhausen and in 1706 at Schwerin. Reinhard Keiser writes to the court of Wurtemberg, that he has in mind a combining of the two good regimental bassoonists for his Suite for 8 oboes; and in the "Pageant of the Gods" in Dresden in 1695, seven bassoonists of the local sovereign's own guards assisted 35 others.

In Leipzig the regimental oboists played outside the military at funerals, and in Sonderhausen at soldier's funerals the Hautboistenkorps was especially important. Von Fleming reports on the burial of an officer: "The oboists walk before the body playing a dirge on muffled oboes." A further function was, naturally: "The trumpets, drums, fifes and oboes encourage the soldiers in battles and attacks, they control marching advances and retreats."

As already mentioned, until now the regimental oboists were of the civilian school, the best of whom were sure to seek places in the court, chapel, and city music ensembles. Those who went to the military as a rule were not the best. There was less demand (in the army) and the job was poorly paid. Mattheson cannot deny himself a parting shot: "However, the oboes were not played in the most delicate way (in the field or among the public where it is not so precisely taken) so I would rather hear a good jew's harp or kazoo." And von Fleming: "the trumpets, oboes and others of the same, which make too loud a noise, are damaging to the head and the health, they impair the lungs and deform the face; the cheeks and the eyes become swollen."

In order to improve the level of playing King Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia founded the "Hautboistenschule" in 1724 in the military orphanage in Potsdam. The first head of the school was Gottfried Pepusch, a brother of Johann Christoph. He was a member of the Brandenburg court chapel ensemble until its dissolution, and then remained as Staff Oboist and had many pupils, six of whom went to Hannover in 1701-2. Oboists were sent to Berlin for further instruction also, five by the Margrave von Ausbach.

As with court and free oboe bands, so also in the regimental bands "the first oboist had to understand composing, the music so much the better to order." The Dessau March, for example, was composed by an oboist.

Unfortunately, nothing particularly concerning the oboe's history can be gathered from the extensive information on town musical groups, so that it can be assumed that the oboe was adopted with very little fuss. In 1690 Kuhnau writes in his novel *Musicus Vexatus* that besides the importance of mastery of the trumpet, bomhart (pommer), cornet, trombone and dulcian, there was demanded a reasonable skill on the oboe and stringed instruments.

Indeed in a report of the laying of a foundation in Glaucha in 1698, the town musicians marched with schalmei and bagpipes, nevertheless, after 1700 the schalmei was no longer mentioned in the town pipers groups.

Linked with this is an interesting regulation of the prorektor in Halle in 1703: "After nine o'clock in winter and ten o'clock in summer, all loud music, whether on horns, trumpets, and drums or oboes or post-horns is forbidden." Also in Halle, in 1698, the Scheinhardtsche Companie was famous for attending luncheon tables with violins, oboes, horns, trumpets, kettledrums, and "French schalmei."

The different instruments had particular tasks in the town music groups. For example, trombones were played, but never required, while strings were reserved for other special tasks. On the other hand, the oboe took on such a universal importance, that groups of musicians called themselves simply "hautboistenbanden" even though they played other instruments also, in order to show that they were available to play with the newly fashionable instrument, outdoors, in houses and churches on both solemn and gay occasions.

The town music group was, of course, an extended training school for the new generation of musicians. Besides stringed instruments the wind instruments were nevertheless their own domain. For example, the pupils at the Thomas school in Leipzig received wind instrument instruction from the town musical group, but instruction on the other instruments from Thomas-Kantor. A supplementary article to the Guild Records set out in 1662 by the Elector of Saxony forbade organists to instruct their pupils on wind instruments, since this was the role of the town musicians. Most of the court and regimental musicians had received their five to six years instruction in the town musicians ensemble.

The town musicians saw to it carefully that they would have no competition. In 1689 it was ordered in Chemnitz that schalmeis were to be played only by town musicians. In addition, in 1702 King Friedrich I of Prussia bestowed the privilege of public oboe playing on the "Hyntzschen Companie" which caused the town musicians great loss. At the time there were about 30 oboists in Halle, however they were only permitted to play the oboe for private occasions or outside the city gates as long as they were excluded from the privilege. Here, as a schoolboy of Zachow, who himself came from a town musicians group, Handel learned to appreciate the oboe and probably composed his trio sonatas for two oboes and basso continuo.

The chapter on town musicians should not be ended without mentioning the Denners, father and son, Johann Schell, and other Nuremberg makers of woodwind instruments, who were contemporary with the town musicians of Nuremberg, which in part explains the quality of the Nuremberg instruments. The spontaneous expansion in Germany of the originally French oboe is essentially thanks to these instrument craftsmen. The oboe parts of Bach's works show to whose ability the town pipers owe their success.

The so-called "stadtoiboists" deserve mention. Such musicians of the city "miliz" were designated for the first time in 1716 in Frankfurt: "six oboists in their fine uniforms walked before the troops playing Telemann's March." In Leipzig in 1720 the Stadtmiliz employed oboists as well as drummers and flautists, about 1750 this group was called the "Stadthautboisten." As a rule the group consisted of six men, as in the military groups and

was put together mostly from dismissed regimental musicians, who had to be given a place in civilian service. Their duties included playing for the guard, and for festivities and processions of the town. They could play privately in taverns by the city gate. In the second half of the 18th century we no longer find these (miliz) musicians in the city records, just as free oboe ensembles, in Halle for example (see above) are no longer mentioned outside of particular occasions.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The idea of German schalmei arose in the 17th c. and referred to instruments which were described by James Talbot in 1700 thus: "They are used in the German army, but have a sweeter sound than the schalmei of other countries. They have only six key holes, no key for the lowest tone, but instead a fontanelle, and the lowest tone with six covered holes is C'." Such instruments are preserved in many museums, among them Brussels, Nuremberg, Basel and Leipzig.

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