

Three Programs of Oboe Music

by

Andreas Arthur Oeste

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of the requirements for the degree of
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Doctoral Committee:

**Professor Nancy Ambrose King, Chair
Emeritus Professor James Allen
Professor Michael Haithcock
Professor David Jackson
Professor Adam Unsworth**

Andreas Arthur Oeste

aoeste@umich.edu

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7596-1725

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ABSTRACT

In lieu of a written dissertation, three recital programs were presented.

The three recitals that were given addressed varying themes in each program. The first recital was a program comprised of living American composers, including standard pieces as well as a commissioned work. The second recital focused on works written for the oboe that were influenced by war. In the third recital, two performances of Richard Strauss' *Oboe Concerto* were given with the Harrisburg Symphony in Pennsylvania.

Wednesday, December 12, 2018, 7:30pm, Mead Witter School of Music, Mills Performance Hall, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Assisted by: Brant Blackard, percussion; Daniel Fung, piano. Program: Blake Tyson, *the trees are quiet* for oboe and vibraphone; John Harbison, *Oboe Concerto*; Garrett Schumann, *Shred to Death* for oboe and percussion; Patricia Morehead, *Conversations for Oboe and Percussion*; Jeffrey Agrell, *Blues for D.D.* for oboe and vibraphone.

Tuesday, January 15, 2019, 7:30pm, School of Music, Theatre & Dance, Britton Recital Hall, University of Michigan. Assisted by: Liz Ames, piano; Garret Jones, clarinet; Daniel Fendrick, bassoon. Program: Robert Schumann, *Drei Romanzen* for oboe and piano; Witold Lutoslawski, *Trio for Oboe, Clarinet, and Bassoon*; Benjamin Britten, *Temporal Variations* for oboe and piano; Antal Dorati, *Duo Concertante* for oboe and piano.

Saturday, March 16, 2019, 8pm; Sunday, March 17, 2019, 3pm, Forum Auditorium, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Featured soloist with the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra. Program: Richard Strauss, *Oboe Concerto*.

RECITAL 1 PROGRAM

the trees are quiet (1998)

Blake Tyson

Brant Blackard, percussion

Oboe Concerto (1992)

John Harbison

Daniel Fung, piano

– Intermission –

Shred to Death (2018)

Garret Schumann

Conversations (2011)

Patricia Morehead

- I. Early Morning
- II. Liquid Light
- III. Fallen from the Garden of Eaton

Blues for D.D. (1993)

Jeffrey Agrell

Brant Blackard, percussion

RECITAL 1 PROGRAM NOTES

Blake Tyson - *the trees are quiet* (1998)

Blake Tyson's compositions are performed in concert halls around the world, and his own performances have taken him to five continents and over thirty states. He has performed in Egypt at the Ministry of Culture in Cairo and at the Library of Alexandria, at international festivals in South Africa and South America, at the Beijing Central Conservatory, in Norway as part of the European Cultural Capital celebrations, and at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention. He has also performed at events throughout the United States, including numerous Days of Percussion, the Northwest Percussion Festival, and the Leigh Howard Stevens Summer Marimba Seminar. He has presented clinics and masterclasses at many universities both in the United States and abroad. Blake is a concert artist and clinician for the Zildjian Company and with Mallettech, where he has his own line of signature mallets. Blake Tyson holds a Doctor of Musical Arts from the Eastman School of Music. While at Eastman, he was also awarded the prestigious Performer's Certificate. He holds a Master of Music degree from Kent State University and the degree of Bachelor of Music in Performance from the University of Alabama. His teachers include Marjorie Engle, Peggy Benkeser, Larry Mathis, Michael Burritt, Halim El-Dabh, and John Beck. Since 2001, Blake has been a member of the faculty of the University of Central Arkansas.¹

From Blake Tyson on *the trees are quiet* -

“I felt a great sense of loss when Toru Takemitsu died. This emotional response was surprising because I had not known Takemitsu in any way other than through his music. In *the trees are quiet* I try to find a musical expression for the unusual feeling of loss that occurs after the death of someone who has had a great influence on your life, but whom you have not personally known. The piece contains fragments of Toru Takemitsu's guitar piece Equinox, which I had been studying at the time of his death. Using these fragments, I try to capture the sensation of fading memory, the sadness that comes as memory grows weaker, and the realization that, in the end, it is the essence of the memory that is truly important. Originally conceived in 1995, the piece was heavily revised in 1998. The title is a reference to the name of the work that introduced me (and many other percussionists) to Takemitsu's music, Rain Tree.”²

¹ Tyson, Blake. Personal Correspondence, November 18th 2018.

² Ibid

The stillness that embodies this work is highly active. Tyson, in the performance notes of the piece, asks the performers to be resistant to forward motion, in order to let the piece “float in midair.”³ He is more specific of the oboist as well, instructing the player never to circular breathe, but to allow the breaths to take time and be used as an expressive tool.⁴ Though only a few minutes in length, this piece demands that the listener and the performers feel each note and the space between them. A poem by Tyson accompanies this work⁵:

the trees are quiet
the equinox unsound
memories lose color
echoes die away
essence remains

John Harbison - *Oboe Concerto* (1991)

John Harbison was born into a scholarly and musical family. His father was a renowned professor of history at Princeton, and his mother and sisters were active musicians.⁶ From an early age, Harbison showed a precocious talent, being heavily influenced by the cantatas of J.S. Bach and jazz, and even playing piano in his own jazz band at just 11 years old.⁷ At the age of 16, Harbison was awarded the BMI Foundation’s Student Composer Award. He went on to study composition under Walter Piston at Harvard where he earned honors in both composition and poetry, and later studied in Germany and then at Princeton. During his career, Harbison has received a Pulitzer Prize (1987), a MacArthur Fellowship (1989), and the Heinz Award (1997). He has been composer-in-residence with both the Pittsburgh Symphony and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and has been commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera for his opera *The Great Gatsby*. He is currently Institute Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a position he has held since 1969.⁸

The style of Harbison’s work is eclectic, and diverse in both genres and styles. To quote the composer, his goal is “to make each piece different from the others, to find clear, fresh, large designs, to reinvent traditions.”⁹ While influences of jazz and Bach are inescapable in his music, the use of serialism and neo-classicism are central to Harbison’s output as well, similar to

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Leitch, Alexander. “Harbison, Elmore Harris.” *A Princeton Companion*. Princeton University Press, 1978

⁷ George, David St. “Harbison, John.” *Grove Music Online*. Oxford University Press, 2001

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

Stravinsky. It is this neo-classic/neo-baroque style that served as the progenitor for many of Harbison's works, including the *Oboe Concerto*.

Commissioned in 1991 by the San Francisco Symphony, Harbison's *Oboe Concerto* was premiered in 1992 by the then principal oboist William Bennet and conductor Herbert Bomstedt. Written in three movements, the titles are meant to suggest Baroque forms: Aria, Passacaglia, Fantasia. In similar baroque manner, Harbison often purposely composes the oboe as a leader in smaller *concertino* groups. The first movement, Aria, begins with a Gregorian-style melody that transforms into a blues interlude, which gets wilder until breaking away, leaving the oboist to solemnly trail away before a final, reinvigorated coda. In the Passacaglia, the oboe variations range from intensely lyrical to crazed in style, which leads attacca into the final movement, Fantasia. It is in the final movement of the concerto that big band styles arise, with the oboist serving as the band leader. The piece comes to a close not triumphantly, but rather in an "anti-heroic, Chaplinesque final gesture."¹⁰

Garrett Schumann - *Shred to Death* (2018)

"Garrett Schumann is an award-winning composer, arts administrator, and music scholar whose works have been programmed across the country, in Europe, and in Asia. An inveterate collaborator, Garrett's recent commissions include collaborations with mezzo-soprano Megan Ihnen, saxophonist Alan Theisen, violist Michael Hall, percussionists Christopher Froh, Mayumi Hama, and Andres Pichardo of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and, of course, oboist Andreas Oeste. Garrett is President of the Michigan-based concert presenting organization ÆPEX Contemporary Performance, and has also internationally published and presented his original music theory research, which focuses on heavy metal music and the inclusion of composers with marginalized identities into music theory pedagogy.

"Shred to Death is a heavy metal-inspired fantasy for amplified oboe and percussion that came to be when Andreas and I discovered our mutual love of Slayer. The piece imagines a kind of death ritual where the oboe, through a series of virtuosic, shredding, and thrashing melodies, expends all of its energy, and is then transported to the afterlife through the performance of a trance-like chant, which involves the percussion. The piece salutes Andreas's and my favorite metal artists through timbre quotation, and spiritual allusions to the dramatic and dark values that define our beloved genre of heavy metal music."¹¹

As quoted by Schumann above, *Shred to Death* certainly does cause the performer to feel "transported to the afterlife" through the sheer technical demands required on the instrument. The opening figure, a flurry of tremolo, requires the performer to use the right hand on the top joint of the instrument in order to accommodate the fast tempo. As this section transforms, a new

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Schumann, Garrett. Personal Correspondence, December 2nd 2018.

section instantly emerges that requires the performer to double tongue at extraordinary speeds while switching back and forth between multiphonics. Then again the mood quickly shifts and suddenly, the full range of the instrument is implemented with disregard to difficulty, as sweeping gestures take us from the oboe's lowest range into the altissimo. It is at this point that the performer is transported, and hypnotic rhythms and multiphonics, accompanied by percussive ritual, closes the work.

Patricia Morehead - *Conversations* (2011)

Composer and oboist Patricia Morehead is the founder and former Artistic Director of the CUBE Contemporary Chamber Ensemble. She served as president for both the International Alliance of Women in Music and American Women Composers Midwest, organizing for the latter a fifth anniversary celebration featuring the music of African-American women composers. Morehead is a highly active performer, having premiered over fifty of her own compositions and performing over forty more works written for her. Her works have been performed across the United States and abroad, being featured by Bowling Green New Music and Arts Festival, the International League of Women Composers, womenALASKAmusic, the University of Chicago Contemporary Chamber Players, and many others. Morehead studied composition at The University of Chicago with Ralph Shapey, John Eaton, and Shulamit Ran. She recently retired from her positions on the adjunct faculty of Columbia College, and for 17 years was the leader of the Composers Forum at the Merit School of Music.¹²

From Patricia Morehead on *Conversations* -

*“Conversations for oboe and percussion is dedicated to and composed especially for oboist Alicia Cordoba Tait and percussionist George Blanchet to celebrate their new friendship and engagement. It has three movements: “Early Morning” evokes an intimate conversation one might have upon waking up in the early morning with one’s partner. “Liquid Light” portrays the sensuous patterns of light playing on and flowing across the surfaces of one’s environment. “Fallen from the Garden of Eaton” was composed as a 75th birthday tribute to John Eaton, one of my composer-mentors at The University of Chicago.”*¹³

Conversations is a three-movement dialogue between percussion and oboe. Often the conversation is polite, with each instrument having a chance to be heard before the other speaks, but more frequently, this texture breaks down into moments of talking over one another. “Early Morning” begins with the oboe singing sweetly over rolled chords in the marimba, eventually morphing into two brief cadenza passages for each instrument. It is after the final outburst from the oboe that a now twisted melody appears, accompanied by single rolled notes in the marimba, and solemnly cadences away in minor. The blend between oboe and vibraphone in “Liquid Light” evokes the sensation of light bouncing off water, with the two forces now imagined as engaged in conversation. Again the tempo fluctuates to accommodate the two voices, though in comparison to the first movement, they speak together more frequently. In the final movement, “Fallen from the Garden of Eaton,” Morehead uses painful tremolo chords amidst soaring

¹² <http://www.patriciamorehead.com/bio/>

¹³ <http://www.patriciamorehead.com/2011/02/conversations/>

oboe lines in homage to her teacher John Eaton. There is a bright middle section that lifts one's spirits for a brief moment, but this fades into a closing section in which the oboe mourns painfully alone.

Jeffrey Agrell - *Blues for D.D.* (1993)

Current Associate Professor of Horn at University of Iowa, Jeffrey Agrell is an American composer, author, and "hornist for all seasons."¹⁴ He is sought after as a guest artist and clinician, performing and presenting at workshops, festivals, and conferences around the world. Agrell is a former member of the Advisory Council of the International Horn Society, and is on faculty at the prestigious Kendall Betts Horn Camp in New Hampshire.¹⁵ His education began at St. Olaf College and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and he continued studies at the Institut de Hautes Etudes Musicales in Motreux and the Basel Conservatory in Switzerland. Before his appointment to University of Iowa, Agrell served as Associate Principal Horn for the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra in Switzerland.

Agrell is an accomplished author and composer, having written several pedagogical books and playing methods in approach to the horn, as well as hundreds of articles covering the gamut of musical topics.¹⁶ His compositions range from brass and woodwinds to string, percussion, and voice, and is often the subject of commissioned works. It is thanks to a commission from Diana Daugherty, Soloist and Principal Oboe of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, that we oboists have *Blues for D.D.* to enjoy and endure.

From Diana Daugherty -

"When I heard Jeff Agrell's Clarinet quartet back in 1993, I was absolutely amazed. I loved it so much that I asked him to write me something. **Blues for D.D.** has been a hit every time I've played it. For me, it never stops being challenging, it never stops being fun, it always makes me laugh and feel good (once I've got my breath back!!). Its outrageous demands have extended my limits to a point I would not have thought possible, and for this, I will be eternally grateful. It may be a short piece but its impact has been far-reaching. I feel truly honoured that it has been written for me."¹⁷

From Jeffrey Agrell -

"It starts slow and easy, and then takes off, transmogrifying the blues through sections of catchy swing, lilting Latin, and blistering bebop before crashing to earth with a nearly three octave chromatic swoop and concluding with sassy bit of tongue in cheek. The piece was designed to be fun to play and fun to listen to, and to test the outer limits of the possible in oboe technique. Thus, the principal requirements for undertaking this piece are a sense of humor and

¹⁴ <https://music.uiowa.edu/people/jeffrey-agrell>

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ <http://jeffreyagrell.com/compositions/reviews/>

considerably more technique than God. The blues is an oboist's Everest, and only an elite few are capable of making it to the top."¹⁸

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¹⁸ Agrell, Jeffrey. *Blues for D.D.*, program notes

RECITAL 2 PROGRAM

Drei Romanzen (1849)

Robert Schumann (1810 – 1856)

- I. Nicht schnell
- II. Einfach, innig
- III. Nicht schnell

Liz Ames, piano

Trio for Oboe, Clarinet, and Bassoon (1945)

Witold Lutoslawski (1913 – 1994)

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Poco adagio
- III. Allegro giocoso (Rondo)

Garret Ray Jones, clarinet
Daniel Fendrick, bassoon

– Intermission –

Temporal Variations (1936)

Benjamin Britten (1913 – 1976)

- I. Theme
- II. Oration
- III. March
- IV. Exercises
- V. Communion
- VI. Chorale
- VII. Waltz
- VIII. Polka
- IX. Resolution

Duo Concertante (1983)

- I. Libero, rubatissimo
- II. Molto vivace

Antal Dorati (1906 – 1988)

Liz Ames, piano

RECITAL 2 PROGRAM NOTES

Robert Schumann - *Three Romances*, Op. 94 (1849)

Robert Schumann (1810 - 1856) was one of the most prominent composers of the romantic era, as well as a noted music critic. Schumann was born to a literary German family, and because of his father's occupation as a translator and book seller, he was exposed from a young age to literary classics. He began taking piano lessons when he was seven years old, and his first compositions followed only a few years later. Though he had many interests outside of the musical realm including poetry and language, his father encouraged his musical talent, and Schumann grew increasingly engrossed in composing and performing at the piano well into his teenage years.

It was with his father's death in 1826 that Schumann lost his sole source of encouragement for a life in music, and instead began to study law in Leipzig in 1828. Schumann was a particularly terrible student as described by his roommate, who commented that instead of attending lectures, Schumann would instead read and write about the works of Jean Paul and other literary minds. Schumann did not care for the "ice-cold" definitions of law.¹⁹ This rejection of his schooling became quite productive for Schumann, not only in his synthesis of literary and musical forms so present in his compositions, but also as he became a piano student of Friedrich Wieck, the great piano pedagogue and father of Clara Wieck. The 1830s was a period of artistic growth for Schumann, studying with Wieck and composing, but it also brought increased affection between himself and Clara, at great protest from her father. The two married in 1840, a day before Clara's 21st birthday.

While much of the 1830s saw Schumann concerned with piano writing, the 1840s brought about a vast amount of vocal music, symphonies, and a large number of chamber music works. Schumann would often compose genre-specific styles in blocks, and this systematic approach continued for the rest of his life, with one exception: the years of 1848-50. These years are seen as Schumann's most fruitful, and also the most varied. It is in this period of boundless creativity that Schumann composed the *Three Romances*, his only piece for oboe (outside of the symphonies).

The *Three Romances* were written in December of 1849 as a gift to Clara, and with the events that transpired throughout the year, it must have been quite a gift to hear such beautiful, simple music. The two had been living in Dresden for several years, but in May of 1849, the Schumann family survived one of the last of the many Revolutions of 1848, known as the May Uprising of

Dresden. These revolutions occurred throughout Europe, including France, Italian States, German States, Denmark, Sweden, and many others, but their unifying thread was that of upheaval of monarchical

¹⁹ Daverio, Sams. "Schumann, Robert."

structures in favor of democracy. These revolutions were made up mostly of the working class, and to quote a French historian of the time: "society was cut in two: those who had nothing united in common envy, and those who had anything united in common terror."²⁰ Fighting broke out in the streets early that May, and a brigade of state police attempted to recruit Schumann at his home. Robert, Clara (who was pregnant), and their daughter fled out the back door and ran through a field to the nearby railroad station, narrowly escaping with their lives.²¹ The Schumann family lived in partial exile for the remainder of the year, but Robert composed with the same fervor as before, and in early 1850 began the last of his career in Dusseldorf.

The oboe is lacking when it comes to romantic representation, and as such we are indebted to Schumann for the *Three Romances*. During its publication in 1850, Simrock (Schumann's publisher), asked if the piece, instead of for oboe and piano, could have alternate versions for violin and clarinet. Schumann wrote rejecting the idea, "If [I] had originally composed the work for violin or clarinet and piano, it would have become a completely different piece. I regret not being able to comply with your wishes, but I can do no other."²² Nevertheless, in 1851 Simrock still published versions for violin and clarinet, in blatant disregard of Schumann's wishes. Though Schumann gave clear indications of the work being meant for the oboe, the *Three Romances* would not receive its first performance with oboe until 1863, with Carl Reinecke at the piano and Emelius Lund, a court music of Stockholm, on oboe. Clara had performed the work several times prior though always with violin, and premiered the work at a private concert shortly after its creation with violinist Francois Schubert on December 27th, 1849.²³

Each movement of the *Three Romances* is written in Ternary form, or "song form" of A-B-A. The key relations are also uncomplicated, with the first and third movements being in A minor and the second movement in A major. Though they are not virtuosic works in the slightest, the ease displayed on the page is illusory. As described by musicologist Alan Walker, "only a player of the most peculiar sensibility, able to nuance a continuously unostentatious yet deeply expressive melodic line with infinite gradation of dynamic and tempo, should attempt to play such music."²⁴ The depth and beauty of this work has made it a staple of the oboists repertoire, and is often the subject of recital performances and recordings.

Witold Lutoslawski - *Trio for Oboe, Clarinet, and Bassoon* (1945)

A polish composer and conductor, Witold Lutoslawski (1913 - 1994) was one of the major

European musical influences of the 20th century. Lutoslawski spent much of his young life in

Warsaw with brief moves due to his father Jozef's political activism. This activism did not leave Jozef in good standing after the Bolshevik Revolution, and he was executed by firing squad when Lutoslawski

²⁰ Daverio, Sams. "Schumann, Robert."

²¹ Daverio, Sams. "Schumann, Robert."

²² Leigh. "Is there Romance after Schumann?" pg 4

²³ Leigh. "Is there Romance after Schumann?" pg 4

²⁴ Leigh. "Is there Romance after Schumann?" pg 5

was only six years old. It was around this time that Lutoslawski began his musical education at the piano, and composed his first pieces just a few years later around the age of nine.²⁵

Lutoslawski's interests in music continued throughout his teenage years, and he eventually graduated from the Warsaw Conservatory in 1936 with degrees in piano and composition. Like all aspiring composers of the time, Lutoslawski wanted to continue his studies in Paris, specifically with Nadia Boulanger, but this dream was dashed at the invasion of Poland by Germany and Russia in 1939. Lutoslawski was quickly mobilized as an officer cadet in the signals and radio unit of the Krakow army, but it was not long until he had been captured by German soldiers.²⁶ The Polish soldiers who had been captured were being marched back to Germany to an internment camp, but after a few days, Lutoslawski managed to escape and walked the 250 miles back to Warsaw. His brother Henryk was also taken captive during this invasion by Russian soldiers, but died in a Siberian Gulag.²⁷

Back in Warsaw, Lutoslawski scraped together a living by playing in a cabaret group, with Poland under German occupation. It was only a few years before he would flee again, as Warsaw became a hotbed of street fighting in 1944 with the Warsaw Uprising. This was a move by the Polish resistance to free Warsaw from its German occupation but it was defeated after a month, and to make an example of them, Nazi forces razed the city. This near total destruction of Warsaw left Lutoslawski with only the few pieces he was able to take with him before he fled, leaving much of his work before World War II to burn with the city. The works Lutoslawski was able to escape with included fragments of his First Symphony, as well as a few student piano pieces and contrapuntal studies. Elements from all this material are found in the First Symphony, but also appear in the *Trio for Oboe, Clarinet, and Bassoon*.²⁸

Though much of Lutoslawski's music is associated with aleatoric processes and pitch class systems, the *Trio* is free from these compositional techniques. The wind trio was certainly not a new combination, and other Polish composers such as Bacewicz and Szalowski made use of the *Trio d'Anches* genre, inspired by composers such as Ibert and Auric. Drawing on this tradition, and the musical fragments he escaped Warsaw with, Lutoslawski created the angular and contrasting music found in the *Trio for Oboe, Clarinet, and Bassoon*. The first movement, *Allegro moderato*, starts with a quick sweep and dissonant fermata before continuing in highly motoric fashion, with the three voices acting almost in opposition of one another. Throughout the movement they converge and allow for more solemn melodies to appear, but the movement ends with a gradual breaking of the motoric machine, slowing into the final chord that first appeared in the opening. *Poco adagio* opens with the oboe and bassoon stating a twisted cantus firmus, that repeats several times with clarinet embellishments on top. This repetition is broken only by the appearance of a large B section, somewhat faster, with all three voices crying out in fortissimo together. The final movement, *Allegro giocoso*, is a highly structured Rondo with a developmental fugue in the middle. With the exception of the fugue, the movement operates with the oboe as the clear top voice, accompanied by a clarinet and bassoon force. The movement ends with a deceptive Coda, starting first in a slower tempo before returning to a quick stretto of fragments heard previously, and ending with an unapologetic fortissimo scale ending sforzando.

²⁵ Rae. "Lutosławski, Witold."

²⁶ Rae. "Lutosławski, Witold."

²⁷ Rae. "Lutosławski, Witold."

²⁸ Rae. "Lutosławski, Witold."

Benjamin Britten - *Temporal Variations* (1936)

Benjamin Britten (1913 - 1976) was an English composer, conductor, and pianist. He was one of the most prominent English composers of the 20th century, making significant contributions to opera, orchestral, and chamber music. From a young age, Britten received training from the composer Frank Bridge at the Royal College of Music in London, but even before starting this formal training, he had composed nearly 100 works.²⁹ Studying with Bridge helped to stimulate and direct his love of composition, and it is after those first few years that he composed his first work for oboe: the *Phantasy Quartet* for oboe and string trio, dedicated to Leon Goossens.

After his education, Britten quickly rose to prominence as a compositional force. His first professional work was with the BBC as part of their film unit, and from 1935 to 1937, he wrote over forty scores for cinema, radio, and theatre.³⁰ Shortly after, Britten met the tenor Peter Pears, who would become his lifelong professional and personal partner, and Britten quickly became a household name with works such as *Peter Grimes* (1945) and *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* (1945). In 1948, Britten and Pears (with librettist Eric Crozier) founded the Aldeburgh Festival, an arts festival comprised of opera and chamber music performances, which still takes place every summer. The highest point of his career came with the *War Requiem* (1962), written to commemorate the Coventry Cathedral and its destruction in a World War II bombing raid. Britten, ever the pacifist, was inspired by this commission and set traditional Mass poems against English poetry, with soloists, choir, and full orchestra. This work was yet another massive success for Britten, but the ideologies that fueled his inspiration had been a part of his life for some time.

In the early 1930s while just starting at the BBC, Britten worked with Montagu Slater, a writer at the BBC. The two were involved in the same liberal political circles, and collaborated on projects dealing with political skepticism and pacifism.³¹ In the 1940s Slater would be the librettist for *Peter Grimes*, the last piece the two would collaborate on, but in the mid-1930s, the two were inspired by one another. The ideas of pacifism and political skepticism became core to the *Temporal Variations*, and as such, bears a dedication to Montague Slater. Britten wrote several works for the oboe, all with dedications, though *Temporal Variations* is the only piece in which the dedication was not to a performer. Written in 1936, the piece only received one performance to mild review, and was later rediscovered and published posthumously. There is speculation as to why Britten withdrew this work, but it was not from being dissatisfied with the reviews or his own composition. The late 1930s was a busy period for Britten, and ended with him taking an extensive trip to America. It was in preparation for that trip that Britten packed many pieces of music to take with him and work on, in fear of losing them in World War II. The *Temporal Variations* were included on this trip, but with other projects that took up his time while abroad, Britten accidentally left the piece behind when returning to England in 1942, and the piece was not rediscovered until after his death.³²

To quote musicologist Peter Evans: "If '*temporal*' does not indeed point us to the times in which the oboe variations were written, it remains difficult to draw an unambiguous tract from their sequence of

²⁹ Doctor, LeGrove, Banks, Wiebe, and Brett. "Britten, (Edward) Benjamin."

³⁰ White. "Britten in the Theatre: A Provisional Catalogu," pg. 4

³¹ Biggam. Benjamin Britten's Four Chamber Works for Oboe, pg. 20

³² Biggam. Benjamin Britten's Four Chamber Works for Oboe, pg. 55

moods.”³³ The *Temporal Variations*, with its inspiration from Montagu Slater and pacifism and the imminent war on the horizon, is a piece that is unavoidably programmatic. The degree to which one interprets this programmatic vision is of course individualistic, but Britten gives us clues with the titles of the movements. It is not unlike other theme and variation works of his, but this is one of the only theme and variations in which Britten uses an original theme. Each movement not only varies the theme, but the entire mood is contrasted, and the arrival of each variation has a new disposition than what preceded it. There are nine movements in *Temporal Variations*, each attacca into the next.

The opening *Theme* is bare of true melodic material, but instead insists upon a two-note chromatic neighbor relationship, accompanied by athletic leaps sighing back to the two-note motive. This motive is inescapable throughout the work despite the contrast of the movements, as seen in the opening of the second movement, *Oration*, where the piano begins with alternating chromatic motion. The oboe takes on a much more charismatic role in the *Oration*, which has been interpreted as a call-to-arms, with the oboe voice acting as some sort of recruiter for the war.³⁴ This is followed quickly by the *March*, now spelling out the two-note motive as a seventh rather than a second. There is a brief reprieve in the middle of the movement, with lyrical melodies based again on the two-note motive, but this is quickly dashed as the march rhythm returns. In the fourth movement, *Exercises*, a scene of militaristic training is depicted in the tempo of *Allegro molto e con fuoco*. The athleticism of both voices in this movement can be heard in the large, quick leaps in unrelenting fashion. Britten adds even more programmatic information here by quoting from *The Planets* in this movement, specifically stealing the slow theme from *Mars*.

A brief cadenza leads us into the *Commination*, or “threat of divine vengeance.”³⁵ Here we have the same material as from the *Theme*, but now in the oboes lowest octave. The surrounding accompaniment matches the threatening title, and if the *Theme* was a warning of war, the *Commination* is a certainty. The *Chorale* changes on a dime, as the piano takes the lead with plain, gentle chords with the oboe responding with single held notes. Of the *Chorale*, it can be viewed as “a profound plea for peace which at the same time musically embodies the fractured hopes of the period.”³⁶ This moves into the next movement, *Waltz*, which has the oboe and piano attempting to dance two separate waltz rhythms against one another, with the piano in duple meter and the oboe in triple. The two-note motive and its leaps appears in the oboe, and the dance between the voices has several tempo variants. The *Polka*, another dance movement, is in a folk style to contrast the preceding *Waltz*. There is a lack of harmonic contour to this movement, in efforts to have a sense of folk music, but the two-note motive shows itself in a large downward leap as a seventh. The following and final *Resolution* is ironically named, with the music from the *Theme* again being recalled, but this time with the oboe acting as an air raid siren against large accented attacks in the piano, sounding like bombs dropping. Each entrance of the oboe begins with the chromatic two-note motive and then holds, often with dynamic variation, with the final note holding on a crescendo.

³³ Evans. *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, pg. 553

³⁴ Biggam. *Benjamin Britten's Four Chamber Works for Oboe*, pg. 79

³⁵ Biggam. *Benjamin Britten's Four Chamber Works for Oboe*, pg. 86

³⁶ Biggam. *Benjamin Britten's Four Chamber Works for Oboe*, pg. 73

Antal Dorati - *Duo Concertante* (1984)

Antal Dorati (1906 - 1988) was a Hungarian conductor and composer, who is responsible for over six hundred recordings of eclectic repertoire with various orchestras around the world. He was born to a musical family, with his mother being a piano teacher and his father a violinist in the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra. He studied composition and piano at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest, with such musical icons as Zoltan Kodaly and Bela Bartok. Though his abilities as an instrumentalist and composer were evident, Dorati quickly rose to fame as a conductor, making his first debut in 1924 with the Hungarian State Opera. In 1928 Dorati began to conduct abroad, and would become an American citizen in 1947 after two years as music director of the Dallas Symphony. He went on to conduct the Minneapolis Symphony (now

Minnesota Orchestra), the BBC Symphony, the Stockholm Philharmonic, the National Symphony, the Detroit Symphony, and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.³⁷

His notoriety as a recording artist first began with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, but quickly became one of his passions as a conductor. Dorati was the second conductor to record the complete symphonies of Joseph Haydn, and is also especially known for his recordings of Tchaikovsky, being the first conductor to record the *1812 Overture* with real cannons.³⁸ Studying with Bartok at the Liszt Academy, the two had a professional relationship for many years, which led to Dorati conducting the premiere of Bartok's *Viola Concerto* and recording a multi-CD set of Bartok's orchestral works. As such a high profile conductor, Dorati worked often with high profile performers, which included the near-celebrity oboists Heinz Holliger. Dorati composed several pieces for Holliger, including the *Duo Concertante* and his *Cinq Pieces pour le Hautbois* (1980). Dorati described his compositions as "recognizably contemporary but not afraid of melody," and this is true in his works for the oboe.³⁹

Of *Duo Concertante*, Heinz Holliger gives a terse synopsis:

"In this work (written for András Schiff and myself) the composer has tried to produce a traditional Hungarian rhapsody for the oboe which (in contrast to the clarinet) does not feature either in Hungarian popular music or in Hungarian serious music. The work consists of a declamatory, slow rubato section (Iassú) and a virtuoso fast movement (friss) which increases in speed all the time."⁴⁰

In this quick description, Holliger hits on the central points of the *Duo Concertante*, mainly that of the Hungarian Rhapsody. This was a musical form popularized by Liszt, in which elements of Hungarian folk themes and gypsy bands were used to create showpieces, in the form of the traditional Hungarian dance Verbunkos. The Verbunkos was originally a conscription dance, used to recruit soldiers from villages throughout Hungary. The Verbunkos is in two parts: the lassan (slow) and the friska (fast). The lassan was the slow dance and often included storytelling, which would then be followed the fast friska, an energetic and constantly accelerating dance that featured feats of strength from the hussars (Hungarian cavalry soliders). These dances ceased being used for recruitment purposes in the mid-19th century, at

³⁷ Noël. "Dorati, Antal."

³⁸ Noël. "Dorati, Antal."

³⁹ Gookin. The Development of the Solo Oboe Genre, pg. 33

⁴⁰ Holliger, Dorati Society

which point it evolved into the national Hungarian dance, the Czardas.⁴¹ The elements of Verbunkos were transferred to musical forms by virtuosos such as Liszt in his Hungarian Rhapsodies and Fantasies, and by Janos Bihari, one of the most celebrated gypsy bandleaders.⁴²

Duo Concertante is in two movements, and each movement corresponds with the two elements of Verbunkos. In the first movement, Dorati sets the stage for the lassan, giving the tempo *Libero, rubatissimo*. There are twisting melodic lines based on Hungarian scales, and to the listener, one can imagine the militaristic storytelling that would have accompanied this slow dance. As this movement fades into the second, *Molto Vivace*, the friska starts abruptly with rhythmic ostinato in the piano. This is accompanied by the oboe with athletic tumbling, though Dorati is clever in his use of rhythm. Traditional lassan rhythms include dotted eighths followed by sixteenths, with the traditional friska rhythms employing off beats, and in the opening of the *Molto Vivace*, Dorati provides a bit of transition by having the oboist perform a succession of notes and then resting on a dotted eighth, before continuing into more sixteenth runs. Dorati begins the friska with reserve in this fashion, allowing for it to truly gain more energy and excitement throughout the movement. There is one brief departure from the traditional friska form with an *Andante* section, with the piano mimicking a cimbalom underneath oboe pronouncements, but this quickly transitions back to the feats of strength most associated with the friska. Just as the dancing climaxes, the music naturally slows itself back to the tempo of the first movement, recalling the lassan material, before bursting back to the friska and ending in a quick flurry of unison between the oboe and the piano.

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⁴¹ Bellman. "Verbunkos."

⁴² Bellman. "Verbunkos."

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RECITAL 3 PROGRAM

Oboe Concerto in D Major (1945)

Richard Strauss (1864 – 1949)

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Andante
- III. Vivace – Allegro

Stuart Malina, Conductor
Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra

RECITAL 3 PROGRAM NOTES

Richard Strauss - *Oboe Concerto*, TrV 292 (1945)

Born in 1864 and composing well into his final year of 1949, Richard Strauss was a prolific German composer as well as a renowned conductor. He began composing at the age of six and was influenced in his early years by the works of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. These composers, as well as his early instrumental and composition teachers, were all introduced to Strauss by his father, Franz Strauss, the principal horn in the Munich Court Orchestra. Franz was often referred to as the “Joachim of the horn,”⁴³ so it is of no wonder why throughout his life, Richard Strauss would write such rich and lavish music for the horn in a variety of musical settings.

Franz’s influences on the thorough pedigree of Richard did not end with his compositional guidance, but also included Richard’s introduction to the world of symphonic music and conducting. In 1875, Franz became the director of the Symphonieorchester Wilde Gungl, an amateur orchestra in München. Richard Strauss joined this orchestra a few years later on the violin, and also composed several works for the ensemble, including two Symphonies, his Wind Serenade, and his first Horn Concerto. It was not long after that Strauss received his first conducting appointment as assistant conductor under Hans van Bülow, who he would later credit for teaching him “the art of interpretation.”⁴⁴

It is from the mid-1880s through the turn of the century that Strauss’s output reflects the genres he is most associated with: the orchestral tone poem, and opera. Influenced by fellow composer Alexander Ritter as well as the writings of Schopenhauer, Strauss composed *Don Juan* (1888), *Death and Transfiguration* (1889), *Till Eulenspiegel* (1895), *Don Quixote* (1897), *Ein Heldenleben* (1898), and many other famous tone poems. These works were part of a “New German School” of composition, which delineated from older Viennese traditions and replaced those structures with more spontaneous and passionate narratives.⁴⁵ Bridging from Franz Liszt’s symphonic poems, these tone poems were Strauss’s concept of the “music of the future,” written in one continuous movement instead of standard symphonic form, and meant to inspire the listener to imagine different scenes or stories.⁴⁶

Though these tone poems were highly successful, as Strauss began to compose opera, his first, *Guntram* (1893), was a failure. It received only a few performances before being cancelled, and

⁴³ Gilliam and Youmans. "Strauss, Richard"

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ross, pg 15

⁴⁶ Gilliam and Youmans. "Strauss, Richard"

even Strauss's next opera, *Feuersnot* (1901) was met with a tepid reception. It was not until *Salome* (1905) that Strauss produced a successful opera, which received passionate praise from audience members as well as other composers such as Ravel and Mahler.⁴⁷ Strauss's success continued with productions of *Elektra* (1909) and *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), and though his fame would continue to rise, World War II and German life in the years prior were a deeply difficult time for Strauss.

As the Nazi party came to power, Strauss made attempts to distance himself from them. His goal was to remain apolitical, but knowing that Hitler was a music enthusiast, Strauss hoped that by cooperating with the Nazi party, he could promote and sustain German culture, as well as protect his Jewish daughter-in-law and grandchildren.⁴⁸ He was appointed as president of the newly founded Reichsmusikkammer, the acceptance of which caused Strauss to appear sympathetic to the Nazi cause rather than an apolitical actor. This new position resulted in the famous quote from Toscanini: "To Strauss the composer I take off my hat; to Strauss the man I put it back on again."⁴⁹ Throughout the 1930s Strauss took on conducting responsibilities to stay in the good graces of the Nazi party, and it was not until 1944, when Joseph Goebbels ordered theaters and opera houses to close, that Strauss was out of focus from the Third Reich and could ensure his family's safety. In those final years of World War II, Strauss so happened to cross paths with the American oboist John de Lancie and, unknowingly to both of them, the *Oboe Concerto* was born.

In 1945 Strauss was living in Garmisch in southern Germany, and in April of that year Allied forces peacefully took the town. Part of the occupation required American soldiers to use some of the homes in Garmisch, and one of these was that of Strauss, who upon seeing the American vehicles approaching yelled "I am Richard Strauss, the composer of *Rosenkavalier* and *Salome*!"⁵⁰ Word spread quickly of the famous composer's whereabouts, and he was often visited by music enthusiasts across the Allied forces. He would pose for photographs and often play for soldiers at the piano, usually waltzes from *Rosenkavalier*.⁵¹ One of these visitors happened to be John de Lancie, Principal Oboist of the Pittsburgh Symphony before the war who was at that time serving as a Staff Sergeant in the Office of Strategic Services. John de Lancie visited Strauss often, and in one of these visits he inquired if Strauss would be interested in writing a concerto for the oboe. Strauss had a terse reply for de Lancie: "No."⁵²

It came as quite a shock to de Lancie when he received word that Strauss had indeed composed an Oboe Concerto. The premiere took place in February of 1946 with the Tonhalle Orchestra and Marcel Saillet as soloist, and the renowned British oboist Leon Goossens would go on to record the work a few years later.⁵³ Not long after, Strauss made revisions to the concerto, including some rhythmic and note corrections as well as a lengthy extension to the final coda of the piece.⁵⁴ Strauss made sure that the rights for the U.S. premiere were given to de Lancie, but upon

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Gilliam and Youmans. "Strauss, Richard"

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Binkley, pg. 15

⁵¹ Ross, pg. 344

⁵² Poppy, pg. 10

⁵³ Ibid, pg. 11

⁵⁴ Binkley, pg. 20

returning from the war, de Lancie was no longer the Principal Oboist of the Pittsburgh Symphony, but was a junior member of the Philadelphia Orchestra. This meant that he was unable to perform the concerto, and instead de Lancie gave the rights away to Mitch Miller of the Columbia Symphony Orchestra. It was not until after his retirement from the Philadelphia Orchestra that de Lancie had the opportunity to record the concerto, nearly forty years after his first conversation with Strauss.

Though Strauss had composed in challenging tonalities with works like *Elektra*, the period in which the *Oboe Concerto* emerges is a time where Strauss returns to the classical and romantic styles of his youth. Strauss's final years are often referred to as his "Indian Summer,"⁵⁵ where we see a creative resurgence in the composer and a resultant outpouring of new works. The implementation of older styles in these later works is not by chance, but was an attempt by Strauss to preserve German culture and signal hope to the future of German music.⁵⁶

The *Concerto in D Major for Oboe and Small Orchestra*, or simply *Oboe Concerto*, is a monumental piece of the oboe repertoire. With a standard length of twenty-five minutes, the piece is in three large movements in typical concerto style: *Allegro Moderato*, *Andante*, and *Vivace-Allegro*. The forms present in the movements are also standard of a concerto, with the first movement being in sonata form, the second in ternary or song form, and the third movement presenting a sonata-rondo form. It is interesting to note the tempo indications of the final movement, as the final *Allegro* is written out as a separate fourth movement. This movement functions more as a lengthy coda than its own structural entity however, and the work is usually listed as three movements.

The *Oboe Concerto* shares similarities with the tone poem genre Strauss was quite passionate about in his youth. In similar fashion, and despite having distinct movements, the concerto is performed *attaca*, creating a seamless feeling throughout the work. Continuing in the style of the tone poem, Strauss uses the medium of the concerto texture to reflect on his life and tell a story, specifically a narrative of his struggle between hope and resignation.⁵⁷ This concept came to Strauss before any discussions with de Lancie, for in the years prior to World War II he was attempting to compose a cello concerto. This was Strauss' first return to the concerto genre since his horn concerto in 1883, and the plan for this work was to represent "the struggle of the artistic spirit [the cello] against pseudo-heroism, resignation, melancholy [the orchestra]."⁵⁸ The concerto was never completed, but instead, Strauss implements this idea in the *Oboe Concerto*, using the texture to show a battle between the soloist and orchestra, with the oboe ultimately winning out in the end.

This narrative is structural to the concerto and is manifested through the creative use of several themes and motives that act cyclically throughout the piece. These recurring themes with programmatic intent further the connection between this concerto and the tone poem genre as well. Two examples of such material can be heard in the opening four bars of the piece, where a

⁵⁵ Poppy, pg 5

⁵⁶ Schwartz, pg. 114

⁵⁷ Ibid, pg. 114

⁵⁸ Gilliam and Youmans. "Strauss, Richard"

four-note repeated neighbor motion figure in the cello is paired with the oboe's first entrance, a held pitch followed by swirling sixteenth notes. These two ideas serve multiple roles throughout the concerto, sometimes in a passive connective function or as an active melody. Often times these ideas serve as head motives, as the material afterward is heavily varied, but their initial repetition stands out of the texture.

The most important motive in the concerto emerges later in the first movement, and is reminiscent of Beethoven's "fate motive" from *Symphony No. 5*.⁵⁹ In the months prior to the *Oboe Concerto*, Strauss composed his *Metamorphosen* (1945) for strings, of which musicologist Alan Jefferson has called "possibly the saddest piece of music ever written."⁶⁰ This work quotes Beethoven's funeral march from *Eroica*, as well as the fate motive from the fifth symphony, which begins with four repeated notes.⁶¹ In the *Oboe Concerto*, the motive that arrives late in the first movement also begins with four repeated notes, and is then followed by eighth notes. In the unfinished cello concerto, Strauss wrote a similar melodic idea as the foundation of its second movement. The similarities are so striking that when we first encounter this motive in the *Oboe Concerto*, the first two bars are identical to the cello concerto.

This motive is Strauss most boldly showcasing the artistic spirit from the narrative of the work. Throughout the first and second movements of the *Oboe Concerto*, the orchestra - or the spirit of resignation - leads over the oboe in presenting this motive. For example, Strauss uses this motive as the foundation of the melody in the second movement, but the oboe line simply states the motive in the tonic and continues on, while the orchestra uses the four-note motive sequentially. The control in the battle between soloist and orchestra is asserted by the ability to sequence this motive, which the orchestra does frequently in the opening movements.⁶² It is not until the cadenza leading into the third movement that the oboe gains an advantage over the orchestra and is able to sequence this motive, and the rest of the work showcases the soul winning out over melancholy and resignation.

Though Strauss places sections of technical demands on the soloist, the greatest difficulty comes not in the music, but with the sheer amount of breath control required of the performer. This is not unusual for Strauss, as works like *Don Juan* and *Don Quixote* have lengthy sections of slow, lyrical playing that leaves the oboist emotionally and literally breathless. In the *Oboe Concerto* however, there are multiple sections during which the soloist is required to play for multiple minutes at a time, forcing the performer to either insert breaks into melodic lines to take a breath or to circular breathe. The exposition of the first movement is the most daunting example of this, where for two and a half-minutes the oboe part does not have a single rest. More often than not, during the fast technical passages the oboist will employ circular breathing to stay afloat, and then take a standard breath at the ends of phrases. The second movement is another example of such breathless writing, where the beautiful melodic line is stretched for minutes at a time. John de Lancie famously made edits to these sections, giving several measures to either the

⁵⁹ Chianca, pg. 11

⁶⁰ Schwartz, pg. 113

⁶¹ Ross, pg 338

⁶² Schwartz, pg. 115

clarinet or the horn to help facilitate the breathing difficulties.⁶³ It is not uncommon for oboists to make similar revisions when performing the work, as it can reduce the purely athletic nature of the work in favor of promoting its musical nuance.

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⁶³ Binkley, pg. 37-39