

## ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation:       A DIVERSIFIED SELECTION OF 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY  
                                      OBOE & ENGLISH HORN CONCERTI  
                                      Yeon-Jee Sohn, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2003

Dissertation directed by:   Professor Mark Hill  
                                      Department of Music

My determination in pursuing a soloistic career both as an oboist and as an English horn player is certainly a primary force behind this Doctoral Dissertation Project's theme.

Equally important to me, though, was to notice - both as an orchestral player and as a listener – the relative absence of much Twentieth-Century Oboe/English Horn repertoire in the concert hall over the air waves, and the in the recording market.

Therefore, I have felt the need to explore less frequently heard concerti. Even so, I elected to open my series of recitals with Richard Strauss' well-known masterwork, in the hope of conveying my stance and belief that the lesser known repertoire I chose is by all means competitive - in terms of compositional craftsmanship, musical value, and sheer impact on the audience - even when heard side by side with an accepted staple of our Century.

If this repertoire is under-represented in the concert hall, the amount of scholarly research available is also scarce. Indeed, it is a challenge to gather information beyond the purely biographical and circumstantial data.

Finally, my choice of repertoire is necessarily limited in quantity to number of works I can perform in three recitals, but I believe it is nonetheless stylistically representative of the body of work produced in this Century for my two instruments. I have elected to present a collection of works that I believe represent a variety of 20<sup>th</sup> century musical styles from significant composers of the period, and which are particularly worthy musically.

After much research, score reading, and listening, I have narrowed my repertoire of choice to the following:

Richard Strauss (1864-1949): *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra in D Major*;

Vincent Persichetti (1915-1987): *Concerto for English Horn and String Orchestra*,  
*Op. 137*;

Ned Rorem (b. 1923): *Concerto for English Horn and Orchestra*;

Bohuslav Martinu; *Concerto for Oboe and Small Orchestra*

Bernd Alois Zimmermann (1918-1970): *Konzert für Oboe und Kleines Orchester*;

Jacques Ibert (1890-1962): *Symphonie Concertante for Oboe and String  
Orchestra*;

Lukas Foss (b. 1922): *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*

In addition to my project as listed above, there are many significant concertos that I had to leave out simply by reason of the limited time and the absence of piano transcriptions. Such works are;

William Alwyn; *Concerto for Oboe and String Orchestra*

Malcolm Arnold; *Concerto for Oboe and Strings, Op. 39*

Richard Rodney Bennett; *Concerto for Oboe and String Orchestra*

Lennox Berkeley; *Sinfonia Concertante for Oboe and Chamber Orchestra*

Leonardo Balada; *Music for Oboe and Orchestra: Lament from the Cradle of the Earth*

Ruthland Boughton; *Concerto for Oboe and Strings No.1 in C major*

Elliott Carter; *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*

John Corigliano (b. 1938); *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*

Wolf-Ferrari; *English horn and Orchestra*

Jean Francaix; *L'horloge de flore* (Concerto for Oboe)

Euguen Goossens; *Concerto for Oboe in one movement, Op. 45*

John Harbison; *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*

Heinz Holliger; *Siebengesang fur Oboe, Orchester, Singstimmen und Lautsprecher*

Joseph Horowitz; *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*

Aaron Jay Kernis; *Colored Field* (Concerto for English horn and Orchestra)

Bruno Maderna; *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra No. 1, No. 2, No. 3*

William Mathias; *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*

George Rochberg; *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*

Henri Tomasi; *Concerto pour Hautbois et Orchestre de Chambre*

Ralph Vaughan Williams; *Concerto for Oboe and String Orchestra*

Isang Yun; *Konzert für Oboe/Oboe d'amore und Orchester in einem Satz*

Ellen Taaffe Zwilich; *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*

Besides all these works, Sir Edward Elgar's *Soliloquy Oboe and Orchestra* and Samuel Barber's *Canzonetta* are also valuable repertoire for the oboe soloist. But unfortunately both of these master pieces were not completed before the composers' death.

Lastly, I would like to explore briefly the background of each piece in my project.

Richard Strauss (b. Munich, 1864; d. Garmish-Partenkirchen, Bavaria, 1949):

*Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra in D Major*.

"[Strauss] studied piano and violin from an early age and took lessons in theory, harmony, and instrumentation...Strauss wrote the [Concerto] in the summer of 1945 at the instigation of [...] John de Lancie [...]. What looked like an occasional work and was at first regarded by the octuagenarian Strauss as one of the pieces he still wrote 'to keep his hand in', developed into an impressive statement of the style of his old age,

exemplifying ripe maturity in the sense not only of technical perfection but also of profound humanity [...]”.<sup>1</sup>

Vincent Persichetti (b. Philadelphia, 1915): *Concerto for English Horn and String Orchestra, Op. 137*.

Persichetti, quite prolific as a composer and also versed on piano, organ and double bass, studied theory and composition with Russell King Miller in Philadelphia and subsequently with Roy Harris in Colorado. He taught at the Juilliard School for forty years.

Persichetti’s *Concerto for English Horn and String Orchestra* is part of a series of works commissioned by the New York Philharmonic for its principal players. It was premiered in November 1977 with Thomas Stacy under the baton of Erich Leinsdorf.

Harold Schonberg, on the New York Times, writes that “the concerto reflects the current trend of contemporary composers to write music that means something to an audience. If anything, it is an impressionistic work, although the score does contains sections where Mr. Persichetti demonstrates that the writing of the previous decade is not unknown to him...It does what a concerto should, and that is give the solo player plenty of opportunities for display [...]”.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Volker Scherliess. Brochure Notes, *Oboe Concertos*, Berliner Philharmoniker, Deutsche Grammophon 429 750-2, CD.

<sup>2</sup> “Important Premieres”, *New York Times*, quoted in *The Double Reed*, Vol. 5. 3, Winter, 1982.

Ned Rorem (b. Richmond, Ind., 1923): *Concerto for English Horn and Orchestra*.

Rorem studied with Leo Sowerby in Chicago, and, notably with Virgil Thomson, whose special influence he acknowledges, and Aaron Copland. He distinguished himself especially as a composer for the voice and is widely considered preeminent among American art song writers.

Rorem wrote his *Concerto for English Horn and Orchestra* for Thomas Stacy who premiered the work in early 1994 with the New York Philharmonic under Kurt Masur.

The composer, on the premiere's program notes, comments: "[...] My sole aim in writing the Concerto for English horn was to exploit that instrument's special luster and pliability. [...] Each of the five movements is to some degree a Passacaglia, a neutral or redundant background a canvas upon which the soloist will limn his pictures [...]"<sup>3</sup>

Bohuslav Martinu (b. Policka, east Bohemia, 1890, d. Liestal, Switzerland, 1959):

Martinu was born in Policka and grew up in Prague, where he for the most part taught himself the essentials of music and composition. In 1923 Martinu moved to Paris in order to study composition with Albert Roussel. His style was influence by a number of diverse sources, the *Concerto for Oboe*, written in 1955, being a good example of this. It shows marked influences form American jazz in the first movement, late French impressionism in the *cadenza* of second movement, and elements form Bohemian dance in the Finale.

---

<sup>3</sup> Tomas Stacy. Brochure Notes. *Three Concerti*, Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, New World 80489-2, CD.

Bernd Alois Zimmermann (b. Bliesheim, Germany, 1918; d. Königsdorf, 1970):

*Konzert für Oboe und Kleines Orchester*;

Zimmermann studied with Heinrich Lemacher and Philippe Jarnach, and later with Wolfgang Fortner and René Leibowitz at Darmstadt.

The *Konzert* was written in 1952, commissioned by the Südwestfunk broadcasting corporation.

“The huge leaps at the beginning of the first movement, *Hommage à Stravinsky*, immediately set a shrill tone for the oboe [...]. With its tentative, searching *parlando* style and unmistakable harmonic and tone-colour parallels with Bartók’s music, the slow movement might have been called *Hommage à Bartók*. Culminating in a sparkling *cadenza*, the last movement exploits asymmetrical dance rhythms [which] exude an all-embracing heathen ecstasy [...]”.<sup>4</sup>

Jacques Ibert (Paris, 1890–1962): *Symphonie Concertante for Oboe and String Orchestra*.

Ibert studied with Gedalge (counterpoint), and with Faure and Paul Vidal (composition).

“[His] *Symphonie Concertante* was premiered in Basel [in] 1949. The title refers not so much to the classical *sinfonia concertante* as to the idea of a three-movement

---

<sup>4</sup> Lajos Lencses. Brochure Notes. *Masterpieces for Oboe*, Radio-Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart, Hanssler LC 10622, CD.

symphony with a concertante oboe [...]. Ibert had an intimate knowledge of the wind instruments and in this concertante symphony draws on the oboe's full tonal resources, from B flat to F<sup>''</sup>.<sup>5</sup>

Lukas Foss (b. Berlin, 1922): *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*

Foss has shown his reputation as a composer, conductor, pianist, educator, and spokesman for his art.

The *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra* was composed between 1947 through 1948 while he was occupied as a pianist for the Boston Symphony. The essential feature in his music is the tension, so typical of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, between tradition and new modes of music expression, as does shown in his oboe concerto.

It is my hope that this series of performances will contribute in some small way – to an increased awareness and overview of the wealth of variety concertos written for oboe / English horn in our century.

---

<sup>5</sup> Gunther Joppig. Brochure Notes. *French Oboe Concertos*, Studwestdeutsches Kammerorchester Pforzheim, CPO 999 193-2, CD.

A DIVERSIFIED SELECTION OF 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY  
OBOE & ENGLISH HORN CONCERTI

by

Yeon-Jee Sohn

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Musical Arts  
2003

Advisory Committee:

Professor Mark Hill, Chair  
Professor Peter Beicken  
Professor Paul C. Gekker  
Professor Gregory Miller  
Professor Edward Walters