

NAXOS

ALBINONI

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Oboe Concerti Op. 9, Nos. 2, 3, 5, 8, 9 and 11

Anthony Camden, Oboe
The London Virtuosi
John Georgiadis, Director



Tomaso Giovanni Albinoni (1671–1751) **Oboe Concerti, Op. 9, Nos. 2, 3, 5, 8, 9 and 11**

The oboe, perfected in France around the middle of the 17th century, gained acceptance in Venice during the 1690s. The first known Venetian operas to include a part for it dated from 1692, and by 1696 at the latest it had been heard at the Basilica of San Marco, which two years later recruited its first permanent player of the oboe. Several other oboists of note established themselves in the city, and the four *ospedali grandi* (the charitable institutions caring for foundlings, orphans and the destitute) added the instrument to the teaching curriculum.

It was logical, given Italy's – and, indeed, Venice's – pioneering role in the development of the concerto, that sooner or later the first concerti with parts for oboes would be written. The big question was how, if at all, should they differ in style and form from violin concerti? For Vivaldi, as for most Italian composers, the problem was easily resolved. In his hands the oboe becomes a kind of ersatz violin. To be sure, he takes care not to exceed the normal compass of the instrument (running from the D above Middle C to the D two octaves higher), remembers to insert pauses for breathing and avoids over- abrupt changes of register, but the solo part still seems remarkably violinistic – as Vivaldi himself tacitly acknowledged when, on more than one occasion, he prescribed the violin as an alternative to the oboe.

It was left to Vivaldi's important Venetian contemporary, Tomaso Albinoni (1671–1751), to find another way of treating the oboe in a concerto. Apart from being a capable violinist, Albinoni was a singing teacher married to an operatic diva. His experience of writing operas and cantatas decisively affected the way in which he approached melody and instrumentation. His concerti equate the oboe not with a violin but with the human voice in an aria. Conjoint movement and small intervals are generally preferred to wide skips. In opening orchestral passages the oboe does not double the first violin (as in Vivaldi concerti) but bides its time until its solo entry or else supplies an independent line. The opening solo idea is often presented twice – the first time abortively, the second time with a normal continuation. This twofold presentation is a device borrowed straight from the operatic aria of the time.

Albinoni describes these works as concerti 'with', rather than 'for' oboe. The difference is significant. Whereas in a Vivaldi oboe concerto the prime aim is to show off the capability of the soloist, here the oboe is the partner rather than the dominator of the first violin – and even the second violin is not excluded from the discourse. The spirit of give and take that exists between the treble instruments lends these works a character that reminds one of chamber music.

Albinoni's first set of *Concerti a cinque* with parts for one or two oboes, published in Amsterdam as his *Op. 7* in 1715, has the distinction of being the first such collection by an Italian composer ever published. Some of the works in it, in particular those with two oboes, show their novelty by being insubstantial in content or uncertain in form. Seven years later Albinoni returned to the genre, this time with greater maturity and mastery.

He dedicated his new opus to Max II Emanuel, elector of Bavaria. During much of the War of the Spanish Succession, Max, an ally of the French, had lived in exile, but in 1715 he re-established his court in Munich. Music flourished there (five oboists were on the payroll!), and Albinoni will almost certainly have met the elector personally in 1720, when his wife Margarite sang in opera at Munich. The dedication evidently paid off handsomely, for later that year (1722) Albinoni was invited to write festive stage works for a wedding at the electoral court.

The *Op. 9* concerti are subdivided into four groups, each of which begins with a concerto for solo violin (here the oboe is silent), continues with a concerto for one oboe and finishes with one for two oboes. *No. 5, in C major*, is a typical specimen of the composer's late style. The orchestral texture is

in places highly contrapuntal, but Albinoni never sacrifices tunefulness to a show of learning. Arthur Hutchings, his greatest advocate among British musicologists, aptly describes the finale as 'conveying the allure of the dance without suggesting the street or barnyard'.

F major is one of the traditional keys of the natural horn, which because of its association with hunting was treated as an emblem of the nobility and the courtly way of life. Accordingly, Albinoni, in homage to the Bavarian elector, fills the fast outer movements of the third concerto with hunting calls. The masterpiece of the set is undoubtedly the second concerto, whose long, elegiac slow movement has been dubbed Albinoni's 'second Adagio'.

The concerti in *B flat major* (No. 11) and *G minor* (No. 8) complete the group of concerti with one oboe. Albinoni was very sensitive to the associations of different keys. For him, *B flat major* is bright and assertive, *G minor* melancholy and introspective. Similarly, the key of the other 'double' concerto in this recording, *No. 9 in C major*, conforms to a familiar stereotype, being triumphant with a touch of pomposity. Luckily, the slow movements, which in every case are in a different key, provide the necessary contrast and give each work a well-rounded character.

Michael Talbot

The London Virtuosi

The London Virtuosi was founded in 1972 by Anthony Camden, James Galway and principal string players from the London Symphony Orchestra. In the 21 years of its life the London Virtuosi has performed in all the major countries in the world – USA, Canada, Mexico, Europe, China, Japan, etc. It has been the resident orchestra in Festivals in the UK and Spain and made many recordings. In recent years the London Virtuosi has specialised in performing all the Brandenburg Concertos and a large repertoire of Baroque and classical music. The orchestra consists of 16 string players, a harpsichord and an oboe and is directed from the violin by the leader John Georgiadis who was previously the Concertmaster for 15 years of the London Symphony Orchestra.

John Georgiadis, Rolf Wilson, Barry Wilde, Ben Cruft, James McCleod, Roy Gillard, Roger Garland, Lilly Li (Violins), **Brian Hawkins, George Robertson, Dai Emanuel** (Violas), **Douglas Cummings, Ben Kennard** (Cellos), **Linda Houghton** (Bass), **Paul Nicholson** (Harpsichord)

Anthony Camden

Anthony Camden is solo oboist with the London Virtuosi, having served as principal oboe in the London Symphony Orchestra from 1972 to 1988. His solo recordings with the London Symphony Orchestra include the Bach Concerto for violin and oboe, with Yehudi Menuhin, the Oboe Concerto by Grace Williams and a video of music by Bach with Claudio Abbado. He founded the London Virtuosi in 1972 with James Galway and John Georgiadis and the ensemble thereafter toured widely in the Americas, throughout Europe and in the Far East. Anthony Camden himself, the son of a very distinguished British bassoonist, has given master classes at many of the most famous conservatories and schools of music. In addition to some 400 recordings with the London Symphony Orchestra, his recordings with the London Virtuosi include Mozart's Oboe Quartet, a Telemann Trio for flute, oboe and harpsichord with James Galway and for RCA Haydn's Divertimento for oboe and strings. Anthony Camden plays on a Howarth Oboe.

Julia Girdwood

Julia Girdwood is currently principal oboist of the Covent Garden Orchestra. In 1977 she became the first gold medal winner of the Shell/London Symphony Orchestra Scholarship for young musicians. She then studied in London with Anthony Camden. In the last few years she has appeared as guest principal with all the London Orchestras and has recorded both the Mozart and the Vaughan Williams Oboe Concertos. She also plays on a Howarth Oboe.

Tomaso Giovanni ALBINONI

(1671–1751)

Oboe Concerti, Op. 9

Concerto in C major, Op. 9, No. 5		8:41	Concerto in B flat major, Op. 9, No. 11		10:43
1	Allegro	3:29	10	Allegro	4:13
2	Adagio (non troppo)	1:58	11	Adagio	3:26
3	Allegro	3:14	12	Allegro	3:04
Concerto in F major, Op. 9, No. 3		10:34	Concerto in G minor, Op. 9, No. 8		10:09
4	Allegro	4:45	13	Allegro	3:58
5	Adagio (non troppo)	2:11	14	Adagio	2:15
6	Allegro	3:38	15	Allegro	3:56
Concerto in D minor, Op. 9, No. 2		12:56	Concerto in C major, Op. 9, No. 9		10:26
7	Allegro e non presto	4:34	16	Allegro	4:01
8	Adagio	5:23	17	Adagio (non troppo)	3:01
9	Allegro	2:59	18	Allegro	3:24

Anthony Camden, Julia Girdwood **4–6**, **16–18**, Oboe
The London Virtuosi
John Georgiadis

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