

Letters to the Editors

Dear Dan,

I am in complete agreement with Mr. Holliger (Heinz Holliger Interview, Vol. 20, No. 2) that it is a shame great composers alive during the 1920s and 1930s were not approached to write works for the oboe. While also agreeing with Mr. Holliger's astounding revelation that hindsight is 20/20, ("*and I am so angry ... we missed ... every opportunity*")., research of the history of oboe concerto performances (as well as all woodwinds) in America between the two World Wars would reveal to Mr. Holliger that the principal oboists (Barthel, Duvoir, DeBusscher, Fernand Gillet, Kirchner, Labate, Tabuteau) in American orchestras of that time rarely, if ever, played solos. Nor did they have the financial ability to commission works and/or guarantee any performances, even if they had wanted to.

Baroque works for oboe, with the exception of a few Vivaldi concerti, were, in pre WW2, virtually unknown to us. Oboe recitals were practically unheard of. Symphony oboists never dreamt that 30 or 40 years later playing solo with orchestra would become a reality, albeit an infrequent one, in America.

However, Mr. Holliger's musicology, besides being amateurishly incomplete, is a model of sophistry, and his criticism so selective, not to mention self-serving, as to arouse suspicion. "... *the 19th century standard of playing was too low - etc.*" How many contemporary oboists can successfully perform the Gillet etudes? - a standard requirement in Paris of 1900. (Tabuteau graduated *First Prize*, 1904). While "*Tabuteau spent his time playing music by composers like Grovlez and never once played a great piece*", "... *Goossens ... whom I admire very, very greatly as a musician*" apparently pursued the same uninspired career, but remains admired and unscathed. Does Mr. Holliger's crude choice of words, "*the great boss of oboe playing in America*", and gratuitous misrepresentations conceal a hidden agenda in reference to Tabuteau? or, obliquely, to American oboists?

In early fall 1977, Mr. Holliger was booked for some solo appearances in the U.S.A., one of them being in Philadelphia in a series with the Concerto Soloists Chamber Orchestra, Marc Mostovoy, Music Director. It seems that Mostovoy had, that morning, received a call from a clerk at the SwissAir desk in New York saying a Mr. Holliger asked her to transmit the message that he (Mr. Holliger) had boarded a flight to Switzerland. No explanation or communication.

I heard Tabuteau perform, among others, Handel, Bach, and even played with him in a performance of the *Opus 87 Trio*, all with the Philadelphia Orchestra. I

attended two performances of the Mozart *Quartet* (not "*a great piece*") with the Philadelphia Orchestra (small strings), one in Carnegie Hall when Tabuteau *did not fail to appear*, even though he had to be wheeled out on the stage because of a severe attack of gout. What does it say that an oboist in Holliger's position feels the need to stoop to using such irresponsible remarks in an ill concealed attempt to malign the musical integrity of a man he most probably never saw or met, and most certainly never heard perform, and who has been dead for 32 years?

John de Lancie
Walnut Creek, California

Dear Dan,

May I respond to the Holliger interview in your recent journal and, in particular, to Mr. Holliger's ill-considered remark about Marcel Tabuteau having failed to commission works by Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Hindemith, etc., when they lived in America.

I should like to ask Mr. Holliger two questions: first, did he commission pieces when he was an orchestral oboist? Second, why single out Tabuteau when it is apparent that no European oboist commissioned works by the above-named composers when they were achieving great notoriety in Europe, before they left for America? Furthermore, Mr. Holliger seems to have conveniently forgotten commissions by John deLancie of solo works for the oboe by Jean Françaix and Benjamin Lees. By the way, Richard Strauss' *Oboe Concerto*, so favored by Mr. Holliger, probably would not exist if not for deLancie's suggestion to Strauss.

In contrast, I should like to mention two achievements by Tabuteau: One, his musical ideas had a profound influence on many musicians, not only oboists; secondly it is said that he was described by no less an artist than Fritz Kreisler as "the greatest living master of phrasing", I can safely state that Mr. Holliger can claim neither of these accomplishments. Mr. Holliger is certainly an outstanding musician but, to my mind, his expertise in circular breathing, flutter-tonguing, etc., plays a quite secondary part when considering the real values of music. It is commendable to commission music, but commissions do not necessarily produce fine works. Composers, on the other hand, will continue to write their pieces even without the inducement of money.

Sincerely yours,
Louis Rosenblatt

[Editor's Note: Mr. Rosenblatt recently retired from the English horn position in the Philadelphia Orchestra.]

Dear Mr. Stolper:

Heinz Holliger's inflated ego (Interview, Andrew Palmer) led him to make a number of invidious remarks in his attempt to portray himself as the ultimate musician. In doing so, he displayed a surprising ignorance of history, as well as a considerable lack of integrity. He found little to praise, but much to denigrate when referring to the efforts of other musicians: composers, conductors, and oboists all fell short of meeting his lofty expectations. He is not flattered by the appellation "complete musician" of himself. "It's what everybody should do, but nobody does."

On conductors - "I can't understand those conductors who hardly play an instrument" - "all the great conductors were the great soloists of their time." Has he not heard or read of Nikisch, Mahler, Wagner, Stokowski, and Reiner? None qualified as a great soloist, nor did Toscanini, Walter, Furtwangler, or Beecham.

On composers - "It's a little depressing that they (oboists) go on playing bad music" - "Oboists have been given a lot of bad compositions by third rate composers" - "rather than spending time with little pastorales and scherzos by salon composers." How fortunate we are that Heinz Holliger came along just in time to save the musical world from mediocrity.

On oboists - "In the nineteenth century the general standard of playing was too low to inspire great composers to write for the instrument." Mr. Holliger should realize that the oboe was, and remains, most effective as an orchestral, and not as a solo instrument. The well known oboists of the nineteenth century - Vogt, Brod, Yvon, Barret, Gillet, et al did play solos, but they are known primarily as orchestral players and teachers. They had to contend with all of the problems that plague contemporary oboists - intonation, balance, projection, personality clashes, etc. while playing on inferior instruments, using crude reed making equipment, and surviving on salaries that prescribed jetting around the globe playing solos and making recordings. Yet the great composers from Beethoven and Schubert, to Wagner and Mahler, were inspired to write innumerable oboe solos in their symphonic works and operas, and it stretches the imagination to believe the oboists of that era were not competent in performing them. Mr. Holliger might have acknowledged his debt to those oboists, long dead, who were responsible for improvements in the instrument and in reed making equipment, and to the teachers whose legacies enabled Mr. Holliger to begin where they left off. Instead, he chose to diminish them, and then aimed his most defamatory remarks at the premiere oboist of the twentieth century, Marcel Tabuteau. "Tabuteau

never once played a great piece" - "was the great boss of oboe playing in America."

Over a period of fifty years Tabuteau played all of the great solos of the orchestral and operatic repertoires, and yes, an occasional solo by those "third rate composers" - Bach, Handel, and Mozart. Until his last few years he performed flawlessly, technique being merely a means to the end of making great music, and making great music was what he did, day after day. I had the privilege of being a member of the Philadelphia Orchestra during his final eighteen years as a performing artist (1936-1954), and I never ceased to marvel at his incredible virtuosity. As a teacher he revolutionized woodwind playing in America. His pupils revered him, and such prominent musicians as composer Samuel Barber, and pianist Jorge Bolet, attended his classes. Both acknowledged his insight with having been among the most important influences on their musical careers. He was also a constant inspiration to his colleagues in the orchestra.

His playing was uniformly musical, whether playing a Bach cantata or a Strauss Waltz, and at times simply breathtaking, as for example in the solo a few bars into Strauss' *Don Quixote*. Year after year he electrified his audiences at the annual Bach Festivals in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania with astounding performances of the numerous solos for oboe and oboe d'amore in the cantatas, passions, the Mass, and instrumental music. "Never once played a great piece." Indeed! He performed the works of lesser composers with equal distinction and dedication. It is doubtful that any oboists having heard him play the solos in Johann Strauss' *Zigeunerbaron* overture could ever forget the glorious sound that only he could produce, along with his incomparable articulation and phrasing. It was reminiscent of the great violinist, Fritz Kreisler, whose exquisite performances of similar light works as encores delighted his audiences and who, at a Saturday night concert in Philadelphia circa 1930, became so mesmerized by Tabuteau's solo in the slow movement of the Brahms *Violin Concerto* that he failed to make his entrance, and it had to be repeated. They were both giants in their respective fields.

Mr. Holliger's career has indeed been remarkable, but it is regrettable that he could not have rested his reputation on his many noteworthy accomplishments without feeling the need to belittle so many others. His maligning of an artist of Tabuteau's stature not only failed to enhance his own image, but carried with it the

inference that he is cognizant of his own inferiority.

John Minsker

[Editor's Note: John Minsker served a distinguished tenure as English horn player of the Philadelphia Orchestra.]

Dear Mr. Stolper and Dr. Dawson:

Here's an idea for an article I'd love to see in *The Double Reed*: fitness for the double reed player. Like many of your readers, I suppose, I work out several days a week at a gym. I always wonder if there's anything I could or should be doing that would help me with my oboe playing, as opposed to general cardio-vascular fitness.

For example, I know that the AbMaster won't give me a good vibrato, but will it help? Or am I doing anything to my abdominal muscles that will actually make it harder to develop good vibrato?

I'm not even sure who knows the answer to these questions. Perhaps an oboe professor should collaborate with a physiologist! Thanks in advance, and thanks for starting that new medical column.

Best, Alan Hyde

Dear Ron,

I hope you will allow me to reply to Steve Hanna's letter dated June 25, 1997, which is found in *The Double Reed*, Vol. 20/2 (1997), page 54. His letter is in response to my article "Playing those 'Missing' Notes in Baroque and Classic Concerti" in *The Double Reed*, 20/1 (1997), pages 85-90. Mr. Hanna's criticism of my article on the soloist performing during the tutti passages of Baroque and Classical concerti may be summarized as follows: 1) printed editions and critical editions are not as reliable as the composer's manuscripts, 2) composer's manuscripts (particularly Vivaldi's autographs) often pose dilemmas for the performer, and 3) ultimately we should perform what sounds best, relying on "taste and judgement, not dogma."

The issue of what forms the basis for the best performing edition of a work is more complex than finding the autograph of the work and reprinting it. Even composers such as J. S. Bach and W. A. Mozart, who are renowned for carefully penned manuscripts, have left behind works with errors and omissions. With some composers the first or second printed edition of the work is more reliable than the autograph, often because the composer reviewed the edition before publication. Some composers revised their works many times, leaving behind a number of autographs of the same composition. Thus, a variety of sources must be carefully consid-

ered to produce a worthy critical edition of the work.

Mr. Hanna's abrupt dismissal of all critical editions (especially those of Vivaldi's works) does a disservice to the scholarship and careful research that has crafted each edition. The problems that Mr. Hanna has with manuscripts of Vivaldi's works - see his third paragraph - are examples of the issues that careful scholarship seeks to answer. Scholars study the entire body of composer's works and learn of the performance practice, copying practice, and printing practice of the time. Only after a careful weighing of the alternatives can a conscientious edition of a composition be brought forth. I for one do not consider myself competent to overturn the work of distinguished scholars who have labored for decades in their fields of study. This does not mean that they are above critique, but those who wish to differ with their position should at least match their expertise in the field. I submit that Mr. Hanna's possession of merely two copies of Vivaldi's manuscripts does not give him firm ground to make such sweeping judgements against eminent musicologists.

Mr. Hanna's ultimate question, "what sounds best," cuts to the heart of the matter. I certainly admit that a poll of today's performers will find my position in the distinct minority (perhaps a minority of one). No doubt most performers will think it sounds best to continue a performance practice that has been in existence for decades, if not for a full century. I maintain, however, that the written documents of the Baroque and Classical periods indicate that composers wished performers to play during most tutti sections. Presumably this sounded best to them. This conclusion that one should perform the written solo part in the tutti passages is not one that I have come to easily, but the evidence is so overwhelming that I am convinced of its validity. I encourage others to closely examine critical editions, manuscripts, the performance practice of the Baroque and Classical periods, and writings about music from those times. Perhaps then you will also desire to perform all of the notes the composers wrote for your instrument.

Terry B. Ewell, Morgantown, West Virginia

Dear Ron

I was interested in the articles by Arthur L. Gudwin and Nicola A. Adams on making bassoon reeds. Amateur players like myself don't fuss that much with reeds, but I did attend one reed making lesson with my erstwhile friend Morris Newman. He took me to observe his instruction from Roberto Sensale who was then the retired contra bassoonist of the New York Philharmonic. (This was sometime in the 1950's.)

Sensale was a great "knife man". The way he made

a reed was: taking the soaked cane which had been gouged, shaped, profiled, and folded, he quickly put on the first and second wires, took his knife (my recollection is that he used a straight razor), slashed the reed from the base to the second wire. He didn't even look at what he was doing, but the slashes were about one millimeter apart. I guess if you've done this often enough you don't have to look. He then applied the third wire, sodomized the reed with a mandrel, touched it up with pliers, wound it and handed it to us for inspection. The whole process took about six minutes ... and he was talking all the time! I think the enclosed reed is the one he made, (but I'm not sure.)

Harold W. Kohn, Columbus, Ohio

Dear Dan,

I was very surprised to read the statement by Heinz Holliger in the recently published interview with Andrew Palmer (*The Double Reed*, Vol. 20, No. 2) that "Tabuteau spent his time playing music by composers like Grovlez and never once played a great piece."

Consider some of the music which Marcel Tabuteau did play during a career which spanned over fifty years. As principal oboist of the Metropolitan Opera, all the major operatic works of Mozart, Verdi, Puccini and Wagner, including the U.S. premieres of *Boris Godunov*, *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Wozzeck*; as solo oboist of the Philadelphia Orchestra for thirty-nine years, all the standard symphonic repertoire plus in 1916 the first American performances of the Mahler 8th Symphony and Richard Strauss' *Alpensymphonie*; in 1922, Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* and the *Symphony for Wind Instruments* for the first time in America. With the Philadelphia Orchestra, he took part in the new music of the day; Varèse, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Milhaud and Martinu. He hardly had time or interest for "composers like Grovlez" who I never head him mention, let alone play. It is quite unlikely that he would have been familiar with this composer of the *Solo de Concours* for the year 1929 which was long after the period of his own studies at the Paris Conservatoire. It is true that he played one movement of the de Grandval *Concerto* for the mid-year exam in 1903. Perhaps Mr. Holliger is thinking of this arguably not great composer whose name also begins with "G". Although the de Grandval seems to have been a favorite work of Tabuteau's teacher Georges Gillet, to Tabuteau's credit he never performed it after leaving the Conservatoire.

At Tabuteau's 1921 and 1939 solo appearances with the Philadelphia Orchestra he played Mozart. Leopold Stokowski made a special transcription for small orchestra of the *F Major Oboe Quartet*, K. 370, so that Tabuteau could fulfill his wish to play what everyone will no doubt agree is a "great piece." We must remember that the Mozart *C Major Oboe*

Concerto, K. 314, was only finally accepted by musicologists and published at the end of the 1940s. Also central to his musical thinking and performance were the Cantatas of J. S. Bach which he played every year at the Bethlehem (Pennsylvania) Bach Festival. The recording he made at age 63 of the *C Minor Concerto for oboe and violin* at the 1950 Prades Festival with Casals conducting remains a testimony to the beauty of his phrasing and sound.

To belittle Tabuteau because he did not ask Stravinsky, Hindemith, or Bartok to write works for the oboe reflects a lack of recognition of the reality of music life in the United States during the first half of this century and at the same time ignores the very real contributions he made. Mr. Holliger states that Tabuteau "was the great boss of oboe playing in America" which seems to imply that he was running a Mafia-style organization! It was not by such tactics that his students became the solo oboe and English horn players of the orchestras of New York, Boston, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Cleveland, St. Louis, Toronto, Philadelphia and Minneapolis. Their own long and distinguished careers (most remained at their posts 20, 30 years or more) testify to the fact that they were superbly trained, from both an instrumental and musical standpoint, enabling them to fulfill these exacting orchestral positions. They demonstrated the control and flexibility to satisfy the demands of the parade of international conductors for whom they were required to play. Without exception all were also active as teachers. And we should not forget that it was John de Lancie, a student of Marcel Tabuteau, who *did* suggest to a great composer that he write for the oboe. The Richard Strauss *Concerto* has enriched the oboe repertoire to such an extent that we can scarcely imagine what the past fifty years would have been without it!

During Tabuteau's thirty years of coaching classes at the Curtis Institute of Music, not only oboists, but other wind players, string players, pianists, singers and even composers were influenced by his musical ideas. Many have testified to the profound effect he had on their own musical lives and on standards of performance in this country.

It is regrettable that Heinz Holliger, who has achieved his own reputation in the international world, should feel impelled to discredit someone of the stature of Marcel Tabuteau.

Sincerely yours
Laila Storch
Seattle, Washington

Dear Ron,

Some time back, a woman from California wrote in to ask information about her TAM bassoon. The TAM musical instrument line was created by the recently

deceased music store owner Don Wunn of Portland, Oregon. Don had his store in Portland for many years and imported brass and woodwind instruments from various European makers. These instruments were made for Don without the manufacturer's name or logo. According to Oregon Symphony tubist John Richards, Don used the name TAM since it involved all straight lines, which he could easily engrave onto each instrument by hand. Later the engraving became more elaborate. Many of the brass and woodwind instruments still exist locally. Don Wunn also created a line of music related cards, gifts, and novelties under the name Clef House. Don Wunn music closed its doors in 1978.

The TAM bassoons were not all the same. Some were clearly Schreibers, while others had a different shaped body. The "fat body" TAM bassoons had an exceptional tone. All those I have talked to believe that these were made by Puchner.

I hope you enjoy the article about the Bassoon Brothers commissioning Peter Schickele for a new bassoon quartet. Peter is a great person, and has made so many of us happy over the year with his *Last Tango. Blue Set No. 2* is a very challenging piece, I don't know at this point whether it will be published. However, it will be available from his publisher—but at some expense.

All is going well here with a busy schedule for the Oregon Symphony and the Brothers...And finally, yes, I flick. But in my publication *Advanced Reed Design and Testing Procedure for Bassoon*, and important objective is for the reed to slur quickly and easily back and forth across the break from E2 to C3 without flicking (release whisper key only). If the reed hesitates or won't do it, usually the blade is too long or if you are at your normal blade length, the cane is too soft. Often after the reed breaks in (or is on the way out) another clip is needed. Other considerations are balanced and complete scraping in the channels and consistent throat dimensions. Failure of the flickless slur test is one of at least ten indicators to clip the tip. So clip away. Once this slur works, the player will find the second octave much more enjoyable and the opening to Vivaldi's *Concerto in E minor* can be played without a full—even if you do flick. An expanded reed tuning publication is currently in development, based on a draft used in my reed seminars. I'll keep you posted.

Best regards, Mark Eubanks,
Portland, Oregon

P.S. TAM was the name of the Wunn's family dog.

Dear friend Ron,

Yesterday I finally got the IDRS Vol. 20, No. 2 and would like to thank you very much indeed, also in the

name of my good colleague Eli Heifetz, for the excellent review you have given us to our two CD's with "Koch I.C." However, your reservation to our recording of the Clarinet and Bassoon which you have your only complaints about needs a reaction and quite a "long explanation" which I believe might be of interest to you.

A few months after my retirement from the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (1991) I got a phone call from Eli Heifetz (principal clarinet of the Israel Chamber Orchestra) asking me what I have done with all those many arrangements of for two clarinets and bassoon. My answer was that all of them are resting well in my drawer. "Let us play them", he said. "Play them?" I said. "Don't you know that my bassoon is closed in forever? Fifty years of professional playing is enough—I have quit for good!", I told him.

Eli, who is five years younger than I, a former student of the late Yona Ettlinger who was principal with the IPO, heard us perform those trios with Yona, Peter Simenans (presently with the IPO) and me over and over again during the early 1950's, did not give up on me, calling me again and again until finally I said "OK, let us give it a try at my home."

This turned out to be significant as I had to take out and play my instrument again. To shorten the story, not only that we have recorded all that "nostalgic" stuff, but Eli urged me for further NEW arrangements which should feature mainly the clarinet and bassoon. So here he did the Beethoven op. 104, and both of us playing all the three Beethoven duos. Then Eli said that in order to balance the recording I have to play something with bassoon and strings. What shall I play? I used to play the Devienne quartets, Danzi, Stamitz, and got really tired of playing those "third rate" composers. Suddenly I got the idea. Although short of time, I managed to arrange the Mozart K. 370 in less than a fortnight, one rehearsal, a very short recording session, and we got our second CD done in time. Now Eli and I are preparing our third one: an all M. Rechtman arrangement, one which will have the J.S. Bach *Bassoon Concerto* taken from his *Cembalo Concerto BWV 1056*. I will also play Mozart's *Adagio K. 580a*, and Eli will play my NEW arrangement of Beethoven's op. 4 for clarinet and string quartet, originally the *Quintet in E flat Major*.

If not for the 2 Clarinet and Bassoon Trio arrangements and Eli Heifetz urging me to play again, I certainly would never have taken my bassoon in hands. Not only does it keep me busy, I practice now daily and am in a better shape than ever before, but my reeds are getting better, much better. I wish I could share my experience with my colleague bassoonists. There is so much to say in this respect.

All the best wishes, Mordechai Rechtman
Ramat-Aviv, Israel