

Three Reviews

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Marcel Tabuteau's Lessons.
Boston Records BR1017CD.
Boston Records
80 Island Creek Road, Duxbury, MA 02332
Fax 617-934-9017

First, a confession. This is not an unbiased review. As a college student (in Cleveland, 1974-78) my oboe teachers were fond of quoting **Marcel Tabuteau** as a "ne plus ultra" of oboe playing and teaching; the name had almost mythical connotations. Thus I am predisposed to favor such a CD, which aims to present Mr. Tabuteau's teachings to a wide audience.

Marcel Tabuteau was a student of George Gillet who emigrated to the United States in 1905. After playing in the New York Symphony and the Metropolitan Opera, he was principal oboist of the Philadelphia Orchestra from 1915 through 1954. His pedagogy at the Curtis Institute created a legacy of major oboe players and teachers that is the dominant influence on American oboe playing 30 years after his death. The importance of his influence can be grasped by looking at a list of his students; these include **Rhadames Angelucci, Robert Bloom, John DeLancie, Alfred Genovese, Harold Gomberg, Ralph Gomberg, Felix Kraus, Marc Lifschey, John Mack, John Minsker, Louis Rosenblatt, Laila Storch** and many others.

Tabuteau recorded this material in Nice (1965-66) under the aegis of **Wayne Rapier**, his student from 1951-54, who also produced the present CD. Previously issued as "The Art of Oboe" by Coronet, this material has long been out of print and available only on jealously-guarded original LP's. Devotees of the previous release will be pleased by the improved sound quality and by the inclusion of new material, mostly Tabuteau demonstrating points on the oboe.

In "Marcel Tabuteau's Lessons", Mr. Tabuteau discusses 12 topics in 72 minutes, including Wind Control, Breath Taking, his Number System with Tone Color, Inflection Distribution, Practice Routines, and more. Each point is introduced, discussed, and demonstrated on the oboe. The intent is to create a rational understanding of musical phrasing and context, and to establish a means of expressing a musical line on the oboe. A 24 page booklet accompanies the CD, for which John DeLancie wrote an introduction and Laila

Storch, a biography of Tabuteau. The complete transcript of Tabuteau's comments is helpful in view of his heavily accented English. Mr. Rapier provides his interpretation of what was meant by "Ups and Downs", a central tenet of Tabuteau's lessons which we hear frequently in his students' teaching; for example, in John Mack's oft-repeated dictum, "up is up, and down is down".

The CD is much more intelligently edited than the LP. Musical examples are closer to the relevant discussions. The descriptions of Inflections, Slurred-Detached Articulation, and Interrogative Mode are clearer on the CD than on the LP. The only significant omission from the Coronet LP is Tabuteau's comments on oboists suffocating with too much air: "To minimize this great handicap, we must master the technique to exhale through the nose while playing in order to be relatively at ease to continue playing. The difficult part is not to break your line." The only aspect of the LP which is not improved in this CD is the loss of excerpts from Philadelphia Orchestra recordings, which are being released on a separate disc. Many of these recordings are being reissued by RCA and Sony, including Tabuteau as soloist in Mozart's *Divertimento, K.251* under Casals in the Perpignan Festival (Sony SMK 66569). Look for Philadelphia Orchestra recordings from before 1953. Tabuteau can also be heard performing the Mozart *Quartet K 370*, on a CD from Music & Arts Programs of America, number 689-4.

Who should buy this disc? Not every oboist will have the discipline to benefit from these lessons without the help of a teacher familiar with Tabuteau's teachings. This is not a method for oboe, it is a method of using the wind, and any motivated wind instrumentalist can benefit from its wisdom. The material seems simple yet requires repeated hearing, and much more thought than does a typical lesson. The student must understand, internalize and adapt novel concepts to the diverse musical challenges he faces. Tabuteau says it well at the beginning of lesson 4, Dancing Numbers: "I have always been in favor to play as I think. Of course, the ideal combination would be to play with thinking and intelligent feeling".

For the very small cost of this CD, a motivated student will find a mine of valuable insights which can provide new, logical and often unexpected

solutions to the problems of musical expression that we all face. If you are interested enough to read this much of a tedious review, you ought to buy the CD.

Finally, readers should know that Boston Records Classics Corporation is a non-profit corporation which relies upon private contributions to make their CDs possible. This reviewer thanks three oboe dealers who helped make the "Lessons" CD possible by buying copies before the disc was produced; these are Pat McFarland, of the McFarland Oboe Shop; Robert Gilbert of RDG Woodwinds; and Peter Klatt of Forrest's Music.

**Wayne Rapier Oboe Recital (Number 3).
Boston Records BR 1016CD.
Boston Records
80 Island Creek Road, Duxbury, MA 02332.
Fax 781-934-9017**

Oboist **Wayne Rapier** is now retired from a career which included positions in the orchestras of Indianapolis, Kansas City, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Boston, and teaching positions at Oberlin, Indiana University and Louisiana State University. Rapier is the driving force behind Boston Records, a small label which has a significant emphasis on performances with oboe. Other discs on this label include Marcel Tabuteau's Lessons, performances by Rapier and by Boston Symphony principal oboist **Al Genovese**, and the last recordings made by clarinetist Harold Wright before his premature death.

This disc is a recital Rapier gave in February 1996, beginning with the Telemann *A minor Sonata*. Rapier plays this favorite work with a wonderful variety of colors. His baroque style here and in arias from Bach's *Cantatas BWV 32* and *105* is very to-the-point, eschewing more than a minimum of ornamentation; the listener feels that he is hearing the music and not the performer in these interpretations.

From 19th century Paris, Rapier plays the Georges Guilhaud *First Concertino* and the enigmatically named *Piece V* by Franck. Rapier brings out the elegance of the Guilhaud without the "student" feeling that such music often shows when played by a lesser artist. His Franck is chaste and pure, exemplifying many of the points made in the Tabuteau disc; here are perfect illustrations of the techniques of tone color variation, distribution of inflection, and question and answer. The program notes explain the name of this petite charmer; it was originally the fifth of a series of

church pieces for harmonium before being transposed and transcribed by Franck for oboe and piano.

Twentieth-century music by English and American composers on the disc include a dry, very witty performance of Gordon Jacob's *Sonatina* for oboe and harpsichord. The *Introduction* and *Allegro* for oboe and piano by Alvin Etler is both the central work and the high point of the recital, played with great dramatic effect. Etler, himself an oboist, had a perfect understanding of the dramatic capabilities of the oboe, and Rapier brings this to the fore, I only wish that he had made more noise in some of the upper register forte passages of the *Allegro*. Howard Hanson's beautiful *Pastorale* receives a fine performance. The *Old Irish Verses* of J. Melvin Butler were new to me, I was impressed by their beauty and by the singing of soprano Kendra Colton.

This disc is a gem, not only for the unfailingly high quality of Mr. Rapier's playing, but for the many lessons to be learned from the undubbed presentation of a superb player in recital. The concert order provides a constantly shifting mass of musicians; the everpresent oboe works with piano, harpsichord, soprano and strings in six different combinations. Mr. Rapier places the Etler, a very intense and difficult work, between the relatively lightweight Franck and a Bach aria which (uncharacteristically) has few prolonged passages for oboe. All of the musicians play to the highest professional standards, there are fewer clams and less audience noise than expected, and the quality of the sound is very, very good; this is typical of the Boston Records discs I own. All in all, a most impressive disc.

***Technical Exercises for Baroque Oboe*
by Matthew Peaceman.**

Modern oboists often view the baroque oboe as little more than a recorder with double reed, and assume that mastering it will be easy. This is absolutely wrong. For a capable modern oboe player to achieve facility on the baroque oboe is no small challenge, for the baroque oboe is as unlike the modern oboe as are the bassoon or saxophone. When I received this volume for review I had played the baroque oboe for 17 months, mostly without instruction. My first reaction to it was, "what an ogre this author is", for the material was very difficult for a beginner. After spending a year with the book, I have changed my

thinking; it is a contribution to the pedagogy of the two-keyed oboe.

Mr. Peaceman organized his book in three parts: Diatonic Exercises, Specific Baroque Oboe Problems, and Chromatic Exercises. Diatonic exercises includes scalar patterns from seconds to fifths, intended to be played in all the keys; scales, pedal points, and arpeggios on common, seventh, and diminished seventh chords. Specific Baroque oboe problems approaches intervals that are difficult on the baroque oboe. There is a page of exercises on the interval low F to E (or F# to E, or F to Eb), another for the octave F and E, and similarly for 16 other awkward combinations; and several pages of exercises on register changes. Chromatic Exercises, as Mr. Peaceman points out, would seem superfluous in a baroque context, but these exercises tease the player to the technical limits of his instrument, and reveal deficiencies in finger action like no others.

Mr. Peaceman provides the baroque oboist

with a methodical approach that encourages persistent attention to minor details. The book is not well suited for beginners, who are generally busy learning how differently the baroque oboe plays and feels relative to the modern instrument. It will, however, be of value to medium level students, who can use it to analyze and solve problems of particular passages that they encounter in their music. Some teachers in Europe are using this book as “a line a day” for their students, an approach that may ultimately prove to produce the best overall technical capabilities for a budding professional player.

Available from Brian Charles Double Reeds or from Mr. Peaceman.

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