

The O Zone

By Nehama Timstitt
Jerusalem, Israel

Scientifically speaking, an o zone is any given area within the circumference of an oboe's acoustical and/or psychological influence. (Note that the psychological factor is usually heavily influenced by the acoustical).

Early in my wild-duck-and-train-whistle stage, I asked my teacher where such a small, delicate object gets this kind of volume. She told me to remember that it belongs to the bagpipe family.

One day while I was assembling the oboe for a lesson, I heard the teacher singing quietly to herself: "O ye'll take the high road and I'll take the low road ..." She accurately predicted the sound effects of that lesson. Later, seeking sympathy, I described the proceedings to my flatmate.

"I don't know how music teachers stand it," she said. So much for sympathy.

A couple of days later, my flatmate and I went to a concert during which there was a fantastically beautiful oboe solo. I heard a murmur over my shoulder. "So *that's* how it's supposed to sound."

There was an article in *Time* about the Turkish army bands of yore. They described these bands as consisting of 30 drums, 30 trumpets, and 30 oboes. (I immediately pictured rows of black and silver Lorées.) Apparently more than one audience turned around and ran, and nary a shot was fired.

Likewise, neighbors inadvertently stuck within an o zone feel a strong compulsion to separate themselves from what they perceive as noise pollution, but their reactions tend to be the opposite of the above. One beginning oboe student told me that the building committee in her apartment house gave her a choice: "Either it goes or you go."

Then there is the professional bassoonist who invited two oboes in for a rehearsal. That building committee paid the trio an official visit after the first page.

An acquaintance told me about her experience in an o zone. She named her cat after the perpetrator, "because of intonational resemblance," she said.

Not all environmental reactions are so unappreciative, however. Once, my teacher presented me with three new reeds which sounded quite lyric when she demonstrated them on my oboe. I took my equipment over to a



friend's house, shut myself in the study and ran through a few arpeggios. It sounded like a fire siren: there is no other way to describe it. It was a losing battle that day.

Two little three-year-olds opened the door, came in and sat down. They were fascinated and tried to imitate the sound of what was going on, matching the volume as best they could. In a few minutes a bigger girl and another small boy appeared in the doorway:

"He wants to hear the nice noise," she explained.

I consider myself lucky in that my neighbors seemed indifferent; they probably didn't notice what was going on upstairs because of the described levels in their own flats. The downstairs neighbor believed in the humorous approach: She said she turned on the food processor when the oboe got out of control.

This neighbor has no musical background, and I was hard put explaining *What Is An Oboe?* One day I heard myself saying,

"This clarinet is called 'oboe'."

"Why?" she asked.

I am still working on an answer. ❖