

Oboe Conference in Angers

By Laila Storch
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L' Association française du Hautbois, one of the newest double reed organizations to establish Associate Membership with the IDRS, held its third annual conference on October 30 and 31 in the historic town of Angers on the River Maine. Although short in duration, the well-organized two days were filled with an impressive variety of concerts, lectures and master classes, a gala dinner and exhibits by instrument makers, music publishers and suppliers of reed-making equipment. All took place in the Grand Theatre of Angers, an elegant late-nineteenth century example of Second Empire architecture. **Guy Remaud**, professor of oboe, composer and conductor at the National Conservatoire (Angers Region) was responsible for the organization of the event, supported by **Bernard Delcambre**, president of the Association, its other officers and *Aladan*, the local Angers double reed group. In attendance was **André Lardrot**, honorary member and faithful advocate of the Association since its foundation. Among the exhibitors of instruments and accessories were Buffet-Crampon, Fossati, Lorée-de Gourdon, Rigoutat, Marigaux, Ecochard, Glotin, Neuranter, Rigotti, Berthelot, and B.G.

On Saturday morning the mayor of Angers, Monsieur Jean Claude Antonini, hosted an opening reception at the Hôtel de Ville. **Robert Casier**, eminent former oboe soloist of the Paris Opera and well-known chamber music performer, was introduced as a guest of honor at the convention. The theme of this year's gathering was centered around large oboe ensembles, known as "Les Bandes de Hautbois." The word "band" is not used in the sense that it is usually thought of in the United States, but rather reflects the time during the reign of Louis XIV when groups of double reed instruments played for the court. France has experienced a resurgence of this practice in the past few decades and the Angers conference provided a fine opportunity to hear the results.

The opening concert featured twelve very young oboists from the Angers Conservatoire under the direction of **Guy Remaud**. This was followed by an imaginative presentation of a narrated history of the oboe from antiquity to modern times with music appropriate to each period played by ten oboes, three English horns and two bassoons. The profusion of concerts continued with ensembles of up to twenty children and with performers from Paris, Lyons, Bordeaux, Montpellier, and Luxembourg playing in mixed groups of oboes, oboe d'amores, English horns,

bass oboes and bassoons. Music from the time of Telemann, Vivaldi and Bach was balanced by works from the romantic and modern era. A group from Bordeaux, *Arundonax*, played an unusual arrangement of a work by the organ virtuoso, Louis Vierne. Another group played a massive composition in which the organ had a featured role. We heard ragtime and even an encore by Dave Brubeck.

Robert Casier reflected on the greatly expanded availability of all double reed instruments in the last half century. When a quartet for oboe, oboe d'amore, English horn and bassoon written in 1949 by Maurice Journeau was played in its original form on one of the convention programs, Casier remembered that he originally had to perform it with the substitution of a clarinet for the oboe d'amore. Nor were early instruments neglected in this meeting. There were several admirable "bandes" of baroque and renaissance oboes from Tours and bombards from Nantes. **Claude Villevielle**, an enthusiastic promoter of music for groups of oboes, presented a program of works ranging from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries, with the *Three Equals* of Beethoven sounding especially well in a version for three English horns and bass oboe.

Two lectures were presented in the foyer of the Theatre. **Marc Ecochard**, a maker of early instruments, spoke on "The Baroque Oboe of Lully" and I was asked to speak about the French oboists who came to the U.S. in the early part of this century. In preparing this talk with the title, "Georges Gillet or the French Oboe School in the United States," it came as a surprise even to me to find that no fewer than fifteen of Gillet's students came to America between 1898 and 1925 comprising almost one fourth of those who earned their Premier Prix during the period of his professorship. It is gratifying to note that the



Grand Theatre at Angers



Bernard Delcambre and Laila Storch at the gala dinner.

Association Française has made the decision to restore the grave of Georges Gillet at the Cimetière Montmartre in Paris. It has been sadly neglected during the past half century and the inscriptions on his tomb are almost completely worn away.

The Saturday evening "Soirée de Gala" began with a most unusual flourish. On the stage of the Grand Theatre, Sébastien Giot, a champion archer, launched an arrow without erring by a centimeter, directly into a target at the center back of the stage. This was the insignia of a duck used on the French Oboe Association's web site with instructions, "To visit the site, cliquez sur le canard." (Click on the duck.) Apparently 6000 visitors have "clicked" to date! (<http://www.musique.net/hautbois>)

Several oboists familiar to American audiences from their performances at IDRS conferences took part in the gala concert; the ever ebullient **François Leleux** together with **Jérôme Guichard**, played the Vivaldi *Concerto in D Minor* followed by a brilliant short encore by **Gilles Sylvestrini**. **Lajos Lencsés** played several haunting pieces with orchestra by Charles Koechlin and explained that Koechlin had actually studied oboe in Paris. I only regret that it is impossible to cite every item of interest in the full weekend of concerts. I must, however, not fail to mention someone with whom I have been in contact but had never met. Guy Baumier, an oboist and conductor, is a vice president of the Association and editor of its publications. It just so happens that he is a great-grand-nephew of Marcel Tabuteau. His great-grandmother, Charlotte Tabuteau Létouffé, was Tabuteau's older sister. Guy Baumier lives near



Guy Baumier trying oboes at Angers Conference.

Nantes where he is active as a performer and teacher.

It was with the greatest difficulty that I managed to tear myself away from the conference for a couple of hours on Sunday morning to walk to the monumental chateau-fortress of Angers with its formidable seventeen towers in order to see the famed tapestry of the Apocalypse. **William Waterhouse**, with his fount of knowledge which extends well beyond the bassoon, had alerted me to the existence of this unique treasure, and I not only wished to see it, but would not dare let him know that I had been in Angers and missed it! Carefully restored, and now beautifully displayed in a specially air conditioned gallery, the 103 meters which remain of this fourteenth century art work take one on a trip into another world. After viewing the six-headed dragons and other multi-headed beasts, plus the destruction of Babylon and its invasion by demons, pools of fire, and Satan attacking the city, and despite the views of several trumpet-



**Left:
Marc
Ecochard
displays his
Baroque
Oboes.**

**Right:
Young
oboists
trying
Lorées.**



playing angels against lovely flowered backgrounds, it was reassuring to return to the cheerful and sprightly sounds of the oboe *bandes!*

It is my impression that these large groups of double reed instruments or "bandes of oboes" are being seriously cultivated in France as permanent ensembles. Their formation is facilitated through the large numbers of very young children who are being encouraged to study the oboe. In the United States it would be a rarity to see twenty or more oboists ranging from the age of six to eleven all playing together. An expansion in the number of players of all types of early double reed instruments also contributes to creation of more oboe bands.

The Association Française du Hautbois now has approximately six hundred members which includes many of the young oboists. The organization hopes to be joined by bassoonists in the near future. With its major publication "La Lettre du Hautboïste" and frequent newsletters, the Association has made great strides in three years of its existence and can look forward with optimism to the next conference which will be held on October 29 and 30 of the year 2000 in Bordeaux. ❖