

Everything About the Oboe

By **L. F. Poushechnikov**
Honored Artist of the Russian Federation
Professor of the Gnessines Russian Academy of Music

On March 29, 1999 at the Organ Hall of the Glinka State Museum of Musical Culture in Moscow an exciting evening of premieres took place. The celebrated composer David I. Krivitsky presented his works in a concert entitled "Everything About the Oboe". Is it possible to say everything about the oboe in one concert? It is a really difficult task. The oboe is a multifarious instrument, especially if you have in mind its kindred instruments - oboe d'amore and English horn as well. Some musicians think that the oboe timbre is rather monotonous and even boring. Luckily music lovers who attended Mr. Krivitsky's concert were convinced to the contrary.

The program content of the concert was intense and varied. The composer presented works in which the oboe, in combination with other instruments, showed its different facets. The timbral color of the instruments, merging and fusing together, or vice versa, coming into contrast, introduced works that represent a really bright page of the modern musical life of Russia. His original and highly emotional music is constantly performed in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and abroad.

One of the main features of Mr. Krivitsky's output is his great interest in the brass instruments.

His contribution to the oboe repertoire in Russia is really unique. Without any exaggeration, it is possible to say that his oboe works are a genuine qualitative step forward, unprecedented in the history of Russian music. His works for oboe include:

Two pieces for flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, and bassoon (1970)

Concerto Music No. 1 for oboe, string quintet, cembalo, and percussion (1980)

Double Concerto for English horn, piccolo trumpet, and strings (1989)

Nonette-Symphony No. 2 for flute, oboe, English horn, clarinet, bassoon, horn, and piano (1989)

Also in 1989 he composed *Ave Maria* for soprano, flute, oboe, English horn, clarinet, bassoon, horn, and piano.

Concerto Epilogue - poem for flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, bassoon, and piano (1990)

Andante con tristezza for oboe and viola (1984)

Six sonatas for oboe solo (1984)

Serenade for oboe, two violins and cello (1995)

Concert Music No. 2 for oboe and piano (1997)

Christmas on the Temple Ruins for violin, oboe, and horn (1997)

"If pardon me...." Canonic fantasy for oboe and soprano (based on A. S. Pushkin's poems) (1997)

Terzetto No. 8 for flute, oboe, and viola (1998)

Theme and Seven Variations for oboe and piano (1999)

For the March 29 concert, Mr. Krivitsky chose his most recent pieces for oboe. The concert opened with *Concert Music No. 11 for Oboe and Piano* (or Organ) written in 1998 and dedicated to this writer. This is a one-movement piece containing ideas for a four-movement cycle. The piece was brilliantly performed by **Sergei Lysenko**, soloist of the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra and prize winner of a national competition, and by Eugenia Krivitskia who played the organ part. Suave and full sounding in lyric and romantic episodes, a virtuoso interpretation of the composer's concept in freely improvised cadenzas, assured leaps to maximum high and low pitches, untraditional ways of sound production - everything was impeccably performed. Sergei Lysenko showed the highest professionalism, outstanding ability, and deep penetration into this demanding work.

The *Sonata for English horn* was written in 1997. It was the first work of this kind in the national culture. This purely orchestral instrument is very often put back in secondary roles, but here the English horn comes forward to the concert stage. The sonata was played by **Vladislav Komissarchuck**, soloist of the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra. Despite his youth, Mr. Komissarchuck showed himself to be a mature musician, successfully overcoming interpretive difficulties, and displayed a beautiful English horn tone in all its richness; he also demonstrated his understanding of the modern musical idiom.

The first part of the concert was completed

with the *Canonical Sonata* for flute and oboe of 1997. The musicians who performed this work belong to the most brilliant and experienced. Vladimir Koudrya, flutist, prize winner of many international competitions, and **Vladimir Tambovtsev**, oboe soloist of the National Symphony of Russia, showed outstanding playing and a perfect feeling of ensemble, as well as a fresh and convincing interpretation of a most difficult work.

The second part of the concert was opened with the *Terzetto No. 1 for two oboes and English horn* of 1998. Such a trio became a classical combination even at the end of the 18th century. On December 23, 1872, a trio composed by Wenzel was performed in Vienna; Beethoven was in attendance at that concert. Inspired by the performance, Beethoven went on to write two trios for oboes and English horn that are still very popular and often performed. Mr. Krivitsky's *Terzetto* is a 3-movement composition depicting the whole panorama of human existence. It was played by the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra soloists - **Sergei Lysenko**, **Evgeny Ivanov** (prize winner of the All-Russian Competition), and **Leonid Kondakov**. Their performance was characterized by a harmony and coordination of vertical constructions, a bright emotional charge of solo episodes, and a rich palette of dynamic and timbral colors. The musicians began working together more than a year ago. They have proven themselves to be thoughtful and subtle interpreters of classical music. However, playing Mr. Krivitsky's *Terzetto*, they convinced the audience that ultra-modern music, bordering on the 21st century, is also an integral part of their artistic credo. Special mention should be made of the fact the trio ensemble included a teacher, professor at the Gnessines Russian Academy of Music, Leonid Kondakov, and his very talented student, the young oboist Evgeny Ivanov.

The National Symphony of Russia was represented at the concert by another solo oboist, **Petr Fedkov**, who together with a violist from Venezuela, Ms. Marbic Urbino, performed *Andante con tristezza for oboe and viola*, composed in 1994. This piece is dedicated to the memory of the composer's mother. The lines "Light is my sorrow...." could serve as an epigraph to this composition. The two instruments, very different in their timbre, fused and merged in this piece, creating an unprecedented acoustic effect. The performers tactfully and gently interpreted this romantic mood of this work.

The *Canonical Sonata for oboe d'amore and English horn "Hommage a Telemann"* (1999) captured the audience's interest in a special way. Mr. Krivitsky's innovation is revealed not only in the search for new forms and concepts, as well as in the use of instruments almost completely vanished from usual concert practice. As it often happens, the new turns out to be the well-forgotten. The oboe d'amore has a unique coloratura mezzo-soprano with a wonderful range, and great technical possibilities. Besides it combines marvelously with the sound of the English horn, creating sort of a "super oboe". This 4-movement composition has two more innovations. In the third movement (Interlude) the musicians change their instruments for a nightingale and a cuckoo, which were used by Telemann in his works.

In the sonata's finale, the picturesque interlude of the cuckoo is reprised; in the background of the oboe d'amore's virtuosity another cuckoo appears, philosophically measuring off the days of our lives. The sonata requires a wide arsenal of modern performance techniques. The Bolshoi soloists, Sergei Lysenko (oboe d'amore) and Leonid Kondakov (English horn) have brilliantly coped with the challenges posed by the composer. They masterfully played multiphonics and chords. This composition is dedicated to these performers.

To conclude the concert, a monumental *Septet for Six Oboes and Two English Horns* was performed. The part of the second English horn is combined with the part of the 6th oboe. The *Septet* is dedicated to the famous conductor Marc Ermler. Its title "Sub Rosa" takes its meaning from ancient Roman history. When the owner of a house where important events took place hung a rose under the ceiling it was understood that everything that had been said there would be kept secret. The title of the work predetermines the manner of its performance in which the dynamic complex is strictly differentiated. It includes nuances, subito rises and falls, cantilena melodies, trill clusters, etc. This creates a mysterious, enigmatic feeling, that together with the vocalism and beauty of the themes, makes the most important feature of this work. The *Septet* was played by the Bolshoi soloists and other musicians: Sergei Lysenko, Alexandr Krylov, Evgeny Ivanov, Nikoley Zhemchouzhin, Ivan Paisov, Vladislav Komissarchuk, and Leonid Kondakov. The ensemble was conducted by Vladimir Koudrya.

Besides pieces for oboe and its related instruments, a cycle of organ compositions entitled *Nostradamus' Mysteries* was performed. The titles of the movements: "About the Past", "About the Present", and "About the Future" (this last piece is composed for four hands), predetermine the imaginative form of these laconic miniatures. The pieces were performed at random as interludes in order to emphasize dramaturgically the timbres of the oboe family. The gifted organist Ms. Eugenia Krivitskaia who performed the pieces deserves every praise. Having superb technique, possessing all the secrets of her instrument, she temperamentally and passionately plumbs the deep philosophic contents in the compositions of her father. The piece *About the Future* for organ four hands was interpreted in a bright, emotionally impressive and impeccable manner in ensemble with Ms. Marianna Vysotskaya.

This concert without doubt has been a great success. Mr. Krivitsky's music stirs passions and emotions both in the performers and in the listeners. The success of the concert was guaranteed by the performers who really belong to the musical elite of Russia. Almost the whole oboe section of the celebrated Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra and the two soloists from

the National Symphony of Russia took part in the concert. It is very rare these days to get together in one concert so many wonderful wind musicians. It is especially pleasant for me to know that of the nine oboe players who participated in this concert, eight of them graduated from the Gnessines Russian Academy of Music. After the concert, the composer, highly pleased and emotionally moved to tears, expressed his gratitude to me with these words: "Thank you for 'Everything about the Oboe', thank you for your marvelous students". This concert has already become a part of history. There is no doubt that this oboe feast will become an important landmark in the history of wind performance in this country. Mr. Krivitsky's works will become classics and will occupy a worthy place in the pedagogic and concert repertoire of oboists.

One of the listeners remarked to me as he left the concert "I wish I could be the sound of one of the passages performed at this concert; I would then fly under the firmament of the Supreme Liberty and would surely leave in the people's hearts a little bit of goodness, a tiny shaft of idealism, and would ignite a spark of hope. In other words I would leave what this concert has left in the listeners' hearts." ❖

