



Figure 1. Anonymous portrait of Peter Philip Eiffert. Reproduced with permission of Smith College Art Museum.

Putting a Name to the Face—Warts and All

Geoffrey Burgess
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The portrait reproduced as Figure 1 has long posed a mystery to both oboists and art historians. Until recently the identity of both artist and subject were unknown. Donated in 1956 to the Art Museum at Smith College in Massachusetts with the attribution plaque “Sir Joshua Reynolds P.R.A. 1723–1792, The Obie Player,” this fine portrait showing an oboist with instrument and reed, has been reproduced numerous times, and has accrued status as an archetypal image of an eighteenth-century oboist.¹

Suspicious of the attribution (let alone the absurd typographical error), the Museum’s curators initiated a search to trace the painting’s provenance. The style of dress and the type of oboe depicted place the portrait squarely in England in the 1770s, and over the years, virtually every authority who could potentially shed light on the identity of artist or sitter was contacted. In 1957, British art specialist Ellis Waterhouse of the University of Birmingham proposed Johan Zoffany as the artist, supported by Christopher Norris, who declared “absolutely Zoffany” based on the “uniquely characteristic” blue of the sitter’s coat.² But without hard evidence, this must remain speculative. Similarly, oboe historian Bruce Haynes proposed a number of British oboists as candidates for the subject of the painting—Thomas Vincent, William Teede, Thomas Gray, Redmond Simpson, John Perkins, and Charles Suck—but because of the lack of other known likenesses of these players, was unable to affirm a definitive identification.

About twenty years ago I was alerted to the existence of an anonymous watercolor copy of the portrait in a collection of portraits of musicians now housed at the New York Public Library with the designation “Gaetano Besozzi” (see fig. 2). At first it seemed that this



could be the renowned Italian oboist, a member of a distinguished dynasty of oboists that thrilled audiences across Europe. Added to that, Gaetano had relocated to London late in his life, but without corroborating evidence I was hesitant to accept the

Figure 2. Copy of the Smith College portrait possibly by Joseph Müller (1877–1939). Music Division, The New York Public Library. “[Gaetano Besozzi]” New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed May 23, 2023. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47dc-7cf8-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>



Figure 3 (left). Attrib. Teeds, portrait of Peter Philip Eiffert c. 1758, Faculty of Music Collection, Oxford University, courtesy Bridgeman Images.

attribution as any more than an educated guess. No other likenesses of Gaetano Besozzi are known to exist, and as he arrived in London in 1793, it is hardly credible that he would have been depicted in clothing that would, by that time, was decidedly *démodé*.

As it turned out, my hesitation was well advised. Recently a much more convincing identification has come to light. The Music Faculty of Oxford University owns a portrait of the oboist Peter Philip Eiffert (1711–91) by a certain Teeds.³ If I had seen the portrait reproduced in Figure 3, I had quickly dismissed it as of little value for musical research. The Turkish costume poses a dilemma, and as depicted here, Eiffert appears strikingly plain. Rachel Poole was particularly disparaging when she described the painting in an account of the Faculty's art holdings:

A man of quite extraordinary ugliness, fantastically dressed in Turkish costume, and painted by a local artist named Teeds. Eiffert was a hautboy-player who performed in the Holywell Music Room at Oxford between 1754 and 1773. He seems scarcely of sufficient importance to have his portrait bought for the Music School.⁴

Nevertheless, I found myself examining the face, and noticing certain features that seemed surprisingly familiar. While it might seem foolhardy to draw conclusions on the evidence of two portraits, particularly by artists of such markedly different ability, I found myself increasingly confident that this was the same man as seen in the Smith College portrait! If the large nose and wart (or other protuberance) to the side of the left nostril are not enough, the arch of the right eyebrow, and the forward lower jaw should secure the

identification. Facial recognition software corroborated my observations, and confirmed a match with “Normal Probability.”⁵

Eiffert is also depicted in a caricature dated 1782 by Charles Lorraine Smith entitled *A Sunday Concert*. Figure 4 shows the full image, with a detail of Eiffert in the original sketch (b) and the engraving by James Bretherton published the same year (c). The scene is an informal music gathering in the home of Charles Burney, and on one copy of Bretherton’s reproduction the figures are identified (Eiffert is Anglicized as “Hayford”).⁶ Notice the similarities between this caricature and the oil pointing: the wig, protruding lower jaw, and prominent nose. The oboes being played in the caricature by Eiffert and J.C. Fischer, the other oboist playing behind the keyboard instrument, appear to be straight-top. This design of classical oboe, possibly of Italian origin, was popular in eighteenth-century England. It dispensed with the bulbous ornament at the top of the oboes seen in the hands of German players of the time, including Eiffert in the Smith College portrait, and Fischer in the famous portrait by his father-in-law Thomas Gainsborough.⁷ Recently, Marcello Rizzello has suggested that Eiffert is depicted in another caricature, this one by Thomas Dashwood (engraved by John Malchair, a copy of which is preserved at the British Museum) that shows an oboist with a straight-top instrument.⁸ Was this merely an artistic shortcut, or did Eiffert and Fischer play both types of oboe?



a.



b.

Figure 4. Charles Lorraine Smith, *A Sunday Concert*, 1782 (a); b) detail; c) detail of aquatint by James Bretherton, 1782. (a and b reproduced from <http://contemporarymakers.blogspot.com/2010/12/sunday-concert-by-charles-lorraine-smith.html>, accessed July 31, 2023.)



c.

Who was Eiffert, and how is it that his likeness survives in not one but two portraits in oils, and possibly two caricatures? Thanks to shrewd detective work carried out by Michael Talbot, we now know the essential details of his life.⁹ Born in Weilburg an der Lahn in what was then the principality of Hesse–Nassau, Eiffert arrived in London by 1746, but under what circumstances is unclear. Talbot proposes that the Turkish costume in the Teeds portrait could have been a reference to his involvement as a military musician in campaigns against the Turks prior to his arrival in England.¹⁰ This gains credibility from the presence of Eiffert's name among the list subscribers to the first edition of memoirs of John Lindsay, Earl of Crawford (1702–49), a prominent Scottish military commander who participated with distinction in battles that precipitated the Ottoman retreat from Europe. Could Eiffert have served under Lindsay, and joined his retinue on his return to Britain? It is also possible that he arrived in England as part of a Hessian regimental music ensemble.

Eiffert does not appear in the writings of either John Hawkins or Charles Burney, the two leading music historians of the day, but in 1779 Susan Burney, the daughter of music historian Charles Burney, noted that “Einfort [sic.] (who plays the Hautbois) is a very good Man—but he grows very old & he ought now to give way for younger men”¹¹ That, at the age of 68, Eiffert was past his prime seems credible, but he had formerly been a prominent figure in London's musical life. He is first mentioned in 1746 as oboe soloist in a concerto in a musical entertainment at Ruckholt House in Essex, and from that date up to 1782 he was listed as an oboe soloist in almost fifty performances ranging from informal music-making in taverns, benefit concerts, fledgling concert series, and interval music at oratorio performances. There is a noticeable gap in his solo engagements from mid 1766 to early 1672. This could in part have been a consequence of the arrival of another younger German virtuoso oboist—Johann Christian Fischer (1733–1800). From his first appearance in 1768, Fischer immediately became the taste of the town, and appeared as oboe soloist at practically every concert of note. Eiffert's name appears again in concert announcements for solo appearances from 1772 to 1774, after which time his career as soloist appears to have slowed down, while he continued as an orchestral and ripieno player. That is the capacity in which he seems to be depicted in the Smith caricature, with J.C. Fischer on the other side of the group, presumably performing a solo part.

Eiffert was a member of the orchestra at the King's Theatre in the 1760s and 70s; he played charity concerts, participated in the music for the coronation of George III in 1761, led the oboe section at the annual performances of Handel's *Messiah* at the Foundling Hospital during the period 1754–69, and played in performances organized by the Royal Society of Musicians (or Fund for Decay'd Musicians, to give its original title). He was a member of the Fund from 1750, and served on its court of assistants up to his death, but does not seem to have been in need of charity himself.¹² Having never been granted citizenship, Eiffert was ineligible to purchase property in England, and he died unwed, and childless, but with significant savings in the form of bank annuities which he left to four female family members back in Germany. He rarely traveled far from his residence in Soho, London; occasional concerts in Oxford over the period 1754 to 1773 being the exception. His last appearances were in the orchestra at the Handel Commemorations of 1784 and subsequent years.

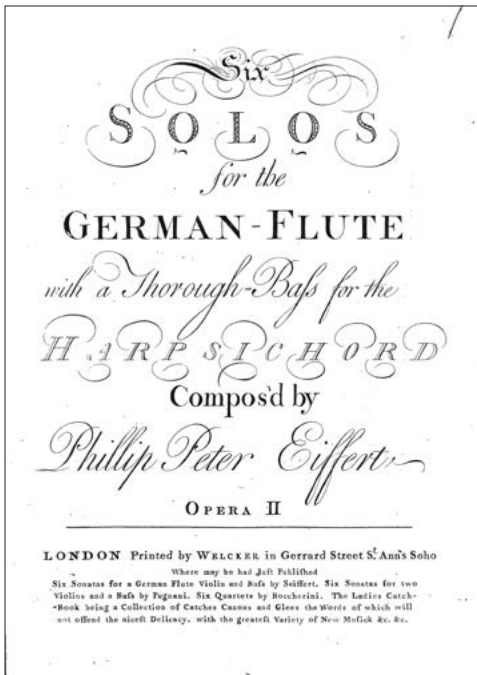


Figure 5. Title page to Eiffert's flute sonatas opus 2.

Among Eiffert's musical acquaintances were two other German émigrés, Samuel Christian Baumgarten (1724-98)¹³ and Charles Wiedeman (d.1782). Baumgarten may have traveled to England as a military bandsman. He was a member of the First Regiment of Foot Guards, played bassoon in many of the same concerts where Eiffert appeared. The two developed a particularly close friendship, and may even have been part of the same band when they moved to England. Baumgarten's daughter Marie (1755-98), whom Eiffert named in his will as one of his legatees, married the Alsatian flute virtuoso Jean-Gaspard Weiss (1739-1815). Weiss wrote in his autobiography of Eiffert as a worthy old friend in whom Baumgarten had placed his full confidence for more than thirty years.¹⁴ The two men shared accommodation, and presumably after Baumgarten's wife had died were virtually inseparable. Together they accompanied Weiss and his

bride-to-be in their carriage to their wedding. Eiffert acted almost like a surrogate parent, offering Gaspard and Mary advice.¹⁵ Flutist, oboist, and composer Charles Wiedeman appointed Eiffert his sole executor. The details of the will are not known, but Eiffert may have inherited enough from him to supplement his earnings so that when he drafted his own will he was able to call himself a "gentleman" (i.e. a man of means without need for gainful employment).

What concertos would Eiffert have played? On April 5, 1759 he premiered a work (now lost) by the renowned viola da gamba player and composer Karl Friedrich Abel (1723-87); otherwise he, like other soloists of his day, would have played his own compositions. Even though every reference to him as a performer indicate that he was an oboist, Eiffert's only known compositions are two sets sonatas: one for flute, the other for cello. He may well have played these instruments, or if not, could have gained familiarity with them through his musical acquaintances. The flute sonatas were published as op. 2 by Weckler in 1769.¹⁶ Given that flute music would have attracted far greater sales than that for oboe, it is possible that this opus contains oboe music masquerading in transposed versions for flute. Each of the six charming sonatas is eminently playable on a 2-keyed oboe and, particularly when following the standard custom of transposing flute music down a step, is well within range (see, for example the movement shown in fig. 6).

Typically, a lowly musician would not have his portrait painted in oils. That represented a considerable outlay of expense. Other London musicians of the time, including George Frideric Handel and oboist Redmond Simpson, were art connoisseurs whose collections

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SONATA IV Allegro

Figure 6. Opening of the first movement of Eiffert's Flute Sonata IV.

included portraits of acquaintances as well as more fashionable genres such as landscapes and historical and religious subjects.¹⁷ We don't know whether Eiffert invested in art like Simpson and Handel, but from what we know about him, he seems to have been sufficiently well regarded for a wealthy patron to commission a portrait of him, or to have had adequate funds to pay for one himself.

Now that we can name of the oboist in the Smith College portrait with some degree of certainty, does that help identifying the artist? As I mentioned above, Johan Zoffany has been proposed as a likely possibility. Like Eiffert, Zoffany was a German émigré, and he accrued considerable fame as a portraitist of London society in the 1760s and 70s, and was also famous for his conversation pieces.¹⁸ He was able to command high fees for his work, enjoyed the patronage of George III, while at the same time keeping company with actors and musicians, so it is entirely conceivable that Zoffany's and Eiffert's paths crossed. In fact, their names appear on a list of contacts the Mozart family visited while in London in 1764–65.¹⁹ Some of Eiffert's musician-colleagues, including the cellists James and Giacomo Cervetto, sat for Zoffany, and one of the artist's most renowned canvasses is the large group portrait of the Sharp family, known as much for their love of music as amateur performers, and music patrons as their philanthropic projects.²⁰

But there is still a lack of hard evidence linking Zoffany to the Smith College painting. All of Zoffany's records were destroyed after he died, and there is a gap of more than a hundred years unaccounted for in the painting's history. Recent art historians are not as certain about the painting's attribution as their predecessors.²¹ In recent years art connoisseurship has come to rely increasingly on objective evidence from material evidence as

much as historical references. Still, even if a chemical analysis of the pigments, an analysis of the weave of the canvas, and a microscopic examination of the brush technique were to reveal similarities to other authenticated Zoffany paintings, at best it may be sufficient to declare status as “Attributed to Zoffany” or “School of Zoffany”—or at worst leave the identity of the painter open to speculation.



Since his student days in Sydney Australia, Geoffrey Burgess has had a passion for all things to do with the oboe. Discovering the baroque oboe, he has worked over the course of his career with leading early music ensembles in Australia, Europe, and the US. For twenty years he was associated with the Paris-based company Les Arts Florissants, and he has appeared with all the major early music ensembles in the U.S., and Canada. In addition to serving as Oboe Editor for the IDRS, Geoffrey’s contributions to the history, repertoire, construction, performance, and culture of the oboe can be found in numerous reference works, including the New Grove Dictionary. The Oboe (Yale University Press, 2004) which Geoffrey co-authored with Bruce Haynes, is the standard reference work in English, and a French translation is in preparation. His latest book, a historical novel on the life of Bach’s oboist, The Thorn of the Honey Locust was released in February 2023. Geoffrey is principal oboe with the Washington Bach Consort, he lives in Philadelphia, and teaches at the Eastman School of Music.

Endnotes

- 1 It was used as the cover illustration of a special issue of *Early Music* dedicated to double-reed instruments in 1988. This year, it adorned the cover of a new edition of a concerto by the early eighteenth-century Italian composer Antonio Lotti (Concerto in g minor, edited by M. Talbot, Edition HH Ltd., 2023). The choice of the image was the publisher’s, made against the editor’s better judgment (private communication from M. Talbot, April 13, 2023).
- 2 Information found in dossier at Smith Art Museum.
- 3 Numerous variant spellings of Eiffert are found in contemporary documents, and his first names were occasionally reversed.
- 4 “The Oxford Music School and the collection of portraits formerly preserved there,” in *The Musical Antiquary* 4/1 (1913): 143–59, at 156–57. Talbot has proposed that Teeds was not local, as Poole asserted, but likely Johann Ludwig Tietz, a German painter known to have been in London in 1758. The same artist painted a portrait of K.F. Abel, also owned by the Music Faculty of Oxford University (“Philip Peter Eiffert: a German oboist and composer in 18th-century London,” *Musical Times*, spring 2023, 3–21, at p. 4).
- 5 For this, I used the app Face ++.
- 6 See www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1954-0809-1. Smith’s original was sold by Cheffins, Cambridge, UK see <https://www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/charles-loraine-smith-british-1751-1835-a-sunday--625-c-a8c49009a6> (accessed May 13, 2023).
- 7 This portrait is reproduced in Blake Johnson’s article about Fischer, “Virtuosity and Taciturnity,” *DR* 44/1 (2021): 101.
- 8 “Something More about Straight-Top Oboes,” *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* 47 (2021): 29–91. Like my identification of the Smith College his is

- based on facial similarities. The engraving can be seen at https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1867-0309-573.
- 9 “Philip Peter Eiffert.”
 - 10 Talbot has also identified “Teeds” as Johann Ludwig Tietz, a German artist who also painted the portrait of the famous German gambist Karl Friedrich Abel in the Oxford University collection.
 - 11 Quoted in Talbot, “Eiffert: A German oboist,” 5.
 - 12 See Donald Burrows, “Lists of musicians for performances of Handel’s *Messiah* at the Foundling Hospital, 1754–1777,” *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 43 (2010): 85–109.
 - 13 Relation to the better-known composer and violinist Charles Frederick (1739/40–1825) unknown.
 - 14 “Seinem würdigen alten Freund H. Eiffert in welchen Er seijt mehr also 30 Jahren sin gänzliches zutrauen hatte≥”, *Johann Gaspard Weiss: Lebens und Reisebericht eines Musikers aus dem 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. T. Bonz and E. Michelon (Beeswkwow: Ortus, 2012), 74, 107.
 - 15 Ibid. 108, 110.
 - 16 Published in a modern edition by Michael Talbot, Bicester, UK: Edition HH, 2022.
 - 17 This is discussed by Samantha Owens in her lecture “Matthew Dubourg, Redmond Simpson and the Accumulation of Wealth by Professional Musicians in Eighteenth-Century Ireland and England,” presented on February 10, 2021, as part of the Royal Irish Academy of Music Lecture Series, and available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=599Q-57YimM>. See also Katherine Hogg, “Redmond Simpson: Musician, accountant, and art collector,” *Handbook for Studies in Eighteenth-century Music* 22 (2018): 47–57.
 - 18 The most detailed biography of Zoffany is *Johan Zoffany 1733–1810* (Yale University Press, 2011), released the same year as *Johan Zoffany RA: Society Observed*, ed. Martin Postle (Yale University Press, 2011), a catalogue of a major international exhibition of Zoffany’s work.
 - 19 Hannah M. Templeton, “The Mozarts in London: Exploring the Family’s Professional, Social and Intellectual Networks in 1764–1765” (PhD diss., King’s College London, 2016), 51, 56.
 - 20 See Hester Grant’s remarkable study of the family, which takes the Zoffany family portrait as its centerpiece *The Good Sharps: the brothers and sister who remade their world* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2020).
 - 21 Jessica David, conservator at the Yale Center for British Art who has had the opportunity to undertake a close examination of several paintings of Zoffany feels that the Smith College painting “lacks the crispness and luminosity of Zoffany’s portraiture... Zoffany tended to let his white (invariably double-layer) grounds to peek through the flesh tones, lending a bright buzz and clarity to his palette... Although a fine painting, the *Eiffert* has a softness to its contours that don’t sing ‘Zoffany’ to me; also, it *appears* to have been painted on a darker (brown-reddish) ground color” (email, May 9, 2023).