

The Early Clarinet: A Practical Guide

This practical guide is intended for all clarinetists with a desire to investigate music of earlier periods. It contains practical help on both the acquisition and the playing of historical clarinets, while players of modern instruments will find much advice on style, approach and techniques which combine to make up a well-grounded period interpretation. The book presents and interprets evidence from primary sources and offers suggestions for further reading and investigation. Most importantly, a series of case studies which include the music of Handel, Mozart and Brahms helps recreate performances which will be as close as possible to the composer's original intention. As the early clarinet becomes increasingly popular worldwide, this guide, written by one of its foremost interpreters, will ensure that players at all levels – professional, students or amateurs – are fully aware of historical considerations in their performance.

COLIN LAWSON is one of Europe's leading period clarinetists. As principal clarinet of The English Concert, The Hanover Band and Collegium Musicum 90, he has recorded extensively and toured worldwide. An avid researcher into performance practice and the history of the clarinet, he is editor of *The Cambridge Companion to the Clarinet*, author of *Mozart: Clarinet Concerto* and *Brahms: Clarinet Quintet* in the series Cambridge Music Handbooks and co-author of *The Historical Performance of Music: An Introduction* in the present series. He currently holds the Chair of Performance Studies at Goldsmiths College in the University of London.

Cambridge Handbooks to the Historical Performance of Music

GENERAL EDITORS: Colin Lawson and Robin Stowell

During the last three decades historical performance has become part of mainstream musical life. However, there is as yet no one source from which performers and students can find an overview of the significant issues or glean practical information pertinent to a particular instrument. This series of handbooks guides the modern performer towards the investigation and interpretation of evidence found both in early performance treatises and in the mainstream repertoire. Books on individual instruments contain chapters on historical background, equipment, technique and musical style and are illustrated by case studies of significant works in the repertoire. An introductory book provides a more general survey of issues common to all areas of historical performance and will also inform a wide range of students and music lovers.

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The Early Clarinet A Practical Guide

COLIN LAWSON



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Acknowledgements for kind permission to reproduce illustrations are due to the Bibliothèque Nationale (Fig. 3.1) and the British Library (Fig. 7.1).

Preface

This practical guide is intended for all clarinet devotees with an interest in historical performance, whether as professionals, students, enthusiastic concert-goers, discriminating listeners or players of modern instruments seeking advice about those matters of style, approach and general technique which combine to make up a well-grounded period interpretation. The art of music is indeed notoriously difficult to describe in words, and there were inevitably numerous conventions which theorists simply took for granted. However, primary sources can be a great inspiration, whether on a philosophical or a practical level. Above all, we should never forget that in Mozart's day the performer's foremost aim was to move an audience.

Treatises can illuminate the history of music in a variety of unexpected ways. For example, Joseph Fröhlich's *Vollständige theoretisch-praktische Musikschule* (Bonn, 1810–11) has the following advice for the wind-player. He recommends a moderate life-style and avoidance of anything which could damage the chest, such as running, riding on horseback or excessive indulgence in hot drinks. One should not practise after a meal and so the afternoon is best avoided; furthermore, one should not drink immediately after practising if the lungs are still warm, since this has been the cause of early deaths with many people. In the case of dry lips – very bad for the embouchure – the mouth should be rinsed, preferably with an alcoholic beverage to give the lips new strength. Crucially, Fröhlich's advice needs to be interpreted with the original conditions and tastes in mind, since he was writing at a time when a performer's continued good health was an altogether more fragile matter than it is today.

The primary aim of this book is to present and interpret evidence from such sources on matters which include technique, style and expression, and to offer suggestions for further reading and investigation. There is also guidance on many other relevant issues, as well as advice regarding the

acquisition of appropriate instruments and accessories. The parent volume to the series, *The Historical Performance of Music: An Introduction* (co-authored by the present writer with Robin Stowell), deals with the more general, large-scale practical issues that need to be addressed in connection with the preparation and execution of performances which are historically informed, yet at the same time individual and vivid. It happens that one of its case studies is Mozart's magnificent Serenade K361 for thirteen instruments, a cornerstone in the repertory of any clarinetist or basset horn player.

For the series as a whole, the core study period is c. 1700–c. 1900, a time-span within which most important developments in the history of the clarinet took place. Each of the volumes includes a number of case studies, demonstrating the application of the technical, interpretative and other principles discussed in different performing situations and in various musical genres. In Chapter 6 will be found discussion of specific works by Handel, Stamitz, Mozart, Weber and Brahms. This is intended to provide an historical basis for artistic decision-making which has as its goal the recreation of a performance as close as possible to the composer's original conception.

My own experience of playing early clarinets has been stimulating on a variety of levels. Primarily, I believe that engagement with original conditions has the capacity radically to expand one's musical horizons. Of course, different historical clarinets present satisfying technical challenges and their variety of response is pleasurable both on a purely physical and on an aesthetic level. In particular, I believe that the variety and range of nuance available from many early clarinets is well-nigh impossible to match on the modern Boehm instrument. Many years ago, as a novice of the early clarinet, I fell into the trap of supposing that period instruments were somehow more difficult to play, even within their own particular repertory, an argument I should now find it difficult to sustain. As historical performance has become more widespread, the sheer popularity of the modern clarinet has filtered down to early instruments at the hands of players from various backgrounds. Inevitably, some fine players of Boehm-system clarinets are content to overload their early clarinets with mechanism and to pay scant attention to considerations of style. As will be emphasised in the following chapters, an approach which merely allows

practical expediency to predominate is bound to be limited in its aspirations and achievements.

It is a pleasure to thank a number of friends and colleagues for their help and advice in the preparation of this book. Having lost both my parents during the gestation of this project, I am acutely aware that my own interest in the clarinet was originally begun, sustained and nourished with their unstinting support. After initial academic interest in the history of the chalumeau and early clarinet, I was first inspired to complementary practical endeavours by collaborations on Spanish concert platforms with my friend and erstwhile pupil, Carles Riera. Later immersion in period performance brought me into close contact with Nicholas Shackleton, who has always been generous enough to place at my disposal his unrivalled knowledge of surviving instruments world-wide. The Cambridge maker Daniel Bangham alerted me to the expressive potential of boxwood clarinets by producing for me many fine copies from different eras of the instrument's history. I am also grateful to Ingrid Pearson for writing Chapter 4 and for innumerable other important details in the text. Last but not least, Penny Souster at Cambridge University Press has been characteristically tactful in creating that sense of urgency which no publication can afford to be without during each stage of its preparation.

In the following chapters, pitch registers are indicated in the following manner: middle C just below the treble staff is indicated as c' , with each successive octave higher shown as c' , c'' , c''' etc. and the octave below as c . For fingerings, L = left hand, R = right hand, th = thumb and finger 1 = index.