

BMC 14 - Baroque Oboe Concertos

Though there is some uncertainty as to when Handel's Oboe Concerto on this disc was composed, we may rely on Charles Burney, a great Handel supporter, who in 1785 wrote in his *Account of the Commemoration of Handel* that from 1717 to 1720 Handel was employed at Cannons, as *Maestro di Capella* to the Duke of Chandos. Here he produced, as well as the wonderful Chandos Anthems, "the chief part of his Hautbois Concertos..." The Concerto we hear here was part of a group of *Concertos for Various Instruments*.

The dates and places of composition of **Telemann's** Concerto in f-minor, as indeed with his 170 surviving Concertos, cannot likewise be precisely determined. However it may be conjectured that many may have been composed during his tenure in Frankfurt (1712-1720), where he took up duties as Director of Municipal Music and also as Capellmeister of the Barfüßerkirche. Together with his activities as director of the "Frauenstein", a musical society in that same city, which presented weekly concerts, Telemann's new posts suited his talents very well. He composed occasional music for civic ceremonies, five year-long cycles of Church Cantatas, Oratorios, Orchestral Music and a wealth of Chamber Music, much of which was published. Only the opportunity to produce Operas was lacking, though he continued to supply works for the Leipzig Opera.

During this period he was also appointed Capellmeister to the Prince of Bayreuth. Some of his Concertos do exist in copies by Christoph Graupner, whose Darmstadt orchestra frequently supplemented Telemann's own Frankfurt Court forces. The present Oboe Concerto in f-minor for example exists in manuscript parts both in Darmstadt and Dresden. It may thus have been composed at this time, for entertainment at Court or by the Frauenstein Musical Society.

Alessandro Marcello brought out a set of Six Oboe Concertos in 1708; the present c-minor Concerto however was composed rather later and published in Amsterdam in about 1717 as part of a collection of concertos for various instruments by different composers. It was from this that confusion subsequently arose concerning the identity of the present Concerto's composer. At one time it was credited to Vivaldi, then later to Alessandro's even more famous younger brother Benedetto (1686-1739). Bach transcribed this Concerto for Solo Harpsichord (BWV 974). Today it is generally accepted as being the work of Alessandro Marcello, whose name was mentioned in the original publication. The Concerto was originally presented in d-minor; a later edition being transposed to c-minor. Alessandro Marcello sang, played the violin, and composed music under his academic pseudonym "Eterio Stinfalico". He and his younger brother Benedetto were taught to play by their father, a Venetian Senator, and took part in the weekly concerts held in their home. Both were later admitted to the Accademia dell'Arcadia in Rome.

Without any undue reflection on the Oboe Concertos already noted, it has often been suggested however, and not without reasonable grounds, that Albinoni was the real originator of the Oboe Concerto in the sense of a concerto written specifically for the oboe as opposed to "any melodic instrument" as was so often the case in Baroque music, and written moreover with the oboe's particular stylistic and performance requirements in mind.

Tomaso Albinoni, eldest son of a wealthy paper merchant, was born in Venice in 1671. At an early age he became proficient as a singer and, more notably, as a violinist, soon turning his hand to composition.

Until his father's death in 1709, he was able to cultivate music more for pleasure than for profit, referring to himself as "dilettante"- a term which in 18th century Italy was totally devoid of unfavorable connotations. Under the terms of his father's Will he was relieved of the duty (which he would normally have assumed as eldest son) to take charge of the family business, and this task devolved on to his younger brothers. Henceforth he was to be a full-time musician, who according to one report, at one time ran a successful academy of singing. He resided in Venice all his life, though visits to Florence (1703) and Munich (1722) are recorded. After a long period of inactivity he died in 1751 (the oft-quoted date of 1750 is incorrect).

In his youth Albinoni flirted unsuccessfully with the composition of church music. He first came to public notice as a composer when, in 1694, his first Opera, *Zenobia, regina de Palmireni*, was produced in Venice and his first collection of instrumental music (Sonata a tre, Op.1) appeared. Thereafter he divided his attention almost equally

between vocal composition (operas, serenatas and cantatas) and instrumental composition (sonatas and concertos

His vocal music circulated only in manuscript, apart from twelve Cantatas published in 1702 as his op.4 and one Cantata that appeared elsewhere, and was comparatively little known outside Italy. His instrumental music (108 works published as Op. 1-3 and 5-10, plus 17 works published in “unauthorized” collections and about 50 authenticated works remaining in manuscript) enjoyed a vogue in northern Europe, particularly through the activity of publishing houses in Amsterdam and London.

Albinoni's Oboe Concertos, and in particular the collection known as Op.7 issued by Estienne Roger of Amsterdam in 1715, are significant in terms of the wider development of music. Prior to Op.7, Albinoni had not published any compositions with parts for wind instruments. The concerto, in particular, had been regarded as the province of stringed instruments. The Six Concertos in Albinoni's Op.2 (1700) and his Twelve Concertos Op. 5 (1707) feature - only in certain works and movements, it is true - a principal (i.e. solo) violin. These early concertos were progressive in establishing a cycle of three movements (fast-slow-fast) as the norm.