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Origins and birth of the clarinet

It is a remarkable fact that little more than a hundred years before the composition of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto K622, there had yet been no inclusion of single-reed instruments in art music. Despite a long history in folk music, no evidence of clarinet-types in written scores occurs until just before 1700, and this accounts for the clarinet's reputation as the youngest member of the orchestral wind section. In fact, the baroque flute, oboe and bassoon had been developed not many years before, and were featured in the orchestra by Lully (1632–87); however, these instruments were more closely related to their antecedents, both in design and in musical usage.

The early years of the clarinet are especially relevant to a study of Mozart's Concerto, because the principal registers featured and contrasted so effectively within its solo part existed for many years as two distinctive instruments. The starting point for any discussion of the birth of the chalumeau and the clarinet remains J. G. Doppelmayr's *Historische Nachricht von den Nürnbergischen Mathematicis und Kunstlern* (Nuremberg, 1730), whose biography of the maker Johann Christoph Denner (1655–1707) contains the celebrated statement: 'At the beginning of the current century, he invented a new kind of pipe-work, the so-called clarinet, to the great delight of all music-lovers, discovered again from ancient times the already well-known stick or rackett bassoon, and at length presented an improved chalumeau'. It has been observed that Doppelmayr is elsewhere not always a wholly reliable source, that he tended to exaggerate the achievements of local craftsmen and that he failed to assess the contributions of other makers to the development of the chalumeau and clarinet.¹ But the most serious problem is his failure to make clear the relationship of the two instruments and Denner's involvement with each. Nevertheless, no evidence has emerged to contradict Doppelmayr's claim, which finds support in other sources such as Bonanni's *Gabinetto armonico* (Rome, 1722), Walther's *Musicalisches Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1732) and Majer's *Museum musicum* (Schwäbisch Hall, 1732).

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These sources describe a two-keyed chalumeau with recorder footjoint resembling a specimen by Denner which survives in Munich. Its mouthpiece and bore were designed to produce effectively a fundamental range of an eleventh or twelfth. Majer identified a family of soprano, alto or quart, tenor and bass chalumeaux, which were hard to blow because of their difficult embouchure. Musical sources show that Majer's four chalumeaux corresponded in length to sopranino, descant, treble and tenor recorders, though sounding an octave lower on account of the acoustical properties of the cylindrical stopped pipe. Majer noted that the fingerings closely correspond with those of the recorder, and it seems likely that this was the instrument which gave rise to the chalumeau, perhaps during attempts to increase its dynamic range.

On the other hand, Bonanni's clarinet (*clarone*) was two-and-a-half palms long, terminating in a trumpet-like bell three inches in width, and with a further differentiating feature from the chalumeau: its two key-holes were no longer diametrically opposite; instead, the thumb-key hole was further towards the mouthpiece, as with the modern speaker key. On Bonanni's evidence, it would be possible to take Doppelmayr's ambiguous statement at face value; perhaps Denner extended the range of the chalumeau and then proceeded to develop the clarinet by means of a smaller mouthpiece and resited speaker key, projecting its characteristic upper register via a bell rather than a mere recorder-type footjoint. Bonanni described its sound as high and vigorous, whilst significantly Majer and Walther observed that from afar it sounded like a trumpet, a characterisation nicely reflected in the earliest clarinet repertoire. Two-keyed clarinets in C and in D by Denner's son Jacob survive in Berlin, Brussels and Nuremberg.²

Walther and Majer ascribed the invention of the clarinet to a Nuremberger 'at the beginning of this century', information which patently derives from Doppelmayr, and suggests an air of uncertainty even in the 1730s. There is a long tradition of writings which specifically mention the date of 1690 or thereabouts, an early example being C. G. Murr's *Beschreibung der vornehmsten Sehenswürdigkeiten in Nürnberg* (Nuremberg, 1778). Recent research has unearthed various references to the chalumeau from this time; for example, 'Ein Chor Chalimo von 4. Stücken' was purchased from Nuremberg in 1687 for the Duke of Römheld-Sachsen, according to Herbert Heyde's 1976 catalogue of the wind instruments at the Bachhaus in Eisenach.³ Usage of the chalumeau in Germany is documented from shortly afterwards in an anonymous collection now in Darmstadt, inscribed 'Hannover 1690' and entitled 'XII^e Concert Charivari ou nopce de village a 4 Violon, 2 Chalumeaux

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3 Pollissons et un Tambour les Viollons en Vielle'. In an autobiographical sketch Telemann observed that during his career at Hildesheim (1697–1701) he became acquainted with the oboe, flute, 'Schalümo' and gamba, amongst other instruments. Furthermore, it is significant that in 1696 J. C. Denner and the woodwind maker Johann Schell successfully petitioned the Nuremberg city council to be recognised as master craftsmen and to be granted permission to make for sale the '... French musical instruments ... which were invented about twelve years ago [i.e. in 1684] in France'. Whilst the document specifies only recorder and oboe, it is surely not unreasonable to surmise that the single-reed chalumeau was also one of the new instruments.⁴ Earliest documentary evidence of the clarinet post-dates the development of the chalumeau by some years. A 1710 invoice for instruments ordered from Jacob Denner for the Duke of Gronsfeld in Nuremberg includes besides chalumeaux '2 Clarinettes' – the first known reference to the clarinet in any source.

Repertoire for chalumeau and two-keyed clarinet

The chalumeau repertoire is extensive and varied, with contributions from a number of pre-eminent German composers, including Fasch, Graupner and Telemann.⁵ Handel, Vivaldi and Molter were among other composers who were acquainted with both chalumeau and clarinet and clearly differentiated their idioms. However, it is the long Viennese tradition of writing for the chalumeau which bears directly upon a study of Mozart. The instrument was used as early as the first decade of the century, took part in the Vienna versions of Gluck's *Orfeo* (1762) and *Alceste* (1767), and survived into the 1770s. The soprano chalumeau (range $f - bb''$ or c''') became a favourite obbligato colour, notably in operas and oratorios written between 1708 and 1728 by the court Kapellmeister Johann Joseph Fux (1660–1741).⁶ The chalumeau generally appears as an alternative to the oboe in pastoral or love scenes, either in pairs or with the flute or recorder; this distinction between the character of double and single reeds nicely anticipates Mozart's treatment of the woodwinds (and prominent clarinet writing) in *Così fan tutte*. Significantly, Köchel's biography of Fux (Vienna, 1872) cites two references written by the composer in 1718 and 1721 for court oboists who also played the chalumeau. From 1706 until the 1730s the soprano chalumeau made regular obbligato appearances in the works of contemporaries such as Ariosti, Bonno, the brothers Bononcini, Caldara, Conti, Porsile and Reutter; the Emperor Joseph I wrote an aria with chalumeau obbligato for insertion in Ziani's opera *Chilonida* (1709). In 1707 an amusing vignette finds a place in the libretto to Bononcini's *L'Etearco*,

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written for the Vienna carnival that year. During Act III an exchange takes place between two comic characters, in which the remark, ‘I’ll try to find both bassoons and oboes’, is met with the retort, ‘I’d like there to be chalumeaux as well’. Thus the chalumeau was perceived as an attractive novelty, to be distinguished from the traditional woodwinds.

No evidence of the chalumeau in Vienna during the 1740s and 1750s has yet come to light, so the circumstances of Gluck’s revival remain something of a mystery. The list of court players compiled by Köchel reveals the survival into old age of oboists who must have known the instrument and perhaps were in a position to influence pupils. Repertoire with chalumeau from the 1770s includes ballets by Aspelmayr (1728–86) and Starzer (1726–87), as well as Gassmann’s late opera *I rovinati*. The first known appearance in Vienna of the clarinettist brothers Anton and Johann Stadler was in 1773, but around this time divertimenti with chalumeau were still being composed by the generation of Dittersdorf (1739–99), Gassmann (1729–74) and Pichl (1741–1805). Above all, the concerto by Hoffmeister (1754–1812) testifies to the ability of a native virtuoso even at this late stage. Viennese enthusiasm for the chalumeau at the threshold of the classical period has never been fully explained, but is confirmed in a magnificent if belated tribute by Daniel Schubart, whose *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (written in 1784–5 but published only in 1806) observes: ‘its tone is so interesting, individual and endlessly pleasant, that the whole world of music would suffer a grievous loss if the instrument ever fell into disuse’.⁷ It is certainly true that the sound of the chalumeau can never be reproduced even on a clarinet of Mozart’s day, though the limited compass made its demise inevitable once the clarinet became fluent in both its principal registers.

A tenuous if important link exists between Mozart and the chalumeau. This relates to a ‘Musica da Cammera’ by Starzer, which was scored for two chalumeaux or flutes, five trumpets and timpani. The dedication ‘alla Regina di Moscovia’ suggests the composer’s St Petersburg period (1760–8) as the time of composition; not long afterwards Leopold Mozart copied out all five movements, specifying only flutes for the upper parts. He added arrangements of five numbers by Gluck (of which one is lost), and the surviving movements were subsequently attributed to Mozart *filis* as K187 (later 159c); their correct identity was revealed only in 1937.⁸ However, Starzer’s music did inspire Mozart’s own identically scored Divertimento K188 (240b), and the whole episode offers more than a suggestion that Mozart was at least aware of the chalumeau, if only as an obsolete curiosity.

Whilst a mere half dozen chalumeaux survive, a recent listing of two-keyed

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clarinets in various collections numbers as many as thirty-one.⁹ Conversely, rather less early repertoire for the clarinet has yet come to light, nor can we yet be certain of the precise contexts in which the instrument was played. The list of music compiled by Albert Rice for *The Baroque Clarinet* (Oxford, 1992) comprises twenty-eight works by as many as thirteen composers. Despite historically significant concertos by Valentin Rathgeber (1682–1750) and a trio by one Ferdinand Kölbl, the focus of interest today remains Handel, Vivaldi and Molter, even though orchestral C and D clarinet parts have been found in the works of Caldara (1718), Conti (1719), Faber (1720), Telemann (1721, 1728) and Graupner (1754). Vivaldi's concertos RV559 and RV560 are scored for pairs of C clarinets and oboes, and besides a lively appreciation of the upper register, show a delight in exploiting the lugubrious qualities of the lower register. This difference in timbre was subsequently noted by the German author Jacob Adlung, whose *Anleitung zu der Musikalischen Gelahrtheit* (Erfurt, 1758) noted: 'The clarinet is well known. In the low register it sounds differently from the high range, and therefore one calls it chalumeau.' But no other composer before Mozart realised the distinction quite so effectively as Vivaldi. A third concerto RV556 'per la Solennità di San Lorenzo' combines aspects of the solo concerto with the concerto grosso, incorporating a large wind section with recorders, oboes, clarinets ('clarenì') and bassoon.

Vivaldi's espousal of both chalumeau and clarinet is significant, since he continued to write for chalumeau even after discovering the full range of the clarinet, whose low register must have seemed less even and more veiled in sound. Documentary comparisons of the two instruments are rare, though Garsault in *Notionaire, ou mémorial raisonné* (Paris, 1761) noted the similarity of embouchure. The principal sources for playing technique relating to the two-keyed clarinet are Majer (1732) and Eisel's *Musicus Autodidaktos* (Erfurt, 1738), both of whom include fingering charts. One of Eisel's questions is 'What type of clef is used for the clarinet? One usually uses the G [treble] clef, in which case the instrument is treated in the clarino or trumpet style, yet sometimes the soprano and alto clefs are found, in which case the clarinet is handled like a chalumeau.' This nicely reflects Vivaldi's aesthetic, if not his actual practice.

A broadening of the expressive range of the two-keyed D clarinet occurs within the six concertos of Johann Melchior Molter (1696–1765) preserved in Karlsruhe.¹⁰ A very high tessitura to *g*^{'''} is employed, with notes below *c*^{''} usually treated in a purely triadic manner. Rice summarised the technical devices as wide leaps of more than one octave, triplet semiquaver figures and demisemiquaver and hemidemisemiquaver flourishes, as well as a number of

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grace-notes and trills.¹¹ But it is the slow movements (where in trumpet concertos the soloist was traditionally silent) which exhibit a cantabile and elegant *galant* style of clarinet writing which was gradually to replace the old trumpet associations. The tessitura of the Molter concertos already assumes a different design of clarinet from the early Denner specimens; indeed, there is in Nuremberg a later two-keyed clarinet by J. G. Zencker whose characteristics (including smaller mouthpiece) make it an ideal vehicle for these works. At this period we are also at the threshold of developments in mechanism; a further (third) key on some surviving clarinets extended the lower range downwards a semitone from *f* to *e*, which became the norm in Mozart's day.

The classical clarinet

After the middle of the eighteenth century the linking of clarinet and trumpet sound – the Italian term 'clarinetto' is a simple diminutive of 'clarino' – gave way to a radical redefining of the aesthetics of clarinet writing towards emulation of the human voice. This coincided with a period which by the time of Mozart's maturity established the five-keyed clarinet (though the pace and progress of this development was by no means uniform throughout Europe), and brought about changes in design which encouraged a greater flexibility throughout the compass. The improvement of response in the lowest (chalumeau) register was to prove especially significant by the time of Mozart's collaboration with Anton Stadler.

Paris

Mozart's early travels brought him to several European cities where the clarinet was gaining an important foothold. He first visited Paris for five months from November 1763. 'Clarinet: sorte de hautbois' must have been the briefest entry (as well as one of the least accurate) in the *Encyclopédie* compiled by Diderot and d'Alembert (17 volumes, Paris, 1751–65), but doubtless reflected general perceptions of the instrument at the time it appeared some ten years before Mozart's arrival. Nevertheless, important developments were already taking place. Archives of the Paris Opéra show that two German clarinetists were paid as extra players for twenty-five performances of Rameau's opera *Zoroastre* (1749). Since there is no indication of clarinets in the score, their parts probably doubled those for violin or oboe,

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as is actually indicated in an autograph score of *Les Boréades*. However, in *Acante et Céphise* (1751) prominent clarinet parts occur in as many as thirteen sections, scored not only for clarinets in C and D (whose usage by other composers we have already observed), but for the longer, more mellow clarinets in A. Throughout the opera clarinets are usually associated with horns, whose favoured key of D contains two clearly differentiated styles: for the clarino idiom found in the Act II aria 'L'amour est heureux' D clarinets are preferred, whereas in more lyrical numbers such as the Act II *entrée* and the *entr'acte* between Acts II and III, A clarinets are used.¹²

Much of the later activity centred upon the clarinet in the 1750s involved the work of the Mannheim composer Johann Stamitz (1717–57), who worked in Paris for a year from September 1754. A number of symphonies by him with clarinets and horns were played during that decade, probably including at least one example from the collection *La Melodia Germanica* published by Venier in Paris (1758). The title page of this collection, which also contains music by Wagenseil, Kohaut and Richter, expresses a clear preference for the clarinet, stating of the symphonies that 'in place of clarinets, they may be played with two oboes, flutes or violins'.¹³ Symphonies with clarinets and horns by Ruggi and by Schencker were performed in 1760 and 1761 respectively.¹⁴

Another important German connection with the Paris clarinet scene was the *Essai d'instruction à l'usage de ceux qui composent pour la clarinette et le cor* (Paris, 1764) by Valentin Roeser. The continuing limitations of the four-keyed clarinet outside the tonalities of its two registers is reflected in Roeser's listing of as many as seven sizes of clarinet, pitched in G, A, B \flat , C, D, E and F. In Francoeur's *Diapason général* of 1772, the list extended to nine, including clarinets in B \natural and in E \flat . Significantly, Roeser drew attention to the particular sound-quality of certain members of the family, such as the mellow (and rare) G clarinet. Within the *Essai* appeared a short three-movement quartet for pairs of B \flat clarinets and E \flat horns, of which Roeser writes: 'We played this piece in the presence of Mr Stamitz, during his journey to Paris . . .'.¹⁵ The classical (if straightforward) idioms and choice of B \flat clarinets are especially significant features. The subject of individual clarinet pitches was addressed in the article on the instrument in the *Encyclopédie* supplement of 1776. The author F. D. Castillon (*fils*) makes it clear that the A clarinet was the instrument in normal usage, but that it was converted into B \flat by the employment of alternative middle joints. This is the earliest indication of the pre-eminence of today's standard pair of A and B \flat clarinets. As Eric Halfpenny has written:

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The French bias in favour of the A clarinet, playing best in medium sharp keys, was perhaps influenced by the classic pitch (D basso) of the *cor de chasse*, whose association with clarinets came fairly early upon the scene in France. The horn itself, however, was a comparatively late arrival in concerted music there, so that, while in England and elsewhere crooked horns were already being played in the flat keys which best suited oboes and bassoons, the original D tonality may have remained influential for longer in France.¹⁶

We may note in passing that Mozart's 'Paris' Symphony K297/300a, dating from his second visit to the city in 1778, represents his introduction to the A clarinet, which he was to elevate to new heights a decade later.

The relative profile of each clarinet clearly underwent some development during the classical period, coinciding with fewer appearances of the instrument in sharp tonalities. Vandebroek's *Traité général* (c. 1795), designed for the use of composers, lends strength to the evidence for the contemporary use of clarinets pitched in four tonalities only: A, B \flat , B \natural and C. In confirmation of this, Lefèvre explained that the previously used seven sizes of clarinet had now been replaced with two: a C clarinet was converted by means of a *corps de rechange* to B \natural , and the B \flat converted into A. French preference for the C clarinet around the turn of the century was noted by Backofen in his tutor of c. 1803 (*Anweisung zur Klarinette*) in the course of his own advocacy of the B \flat .¹⁷ Lefèvre's tutor of 1802 (*Méthode de clarinette*) apparently confirms this (at least in relation to didactic material), since his twelve sonatas in the appendix were notated for C clarinet, with the qualification that they could be transferred to B \flat clarinet by transposing the continuo down a tone. However, solo works such as those by Michel Yost testify to the established supremacy of the B \flat instrument; Pleyel's concerto, published in 1797, is exceptional for its date in its scoring for C clarinet with alternative solo parts for flute or cello.

Mannheim

Mozart visited Mannheim during the winter of 1777 and again for a month the following year. The court orchestra enjoyed a reputation unrivalled in Europe, and was described by the historian Charles Burney as 'an army of generals, equally fit to plan a battle as to fight it'. Schubart was moved to observe, 'Its *forte* is like thunder, its crescendo like a great waterfall, its diminuendo the splashing of a crystalline river disappearing into the distance, its *piano* a breath of spring'. Mozart quickly became friendly with the Konzertmeister Cannabich and others, including the Kapellmeister Holzbauer

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and the flautist J. B. Wendling. Although he expressed an interest in remaining in Mannheim, it soon became clear that no position was to be made available for him.

Clarinets had become officially part of the court orchestra sometime after July 1759. As we have noted, the celebrated Mannheim composer Johann Stamitz had already encountered the clarinet during his stay in Paris, where he conducted the private orchestra of the wealthy patron A.-J. -J. le Riche de la Pouplinière at his palace at Passy. The Parisian writer Ancelet was so impressed by the combination of horns and clarinets (probably as a result of hearing Stamitz's works) that he stated, 'The horns please still more when they accompany clarinets, instruments unknown till now in France and which have on our hearts and on our ears rights which were unknown to us. Of what use they could be to our composers in their music!'¹⁸ It seems likely that the Clarinet Concerto by Stamitz was written in Paris for a virtuoso who could handle its substantial technical demands. The choice of B \flat clarinet as solo instrument in such an early work is highly significant and marks the beginning of its almost universal dominance as a concerto instrument. Stamitz's Concerto was first brought to public attention in 1936 in an article by Peter Gradenwitz.¹⁹ Its identification as a work of Johann rather than his son Carl (which has now found universal acceptance) is based on stylistic rather than documentary evidence, the Regensburg manuscript merely ascribing it 'del Sigⁿ Stamitz'. In support of this attribution Gradenwitz drew attention to the concerto's heroic gestures, varied repetitions of material, use of thematic development and structural discipline. The degree of solo virtuosity is in fact greater than in most later Mannheim concertos, incorporating use of the low register and some very characteristic figuration, which (unlike some contemporary concertos) make the solo part entirely idiomatic for the clarinet and quite unsuitable for any other instrument. Leaps range over more than two octaves and there is also some high writing up to e''', which resembles Molter's clarino-type writing. It is significant that the Adagio relies for its effect on florid gesture rather than the slow cantabile cultivated by later composers. The final Poco presto, whilst typically less demanding than the opening movement, incorporates wide-ranging gestures which show a real feeling for appropriate idiom.

Carl Stamitz (1745–1801) was a leading figure among the second generation of Mannheim orchestral composers, both prolific and cosmopolitan in style, a widely travelled performer and a major contributor to solo literature for the clarinet. His works include a number of quartets for clarinet with string trio, of which the earliest set of six Op. 8 was published in Paris in 1773. He

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cultivated extensively the genre of the *symphonie concertante*, including two works for clarinet and bassoon,²⁰ one work (1778) for two clarinets or clarinet and violin, and a *Concerto per 7 stromenti principali* for flute, oboe, C clarinet, two horns, violin and cello. Identification and numbering of Stamitz's solo clarinet concertos has been inconsistent, though recent scholarship lists a total of ten, of which five were originally published between 1777 and 1793.²¹ All are for B \flat clarinet, with the exception of a concerto in F, for which C clarinet and oboe are specified as alternatives. A number of the concertos may have been written in collaboration with the virtuoso (and composer) Joseph Beer, whose name is included on at least one title page.²²

Carl Stamitz's concertos and their solo writing were extensively analysed by Helmut Boese in his dissertation *Die Klarinette als Soloinstrument in der Musik der Mannheimer Schule* (Dresden, 1940). He noted that the clarinet was an ideal vehicle for the Mannheim style, with its large range, potential for dynamic contrasts and virtuoso capabilities. The first movements are varied in form and content, whereas the finales adhere to a rondo pattern with dance or character titles such as *allemande*, *menuet* or *à la chasse*. The figuration is freely based on diatonic scales and arpeggios, within solo parts notated only in F and C. High notes are not characteristic, with an upper limit generally restricted to *d'''*, but occasionally ascending to *e'''*, *e'''*, *f'''* and on a single occasion *g'''*. The leaps so beloved of Mozart are already in evidence, though generally encompassing little more than two octaves. The opening movement of an E \flat concerto preserved in Darmstadt shows an integration of chalumeau figuration into the melodic contours, which again foreshadows Mozart in a quite striking fashion. However, it is entirely typical that low *alberti* figuration in the finale of the same work is accompanied by string chords, rather than supporting melodic ideas elsewhere in the texture, as became Mozart's practice. Overall, Stamitz adopts a lyricism which is uncomplicated by contrapuntal considerations and in the slow movements reveals a cantabile aspect of the clarinet which was to prove highly seductive to later composers. Despite its increasingly characterful chalumeau register, the heart of the clarinet lay within its upper register, exploited by Stamitz in an effective manner which anticipates Mozart.

A number of other composers with Mannheim associations were attracted to the clarinet. A special case is the Bohemian Franz Pokorný (1729–94), who studied with Johann Stamitz before 1745 and wrote two concertos for B \flat clarinet, of which the second is dated 1765. The solo parts are marked respectively 'per il Clarinetto primo' and 'per il Clarinetto secondo', a distinction found also in Francoeur's treatise. The second work implies an