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## Delicacy, sentimentality and intimacy: the chalumeau as 'signifier'

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*Its tone has so much interest, individuality and an endless pleasantness, that the whole world of music would suffer a grievous loss if the instrument ever fell into disuse.*

This passionate advocacy of the chalumeau by the Viennese musical theorist Daniel Schubart dates from as late as 1785. The fondness for the chalumeau in that city is confirmed by the prominent role it played in the repertory throughout the 18th century. Composers working in Vienna were amongst the most innovative in writing for the chalumeau. The following article examines some of the repertoire for chalumeau in 18th century Viennese opera, chamber, orchestral and solo literature, and its resonance within clarinet music of that period.

Johann Christoph Denner's role in the development of the chalumeau was first documented by J. G. Doppelmayr in his 1730 account of the state of mathematics and art in Nuremberg. However critically we now react to the ambiguity of Doppelmayr's text, it is certain that experimentation in the workshops of Denner, Oberländer and Kelmer during the late 17th- and early 18th centuries, was motivated by a recognition of the recorder's inability to cope dynamically within the developing orchestral medium. With its externally-fixed single reed, the resultant two-keyed chalumeau was soon to make a distinctive contribution to the literature. Indeed, we can only but blame early 18th century composers' fascination with the sonic novelty of the chalumeau for the demise of the recorder.

The earliest extant 18th century Viennese work to include a part for the chalumeau is the opera *Endimione*, composed by Giovanni Bononcini in 1706. The Bononcini brothers, Giovanni and Antonio, were active in Vienna during Joseph I's reign, from 1705-1711. The following dialogue between the characters *Delbe* and *Binda* in Act III of Giovanni Bononcini's *L'Etearco* of 1707 provides an informative contemporary report of the instrument, indicative of its favoured position amongst wind instruments:

*Delbo:* You should try to find bassoons and an oboe.  
*Binda:* I'd like to have a chalumeau as well.

No less a figure than Joseph I himself wrote an aria with chalumeau obbligato for inclusion in Ziani's opera *Chilonida* of 1709. This piece displays the Viennese preoccupation with the soprano chalumeau in contexts depicting amorous or pastoral scenes. The particularly florid writing in the example given is also a feature of obbligati by Guisepppe Porsile and Guisepppe Bonno, both of whom were working in Vienna in the first half of the 18th century.

Other composers writing for the chalumeau in the first third of the 18th century included Caldara, Conti, Camilla di Rossi and Ariosti. The most prolific and poetic chalumeau obbligati were composed by Johann Joseph Fux. Most noted for his use of the chalumeau in his nine chamber operas, Fux was the most innovative in the exploration of a variety of key signatures and time signatures.

Fux first used the instrument in *Julio Ascanio* of 1708, the only work in which he employed multiple chalumeaux. The aria 'Il vincere superbi, e a'vinti il perdonar' is scored for two soprano chalumeaux and bassoon. A characteristically Fuxian texture, where obbligato soprano chalumeau combines with viola da gamba and continuo, appears in the aria 'Non sdegnar che alte tue piante' from the opera *Il Mese di Marzo* of 1709.

Evidence that the chalumeau was played by oboists can be found in the opening chorus 'Alle Ninfe, ed ai Pastori, frà le selve' of another Fux opera, *La Decima Fattica d'Ercole* of 1710. The two 'hautbois' staves bear the occasional marking 'chalumeau' and 'flute alm' respectively. The fact that at least two of the five oboists in the Viennese Royal Court Orchestra, between 1700 and 1725, played the chalumeau, is supported by the following character references from the pen of Fux himself:

Joseph Lorber, court oboist: this applicant is a very fine virtuoso, not only on this instrument, but also on the German flute and chalumeau. (August 3rd, 1718)

André Wittmann, oboist: this applicant is the most outstanding virtuoso I have heard, on the oboe and also the chalumeau. (April 21st, 1721)

Given that the earliest chalumeau practitioners were non-specialists, the instrument was probably played with the reed under the upper lip. This is further confirmed by the evidence provided by the four out of a total of eight extant instruments with original mouthpieces. Organological research has suggested that the tenor chalumeau by J. C. Denner, currently housed in Munich, is in fact the earliest specimen because of the design of its mouthpiece.

The love Duet 'Si mio ben, si mio diletto' from Fux's 1717 opera *Diana Placata* features the juxtaposition of chalumeau writing with distinctly amorous subject matter. Such writing foretells the clarinet's later role in the opera orchestra in similar contexts, including Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. Fux also used the chalumeau in his oratorios, of which the C minor aria 'Vede che il Redentor' from *Il Fonte della Salute aperto dalla Grazia nel Calvario*, is scored for chalumeau, trombone and continuo. This instrumentation was a favourite texture of Fux's in this genre, where the chalumeau is virtually the only soprano obbligato instrument.

It remains something of a mystery that no music for chalumeau written between Guisepppe Bonno's 1739 virtuosic obbligato in *Eleazaro* and Gluck's *Orfeo* of 1762 survives. Three versions of *Orfeo* exist; the Viennese manuscript of 1769 features the soprano chalumeau echoing the ends of the vocal phrases in the three stanzas and linking recitatives of the aria 'Chiamo il mio ben così'. Gluck's remodeling of the work as *Orphée* for Paris in 1774 excludes the chalumeau and employs clarinets, but they function differently, within the context of an opera written for an 18th century French audience.

A chalumeau is also found in Gluck's *Alceste* for Vienna, 1767. Whilst the two scenes in which the instrument participates are not of the highly ornamental nature of the first generation of Viennese chalumeau writing, these parts represent an attempt to integrate the chalumeau within an orchestral context. *Alceste* too had a Parisian sibling, premièred in 1776. Although this work uses the clarinets somewhat more substantially than *Orphée*, it bears even less resemblance to its Vienna version than *Orphée* to *Orfeo*.

The chalumeau appears even later in the century in Florian Gassmann's 1772 opera *I Rovinati*. Charles Burney, who attended a performance of the work in Vienna that year, reported that Gassmann was "consistently sensitive to the possibilities of the orchestral ensemble". Gassmann also included the chalumeau in his *Notturmo in B flat*.

Amongst other composers active in Vienna in the second half of the century were Pichl, Aspelmayr, Werner and Dittersdorf. Václav Pichl, whose music stands between the early and high classical styles, wrote for the chalumeau in four symphonies and a *Parthie*. That Dittersdorf, now regarded as one of the most highly representative composers of the Viennese Classical school, should write for the chalumeau, provides proof of the instrument's survival into an era when the clarinet was rapidly becoming established. His *Divertimento Notturmo in F* wisely saves the chalumeau for passages of reduced texture.

Of similar significance is the concerto for 'Schalamaux' (sic) by Mozart's personal friend and publisher, the composer Franz Hoffmeister (1754-1812) which dates from the 1770s. The existence of this work is further testament to the status held by the chalumeau well into the 18th century.

An important link between Mozart himself and the chalumeau is the *Musica da Camera* 1768 of Joseph Starzer. The wind parts are for both chalumeau and flute, but their range seems to favour the former. The existence of a manuscript in the hand of Leopold Mozart, which includes the Starzer as well as arrangements of three pieces possibly by Gluck, led Ludwig von Köchel to include the work in his 1862 catalogue as W.A. Mozart's K.187. It was not until 1937 that Starzer was acknowledged as the work's true composer. Mozart's own *Divertimento* K.188, despite the absence of parts for chalumeau, must surely have been inspired by Starzer's essay in the genre.

But what of the role of the clarinet at this time? In 1761 the French author De Garsault remarked that the sound of the clarinet was like "the musette or rural chalumeau". However, this question is best answered by the music of those composers who wrote for both clarinet and chalumeau; Caldara, Conti, Graupner, Handel, Molter, Telemann and Vivaldi. Supported by the views of contemporary theorists, much of the music for clarinet by these composers took advantage of the instrument's trumpet-like timbre in the clarinet/clarion register. The notes of the chalumeau register were either avoided or treated with particular caution, most probably because of their markedly contrasting intonation and resonance. In any case, the surviving repertory from this time for both clarinet and chalumeau certainly confirms the latter's popularity.

The prominence of the chalumeau in 18th century Viennese stage music, implied by the dialogue from Bononcini's *L'Etarco*, reproduced above, meant it was a novel and, therefore highly desirable, timbre to add to the orchestral palette. How ironic it is, therefore, that the clarinet's greater potential for dynamic intensity and extended range was to lead to the demise of the chalumeau.

It is the role of the chalumeau and clarinet as 'signifiers' in 18th century stage music though that warrants further investigation. In the earlier part of the century, the use of the chalumeau in contexts of great delicacy, sentimentality and intimacy betrays its position as one of several 'topoi' or topics for formal discourse that a composer has in common with their audience. Topics are musical signs, and consist of a signifier (a musical instrument), a signified (a particular sentiment) and listeners with the necessary socio-musical knowledge or competence to allow them to perceive the topic. Works from the canon of Western Art music have moments of 'diegesis', that is they speak to us at a level above and beyond the surface narration. The most powerful of these 'extra musical' gestures constitute a narrating voice independent of, but related to the work's 'intra-musical' gestures, for example, the tonal hierarchy. These gestures have been embedded historically within the operatic repertory. For example in dramatic music in the early to mid 18th century, the chalumeau functioned as the signifier to signify amorous or pastoral sentiments. Later in the century though, it was the clarinet that adopted the role of signifier in its portrayal of the chalumeau itself.

However, their resonance within instrumental music is most telling for a reappraisal of the relationship between the clarinet and chalumeau in the 18th century. The operas, oratorios, componimenti per musica and dramatic poems of the first generation of Viennese composers for chalumeau allows us to ask some rather interesting questions concerning the mode of writing for the clarinet later that century. These include:

Does the close relationship in some operas, especially those of Fux, between the voice and the chalumeau provide a repertory within a repertory, in which the chalumeau is used to signify, represent and indicate particular sentiments, and thoughts of a particular character/s? Is the clarinet, when employed later in the century in similar contexts, which we recall are usually of an amorous and/or pastoral nature, supposed to be heard by the character/audience as a chalumeau?

When later 18th century composers wrote for the clarinet, it is reasonable to expect that, as intelligent persons living in such a rationalistic age, they considered fundamental questions about music's potential to convey meaning and its capacity for signification. In other words, mid- to late-18th century musicians were familiar with the concept that certain characters were suitable for certain moments in musical discourse. As Mozart's clarinet writing betrays, he did reserve a special fondness for the chalumeau register, and his use of the instrument in amorous contexts in *Così fan tutte*, and to a lesser extent in *Don Giovanni*, *Le Nozze di Figaro* has not gone unnoticed.

Given that such topics, as semiotic objects, signs or labels, provide important clues as to the meaning of a piece of music, perhaps we as clarinetists and musicians, need to enable ourselves to hear music in as many potentially rewarding ways as possible. With the music of the 18th century, we must embrace the ongoing relationship between the surface laden with signification and the inevitable contrapuntal background, without which the surface cannot exist. Only then will our music making achieve the personal authenticity that performances on period instruments allow us a glimpse, however brief.

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Born in Newcastle, Australia, Ingrid began her study of the clarinet at the Conservatorium there. She holds Licentiate performance diplomas from both Trinity College and the Australian Music Examinations Board. In 1993 she graduated from The University of Sydney with a Bachelor of Music Honours and a Diploma of Education.

At the 1998 Symposium of the International Clarinet Association, Ingrid received the award for Best Paper, for her presentation 'The Chalumeau in 18th century Vienna'. In October 1998 she appeared for the first time at The Wigmore Hall as a member of The Hanover Band Harmonie. In August of this year, as a member of The English Concert, Ingrid makes her debut appearance at 'The Proms'.

