

Margaret Owens

You not only play the modern oboe but you also specialize in playing the baroque oboe. Can you explain what differences or similarities there are between the two instruments?

One of the most important differences is immediately noticeable - the baroque oboe has only 2 keys. The bore is much larger than that of a modern oboe, and the pitch is lower. Many people describe the tone of the baroque oboe as “more mellow” than the modern oboe, upon hearing it for the first time. One of the other important differences is in the tone colors of different keys (i.e. G major, C minor), which are much more pronounced on the baroque wind instruments than on the modern ones.

The Chamber Music Society of Central Virginia prides itself on performing period pieces on period instruments. Is there a special process that you go through when approaching a piece with a period instrument in mind?

This is an interesting question, because I have spent years - and will continue to spend years - answering it. I perform nearly always on period instruments, so I am not really thinking of the music from a modern oboe sensibility. Rather, I try to situate each piece in its historical context - who wrote it, when and where it was written, what type of venue or occasion it was written for. In the end, I want to play music well, in tune and time and with a strong commitment to communicating with the audience and with the other folks on stage. And I am certain these things have always been the most important to all kinds of musicians, from the beginning.



To perform on a period instrument you not only need to be proficient in the instrument itself but also have a strong knowledge of music history and the practices of the period. This kind of training and education takes real commitment and passion, do you have a strong connection to the baroque era of music? How did you discover a love for historically accurate performances?

I do have a strong connection to the baroque era of music, largely because the oboe was born in that era; more music for oboe was written in the baroque than all other eras combined. To me that suggests that there is something about the oboe that was immensely fulfilling to composers, upon its introduction. All the major composers of Europe wrote excellent solos for oboe, in every genre. Oboists tend to hold very special feelings for Bach, because he wrote so many stunning obbligati for oboe, oboe d'amore, and oboe da caccia - more than twice the number he wrote for any other instrument. Modern oboe players often talk of these solos as being the most difficult music to approach. But, these works are so well-written for the oboe as it was when Bach knew it, that on that instrument they don't feel difficult, as much as they feel like soulful friends that you can have with you forever, teaching you more about playing oboe as you go. I first discovered period instrument performance at the Amherst Early Music workshop. I performed in a piece written in 1688 by André Danican Philidor, whose family had a hand in inventing the oboe and whose family members were wind players at the court of Louis XIV. The piece, entitled *Le mariage du Grosse Cathos* (yes, that does translate as *The Wedding of Fat Kate!*) features singers and dancers and is entirely accompanied by an assortment of oboes and bassoons, who perform marching-band style. How could I resist becoming part of such a fabulous performance tradition!?



What composers or artists are you really into right now? What would be at the top of your itunes or spotify playlist if I opened it up?

I'm one of those people who absolutely cannot pick a favorite composer. I do love French baroque music, with Rameau heading the list. I will admit that if you opened up my iTunes right now, you would see that I have been listening to an awful lot of Bob Dylan. Just imagine how great "Every Grain of Sand" would sound on baroque oboe and lute.