

INSTRUMENTS IN THE ORCHESTRA:

(7) The Oboe

THE seventh of a series of short articles on the instruments of the National Orchestra, written to help interested listeners towards a more informed appreciation of orchestral music and a better understanding of the resources at the command of the conductor.



THE oboe consists of a tube, about two feet in length—with a conical bore—usually made in three sections, the bell and the upper and lower joints. It is sounded by means of a double reed mouthpiece, consisting of two thin and narrow strips of reed fastened to a staple with a tiny space between them. It is

a difficult instrument to play, perfect control of the breath and tongue being required in order to ensure the production of even sounds. The reed is very delicate and if it becomes at all damaged, or unduly damp, the tone of the sounds produced suffers badly. The Boehm system of keys is used.



Spencer Digby photograph

F. ROBB
Principal oboist of the National Orchestra

Instruments of this type were used by the ancient Egyptians before the beginning of the Christian era, and there is evidence of their having been used in England by the members of Caesar's occupation force. A family of these instruments arose, those with the higher voices becoming known as hautbois, mispronunciation of which gave us in time the name oboe.

The early hautbois had a very loud tone, but the voice of the oboe today is clear and melancholy. Most composers since the time of Mozart and Beethoven have allowed for the presence of the oboe in their orchestrations, and it has been given parts in some chamber music. It is frequently to be heard playing solo passages in a work for full orchestra, but there are few works in which it has the principal part. One of the exceptions to this, and a work in which the instrument can be heard to its best advantage, is "The Swan of Tuonela," by Sibelius.

The National Orchestra has three oboes.

(continued from previous page)

Province very esteemed for the warlike instincts of its inhabitants, we have decided to appoint him, commander of the valiant and bloodthirsty band of archers now stationed at Si Chow, in the Province of Hu-Nan. We have spoken. Let three guns go off in honour of the noble and invincible Ling, now and henceforth a commander in the ever-victorious Army of the Sublime Emperor, Brother of the Sun and Moon, and Upholder of the Four Corners of the World."

Enchanting Friveries

Sometimes Kai Lung will slip unobtrusively into the background as the mere narrator; sometimes his life and fortunes are interwoven into the pattern of the story.

Of all the four Kai Lung books I am not sure that *Kai Lung's Golden Hours* is not my favourite. It opens explosively with one of Bramah's best

jokes. Kai Lung has slept the afternoon away in a wood beside the road, and he wakes up "with the sound of a discreet laughter trickling through his dreams." And he sees two maidens across the glade.

Kai Lung rose guardedly to his feet, with many gestures of polite reassurance, and having bowed several times to indicate his pacific nature, he stood in an attitude of deferential admiration. At this display the elder and less attractive of the maidens fled, uttering loud and continuous cries of apprehension in order to conceal the direction of her flight.

All the Kai Lung books offer an almost infinite number of variations of that one joke. If you like that particular sort of wit you like all its variations. And as Hilaire Belloc has remarked, if you think it is easy, simply because it looks easy, go and try to do it yourself.

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