

TOMASO ALBINONI (1671 - 1751)

Oboe Concerto in D minor, Op. 9 No. 2

- I. Allegro e non Presto
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro

Tomaso Albinoni, a successful Venetian composer and singing teacher, began working at an early age under his father's stationery business as a maker of cards. He was originally selected to be his father's successor, but this was not the life he wanted, so in 1705 he relinquished his duties, and started anew.

Thanks to his father's business, Albinoni was fortunate enough to be able to receive formal music education while working. He first learnt the violin, then turned his attention to singing, and finally studied composition. After leaving the family business, he married a professional opera singer, which was a common practice among Venetian opera composers of his day, and ran his own singing academy. Progressively, his profound experience with writing operas and cantatas decisively affected the way in which he approached melody and instrumentation. In his concerti, he treats the oboe like the human voice in an aria, exploiting the lyrical potential of the wind instrument and integrating it fully into the contrapuntal fabric of the works.

The concerto begins with violins presenting a stately yet dance-like opening motive in D minor. Decorated with dotted rhythms and demisemiquavers, it exudes elegance and grandeur, giving the oboe the opportunity to present itself confidently. Undoubtedly, the second movement is what made this concerto a masterpiece in Albinoni's 12 Concerti a Cinque (Op. 9). Emotional, yearning melodies fill the entire movement, giving the oboe the liberty of ornamentation and expressiveness. The light and fast-paced third movement brings back energy, ending the piece as strongly as it started.

FRANCIS POULENC (1899 - 1963)

Sonata for Oboe and Piano, FP185

- I. *Elégie (Paisiblement)*
- II. *Scherzo (Très animé)*
- III. *Déploration (Très calme)*

Francis Poulenc was born into a very wealthy family and had a musical life set out for him from the beginning. He started playing a toy piano at 2 years old and received formal piano lessons from his mother at 5 years old. At 15 years old, he instantly became a life-long fan of Stravinsky's music after hearing *The Rite of Spring*, adding to the list of composers he adored, which included Debussy, Ravel, Bartok and Schoenberg. One of Poulenc's closest friends was Prokofiev. Poulenc, in his own words, worshipped Prokofiev and his piano playing. He cherished the moments they shared at his home as some of his most valued memories. He mourned the tragic end of their friendship and thus dedicated the oboe sonata to his memory.

A distant, unaccompanied prayer-like opening figure by the oboe sets the mood for the Elégie. It then turns into somewhat of an arabesque, where the oboe introduces a luscious theme in G major. The piano then replies with the theme, initiating a never-ending conversation with the oboe, exchanging the theme in different keys and variations, then finally winding down and ending the Elégie with a solitary D.

The intense Scherzo bursts open with rude arpeggiated quavers by the piano, with the oboe following suit. The oboe weaves in and out with lyrical and articulated melodies, occasionally screaming hysterically in the 3rd octave, with the piano constantly supporting with dissonant harmonies, in true Stravinsky fashion. Then, there is a sudden shift in tonality and tempo, which moves into a very romantic and heartfelt slow section, almost reminiscent of the Elégie with similar call and response treatment. The fast section is brought back again, ending the movement abruptly.

The third movement begins with a haunting lament in the dark key of A flat minor by the piano. The oboe wails a long heart-wrenching melody, utilizing the full range of the instrument to express the intense sorrow and grief of Déploration. Then, the oboe brings back fragments of the theme from the Elégie, but plays chromatically and restlessly, leading to the heroic climax in A minor. After a short recollection of the dotted rhythm from the Elégie in A flat major, the mood shifts back to a mournful F minor setting. The piano, now playing even more sadly and monotonously (*triste et monotone*) presents a spine-chilling chromatic motif, followed closely by the oboe, which gradually dies away and ends the piece in a sustained E flat over an A flat minor chord in the piano's low register.