



AUDITIONS FOR THE ROYAL CHAPEL OF MADRID IN THE LATE 18TH CENTURY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE OBOE

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Abstract

This paper examines the changes made during the reign of Charles III (1759–1788) to the competitive examinations for admission to the Royal Chapel of Madrid, the most prestigious in Spain. The examination was structured in three stages, with particular emphasis on the sight-reading of a sonata composed specifically for the occasion by one of the judges. The sonata genre was the most favoured among the compositions, so the first movement was key to assessing the candidate's technique for this institution. In this paper, the first movement of Manuel Cavazza's Sonata for Oboe (1777) for the Royal Chapel of Madrid has been chosen as the subject of study. Using Michel Correte's oboe method (1776), a selection of the most complex passages from the piece has been made. Based on these, a comparison has been drawn with the fingering chart from Henri Brod's oboe method (1890), revealing the organological evolution and the level of difficulty required to gain entry to this institution.

Keywords

Royal Chapel, Sonata, Opposition, OBOE, Fingering Charts, Study Methods

Introduction

This paper analyses the passages of greatest technical complexity from the first movement of the Oboe Sonata (1777) composed by Manuel Cavazza for admission to the Royal Chapel of Madrid during the reign of Charles III. In introducing Cavazza (†1790), it should be noted that he was an oboist, flautist, composer and music theorist (Fund. Juan March, 2023). In 1742 he was appointed supernumerary oboist of the Royal Chapel; two years later he became a full member and the principal Spanish oboist (Kenyon, 1999). From 1749 until his death he held the post of principal oboist and flutist, becoming one of the most influential members of the Royal Chapel. Furthermore, he composed exercises for various competitive examinations for the institution and served on the examination boards for these competitions. The Catalogue of the Royal Palace Music Archive (Llorens, 1984) in Madrid lists works for wind instrumentalists with accompaniment, among which is Manuel Cavazza's Sonata for Oboe (1777) (Grimbergen, 2021), composed specifically for the competitive examination (Lolo et al., 1993): two with string accompaniment, one for clarinet and another for horn; and two sonatas with bass accompaniment, one for flute and another for oboe (Kenyon, 1984).

One of the key aspects of this work is the comparison of two oboe fingering charts taken from: *Méthode raisonnée pour apprendre aisément à jouer de la flûte traversière. Nouvelle édition, revue, corrigée et augmentée de la gamme du hautbois et de la clarinette* (1776) by Michel Corrette (1707–1795), and *Méthode de hautbois pour servir à l'Étude du Hautbois modifié tel qu'il est adopté dans les Conservatoires* (1890) by Henri Brod (1799–1839), a revised edition by Georges Gillet (Brod, s.f). The aim is to demonstrate the technical difficulty that existed prior to the introduction of the key system on the instrument. The 'Andante gustoso' from Cavazza's Sonata for Oboe has been chosen; it was composed specifically for an entrance examination to the institution and contains complex passages.

Metodología

The first step was the documentation phase (Araújo & Coimbra, 2023). To this end, three different topics were explored: 1) one relating to the music of the Royal Chapel, with the aim of understanding the institution and the stages of admission to it; 2) another concerning the organological history of the oboe; and 3) the last relating to the methods and treatises in which the fingerings of the different models of the instrument are illustrated and explained.

The author then drew on the literature to compare two fingering charts from two oboe teaching methods separated by a span of 114 years, thereby examining the instrument's historical development. For the notation of the musical notes appearing in the method, as well as for the instrument itself, the Franco-Belgian system has been chosen, in which the lowest C on the oboe is equivalent to C3.

The fingerings from both methods have been learnt by heart, with the aim of achieving as objective a result as possible. Once learnt, a series of technically complex passages were selected from the method closest to the chosen piece. Charts were drawn up for both oboe models, based on each table, and each fingering was marked in relation to the selected passages. Through this performance, it has been demonstrated how these passages have been made easier thanks to the incorporation of the key system.

Interpretation of the Results Analysis

Royal Chapel of Madrid

In the 18th century, the term 'musical chapel' referred to the entire ensemble of musicians—both singers and instrumentalists—employed in the service of a cathedral, collegiate church, court, etc. (Martín, 1985). The Royal Chapel was the most important of all; it could be regarded as the centre of official religious music, and admission to it was by means of a competitive examination. Music formed a substantial part of the religious services celebrated by the institution, and the types of music performed included plainchant, fabordón, organ singing and music 'a papeles' (Ortega, 2010). The chief authority of the organisation was the Patriarch of the Indies, appointed directly by the monarch, with the Archbishop of Santiago holding the title. The Royal Chapel consisted of a body of clergy (priests, preachers, chaplains), a legal section exercising jurisdiction over all royal servants (judge, prosecutor, lawyer, prison warden, etc.), and the musical section, comprising a chapel master, singers and instrumentalists.

In 1701, King Philip V reformed the organization's structure, standardizing positions, responsibilities, and salaries, and assigning them a fixed income. Under this king's reform, the Royal Chapel retained the following instrumentalist positions: a Chapel Master, four organists, two harpists, one archlute player, five violinists, three violists, four bassists, and two trumpeters; and for singers: four sopranos, four contraltos, four tenors, and two basses (Martín, 1985).

Over the course of the century, the chapel expanded due to the growing popularity of instrumental music, despite the misfortune of the fire at the Real Alcázar, which left them without a home or archives. Ferdinand VI (1746–1759) expanded the duties of the chapel master, assigning him the task of educating the princes. This had repercussions on the discipline of the Royal Chapel, as it had little responsibility to perform before the kings and lacked a chapel master (Martínez, 2019). This lack of seriousness necessitated the issuance of the Decree dated November 19, 1747 (AHN, 1747), drafted by Cardinal Mendoza, Patriarch of the Indies since 1733, titular archbishop of Farsalo and abbot of Alcalá la Real since 1734, and cardinal-elect since 1747, who, together with the Marquis of La Ensenada, secured the creation of the position of Vice-Master of the Royal Chapel and Vice-Rector of the College of the Niños Cantorcicos, directly appointing José de Nebra (Ortega, 2010).

In the years that followed, the institution underwent a significant transformation, continually premiering new works by Nebra and Francisco Courcelle (1705–1778), both of whom were committed to

addressing the shortage of musical works caused by the fire. According to Subirá (1953), in 1753 another “organization chart” was introduced, listing four oboes; in 1754, two bassoon positions were created; and two years later, the roster included four violas and two horns (Martín, 1985).

After the enactment of the Constitutions of 1756–57, hardly any changes were made to the regulations during the reign of Charles III (1759–1788) (Hernández, 2005). Furthermore, this was one of the periods that has attracted the least interest, likely due to his image as a king with little interest in music (Ortega, 2000).

Competitive examination for the Royal Chapel

Tomás de Iriarte (1750–1791), a musician, music theorist, and poet, highlights in his poem **La música** the importance of securing a position in the Royal Chapel. The system for obtaining these positions changed during the second half of the 18th century, as Charles III took special care to ensure compliance with the regulations, and all vacancies were filled through competitive examinations following a rigorous procedure (Comella, 2006). Due to the custom of filling positions without a competitive examination, common during the first half of the century, Article 6 of 1749 regulations reiterated the prohibition against filling them without such examinations. Seven years later, in Article 125 of the 1756 regulations, it was again emphasized that musical positions must be filled solely through competitive examination (Ortega, 2000).

The format of the competitive examination was established in 1760 and remained in place throughout the reigns of Charles III and Charles IV (Fernández de Córdova, 2002). The phases include:

- 1) Declaration of Vacancies. Before a competitive examination was announced, the position had to be declared vacant. Notices informing potential applicants were posted on the door of the Royal Chapel.
- 2) Applications for participation. Once the decrees were published, a period of between fifteen days and two months began, during which musicians submitted their applications.
- 3) Composition of the selection committee. The Patriarch issued the order to form the selection committee.
- 4) Competition exercises:
 - The first part consisted of a sonata chosen freely by each contestant. This was an opportunity to demonstrate their skill on the instrument.
 - The second part involved performing a piece composed specifically for the competition, written by one of the judges. The piece was performed sight-read, so a few minutes were allowed beforehand for preparation.
- 5) The final exercise was known as the “chapel exercises.” Two or three excerpts from vocal works with instrumental accompaniment were selected. The members of the jury then required the candidates to perform one or two transpositions of one of these excerpts.
- 6) Judges’ evaluation. They were required to rank the musicians for the top three places based on the quality of their performance.
- 7) Reports on life and conduct. The Patriarch requested reports on the musicians’ age, health, and behavior. He then presented the final proposal to the king, who approved it and issued a royal decree with the appointment.

A History of the oboe: The 18th and 19th centuries.

Shortly after the start of the 18th century, the first major instructional books for the oboe appeared: **La véritable manière d’apprendre à jouer en perfection: du hautbois, de la flûte et du flageolet** (1700) by Jean-Pierre Freillon-Poncein (1655–1720), *Principles of the transverse flute, or German flute, the recorder, or sweet flute, and the oboe, divided into treatises* (1707) by Jacques-Martin Hotteterre (1674–1763), *Musicus autodidaktos: oder Der sich selbst informierende musicu* (1737) by Johann Philipp, and *General Rules and Guidelines for Playing All the Best Instruments* (1754–1774) by Pablo Minguet e Yrol (1733–1778), among others.

The first half of the century was a period of consolidation for the instrument. The oboe was relatively new in Spain. It arrived in the country in 1679 when Charles II married Marie Louise d’Orléans, whose entourage included a group of musicians, among them four oboists. Years later, technical changes were made, and the first characteristic signs of a national identity emerged: the D-sharp key was removed. The earliest Baroque oboe models had this double key, which allowed the instrument to be played with the right hand positioned over the left, and vice versa, because it was observed that most performers played with

the left hand over the right, as is seen today (Haynes et al., 2001).

Around 1770, the “new classical oboe” was in vogue; it differed from its predecessor not only in its external structure but also in its internal bore, with narrower walls and tiny holes for the notes. Beginning in 1780, additional keys began to appear on the oboe, which were used to cover the holes.

Between 1800 and 1825, eight keys were added to the oboe, initially to extend its range. In the Classical period, the oboe’s range was from B₄ to B₂, but this was later seen as merely an aid to the performer. It was Henri Brod who, in 1839, began manufacturing oboes of unsurpassed delicacy, adopting the new keys and making significant mechanical improvements (Haynes et al., 2001).

The Triébert family developed a complete redesign of the internal diameter, as well as progressive improvements to the key system, eventually creating six Systèmes models (Brass & Winds, 2025). The Systèmes models were those used in French conservatories. The Système 6, or Conservatory System, is the one currently in use (Woodwind.org, 2010).

In the 1840s, manufacturers were experimenting with other woods in an attempt to find a more stable material for the delicate key mechanism. The wood used to make oboes was boxwood, which, in the early 19th century, began to be used to improve the instrument’s acoustics. In 1890, Gillet’s revision of the Brod model eliminated references to boxwood, citing instead rosewood, granadilla, and ebony (Bate and O’Loughlin, 1984).

An analysis of the requirements for auditions to join the Royal Chapel of Madrid during the reign of Charles III: Manuel Cavazza’s Sonata for Oboe.

In these academic works, the technical challenge for the soloist was the composer’s primary objective, which may explain their lesser appeal from a musical-aesthetic standpoint [2].

To explain the complex passages of the sonata, we will use the *Méthode raisonnée pour apprendre aisément à jouer de la Flûte Traversière. Nouvelle édition, revûe corijée et augmentée de la Game du Haut-bois et de la Clarinette* from Michel Corrette’s (1707–1795) of 1776, as it is the closest to the year of the work’s composition.

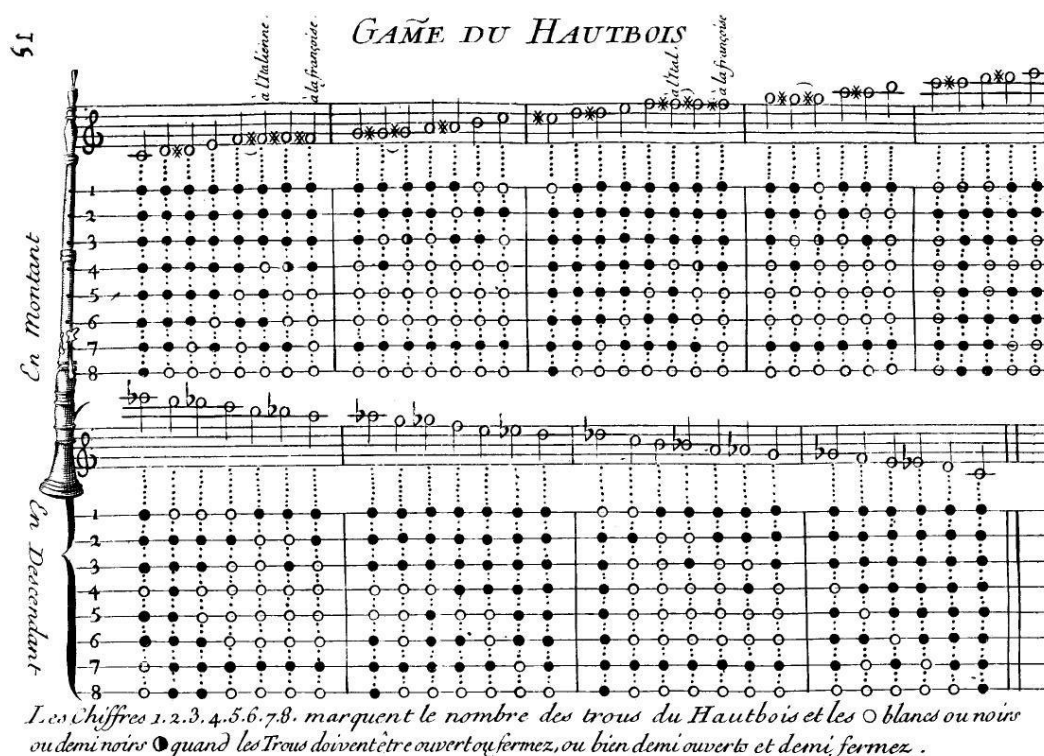


Fig. 1. Fingering chart for the two-key oboe. CORRETTE, Michel. *Méthode raisonnée pour aisément à jouer de la Flûte Traversière, Nouvelle édition revûe corijée et augmentée de la Game du Haut-bois et de la Clarinette*, 1776

Corrette was an organist, teacher, composer, arranger, and author of music-performance methods. These methods were an important source of information on how to play and study music in the 18th century. François-Joseph Garnier’s method is based on an oboe with bifocal holes. Figure 1 shows the fingerings for the oboe from the 1776 method. The range shown was from C3 to E-flat5. It should be noted that C#3 does not appear in Corrette’s chart (Corrette, 1978), and, as can be seen, the oboe in the method has two keys, and its body does not contain bifocal holes. Bifocal holes are two holes positioned at the same horizontal height that allowed for the playing of chromatic semitones on the instrument. An example is the recorders used in schools.

From G3 to D5, you must press the closed foot key continuously. The closed-foot key is the side key of the instrument, while the open-foot key is the longest one. It is called this because the key’s pad (the lower part of the key) is either closed or open, while the other fingers move from hole to hole to play the note, with the exception of D#4 and F#4 (à la française). The fingerings for registers 3 and 4—specifically D, D#, E, F# à l’Italienne, F#, F# à la française, G, G#, A, A#—are identical, which suggests that the technique of lightly pressing the reed to reduce its opening and make the sound higher in pitch may have been used. The same applies to C4 and C5. The need to press a key while shifting to other positions reduces the fluidity of playing this type of oboe.

Figure 2 shows a reconstruction of an 18th-century oboe with its key layout. It should be noted that no 18th-century oboe model without split holes and two keys has been found in museums:

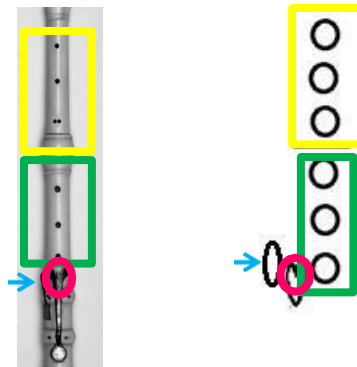


Fig. 2. Illustration comparisons: (a) Oboe, Anonymous, 18th century, RCM0095, Royal College of Music, London; (b) Drawing of oboe keys by Anonymous, digitized and adapted

Excerpts selected using Corrette's method

The passages selected based on the difficulty levels listed in Corrette’s table are as follows (Corrette, 1978):



Fig. 3. Oboe Sonata, Andante gustoso, bar 12, Manuel Cavazza, 1777.

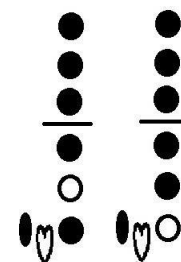


Fig. 4. Fingering to be used according to Michel Corrette’s

From this passage, the transition from F4 to E#4 has been selected because of the interplay between the ring and middle fingers. Since the closed pedal must be held down continuously (see Figure 4), changing fingering becomes more difficult, especially in fast passages like this one (see Figure 3).

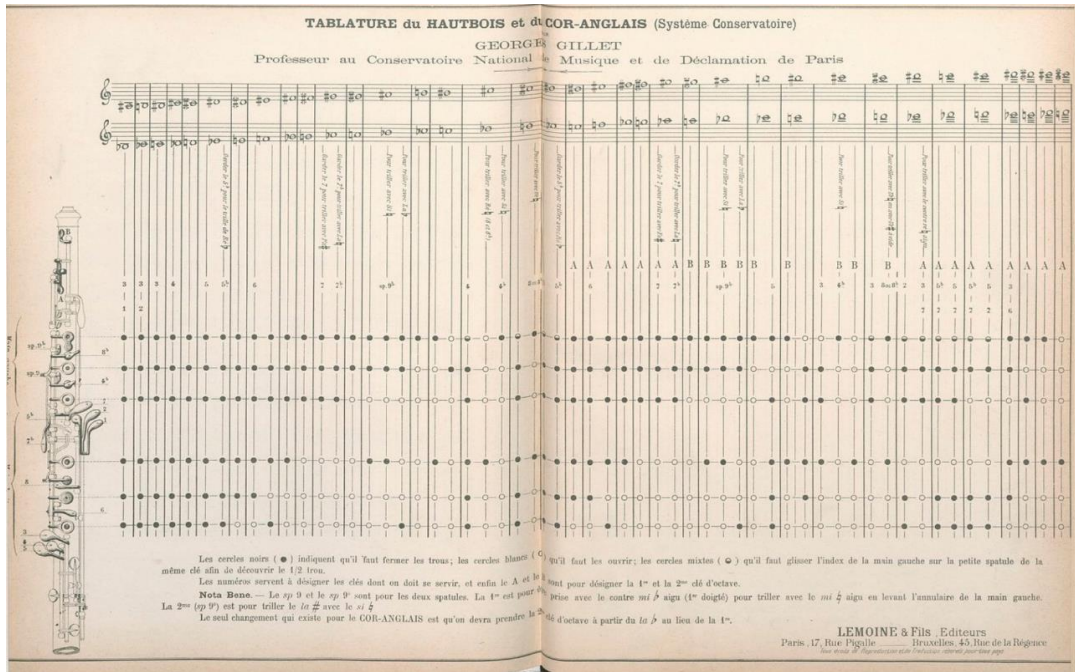


Fig. 11. Fingering chart for the oboe using the conservatory system. BROD, Henri. *Méthode de hautbois pour servir à l'Étude du Hautbois modifié tel qu'il est adopté dans les Conservatoires*, revised edition by Georges Gillet, 1890.

Figure 12 shows a diagram of a conservatory-style oboe with its key layout.

The first octave is shown with a broken line because the key is located at the back of the instrument:

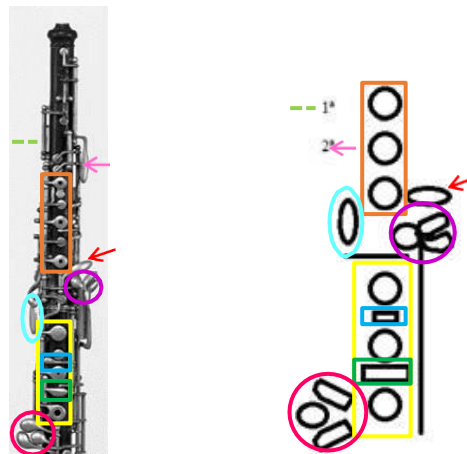


Fig. 12. Illustrations: (a) Oboe, François Lorée, 19th-century original, Documentation, Paris, 2002/323 Cherubini, Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence; (b) Drawing of the keys on a Lorée oboe, for typing.

Comparison of the Corrette method and the Brod method

The diagrams of the oboe keys show a striking difference between one model and another, with the 19th-century model having keys covering its entire body. The illustrations of the fingerings and diagrams from Michel Corrette's table are the same as those in the previous section. To better illustrate the comparison between methods, we have chosen to include them again.



Fig. 13. Oboe Sonata, Andante gustoso, bar 12, Manuel Cavazza, 1777.

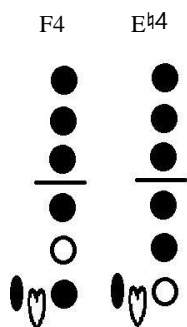


Fig. 14 Fingering to be used according to Michel Corrette's 1776 chart.

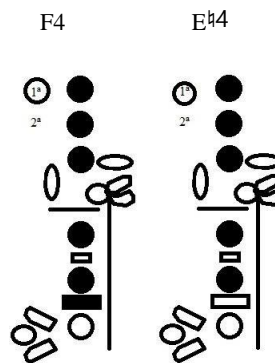


Fig.15. Fingering to be used according to Henri Brod's 1890

Unlike what is shown in Figure 3, the inclusion of the fingering system makes this passage easier. You no longer need to use the ring and middle fingers (see Figure 14); simply lift the ring finger from the F key (see Figure 15).



Fig. 16. Oboe Sonata, Andante gustoso, bar 17, Manuel Cavazza, 1777.

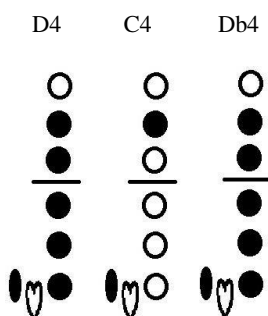


Fig. 17. Fingering to be used according to Michel Corrette's 1776 chart.

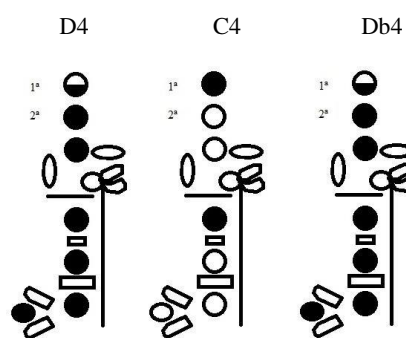


Fig. 18. Fingering to be used according to Henri Brod's 1890 chart.

In this case, both positions are complex, with the difference being that in Figure 17, you must hold down the closed foot key, whereas in Figure 18, you do not. The problem arises again when the oboe's body is left virtually empty on the D4: you must use the abdominal air belt to prevent the pitch from fluctuating.



Fig. 19. Oboe Sonata, Andante gustoso, bar 19, Manuel Cavazza, 1777.

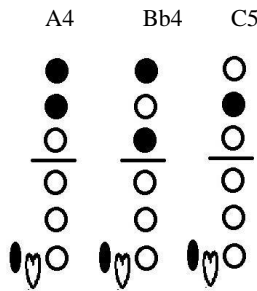


Fig. 20. Fingering to be used according to Michel Corrette's 1776 chart.

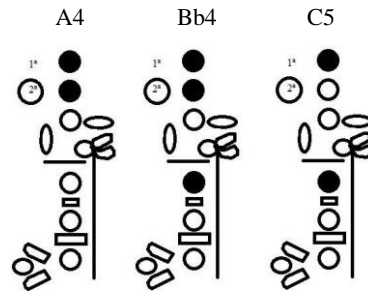


Fig. 21. Fingering to be used according to Henri Brod's 1890 chart.

At first glance, it is clear how easily the Brod scale is played (see Figure 21), without the need to use the ring-finger-to-middle-finger technique (see Figure 20). The octave leap is simpler with the key system, since it does not rely on the technique of compressing the embouchure; instead, there is a key that creates that opening between notes. The challenge in this passage is intonation; even though a key has been included to assist with the octave, one must always be mindful of the abdominal air support.

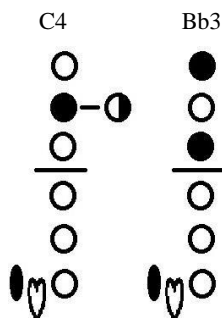


Figure.23. Fingering to be used according to Michel Corrette's 1776 chart.

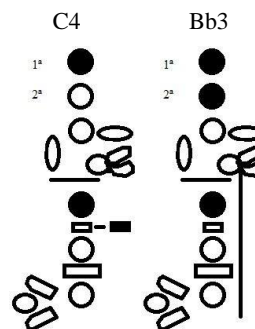


Fig.24. Fingering to be used according to Henri Brod's 1890 chart.

This is one example of a trill key: the D4 trill key (Figure 24). This makes the trill easier to play and improves its intonation; in contrast, Corrette's fingering is more complex due to the finger movements and the transition from the C4 trill to the Bb3 trill (see Figure 23).

Conclusion

In this study, we can examine the musical pieces that were composed specifically for the competitive examination and focused on technique rather than on the musicality that the candidate was expected to demonstrate. To demonstrate the fingering complexity of the oboe of yesteryear, we have chosen the first movement of Cavazza's Sonata for Oboe (1777) for the Royal Chapel of Madrid; in it, we have found a significant number of complex passages that only skilled oboists could have performed with exquisite warmth.

To assess the technical complexity required to gain admission to the Royal Chapel, we examined the oboe fingering methods documented in Bruce Haynes's article, "Oboe Fingering Charts 1695–1816," focusing on Corrette's treatise (1776), which is closest to Manuel Cavazza's work, and that of Brod (1890), with fingerings closer to those used today. By comparing these two methods, using a sonata for a

competitive examination as a musical example, the objective of this study has been successfully demonstrated.

It can be observed that they often included the ring-middle finger or ring-index-middle finger combinations, as these are movements that require extreme care in terms of synchronization. If one of the fingers is not executed with precision, it results in a muddled and poorly performed passage, which can lead to disqualification from the competition. Intonation is another important element in ensemble playing; for example, Figure 7, the octave leap, is a clear example of this. To execute it using the Corrette method, one had to compress the reed or make full use of the abdominal air belt. If not performed rigorously, the intonation would be dreadful. Today, there are still complex positions that require the use of the aforementioned fingerings or dizzying octave leaps. The advantage is the inclusion of the key system and the innovation of methods to improve instrumental technique.

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