**The Altissimo Range of the Oboe: A Guide for Composers Christopher Redgate**

A more in-depth article titled Composing Using the Altissimo Range of the Oboe is due for publications next year. The following is a brief guide for composers to help avoid the pitfalls involved in writing in the top range of the oboe. In the title I refer to the altissimo range of the oboe. This is the range which begins at the oboe’s official top G and goes up from there. Great care is needed when writing in this range as it is still relatively new, little explored by oboists or composers and there are a number of significant pitfalls to avoid. I suggest therefore that composers should, when writing for PROFESSIONAL orchestral performers, consider the Bb6 as the top usable note. This is still very high for most performers. (When writing for the young performer or amateurs it is worth finding out what the individual performer is capable of but the altissimo range will definitely not by usable.)

For the modern SOLOIST the range up to top C7 can be used taking into account the comments below. Beyond that, C#7 and D7, are the province of a few oboists who are prepared to experiment in this range. [I have written several articles for oboists concerning this range which can be found in either Double Reed News or The Double Reed - these articles cover a number of issues for the oboist as well as offering fingerings for this range. The fingerings can also be found on this website along with some trill fingerings and quarter tone fingerings.] – All of these high fingerings can be listened to on the video clips accessible through the Video page of this site - [also below].

 There are two techniques in use for obtaining pitches in this range. First, using a standard embouchure, and perhaps modifying the technique a little and, second, placing the teeth on the reed – which is not very popular with oboists. The better of the two techniques is the use of the embouchure on the reed as it disturbs the playing less. In this range however, many oboists will use a combination of the two techniques; playing up to Bb6 (or A6) using the standard embouchure and then moving over to teeth above that. Some may change the technique used depending on the reed available. The top C#7 and D7 always need the teeth on the reed. It is important for composers to know about these techniques because the use of teeth on the reed inhibits performance in this range. There is a brief but necessary change over from one embouchure to the other which means that time is taken thus reducing agility a little and making a legato between the two impossible. There is a distinct difference in the sound created by the two techniques: the teeth on the reed tends to be thinner and sometimes more wobbly [this can be heard in the video clips]. Ideally a composer should talk to the performer being written for in order to ascertain what is possible. I suggest however that composers write what they would like to hear and then offer ossias for the more demanding passages. In this way the composer states what the ideal is and the performer can work towards it. There is some debate about the possible dynamics available in this range: my personal experience suggests that the range from about mf to fff is the more usual. I would like to see a lot more composers using this range. Not only in more experimental music but also in other forms and styles. The oboe has a very particular quality in this range and it is a pity not to exploit it. When using this range with other techniques it is as well to talk with your performer. My experiments suggest (and they are demonstrated on the videos):

•That double and triple tonguings are possible but not as tidy as in the standard range. I suggest that they are not used beyond Bb6.

•That flutter tonguing is possible up to Bb6 and possibly higher. •That small portamenti or pitch-bends are possible.



•That circular breathing is possible – but do remember that playing in this range is very demanding and so long passages using only this range are probably not a good idea.

•Don’t ask for singing and playing at the same time!

•Some quarter tone facility is possible though the fingerings are quite demanding and so best not used at great speed.

\*The altissimo range is only possible on the oboe and not on the related instruments.\*