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A Widening Gap: Playing Historically-Appropriate Oboes in Performances of 19th-century Music¹

Diversification strategies of period ensembles over the past 20 years have shown a marked tendency to explore later repertoire, with many of these orchestras now readily performing large-scale Romantic works by composers such as Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Berlioz. As Bruce Haynes observed, 'Early Music has come full circle, from a movement devoted to finding an alternative to the Romantic performing style to one that revives that very style'.² With the Historically-Informed Performance (hereafter HP) movement pushing its frontier inexorably forward into the 19th and early 20th-centuries, musicians trained in the performance practice of the 18th-century are increasingly confronted with a widening gap between demand and supply: *demand* for later Romantic repertoire, for which they have not been specifically trained; and *supply* in their capacity (or lack thereof) to quickly acquire a new set of tools and skills, often requiring historical woodwind players to find patchwork solutions 'on the job'.

The greatest challenge for the modern-day historical oboist confronted with 19th-century repertoire in the workplace (above and beyond actually learning how to master the instrument and to make reeds for it) lies in gaining access to an appropriate model, whether it be a copy or an original that is in good playing condition.

Because no modern copies of 19th-century oboes are readily available on the market (at the time of writing, only nine makers worldwide have embarked on projects, but have not advanced to put-

1 This article is based on the annex to the author's PhD thesis, 'Berlioz's Lost Oboe: Exploring the Forgotten Last Generation of the Simple-System Oboe in France' (Royal Academy of Music, University of London, 2023).

2 Bruce Haynes, *The End of Early Music: A period performer's history of music for the 21st-century* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 219.