

an arching, aching plaintive horn theme, which, with its variants, comprises the entire first section. The agitated second section gives both winds plenty of activity, and sends the piano on a frantic flight. Several more sectional mood swings—folky, dance-y, grace-notey parts alternating with joyous, soaring wind lines over busy piano parts—lead to a return of the original, gloomy theme. But the Serenade ends with a final burst of energy and happiness that seems to poke fun at the whole ordeal.

As if he had not tugged enough heart-strings, Lisicky concludes with his original arrangement of "Danny Boy." His setting is unaffected, as is the trio's performance, but evocative in its creative voicing and graceful counter melodies. Orchestrating for the horn can be a challenge. Lisicky has placed his colleagues and himself in registers that complement each other well in unusual ways. The result is tender and satisfying, but never maudlin—a fine trick with this beloved chestnut. Here we have another strong recording of fine musicians playing repertoire that is meaningful to them and enjoyable for anyone listening—a pleasure and an inspiration to review.



OBOE BOOK REVIEW

Mary Ashley Barret, Greensboro, North Carolina

Jacqueline Leclair

Oboe Secrets: 75 Performance Strategies for the Advanced Oboist and English Horn Player

London: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013

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Have you ever wondered how to improve your endurance? Or how about techniques to super-hydrate your oboe? What about creating exercises to work on complex rhythmic patterns? Jacqueline Leclair is here to answer these questions and to offer possible solutions to at least 70 other ponderings or musings you may have about the oboe, the English horn, or performing in general.

As developed by Scarecrow Press Music Series, the volumes comprising the *Music Secrets for the Advanced Musician* are designed as quick resources for those students or teachers who are looking for ways to improve their music making beyond the level of beginner or intermediate performer. Leclair's *Oboe Secrets* is the fourth book in the series, and as titled, presents performance strategies for experienced players, from the advanced high school oboist to professional performers, teachers, and amateurs. Dr. Leclair is an internationally distinguished performer, a champion of new music, and is currently the oboe professor at the Schulich School of Music of McGill University in Montreal, Canada. Her performance edition of Luciano Berio's *Sequenza VIIa* has become the "go-to" road map in learning this masterwork of the oboe repertoire.

Oboe Secrets is intended to be provocative, to encourage discussion, experimentation, and above all "to help make oboe and English horn playing easy, healthy, joyful, and focused on making music."¹ The book is divided into nine chapters plus a resource section, and includes secrets for practicing, tone and rhythm, reed making, health and strength, simplifying your musical life, maintaining your equipment, English horn, expanded techniques, and one chapter containing a variety of topics, entitled "Sundry Strategies". Illustrations, drawings, photos and musical examples highlight many of the strategies and provide clarity where necessary. Each chapter is divided into several *secrets*, which in turn are defined by Leclair, followed by a suggested *technique* to aid in mastering this secret, *notes* or helpful hints often containing a personal story, and the *benefits* we gain by learning this technique.

Most secrets are reduced to one or two pages of explanation, rendering them easy to read and distilled to the most important aspects of the topic at hand. For example, "Secret 6: Rhythm First" focuses on learning a new piece of music containing rhythmic challenges. Leclair suggests working on the rhythms alone, without the oboe, using a metronome and singing or speaking the rhythms. Add musical gestures and appropriate style as you say the rhythms. Only when your rhythm is solid do you begin to add the oboe. This *secret* is especially helpful when learning mixed meter sections or a pattern of five quarter notes against three quarter notes, or simply learning foundational rhythms such as triplets, syncopations, and dotted figures. "Good rhythm supports all aspects of musicianship." (Leclair, 9)

Secret 18 discusses "Contemporary Music with Big Leaps". How often have you looked at music containing large leaps and thought "There is no way I will be able to sound lyrical on this passage"? The temptation to perform these phrases as simply "notes" is great; however,

lyricism can prevail if you reconsider how to practice these leaps. Leclair suggests rewriting the intervals to be in close position, all within one range, and in simple quarter note rhythms. Practice the section several times slowly so that you can hear the intervals and melodic intent. Focus on beautiful phrasing and tone. Sing through the passages. Add in the original rhythms. Once you have the "tune" and rhythm in your ear, move forward to playing the passage as written, making sure you remain focused on hearing the intervals and melody you previously established, no matter how large the leaps have become. Voila, lyrical intervals!

Many of the topics discussed may be familiar to professional oboists; however, Leclair's descriptions and ideas of conquering them should be refreshing and often liberating. Being reminded of a "lost technique" is quite helpful, and likewise reading solutions similar to your own can be reassuring. The resource list at the end of the book is extremely helpful in that Leclair has included a brief synopsis for each book listed. The variety of texts and suggested recordings lends insight into Leclair's reading tastes and habits. It is clear that she is committed to working towards healthy playing habits, enhancing and encouraging creativity, and opening her mind and body to discovery and invention. *Oboe Secrets* is written in clear, easy to comprehend language, should be a staple in the oboists' and English hornists' libraries, and I recommend it for students, teachers, amateurs and professionals alike.

Ashley Barret is professor of oboe and associate department chair for the School of Music, Theatre and Dance at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She actively freelances in the Piedmont Triad area in addition to holding the principal oboe position with the Greensboro Symphony Orchestra. Her main teachers have been Richard Killmer, Doris DeLoach, and Eric Ohlsson.

- 1 Jacqueline LeClair, *Oboe Secrets: 75 Performance Strategies for the Advanced Oboist and English Horn Player* (London: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013), ix.

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