

Hey Kids, It's an Oboe



The Oboe has a sound that is clear and penetrating. Its name comes from the French word hautbois which means 'high wood'. An oboe player may be referred to as an oboist. You might even think it sounds a little like a duck! Prokofiev thought so when he wrote his celebrated masterpiece *Peter and the Wolf* where he used the oboe to represent the duck.

History

The baroque oboe first appeared in France in the 17th century. It was usually made of boxwood and had only three keys: a "great" key and two side keys. In the classical era that followed, the oboe continued to develop, adding several new keys including a key similar to the modern octave key referred to then as a "slur key". In the 19th century, instrument builders continued to increase the complexity of the keywork of the oboe, drawing ideas from the Boehm flute. The modern symphonic oboe, with the "full conservatory" key system, has a whopping 45 pieces of keywork!

How It's Played

The oboist blows air through a double reed causing the reed to vibrate. This vibration is what makes the sound. To play notes, the oboist covers various combinations of tone holes with fingers or keys. Each new note requires a different finger combination allowing the air to travel through a different length of tubing before it escapes out of the uncovered holes and the bell.

How It's Made

The symphonic oboe is commonly made from grenadilla wood which also is called African Blackwood. Some instrument makers also build oboes from ebony, cocobolo, rosewood, and violetwood. Oboes begin as a block of wood that is shaped on a lathe into a wooden tube with a hole in the middle. Oboes have a conical bore, which means that the hole is shaped like an ice cream cone - growing gradually bigger



from one end to the other. Tone holes are drilled, and then keys and a double reed are added. The double reed is typically made by the player from cane reed that is similar to bamboo. Student oboes are made from plastic resin to make the instrument more affordable.

The Oboe Family

The most popular members of the oboe family include the oboe which sometimes is called the hautbois, and the English Horn which sometimes is called cor anglais. The bassoon, alas, is only a cousin because its keywork is very different from the oboe.

Fun Fact

The oboe is featured in "Across the Stars" from John Williams film score to *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*.

