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An Analysis of Ralph Vaughan Williams' Concerto for Oboe and String Orchestra in A Minor

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Concerto for Oboe and String Orchestra in A Minor

Megan Diann Wheat
Western Kentucky University

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Concerto for Oboe and String Orchestra in A Minor

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the
Western Kentucky University Honors Program

by Megan Diann Wheat

Spring 2008

Approved by

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Abstract

An Analysis of Ralph Vaughan Williams' Concerto for Oboe and String Orchestra in A Minor is an attempt to give readers a better understanding of Ralph Vaughan Williams, his composition style, and his life. The document provides a theoretical and historical analysis of the concerto. It discusses the form and harmony of the work. The thesis also gives the reader a better understanding of Leon Goossens, his relationship to the concerto, his life and his influence on pastoral music of the early 20th century. In addition, this paper will highlight the difficulties of playing the concerto, offer suggestions for practice and list recordings that are available to the public. Due to international copyright laws, the score is not included with the thesis. Included with the thesis is a compact disc recording of the concerto.

The appendixes label the composition by rehearsal letter and measure number, clarify Italian terms (which are italicized throughout the document) and list the compact disc track numbers.

Acknowledgements

There are so many people who have helped to make this paper possible. First, I would like to thank my heavenly Father for giving me life and the opportunity to learn and grow. I know that it is not by my own knowledge or the texts of others that I was able to complete this paper. Secondly, I would like to thank my family for all of their continued support of my education and all of my endeavors. Thank you to my fiancé, Troy, for his support, help and council on this project. Thirdly, I would like to thank my “first reader” and prized professor, Dr. Michele Fiala. She has continually pushed me over the last four years to be a well-rounded, hard-working individual. She has helped me to strive for excellence in all that I do and to be a better musician.

Additional thanks to Mrs. Deanna Catlett for accompanying me, Tom Wilhelm for his recording excellence, Professors Mary Wolinski and Yvonne Petkus for agreeing to be readers for the project, Professors Heidi Pintner, John Cipolla and Michael Kallstrom for their musical expertise and the Western Kentucky University Honors Program for allowing me to do this study.

Historical Aspects

Ralph Vaughan Williams' Concerto for Oboe and String Orchestra in A Minor, said to be "Rarely heard—perhaps because it is difficult to play..."¹ and the "best known oboe concerto"² is actually one of the most frequently played concerti in the oboe literature. Having composed only four solo concerti, Vaughan Williams composed the piece for Leon Goossens, one of the best known and respected oboists of the early 20th century.

I. Ralph Vaughan Williams

Ralph Vaughan Williams was born on October 12, 1872 in Down Ampney, Gloucestershire to Arthur Vaughan Williams and Margaret Susan (Wedgwood) Vaughan Williams. Ralph was preceded by one brother, Hervey, and one sister, Margaret. Arthur, previously a Deacon and school master was the School Manager and he was recorded to have given lessons in arithmetic, writing slates, teaching scripture and catechism. Margaret, a well-educated woman, examined the children's work and inspected the children's sewing. Sadly, Vaughan Williams' father soon passed away due to illness in 1875.³

At age four, Vaughan Williams was reading and writing to his mother. He had his first pianoforte lessons with his Aunt Sophy and later had lessons with Mr. Goodchild at

¹ Pakenham, Simona. *Ralph Vaughan Williams: a discovery of his music*. London: Macmillan & C. Limited, 1957, 135.

² Collis, Jaron. "Vaughan Williams' Concerti for Soloist and Orchestra." *Agentsmith*. <http://www.agentsmith.com/rvw/RVW_Works/Concerto.html#oboe>.

³ Pakenham, Simona. *Ralph Vaughan Williams: a discovery of his music*. London: Macmillan & C. Limited, 1957.

Ockley (1881). At age seven he took violin lessons with an old German teacher named Cramer. It was reported that he loved the string instrument “and sometimes, when they had hymn singing after tea on Sundays, he would play a voice part, although he had a clear treble voice and enjoyed singing.”⁴ At age eight, he corresponded with his nurse’s brother, Henry, a musician, who helped him pass the preliminary and advanced examinations in a music correspondence course organized by Edinburgh University. To encourage Vaughan Williams’ musicality and creativity he was given a toy theatre for which he wrote operas. His manuscript book labeled “Overtures by Mr. R.V. Williams” held the subjects, “The Major, The Ram Opera, The Galoshes of Happienes” and several piano works dedicated to his aunt.⁵

Vaughan Williams attended boarding school at Rottingdean in 1883 and Charterhouse in 1887. He then went to the Royal College of Music to study with Parry.⁶ He entered Trinity College as an undergraduate in 1892 and received his Bachelor of Music in 1894 and a second degree in history in 1895. While there he belonged to the University Musical Club where his early works were sometimes performed. In the fall he re-entered the Royal College of Music and studied with Stanford.⁷

⁴ Ursula Vaughan Williams, R. V. W.; *A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 19.

⁵ Pakenham, Simona. *Ralph Vaughan Williams: a discovery of his music*. London: Macmillan & C. Limited, 1957.

⁶ Hubert Parry was the director of the Royal College of Music in 1894 and was a professor of music at Oxford University. He was composer of experimental works and influenced Elgar, Vaughan Williams and several other English composers. Dribble, Jeremy. “Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry.” New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Second Edition. Ed. Stanley Sadie. London: Macmillan Press, 2001. 152-54.

⁷ Sir Charles Villiers Stanford was an Irish composer who resided in England most of his life. He was appointed the professor of composition at the Royal College of Music in 1883 and later at several other music establishments. His works were typically choral and his music showed evidence of Brahms,

On October 9, 1897, Vaughan Williams married Adeline Fisher. They began their life together in Berlin where he studied at the Hochschule of Music and taught at a girls' school. Over the next nine years he composed almost constantly and notated traditional English hymns from around the countryside. He edited the English hymnal in 1904 but wondered if he had wasted his time. In an autobiography, he states, "But I know now that two years of close association with some of the best (as well as some of the worst) tunes in the world was a better musical education than any amount of sonatas and fugues." At this time, Vaughan Williams' works began to be more widely performed and he began writing articles for *The Choral Journal*. Excellent singers began performing his works as well.⁸

In 1908 Vaughan Williams studied with Maurice Ravel in Paris, saying, "I came to the conclusion that I was lumpy and stodgy, had come to a dead-end, and that a little French polish would be of use to me. So I went to Paris armed with an introduction to Maurice Ravel."⁹ This resulted in Vaughan Williams' attention to the color of the music rather than the line of it. (His earlier works tended to be heavier and his works after studying with Ravel were lighter, more like those of Debussy.)¹⁰

Vaughan Williams enlisted in the Royal Air Music Conservatory in 1914 as a private and later as the director of Music in 1918. During the early 1920's he was

Schumann and Irish folk music. Dribble, Jeremy. "Sir Charles Villiers Stanford." New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Second Edition. Ed. Stanley Sadie. London: Macmillan Press, 2001. 278-280.

⁸ Pakenham, Simona. *Ralph Vaughan Williams: a discovery of his music*. London: Macmillan & C. Limited, 1957.

⁹ Ralph Vaughan Williams, A Study by Hubert Foss; New York Oxford University Press, 1950, 34.

¹⁰ Pakenham, Simona. *Ralph Vaughan Williams: a discovery of his music*. London: Macmillan & C. Limited, 1957.

demobilized, appointed as the Professor of Composition at the Royal College of Music, received an honorary doctorate from Oxford, and was appointed conductor of the Bach Choir. Over the next twenty years, Vaughan Williams composed and arranged over three hundred works before composing the Concerto for Oboe and Strings. These consisted of orchestral works, symphonies, incidental works, operas, film scores, folk music arrangements, choral works, instrumental works, church music, hymns and solo song works.¹¹

Vaughan Williams was sixty-two when he composed the Concerto for Oboe and Strings in 1944. He composed the piece at the suggestion of the management of the BBC which brought the famed oboist, Leon Goossens, and the composer together. In the years previous to the oboe concerto, Vaughan Williams composed largely for films. In 1943 he composed a Symphony in D Major (No. 5) and the same year as the concerto, he composed a String quartet in A minor. Two years after Adeline's death in 1951, Vaughan Williams married Ursula Wood. After this, he composed over a dozen more works including the Concerto in F minor for bass tuba and the Sonata in A minor for violin and pianoforte. He lived to be 86, before he passed away in August of 1958.¹²

II. Leon Goossens

Known as one of the best oboists in the world, Goossens was especially connected with pastoral music of the twentieth century. "He undoubtedly captured the imagination of British composers with a sound and style that lent itself to this type of music, since so

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

much of this music has been written for or played by him.”¹³ Born in Liverpool, England on June 12, 1897 to a musically inclined family, Leon Goossens was one of conductor Eugene Goossens II’s five children. Encouraged at an early age to play piano by his father, he also sang in the choir at St. Anne’s Benedictine Church. His grandfather urged that he and his siblings play “unusual instruments.”¹⁴ By the age of eight, Leon was playing the instrument- an open-hole, thumb plate system oboe by F. Loree. He played this very same instrument his entire life. Inspired by violinist Fritz Kreisler, Goossens is said to be the first oboist to have used diaphragmatic vibrato, forever changing the characteristic tone of the oboe. This is why his sound was so influential, sought after and his teaching so valuable.¹⁵

III. The Oboe Concerto

Leon Goossens refers to Vaughan Williams’ Concerto for Oboe and String Orchestra as “English pastoral” along with the concertos by Scott, Rutland, Boughton and Eugene Goossens (Leon Goossen’s brother). In a time where the British countryside was of little importance to the average Britain because of the industrial revolution, composers such as Vaughan Williams used the folksongs of the rural culture to evoke emotion and loyalty to England. According to Dr. Ted Perkins at the Dana School of Music, these pastoral works generally included colors of string instruments, the flute, oboe and textless voice. Softer dynamics, a gentle mood, the use of modes and pentatonic scales dominate

¹³ Perkins, Ted. “British Pastoral Style and the Oboe.” *International Double Reed Society*. <<http://idrs.colorado.edu/Publications/DR/DR11.2/DR11.2.Perkins.html>>.

¹⁴ Wilson, Marian. “Leon Goossens, Oboist.” *International Double Reed Society*. <<http://idrs.colorado.edu/Publications/DR/DR9.3/DR9.3.Wils.Goos.html>>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the music. The tempi are often slow and/or moderate and the melodies are generally repeated. Also, pastoral music balances nationalism, impressionism and neo-classical style traits in which Vaughan Williams does in the concerto.¹⁶

Though Goossens was responsible for some editorial changes in the oboe part, the composer made some last minute changes in the score as well. Vaughan Williams wrote the following to Goossens:

*Dear Goossens:
I hear from the B.B.C. that they have asked you to play my new concerto at the Proms. I need hardly say I am pleased at the prospect, if you are also pleased - but you had better see it before you make up your mind! I hope to send you the oboe part and a pianoforte reduction of the score in about a fortnight. Of course, I shall welcome suggestions from you as to making the part more "oboistic".*

Two weeks later, Vaughan Williams sent the oboe score and piano reduction (arranged by Michael Mullinar¹⁷) to Goossens with this explanation:

"Herewith the score of the concerto. Don't blame Mullinar for its untidy state - I altered it all after he had made it!"¹⁸

Set to be premiered on July 5, 1944, the Promenade Concert was cancelled due to bombings in the area. However, the Concerto was finally performed in Liverpool on

¹⁶ Perkins, Ted. "British Pastoral Style and the Oboe." *International Double Reed Society*. <<http://idrs.colorado.edu/Publications/DR/DR11.2/DR11.2.Perkins.html>>.

¹⁷ Michael Mullinar was a pianist and composer who was Vaughan Williams' copyist. In addition to writing the piano reduction to the oboe concerto, Vaughan Williams dedicated the Sixth Symphony to him and the piano part in *Fantasia on the Old 104th* was written for him. The relationship between them was that of personal friends. Butterworth, Neil. *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Guide to Research*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990.

¹⁸ Wilson, Marian. "Leon Goossens, Oboist." *International Double Reed Society*. <<http://idrs.colorado.edu/Publications/DR/DR9.3/DR9.3.Wils.Goos.html>>.

September 30, 1944 by Goossens and the Liverpool Philharmonic conducted by Malcolm Sargent.¹⁹

¹⁹ Pakenham, Simona. *Ralph Vaughan Williams: a discovery of his music*. London: Macmillan & C. Limited, 1957.

Theoretical Aspects

Vaughan Williams is known for his frequent use of the church modes. Within the oboe concerto he uses five of the seven: Ionian, Dorian, Lydian, Mixolydian and Aeolian. The Rondo Pastorale is centered on the Aeolian and Dorian modes.²⁰

I. Rondo Pastorale

The Rondo Pastorale, set in A minor (beginning in Dorian mode), uses “the lush sound of the instrument to evoke the spirit of the countryside.”²¹ It begins *cantabile* with a tempo of *allegro moderato*, the quarter note equaling eighty-eight beats per minute.²² The movement is delineated by the repetition of the opening theme in A Dorian mode throughout the movement. Vaughan Williams uses this theme in several places in this movement. We will call this theme A. The rondo takes the form of ABACABA.

The theme first appearing in the accompaniment is built upon the fifth, sixth, first and second degrees of the mode. The oboe begins with a rhythmically flowing line at a soft dynamic with a melody consisting of the fourth, fifth, first and second scale degrees, adding the sixth scale degree in the third measure of the piece. This is significant because theme B uses scale degrees five, six, one and two as well. This four-note passage based on relationships of fourths and fifths is used throughout the entire work and provides a familiar sound without having the same melody continually. The tenth

²⁰ See Appendix I: Themes, Measure Numbers and Modes (p. 29) for a listing of the modes and letter themes throughout the movement.

²¹ Wilson, Marian. “Leon Goossens, Oboist.” *International Double Reed Society*. <<http://idrs.colorado.edu/Publications/DR/DR9.3/DR9.3.Wils.Goos.html>>.

²² See Appendix III: Musical Terms Glossary (p.33) for definitions of all italicized words in the paper.

through twelfth measures contain a cadenza that is played by the oboist, primarily outlining the A Dorian mode used. At measure 13 the listener will hear the original oboe melody in the accompaniment as it leads into theme B.

Theme B can be found in measure 19 in G Ionian mode. Here the same scale-degree relationship is apparent as the beginning. The first, second, fifth and sixth scale degrees form a melody with strong intervallic relationships of fourths and fifths. In measure 21, the oboe enters with theme B before restating theme A beginning in measure 29. Here Vaughan Williams uses the theme A accompaniment in an identical form to the opening measure of the movement. Beginning with measure 33, Vaughan Williams repeats the original melody of theme A with a *diminuendo* into the *piano* dynamics with the melodic pick-up notes into measure 40.

Theme C is first found at measure 40.²³ This theme is first played in F# Aeolian mode and later in A Aeolian mode in measure 46. It can be heard a third time in C melodic minor, in measure 64 as well. Again, theme A returns in measure 75 and is quickly followed by theme B in measure 80, this time a whole step higher in A Ionian mode.

Interestingly, the oboe melody is marked *cantabile* both times that theme B is played. In measure 87 there is a great color change with the first noticeable break for the oboist during theme B. Though this new material is marked *piano* and *tranquillo* for the oboist and *pianissimo* in the accompaniment, the syncopated entrance of the oboist makes a textural difference to the listener. Here, the accompaniment evokes the pastoral idea by use of a droned fifth in the left hand accompaniment. This continuation of theme B soon

²³ See Appendix II: Rehearsal Letters and Corresponding Measure Numbers (p. 31) for a complete listing of rehearsal letters and corresponding measure numbers in the score for quick reference.

comes to an end as theme A returns in measure 104. Here the cadenza that is played is much like that found in the tenth measure of the movement, outlining the A Dorian mode.

Measures 112 and 113 are identical to the eleventh and twelfth measures of the movement and followed by a longer cadenza than before. Over A minor chords and their inversions, this cadenza quotes the opening measures as well as the additional theme B melody that is found first in measure 87.

The last four measures of the first movement are marked *pianissimo* and state the fifth, sixth, first and second scale degrees of the A Aeolian mode just as the accompaniment does in the beginning in A Dorian mode. The oboist ends on the fifth just as he/she started the movement.

Throughout this movement the listener can hear the trading of the melody from soloist to accompaniment. This technique along with the numerous tone colors and stylistic changes make this movement characteristic of pastoral music of the early 20th century.²⁴

II. Minuet and Musette

The shortest of the three movements, Minuet and Musette, is said to have “the tang of the open air rather than the scent of the ballroom.”²⁵ Traditionally, the minuet is in $\frac{3}{4}$ time with two binary forms, is quite dance-like and felt in one. This movement begins in C Dorian Mode and frequently uses the Ionian and Aeolian modes as well. In this movement, the oboe melody of scale degrees five, one, (raised) six and five begin the

²⁴ A recording of the concerto may be found with this document. Appendix IV: Reference Page (p. 34) lists track numbers of the recording.

²⁵Day, James. *Vaughan Williams*. London, J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1961, 173.

dance. The “Minuet and Musette” is in compound ternary form. The Minuet part is labeled section A appearing in measure one and returning in measure 108. The A section is in simple binary form, consisting of a and b themes. Theme a is stated twice before b is stated in measure 22 in E Aeolian mode. Theme b is a derivation of theme a. This is evident in the dotted quarter note, eighth note, quarter note rhythm that is found in measure six and measure 22. Theme b is restated but in D Aeolian mode before the Musette begins.

According to the Norton/Grove Concise Encyclopedia of Music, a Musette is a “gavotte-like piece of pastoral character whose style suggests the sound of the Musette or bagpipe, generally with a drone bass.”²⁶ Here the oboe, a modern cousin to the Musette of the 1830s, is bagpipe-like by its low, sustained pitches. The Musette marks the beginning of section B which is in rounded binary form. At theme a of the Musette (measure 50), the music flows between C Ionian, C Aeolian and C Dorian modes. It is open, meaning that the a section ends on something other than the original tonic. In measure 61 theme b is in G Ionian mode and G Aeolian mode in beginning in measure 65 before the transitioning C# Aeolian mode section, beginning in measure 83. The accompaniment then restates theme a of the Musette beginning in measure 92, modulating to C Ionian and C Aeolian modes.

Section A returns in measure 108 in C Dorian mode and is marked *cantabile*. This time section A is in rounded binary form. Theme b of section A appears in measure 116 before a final statement of the beginning of theme a in measure 132. From there, the

²⁶ Sadie, Stanley. “Musette.” Norton/Grove Concise Encyclopedia of Music. London: Macmillan Press, 1994, 545.

oboe melody combines section A with section B and finishes with a descending C Aeolian scale and a reminiscent low c of the earlier Musette's bagpipe.²⁷

III. Finale [Scherzo]

The final movement, Finale [Scherzo], is marked *Presto* with the dotted half note equaling eighty-six beats per measure. The scherzo, frequently defined as “a joke,” and traditionally in place of a minuet in orchestral works, is in ABA form, traditionally in one beat per measure. Vaughan Williams uses the Scherzo in more of a free sectional style, which is typical of scherzos after the Classical period. Here the form is:

ABCDEACBDEA. The accompaniment begins with six eighth notes outlining the E Dorian mode. The constant eighth note pattern in the piano accompaniment is transferred to the oboe in the tenth measure of the movement. Here, the oboist plays the fifth, sixth, first and second scale degrees that were first outlined in movement one.

Letter B marks the beginning of theme B and is characterized by the eighth rest, eighth note, followed by a half note tied to a quarter note rhythm. Theme B begins in E Aeolian mode and moves to F Mixolydian mode in measure 43 before shifting into F Ionian mode in measure 54. Also, this is the only place in the third movement that has sixteenth notes. Unlike the eighth note passages throughout the piece, these sixteenth notes are broken most often by a quarter rest. In measure 61, the oboist begins trilling each note on beat two.

Theme C begins in E Dorian mode in measure 67 and has a consistent left hand pattern in the piano accompaniment, outlining e minor scale with an added sixth scale

²⁷ A recording of the concerto may be found with this document. Appendix IV: Reference Page (p. 34) lists track numbers of the recording.

degree. Here the oboe melody is again based on scale degrees five, six, one and two with the addition of three and four in the fourth and ninth measures after letter D. In measure 83 the piano takes the melodic material before modulating into theme D.

Theme D, marked *piano* in the oboe and *pianissimo* in the accompaniment, is in Bb Aeolian mode in measure 91. The eighth note rhythm is accented every other beat, creating a *hemiola* that begins on the second beat of the theme. In measure 104 the rhythmic pattern is reminiscent of the beginning of letter E before modulating into C Dorian mode. This short thematic material contains the staccato notes of theme A before moving into theme E.

Theme E begins in measure 117 and is in E Ionian mode. Marked *pesante*, the right hand contains the melodic line. In measure 128 the oboist enters with a scale pattern from the tonic pitch downward to the dominant and then continues with theme E in measure 135. This time, however, it ends on the dominant after an octave descent ending in measure 155. The piano continues with theme E until measure 166 where theme A returns in E Mixolydian mode.

Measure 172, in E Ionian mode, contains the oboist outlining the scale before the accompaniment begins in A Aeolian mode in measure 186. The accompaniment consists of scale degrees five, six, one and two before beginning a modulation consisting of constant chromaticism outlining the same scale degrees in several keys. This section continues through letter L until reaching letter M (measure 213). Upon arrival, the piano accompaniment is in Bb Ionian mode and again the melodic line is centered on pitches five, six, one and two. In measure 221, the oboe continues this idea as a small cadenza before playing a *ritardando* into the *Doppio più lento* in measure 228. At the *Doppio più*

lento, the previous dotted half note beat becomes equivalent to the half note. Here the accompaniment is in B Dorian mode at a *forte* dynamic. This continues as a transition into C Dorian mode before reaching measure 238 where theme C is again found.

Theme C is here stated in C Dorian mode by the oboist. In measure 245 the piano accompaniment plays the same material found in measure 228, again in B Dorian mode. The oboist continues into a short reminiscence of theme C in C Dorian mode before shifting into D Aeolian mode in measure 262. The melody shifts into Eb Aeolian mode in measure 268 before moving to B Dorian mode in measure 278. Here, the piano begins the melody before the oboe enters with the pick-up to measure 280. This idea continues until measure 292 where theme A is visited before the oboe enters in measure 294 with theme B.

The thematic material is cadenza-like before the piano enters with the nearly identical account of theme B in measure 306. Also, the tempo returns to the first section tempo. Here it is marked *Doppio più mosso* and theme B is written one octave higher in the right hand accompaniment and two octaves higher in the left hand melody in F Mixolydian mode. At measure 317 the accompaniment continues with theme B in C Aeolian mode before restating theme D in measure 328 in A Aeolian mode.

The oboe returns at theme D and is again marked *piano* with accented rhythms followed by a *tenuto* half note and *staccato* quarter note rhythm. This idea continues through Bb Aeolian mode before reaching a restatement of theme E beginning in measure 349. Here the tonality has shifted to G Ionian mode and is notated as *cantabile*.

In contrast to the first statement, theme E is played at a *piano* dynamic. The oboist enters at a *piano* dynamic both times with the same melodic material. This section

of theme E repeats the “one, seven, six, five, five” pattern five entire times and then finally just “six, five, five” twice before reaching the *cantabile* transition into the *Lento* section at measure 386.

In 3/2 time, the quarter note is equivalent to the dotted quarter note rhythm of the previous section and is notated *piano* for the oboist and *pianissimo* for the accompaniment. This theme is built upon the same five, six, one, two scale degree pattern as before and is more elaborated upon, with frequent echoing in the piano accompaniment of the oboist’s melody. Also, there are frequent *hemiolas* in the piano accompaniment when every other beat is accented like it is in two even though the meter says it is in three. The accompaniment grows from measure 386 into a *forte* dynamic by measure 398 where the melody is heard. In measure 402 and 403, the oboe echoes the accompaniment of measures 401 and 402. Both the melody and accompaniment parts end on a *pianissimo* dynamic in measure 404 before the *Presto* begins in measure 405.

In G Phrygian mode and ¾ time, the oboist starts an eighth-note pattern consisting of scale degrees one, seven, two, six and five. Though not identical to theme A, the oboist continues the eighth-note pattern with the same accompanimental theme in measures 407 and 410 as in measures 169 and 172. The accompaniment stops in measure 412 as the oboist plays a cadenza consisting of constant eighth notes until measure 429. Here the rhythm slows by half for three measures and then by half again in measure 432. At measure 434 the oboist is joined by the piano accompaniment on a four octave span of D (three octaves in the accompaniment and the top octave in the oboe) at a *piano* and *pianissimo* dynamic. This four octave span continues until the a minor chord in measure 437 in the accompaniment. The oboist sustains scale degrees five, six, one and two for a

last time before landing on the *pianissimo* D in the top register of the instrument. The accompaniment follows one measure later with a sustained G major chord at a *pianissimo* dynamic. This is stated a second time under the D in the oboe part before both parts come to a close.²⁸

²⁸ A recording of the concerto may be found with this document. Appendix IV: Reference Page (p. 34) lists track numbers of the recording.

Performance and Practice Aspects

Ralph Vaughan Williams' Concerto for Oboe and String Orchestra is one of the best-recognized concerti for the oboe. There are many difficult passages and effects that the oboist must master before playing the concerto. These may include making corrections to the manuscript, maintaining endurance, shaping phrases, practicing difficult technical passages, contrasting styles, planning for cadenzas and understanding the third movement tempi. Also, listening to recordings is helpful to the oboist.

I. Corrections to Manuscript

There are some small corrections to the oboe part. Here is a list of the locations followed by the corrections.

<u>Location (measure, beat)</u>	<u>Correction</u>
Movement one	
Ms. 12, beat 3	trill to G natural
	(because it outlines A Dorian mode)
Ms. 29, beat 3	notes are B-C-B
Ms. 39, beat 3	a, not g
Ms. 113, beat 3	grace notes g natural and a

II. Maintaining endurance

Maintaining endurance throughout the piece is perhaps the most important aspect of playing the concerto. It is twenty minutes in length and the first movement alone is around seven and a half minutes. In order to achieve great endurance the oboist must most importantly take a usable breath. This does not mean a large breath but a breath that

is placed in the lowest point possible. This can be done best through the word, “how.” First release the air inside the body until it is gone and then feel what happens when it is allowed to enter again- the part of the body that fills with air is the lower abdomen. Secondly, breathe in the word “how” and feel how the lower abdomen expands. Thus, taking a breath with the same feeling as “how” should produce the same effect. Of course, the next most important step in breathing as an oboist is finding places to release air. In measure 57 of the first movement, it would be ideal to breathe out during the eighth rest. Also in any rest between measures 62 and 66 in the third movement would be ideal places to release air. In Vaughan Williams’ music, where there is a rest is generally a great place to inhale, exhale or do a combination of the two. Sometimes this happens quickly, such as measure 29 in the first movement. Of course there are many places to breathe during the concerto and it is dependent upon the player as to precisely where those take place.

III. Phrase Shaping

The Concerto for Oboe and Strings is full of long phrases. In addition to knowing how and when to breathe, the oboist must know how to shape these phrases. Largely, the oboist will learn this as they play so it should not be a difficult task for the experienced player. However, phrasing holds the key to being musical. If there is not a place to breathe which would help you know the phrasing, then look at the melodic rise and fall of the music. For example, the fourth beat of measure 20 in the first movement until measure 29 continues without any rest. The oboist could have an eight bar phrase with a crescendo to measure 28 (for example) but seven of those measures have no direction.

So, in this passage, look for where the rhythmic durations lengthen before returning to shorter durations. Measure 25 does this and would be a good place to end the phrase (beat three) and begin the next (with the pick-up beat to measure 26). In the beginning of the third movement the phrases look as if they could be in two bar phrases. However, looking more closely at the score, the oboe and accompaniment are overlapped so that the end of a four bar phrase is also the beginning of the next phrase. So, phrasing depends upon the melodic material presented in the work.

In preparing for the concerto, I have found that playing through difficultly phrased passages using different musical ideas has helped me to find the correct phrasing. Also, the more etudes and exercises I study, the more I understand how to phrase different passages in all the music I play.

IV. How to Practice Technical passages

Vaughan Williams composed this work for perhaps the best British oboist of the early 20th century, Leon Goossens. The cadenzas, technical passages and lyrical passages written were to be played by those of virtuosic ability.

In preparing for the concerto, I began with much slower tempos when practicing the more difficult passages. The first of these would be the cadenza in bar ten of the first movement. The second cadenza in measure 104 and continuing from measure 114 to the end is similar in style and should be practiced in a similar manner. I will save their preparation and discussion for the section entitled “Cadenza Planning.”

Practicing the technical sections of the piece should be done in a similar manner (beginning slowly and progressing to faster speeds. Firstly, listen to a recording of the

piece. Listen for style contrasts, differing tone colors and parts you believe will be difficult to play. After listening, attempt different tone colors and styles while playing through a passage. Then play these passages at least 20 beats per measure below the written tempo. For the first movement I suggest 60 beats per minute, the second, 46 beats per minute and the third, 56 beats per measure. (This may differ from passage to passage within the music and should be at the discretion of the player.)

Next, use techniques such as working backward and using uneven rhythms to play through these sections. Example A shows the tenth measure of the third movement and variations on how to practice it. First, play it like measure two of Example A. This example shortens the first eighth note throughout the eighth note passage. Do this at least thrice correctly and then quicken the tempo by four beats per minute before lengthening the eighth note (like the third measure of Example A). Example B shows the tenth and eleventh measures of the third movement. To “work backwards” play two beats in measure eleven correctly before adding one from measure ten. Add one beat or note at a time as you play them correctly. This will enhance and facilitate your muscle memory and mental memory in playing the passage.

Example A



Example B



V. Difficult ensemble passages

Another difficulty of the concerto are the ensemble passages. If playing with a pianist, this accompaniment is extremely difficult even for very mature players. If with a string orchestra, it is difficult to balance the relationship of soloist to accompaniment because the melody is so often traded between the two parts. Specific places of note would be measure 11 in the first movement after the cadenza and measure 108 in movement two. As a soloist, make sure to explain how you want a certain section to sound. Also, frequent cuing is helpful in the concerto. Landing on beat one of measure 92 in the second movement is a great example of this. Here the oboist is trilling to a low, sustained c and the accompaniment is playing continuous eighth notes leading to a quarter note. Keeping tempo in the second and third movements (because of the quick tempi) is also of concern to the ensemble and should be considered in practice situations.

VI. Style contrasts

There are many style contrasts throughout Vaughan Williams' music. The first movement, Rondo Pastorale is in Rondo form. Theme A has a lyrical style and returns several times throughout the movement. When preparing for the concerto, I visualized this theme as the air in the countryside. In some places it gusts and in other places it is calm. Themes B and C each have a different style. Theme B is marked *cantabile* each time it enters and is flowing. Thinking of the pasture and countryside, I visualized it as a stream. Theme C is staccato and consists of sixteenth notes, reminding me of birds chirping.

The second movement, Minuet and Musette, is predominantly constructed of two ideas. Theme A (the Minuet, measures 1-49) is staccato and dance-like. Theme B (the Musette) is also dance-like but is centered on the idea of the bagpipe sound. Most of the movement is notated in a soft dynamic and mimics a country-dance.

The third movement, Finale [Scherzo], is also in rondo form but the themes are more hidden than the first movement. The opening theme is lively and dance-like, whereas theme B is lighter in mood and the following C theme is much more lyrical. Theme D is constructed around the *hemiola* in the melody and Theme E is notated *pesante* and *piano* with a strong flow.

VII. Third Movement Tempi

The tempo changes in the third movement are notated in unfamiliar ways. In measure 228, notated as *Doppio più lento*, the quarter note is said to equal the half note. This means that the quarter note of the previous section should equal the half note of the new section. In any other piece of music, if a quarter note is said to equal the half note then the tempo will seem twice as fast. The notation is backwards and means that the half note of the previous section is equivalent to the quarter note of the new section thus reducing the tempo to nearly half. This is also the case in measure 306, *Doppio più mosso (Tempo primo)* where the half note is notated as being equivalent to the quarter note. This notation means that the current half note is equivalent to the previous quarter note. The *Presto* at measure 405 is at the discretion of the player and should be played as quickly as is comfortable.

VIII. Cadenza Planning

The preparation of cadenzas is best done by reading the notes in rhythm slowly and then out of tempo. Also, finding the peak(s) of the musical phrase is important before playing the cadenza with the rest of the piece. After this the tempo may be increased. When playing a cadenza, the soloist has the right to take the cadenza out of time, slowing and quickening as he/she pleases. This push and pull of the tempo is called *rubato* and should be exercised with care. If the soloist gets carried away with the cadenza, playing without any steady tempo, the music may feel chaotic to the listener.

IX. Recordings

The following is a list of the recordings of the Concerto for Oboe and String Orchestra by Ralph Vaughan Williams. Many of these are taken from the discography section of Neil Butterworth's, Ralph Vaughan Williams, A Guide to Research. Entries will be listed in the following order: Performer, Ensemble, Conductor, Record Company, Item Number and Year.

- Neil Black, English Chamber Orchestra; Daniel Barenboim. EMI Classics for Pleasure; CDM 641142, 1977.
- Ruth Bolister, Elgar Chamber Orchestra; Stephen Bell. ASV; CD DCA 1173, 2003.
- Maurice Bourgue, English String Orchestra; William Boughton. Nimbus; 7013, 1994.
- Robin Canter, London Symphony Orchestra; James Judd. Innov. Music Production; B000000TQV, 1996.
- Nancy Ambrose King, Janacek Philharmonic Orchestra; Jeremy Swerling. Cala; B0001MZ840, 2006.
- Humbert Lucarelli, Lehigh Valley Chamber Orchestra; Donald Spieth. Koch International Classics; 7023, 1995.
- Celia Nicklin, Academy of St. Martin's; Neville Marriner. Decca; 4603572, 1999.
- Evelyn Rothwell, London Symphony Orchestra; John Barbirolli. EMI British Composers; 5665432, 1998.

- Jonathan Small, Royal Liverpool Symphony Orchestra; Vernon Handley. EMI Classics for Pleasure; 5753112, 2004.
- David Theodore, London Symphony Orchestra; Bryden Thomson. Chandos; 92623, 1992.
- Roger Winfield, Northern Sinfonia; Richard Hickox. EMI British Composers; 5739862, 2000.
- John Williams, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra; Paavo Berglund. EMI British Composers; 2161462, 2000.

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- Vaughan Williams, Ralph. *Oboe Concerto in A minor*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947.
- Vaughan Williams, Ralph. *Oboe Concerto in A minor*. Cond. Bryden Thompson. London Symphony Orch. Chandos, 1994.
- Vaughan Williams, Ursula. *R.V.W.; a biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Wilson, Marian. "Leon Goossens, Oboist." *International Double Reed Society*. <<http://idrs.colorado.edu/Publications/DR/DR9.3/DR9.3.Wils.Goos.html>>.

Appendixes

Appendix I: Themes, Measure Numbers and Modes

Movement 1, Rondo Pastorale

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Measure Number</u>	<u>Mode</u>
A	1-18	A Dorian
B	19-23	G Ionian
	24-28	D Aeolian
A	29-38	A Dorian
C	39-45	F# Aeolian
	46-53	A Aeolian
	54-70	C Mel. Minor
A	71-79	A Dorian
B	80-86	A Ionian
	87-93	C Lydian/C Mel. Min.
	94-103	C Dorian
A	104-119	A Dorian
	120-121	C Dorian
	122-125	A Aeolian

Mvt. 2, Minuet and Musette

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Measure Number</u>	<u>Mode</u>
A	1-21	C Dorian
B	22-28	E Aeolian
	29-34	D Aeolian
A/B	35-49	4 bar transition into C Aeolian
	50-60	C Ionian/Aeolian/Dorian mixture
C	61-64	G Ionian
	65-82	G Aeolian
	83-91	C# Aeolian
C	92-94	C Ionian
	95-102	C Aeolian
	103-107	Eb Mixolydian
A/B	108-120	C Dorian
B	121-131	C Aeolian
A	132-140	C Dorian
	141-149	C Aeolian

Mvt. 3, Finale [Scherzo]

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Measure Number</u>	<u>Mode</u>
A	1-30	E Dorian

	31-42	E Aeolian
B	43-50	F Mixolydian
	51-53	shift to F Ionian
	54-66	F Ionian
C	67-82	E Dorian
	83-90	B Aeolian
D	91-109	Bb Aeolian
	110-116	C Dorian
E	117-166	E Ionian
A	167-171	E Mixolydian
	172-186	E Ionian
	187-192	A Aeolian
	193-212	Chromatic
	213-227	Bb Ionian
	228-232	B Dorian
	233-237	C Dorian
C	238-244	C Dorian
	245-250	B Dorian
	251-261	C Dorian
	262-267	D Aeolian
	268-277	Eb Aeolian
	278-290	B Dorian
B	292-305	C Aeolian
	306-316	F Mixolydian
	317-327	C Aeolian
D	328-334	A Aeolian
	335-336	transition into Bb Aeolian
	337-348	Bb Aeolian
E	349-404	G Ionian
A	405-422	G Phrygian
	423-433	alternates major/minor third sound
	434-445	G Ionian

Appendix II: Rehearsal Letters and Corresponding Measure Numbers

Mvt. 1, Rondo Pastorale

<u>Rehearsal Letter</u>	<u>Measure Number</u>
A	13
B	29
C	40
D	54
E	71
F	80
G	92
H	104
K	114

Mvt. 2, Minuet and Musette

<u>Rehearsal Letter</u>	<u>Measure Number</u>
A	17
B	35
C	61
D	71
E	92
F	108
G	127
H	139

Mvt. 3, Finale [Scherzo]

<u>Rehearsal Letter</u>	<u>Measure Number</u>
A	31
B	43
C	54
D	67
E	83
F	104
G	128
H	155
K	172
L	193
M	213
O	238
P	262
Q	278
R	294
S	317

T	337
U	359
V	378
W	398
X	434

Appendix III: Musical Terms Glossary

Allegro	- (It.). Quick; a movement in lively tempo.
Cantabile	- (It.). Singable, in a singing style.
Concerto	- a work in which a solo instrument contrasts with an orchestral ensemble
Diminuendo	- (It.). 'Diminishing': an instruction to become quieter sometimes expressed with a 'hairpin' or abbreviated <i>dim.</i>
Doppio	- (It.). 'Double', e.g. <i>doppio movimento</i> ('double the tempo').
Forte	- (It.). 'Loud', 'strong', abbreviated <i>f</i> ; hence <i>fortissimo</i> (<i>ff</i> , very loud)
Gavotte	- An elegant and graceful late-17 th century dance in 4/4 time; generally begins on the third beat.
Hemiola	- 1: The rhythmic relation of three notes in the time of two.
Lento	- (It.; Fr. <i>Lent, lentement</i>). Slow.
Minuet	- A French dance from the mid 1600's in slow $\frac{3}{4}$ time. A movement (usually the third) in sonatas and symphonies of the Classical period.
Moderato	- (It.). 'Moderate', 'restrained', e.g. <i>allegro moderato</i> ('a little slower than <i>allegro</i> ').
Mosso	- (It.). 'Moved', 'agitated', e.g. <i>più mosso</i> ('more moved', i.e. faster).
Musette	- (It.): 1: An early French bagpipe. 2: A dance with a drone bass accompaniment.
Pesante	- (It.). Heavy, weighty.
Pianissimo	- (It.). Very quiet, the superlative of <i>piano</i> ; abbreviated <i>pp</i> .
Piano	- (It.): 1: Soft (<i>p</i>). 2: Pianoforte.
Più	- (It.). 'More', e.g. <i>più animato</i> .
Presto	- (It.): Very quickly.
Ritardando	- (It.): Holding back, becoming slower.
Rondo	- (It.): A musical form characterized by a recurring theme in alternation with contrasting themes; often the form is ABACADA or ABACABA.
Scherzo	- "Joke." 1: A piece in a lively tempo. 2: A movement of a symphony, sonata, or quartet in quick triple time, replacing the minuet.
Staccato	- (It.): "Detached." Short, separated notes indicated by a small period above or below the note.
Tenuto	- (It.): "Held." 1: Hold a note for full value. 2: The tenuto symbol is a line over or under the note.

Appendix IV: Reference Page

Movement, Title	Compact Disc Number
Movement 1, Rondo Pastorale	1
Movement 2, Minuet and Musette	2
Movement 3, Rondo [Finale]	3