A COMPARISON OF EDITIONS OF MARTINŮ’S OBOE CONCERTO

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Introduction

Bohuslav Martinů was a Czech composer, born in Bohemia in 1890, who was active as a composer in Europe and the United States. He wrote in almost every genre, including a number of symphonies and concertos, two television operas, and a number of vocal and chamber works.1 Although some scholars describe his style as eclectic, others consider this term misleading. His music had an individuality that did not fit precisely into any one identifiable school, but by the late 1920s he had a distinctive individual style that was characterized by “syncopated, sprung rhythms and the superimposition of closely spaced harmonies against a fundamentally tonal background.”2

To oboists, Martinů is best known for his Oboe Concerto, H. 353, composed in 1955 at the request of Jirí Tancibudek, a Czech oboist living in Australia, who gave its first performance with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Since then it has become a part of the standard repertoire for oboists. The work is often performed on recitals, there are a number of recordings of it by well-known oboists, and it has found its way into major international woodwind competitions in Europe and the United States.3

The concerto is in three movements. The first movement, Moderato, begins with a lyrical, singing melody, leading to a contrasting scherzando-like middle section, and then ends calmly. The second movement, Poco Andante, is meditative when the oboe first enters, and then

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there are a series of virtuosic passages, followed by a beautiful, simple, profound coda. The third
movement, Poco Allegro, is rhythmic and vivacious, reminiscent of a Czech “polka” dance.

Significance of the Problem

Despite how frequently the Martinů Oboe Concerto is performed, the performer faces
some basic issues with the multiple available editions. Some of these challenges likely stem
from the fact that the composer died between the time when the Concerto was first performed
and when it was published, which meant that he could not supervise the editing process. Martinů
died in 1959, and the first edition that was published in 1960 contains numerous errors. Several
other editions have been published since then, and the newest edition, published in 2008 and
edited by Maurice Bourge and Guy Porat, corrected many, but not all, of these errors, and their
edition provides the performer with footnotes that explain some of the ambiguities that still
remain in the score.

In some places, the 2008 edition presents the performer with passages that can be
performed in two different ways, for Martinů made a number of changes to the score at
Tancibudek’s suggestion. Martinů seemed to welcome these suggestions as a way to improve
his composition and make it more idiomatic to the oboe, for even before he sent the finished
score to Tancibudek to perform, he wrote to him, “Feel free to make final adjustments in the
virtuoso passages to suit your own personal technique and the possibilities of the instrument.”
Tancibudek performed the concerto numerous times throughout his life, and at times he made
use of the adjustments of which Martinů had approved, even going so far as to take out one of
the two cadenzas in the third movement. However, Tancibudek later said that there were some

\[\text{\footnotesize \cite{Ibid}}\]
alterations that he regretted, and when he recorded the concerto, he included both cadenzas, so as “to be completely faithful to the original.”

Knowing about the differences in the editions and the various alterations that were made to the concerto allows the performer to decide which version to perform. This decision could be made based on personal preference. If needed, the performer could choose to play the version of a passage that is the less technically demanding, or if time constraints are an issue, the second cadenza in the third movement could be left out for that purpose. Often, performers utilize recordings of past performances or go to their instructors to get an idea for what other performers have traditionally done. These are both useful and important steps for preparing any piece of music, and especially for a piece as complex as the Martinů Oboe Concerto. In addition, understanding the historical context of the piece would help the performer make a more informed decision, comparing the editions would give the performer a clearer picture of what the options are, and analyzing the score could help clarify some of the ambiguities that remain in the newer edition. Because most performers do not have the time to do that much in-depth research on every piece they learn, this paper is meant to be a resource that brings together all the relevant information needed to prepare a successful performance of the Martinů Oboe Concerto.

Editions

One of the first things to be aware of when starting work on the Martinů Oboe Concerto is the differences between the various editions. Two editions were published shortly after Martinů’s death in 1959. The first copy that was made available to the public for purchase was a

\(^5\) Ibid.
piano reduction published by Editions Max Eschig in 1960. It is considered the most problematic edition, with numerous typing and note-deciphering errors, as well as a bad layout. Even Tancibudek’s name was misspelled. Until recently, however, this was the most commonly available edition, and oboists had to rely on lists of corrections or copies of other oboists’ scores to bring their copies of the concerto into working order. Although it was published only a year later, the orchestral score, published by Editions Max Eschig in 1961, is quite different. According to the editors who prepared the 2008 edition, the 1961 orchestral score “is generally faithful to the [manuscript] (except for a few typing errors and misread notes), but it contains only a part of the changes made by Tancibudek.” Despite the better quality of this edition, it would seem that it was less familiar to oboists, very likely because of the price of buying an orchestral score. Even when preparing to play a concerto with an orchestra, it is not uncommon for the soloist to prepare using their own personal copy of the concerto, which they more than likely purchased along with a piano reduction.

Only a few new editions have been published since these first two. In 1974, a non-authorized edition was published by Muzyka, based in Moscow. It is basically a copy of the 1960 piano reduction, with a few minor changes. In 1983, Editions Max Eschig published a second edition of the 1960 piano reduction that contained some corrections. Both of these newer editions are only of minor interest, because they retain so many of the original errors.

Of most interest to today’s oboists is the 2008 edition made available by Editions Max Eschig. The editors, Maurice Bourgue and Guy Porat, saw the need for a more accurate edition, and therefore, when compiling their research, they largely disregarded the 1960 piano reduction

__6__ Ibid.

and instead worked from the original manuscript and several early copies of the orchestral score.\(^8\) The original manuscript was handwritten by Martinů, and is kept at the Eschig Music Deposit at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris. Bourgue and Porat said it is “very clean and clarifies many questions,” although they also say that “in some cases [the original manuscript] is unclear and more than one solution is possible.”\(^9\) They also say that an early copy of the manuscript, which was used for the preparation of the first Eschig editions, contained “numerous accidentals and question marks added by the editor [which] show the difficulties he faced in deciphering Martinů’s handwriting.” Putting these comments together might suggest that the manuscript is, for the most part, legible, and that not all of the publication errors are a result of illegible handwriting, but that, by nature of being handwritten, there are some ambiguities that even still have not been cleared up.

Bourgue and Porat also studied a photocopy of the score used by Tancibudek, which contained many handwritten notes and alterations made by conductors, the original score of Lady Evelyn Rothwell Barbirolli, who performed the concerto just 4 days before Martinů’s death, a copy kept at the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel, and the first published edition of the orchestral score made in 1961.\(^10\) By comparing these different sources, the editors were able to locate and resolve most discrepancies. Those discrepancies that they could not resolve with certainty, they noted so that anyone using their edition could use their own judgment to decide how to perform the piece.

Of those available, the 2008 Eschig edition is certainly the most accurate and scholarly. This does not mean that it is perfect, or that the other editions should all be disregarded, as will

\(^8\) Ibid.

\(^9\) Ibid, 32.

\(^10\) Ibid.
be discussed later. But it is a valuable resource, because it compiles most of the research that the
performers would otherwise have to do on their own. For the purposes of this paper, the focus
will remain on the 1960 and the 2008 editions, and all examples will refer to these unless
otherwise indicated.

Corrections

Each edition of the Martinů Oboe Concerto has different errors that need to be corrected.
Some of these errors can be found and corrected without outside help, but some are less obvious.
The oboist James Brody, who was privileged to meet Jiri Tancibudek and discuss the concerto
with him, said that “A portion of our discussion dealt with what are generally considered to be
errors in the score. When I showed Tancibudek what I had altered in my part, he offered double
that number of changes.”\textsuperscript{11} The following is the list of corrections supplied by Tancibudek that
Brody published as an article in \textit{The Double Reed} in 1990. All rehearsal numbers refer to the

Movement I
1) after 7, measure 6, beat 2: notes should be d-flat, b-flat, c-natural, e-flat, f-flat, e-flat
2) after 8, m. 2 to m. 3: b-flat at end of m. 2 should be slurred to the g-flat in m. 3
3) after 8, m. 5: third and sixth sixteenth notes should be d-natural
4) at 9: four measures rest, not five
5) after 9, m. 4: tempo is slightly slower from this point until five measures before 12
6) after 10, m. 2: second eighth should be c-sharp
7) at 11: third sixteenth should be a-flat
8) after 12, m. 8: fourth sixteenth should be a-natural

Movement II
All of the following statements refer to the first page of the second movement as it
appears in the Eschig oboe solo part.
1) line 3, first quintuplet: e-flat should be d-flat

\textsuperscript{11} James Brody, “Corrections to the Martinů Oboe Concerto,” \textit{The Double Reed} 13, no. 1 (1990),
accessed December 3, 2014,
2) line 3, in the group of four sixteenths: d-flat should be d-natural
3) line 4, end of line: the "c" before the first ascending sixteenth note triplet is a c-natural
4) at 4, delete the d-natural from the ascending passage
5) last note on the page: d-flat to e-flat trill

Movement III
1) after 3 (and after 12) m. 7 and m. 9: quarter note on beat one is slurred to the first
eighth of beat two; second eighth of beat two is staccato
2) after 7, m. 8, beat 2: e-natural should be e-flat
3) at 8: first note should be c-sharp
For the remainder: the references are to page seven of the oboe part and are given by line.
"Beats" refers to quarter note increments from the beginning of the line.
4) line 5 (after 10), beat 2: printed "c" should be b-natural
5) line 6, beat 3: as printed, reads g, a, e-flat, c, a, c; should read g, b-flat, e-natural, c, a-flat, c
6) line 6, beat 6: the third sixteenth is an e-natural (e-flat does not carry over from two
beats previous)
7) line 6, last beat: the dotted eighth is a c-natural (c-sharp doesn't carry over)
8) line 7, beat 5: the second eighth is an e-natural
9) line 8, beat 1: the seventh thirty-second note reads d-flat; should be e-flat
10) line 9 (last line): the half note at the fermata should be an e-natural (In the original
score, this was the location of an orchestral interlude and the second cadenza
Tancibudek mentions in his article. If the second cadenza is not performed, the e-
natural is necessary for the transition for the Allegro.)

Shortly after Brody published this article, he became aware of the 1983 edition, and
wrote again to The Double Reed to inform the public that this edition contained a few
corrections. He listed them as follows, with the numbers corresponding to the former list:

“Movement I: numbers 5), 6) and 7) have been corrected; Movement II: number 5) has been
corrected; Movement III: numbers 2), 3) and 4) have been corrected.”

Other corrections have been shared by Andreas Gosling in 1997, and by Andre Lardrot and Alain Girard in 2004, and
for any oboist using the 1960 or 1983 edition, studying these corrections could be useful.

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12 James Brody, “More Corrections for the Martinů Oboe Concerto,” The Double Reed 13, no. 3
(1990), accessed March 10, 2015,
The 2008 edition corrected many, but not all, of Brody’s listed corrections (which are essentially Tancibudek’s corrections). In the first movement, Correction 1, which refers to mm. 76 in the 2008 edition, suggests changing a C-flat to a B-flat, and then the following C-flat to a C-natural, but the editors left them both as C-flat. Their reasoning was that, although several of the manuscripts they looked at showed a change to a B-flat, it was probably not done by Martinů, but rather at Tancibudek’s suggestion, and may or may not have had Martinů’s approval. The editors also point out the harmony, an E—G—B-natural—D-flat chord resolved to E-flat—A-flat—C-natural.13 Because the B-natural is an enharmonic equivalent of the C-flat, this would make sense. However, Tancibudek maintained that it should be B-flat followed by a C-natural, and because the concerto has been performed successfully both ways, changing it or leaving it as is in the part could be considered optional.

The next unresolved change is in the second movement. Correction 2, referring to the group of sixteenth notes in mm. 29, suggests changing the D-flat to a D-natural, but the editors left it as a D-flat, because that was what was shown in the manuscript. The harmony would permit either a D-flat or D-natural, because the piano trills from a C-sharp to D. Tancibudek’s input was “It is D-natural, I prefer it.”14 So, if the performer prefers a D-natural, they can make the change. Otherwise they can leave it as D-flat. On what would be beat 4 of mm. 32, Correction 3 suggests the C should be a C-natural. The editors did mark it with a courtesy natural sign, but in brackets, because two beats earlier is a marked C-natural, up one octave.

In the first cadenza of the third movement, in what would be the 7th beat of the cadenza, is a C-natural that Tancibudek thought should be a B-natural, as indicated by Correction 4. Both the manuscript and the 1961 orchestral score clearly show a C-natural. Based on the musical

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13 Martinů, Concerto pour hautbois, 33.

14 Ibid.
line, a C-natural would seem to make more sense, because that would result in a series of three 3-note groupings that rise to a C-natural. At the end of the first cadenza, Correction 10 suggests that the half-note fermata should change to an E-natural to accommodate for the lack of the second cadenza. This has not been changed in the 2008 edition, because the second cadenza is included. If the performer should choose to leave out the second cadenza, then they should change the E-flat to an E-natural, and skip to the sextuplets after the C-sharp—E-natural at the “A tempo.”

There are other corrections in the 2008 edition that are not in Brody’s list, which could be helpful to know about for anyone playing from the 1960 edition. In the first movement, in the third measure after Rehearsal 8, the editors suggest that the B-natural in the second half of the bar should be a B-flat, to match the sequence of notes in mm. 132. The fifth measure after Rehearsal 9\(^\text{15}\), where the oboe part comes back in, should be marked as “Poco meno,” and then four measures before Rehearsal 12 should be marked “Tempo I.” Because the fingerings are somewhat tricky, and because the oboe part fits in with the accompaniment in a very intricate manner, taking this middle section at a slightly slower tempo could allow for improved clarity.

In the second movement, in the second quintuplet measure near the end of the third line, the editors mention that the manuscript is unclear, and the D-flat possibly should have been an E-flat. However, a D-flat would seem more likely, because it results in the same sequence of notes as in the preceding sextuplet. After Rehearsal 4, on the last line of the page, the editors clarify that the quarter-note Bb trills to a C-natural, and that the following quarter-note trill starts on a C-natural. The way it is written in the part for the 1960 edition could be misleading, because there is a C-sharp in the preceding sextuplets. In general it should be assumed in Martinů’s

\(^{15}\) Brody, “Corrections to the Martinů Oboe Concerto.” The 1960 edition shows 5 measures of rest starting at Rehearsal 9, where there should be 4.
cadenzas that the accidentals do not carry through to the same pitches that recur later in the same measure. However, there are exceptions. The next set of trills, according to the editors, is one. According to the 2008 edition, the quarter-note trills should be on B-flat, and then D-flat, whereas in the 1960 edition the D is marked with no accidental. The editors do not give an explanation for adding an accidental, but there are several D-flats in the line several beats earlier, so perhaps they assumed that the D-flat should carry through. Whatever their reasoning, with the sustained D-flat in the accompaniment, a D-flat does seem the more logical choice.

In the third movement, in the seventh measure of Rehearsal 12 (Rehearsal 15 in the 2008 edition), the high A is missing a trill that certainly should be there, because this measure is otherwise identical to the corresponding measure of Rehearsal 3. At Rehearsal 15 (18 in the 2008 edition), the editors add a bracketed flat to the A, with the explanation that, although Tancibudek preferred an A-natural because it sounds more melodic, the harmony suggests an A-flat. If preferred, the performer can get away with playing this note as an A-natural, because the accompaniment is not playing at that exact moment. Finally, the quarter-note E trills in the measures following Rehearsal 17 (Rehearsal 20 in the 2008 edition) should trill to an F-sharp rather than an F-natural.

This constitutes a fair number of changes, and because many of the suggested changes are somewhat debatable, there will probably never be one definitive way to play any of the passages mentioned above. This could be seen as an annoyance, or it could be seen as an opportunity for the performer to establish a more personal connection with this concerto, as they become aware of the differences that exist and decide which of the proposed corrections to keep or reject.

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16 Martinů, *Concerto pour hautbois*, 33.
Suggestions and Optional Changes

In addition to the changes made in an attempt to correct errors, where it could be argued that one note is either right or wrong, there are a number of suggestions that are purely optional. Most of these changes were proposed by Tancibudek and approved by Martinů, but some of these changes Tancibudek later regretted. Tancibudek was generally considered the authority on the Martinů oboe concerto, because the concerto was written for him and he was one of the few oboists who performed the concerto while the composer was still alive. However, the fact that he performed it various ways throughout his career would suggest that there really is no one way that this concerto must be played. All of the following suggestions, therefore, should be considered with this in mind.

In the article that Brody published in 1990, along with the list of corrections, he included a list of suggestions from Tancibudek regarding interpretation.\(^\text{17}\)

Additional recommendations from Tancibudek

Movement I
1) after 10, m. 3: slur the first two notes of each triplet group
2) after 10, m. 4: slur the first two notes of each triplet group in the first beat; second beat as it appears in the score

Movement III
1) from six measures after 6 to 7: this should be perceived/played as a "polka"
2) after 13, m. 4: slur the sixteenths in four note groups

Three of these four suggestions regard articulation, and most of the changes are included in the 2008 edition, with slur markings that are dotted, in addition to solid slur markings that show the original articulation markings.

\(^{17}\) Brody, “Corrections to the Martinů Oboe Concerto.”
In the second movement, the sixth measure of Rehearsal 6 (m. 69) could be played one of two ways. The part as originally written by Martinů consists of a group of eight 32\textsuperscript{nd} notes followed by a septuplet. Tancibudek proposed a simplified version consisting of eight 16\textsuperscript{th} notes, which was approved by Martinů. Tancibudek’s reasoning for the change was that “the original was too busy—there were too many notes for the generally nostalgic and lyrical atmosphere.”\textsuperscript{18} The 1960 edition contains the simplified version suggested by Tancibudek.

The next substantial change involves the two cadenzas in the third movement. After playing the concerto a number of times, Tancibudek thought that “it might be almost too much to have two cadenzas in a relatively short concerto,” and at his suggestion, after discussing it with Martinů in 1958, the second cadenza was omitted. Later in his life Tancibudek regretted this decision, and when making a recording of the piece, he included the second cadenza so as to be “completely faithful to the original.”\textsuperscript{19} If a performer chooses to play the second cadenza, they would need to play from the 2008 edition, as the second cadenza is not even included in the other editions. If choosing to play just the first cadenza, this can still be done from the 2008 edition, but some cuts will need to be made, skipping from Rehearsal 11 to the “A tempo” before Rehearsal 13. As discussed previously, doing this necessitates changing the fermata just before 11 from an E-flat to an E-natural, and then skipping the C-sharp—E at the “A tempo.” Another option would be to leave the fermata as an E-flat, and then make a slight break before starting at the “A tempo” as written.

Coming out of the cadenza, Bourgue and Porat recommend adding an eighth-note E on the downbeat of the Allegro (m. 118 in the 2008 edition). Although this note is not in the

\textsuperscript{18} Martinů, \textit{Concerto pour hautbois}, 33.

\textsuperscript{19} Tancibudek, “Bohuslav Martinů.”
A final option to discuss is in regards to the piano part. Although the oboe part in the 2008 edition could be considered preferable in almost every respect, this is not the case for the piano part, which is incredibly difficult even for experienced, professional pianists. One possible solution to this problem would be to obtain a copy of one of the earlier editions of the piano part, which, while still challenging, is much more manageable. The oboist could even still play from the oboe part from the 2008 edition. The only place where the parts from the different editions do not fit exactly is at the cadenza of the third movement, because the 1960 edition includes only one cadenza, and the 2008 edition includes both. If the oboist chooses to play only the first cadenza, they could alter their part to exclude the second cadenza, as discussed above. If the oboist chooses to play both cadenzas, the pianist would have to play from the 2008 edition, at

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20 Martinů, *Concerto pour hautbois*, 33.

21 Ibid.
least from Rehearsal 11-13 (mm. 102-118), so as to include the accompanimental interlude between the two cadenzas.

Another minor issue that arises from mixing editions is that the rehearsal numbers after the cadenza in the third movement do not match, again as a result of the 2008 edition including both cadenzas while the other includes only one. The rehearsal numbers appear in the same places in both editions, however, so accommodating for this discrepancy would not be too difficult.

Historical Considerations

After taking care of the technical issues of making corrections and deciding on variations, the performer should seek to capture the style of the piece. Listening to recordings or live performances of other oboists would certainly be a useful and needed tool to accomplish this. But in order to understand not just what is considered a good interpretation, but also why, one should learn about the composer’s life and musical influences.

It could be useful to know that, after Martinů first agreed to compose the Oboe Concerto, he requested for Tancibudek to send him “a manuscript of some warm-up exercises that he customarily used so that he might judge the oboist’s range and fingering capabilities.” But because the package that Tancibudek sent was delayed several months as it traveled from Australia to France, Martinů resorted to using Eugene Bozza’s 18 Etudes as his model for the passagework in the Concerto. Although Tancibudek later altered some of the passages to make them more manageable, studying Bozza’s 18 Etudes prior to or while working on the Martinů

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23 Ibid.
Concerto could prove an effective way of getting more comfortable with some of the more virtuosic passages.

For the second movement, it is important to know that Martinů grew up in a bell tower, and that the piano sounds in the slow second movement are meant to be reminiscent of those bells. His father was a bell ringer and watchman, and his family lived in a tiny room in the tower of St. James in Polička, Bohemia. Because he was born on a public holiday, he was actually born “to the accompaniment of the festive ringing of all the bells.” For nearly twelve years he lived in that tower, and heard the bells every morning, noon, and evening as they were rung for prayers. With this in mind, it should serve as little wonder that the sound of these chiming bells would become so ingrained in him that, even as an old man near the end of his life, he would incorporate the sounds into his music.

This is confirmed by a letter he sent to his family approximately two months before he completed work on the Concerto. After receiving a postcard from his family of this very tower where he was born, he wrote back saying, “It was as if I were suddenly at home. So many memories came back—the snow-covered roofs—the tower—and my childhood! Suddenly it was as if it were all present. But it’s far, far away, and I wander around the world but cannot go to that little corner of the earth that I long for.” We have few details of Martinů’s process of working on the Oboe Concerto, but it is at least possible that this postcard was his inspiration for

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the second movement. In any case, it is clear that the tower where he spent his childhood was on his mind during the time that he was working on the Concerto.

It could also be useful in the second movement to know that ringing the bells was associated with prayer. When the oboe comes in, it is marked as piano and dolce. It should sound reflective and personal, a quiet, reserved prayer that then intensifies, through increasing dynamics, range, and quickness of notes, until the prayer breaks out into an emotional, unrestrained cry. After releasing all that bottled-up emotion, it then relaxes back to a more stable state.

After the Recitativo section, the simple, lyrical melody that begins at Tempo I is again piano and dolce, but it has a slightly different character than the prayer-like section at the beginning. It has been described as a “lovely folk-song melody.”27 The difficulty with this section is that it comes “after a long and exacting recitative-cadenza when the soloist cannot enjoy it,” which can turn the movement into “an endurance test of breath control.”28 There is, unfortunately, no easy solution to this difficulty, but being aware of the character of the different sections could help with the pacing.

The third movement has been described as “reminiscent of a Czech ‘polka’ dance,”29 specifically the middle section starting after Rehearsal 6. After Tancibudek left his Czech homeland and settled in Australia in 1950, he tried to include significant works by Czech composers in his programs. Because he greatly admired Martinů’s style, and considered him to

27 Brian Large, Martinů (London: Duckworth, 1975), 119.
28 Ibid.
29 Tancibudek, “Bohuslav Martinů.”
be one of “the leading and best known Czech composer[s],”\textsuperscript{30} he requested a work “that would illustrate Czech themes that he could demonstrate in Australia.”\textsuperscript{31} Knowing this, it makes sense that Martinů would incorporate the idea of a polka into the Concerto, as “of all Czech dances the polka is the one that most commonly denotes notions of Czechness.”\textsuperscript{32} Although there is some dispute regarding the origins of the polka, it is known that it originated in Bohemia around 1830 as a round-dance. The rhythms of the polka, in duple-time with strong downbeats, parallel the inflections of the Czech language, “whose defining characteristic (almost unique among European languages) is that all words have a first-syllable stress.”\textsuperscript{33} Understanding these characteristics of the polka could help the performer better portray the Czech influences that both Martinů and Tancibudek hoped it would convey.

Conclusion

The Martinů Oboe Concerto, although a beautiful piece and a standard part of the oboist’s repertoire, is not a piece that can be played to its best potential without a certain amount of extra research and exertion on the part of the performer. Regardless of which edition the oboist uses, there are corrections to make and different variations to choose between. Even after the notes on the page are correct, coaxing the music from those notes can be a challenge. Understanding the composer’s Czech origins, and his love of his childhood home, as well as the

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} Rybka, Bohuslav Martinů, 239.


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
role that Tancibudek played in the creation of this piece, can help the performer to understand the music on another level.

Bibliography


