JOHN DE LANCIE'S INFLUENCE

ON THE MODERN OBOE REPERTOIRE

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ABSTRACT

This project is a performance of three concertos for oboe by Richard Strauss, Jean Françaix, and Benjamin Lees. The recital took place on March 2, 2019, and the accompanying manuscript serves as program notes for the performance.

John de Lancie was known for his tenure with both the Curtis Institute of Music, where he served as the Professor of Oboe from 1953 to 1985, and the Philadelphia Orchestra, where he was principal oboe from 1954 to 1977. He is responsible for all three of the concertos mentioned above; he commissioned the works by Françaix and Lees, and his chance meeting with Strauss led the composer to write his *Oboe* Concerto. His career and connection to these works will be discussed.

The work by Lees becomes the focus of this research; it is a forgotten work that has only been performed a handful of times. This document will focus largely on the history of Lees's *Concerto*, its premiere, and other musical information about the piece.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this document to my parents, Milka Božić Pejašinović and Milovan Pejašinović, for all their love and support.

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I would like to personally thank Mr. Delmar Williams, Mr. Douglas King, and Mr. Robert Dean Huffman Jr. for all of their help in finding information about John de Lancie and these three concertos.

Thank you to my committee for their guidance and support throughout this process.

I am grateful to Dr. Kevin T. Chance for preparing and performing such a challenging program.

I am thankful to Boosey & Hawkes for allowing to use their copyrighted work, and to The Irving S. Gilmore Music Library at Yale University for providing the archive materials on Benjamin Lees.

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INTRODUCTION

This document serves as program notes for a recital consisting of three concertos influenced greatly by John de Lancie (1921–2002). These concertos are Richard Strauss's *Oboe Concerto* (1945), Jean Françaix's *L`Horloge de Flore* (1959), and Benjamin Lees's *Oboe Concerto* (1963). These three pieces were performed on one program, which took place on March 2, 2019.

The history of the Strauss and Françaix concertos is relatively well known to oboists, but Lees's *Oboe Concerto* is a work that has been all but forgotten. This is due in part to the resurgence of works for oboe from the eighteenth century and earlier, which took place around the time Lees's concerto was written. The *Oboe Concerto* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) was only discovered in manuscript form in 1950, and oboe soloists began recording the works of Albinoni, Vivaldi, and others around that time.[1] It is even more surprising that information about Lees's concerto is not easily available; all that is known is that it was commissioned by John de Lancie, completed in 1963, and performed by de Lancie with the Philadelphia Chamber Orchestra in 1964.[2] This document concentrates on the Lees concerto, since it deserves to be "rediscovered." Geoffrey Burgess and Bruce Haynes mention de Lancie several times throughout their book *The Oboe,* and list works that were written for him.[3] The

[1] Geoffrey Burgess and Bruce Haynes, *The Oboe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 207-8.
[2] Erin Smith, "An Annotated Bibliography of American Oboe Concertos," (MM Thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2018), 46.
[3] Burgess and Haynes, *The Oboe*, 337.

connection between these three pieces and why de Lancie chose to ask those particular composers to write concertos for oboe is also explored.

JOHN DE LANCIE

John de Lancie was an American oboist and the student of Marcel Tabuteau (1887–1966), the father of the American school of oboe playing. De Lancie was born in Berkeley, California and went to Philadelphia after high school to attend the Curtis Institute of Music from 1936 to 1940, studying with Tabuteau. In 1940 he joined the Pittsburgh Symphony as principal oboist under Fritz Reiner's direction. In 1942 he enlisted in the United States Army as a bandsman in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations during World War II, and was later transferred to the Allied Translator and Interpreter Service, finishing his tenure with the Office of Strategic Services in early 1946. De Lancie met his wife, Andrea, in Paris in 1945 and in July of that same year he decided to get married, so he volunteered for another six months of service in order to stay in Europe with her. He thought of staying in France, but at that time he could not work since he was not a citizen and he did not want to quit his musical career. He ultimately returned to the United States in early 1946.

He joined the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1946 as a section oboist. After Tabuteau retired from the orchestra following thirty-nine years of service, de Lancie served as the principal oboist for twenty-three years, from 1954 to 1977. During this time, he commissioned two new concertos for oboe: Jean Françaix's *L'Horloge de Flore* and Benjamin Lees's *Oboe Concerto*.

De Lancie was also the oboe professor at Curtis from 1953, following Tabuteau's retirement, and director of the Curtis Institute of Music from 1977 until his resignation in 1985. He later taught at San Francisco Conservatory and helped to establish the New World School of

the Arts in Miami.[4] He was a very influential oboist and professor; some of his students are still active and very successful in the United States. Mr. de Lancie is still well-known by younger generations of oboists because of his influence on the characteristic American oboe sound. This sound results from the long scrape of the reed developed by Tabuteau while working in Philadelphia.[5] De Lancie continued Tabuteau's tradition as his successor at both Curtis and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Many American oboists describe their ideal sound as dark and controlled, which separates them from the wild and brighter sounds of the European schools of playing. This sound distinguishes the American school from the rest of the world's oboists.

[4] Douglas Martin, "John de Lancie, 80, an Oboist and Curtis Institute Director" *New York Times,* May 27, 2002, A00011.

[5] Tabuteau, a native Frenchman and student of the French school, found that a longer scrape than what is traditionally used by European oboists helped him to blend with the Philadelphia Orchestra's sound more effectively, and provided him with the flexibility to perform in the manner that Leopold Stokowski, the orchestra's conductor at the time, preferred.

RICHARD STRAUSS'S *OBOE CONCERTO*

The importance of the *Oboe Concerto* by Strauss in the oboe repertoire cannot be argued, as according to Geoffrey Burgess and Bruce Haynes, "practically every oboist of note has recorded it, its discography serves as a veritable catalogue of oboe players and playing styles of the second half of the twentieth century."[6] Strauss's *Oboe Concerto* is considered by many to be the most important oboe concerto of the twentieth century. This work would not exist were it not for a chance meeting between de Lancie and Strauss in 1945 which led to the work's completion and premiere in early 1946.

De Lancie met Strauss in Germany while serving in the United States Army at the end of World War ll. In 1983, Sol Schoenbach, principal bassoonist of the Philadelphia Orchestra from 1937 to 1957, recorded a conversation between himself and de Lancie, which features de Lancie talking about how he met Strauss.[7] De Lancie states that in 1945, he was stationed in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, a town in the Bavarian Alps, where his classmate from Curtis, Alfred Mann, had already been stationed and had met Strauss previously. When Mann introduced de Lancie to Strauss, he told him that de Lancie played in the Pittsburgh Symphony with Fritz Reiner. Strauss replied, "There is a man who knows how to conduct my music."[8] From then on, Strauss was

[6] Burgess and Haynes, *The Oboe*, 210.
[7] John de Lancie. "John de Lancie Discusses the Strauss Oboe Concerto." Interview by Sol Schoenbach. January 10, 1983. From the personal collection of Douglas King. Mr. King has done extensive research on Marcel Tabuteau and his students, and the author received the recording with Mr. King's permission.
[8] Ibid.

extremely cordial toward de Lancie. As a result of wartime conditions, the Strauss family was in need of food, so de Lancie provided them with both food and supplies.

De Lancie also recalled in the interview that he visited Strauss one afternoon, at the beginning of May just after the war had ended. De Lancie and Strauss were sitting on Strauss`s porch and de Lancie told him that it seemed that Strauss had an affinity to oboe, since he wrote such magnificent lyric solos for the oboe, and he mentioned the most obvious ones: *Don Juan* (1888), *Sinfonia Domestica* (1903), and *Don Quixote* (1898). De Lancie then asked Strauss: "Did it ever occur to you to write a concerto?" Strauss's answer was simply no, and that was it.[9]

De Lancie eventually moved away from Garmisch-Partenkirchen, not knowing that Strauss had in fact decided to begin composing a concerto for oboe. De Lancie's brother, who was stationed in the Pacific where the war continued after the fighting in Europe had ended, was actually the one to tell him of the work's creation. De Lancie received a letter from him at the end of July or beginning of August 1945 with a copy from *Stars and Stripes South Pacific Edition*, an armed forces newspaper based in Okinawa, in which there was a little article that said, "Richard Strauss is writing an oboe concerto for young GI from Pittsburgh."[10] His brother realized that it had to be de Lancie. When de Lancie received this news, he immediately drove from Wiesbaden to Munich where Strauss confirmed this to be true, and that he was halfway through composing the work.

Unfortunately, de Lancie did not premiere the concerto. In October 1945, Strauss and his wife, Pauline, left Germany and moved to Switzerland seeking political asylum because his brief

[9] Ibid.
[10] Linda Elizabeth Binkley, "Three Versions of the *Concerto for Oboe and Small Orchestra (1945-1946, revised 1948)* by Richard Strauss: An Analytical and Historical Study for the Performer" (DMA diss, University of Arizona, 2002), 31.

connection with the Nazi party created suspicions about his character. Strauss brought the manuscripts of the incomplete *Oboe Concerto* with him. At the end of November, Strauss sent de Lancie a note that the work was completed and that the world premiere would take place in Zurich in January 1946.[11] By that time de Lancie had been put on the list to go home. If he gave up his spot he did not know when he would get another one, so he decided to return to the United States.

The Strauss *Oboe Concerto* was premiered by Marcel Saillet, solo oboist of the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra on February 26, 1946. Andreae Volkmar, Strauss's close friend and one of the biggest supporters in his move to Switzerland, conducted the premiere.[12] Strauss had second thoughts about certain parts of the concerto after the premiere and revised the work in 1948. In her dissertation, Linda Elizabeth Binkley showed that there were only minor differences between editions, including revisions of the rhythmic notations and orchestration, but Strauss did lengthen the final coda, expanding the dominant harmony.[13] Leon Goosens (1897–1988) gave the first performance in England (in 1946) and was the first to record the 1946 version.

When de Lancie returned to the United States, Tabuteau sent him a telegram stating that he was sick and could not go on the transcontinental tour with the Philadelphia Orchestra in the spring of 1946. The orchestra planned to hold auditions and Tabuteau asked de Lancie to come take the audition. De Lancie won the audition and, while on tour, the orchestra's conductor Eugene Ormandy (1899–1985) offered him a permanent position in the orchestra.[14]

[11] De Lancie, "De Lancie Discusses."
[12] Burgess and Haynes, *The Oboe*, 210.
[13] Binkley, "Three Versions…" 24.
[14] De Lancie, "De Lancie Discusses."

In his second season with the orchestra, de Lancie received a letter from the head of Boosey & Hawkes, the publisher of Strauss's *Concerto*, saying that they wanted the work to be performed in America; they had instructions from Strauss that de Lancie should be given the opportunity to play its premiere.[15] De Lancie, however, was unable to perform the premiere of Strauss's concerto in the United States. Tabuteau, who had just returned from London where he had had a chance to look at the concerto, was very upset. He then called de Lancie a liar for claiming the work was written for him, and told him that de Lancie's name was never on the work, so it could not have been written for him.[16] Tabuteau said that if anybody would play it, it should be him, the principal oboist. Nevertheless, Tabuteau did not want to play it, since it seemed incredibly difficult.[17] Instead, Mitch Miller (1911–2010), the principal oboist of the Columbia Broadcasting System Orchestra, offered to give the premiere, and did so with the CBS Symphony and conductor Bernard Hermann (1911–1975) during a radio broadcast in 1948. Tabuteau retired from the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1954 and de Lancie became solo oboist. He performed Strauss's *Concerto* for the first time when the Philadelphia Orchestra was on tour in the early 1960s at the Interlochen Music Camp in Traverse City, Michigan with Eugene Ormandy. De Lancie said: "I decided to make the Strauss my swan song as a soloist."[18]

He made his own revision of the concerto because he was mostly concerned about the very long solo passages in the concerto. Many modern oboists use circular breathing to perform these passages, but de Lancie did not use this technique. He said, "It is not reasonable to make

[15] Binkley, "Three Versions…" 33.
[16] Strauss mistakenly dedicated the work to "an American soldier (oboist from Chicago)," confusing de Lancie's home of Pittsburgh with Chicago. Binkley, "Three Versions…" 33.
[17] John de Lancie. "John de Lancie Discusses the Strauss Oboe Concerto."
[18] James Roos, "Oboist Finally Records the Concerto he Inspired." *The Double Reed*, 14, 3 (1991); 34-36.

artistic and technical demands secondary to physical demands."[19] According to James Roos, "De Lancie chose to re-orchestrate some of the solo oboe line into other wind instruments in an effort to alleviate some of the endurance problems." De Lancie explained: "Sometimes too much oboe is a bad thing. Better to give the listener some variety in order to better appreciate the beauty of the solo oboe writing."[20] Thus, de Lancie gave some of the solo oboe's melodic lines to the clarinet, flute, and horn.

Before making revisions to the concerto, de Lancie consulted his friends and conductor Sergiu Celibidache (1912–1996), who was well acquainted with Strauss and his music. Celibidache agreed with de Lancie's revisions except for one: a cut in the triplet section of the third movement, where de Lancie agreed to undo his changes.[21] He also presented his version to the Strauss family with his personal recording, which he made in May 1987 with a chamber orchestra conducted by Max Wilcox.

De Lancie also used the original ending of the concerto from 1946, which he personally preferred.[22] Alice Strauss, Strauss's daughter-in-law and secretary for twenty-five years, supported de Lancie in his modifications. She remembered that opera singers would often tell Strauss about difficulties in their parts and he would always change their parts to help them.[23]

One question that many oboists have is why de Lancie did not perform the work more frequently. One explanation for this is that the oboe in the United States at this time did not have as much "solo space" as other instruments in the orchestra, particularly the violin and piano.

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[19] John de Lancie, "Some Thoughts on the Strauss Oboe Concerto." *The Double Reed*, 18, 2 (1995); 61-62.
[20] Binkley, "Three Versions…" 40
[21] Ibid, 37.
[22] Ibid, 40.
[23] Ibid, 41.

Another possibility is that the piece was nearly impossible for de Lancie, like many other oboists of the time, to perform. Strauss's incredibly long phrases are daunting to oboists today, even with circular breathing being a common technique. For oboists of the 1950s and 1960s, when circular breathing was not as common as it is today, it would have been quite formidable.

Strauss's *Concerto* maintains its status today as one of the most important, and possibly one of the most demanding, concertos for oboe. De Lancie is in large part responsible for this work, and performing it has become one of the defining moments of his career.

JEAN FRANÇAIX'S *L'HORLOGE DE FLORE*

Jean Françaix's *L`Horloge de Flore* was commissioned by John de Lancie in 1957 and completed in 1959. It was premiered in 1961 by de Lancie and the Philadelphia Orchestra. *L'Horloge de Flore* has seven movements which are played without a pause. The piece was inspired by the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778), who first proposed a flower clock as a way to tell time, based on the hour of a day at which certain flowers bloom.[24]

The movements are described as:

3 heures – (Galant de Jour)
5 heures – (Cupidon Bleu)
10 heures – (Cierge à grandes fleurs)
12 heures – (Nyctanthe du Malabar)
17 heures – (Belle de Nuit)
19 heures – (Géranium triste)
21 heures – (Silène noctiflore)

L'Horloge de Flore has been a staple of the twentieth-century oboe repertoire since its premiere. Robert Huffman, an oboist and expert on de Lancie, explained that "de Lancie was rehearsing the Françaix Quintet with the Philadelphia WW5 [sic] and he was impressed with the writing and thought Françaix would be someone to approach with an oboe commission."[25]

On a radio broadcast leading to the premiere of Françaix's work, de Lancie is quoted by the announcer recalling the events leading up to the completion of the concerto:

> The first idea of commissioning Jean Françaix to write an oboe concerto came to my mind during a rehearsal with the Philadelphia Woodwind Quintet of which I

[24] Jennifer Marie Wohlenhaus Bloomberg, "Jean Françaix: 'L'Horloge de Flore,' an Analysis, Performance Suggestions and a Simplified, Two-Hand Reduction of the Piano Accompaniment." DMA diss., The University of Iowa, 2015.
[25] Robert Huffman, Facebook message to the author, January 11, 2019.

> am a member. At that time we were playing some chamber music by Mr. Françaix. I decided to ask him to write for a category which was sadly neglected, namely concerti for woodwind instruments and orchestra. Monsieur Françaix and I exchanged letters in which I attempted to give him my thoughts about the limitations of the oboe and the type of thing the oboe is best suited to do. In the early summer of 1959 I received a note from Monsieur Françaix saying: last night at eleven o clock I completed your *L'Horloge de Flore* for solo oboe, two flutes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns and a small string orchestra.[26]

The speaker in this broadcast introduced de Lancie as he entered the stage and described an interview he had with de Lancie. He described the work as not in a conventional concerto form. The host then quoted de Lancie a final time before the work began, "I believe this work will be a very welcome addition to the repertory because it was written with the thought that the oboe is primarily a lyric instrument, and the work abnormally supports this concept."[27]

This statement by de Lancie is especially striking since it summarizes his entire philosophy of oboe playing in a single sentence. De Lancie firmly believed that the instrument should be treated lyrically first and as a virtuosic soloist second.[28] In a time when other oboists were leaning further and further into the technical possibilities of the instrument, de Lancie maintained his focus on the sound as a primary goal.

Although de Lancie was very happy with the work in the end, there was at least a little tension between him and Françaix about its composition. In a letter de Lancie received from Françaix during the compositional process, it is clear that de Lancie preferred part of an earlier version of *L'Horloge de Flore* Françaix had written, which had a movement based on the composer's *Divertissment* for oboe, clarinet and bassoon

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[26] World premiere Françaix's *L'Horloge de Flore,* Radio broadcast, April 1, 1961. From the collection of Douglas King.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Samuel Singer, "Notes on the Program," Philadelphia: Academy of Music, January 12, 1964. MSS 134.

(1947). Françaix replaced this movement with a new one and did not tell de Lancie until afterward. This upset de Lancie, as he favored that movement and felt that the "floral material" would be lost without it. It seems that Françaix was trying both to reassure de Lancie that the piece would work with this new movement and to secure a premiere or recording date with the oboist, even suggesting that the work be recorded in France.[29]

De Lancie was very influential in the compositional process of this concerto, as explained by Huffman:

> The cue notes in the solo part were originally in the oboe part. Mr. de Lancie persuaded Françaix to give both the oboist and the audience a break. The only one Françaix didn't agree to is the last note of the first movement. Françaix kept this as a high F but added the top line F as a concession to JDL [John de Lancie]. JDL thought that the high F sounded too final and not like the end of a 1st [sic] movement. Also - Françaix and his daughter were a piano duo and the piano reduction is really designed for piano - four hands - even though it isn't printed as such. This is why the piano part is so difficult.[30]

Although this work is overall not as challenging as the Strauss, the Françaix requires great technique and flexibility. Each of the seven movements presents a new character, and each asks the soloist to display a wide range of styles. The slow movements contain long and lyric lines, but unlike the Strauss, they are playable without the aid of circular breathing. Each slow section is written mainly at either piano or pianissimo dynamic levels, requiring the oboist to display their dolce sound at this soft volume. In the quick movements, there are many sudden changes in both dynamic and articulation, which demand that the soloist be flexible.

The original piano reduction was very difficult for the pianist, since it was written for piano four hands, and most often is performed by a single pianist. Jennifer Marie Wohlenhaus Bloomberg, a student of de Lancie in the mid 1990s at the San Francisco Conservatory of

[29] Letter from Jean Françaix to John de Lancie, date unknown. Received from Douglass King.
[30] Robert Huffman, Facebook messages to the author, June 25, 2018.

Music, wrote "de Lancie made numerous suggestions to my pianist concerning what to leave in or remove from the reduction and at one point expressed the wish that someone who knew something about the oboe and the piano would create a simplified reduction."[31] Dr. Wohlenhaus Bloomberg's lessons with de Lancie from 1995 to 1997 provide performance and pedagogical suggestions as well as offer insight into the simplified reduction, that she supplies in her dissertation, which is very useful for both professional and student performances.[32]

Françaix`s music was well received at the beginning of his career but when atonality and serialism became more prominent in post-World War II France, his neoclassical music fell out of favor. De Lancie, however, firmly believed that Françaix's music suited his vision of how one should write for the oboe. The musical preferences shared between these two created a lasting work for oboe and orchestra.

[31] Wohlenhaus Bloomberg, "Françaix." 2.
[32] Ibid.

BENJAMIN LEES'S *OBOE CONCERTO*

Benjamin Lees's *Oboe Concerto* was commissioned in 1963 by John de Lancie, who premiered it with The Philadelphia Chamber Orchestra under conductor Anshel Brusilov on January 12, 1964, at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia.[33] While the two previous concertos have been researched extensively by many oboists and historians, this concerto has been forgotten and wrongfully ignored. The shift away from newer works for the instrument, with the exception of those by the most famous composers, would certainly have detracted from the visibility of a work by a composer such as Lees. To my knowledge, the *Concerto* was only performed on three occasions: once for the premiere in 1964, once by Jay Light with the Drake University Orchestra in 1977, and most recently by Kelli Short with the Richardson Symphony Orchestra in 2008.[34] According to John Canarina – a former assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic under Leonard Bernstein who performed Lees's concerto with Light at Drake University in 1977 – "The concerto certainly deserves to be better known."[35]

Benjamin Lees, although not a particularly well-known composer today, was very successful throughout his career. He was born in Harbin, China, to Russian-Jewish parents as Benjamin George Lisniansky. In 1925 his family immigrated to California where he earned citizenship through his parents' naturalization. He served in the United States military in World

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[33] Smith, "An Annotated…" 46.
[34] Sequenza21, "Benjamin Lees Oboe Concerto to Be Performed by Richardson Symphony Orchestra on November 8 in Richardson, Texas," Accessed January 14, 2019. http://www.sequenza21.com/calendar/2008/11/benjamin-lees-oboe-concerto-to-be-performed-by-richardson-symphony-orchestra-on-november-8-in-richardson-texas/.
[35] John Canarina, email to the author, September 17, 2018.

War II and afterward studied composition at the University of Southern California with Halsey Stevens (1908–1989) and Ingolf Dahl (1912–1970). He also studied privately with George Antheil (1900–1959). He won the Fromm Foundation Award in 1953 and Guggenheim Fellowship in 1954, which allowed him to live in Europe for seven years, premiering works in Genoa and Vienna. He also earned a Fulbright Fellowship to study in Finland in 1956. He returned to the United States in 1961 and taught composition at Peabody Conservatory, Queens College, Manhattan School of Music, and the Juilliard School.

Lees rejected atonality, writing in an extended tonal idiom. According to Niall O'Loughlin's article on the composer in *The New Grove Dictionary,* "From an early interest in the bittersweet melodic style of Prokofiev and the bizarre and surrealist aspects of Bartók's music, he progressed naturally under the unconventional guidance of Antheil."[36] His music is rhythmically active – frequently changing meter and accent patterns – and is also known for its semi-tonal inflections in melody and harmony.[37] He wrote for symphony orchestra, chamber ensembles, solo instruments, and voice, and they were performed by major orchestras, among them the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, the Louisville Symphony Orchestra, and the Delaware Symphony Orchestra.

Much of the information about this concerto can be found in several different sources, with no single source containing the full story. The founder of the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, music director and conductor Marc Mostovoy, indicated that the Lees concerto was never performed by the Concerto Soloists, the ensemble's original name, but it was instead performed by The Chamber Symphony of Philadelphia, an orchestra which has been defunct for

[36] Niall O'Loughlin, "Benjamin Lees," *Grove Music Dictionary*, 2001, https://doi-org.libdata.lib.ua.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.16257.
[37] Ibid.

over 50 years.[38] There is a full score with parts and a piano reduction, which is particularly hard to find since only three libraries in the world hold it. The full score and parts can be rented from the publisher, Boosey and Hawkes, but the piano reduction is not available either for sale or rent.

I contacted the Curtis Institute, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the Yale Music Library in order to locate any information regarding the work, its premiere, or any potential recordings of the piece. Only a single recording of the concerto, performed by Jay Light, which Lees left, along with the entire archive of his works, to the Irving S. Gilmore Music Library at Yale University, was found. This recording is found on the CD *Music of Benjamin Lees* produced by the Historical Music Recordings Collection University of Texas at Austin and contained the following available information:

> Oboe Concerto
> Jay Light, oboe; Drake University Orchestra
> John Canarina, conductor
> (Recorded in concert, date unknown)[39]

Light, Professor Emeritus at Drake University and a student of de Lancie, offered some information regarding the origins of this work. According to Light, he was not aware that the recording had been made available at Yale, nor was he positive of the performance date of the recording. Canarina, the conductor, provided the date, March 8, 1977.

According to Light, de Lancie approached Lees after being impressed by other works of his, and requested that Lees compose a concerto for oboe.[40] Light was there for the premiere in

[38] Marc Mostovoy, e-mail to the author, August 6, 2018.
[39] Benjamin Lees, *Oboe Concerto*. Recorded March 8, 1977. Self-published. From the Irving S. Gilmore Music Library.
[40] Jay Light, email to the author, September 14, 2018.

1964 and is one of the only oboists to perform it and possibly the only one to make a recording. In an email he states:

> The work is not a great finger-buster. (De Lancie was very scornful of both music and players whose main thing was "a million notes a minute.") Much of its charm is from the asymmetric rhythms which were just finding their way into more music of that era (The Rite of Spring and Tchaikovsky 5th notwithstanding). The 2nd movement is rather anguished, but emotionally gripping.[41]

This version of the concerto's birth is confirmed by an email to Robert Huffman from Harold Smoliar (English Hornist of the Pittsburgh Symphony and Curtis graduate in 1978), who indicated that "I know that de Lancie liked a chamber music piece by Lees that he had me play in wind class- woodwinds and piano I think. My recollection is that he contacted Lees after playing that piece to ask him to compose the concerto."[42,]

The Yale Music Library also has program notes for the concerto, which provide information about the Philadelphia Chamber Orchestra. This information also agrees with earlier sources, as it includes the following information: "[Lees's] quintet for piano and winds, played by the Philadelphia Woodwind Quintet and Rudolf Firkusny, led tonight's soloist, John de Lancie, to commission this concerto which is having its world premiere."[43] De Lancie chose to ask Lees to write a concerto for him after being pleased with his music, just as he had asked Strauss and Françaix.[44]

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Huffman, messages. The work referred to by Smoliar is most likely the *3 Variables* for oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, and pianoforte (1955).

[43] Singer, "Notes..."

[44] More information about the premiere of the concerto exists in articles from several Philadelphia are newspapers: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Philadelphia Daily News*, and *The Evening Bulletin* all ran articles on the premiere of this work.
Daniel Webster, "French Music is Scheduled By Orchestra," The Philadelphia Inquirer, January 12, 1964, b13.
Samuel Singer, "Oboe Concerto is Applauded – Twice," The Philadelphia Inquirer, 1964, newspaper clipping received from Irving S. Gilmore Music Library.

The program notes for the premiere performance quote de Lancie describing the concerto as "lyric in the modern vein, showing off the oboe to its best advantage." He also notes that "Some contemporary works for oboe are not realistically written for the instrument. The oboe is lyric, not wild."[45] The program notes also contain a description of the three movements by the composer:

> There are four distinct elements in the first movement, which is modified sonata form. The first subject combines cantilena and sarcasm. A difficult section later in this movement alternates between 7/8 and 5/8 time. The second movement is in three-part song form, opening with the solo horn answered by the timpani. The finale is a "driving rondo" although in place of the usual re-statement, several new ideas are heard in quick successions.[46]

According to Erin Smith's *An Annotated Bibliography of American Oboe Concertos* Lees's concerto is considered moderately difficult because of the frequently changing time signatures, making it difficult to learn the rhythms.[47] While Smith indicates that the concerto has just two movements, it in fact has three: I Allegro enfatico, II Andante, ma con morbidezza, III Allegro giocoso. Smith also states that the piano reduction is written by composer.[48] However, the score currently available with publisher Boosey & Hawkes shows that the piano reduction was written by Marcel G. Frank.[49]

The Yale Music Library also possess a copy of an article from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* by Samuel L. Singer entitled "Oboe Concerto is Applauded Twice" which indicates that instead of performing both the Marcello and Lees oboe concertos, de Lancie performed Lees's concerto

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Max de Schauensee, "Concerto for Oboe Gets Double Billing," Evening Bulletin, January 13, 1964, newspaper clipping received from Irving S. Gilmore Music Library.
[45] Singer, "Notes…"
[46] Ibid.
[47] Smith, "Bibliography" 46.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Benjamin Lees, *Oboe Concerto*, (London: Boosey and Hawkes) 1967.

a second time that night because the audience wanted to hear it again.[50] Brusilow, the conductor of the premiere, is quoted in the article saying: "This is an exciting, excellent and important addition to the oboe repertoire."[51]

According to Singer, the concerto is a most difficult work for soloist, conductor and accompanists, a grateful work for the oboe with a lively and colorful accompaniment. The structure of the work is explained as "introduction of new material to extended development of any one or two themes. But he never runs out of ideas."[52] Singer continues his description of the concerto:

> The syncopated introduction is rather boisterous, and there is both "cantilena and sarcasm" in the first movement. The oboe is at its most songful in the slow movement, which opens with a short dialogue between solo horn and timpani. The strongly rhythmic finale alternates between steady buildup by the orchestra and, again, exotic melodies for the oboe, until the unexpectedly quiet ending.[53]

In an article entitled "Concerto for Oboe Gets Double Billing" (The Evening Bulletin dated Monday January 13, 1964), Max de Schaunesee describes the premiere of the concerto in depth, with a very positive review that shows the impact that work had on the audience that evening:

> The third program of the season by the Philadelphia Chamber Orchestra Society was heard at the Academy of Music last night. Anshel Brusilow, with an assist from Mason Jones, conducted, and John de Lancie, the first oboist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, appeared as featured soloist. A good-sized, enthusiastic audience was on hand. Of outstanding interest was the world-premiere of an interesting and obviously important work of Benjamin Lees, a "Concerto for Oboe and Chamber Orchestra." Mr. Lees has written a piece of great ingenuity with busy patterns that cross each other within a light and supple framework. In the first movement and especially in the final one, a dot-and-dash technique that recalled some of Shostakovich's effects was apparent – the rhythms were smart and impudent. The adagio is a haunting movement, opening with a back-and-forth between brass and percussion. Here the plangent melody assigned to the solo

[50] Singer, "Oboe Concerto…"
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

> instrument allowed Mr. de Lancie to display his admirable legato. The final movement has some interesting ornamental passages for the soloist echoed elsewhere. The 39-year old composer was on hand to take a bow. Mr. de Lancie played the solo line with his well-known fluidity and skill. Mr. Brusilow, who had done an admirable job, stepped to the footlights and announced his belief in this 21-minute piece as important music and told the audience that he would then and there repeat it, omitting the Benedetti Marcello concerto that had been scheduled. A second hearing deepened the impression of the compositions strongly-knit fascination.[54]

A few years later in 1970, there was an article about Lees's *Oboe Concerto* in *Southern Arts*, an American music publisher, describing it as a welcome and worthwhile addition to the modern wind repertoire:

> Lees is a tonal composer who casts most of his material in traditional symphonic designs and yet still manages to sound original and stimulating. His symphonic arguments are always cogent and purposeful and the strong sense of rhythm which pervades his music gives it a pronounced momentum – particularly noticeable in the outer movements of this concerto. The solo part is not mere virtuosic melisma but plays an important part in the symphonic discussion of thematic material. The central Andante, marked "con morbidezza", is a fine dramatic elegy and provides an admirable foil to its bustling neighbors. Advanced oboists are recommended to get to grips with this new work via the oboe/piano version, published by Boosey at 20/-.[55]

The work is written for solo oboe, two flutes, two B-flat clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, timpani, cymbals, mounted cymbals, woodblock, triangle, tambourine, and strings. According to the composer, it should last roughly sixteen and one-half minutes, and all trills should be performed as semitone trills. The first movement opens with a largely syncopated accented rhythm performed by the orchestra in unison (Fig. 1), which sets up the movement. This leads to an uneven opening section, with meter changes nearly every measure, a trend that continues throughout the movement.

[54] de Schaunesee, "Concerto for Oboe..."
[55] Benjamin Lees, "Oboe Concerto," *Southern Arts*, 1970.

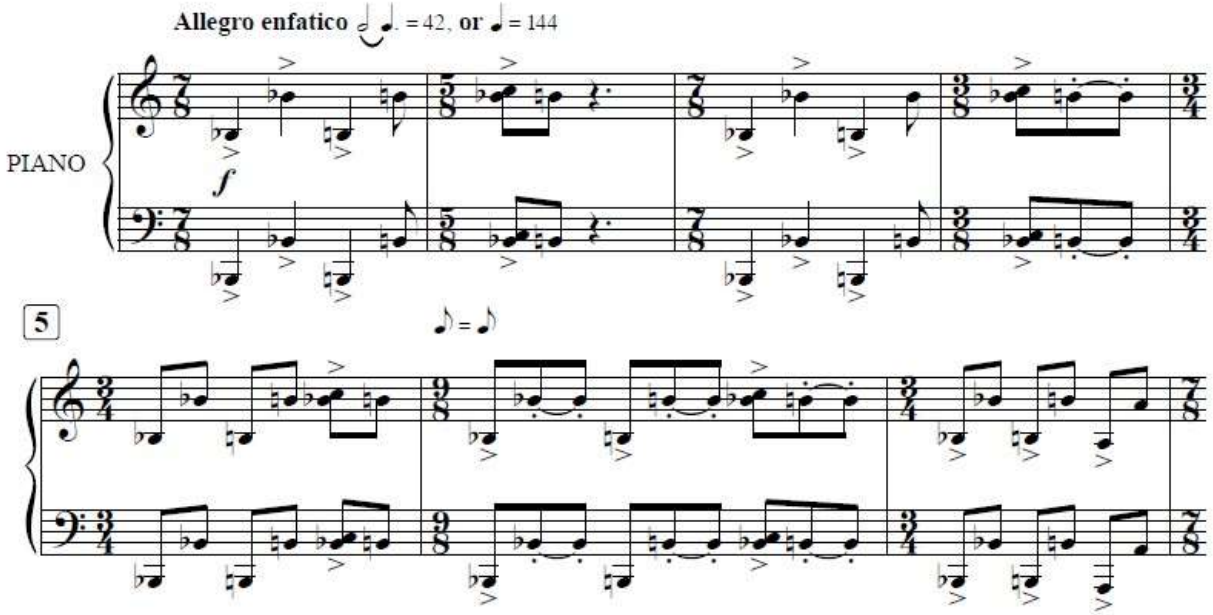


Figure 1 - Lees Concerto, mm. 1-7.

The oboe enters in measure twenty-four and exchanges rhythmic ideas with different members of the orchestra (Fig 2). After much back and forth, there is a contrasting section, marked *piu calma* primarily in 7/8, with meter changes at phrase ends. Here the oboe has an opportunity to demonstrate its legato phrasing in an otherwise staccato movement (Fig. 3).

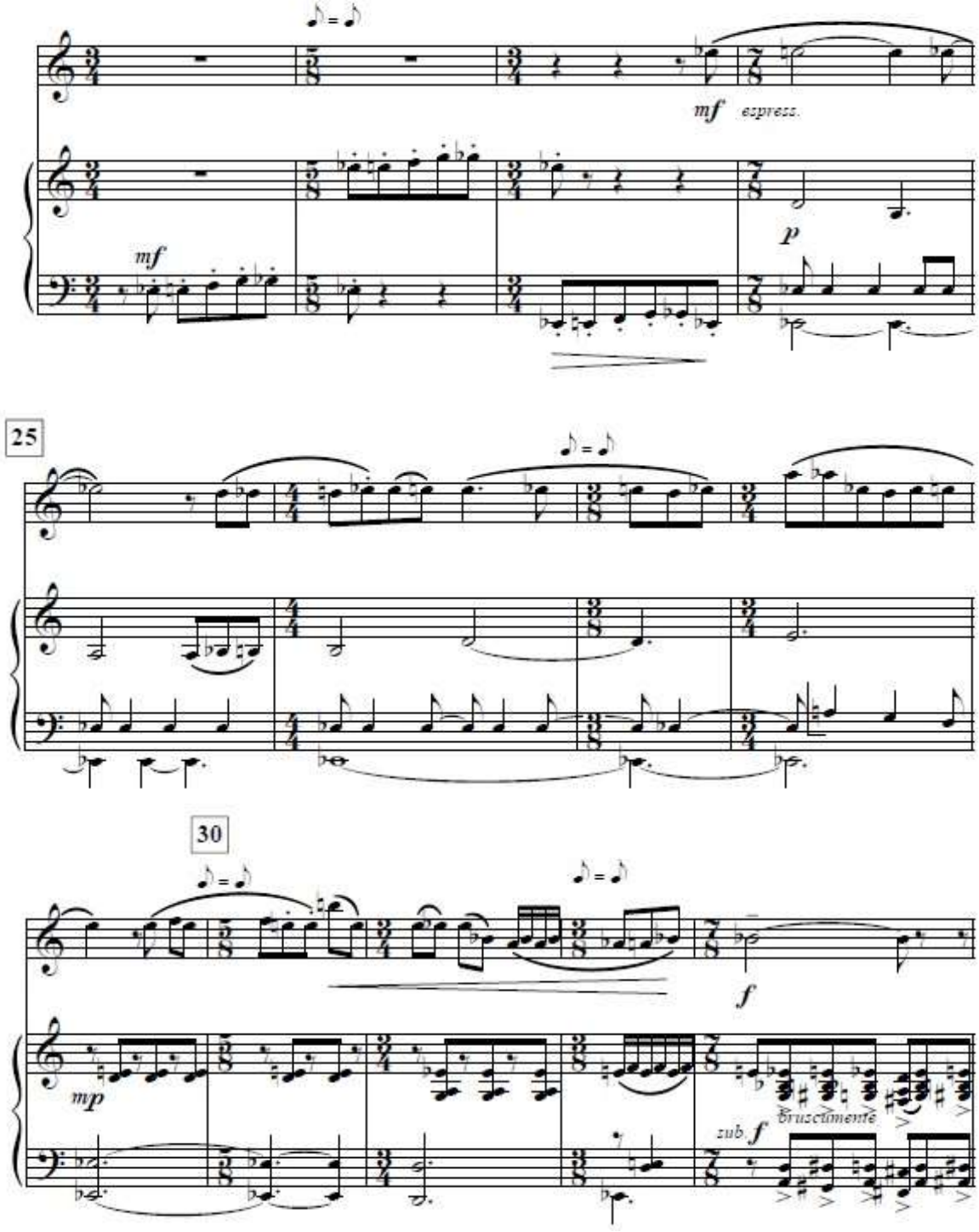


Figure 2 - Lees Concerto, Mvt. 1, mm 21-33.

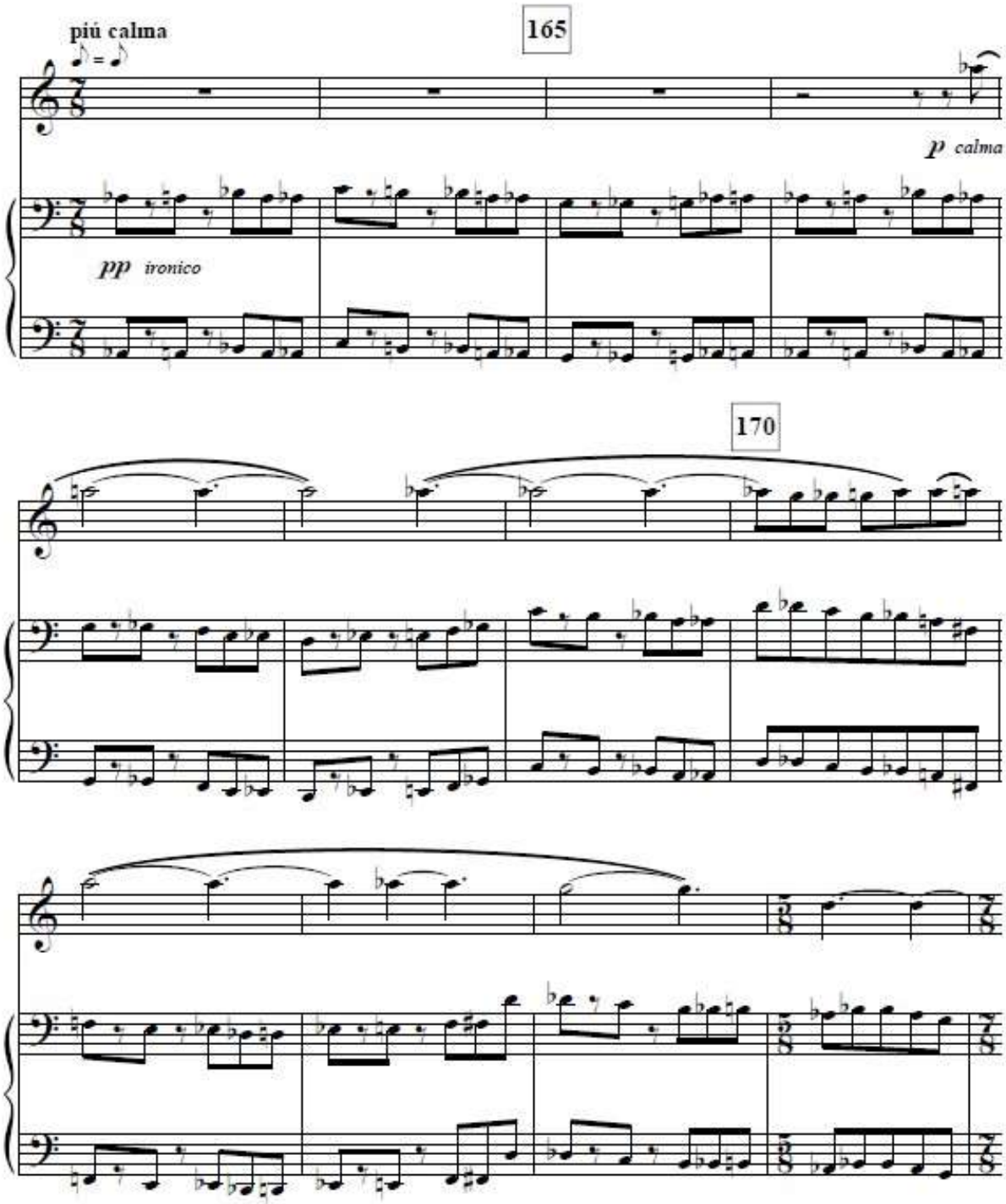


Figure 3 - Lees Concerto, Mvt. 1, mm 163-174.

This section eventually gives way to a return of much of the opening material, which swiftly moves to the end of the movement. The entire movement can be considered a variation of sonata form, except that in the "recapitulation" the second theme returns before the first.

The second movement, "Andante, ma con morbidezza," is similar in style to the middle section of the first movement. The low winds and strings present a walking lower voice while the oboe solo sings over it. This movement, however, maintains a steady increase in both dynamics and rhythmic variety before settling back into the statements by the oboe. Many of the oboe figures have a cadenza-like feel, often allowing the oboe to demonstrate the instrument's lyrical nature. This movement also allows the soloist to showcase their sound, dynamic control, and articulation (Fig. 4).

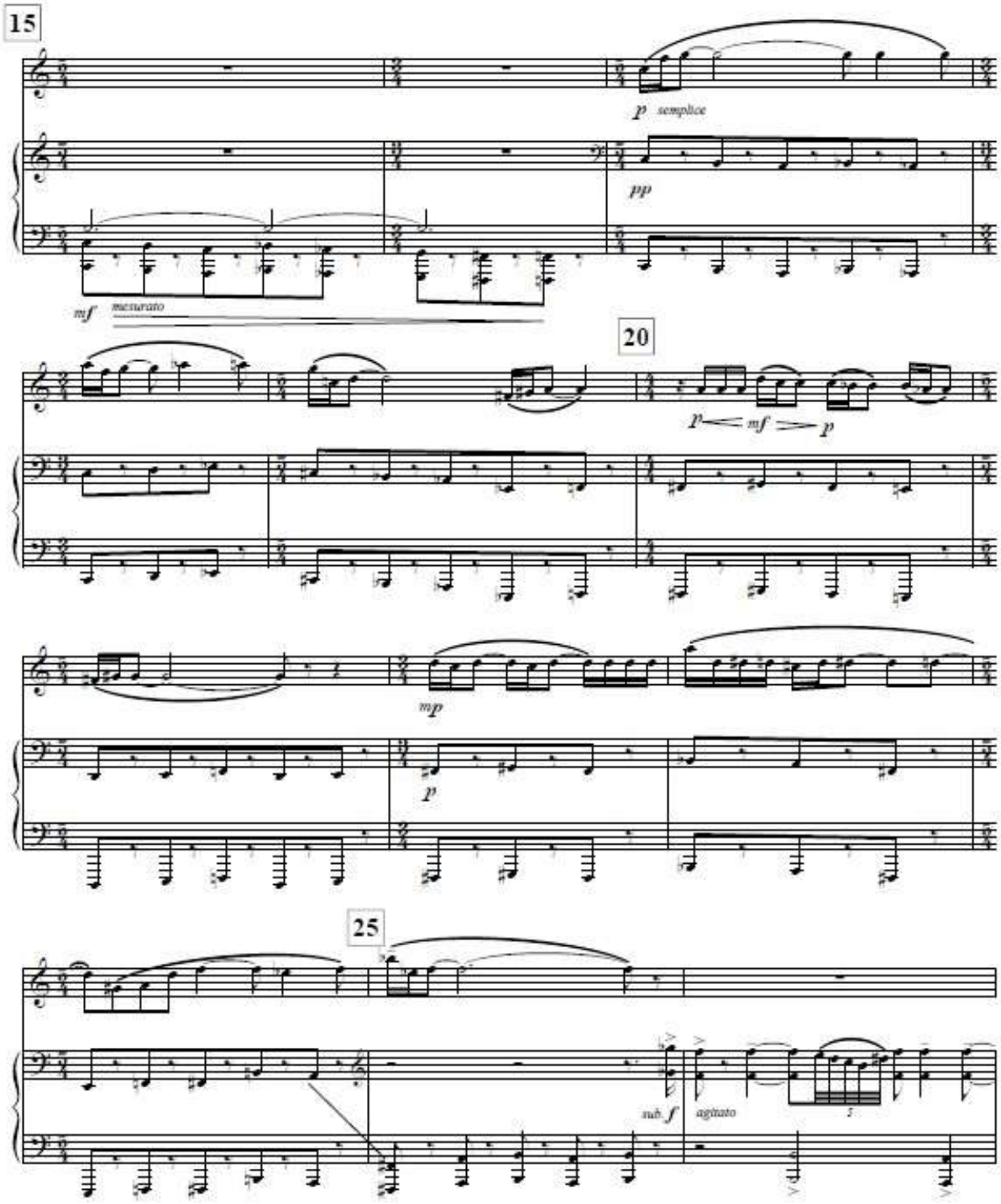


Figure 4 - Lees Concerto, Mvt. 2, mm. 15-25

The third and final movement, "Allegro giocoso," does not change meter as frequently as the first, instead using shifting accents to make the rhythm less predictable (Fig 5). Again, call and response pushes the movement through several different rhythmic ideas. The work ends unexpectedly with a sudden change in tempo and style (Fig. 6). The solo oboe makes its final statement over a subdued orchestration before the final eight measures race to the finish.

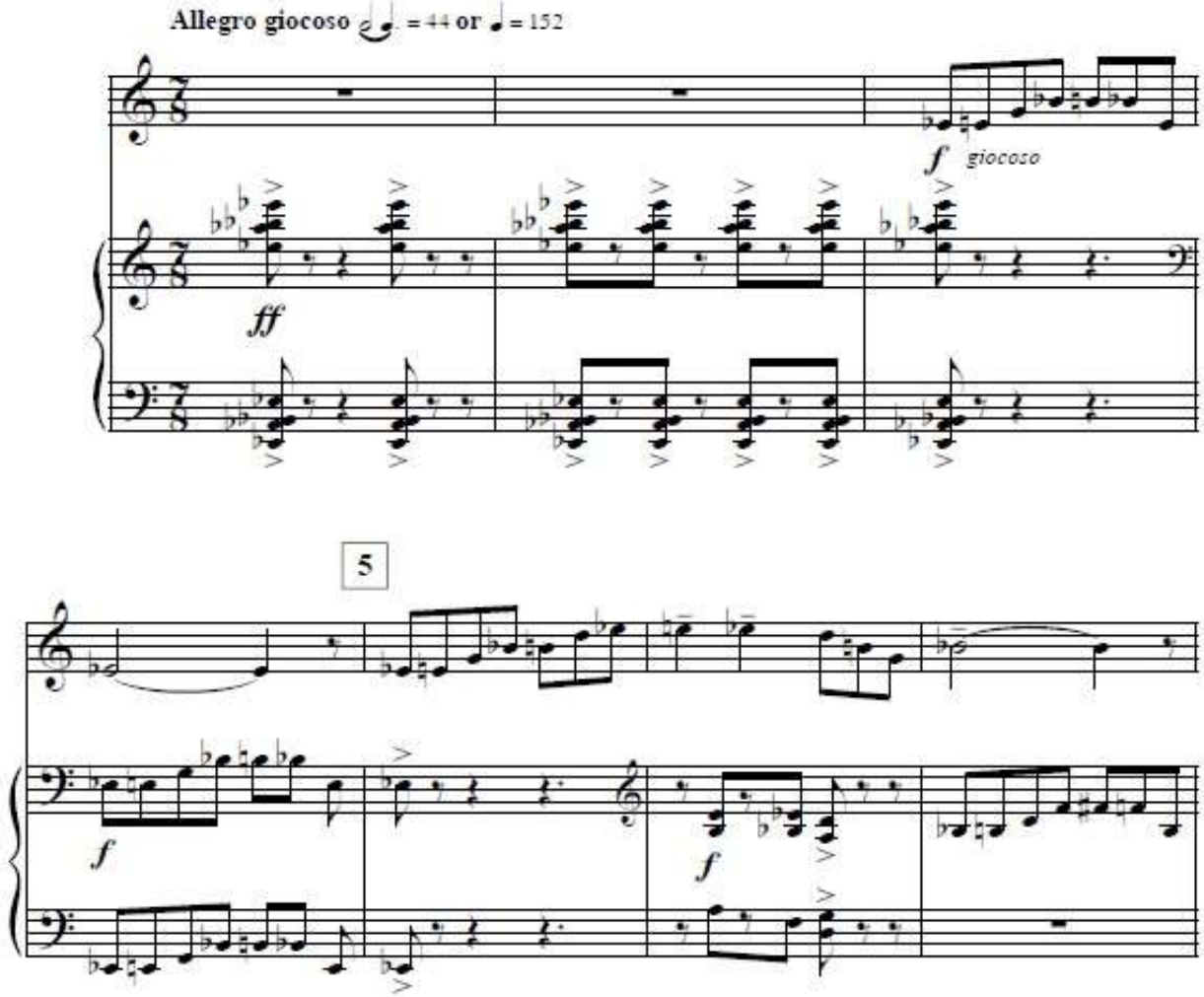
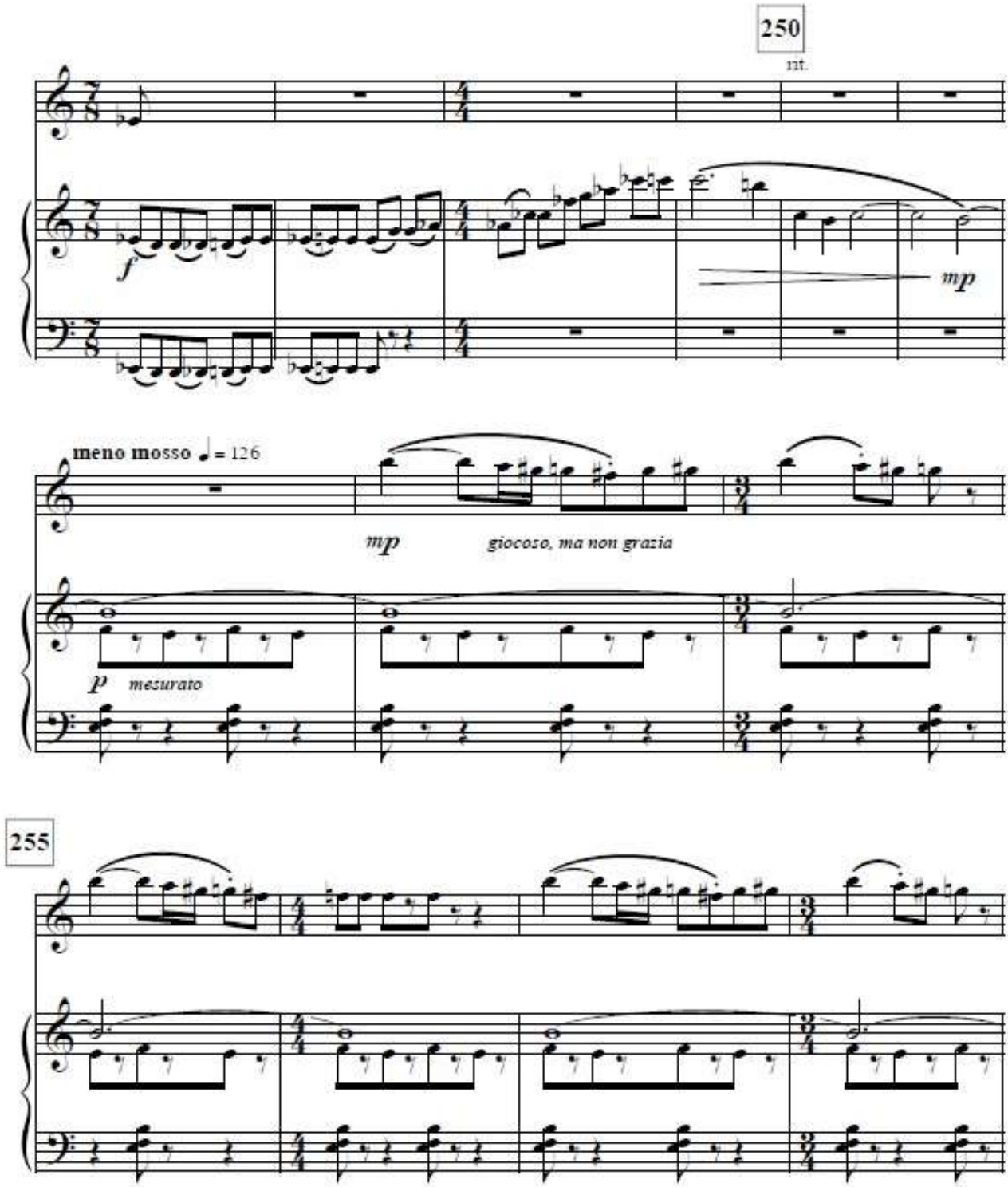


Figure 5 - Lees Concerto, Mvt. 3, mm. 1-7.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mesurato
255

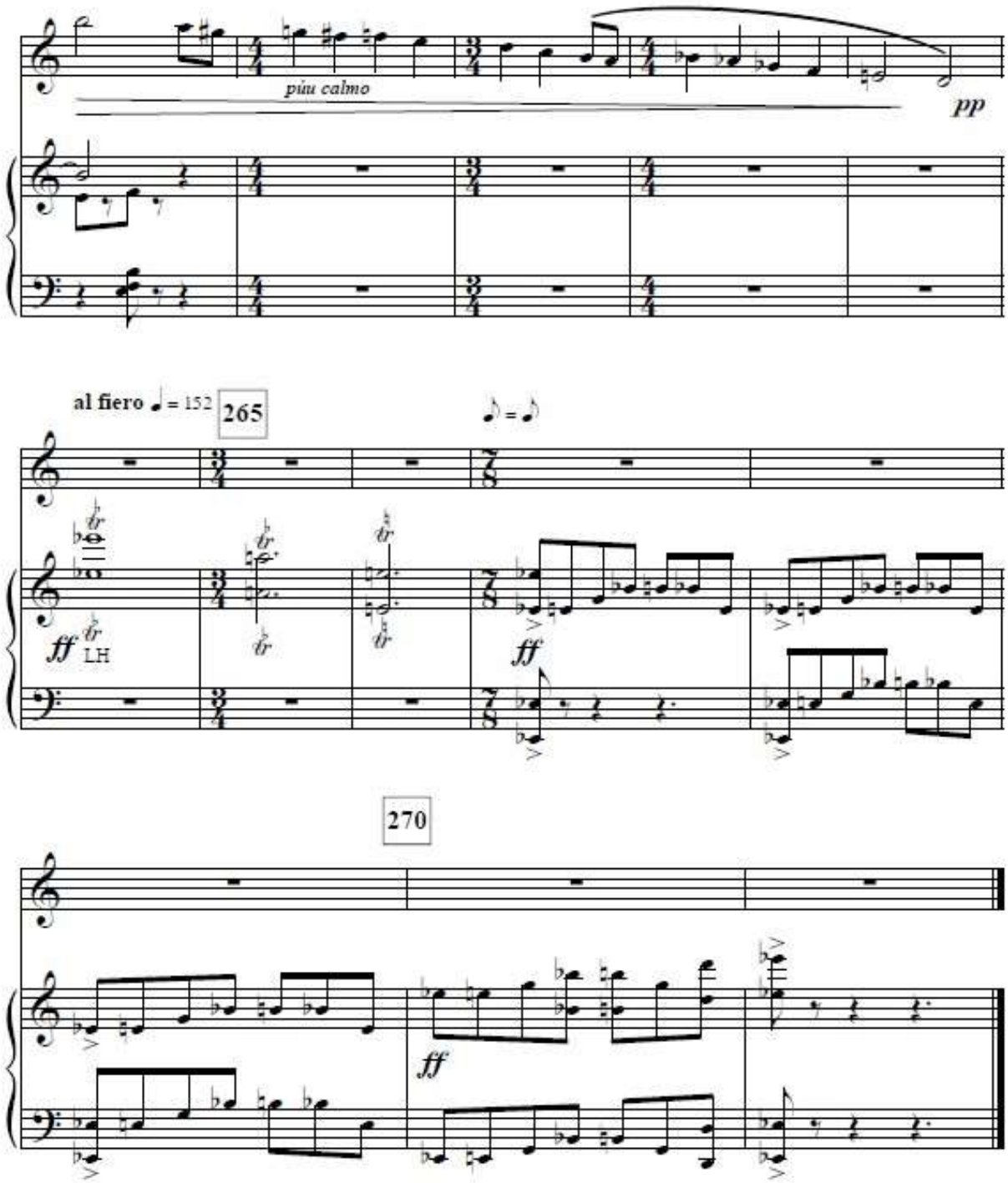

Figure 6 - Lees Concerto, Mvt. 3, mm 246-271.

CONCLUSION

These three concertos were all written in the span of eighteen years during a time when many composers stared writing atonal music, very often using serialism. However, de Lancie chose to commission concertos for oboe composers who wrote tonal music. Coming from the American school of oboe playing, de Lancie was primarily an orchestra player, while in Europe there was a long tradition of oboe soloists. Therefore, de Lancie's contribution to the oboe repertoire is not as large as his European counterparts. In fact, de Lancie's life overlaps with two of those influential European oboists, British oboist Leon Goossens (1897-1988) and Swiss oboist Heinz Holliger (b. 1939). Goossens performed and premiered many oboe concertos, sonatas, chamber music, and he was one of the most recorded oboists of his time. While he was very influential as an oboe professor and orchestral player, he is mostly remembered as a soloist. Heinz Holliger was not only an oboist but a conductor and composer, and he himself wrote many works for oboe. Holliger was one of the first oboists to experiment with extended techniques, eventually incorporating them into his own works. At the same time, American musicians such as Robert Bloom, professor of oboe at Yale University and a student of Tabuteau, were focused mostly on the correct interpretation of the newly popularized Baroque music.

Meanwhile, John de Lancie commissioned two concertos and is credited with the inspiration for Strauss's *Oboe Concerto*. Even so, the works by Françaix and Strauss are today among the most performed oboe concertos, considered staples of the twentieth-century oboe repertoire. The Lees, though not as well known, demonstrates the same lyric qualities as these two works, and aligns with de Lancie's view of how the oboe should be written for and played.

While oboists such as Holliger and Goosens were extending the technical possibilities of the oboe and treating it with more and more virtuosity, de Lancie saw the oboe as a lyrical instrument, and not "wild," as he would say.[56] He considered some contemporary not realistically written for oboe. The revisions de Lancie made in Strauss's concerto and the suggestions he gave to Françaix were very similar: changing orchestration, giving other woodwinds some of the melodies that the oboe was supposed to play in order to give the oboist opportunity to breathe and rest. In this instance, de Lancie stood his ground against the changing times, refusing to use the oboe merely as a technical tool. Instead, de Lancie's focus was on music that would allow him to demonstrate the dark, rich tone he had developed throughout his career, which is reflected in the works written for him.

[56] Singer, "Notes On The Program."

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