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The Voice (Kristen Watson) Meets the Chalumeau (Eric Hoeprich), an Aston Magna Concert at Brandeis

by [MICHAEL MILLER](#) • JULY 2, 2013 • [PRINT-FRIENDLY](#)



Eric Hoeprich

Aston Magna FestivalThe Art of the ChalumeauSlosberg
Auditorium, Brandeis University, Waltham,
MassachusettsThursday, June 13, 2013(also performed at Olin
Hall at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson and The Daniel Arts
Center at Bard College at Simon's Rock, Great Barrington, MA,
June 14 and 15)

Eric Hoeprich, chalumeauKristen Watson, sopranoStephen
Hammer, baroque oboeDaniel Stepner and Jane Starkman,
baroque violinAnne Black, baroque violaGuy Fishman, baroque
celloAnne Trout, VioloneCatherine Liddell, theorbo

Antonio Vivaldi – Concerto in E Minor for Strings, RV 134Johann
Adolph Hasse – Adagio from Trio for oboe, chalumeau, and
continuoMarcantonio Ziani/Joseph I of Hapsburg – “Tutti in
piano” (from *Chilonida*, 1709)Francesco Conti – Adagio (from
Fra queste ombrose piante)Georg Frideric Handel – “Io sperai
trovar nel vero” (from *The Triumph of Time and Truth*)Alessandro
Marcello – Concerto for oboe, strings, and continuoJohann
Friedrich Fasch – Concerto in B Flat for chalumeau, strings, and
continuoVivaldi – “Domine Deus” (from *Gloria*)“Veni, veni” (from
Juditha Triumphans, RV 644)Conti – Cantata: *Lontananza
dell'amato*

Reluctant to miss an opportunity to hear the great clarinetist
Eric Hoeprich, especially after his sensitively nuanced
performance of Mozart's *Kegelstatt* Trio for the Boston Early
Music Festival, I found it necessary, unfortunately, to miss an
important BEMF evening in order to make the trek out to
Brandeis. Daniel Stepner in fact apologized for the conflict,
promising to avoid them in the future. Indeed, it would be to the
advantage of Boston audiences if the two festivals could pool
their resources to make it possible for BEMF audiences to hear
the Aston Magna musicians, especially this one, devoted to a
rarely heard, obsolete elder sibling of the clarinet, the
chalumeau. The purpose of the instrument was to increase the

loudness of sound produced by the recorder. Their relationship is shown by the foot-joint the chalumeau inherited from the recorder. The chalumeau also had a functional relationship with the trumpet, especially clear in the English term for a crude, keyless chalumeau, the “mock trumpet.” Johann Christoph Denner, the Nuremberg instrument maker credited with the invention of the clarinet, had refined the chalumeau by adding two keys to its recorder-like holes. The chalumeau existed in at least four different sizes, with instrumental groups combining them identified at an early date. (As the range of the clarinet extended into lower registers over the course of the late eighteenth century, it superseded the chalumeau.) The soprano chalumeau was chosen for this concert, a diminutive instrument with a surprisingly rich, low sound. This gave it a sound which naturally complimented the higher registers of the human voice—an aspect that was amply explored during the course of the evening.



Kristen Watson, Soprano

Like all Aston Magna concerts, this one delighted the audience with the relaxed, unpretentious playing of musicians who are masters of the field. Mr. Hoeprich is as impressive a virtuoso with the chalumeau as with the clarinet. However, there was an added thrill in soprano Kristen Watson's astonishing vocal contribution. It has been a special pleasure over the past few years to follow Ms. Watson's development from impressive newcomer to a vocal and interpretive talent of the highest order. Her voice, now fully mature, is brilliant and supple, enriched by just the right amount of natural vibrato for music of the baroque and classical periods. Both musically and dramatically, her work was truly thrilling. Her voice also has an extraordinary range, enabling her to sing the contralto aria, "Io sperai trovar nel vero," from Handel's *Triumph of Time and Truth*. Her performance was magnificent—but, let's not forget, no more so than Lynn Torgove's performance in the excerpts from the oratorio at Aston Magna's 40th Anniversary Concert last year. Torgove's expressive line, deep feeling, and rhapsodic freedom made the music timeless—free from the baroque or any other historical category, and I'll remember her performance as one of the most extraordinary I've heard. This is not to detract from Kristen Watson's splendid achievement in this concert (She also made her own brilliant contribution to Aston Magna's anniversary concerts.), but, since I only wrote a preview of the Aston Magna anniversary concerts, I wanted these retrospective marvels to go on record.

The program began with a string concerto by Vivaldi as a sort of windless prelude. Ensemble and intonation were not quite where they should have been in the earlier part of this, but soon enough the musicians came together with their usual unanimity and fervor. The deep experience and ease of the players in the Vivaldi brought us, I thought, into direct and intimate contact with the Venetian master's music—all the more so, since the musicians showed no sign of having anything to prove in their playing.

A set of four short pieces by composers who worked extensively in opera—Johann Adolph Hasse, Marcantonio Ziani (or his patron Joseph I of Hapsburg), Francesco Conti, and Handel—brought the chalumeau into the mix—in the forefront of instrumental groups and in tandem with a singer. Surely one of the instrument's great virtues was its ability to compliment the other instruments of whatever group it is a part of—whether strings or oboe in this ensemble, but above all the human voice. Its ability to mimic the trumpet was apparent on occasion as well, reminding Casals aficionados of his 1950 Prades performance of Bach's second Brandenburg, in which the trumpet part was played on soprano saxophone, since Casals' tempo was too fast for any available trumpeter. One might well wonder whether Bach ever heard it played on a chalumeau.) The excellent notes by Joseph Orchard, which amply quote Mr. Hoeprich's own observations, noted that bassoon and second oboe parts had been omitted in the works by Hasse and Fasch which double the pertinent string parts. Still it would have been good to hear the more complex sonorities. Hoeprich also observed in his introductory talk that he planned to leave the larger and lower chalumeaux for another program. This will be something to look forward to, especially if he can assemble a chalumeau quartet.

After this, Mr. Stepner and his colleagues seemed to think that the audience was due for a diversion from the chalumeau—and I'm sure they didn't want to fail to take advantage of their superb oboist, Stephen Hammer—and offered Alessandro Marcello's Oboe Concerto in D Minor, one of the more familiar works of a relatively obscure composer. His brother Benedetto was more consistently active as a composer, more productive, and remains better known today. As scions of old Venetian nobility, both followed the traditional career path of public service, pursuing their musical careers as dilettanti. This work combines the incisiveness of the oboe in quick, rhythmically angular passages with its plangent lyrical qualities, both of which Mr. Hammer brought off with sensitivity and élan.

Johann Friedrich Fasch's Concerto for Chalumeau gave us the first sample of the instrument in an extended work. Hoeprich is a great virtuoso of the best sort—one who devotes his skills to the music—and his eloquent reading of this fine composition made a case for both the instrument and the composer without making an effort to impress. An Italianate German, Fasch absorbed the influence of Vivaldi more exclusively than his near-contemporary Johann Sebastian Bach

This was followed by a series of important arias by Vivaldi and an entire secular cantata by Francesco Conti, *La lontananza dell'amato*. The beloved Domine Deus from Vivaldi's Gloria paired Kristen Watson's glorious soprano with Stephen Hammer's oboe in a pastoral siciliana in 12/8 time. The strong phrasing and elegant line of both complimented each other most attractively. The aria "Veni, veni, me sequere" from Vivaldi's *Juditha triumphans* could well be the locus classicus for chalumeau and voice. In it the soprano chalumeau imitates the call of the turtle dove, as Judith, a contralto, calls on her maid, Abra, to go with her to the banquet where she plans to murder Holofernes. Eric Hoeprich played his part most expressively, with a fine feeling for this imitation of nature which integrally lies within the emotional content of the text through the metaphor of the turtle dove and interacted most responsively with Ms. Watson, who was singing at the bottom of her exceptional range. Beyond vehicles for her to display her dramatic and vocal range, they also demonstrated Vivaldi's mastery of textual setting and human expression. Anyone who fails to appreciate Vivaldi as he deserves should come away from this set a convert.

Francesco Conti was a Florentine, much travelled in Northern Europe, who, like Ziani and Hasse, composed operas for the court at Vienna. During his lifetime, he was as much known as a virtuoso lutenist and theorbist as as a composer. This secular cantata for soprano solo, a voice Conti especially favored in his vocal chamber works, was one of several probably composed in the second decade of the eighteenth century. The obbligato

course amply compensated by the quality of the playing. Beginning as the lament of the faithful lover at the absence of her beloved, much of the cantata consists of apostrophes to a nightingale, who has the ability to fly, as she wishes she could. This begins in a recitative for voice and continuo alone which introduces a spritely aria, in which the chalumeau carries the tune in dialogue with the soprano, not as literally imitating nature as Vivaldi's bird call, but clearly enough in the character of the tune. In the final aria, the two wind instruments take over the melody together. The virtuoso lute parts one would expect from Conti were not lacking either. The cantata was a rich, multifaceted dramatic monologue, and one can only be grateful to have made the acquaintance of this prolific and important composer.

In this deeply satisfying concert, the chalumeau was not so much an end in itself, as a guide through largely unfamiliar music which was either composed for it or complimentary to it. Nor was it the only theme in the program. The influence of Vivaldi and other Italians in Germany equally supported the program—a theme which would have fit perfectly with the unstated subtext of this year's edition of BEMF—Handel and Italy. Finally, in addition to the superb playing of all the instrumentalists, above all Messrs. Hammer and Hoeprich, it was a particular delight to enjoy Kristen Watson's continuing growth. She is well on her way in a major career in the baroque and classical repertory. This kind of programming, playing, and singing only brings us closer to the music, and what could be better than that?