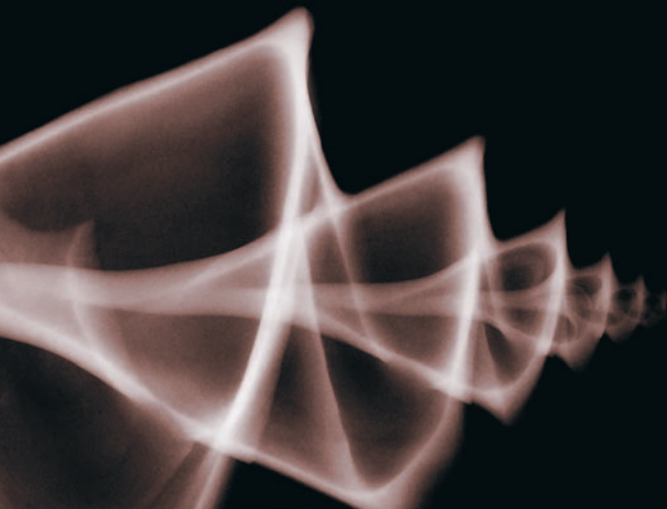


Denx-Elles

the  
**fibonacci**  
sequence

# oboe

Mozart | Poulenc | Françaix | Alwyn | Elgar | Crusell



## Oboe

The Oboe started life as a rather raucous outdoor instrument used on the battlefield and in town marching bands. Known as a Shawm, it probably arrived in Europe from the Middle East at the time of the 13th century Crusades. By the mid 17th century, the 2-keyed Hautbois, developed by Jean Hotteterre, was beginning to ease into musical life with its narrower bore and reed, giving a sweeter, more melodious timbre, better suited to indoor music-making in a more refined society. I love these lines by the German engraver Johann Christoph Weigel (1661-1725) celebrating the newer instrument:

*Away thou rural shawm! My sound shall drive thee hence  
I serve right well in time of peace and time of war,  
I serve the church and serve at court, where thou art not,  
Wine is my reward, and thou must do with yeasty beer,  
Thou in the village, I in castles live and towns,  
Thou hast but a penny ribbon; I have golden chains.*

The modern oboe owes its development to father and son Guillaume and Frédéric Triébert, whose 1872 "Système 6" was later declared the official oboe of the Paris Conservatoire and although instruments continue to develop, the basic key system has changed very little since then.

**Richard Skinner** Did you start your music making on the oboe, or did you come to the oboe from another instrument?

**Christopher O'Neal** My first instrument was the recorder, and then I started on the piano when I was 7. I was 10 by the time my parents asked me if I wanted

to play an orchestral instrument, and I chose the oboe. Nobody knows why, but I have a hunch that it was because I'd heard some wonderful playing on my Dad's LPs by Roger Lord. I still have the records, but no record player!

**R. S.** Was there a lot of music in your family?

**C. O'N.** Tons. I have a fond memory of sitting at the top of the stairs well past my bedtime listening to the chamber music coming from the drawing room. My Dad played piano and my Mum the cello, so they got friends round to play Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Beethoven and Brahms.

**R. S.** Just how hard do you have to blow to make a note on the oboe?

**C. O'N.** The aperture at the tip of the reed is actually tiny, and the trick is to make it work with as little effort as possible, thus ensuring a longer life, and calmer audiences. I remember my professor Terence Mac-Donagh making me blow down my reed progressively harder until the moment a sound came out. "STOP!" he shouted. "All the blowing you've done up to that point was completely wasted effort!"

**R. S.** What's the best thing about being an oboe player - and the worst?

**C. O'N.** When you're on song, surrounded by friends and you're given a beautiful tune to play, it's hard to imagine a better way of earning your living. My own opinion is that the oboe is the most lyrical of all instruments, and if like me you feel slightly embarrassed

about singing out loud it gives you a chance to release all that emotion. The worst thing? Making reeds.

**R. S.** The oboe is essential in all styles of music; baroque, romantic, *avant-garde* and so on. Which do you enjoy playing the most?

**C. O'N.** The baroque repertoire is stunning - it's got everything from quiet contemplation to virtuosic fireworks, humour, tragedy, mysticism, raunchiness, you name it. The advent of period instrument performances sadly means fewer opportunities to play those great obbligatos in the Bach Passions, Cantatas and Masses. But good luck for those players, of course! There was a time when I did a lot of *avant-garde* or contemporary music: it is a satisfying challenge both musically and intellectually. Nowadays, dare I say it, I find I prefer to send people home with a tune in their heads. But there again - William Alwyn was regarded as *avant-garde* in the 1930's so who knows what people will sing in the bath in the centuries to come?

**R. S.** How long does an oboe last? Do they get better as they get older?

**C. O'N.** The wood for an oboe used to be seasoned in oil for 20 years or more before being fashioned. Those oboes lasted for decades, but in the end they all wear out. Modern oboes I think only get 5 or 6 years in oil. I like to get a new instrument every five or six years. The manufacturers are doing great things with all the new technology available so it's always worth trying the latest models.

**R. S.** Why does a cor anglais have that egg shaped

bulge where most wind instruments have a bell of some sort?

**C. O'N.** The absolutely crucial thing about the cor anglais is its particular dark timbre. The more usual flared bell acts like a megaphone, but most cor tunes veer towards the mournful and it's hard to mourn through a megaphone. This Adagio by Mozart is no exception. I first heard it played (ravishingly) by Heinz Holliger, with whom I had the good fortune to study after my time at the Royal College.

**R. S.** Do all oboe players also play the cor anglais?

**C. O'N.** You have to have a slightly bigger reed to play the cor anglais, and it is rather heavier than the oboe, but otherwise the two instruments are very much alike and you don't need to learn anything new. So if you can afford one, you can play it! In professional circles, it is expected of you to be able to play cor anglais on request.

**R. S.** Which pieces in the Fibonacci repertoire do you enjoy playing the most?

**C. O'N.** I have always loved playing any chamber music - I grew up with it all round me, and really it seems to be where I am happiest. There is so much wonderful music, but I would have to say Mozart's Piano and Wind Quintet is right up there amongst the favourites! The repertoire I've chosen for this disc might give you an indication of my various tastes - I love the humour of Françaix and the irony of Poulenc, the brilliance of Crusell and the easy charm of Alwyn. But the two Mozart pieces have it all, and in spades!

## **W. A. Mozart (1756 - 1791)**

Mozart was staying in Munich during 1781 at a very happy time of his life. He was composing his opera "Idomeneo" for performance there with the orchestra of the Prince Elector, which boasted a superb woodwind section. The oboist was Friedrich Ramm - one of the first virtuosos of the instrument. A contemporary (and, to me, rather intimidating) description of his playing largely characterizes the mood of the Oboe Quartet which Mozart wrote for him: "...nobody as yet can produce the beautiful, round, gentle and pure tone of the oboe, combined with the resounding depth in the forte so excellently as he can. Incidentally, he blows with a refinement, an ease, an expression which are enchanting, treating this instrument according to its genuine inherent nature, with cleverness and a practical skill which few oboe players possess, and has a very feeling rendition in the Adagio, at the same time also knowing how to put spirit and fire into it should the effect and the enthusiasm so require." (Lipowsky: Baierischem Musik-Lexicon)

Even for a modern oboist, the Quartet stretches the capabilities of the instrument and the player from beginning to end. The first movement is dominated by the interval of a perfect 4th - either rising cheerfully or falling gently - interspersed with turns and running passages. The second consists of just 37 bars of some of the most heartfelt cantilena in all chamber music, and the sparkling Rondeau finale is notable for what might be described as an improvisation break for the oboe, suddenly taking off in common time while the string trio chugs along in 6/8.

The fragment of Adagio K580a was probably written in 1789. At almost the same time, he composed the Clarinet Quintet K581 and "Cosi fan Tutte" K588. Of the total of 73 bars, he completed only the first 28. After that he wrote the cor anglais part only. This recording is of the completion by E. Lowicky.

## **Francis Poulenc (1899 - 1963)**

Composed in 1926, this Trio is one of Poulenc's best known chamber works and is very much a distillation of all of his musical characteristics: colourful, lively (very), tuneful, great fun yet never superficial, a neo-classical exercise in clarity and concision.

The first movement, patterned on a Haydn Allegro is a sparkling Presto. The middle movement is a soft dream described by Poulenc himself as "sweet and melancholic", and whose main theme I was instructed by Terence MacDonagh to play like a "cat creeping through the undergrowth." The final movement is another brisk sequence of tableaux, a Rondo that suddenly takes a Spanish turn, with Flamenco guitar and town band – the Trio is dedicated to Manuel de Falla.

## **Jean Françaix (1912 - 1997)**

It is often said that you can tell whether you are going to enjoy a book once you have read half the first page. To me, this Quatuor lives up to the promise of its opening four bars without a single wasted note. There is both ebullience and tenderness in the first movement, melancholy in the second, burlesque in the scherzo, and the finale just seems completely insane until everything dissolves into a short peaceful epilogue.

Nadia Boulanger considered Françaix to one of the best, if not the best, of her students. He remained prolific throughout his life; even in 1981 he described himself as "constantly composing", barely finishing one piece before beginning another, and continued thus until his death in 1997. Although his best known works are wind-orientated, his huge output is well worth deeper exploration.

## **William Alwyn (1905 - 1985)**

This little Suite for Oboe and Harp was written for Léon and Sidonie Goossens. It is in three short movements, the last of which is a lively jig with a hint of an Irish folk song. The manuscript, lost for many years, was located in the Léon Goossens bequest of his entire musical repertoire to the British library.

## **Elgar (1857 - 1934)**

In the Summer of 1888, Edward Elgar and Alice Roberts were courting. Edward decided on a holiday with his long-standing friend, Dr Charles Buck of Settle, Yorkshire. As he left Worcester, Alice presented Edward with a poem she had written and entitled Love's Grace. While on holiday in Settle, Edward reciprocated by writing a short piece of music for her, which he called Liebesgruss (Love's Greeting, or Salut d'Amour). The work carried the dedication "To Carice", a contraction of his future wife's forenames Caroline Alice with which they subsequently christened their daughter. On his return from Settle, Elgar presented the work to his wife and proposed to her. They married at

the Brompton Oratory in South Kensington, London in May the following year.

I have included this miniature as a tribute to Elgar since we recorded this compilation during his 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

## **Bernhard Crusell (1775 - 1838)**

Crusell was principal clarinet with the Royal Court Orchestra in Stockholm for forty years and eventually became an internationally celebrated clarinettist based there; so it is not surprising that his best-known compositions feature solo clarinet. A notable exception is this Divertimento for oboe. It dates from 1822 and is quite a concerto piece for the oboe, requiring a virtuosic and almost operatic personality from the soloist. It's concisely put together, and - as might be expected from a contemporary of Weber, Schubert and Bellini - there's an abundance of early-Romantic colouring, despite its clear Classical roots.

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## Christopher O'Neal

Christopher O'Neal's richly varied career has always centred on a core of chamber music-making with the finest ensembles in Britain. A founder member of award-winning and ground-breaking ensembles Capricorn and the Elysian Wind Quintet, he has been the oboist of the Fibonacci Sequence since the group's inception in 1994. He is a long standing principal oboe and soloist with the Orchestra of St Johns, the London Mozart Players and formerly the English Sinfonia with whom he has played concertos the length and breadth of the UK. He has taken part in numerous celebrated recordings including the Gramophone Award winning premiere recording of music for wind and piano by Gustav Holst with the Elysian Quintet on Chandos. Christopher has the distinction of having been invited to play as guest principal with virtually every major symphony orchestra in the UK. His versatility extends to the commercial studio where he has numerous films to his name and is mentioned in the credits for his oboe solos in 'The Madness of King George'.

Born into a family of amateur musicians whose home constantly reverberated to the sounds of practice and chamber music, Christopher studied with Terence MacDonagh at the Royal College of Music and Heinz Holliger in Freiburg, Germany, generously supported by awards from Countess of Munster Trust, the Martin Musical Trust and the RVW Foundation. In his turn he is now Professor of oboe at Trinity College of Music in its magnificent new setting on the Thames at Greenwich.

photo Sasha Gusov



the  
**fibonacci**  
sequence

[www.fibsonline.co.uk](http://www.fibsonline.co.uk)

The Fibonacci Sequence is now well established as one of the foremost chamber ensembles in Britain. Founded by the pianist Kathron Sturrock, The Fibonacci Sequence is composed of musicians of international repute, and distinguished by the variety and imagination of its programming which makes full use of the range and versatility of the chamber music repertoire. The Fibonacci Sequence was ensemble-in-residence at Kingston University for eight years, where they were sponsored by the Stanley Picker Trust: Kingston University is continuing to support the Fibonacci Sequence with sponsorship of their ongoing Deux-Elles CD project. The ensemble is named after Leonardo of Pisa, known as Fibonacci, a great mediaeval mathematician. The series of numbers named after him occurs throughout the natural world in the most extraordinary way, appearing as if by magic in petals of flowers, branches of trees, spirals, and many more complex ways. The relation of the numbers to each other is directly connected to the Golden Section, held by many to determine the most harmonious proportions in art and music.

Jack Liebeck	violin
Zoe Beyers	violin
Yuko Inoue	viola
Andrew Fuller	cello
Ileana Ruhemann	flute
<b>Christopher O'Neal</b>	<b>oboe</b>
Julian Farrell	clarinet
Richard Skinner	bassoon
Gillian Tingay	harp
Kathron Sturrock	piano

# Deux-Elles

DXL1121

- |    |   |    |                                   |
|----|---|----|-----------------------------------|
|    | Oboe Quartet in F major KV370<br><i>oboe, violin, viola and cello</i> |    | Mozart                            |
| 1  | Allegro   | 2  | Adagio                            |
|    |   | 3  | Rondeau                           |
|    | Trio  |    | Poulenc                           |
|    | <i>oboe, bassoon and piano</i>  |    |                                   |
| 4  | Presto  | 5  | Andante                           |
|    |   | 6  | Rondo                             |
| 7  | Adagio KV580a<br><i>cor anglais, violin, viola and cello</i>          |    | Mozart<br><i>arranged Lowicky</i> |
|    | Quatuor à vents   |    | Françaix                          |
|    | <i>flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon</i>                              |    |                                   |
| 8  | Allegro   | 9  | Andante                           |
| 10 | Allegro molto   | 11 | <b>Allegro vivo</b>               |
|    | Suite for Oboe and Harp   |    | Alwyn                             |
| 12 | Minuet  | 13 | Valse Miniature                   |
|    |   | 14 | Jig                               |
| 15 | Salut d'Amour<br><i>oboe and harp</i>                                 |    | Elgar<br><i>arranged O'Neal</i>   |
|    | Divertimento  |    | Crusell                           |
|    | <i>oboe and string quartet</i>  |    |                                   |
| 16 | Allegro   | 17 | Andante poco adagio               |
| 18 | Allegro   | 19 | Allegro vivace                    |

Producer  
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Booklet Notes  
Cover Design

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Recorded in Potton Hall, Suffolk, July 2006.

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