

The following material is an excerpt from the master's research exposition:

THE IMPORTANCE OF ARUNDO DONAX CANE SELECTION, FOR MANUFACTURERS OF OBOE REEDS (2020) by [Christos Tsogias-Razakov](#).

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[...]

Chapter I

b) The Art of Adjusting the Oboe Reed

The music archeologist and curator of musical instruments Kathleen Schlesinger (1862-1953), in her article: *The origin of the major and minor Modes* of the journal *The Musical Times*, wrote, “*The mouthpiece is by far the most important part of the instrument - it is the soul of the pipe, but the player must be the master of both.*”¹

If the mouthpiece is undeniably the soul of the instrument, perhaps this is the reason why for oboists, reed making has been “*a mysterious and very personal art for many centuries, with rich oral traditions maintained by guilds who secretly passed down knowledge from teacher to student.*”²

Before stepping into details about the *Arundo Donax* and the cane selection. It is important to mention that numerous parameters influence sound production, apart from the reed. These parameters affect even the musical qualities of the oboist and give their characteristics to the performer. The reed could be described mainly as a result of personal choice during the reed making, rather than just uncontrolled luck.

The personal skills of the player like breathing control and technique, articulation, flexibility, intonation, dynamics, quality of playing, just to mention a few, and a set of principles about the

¹ Schlesinger, Kathleen. “The origin of the major and minor Modes”. *The Musical Times*. Vol. 58, No. 893, July 1917, pp. 297-301.

² Haynes, Bruce. “Making Reeds for the Baroque Oboe-1”. *Early music*, Vol. 4, No. 1, January 1976, pp. 31-34.

artistic and music taste, beauty, aural conception, pedagogy, and aesthetics in general perhaps have the major and the most important role.

Some other factors are affected by the human body characteristics, like the body physiology of the oboist - performer. For instance, the mandible (*lower jaw*) that holds the teeth, has an immediate impact on the embouchure together with the respiration system such as the nature of the lungs, diaphragm, etc.

Furthermore, the equipment and the technical part have a significant influence due to the final result of the tone production. All of the examples have an impact on the reed-making style with the main influence on sound production.³

The factors that were mentioned and briefly described above, could be described as personal more stable factors of the oboist (*like body physiology, instrument etcetera*). On the contrary, the primary material for reed making, the reed cane itself depends mainly on nature, as it is a product of nature. It is more unstable and fragile, with short durability. The factors that the cane is dependent on, would be inquisitive and described further.

It is a common occurrence lately, that the oboists are also reed makers. This perception could be described as false since approximately 1750 there are reports of purchasing reeds from professional reed makers.⁴ The difference between amateurs and professionals could be found, that the last one ordinary at some point work on the reed to adjust it. Often, the oboist as a reed maker is not always involved in the whole process from the beginning till the end of the process, but it is very usual to finish and adjust the reeds for each specific occasion and to achieve the desirable freedom of playing. This art of adjusting creates the oboe, a particular instrument.

The oboist, of course, should not lose the artistic identity as a music performer, but this requires to be also a good craftsman. The art depended on the level of craftsmanship and making the correct choices for adjusting the reeds. This is the reason why it is important to review and understand the whole process from its roots. Particularly, from the primary moment when the cane grows in the field, it has been cut and dried. The reed maker, with the knowledge to select a particular piece with specific features among others, will invest wisely the precious time of reed making to achieve the expected outcome in a shorter period. [...]

³ Ledet, David A. "Oboe Reed Styles, theory and practice" Indiana University Press, 1981.

⁴ Owens, Samantha. "An Italian Oboist in Germany: Double Reed Making c.1750". *Early music*, Vol. 28, No.1, February 2000, pp. 65-70.