

Concerto for oboe and strings in D Minor, op. 9 no. 2

I. Allegro non presto

II. Adagio

III. Allegro

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Tomaso Giovanni Albinoni (Born 1671 - Died 1751)

Tomaso Giovanni Albinoni was born in Venice, Italy in 1671. On the musical time line, that makes him a contemporary of the more flamboyant and exponentially more prolific Antonio Vivaldi, who wrote something approaching 600 concerti. There is, however, a well-known quip among musical historians that Vivaldi "wrote only one concerto-he just wrote it 600 times." In any event, Albinoni's significance has never really been in doubt-it is just that his musical innovations were carried out with a subtle mastery rather than an over-the-top display.

Albinoni first employed and popularized the three- movement fast-slow-fast concerto form. He also used the technique of opening his faster movements with a resolute statement, which serves to unite the movement. This practice would be adopted by many subsequent composers. In addition, his oboe concerti, one of which we'll hear performed this evening by Laura Robinson, were among the very first of their kind ever published by an Italian composer.

The Albinoni family was quite wealthy and prosperous, so the composer did not need to earn his living by writing music. No, the Albinonis weren't in video games-actually, they manufactured playing cards. Tomaso's father inherited the business from his former employer, who had no children. Albinoni did, however, receive extensive training in the arts, and as his musical reputation grew as he became a distinguished violinist. He was also an eminent composer, who, as he matured, put Venice on the map as an artistic hub during the late Baroque Era. Albinoni wrote more than fifty operas, a large body of vocal music and well over a hundred concerti. Even the great J.S. Bach respected Albinoni's music, used it as a model for his students, and even wrote four fugues on Albinoni's subjects.

With all the skill and talent Albinoni possessed, it seems ironic that he is the only great composer whose popularity rests almost completely on a piece that he didn't actually compose. The piece was *Adagio for Strings*, which was attributed to Albinoni but was actually written by Italian musicologist Remo Giazotto in 1949. Giazotto claimed he based his composition on a paper scrap found in the ruins of the Library of Dresden, which was bombed during World War II. What turned up were merely fragments of the Basso continuo staff and the first six measures to boot. So, it is actually the *Giazotto Adagio*. Musician and author Fritz Spiegl, in his book Music Through The Looking Glass sums it up thusly:

"The Adagio of Albinoni
Is largely phony
And is a musical risotto
Cooked up by Giazotto."

A lifelong resident of Venice, Albinoni married opera singer Margherita Raimondi in 1721. By the early 1720s, Albinoni's popularity peaked and would continue for over a decade. After that, Venetian audiences hankered for a change, finding the "old" style of opera formulaic. This slowed down the composer's output and by the 1730s and 40s, he produced very little music. He became quite ill, and was bedridden for nearly the last two years of his life.

Albinoni was particularly enamored with the beautiful sound of the oboe. Concerti of the time were primarily the domain of stringed instruments, but a new era began with the publication of Albinoni's four concerti with one oboe, and four with two oboes.

The Concerto for oboe and strings in D Minor, op. 9 no. 2 on tonight's program is certainly one of the most glorious of all Albinoni's compositions. The piece is the second of his last published set (Opus 9) issued in Amsterdam in 1722. The entire set was dedicated to Maximilian Emanuel, the Elector of Bavaria, and each possesses a sense of magisterial grandeur.

It is interesting to note that in the Baroque era, composers wrote in a minor key to lend a certain strength to the music that was thought to be lacking in a work in the major mode. The use of minor keys to denote anger or sadness would not take place until roughly fifty years after Albinoni's creations. This *D Minor concerto* opens with an *Allegro non presto* of military themes. This movement and the third are written in the Vivaldian *ritornello-rondo* form, with material for the soloist leading the musical line away from the main musical subject in a series of virtuosic amusements. Melodic richness and rhythmic variety give the movement's developmental sections great liveliness.

This concerto is known for its slow movement-the extravagantly unrestrained *Adagio*, which is full of tenderness. The oboe sings a smoothly flowing melodic line over a rhythmic foundation in the strings that is clearly subordinate to the soloist, but which provides a solid backbone. This is truly opera for the oboe.

The radiant third movement, marked *Allegro*, puts a perfect cap on the piece, achieving a great balance with the opening movement. This finale is in 6/8 time, with a commanding air reminding the listener that Vivaldi was not the only Italian composer worthy of the great J.S. Bach's respect and attention.