

**Oberlin Artist Recital Series:
Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment
(first of two articles)**

by Mike Telin



Central to Enlightenment thought were the use and celebration of reason, the power by which humans understand the universe and improve their own condition. The goals of rational humanity were considered to be knowledge, freedom, and happiness. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

On Friday, November 22 at 7:30 pm in Finney Chapel, the Oberlin Artist Recital Series will present the Orchestra and Choir of the Age of Enlightenment. Under the direction of Jonathan Cohen, the program will

include Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*, Albinoni's *Oboe Concerto No. 2 in d*, Op. 9, and Vivaldi's *Gloria*. The concert will feature sopranos Katherine Watson and Rowan Pierce, countertenor Iestyn Davies, and oboist Katharina Spreckelsen. Tickets are available [online](#).

Following the performance, you can unwind with members of the OAE during The Night Shift. The free hangout and performance will take place at the Birenbaum club, on the lower level of the Hotel at Oberlin. Capacity is limited, and guests will be admitted on a first-come, first-served basis.

Founded in 1986, the musician-governed [Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment](#) took its name from the historical period in the late 18th century where the ensemble's core repertoire is based.

I caught up with OAE principal oboe Katharina Spreckelsen and began by asking her how long she has been with the orchestra?

Katharina Spreckelsen: I've been an official member for four years, but I've played on and off with them for nearly twenty.

Mike Telin: What excites you about being a member?

KS: Without a doubt it's having more than one musical director. Working with a variety of directors is so exciting. It never gets boring.

MT: Albinoni wrote a lot for the oboe — please say a few words about the concerto you'll be playing.

KS: The Opus 9 has several double concertos and several single concertos. He wrote incredibly well for the instrument. He never goes off the range and never composed awkward sequences like you get even with composers like Vivaldi, who were clearly more string player-oriented.

I think the d minor that I'm playing is the most beautiful partly because of the slow movement, which is one of the best tunes ever written for the instrument — along with all the wonderful tunes that Bach wrote. It is an extraordinary movement. The string writing is also amazing. It's all just so imaginative and very atmospheric.

MT: The program is a fantastic selection of pieces.

KS: I think so too. In the Pergolesi, you have this wonderful mix of dissonances and suspensions. It's also quite slow-moving in the best sense.

The Vivaldi *Gloria* is a wonderfully happy piece and quick-moving. It's very concise with wonderful chorus writing. He puts the oboe in there basically as a second trumpet in the outer movements. He also gives it a wonderful obbligato in the middle. And the way he treats the cello is something to listen for — the aria for Iestyn and the cello is out of this world. There's so much packed into the piece and it's only about 35 minutes. It's Vivaldi at his best.

MT: How does the governing of the orchestra operate?

KS: We have the Players Artistic Committee which is made up of five players who are elected by the Orchestra. Members of the orchestra can go to PAC, as we call it, and ask to have concerns put forward, or they can email them in.

I'm a member at the moment, and we meet once a month for three hours — an intense three hours — and discuss programming, and things like which conductor to employ for certain repertoire. It's a wonderful thing. I'm now in my third year of a three-year term. You can be re-elected if you want. We encourage as many members of the orchestra as possible to get involved.

I have certainly learned a lot suddenly being on the other side. You realize that as a player you have some huge demands, and then you see what is behind facilitating those demands. It's been a very enlightening experience.

Also, if you are a member of PAC you automatically become a member of the Board, so you get to meet all of these amazing people who give their time and their money and their expertise to us, which is quite humbling, I have to say. These are people that we normally would only meet at a reception, but not really know what they do, and they're doing so much.

MT: Was there any one thing that you were surprised to learn?

KS: I think it's any financial decision, and the compromises that have to be made. We are moving into an incredibly serious and fascinating era as well, and we're working very hard to reduce our carbon footprint. We are looking at travel alternatives — not to Oberlin of course — but how much could we travel by train instead of by plane? We are at the very beginning of what I think is a very long road. But it is a positive thing to do.

MT: After the concert the orchestra will be hosting a Night Shift. Tell me more about that series, it sounds fun.

KS: The aim is just to get more young people interested in classical music. It's going out into the young people's world of clubs and pubs. Like some of my colleagues, I always thought, 'oh no, I can't talk to people. I can sit down and play the oboe, but I feel shy and tongue-tied.' But when you're there, it's all different and everything seems possible.

On Wednesday, Iestyn Davies weighs in on the program, as well as common misconceptions about countertenors — they're not castrati.

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