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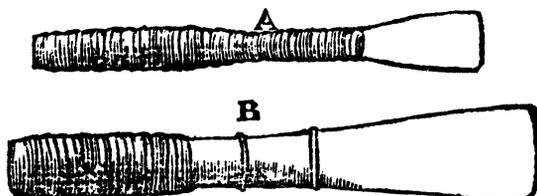


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Samantha Owens

## An Italian oboist in Germany: double reed making c.1750



1 Mid-18th-century oboe and bassoon reeds, illustrated in François Alexandre Pierre de Garsault, *Notionnaire, ou, Memorial raisonné de ce qu'il y a d'utile et d'interessant dans les connoissances acquises depuis la creation du Monde jusqu'a present* (Paris, 1761) (Washington, DC, Library of Congress)

IN 1977 the famous English oboe player Leon Goossens wrote that 'All serious oboists make their own reeds', a view generally held by modern professionals on the instrument.<sup>1</sup> It appears that in the 18th century this idea was not as widely accepted, and that many oboists who were full-time players relied on instrument makers, or even specialist reed makers, to provide this vital part of their instrument.<sup>2</sup> Professional reed makers could be found throughout Europe at the time—J. G. Walther's musical dictionary (Leipzig, 1732) included entries for the 'Glottis ... the reed for an oboe and bassoon' and the 'Glossopæus ... one who makes such reeds'.<sup>3</sup> Presumably these craftsmen catered mainly for beginners and amateurs, but they also supplied professionals who for whatever reasons did not make their own reeds.<sup>4</sup>

Two letters written around 1750 by musicians employed at the ducal court of Württemberg, based

in Stuttgart, throw interesting light upon the subject of double reed making in the 18th century. The first is an oboist's petition for an allowance specifically for purchasing reeds; the second is a report written by the director of music in response to this request. The player concerned was Ignazio Ceceri, a virtuoso oboist who served as a Württemberg chamber musician from late November 1744 until 11 March 1755. His instrumental abilities were obviously highly regarded since in 1747 he was listed among a select group who received 50 per cent more salary than the remaining 23 ordinary court musicians.<sup>5</sup> Other members of this exclusive circle included the violinist Giovanni Battista Bianchini (d 1754), woodwind specialist and *Concertmeister* Johann Michael Böhm,<sup>6</sup> and the celebrated soprano Francesca Cuzzoni (c.1698–1770).

The second letter was written by *Oberkapellmeister* Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello (c.1690–1758). Having arrived in Germany from Venice in 1715, Brescianello worked initially as a violinist at the Bavarian court of Elector Maximilian II Emanuel, but within only a few months had been appointed *Musique Directeur, Maître des concerts de la chambre* in Stuttgart.<sup>7</sup> In 1721 he gained the position of Württemberg *Oberkapellmeister* after a lengthy, and at times vitriolic, contest with the Hamburg opera composer Reinhard Keiser.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, this victory made Brescianello the first Italian to take a leadership role in the Württemberg *Hofkapelle* (and he was to be succeeded by Nicolò Jommelli).

Ceceri's letter is addressed to his employer, the Duke of Württemberg, Carl Eugen II (1728–1793) and is dated 31 December 1748:

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*Samantha Owens is a Research Fellow in Music at Victoria University of Wellington.*

Durchleuchtigster Herzog,  
Gnädigster Fürst und Herr!

Seit deme ich *Euer Hochfürstl. Durchl.* als *Camer-Hautbois* zu seyn, die hohe Gnade habe; so habe in diser zeit die nöthige Röhre, weilen Sie allhier nicht zu bekommen, auf eigene und schwehre Casten aus *Paris* kommen lassen, und vor das duzent 2. grose thaler zahlen müssen. Da nun Jährlich über 6. duzent brauche, gestalten manchmal unter 1. duzet [*sic*] mir nicht eines nützlich ist; und dann *Euer Hochfürstl. Durchl:t Höchstdero* fürstl. Hof *Musique* die erforderliche Saiten gnädigst abraichen zu lassen gewesen, ich auch anderer Orten allezeit gnädigste *Indemmisation* vor disen Aufwand genossen. Alß habe *Ewr Hochfürstl. Durchl:* hiemit unterthgst überlassen wollen, was *Höchst Dieselble* hierin zu meiner Schadloßhaltung [*sic*] zu *disponiren* gnädigst geruhen mögen; anbey zu hohen Hulden und Gnaden mich unterthänigst empfehlend, verharre in tiefstem *Respect:*

*Ewr. Hochfürstl. Durchl:t*

Unterthänigst Verpflocht gehorsamster,

Ignacio Ceceri.

Stuttgart. [*sic*] d. 31. 10br 1748.<sup>9</sup>

Your Highness the Duke,  
Most Gracious Prince and Lord!

Since I have had the high favour of being a chamber oboist in the service of Your Most Royal Serene Highness; so during this time I have required the necessary reeds. As these cannot be obtained here in Stuttgart they have to come from Paris in their own sturdy boxes, at the price of two *grose thaler* per dozen. I require over six dozen per year, because it sometimes happens that out of one dozen not a single reed is of any use—and just as Your Most Serene Highness has most graciously allowed that the necessary strings be provided for the ducal musical establishment, I have always received compensation for this expenditure when [employed] elsewhere. Therefore, most submissively, I wish to leave this matter in

the care of Your Most Royal Serene Highness, for whatever Your Highness deigns to dispense for my compensation will be most graciously appreciated. With the highest grace and favour I take my leave most submissively, and remain with the deepest respect of Your Most Royal Serene Highness,

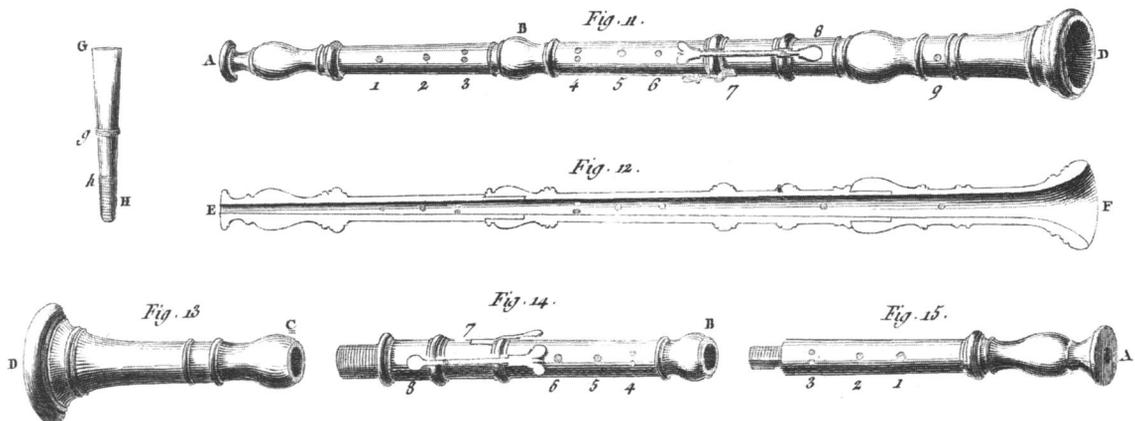
Your most submissive, dutifully obedient,

Ignacio Ceceri.

Stuttgart 31 December 1748.

Not only does this document offer factual information about the price and longevity of 18th-century oboe reeds, but it provides firm evidence that not all professional oboists at that time were in the habit of making their own. It also reveals the extraordinary fact that an (Italian) oboist working in Germany found it necessary to order his reeds from France, obviously at great expense.

Ceceri claimed that the necessary reeds could not be purchased in the immediate Stuttgart area, but it is inconceivable that the nearest commercially available oboe reeds were in Paris. Reeds were obtainable closer to hand: in 1705 the Nuremberg-based instrument maker Johann Christoph Denner sold six oboe and bassoon reeds at 7½ *Kreutzer* each along with a reed case ('eine Rohrbixe') worth 15 *Gulden*.<sup>10</sup> In 1738 Johann Philipp Eisel writing in his *Musicus Autodidaktus* noted that the best bassoon reeds were made in Berlin.<sup>11</sup> Some 30 years later numerous bills covering the years 1766–77 show that at the Esterházy court under Haydn's direction both oboists and bassoonists played on reeds made by the



2 An oboe and its reed, illustrated in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris, 1751–80), xxii (1767), plate viii

Viennese firm of Matthias Rockobauer.<sup>12</sup> A similar collection of receipts exists for reeds purchased for the members of the *Harmonie* ensemble employed at the Schwarzenberg court in Vienna from 1779 to 1788—the first of these documents is signed by ‘Andras Buchberg, reed maker’.<sup>13</sup> All of this points to the reasonably widespread availability of double reeds in German-speaking lands during the 18th century.

It is probable, then, that the musicians working at the Württemberg court purchased their reeds, or reed making materials, from instrument makers in the southern German region. Although none is known in the Stuttgart area, the lower half of Bavaria was particularly active in the field of woodwind manufacture at this time.<sup>14</sup> By no means was the oboe a novel or unusual instrument in mid-18th-century Stuttgart. The French *hautbois* had been played at the Württemberg court since the early 1680s, when a number of the court musicians and choirboys were encouraged to apply themselves to the fashionable instrument. Its importance was stressed in a set of ducal instructions regarding the organization and duties of the *Hofkapelle* issued on 30 June 1686:

7. Sollen alle die Jenigen, welche sonsten blasende *Instrument tractiret*, insonderheit aber die fräntzoßen, der Junge Magg, Schuekhardt, Doekh, und die Trompeter, auff denen *Hautbois* sich *exerciren*, der Kreß darbey den *Fagott* blasen, die Capellknaben darauff *informirt*, und fürauß beständig ein paar dergleichen angenohmen werden, die *profession* von der *Music* machen sollen, und Cräften haben die *Hautbois* zur tractiren.<sup>15</sup>

7. All of those who usually play wind instruments shall practise the oboe, but especially the Frenchmen, the young Magg, Schuckhardt, Dock, and the trumpeters, with Kreß playing along on the bassoon. The choirboys must be told about this and a couple of them will be taken into service and make music their profession, if they have the strength to blow the oboe.

The latter suggestion was certainly taken up: by the following year two choirboys, Johann Eberhard Hildebrand and Christoph Reinhard Schwartzkopff, had become particularly valued for their oboe and recorder playing—a circumstance which ensured that Hildebrand remained in service despite his terrible singing.<sup>16</sup> Whereas many German courts initially employed Frenchmen as a means of intro-



3 Caricature of a Venetian oboist by Pier Leone Ghezzi (1751) (Rome, Gabinetto Nazionale dei Disegni e delle Stampe, vol.2606, FN 4659)

ducing the new instrument to their musical ensembles this was not the case in Württemberg.<sup>17</sup> Instead the *Kapellmeister* Theodor Schwartzkopff appears to have been the chief instigator of these developments: in 1706 he wrote grudgingly to the duke, Eberhard Ludwig IV (1676–1733), stating that over the years he had instructed ‘musicians, oboe band members, and choirboys on the oboe, recorders and other instruments without any pleasure or money for the results’.<sup>18</sup>

Ceceri’s reasons for ordering reeds from Paris can perhaps be understood more clearly in the light of his career up to his Württemberg appointment. Presumably born and trained in Italy, Ceceri is first mentioned in surviving sources when he performed at the Parisian Concert Spirituel in 1736. On that occasion he was described as ‘Ignace’ the oboist of ‘La Pouplinière’—the wealthy Alexandre Le Riche de La Pouplinière (best remembered as a patron

of Rameau).<sup>19</sup> Shortly after this concert appearance Ceceri seems to have entered the service of Louis XV's father-in-law, the exiled King of Poland, Stanislaus Leszcynski, at the court of Lorraine in Lunéville, near Nancy.<sup>20</sup> Other musicians at Stanislaus's court were the violinist Jean-Jacques-Baptiste Anet (1676–1755)<sup>21</sup> and the Württemberg chamber musicians Maria Dorothea and Franz Spurni, the parents of the Mozartean soprano Dorothea Wendling.<sup>22</sup> Throughout his years in Stuttgart Ceceri must have maintained his French links, since after his release from Württemberg service in 1755, he seems to have returned to Paris. In March 1763 he was living in the house of La Pouplinière in rue des Petits-Champs, Paris.<sup>23</sup>

Brescianello's reactions to Ceceri's request for a special allowance to cover the purchase of French oboe reeds are recorded in a letter to the duke:

Durchleuchtigster Herzog,  
Gnädigster Fürst und Herr!

Auf Ewr: Hochfürstl:<sup>n</sup> Durchl:<sup>t</sup> gnädigstem Befehl, um 1.<sup>lich</sup> unterthänigst zu berichten wie viel man dem Cammer-Hautboisten Ceceri jährlich vor seine Rohre zukommen laßen könne? und 2.<sup>tens</sup> ob nicht daßelbe von denen ausgesetzten Instrument-Geldern zu bestreiten seye? meldte Puncto 1.<sup>mi</sup> zu unterthänigster Folge. Daß ich Zeit meines Hierseyns kein Exempel allegiren kan, daß man davor etwas gewißes bezahlet als die Zeit des Music-Directorii unter dem Baron von Ziegessar, da dem damahligen Cammer-Hautboisten Schiavonetti, gleich denen Saiten-Instrumentisten vor Saiten, jährlich 1. Species Ducaten zu Anschaffung seiner Rohr gegeben worden und Er auch damit zu frieden gewesen. Nach der Zeit hat auch dieses cessires und der nach gekommene Hautboist Staggi schon nichts weder bekommen noch begehret; Wie dann auch die mehresten Meister dieses Instruments ihre Röhre selbsten machen und sich accommodiren; Mithin Ewr: Hochfürstl: Durchl: ich lediglich überlaßen muß, was Höchst- Dieselben ihme Supplicanten davor gnädigst zufließen laßen wollen.

Puncto 2.<sup>di</sup> berichte unterthänigst: daß dermahlen kein gewißes Quantum zu Instrument-Geldern um dieses davon bestreiten zukönnen, ausgesetzt ist, gestalten wann Saiten oder an Instrumenten etwas nöthig, desfalß allezeit Specificationes eingegeben werden müssen.

Welches dann Ewr: Hochfürstl:<sup>n</sup> Durchl:<sup>t</sup> hiermit alles unterthänigst melden und im übrigen in tieffsten Respect verharren wollen

Ewr: Hochfürstl:<sup>n</sup> Durchl:<sup>t</sup>,  
unterthänig verpflichtet gehormsamster,  
J. Brescianello,  
Rath und Ober Capellmister [sic].  
Stuttgardt, den 12. Februarii 1749.<sup>24</sup>

Your Highness the Duke,  
Most Gracious Prince and Lord!

With regards to the request of your most gracious Royal Serene Highness; first, to report most submissively how much in the way of reimbursement the chamber oboist Ceceri can be allowed to receive per year for his reeds. And second, whether this should be financed from the instrument money already released. I report most submissively on the first point as follows: That since the time I have been here I cannot give a single example of a set amount being paid for this purpose. In the time of the Music Directorate of Baron von Ziegessar, the former chamber oboist Schiavonetti was given one *Species Ducat* per year for the purchase of his reeds, the same as the string players for strings, and he was content with that. After that time this arrangement ceased, and his successor the oboist Staggi neither received anything nor desired it; as, furthermore, most masters of this instrument make and adjust their reeds themselves. With that thought Your Most Royal Serene Highness I simply leave the matter in your hands, whatever Your Highness wishes to grant most graciously to the supplicant.

On the second point I report most submissively that at present nothing has been released in the way of a set quantity of instrument money in order to pay for this. But rather when an item such as strings or something for an instrument is required, then a *Specification* must always be submitted. Upon this occurrence I will report most submissively to you and moreover wish to remain, with the usual deepest respect of Your Most Royal Serene Highness,

Your most submissive, dutifully obedient,  
J. Brescianello,  
Rath und Oberkapellmeister.  
Stuttgart, 12 February 1749.

In comparison with the known prices of double reeds purchased in 18th-century Germany, those ordered by Ceceri from Paris at approximately 20 *Kreutzer* each were phenomenally expensive.<sup>25</sup> Ceceri's French reeds were almost triple the price of 7½ *Kreutzer* Denner charged in 1705—no doubt due in part to delivery costs. Even the oboe reeds sold by the firm of Matthias Rockobauer to the Esterházy court between 1766–1772 were only 10 *Kreutzer* each. Ceceri's demand of 24 *Gulden* per year for his reeds seems rather preposterous (especially when we compare it to the 6 *Gulden* paid to the Schwarzenberg *Harmonie* musicians some 40 years later). Not only were the Parisian reeds remarkably expensive but Ceceri contended that at least 72 were necessary per year, taking into account that often not a single reed from a dozen was of any use. No doubt many were broken during their journey from Paris, while others

may simply not have played satisfactorily. The reed bills at Eszterháza depict a similar situation.<sup>26</sup>

Ceceri had maintained that in all his previous places of employment money had been provided specially for reeds, and Brescianello's letter does indicate that the chamber oboist Giovanni Schiavonetti had received 1 *Species Ducat* (about 4½ *Gulden*) per year for reeds from a fund which furnished string players with an allowance for strings and to which other instrumentalists could apply for equivalent expenses. This allowance comes much closer to the amount paid to the Schwarzenberg musicians in the 1780s. The oboist who succeeded Schiavonetti, Carlo Staggi, no longer received a special allowance because he made his own reeds.

Why didn't Ceceri make his own reeds? One fact is clear; during the 18th century not all professional double reed players deemed it obligatory to perform on their own reeds. Bruce Haynes has pointed out that 'numerous arguments are advanced in early sources on the advantages of making one's own reeds. These arguments would have presumably been unnecessary if reed making was an accepted adjunct to playing the oboe and bassoon, as it generally is today.'<sup>27</sup> Among these sources was Johann Mattheson's *Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg, 1713), which includes the statement 'It is particularly

important for the bassoon and oboe for one to have a good reed, and the best masters make these themselves after their own taste, because a good reed is half the playing.'<sup>28</sup> Twenty-five years later this sentence was copied, virtually word-for-word, by J. F. B. C. Majer in his *Museum musicum* (1732).<sup>29</sup> This work, published in nearby Schwäbisch Hall, was one which may well have been owned by Brescianello; he certainly subscribed to the same view.

No documents recording details of the duke's final decision remain, so we will never know whether Ceceri won his case. While on the surface it appears strange indeed that an Italian oboist living and working in Germany should find it necessary to order his reeds from Paris, the details of Ceceri's career—primarily his strong French links—provide the clues needed to understand this mystery. Perhaps the reeds Ceceri ordered from France were the best he had ever played, or they may have been produced by the same person (or firm) who had made his oboe, therefore perfectly matching his instrument and playing style.<sup>30</sup> Alternatively Ceceri may have been too busy, too lazy, or simply not sufficiently skilled to make his own reeds. Whatever the reason, this pair of letters allows a rare insight into double reed manufacture and use in the 18th century.

*I would like to thank Julia Grenfell, who at short notice provided me with some essential information unavailable in New Zealand, and Elisabeth Weinland of the Württemberg Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart.*

1 L. Goossens, *The oboe* (London, 1977), p.31.

2 B. Haynes, 'Double reeds, 1660–1830: a survey of surviving written evidence', *Journal of the International Double Reed Society*, xii (1984), p.19: 'There is also a general assumption in many sources—strange to us in this century—that reeds were also supplied by instrument makers.'

3 J. G. Walther, *Musicalisches Lexikon* (Leipzig, 1732), p.285: 'Glottis ... das Rohr zu einer Hautbois und Basson'; 'Glossopæus ... der solche Röhre verfertigt.'

4 For information regarding known reed makers see H. Lang and B. Haynes, 'The importance of original double reeds today', *Galpin Society journal*, xxx (1977), pp.145–51; M. Byrne, 'Reed makers', *Galpin Society journal*, xxxvii (1984), pp.99–101; and G. Burgess and P. Hedrick, 'The oldest English oboe reeds? an examination of nineteen surviving examples', *Galpin Society journal*, xlii (1989), pp.32–69.

5 Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart [hereafter D-Sa], A21 Büschel 607, *Reglement Wegen jedesmahliger Austheilung derer zur Frstl. Cammer- und Hof Musique fallenden Present Gelder*, 4 Jul 1747; see also W. Pfeilsticker, *Neues württembergisches Dienerbuch* (Stuttgart, 1957), §890, 'Cesari, Ignatius' and 'Cicero, Ignatio.'

6 Regarding Böhm's life, see B. Haynes, 'Telemann's *Kleine Cammer-*

*Music* and the four oboists to whom it was dedicated', *Journal of the International Double Reed Society*, xv (1987), p.15.

7 See A. Damerini, 'Sei Concerti a Tre sconosciuti di G. A. Brescianello', *Studien zur Musikwissenschaft*, xxv (1962), p.97; Pfeilsticker, *Dienerbuch*, §882.

8 D-Sa A21 Büschel 612, 1 Feb 1721, Brescianello's appointment decree; see also J. Sittard, 'Reinhard Keiser in Württemberg', *Monatshefte für Musikgeschichte*, xviii (1886), pp.3–12.

9 D-Sa A21 Büschel 629.

10 E. Nickel, *Der Holzblasinstrumentenbau in der freien Reichsstadt Nürnberg* (Munich, 1971), p.452.

11 J. P. Eisel, *Musicus Autodidaktus* (Erfurt, 1738), p.104: 'Vom Teutschen Basson ... 2. Was ist weiter bey

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12 H. C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn at Eszterháza, 1766-1790* (Bloomington, IN, 1978), ii: *Haydn: chronicle and works*, pp.120, 138, 156, 158, 162, 170-1, 176, 182-4, 202, 204, 212-3, 224, 397, 404.

13 R. Hellyer, 'Some documents relating to Viennese wind-instrument purchases, 1779-1837', *Galpin Society journal*, xxviii (1975), pp.50-59.

14 W. Waterhouse, *The new Langwill index* (London, 1993). See also E. Hoeprich, 'The earliest paintings of the clarinet', *Early music*, xxiii (1995), p.263.

15 D-Sa A21 Büschel 609, 30 Jun 1686.

16 D-Sa A21 Büschel 608, 24 Nov 1687, Consistorial Rath report on *Die erwärtige Bestellung guther Discantisten bey der Fürstl: Hoff Capell*.

17 See B. Haynes, 'Johann Sebastian Bach's pitch standards: the woodwind perspective', *Journal of the American Instrument Society*, xi (1985), pp.61-4.

18 J. Sittard, *Zur Geschichte der Musik und des Theaters am Württembergischen Hofe* (Stuttgart, 1890-91), i, pp.327-8, letter of T. Schwartzkopff, Stuttgart 22 Feb 1706: 'die Musicos Hautboisten und Capell Knaben in denen Hautbois, Flöten und andern Instrumenten ohne einigen Genuß oder Endgelt informirt ...'

19 G. Cucuël, *La Pouplinière et la musique de chambre au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1913), p.350, citing M. Brenet, *Les concerts en France sous l'ancien régime* (Paris, 1900), p.195.

20 Ceceri's entry in the Württemberg *Dienerbuch* notes 'bisher bei König Stanislaus von Polen' (formerly with the King of Poland), Pfeilsticker, *Dienerbuch*, §890, and a comment written alongside Ceceri's name and address (18 rue des Petits-Champs, Paris) in the cover of a book in 1767 reads 'premier hautbois du roi Stanislaus' (First Oboist to King Stanislaus): Cucuël, *La Pouplinière*, p.351.

21 N. Zaslav, 'Anet, Jean-Jacques-Baptiste', *New Grove*; M. Antoine, 'Note sur les violinistes Anet',

*Recherches sur la musique française classique*, ii (1961-2), pp.81-93.

22 Pfeilsticker, *Dienerbuch*, §910.

23 Ceceri was only one of a large number of musicians to be dismissed by Duke Carl Eugen II in a restructuring of his *Hofkapelle* in 1755: the Spurnis were released in November of that year, and many of the older members retired (including Brescianello, the gambist Johann Daniel Hardt, and Johann Michael Böhm). By 1767 Ceceri had moved to the home of La Pouplinière's estranged wife, Thérèse Deshayes (Madame de la Pouplinière) in rue Montmartre, where he died on 3 May 1778. Cucuël, *La Pouplinière*, pp.350-51.

24 D-Sa A21 Büschel 629.

25 Ceceri's letter claims they were supplied at a cost of two 'grose thaler' per dozen. If a *Grose Thaler* is taken to be equivalent to a *Speziesthaler* then the reeds retailed at approximately 20 *Kreutzer* each. Regarding currency values see W. H. Bruford, *Germany in the eighteenth century: the social background of the literary revival* (Cambridge, 1939), p.329.

26 Robbins Landon, *Haydn at Eszterháza*, p.158, notes that these document 'the extraordinary number of reeds that were consumed by the band'.

27 Haynes, 'Double reeds, 1660-1830', p.19.

28 J. Mattheson, *Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg, 1713), p.269: 'Man hat sich insonderheit bey Bassons und Hautbois auff gute Röhre zu richten und die besten *Maitres* pflegen sie sich selber nach ihrem Maul zu machen weil ein gutes Rohr halb gespielt ist.'

29 J. F. B. C. Majer, *Museum musicum theoretico practicum* (Schwäbisch Hall, 1732), p.34: 'Man hat sich aber besonders bey Bassons und Hautbois auff gute Röhre zu richten und die beste *Maitres* pflegen sie sich selber nach ihrem Maul zu machen; weil ein gutes Rohr halb gespielt ist ...'

30 Among candidates for this possibility are the Parisian woodwind instrument makers Charles Bizet (fl.1716-1752) and Thomas Lot III, (1708-87): Waterhouse, *The new Langwill index*, pp.34, 241-2.