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## Chalumeau

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### Chalumeau

(from Gk. *kalamos*, Lat. *calamus*: 'reed').

A single-reed instrument of predominantly cylindrical bore, related to the clarinet (it is classified as an **AEROPHONE**). The term originally denoted a pipe or bagpipe chanter, but from the end of the 17th century was used specifically to signify the instrument discussed below.

### 1. History and structure.

It seems likely that the chalumeau evolved in the late 17th century from attempts to increase the volume of sound produced by the recorder; the retention of the latter's characteristic foot-joint is evidence of the close physical relationship between the two instruments. Two diametrically opposed keys were soon added above the seven finger-holes and thumb-hole of the chalumeau, bridging the gap between the highest note and the lowest overblown 12th. The relatively large dimensions of the vibrating reed and the mouthpiece to which it was tied, however, were principally designed to produce the fundamental register. The clarinet itself evolved when the thumb-hole was repositioned, the mouthpiece was reduced in size to facilitate overblowing, and the foot-joint was replaced by a bell to improve the projection of sound. Since the clarinet functioned rather unsatisfactorily in its lowest register, the chalumeau was able for a time to retain its separate identity.



Chalumeau in C by Liebav (left), and chalumeau in F...

J.F.B.C. Majer remarked that since the technique required was broadly comparable, a recorder player could handle the chalumeau, though the latter is described as 'very hard to blow because of its difficult mouthpiece' ('ratione des schweren Ansatzes sehr hart zu blasen'). He indicated a maximum range of  $f-c'''$  for the two-key soprano chalumeau, and also listed three larger sizes (alto or quart,

tenor and bass), whose ranges may be deduced as  $c'-f'$ ,  $f-b'$  and  $c-f$ . Of the surviving chalumeaux, one, by Liebav (Musikmuseet, Stockholm, no.139), is in C and about 33 cm long (see [illustration](#)).

Of the others, one by Denner (Bayerische Nationalmuseum, Munich, no.136 Mu K20) and two by Klenig (Musikmuseet, Stockholm,

nos.141 and 142) are in F and about 50 cm long (see [illustration](#)). Philip Borkens, Jeremias Schlegel, Jan Steenbergen and Andrea Fornari also made chalumeaux, but no examples are known to survive. The relative lengths of the two keys on the Denner chalumeau indicate that it was played, like early clarinets, with the reed against the upper rather than the lower lip. While the four instruments mentioned above correspond with Majer's alto and tenor sizes, none equivalent to his bass chalumeau is known to survive; it may be presumed that a bass chalumeau was of similar length to the tenor recorder and was likewise furnished with a foot-joint key in order to make the lowest note easier to play. A quotation by Jacob Denner for the supply of instruments to the Benedictine abbey at Göttweig, near Vienna in about 1720 includes 'premier chalimou', 'secont chalimou' or 'alt-chalimou', and 'chalimou basson'. The first of these is probably equivalent to Majer's soprano chalumeau; this size of instrument was used exclusively for obbligato parts in Vienna at the time. The 'chalimou basson' may correspond to Majer's bass chalumeau, but the rather sharp difference in price between this and the smaller chalumeaux suggests an even larger instrument; several Viennese opera scores of the period specify a

continuo part with 'basson di chalumeau', perhaps indicating an instrument capable of playing the bass line at pitch (and thus with a probable range of *F*–*c*). The three earliest known surviving instruments of bass clarinet size, which were clearly designed to be played chiefly in their chalumeau register at a time when clarinets did not, might be considered as bass chalumeaux; they were possibly made in Germany, though they bear no stamp (Brussels Conservatory, no.939, illustrated in Rendall, pl.7; Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst, Berlin, no.2810; and Museo Storico Civico, Lugano). These have angled finger-holes, like those of a bassoon, allowing them to meet the bore at intervals more widely spaced than can otherwise be attained.

The earliest documentary evidence of the chalumeau is to be found in an inventory of instruments in the Hofkapelle of Duke Heinrich of Saxe-Römhild (1687); this includes 'Ein Chor Chalimo von 4 stücken' ('a four-piece chalumeau ensemble') purchased from Nuremberg. The reference to Nuremberg lends support to J.G. Doppelmayr's assertion (1730) that J.C. Denner (1655–1707) of that city was responsible for the improvement of the chalumeau and the invention of the clarinet. Writers were long reluctant to take this statement at face value; instead they assumed that Denner rendered the chalumeau obsolete by so improving it as to make it constitute a clarinet. It is known from Nuremberg council records, however, that his son Jacob Denner made both instruments: a commission in 1710 for various instruments includes a pair of clarinets and three sizes of chalumeau. Although Denner is known to have been preoccupied with French manufacturing techniques (see Nickel, 204), the chalumeau cannot be assumed to have been French in origin, and evidence of the instrument in France is scarce – a rare reference is an important article in the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and D'Alembert (1753). Johann Mattheson referred to 'den so-genandten Chalumeaux' ('the so-called chalumeaux') as early as 1713 (*Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre*); other sources reveal a variety of transliterations, such as 'scialumò', 'schalamaux', 'shalamo' and 'salmò' or 'salmòè'.

## 2. Repertory.

The amount of music written for the chalumeau was for many years seriously underestimated. Among the earliest known sources is a volume *A Variety of new Trumpet Tunes Aires Marches and Minuets*, published in 1698 as for the **MOCK TRUMPET** (the name by which the keyless chalumeau was apparently known in England). Chalumeaux are among the alternative instruments specified in duets by the Parisian flautist J.-P. Dreux, which are listed in a catalogue of the Amsterdam publisher Roger (1706). In the same year the instrument was first played by the oboists of the opera orchestra in Vienna; until 1725 composers such as the Hofkapellmeister Fux, Ariosti, Caldara, Conti and the brothers Bononcini wrote parts for it, generally reserving its individual tone-colour for pastoral contexts. Joseph I wrote a particularly ornate obbligato for the instrument in an aria he contributed to Ziani's *Chilonida* (1709). Although the chalumeau was rarely used as an orchestral instrument in Vienna after the mid-1730s, Gluck revived it in the original versions of *Orfeo* (1762) and *Alceste* (1767); there is an even later appearance in Gassmann's *I rovinati* (1772).

Instrumental pieces include a concerto by Hoffmeister, divertimentos by Dittersdorf, Gassmann and Pichl, and ballet music by Asplmayr and Starzer. *A Musica da camera* by Starzer was formerly attributed to Mozart as part of *K187/159c*.

In Germany one of the most prolific composers for the chalumeau was Telemann, who had played the instrument earlier in his career. He continued to include a pair of chalumeaux (alto and tenor) in a variety of works long after he had first used the clarinet (in a cantata of 1721); parts for both chalumeau and clarinet occur in a serenata of 1728, where their roles are clearly differentiated. Chalumeaux were often reserved for poignant, dramatic moments, for example in the passion oratorio *Seliges Erwägen*, where they are combined with muted horns, bassoons and muted strings at the beginning of the eighth meditation, 'Es ist vollbracht'. Another example is the Concerto in D minor for two chalumeaux, notable for an unusual degree of chromaticism in its extended passages of unaccompanied writing. The chalumeau appears in over 80 of Graupner's cantatas and in 18 of his instrumental works. He engaged a chalumeau player (who was primarily a virtuoso bassoonist) for the orchestra at Darmstadt in 1734 and subsequently became acquainted with all four sizes of the instrument. His fondness for the sonority of alto, tenor and bass together is illustrated by two suites for this combination; further examples of the use of

unconventional textures involving the bass chalumeau include a trio for that instrument with viola d'amore and continuo and a triple concerto with bassoon and cello. Other German composers made less use of the chalumeau. Fasch left a single concerto; J.L. Bach, Gottlob Harrer, Hasse, Keiser, J.B. König, J.M. Molter, G.C. Schürmann, Steffani, J.H. von Wilderer and J.D. Zelenka used the instrument in one or two works. Handel composed an aria with two 'chaloumeau' parts for *Riccardo Primo*, written in London in 1727, but it is not certain whether this was included in contemporary performances.

The German oboist Ludwig Erdmann taught the chalumeau at the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice from 1706, and Vivaldi subsequently used it in a total of five works. An obbligato for the soprano instrument occurs in the oratorio *Juditha triumphans* (1716), in an aria concerning the lament of a turtle-dove. Three concertos include parts for the tenor 'salmòè', while a sonata for violin, oboe and organ has an optional chalumeau doubling the bass line throughout.

The overall delicacy of the chalumeau repertory is not reflected in contemporary criticism of the instrument. Walther (1708) observed that it sounded like a man singing through his teeth, while some five years later Mattheson referred to its 'etwas heulende Symphonie' ('somewhat raucous sound'). The *Encyclopédie* described its tone as disagreeable and savage, but conceded that this could be improved by a good player. More favourable remarks were made by the critic Schubart, writing in 1784–5, who paid tribute to its 'individual and infinitely pleasant character', adding that 'the whole gamut of music would sustain an appreciable loss if the instrument became obsolete'. Towards the end of the 18th century, however, the term 'chalumeau' came to be used almost exclusively in its present-day sense to signify the lowest register of the clarinet.

See also [ORGAN STOP](#).

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### Colin Lawson

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