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in Seventeenth-Century England

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The Recorder in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries — Part IV: The Recorder in Seventeenth-Century England

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THE turn into the seventeenth century brought some marked changes in musical style. The shift from a horizontal to a vertical emphasis in musical composition heralded a new distinction between the solo line and the accompaniment. New demands were placed upon instruments serving both of these functions. The popularity of the recorder, however, did not diminish throughout this transition. It remained a favorite solo and ensemble instrument on both the amateur and professional levels. The adaptation of the recorder to the new styles of music in the seventeenth century is particularly well documented in England, where there exist not only court and civil records of recorder players, but also published music and tutors for specific instruments, including a large amount of material for the recorder. England, then, will be the focus of the following study of the recorder in the seventeenth century.

The Place of the Recorder in Seventeenth-Century England

There can be no doubt that the recorder was an extremely popular instrument at this time in England. The Elizabethan ideal that every gentleperson be versed in some manner of musical performance still held true in the seventeenth century. Consorts of four like instruments of differing voice ranges were still employed, although they went out of fashion by about 1650. Mixed consorts involving a variety of instruments gradually surpassed the consorts of like instruments in popularity, as is revealed in the continued popularity of the consort pieces by Morley and Holborne.¹ The recorder, in particular, was much in demand as a solo instrument for accompanying popular songs and dances.²

Royal courts and common households, alike, held the recorder as an important instrument. Court payrolls show that professional recorder players made up an important part of the king's band. Such professionals

as Alphonso and Clement Lanier, John Adson, and the Bassano family are among those mentioned.³ Recorder parts were also included in some of the court masques.⁴

Oliver Cromwell's reign during the Commonwealth, from about 1650 to 1660, saw a drastic curtailment of court and church music. The Puritans led an all-out attack on the recorder (which was also called the "flute" or "pipes"). Accounts of the day state that flute players were refused the rite of Baptism noting that the ". . . cymbals, pipes and filthy songs are the very poms, and hodgepodge of the Devil." Such accounts warn us that a Bishop, after playing his flute, ". . . would resort strait to his prayer . . ." in repentance. Stephen Gossen in "The Schoole of Abuse" called the flute player ". . . one of the Caterpillars of a Commonwealth," and warned his readers that ". . . piping leads to playing, playing leads to pleasure, pleasure to slouth, slouth to sleepe, sleepe to sinne, sinne to death, and death to the Devil."⁵ The recorder must, indeed, have been a popular and much enjoyed instrument to warrant such vicious criticisms. John Playford in his *Introduction to the Skill of Musick* said that it is "all Christians' sorrow, to see how that Divine Worship is condemned by blind Zealots [Puritans], who do not, nor will not, understand the use and excellency thereof."⁶

The suppression of public music making did, however, have some beneficial effects. Since people were forced to make music for themselves, there came about a resurgence of amateur musicians and the "old style" of consort playing. Instrumental music predominated in this context. John Playford began his publishing business during this time, an innovation with far reaching effects.⁷

The return of Charles II to the throne in 1660 was accompanied by the return of court music festivities. By 1672, civic pageants and public concerts were very popular. The records of the city of London show that the recorder was used in both. The French influence brought to England by Charles II resulted in an increased sophistication in English music. In higher circles, the recorder was referred to as the *flûte douce*, often shortened simply to *flûte*. The continental influence did not supercede, but rather co-existed with, the old style of English consort music for many years.⁸

There was a gradual decline in consort music throughout the seventeenth century. The recorder had dominated the transverse flute in the Renaissance, because it was more easily handled in the larger sizes. With music for consorts of like instruments going out of fashion, part of the recorder's usefulness was gone. Although it remained a popular solo and

chamber music instrument, the brilliance and flexibility demanded by mid-eighteenth-century composers hastened its obsolescence.⁹

Recorder Construction

Any study of recorder playing in the seventeenth century must take into account the changes that took place in the instrument's construction. While the Renaissance recorder was made in one unsculpted piece with an extra eighth hole to accommodate left-handed playing, a small beak, a wide bore, more lower partials in the tone, and a practical range of a thirteenth, the late Baroque recorder was constructed in three pieces with bulb-shaped joints, a flared foot, a curved beak, and doubled seventh and eighth holes. (To achieve more accurate chromatic notes, no extra eighth hole was actually necessary, due to the movable foot joint; but the double touch was still kept on the keys of both the tenor and bass instruments.) This eighteenth-century recorder had a narrow bore, a bright tone that was mellow in the lower register and pure without shrillness in the upper, and a range of two octaves plus one note. The recorder of the seventeenth century was probably shaped somewhere between these two extremes. The frontispiece to Humphry Salter's tutor, *The Genteel Companion* of 1688, shows recorders with bulbous joints and a curved beak, but with a sharply flaring bell and a wide bore.¹⁰ If wide bores were, indeed, still in use, they would account for the limited range of music for recorder of this time (rarely above d³).

Composers for the Recorder and Their Music

The quality of professional recorder playing was very high in seventeenth-century England. Composers wrote virtuosic music for the recorder, and there were performers equal to the challenge. Often the composer and performer were embodied in the same person, as in the cases of Godfrey Finger (a Moravian who came to England in 1685 and served as musician to James II)¹¹ and James Paisible (Peasible), a Frenchman who also served James II in the 1680's.¹² Other Englishmen who composed for the recorder included Daniel Purcell, William Croft, John Banister, Christian Frederick Witt, and Robert King.

Music written for the recorder at this time included many solo and duet sonatas. Italian violin works (such as Corelli's sonatas transcribed by Daniel Purcell) were frequently arranged for the recorder; operas by Purcell, Blow, and Handel include parts for recorder; and lessons, airs, dance movements (gavottes, jigs, minuets), and, particularly, grounds and rounds (very popular among the English) written by various masters were included in recorder tutors of this period.¹³ Some seventeenth-century

collections of music for recorder are John Playford's *Apollo's Banquet* (1686?), John Clarke's *Aulo Melodia or the Art of Playing on the Flute* (1690), and John Hudgebut's *Thesaurus Musicus* (1693). The last-mentioned collection contained the newest operatic tunes arranged for recorder (probably the tenor instrument in D, called the "voice flute") and basso continuo and arias arranged for two recorders, as well as solo and duet recorder sonatas composed by English and Italian masters.¹⁴ It is important to remember the many names given to the recorder. Music of this time marked "flute" was invariably intended for the recorder.

Recorder Tutors

All but one of the known seventeenth-century recorder tutors were published in England. The exception is Gerbrandt van Blanckenburgh's *Onderwyzinge* of 1654. The English tutors are, for the most part, geared to the skill of the amateur player. They all include basic instructions for the alto recorder (without even a mention of the other voices) and sets of tunes by various masters of the day, some of which are set in dot notation (a recorder tablature with one line per finger hole); some of which are printed in regular notation; and some of which make use of both notations. Each tutor includes fingering charts and tables of note values and rests. Most explain three basic graces: the beat, the shake, and the slur and give symbols for each in both types of notation.

The first English tutor to be examined here is *A Vade Mecum for the Lovers of Musick, Shewing the Excellency of the Rechorder* (1679) by John Hudgebut, an uneducated shopkeeper at the Golden Harp and Hautboy in Chancery Lane near Fleet Street, London.¹⁵ In his preface, Hudgebut extols the divine virtue of music and mentions the recorder and flageolet as nearest of all instruments to the voice. He states: "The Recorder like Jacob hath got the Birth-right, being much more in Esteem and Veneration, with the Nobility and Gentry, whilst the Flagilet sinks down a Servant to the Pages and Footmen." Hudgebut instructs the student to hold the recorder with the left hand on top, supported by the third finger and thumb of the right hand. His directions for the dot system include the symbol of a comma on a line with a dot for the "beat," a comma on a line without a dot for the "shake," and a curved line connecting two figures for the slur. The "beat" and "shake" are represented in regular notation by an inverted modern fermata sign and by two slashes, respectively. Hudgebut's fingering chart involves plain notes (f^1 to $g^{\#2}$) and "pinched notes" (a^2 to d^3), which are produced by pinching the left thumb nail into the underside hole. Some of the fingerings for graces illustrated in the dot notation of certain lessons do not work as well on

modern copies of Baroque recorders as they do on Renaissance ones, a situation which supports the assumption that the recorder of the seventeenth century was at an intermediate stage in its development.

John Banister's¹⁶ *The Most Pleasant Companion or Choice New Lessons for the Recorder or Flute* of 1681 is almost identical to Hudgebut's *Vade Mecum*. The title is plagiarized from Thomas Greeting's *The Pleasant Companion* (ca. 1667/1668), containing instructions and lesson tunes for the flageolet. Unlike Hudgebut's work, Banister's contains no diatribe against the flageolet. Also, Banister's system of tablature employs six lines instead of seven; and he explains how to perform "pinched notes" and graces instead of merely mentioning them. He describes the "beat" as being produced by lifting the finger marked with a dot and a comma, shaking it, and returning it to its place before proceeding and the "shake" as being produced by shaking the finger marked by a comma (without a dot) and, then, leaving it off the hole before going on. Banister mentions two more graces: the "slur-and-beat," which is specifically designed for the interval f^2 to e^2 (slur f^2 , then shake e^2) and the "double shake" which is designed for the interval a^2 to g^2 (shake the fourth finger of the left hand). Banister's fingering chart extends to f^3 , unlike Hudgebut's and Salter's charts, which only reach d^3 . Although Banister published *The Second Part to the Gentleman's Tutor to the Flute* (the second volume of this tutor) in 1699, no copies of the book have, as yet, been located.

Humphry Salter's *The Genteel Companion, Being Exact Directions for the Recorder* of 1688 is much like the two preceding tutors (major sections are lifted directly from them) but contains more complex melodies with key signatures of up to five sharps. Its frontispiece shows a very "modern" scene of a gentleman playing recorder for a sumptuously dressed lady — an indication of the increased sophistication in recorder playing among amateurs.¹⁷ Plates I and II following this article show two sets of tables which follow Salter's instructions. Plate I includes a fingering chart with dot and regular notation plus note names in the gamut system, the names of the note values and rests, and examples in dot notation of the graces. Plate II includes a chart of proportional note values, a chromatic fingering chart, and symbols used in regular notation for graces and accidentals.

Two more tutors exist from this time. Although neither adds much in the way of text to the information presented in the tutors already discussed, both contain new sets of tunes. Robert Carr, a music publisher with John Playford, compiled *The Delightful Companion or Choice New Lessons for the Recorder or Flute* in 1686. In his preface he mentions

that recorders make excellent harmony in consorts of two or three parts. In 1690 John Hare and John Walsh, important publishers and instrument makers of the day, began a series of publications under the title, *The Complete Flute Master*. This collection was to run for eight issues — well into the eighteenth century — but as yet, only the initial issue has been located.

Summary

The recorder has, indeed, had a long and illustrious history. This series of articles has attempted to reveal it as a popular instrument among amateurs and professionals and one well represented in treatises, tutors, and compositions throughout the Renaissance and the early Baroque periods. The value of the renewed interest in serious recorder study must not be underestimated. Authentic and high quality recorder playing is particularly necessary for the modern performance of Baroque works with parts specifically designated for it. No instrument of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries can adequately replace the tone quality of the recorder. It is a unique instrument whose mellow, voice-like sound has attracted composers for centuries. Just as the recorder was readily available to composers of the Baroque period, so must it be available for twentieth-century performances of their music. Hopefully, the spread of historically accurate performance practice information will lead toward that end.

PLATE I

Fingering Chart and Examples of Notes, Rests, and Graces
from Humphry Salter's *The Genteel Companion*, 1688

The first Table of Plaine Notes Ascending

The Severall Notes as they stand on Rule and space by the 6 Solre to Cliffe

Left Hand Right Hand

Thumb
First Finger
Second Finger
Third Finger
Fourth Finger

ff fa ut
Gfate of
Alamyre
Bhabmy
Gof fa
Dla sol
E la
Ffa ut
Gfate of
Alamyre
Bhabmy
Gof fa
Dla sol

Example of Shaks & Beats

A Beat on A Shak of A slur

A slur & Beat on Dubble Shak

Semi-breves Minims Crotchets Quavers Semiquavers

Quaver Rest: Semiquaver Rest

PLATE II

Chromatic Fingering Chart, Chart of Proportional Note Values,
and Symbols for Graces and Accidentals from Humphry Salter's
The Genteel Companion, 1688

Scale of all the Notes gradually Ascending both Flat and Sharp. \circ

Common Time

Triple Time \circ by 3 Mimes

A Beat on A Shake of A Double Shake of A slur A Flat A Sharp #

This Table directs and is a guide to know all the stops upon y Recorder or Flute, both Flat & Sharp, or the half Notes ascending according to the Scale of Musick.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Anthony Holborne, *Pavans, Galliards, Almains, and other short airs both grave and light, in five parts, for Viols, or Other Musical Instruments*, 1599, edited by Sydney Beck (New York: The New York Public Library, 1942) and Thomas Morley, compiler, *The First Book of Consort Lessons*, 1599 and 1611, reconstructed and edited with an introduction and critical notes by Sydney Beck (New York: Peter, 1959).
- ² Hildemarie Peter, *The Recorder, Its Traditions and Its Tasks*, English trans. from German edition (1953) by Stanley Godman (Berlin and Lichterfelde: Robert Lienau, 1958), p. 51.
- ³ Lloyd John Schmidt, "A Practical and Historical Source-Book for the Recorder" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1959), p. 275.
- ⁴ Jeffrey Pulver, *A Dictionary of Old English Music and Musical Instruments* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner, and Co., 1923), p. 192.
- ⁵ Christopher Welch, "Literature Relating to the Recorder," *Proceedings of the Musical Association, London* 24th Session (1897-1898): p. 182.
- ⁶ John Playford, *An Introduction to the Skill of Musick to which is added the Art of Descant or Composing Musick in Parts by Dr. Tho. Campion*, 2 books, 7th ed. corrected and enlarged (London: W. Godbid for J. Playford, 1674, reprint edition, Ridgewood, New Jersey: Gregg Press, Inc., 1966), introductory material.
- ⁷ Schmidt, *Source-Book*, p. 277.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 278-280.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 299.
- ¹⁰ Christopher Welch, *Lectures on the Recorder in Relation to Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 73.
- ¹¹ François-Joseph Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*, 2nd ed. s.v. "Finger, Godfrey," III, p. 282.
- ¹² Fétis, *Biographie*, s.v. "Paisible, James," IV, p. 419.
- ¹³ Schmidt, *Source-Book*, pp. 284-287.

¹⁴ Peter, *Recorder*, pp. 53-54.

¹⁵ Welch, *Lectures*, pp. 69-70.

¹⁶ For a biography of Banister, see Jeffrey Pulver, *A Biographical Dictionary of Old English Music* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner, and Co., 1927), pp. 36-38.

¹⁷ Welch, *Lectures*, p. 73.

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