Since completing my dissertation some fifteen years ago on "Professional Recorder Players in England, 1540-1740," I have begun to wonder about the recorder and the amateur. Couldn't one ask the same questions about them as for professionals? Who were they? Who did they study with? In what circumstances did they play the recorder? How often did they play? Did they practice? (More realistically, did they practice a lot?) What was their standard of performance? Did they play alone or with others? And so on.

In my dissertation, I established some broad evidence of intriguing relationships between professional musicians and amateurs, as listeners, players, students, and consumers of music. In any era, amateurs listen to and want to emulate professionals. The extent of the listening and the emulation, however, vary widely.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, recorders were heard by a large cross-section of the public. The instrument would have been known to the upper classes from its performances at the Court, during visits of groups of waits (town musicians), and at the theater. The wealthiest individuals had their own musicians. The middle and lower classes would have heard waits often, although more in their outdoor than indoor functions and thus playing other instruments more than the recorder. In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the instrument was familiar to the upper and middle classes from its performance in the theaters and public concerts. Those who could not afford to attend such entertainments would have heard the recorder in taverns and coffee houses.

How many amateurs played recorder in the Renaissance is difficult to determine, since almost no evidence of its amateur performance has been brought to light. It is known, however, that in the 16th century and to some extent the early 17th century, gentlemen considered playing wind instruments highly unbecoming to their status, because it occupied both the hands and the mouth. They preferred the lute and later also the viol. For this reason, there would have been little opportunity for professional musicians to teach the recorder to amateurs.

It is a commonplace that the late Baroque recorder was the amateur instrument if there had been a Society of Recorder Players in England in the Renaissance and Baroque, what would we know about its members?
The frontispiece from John Tyther's Complete Flute-Master, brought out between 1740 and 1760, indicating that amateurs continued to learn to play recorder even after the dominance of the transverse flute had long been established.

par excellence. It requires no reeds or special embouchure, it is not fatiguing to play, and it is easy to learn (at least in the early stages, which is where most amateurs would have remained). Its performance by amateurs during the late Baroque is intimately connected with the rise of the middle class, although the upper classes were just as enthusiastic. Those members of the upper and middle classes who flocked to the theaters and concerts emulated the professionals to an unprecedented extent. Songs, and indeed whole operas, were printed with transposed parts for the recorder. The latest professional music, especially duets, solo sonatas, and trio sonatas, was published for the consumption of the avid amateur. To me it is significant that the most technically difficult recorder pieces—the sonatas of Paisible and the soprano recorder concerto of Sammartini—were never published.

Professionals wrote some easy music specially for amateurs and gave away some token trade secrets in the recorder tutors that were issued in large numbers, replete with the latest airs and dances. Those amateurs who could afford to do so took lessons from professionals. This large amateur audience eventually transferred to the transverse flute during the 1720s.

Economics

Is there any economic evidence of the numbers of recorder players in the late Baroque period? I think there is some indirect and imprecise evidence.

The incidence of recorder tutors published in the years after the new late Baroque style recorder was introduced from France in 1673 implies an initially large amateur market, then a falling off: 1679, 1681, 1682, 1683, 1684, 1695, 1700, 1706 (two), 1722, 1728, 1730, etc. (Interestingly, the market for recorder tutors continued to a small extent until about 1780.)

The great French recorder maker Peter Bressan went to live in London around 1688. In 1721 he testified in a law suit that he had acquired fame and fortune "in making of musical instruments and particular-ly of recorders." He went on to say that since about six years before, however, his trade had fallen off considerably. From this we can begin to date the decline of the recorder as an amateur instrument in England at 1715.

The London publisher John Walsh was in business from the early 1690s until his son took over around 1730. He was by far the most successful publisher of the Baroque era, leaving a fortune estimated at £20,000-30,000. To give you an idea of how much that was worth in real terms, I would estimate the annual earnings of James Paisible, the most successful recorder player of the era, to have been about £500.

Walsh published some 130 editions of recorder music—about one-sixth of his total output. Although the amount of recorder music being published today is far larger than in the past, I would bet that it is nothing approaching one-sixth of the total amount of art music published, even for a publisher like Schott.

The pattern of Walsh's publication of recorder music is worth noting. Up to 1710, he published almost exclusively music by local composers. Then, when they seem to have lost interest in writing recorder music, he started basing his editions on those published in Amsterdam by Estienne Roger. In 1717, however, around the time that Bressan testified there was a falling off in his recorder-making business, Walsh returned to local composers. Some of his most important recorder editions even date from the 1720s—for example, the sonatas and trio sonatas of John Loeillet and all the concertos for small recorders by William Babell, John Baston, and Robert Woodcock. In several cases, he shrewdly mixed pieces for recorder with pieces for the newly popular transverse flute in the same edition.

So much for generalities. What do we really know about individual amateurs and their relationship to the recorder? Far less than we now know about individual professionals, but just taking England as our focus, we can still make some interesting observations.

Henry VIII

During the course of his lifetime, Henry VIII of England built up the musical establishment at the Court out of all recognition, largely by importing musicians from Italy and Flanders. He imported two consorts of players, one of viols and violins, the other of recorders. The recorder consort was made up of five brothers of the
Bassano family, who went to England from Venice in 1539. This consort, largely filled out by Bassano descendants, lasted for almost one hundred years.

Henry would have had a particular interest in such a consort because he was a recorder player himself. A chronicler reported during his summer Progresses (visits to noble households around the country) in 1510 that he was

...exercising himself daily in shooting, singing, dancing, wrestling, casting of the bar, playing at the recorders, flute, [and] virginals, and in setting of songs, making of ballads, and did set two goodly Masses.

In the inventory of his possessions at his death in 1547 there were no fewer than 74 recorders. Another inventory made five years earlier had a notation that thirteen of the instruments had been checked out for the use of Henry and his three children: a regal, four flutes, a virginal, and seven recorders; and that the recorders were "for the King's Majesty's own use." Many of the recorders in the collection would have been made by the Bassano brothers, who were at least as celebrated for their instrument-making as for their performing.

**Samuel Pepys**

The involvement of the great English diarist Samuel Pepys with the recorder is very well known. There are two famous quotations:

...and then with my wife and Deb [his wife's maid servant] to the King's House to see Virgin Martyr, the first time it hath been acted in a great while, and it is mighty pleasant: not that the play is worth much, but it is finely acted by Becky Marshall; but that which did please me beyond anything in the whole world was the wind-music when the angel comes down, which is so sweet that it ravished me; and indeed, in a word, did wrap up my soul so that it made me really sick, just as I have formerly been when in love with my wife; that neither then, nor all the evening going home and at home, I was able to think of anything, but remained all night transported, so as I could not believe that every music hath that real command over the soul of a man as this did upon me; and makes me resolve to practice wind music and to make my wife do the like. [27 February 1668]

...and thence I to Drumbleby's and there did talk a great deal about pipes and did buy a recorder which I do intend to learn to play on, the sound of it being of all sounds in the world most pleasing to me. [8 April 1668]

Less well known is what he appended to this second quotation:

So home to my chamber, to be fingering of my recorder and getting of the scale of music without book, which I at last see is necessary for a man that would understand music as it is now taught ... though it be a ridiculous and troublesome way, and I know I shall be able hereafter to show the world a simpler way.

He was referring to the recorder tablature then in use, which had been adapted from the flageolet tablature. The eight holes of the recorder are represented by eight horizontal lines, and the fingers to be placed down are shown by means of dashes. This tablature is found in the recorder tutors of the 1670s and 80s but had disappeared by the tutors of the 1690s.

Eight days after his last comment about the recorder he wrote:

Greeting's book, 1 shilling. Begin this day to learn the recorder. [16 April 1668]

Thomas Greeting, a Court violinist, had taught Pepys and his wife to play the flageolet. He published an influential flageolet tutor, but no recorder tutor by him has survived.

Unfortunately, the diary ends just over a year after this, and there are only two more references possibly describing his recorder playing, although throughout the diary there are many extensive references to playing the flageolet.

**Dudley Ryder**

In June 1715, a 23-year-old law student named Dudley Ryder began keeping a diary in shorthand of his daily activities. The part of the diary that has survived covers over 18 months, but it is full of priceless details of the social life and opinion of the age, the thoughts and feelings of a sensitive young man, and the musical life of a keen amateur musician and dancer. Ryder played the viola da gamba and recorder, sang a little, listened to singing more, attended the odd concert and church performance, and danced a great deal. Despite the fact that he seems to have spent little time on his law books, he eventually rose to become Chief Justice of England and a baron.

Ryder reported playing the recorder far less than the gamba: only ten times in all. One day he played with a friend, John Emmett, "immediately after rising" at 8 a.m. That and breakfast took two hours. Another day, he played after breakfast and again one morning when he "was not very much inclined to study." Twice he played after dinner. Another evening, he went to the coffee house, walked for an hour, musing on his wretched lovelorn condition, then: "Came home. Played upon my recorder: that composed me a little." At the house of another friend, George Smith, a Nonconformist minister, Ryder played "two or three sonatas.

One day, Ryder "Came to London. Called upon Mr. Smith to lend him some music I promised." Unfortunately, he does not tell us what the music was, and in fact only once does Ryder identify the music that he played on recorder. On this particular occasion he went with Smith to the house of a friend of Smith's, a weaver by trade, "who plays upon the bass viol very well" (this is high praise from the critical Ryder). There Ryder and Smith played the recorder to the weaver's gamba.

Some time after, a Frenchman came in who sang some of the French opera songs in concert with our two recorders and the bass [viol]. He sang particularly that part of [Lully's] opera of Psyche, which we saw at Paris... It pleased me very much, as it revived in me the ideas that I had when I was at Paris and filled me with that same kind of pleasure which I had when I was in the opera there. The French music has a very different air and manner from ours; it is extremely simple and easy, but there is a peculiar kind of harmony which touches me very sensibly.

Ryder was characteristically blunt in his comments on his friends’ recorder playing. Smith "plays much better than he did." Of Jackson: "I don't find he plays so extraordinarily well. He has very little judgement and cannot play in time." One day Emmett came to me to play together upon the recorder about 9 o'clock [a.m.]. He brought one recorder we had ne'er another. I played two or three tunes upon the viol and we went in the Long Walk, and he there played over a great many tunes. He plays chiefly by ear and seems to have a very good one. He plays pret­ty well but a little confused, as persons that play by the ear only generally do.

Lastly, Ryder "Saw Mr. Gould and Hudson and invited them to drink a dish of tea with me; which they did. Hudson played some tunes upon the recorder, though but indifferently."

Ryder did not mention taking recorder lessons, but his friend Smith seems to have studied with a man whom Ryder consistently calls "Demodore"—evidently Daniel De Moivre. De Moivre, brother of the celebrated mathematician Abraham De Moivre, was a Huguenot who escaped to England after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. He made his living partly by teaching and partly by playing in coffee houses, taverns, and the occasional concert. Presumably, De Moivre often used his own suites for alto recorder and basso continuo, the third collection of which was
published by Walsh in 1715.

Other recorder teachers in London included James Paisible and John Banister II, who also taught violin. Paisible arrived in England from France in 1673 and stayed there for the rest of his life, apart from a few years in the early 1690s when he worked for the exiled James II at St. Germain-en-Laye, outside Paris. He made his living primarily as a theater musician, but also was a Court composer. In 1710, the London opera band, in which Paisible played bass violin and occasionally the recorder, was singled out for praise by the German traveler Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach. Two weeks later, Uffenbach reported:

...most notable of all was a most charming concerto played with Pepusch by a recorder and a viola da gamba. The person who plays the recorder is a Frenchman called Paisible, whose equal is not to be found.... The second man, who played the viola da gamba with such uncommon excellence, is an Italian called Signor Pietro [Chabaud].

Uffenbach added that a member of his party,

Herr Gramm, who comes of a noble Luneburg family, and frequents our society and is an amateur of the recorder, wished to take lessons from him, but he wanted three guineas for eighteen lessons, which frightened Herr Gramm off....

Three guineas was about what Paisible made for two nights' performance in the opera orchestra, so Uffenbach may have been mistaken about the fee.

One more piece of evidence: on Paisible's death a bill was found in his possession "under the hand of Sir Bowshire Wray for the sum of £33 to the...deceased for teaching him to play the recorder." This is a much larger sum, 11 times what Paisible was reportedly asking for 18 lessons.

Claver Morris

Claver Morris was a doctor in Wells, in the west country. Although he took his work as a doctor seriously, music was clearly his passion in life. He danced, sang, played the harpsichord and organ, and had some facility on the violin, bassoon, oboe, and recorder. Two diaries of his have survived. The first, from 1709 to 1710, shows that he had his own private music-meetings, and also was the leading light in the Wells Music Club, which met every week in the church hall. The climax of the year for the Music Club was a performance of Henry Purcell's "Hail, bright Cecilia" on St. Cecilia's Day, November 22, 1709.

Morris rode around the area a great deal to give medical care. One day he recorded,

We stayed all day at Major Prater of Froom. Colonel Berkeley, the Major, Mr. Jesser, my servant, and I played recorder sonatas almost all the day. Only about 3 o'clock I was sent for, to visit Mrs. Merryweather.

The second diary, from 1718 to 1726 is a mine of information about the musical life of the provinces. In 1719, the Music Club "had the first trial of Handel's pastoral," This was no less a piece than Acis and Galatea, which has some beautiful arias for the recorder: "Hush, ye pretty warbling quire," "O, ruddier than the Cherry," and "Heart, the seat of soft delight."

Later in 1719, Morris "was at our music meeting, and Mr. Bucket of Calne in Wiltshire played on a recorder one song with us. But Mr. Hill's harpsichord being near a note below consort pitch, and no sure hand performing the trebles (being only young lads of Wells and Skepton), our music was very mean." I think we have all known such occasions.

In 1724, in Bath, "we went to the Grove, and Mr. Broad got Mr. Grano to entertain me with his trumpet, German flute, and small flute [i.e., recorder] in the new dining room at the Three Tuns. They dined with me." John Baptist Grano was primarily a trumpeter in Handel's opera orchestra, but he also played the flute and recorder. His own diary, dating from a few years later when he was put in debtors' prison, has recently been published. Morris took a break from the music club for ten weeks after his wife died. Her loss must have prompted his own thoughts about death. Three friends came over and "made a consort. We played the 6th opera of Bonporti all through, Finger's two sonatas which I would should be played at my funeral, and two of Bassani's sonatas." Gottfried Finger had left England 23 years before, so this was really "early music."

Professionals and amateurs together

Morris' diary shows a provincial society in which people put on "music meetings" for their own enjoyment, incorporating professionals whenever they were available. Even in London there were concert series in which professionals and amateurs rubbed shoulders.

Recorders must have been used in the Music Club or Music Meeting of Thomas Britton, a coalman by trade, who had his coal warehouse in Clerkenwell, an unfashionable area on the fringe of the City of London. Although he maintained this humble trade throughout his life, he became wealthy enough to pay property taxes on three other properties and was respected as a skillful bibliophile.

Britton's "consort" began in 1678 and was held in a small, cramped room above his warehouse, accessible from stairs outside the building. These performances were well known to London society, particularly after 1700 when they were described by several writers and alluded to in plays.

Sir John Hawkins claims that the performers included both gentlemen amateurs and professionals. He names some of the amateurs: Henry Neddler of the Excise House, also known to have participated in John Loeillet's concerts, which I shall mention later; Henry Simons, the composer of some recorder music; the poet John Hughes, who wrote some libretti for Handel; and the painter John Woolaston. Hawkins says that the professionals included Pepusch, Handel, and Banister.

The music performed at Britton's concerts must have drawn on his own excellent collection. The descriptions of it in the sale catalogue of his music library are often general or incomplete, although many of the printed works can be identified. Seven of the sales lots definitely contained recorder music—by Purcell, Paisible, De Moivre, Corelli, Croft, Pepusch, William Babell, Corbett, William Williams, Finger, and Keller. The recorder players among these composers—Paisible and De Moivre as well as Banister—presumably played the recorder in the "consort." Alas, we do not know the names of any amateur recorder players who took part.

Sometimes professional musicians organized music-meetings in their own homes in which amateurs participated. The most famous were those of the recorder, oboe, and harpsichord player John Loeillet at his house near Covent Garden. The repertory was never advertised, but it presumably included the recorder music of his that Walsh published belatedly during the 1720s: six sonatas for alto recorder and basso continuo, and six trio sonatas for recorder, oboe/violin, and basso continuo. Hawkins reported that Loeillet, "dwelling in a house...in which was a large room, had a weekly concert there, which was frequented chiefly by gentlemen performers, who gratified him very handsomely for his assistance in conducting it."

As depicted in a poem of the time, Loeillet's character was convivial, generous, and self-effacing. No doubt this was helpful for the concert business. Loeillet's Opus 2 was dedicated to the Duke of Rut-
land and Opus 3 to Charles Edwin, Esq., presumably two of the gentlemen who patronized his concerts. Through his concerts Loeillet amassed a considerable fortune, estimated by Hawkins to be £16,000. His will shows that he had several domestic servants (Paisible had only one). A year after his death, his possessions were auctioned off, including “a very excellent drawing of the Last Supper by Raphael.” It paid to associate with amateurs.

Robert Woodcock

A good example of the kind of amateur who would have taken part in Loeillet’s concerts is Robert Woodcock (1690-1728). Woodcock’s parents kept a girls’ boarding school in Chelsea, then a village just outside London. He himself became a civil servant. Around 1725, he left government service to devote himself to marine painting, which he had learned by copying paintings by Willem van der Velde the younger, the greatest marine painter of the era. Alas, his new career lasted only a couple of years, and he died of the gout at the age of 37, leaving his wife and five children in poverty.

Woodcock’s friend, the art historian George Vertue, described him as “an ingenious gentleman lover of the arts of painting and music, and teacher.” In a second account written after Woodcock’s death, Vertue wrote of him: “He was very skillful in music, had judgment and performed on the hautboy in a masterly manner, there being many pieces, some published, and much approved by skillful masters in that science.” Since six of Woodcock’s twelve published concertos are for recorder and oboe, clearly we have to take “hautboy” in the broad sense of “woodwind.”

Compositions by amateurs

Virtually all of the recorder music written in England in the late Baroque period was by professionals. Some of it was written by recorder players themselves to play in concerts. With the exception of Woodcock, I have found very little evidence of amateurs writing recorder music.

There is one sonata—imitating William Williams’ sonata “in imitation of birds”—by Robert Orme, Esquire, a gentleman about whom I have been able find out nothing beyond his musical interests. It was included in a set of trio sonatas for two recorders and basso continuo dedicated to Orme by Gottfried Keller, a German composer and harpsichordist who settled in London in the 1690s.

Around 1701, Walsh published A New Set of Ayres for the Consorts of the Musical Society, the Tunes for all sorts of Instruments, the title of which is clarified elsewhere as “A Set of Aires made for Mr Banister’s Consort by Mr Orm.” “Mr Banister’s consort” was a concert series promoted by John Banister and Robert King, both Court violinists who doubled on the recorder.

Amateurs on stage

In December 1718, at the Long Room next to the King’s Theater, London, appeared “an assembly of the best masters of vocal and instrumental music, who never performed before in public.” They clearly wished to disguise their identity—not a bad idea for amateurs appearing on the public stage. An advertisement proclaimed:

All the performers will appear in masks... All the solos will be played on a throne built for that purpose; and after the concert is performed, any gentleman or ladies may, appearing in a mask, if they please, ascend the throne, and call for any instrument and play a solo, etc., the auditors only excepted.

The scheduled performances at this concert included “a new concerto on the little flute [i.e., recorder]” and a cantata with recorder obbligato, perhaps one of Pepusch’s.

Conclusions

The material presented here concerns only England and must be the proverbial tip of the iceberg. With a wider focus, we could look at Adriana van den Bergh; Christiaan Huygens; Etienne Loulié, and the Duke of Chartres (later regent of France); Prince Ferdinand (son of Max Emanuel II, the Elector of Bavaria); Johann Christian Schickhardt’s dedications of his publications to amateurs; Alessandro and Benedetto Marcello, and others. A great deal remains to be discovered on this subject, and I welcome information readers can forward to me.

David Lasocki is music reference librarian at Indiana University, Bloomington, and writes frequently about woodwind instruments, their history, repertory, and performance. This text has been abridged from an address he gave to the European Recorder Teachers Association-Austria meeting in Vienna in April 1998.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING


