

PROFESSIONAL RECORDER PLAYERS AND I

by

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For a number of years I did small research projects for the great recorder player Frans Brüggen. In 1978 he approached me with an unusual large research project. He pointed out that we knew a reasonable amount about the recorders of the past, recorder music and its major composers, recorder tutors, and the use of the recorder by amateurs, but we knew next to nothing about the circumstances in which the recorder was played professionally or about the musicians who played it. He planned to make a film about professional recorder players and was commissioning people to undertake research studies in several European countries. Would I like to research the history of professional recorder playing in England - my home country and one to which I had recently returned after a long sojourn in the United States?

At that juncture I was pursuing my research in my spare time while working full-time as secretary to a retired ambassador who was an advisor at the Rothschild family bank in London. He showed up for work only two or three mornings a week (except for the period when he wrote a biography of his father and then his own memoirs - both approved behaviours for retired ambassadors I'm told). I was generally underemployed so had lots of time for writing and managed dozens of short articles and prefaces for editions. But I had to be at my desk to answer his phone calls, so I had almost no time for actual research. I was already working on a number of other projects and didn't see how I could ever do the extensive research I imagined that Frans' project would entail. I promised I would find someone else to do it for him.

After some enquiries I found Wendy Thompson, who was writing her Ph.D. dissertation on Lully at King's College London while working as an editor for Oxford University Press. Wendy agreed to take on the project and then we both spent about a year trying to get Frans to tell us exactly what he had in mind: was it a collective history of the kinds of groups or situations in which recorder players took part, or did he want to emphasise biogra-

phies of the players? By the time we found out, I had finished most of my other research projects and become interested in recorder players by another route. I was engaged in editing recorder music by several composers who worked in England around 1700; men like John Baston, Gottfried Finger and Gottfried Keller. I was curious about the kinds of players or groups or musical settings for which certain unusual items were written: for example, the quintet sonatas for two treble recorders, two oboes or violins and basso continuo by Finger and Keller, and the concertos for small recorders by Baston, said on their title page to have been 'performed at the theatre with great applause'. Perhaps I should become involved in Frans' research project after all and see if I could organise my life so that I could do the research? Wendy kindly agreed to let me share the project. Later on she allowed me to do the lion's share of the research, to write our report to Frans, to continue to pursue the topic by myself and publish all accounts of it under my own name.

Frans, as I eventually learned, was more interested in the settings of professional recorder playing than he was in individual biographies. The two facets proved complementary, as well as equally fascinating in their own way. Both facets depended on doing work on archival sources, many of which were unpublished. I had to become familiar with sources relating to the employment of musicians at the royal court, in noble households, in the theatre, in towns and cities, at concerts and in the opera houses. And I needed to find out as much as I could about the births, marriages, deaths, wills and property holdings of the musicians I encountered. Fortunately most of this material was concerned with London and its environs.

What enabled me to do the archival work was the proximity of my ex-ambassador's office to the Guildhall Library - the library of the City of London that holds a great many sources relating to the history of the City, as well as London in general. The Guildhall was only five minutes' walk away from the office. Before lunch I telephoned to order my sources, then hurried off for an hour (or two, I confess!) buried in sixteenth and seventeenth century tomes. The Corporation of London Records Office, which holds other London material, was next door to the Guildhall. The Drapers Company of London, another goldmine, was ten

minutes' walk away. From time to time I took a fifteen minute ride on the underground to the Public Record Office. Occasionally, at weekends or holidays, I ventured further afield - the British Library, the Greater London Council Records Office, the Essex Record Office, the Museum of Local History at Walthamstow, the Society of Genealogists Library, the Victoria Branch Library of the City of Westminster Public Libraries, the Camden Borough Public Libraries, and various churches, in and out of London.

In doing so, of course, I learned a great deal about the history and geography of London. I pored over copies of old maps that I had pinned to the wall at home. In fact I became so familiar with the way London had been two or three hundred years ago that I began to resent the "modern developments" I encountered in walking around the city, particularly the diagonal roads put in during the nineteenth century which disturbed the grid pattern of earlier times.

But the biggest lesson I learned about research was that you need to make contact with other researchers - the more of them the better. Doing the dissertation finally taught me why authors of books often have such long acknowledgement pages: they really did need the help of the people represented by those motley collections of names. My own acknowledgement section eventually ran to seven pages and the researchers and others who helped me were many and various. Scientists use the term "invisible college" to describe a group of researchers in the same field who share findings with each other prior to the conference or publication stage; they push forward the frontiers of research long before the word gets out to the scientific community at large. I believe that such invisible colleges also exist, to a smaller extent, in musicology.

The two researchers who formed my invisible college shared so much material with me that sections of our respective publications could well have been signed by the three of us. Peter Holman, English musicologist, keyboard player and ensemble leader, was researching his own dissertation on the violin band at the English Court from 1540 to 1642. He gave me much material from the Court records at the Public Record Office and British Library - two archives in which I could never spend much time; I gave him many pieces of biographical information from my lunchtimes

at the Guildhall. In addition he had dozens of insights into the music of the whole period I was studying. Roger Prior, Senior Lecturer in English at the Queen's University, Belfast, and a Shakespeare scholar, shared with me his considerable knowledge of the social life of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and was especially helpful in enabling me to grasp the position of musicians in society at that time. Beyond the sharing of information, both Peter and Roger were sounding boards for ideas and they gave me constant research "companionship," in person, on the phone, or by letter, without which I truly could not have written what I did.

I worked on the project for Frans for about a year, then handed in a 175-page report to him. At that stage it mostly covered the years 1660-1740, with only tentative conclusions about the years 1500-1660. But the topic was so interesting that I decided to keep researching it for my own sake and, in particular, to look more closely at the earlier period. After another year, however, my ex-ambassador - having written his compulsory biography and memoirs - decided it was time to stop being retired and get a full-time job with a foundation. The Rothschilds then sent me to work as an assistant in their business library. The work was routine in the extreme, I could only take an hour for lunch, and I had little time to write up my research. Clearly I needed to make a career change. Eventually I decided to go back to the University of Iowa and, using the recorder players project as a dissertation, finish the Ph.D. degree I had abandoned in 1973. Just before I left England I wrote an article for **Early Music** in which I summarised my work to date.¹ I described it as a summary of my dissertation, but in truth it was a synopsis of what I hoped to write.

Back at Iowa I spent about a year trying to write up some of the material on the typewriter, having trouble organising the large mass of material I had collected by then. What saved the project, and me, was word processing on the University's main frame computer, using powerful software that could store hundreds of pages and cope easily with footnotes. This is not the place to extol the virtues of word processing; suffice it to say that it enabled me to both edit and write at the screen and eventually to organise 1,000 pages of material into a fairly

polished final draft. This is the place, however, to extol the virtues of large American university libraries. As I organised my material I found the need for extra research on secondary sources and I was fortunate to have the three-million volume collection of the University of Iowa Libraries, in which I was able to browse and to find materials in an hour or two that would have taken me weeks of phone ordering and travel in London. In one two-week period, for example, I was able to look through some 200 plays of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries for evidence of the use of the recorder.

So much for how the dissertation was written. What about my findings? First and foremost, it became clear to me how distorted a view we have had of the role of the recorder in English musical life of the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries. The previous picture was twofold: a few scraps of information before the 1670s (the inventory of Henry VIII's instruments, some recorder players at the Court in the early seventeenth century, a few literary references to amateur performance); then, from the 1670s to 1740 or so, an abundance of recorder tutors and music for amateurs as well as biographical material on a few woodwind composers who were known to have been able to play the recorder. I discovered widespread use of the recorder by professional musicians from 1540 to 1740 and the varied and important part the instrument played in the musical life of the nation in general, and London in particular, during that period.

The study really falls into three parts: (1) the use of the Renaissance recorder by professional musicians, (2) the use of the Baroque recorder and (3) detailed biographies of some 100 recorder players. First, the Renaissance recorder. In 1540 Henry VIII, keen to emulate the newly-fashionable Italian practice of having complete consorts of like instruments, imported to his Court an existing consort of recorder players - five brothers of the Bassano family from Venice, who introduced to England the highest standards of musical instrument making² and probably a similar standard of recorder playing. In 1550 the consort expanded to six members. The Bassanos settled in England and continued to dominate the Court recorder consort until 1630, furnishing no fewer than thirteen of the nineteen men who played in it over the years. Two of the Bassanos, Jeron-

imo II and Augustine, and one of the other foreign musicians in the consort, William Daman, wrote music that seems to have been intended for the consort. During the sixteenth century the recorder consort was probably used to play dance, dinner and entertainment music, although evidence of their duties is scarce. By 1630, the musicians were assimilated into a general group of wind players at Court who played dinner music and served in the Chapel Royal.

During the second half of the sixteenth century the use of the recorder consort spread gradually to musicians of noble households, waits (city and town musicians), and theatre musicians. Unfortunately, none of their recorder music seems to have survived. The individual musicians in all such organisations played a variety of string and wind instruments; some also composed. Among noble households, evidence for the use of the recorder consort survives for those of the Earl of Leicester, Sir Thomas Sackville and Sir Thomas Kytson. The London Waits took up the recorder consort in 1568 during a period which, probably in emulation of the Court, they began to use all the resources of its instrumental establishment. The Norwich Waits, well known in London circles, used a recorder consort from about 1584 onwards. Other groups of waits commonly journeyed around the country and would have come across recorder consorts on their travels.

In the theatre, the boy companies who played at the Blackfriars and Paul's Theatres in the first decade of the seventeenth century employed professional musicians who had a consort of recorders. The use of the recorder by adult companies of actors is difficult to document until 1610, after which evidence is abundant that the musicians of most of the companies frequently used recorders - presumably a complete consort - to depict the supernatural and love in plays.

The mixed consort of treble violin (or treble viol), flute or recorder, bass viol, lute, bandora and cittern apparently developed away from the Court. It seems to have originated in the 1570s with travelling troupes of actor-musicians who wore the livery of noblemen, then gradually been taken up by domestic musicians of noblemen, waits, theatre musicians, and finally amateurs, before dying out during the 1610s. The recorder probably took a lesser role in the mixed consort than the flute did,

and surviving recorder parts demand only modest technical accomplishment.

The Civil War and Commonwealth (1642-1660) brought music to a halt at Court and in the London theatres. After the Restoration, the decline in importance of the Court and the rise of the middle class engendered new musical settings; public concerts, theatre intermission entertainments (in effect miniature concerts), and eventually the opera. At the same time the chamber, orchestral and operatic styles of the late Baroque era came to England from the continent. The Baroque recorder, made in three sections, more conical in bore, edgier and more colourful in tone, more capable of dynamic nuance, was appropriate for these new musical styles.

After the Baroque instrument was introduced to England, probably by James Paisible and three other Frenchmen in 1673, the recorder took on new roles. Solo recorders were used in sonatas, suites and, eventually, concertos; pairs of recorders were used in duets, trio sonatas, quintet sonatas and operatic orchestral music. In the hands of such virtuosi as Paisible, John Banister II, and John Baston, the recorder achieved unprecedented popularity in theatre entertainments and public concerts. Concertos for small sizes of recorder (fifth flutes in c" and sixth flutes in d") were staple fare for all professional players from about 1715 into the 1730s. Virtually all of the recorder repertory that was published for amateurs by John Walsh and others between about 1690 and 1730 - and until now associated by us with the amateur market - seems in fact to have been originally written for professional performance. During the 1720s and 30s the recorder declined considerably in importance, apparently because it was incapable of being used readily in the new early Classical music, which demanded more flexible dynamics and more subjective tone qualities.

Most of the professional recorder players working in England during this period were foreigners. Four waves of Frenchmen in the late seventeenth century were followed by Dutchmen (John Loeliliet and Jean Christian Kytch, later Handel's principal woodwind player) and a German (John Ernest Galliard) in the first decade of the eighteenth century and two Italians in the 1720s (Francesco Barsanti and Giuseppe Sammartini). Besides Baston,

most recorder players earned the major portion of their living playing other instruments in the theatre or opera bands and sometimes also at Court - Paisible, the bass violin (he also composed); Banister, the treble violin; Barsanti, Kytch, Peter La Tour, Loeillet and Sammartini, the oboe; John Baptist Grano, the trumpet and flute; to name only the leading players.

The study of professional musicians can yield insights into music history that cannot be obtained by looking only at composers, music and instruments. In my dissertation this approach led to the attribution of some pieces of music (the Court repertory of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries) to the recorder rather than to other instruments. It showed how the availability of performers dictated the genre, instrumentation and technical difficulty of the music. It demonstrated the dependence of the publishers on music written by and for professionals. It traced some of the ways in which musical styles, instruments, standards and performance practices were brought to England by foreign performer-composers. And it shed new light on the recorder itself - its attractions and limitations, and the reasons for its decline and fall.

Notes

1. 'Professional Recorder Playing in England, 1500-1740,' *Early Music* X/1 (January 1982), 23-29; X/2 (April 1982), 182-91.

2. See my recent article 'The Anglo-Venetian Bassano Family as Instrument Makers and Repairers,' *Galpin Society Journal* XXXVIII (April 1985), 112-32.

Dr Lasocki's dissertation is available from University Microfilms International (order number 83-27401). The author has plans for an abridged version in book form in the near future.

