

# Preluding on the Recorder in England in the early 18th Century

DAVID LASOCKI

In 1766, Lewis Granom, a flautist and trumpeter (and perhaps also a former recorder player<sup>1</sup>) working in London, wrote in his flute tutor the first description I have found in English of the improvised woodwind prelude:

Before [the pupil] begins to play a piece of music, he should run over a few notes in the mode (or tone) in which such music is composed, in order to prepare the ear for that which is to follow; [and this creates pieces] called preludes, [which] are irregular pieces of music, depending on the fancy of the performer; [but] though they are deemed irregular, they must be methodical, according to the laws of [music].<sup>2</sup>

The practice of performing such improvised preludes in England was by then well over half a century old, and had once been extremely popular, judging by the references we have to written-out examples in the tutors of the time. Most of the tutors for the recorder and violin advertised for publication in London in the first decades of the 18th century, in fact, contained pieces called either 'preludes' or 'flourishes' or both. Those I have traced are as follows: 'a Flourish in every Key: By Mr J. Banister' (violin, 1699);<sup>3</sup> 'a Prelude, proper to play before any Lesson, by Mr Banister' (recorder, 1699);<sup>4</sup> 'Flourishes in every Key, by Mr Alex Roathwell' (rec 1699);<sup>5</sup> 'Flourishes or Preludes in every Key' (vn 1701);<sup>6</sup> 'a New Set of Flourishes in Every Key on the Flute [i.e. recorder], Composed by Mr J. B.' (rec 1703);<sup>7</sup> 'a Flourish or Prelude in every Key . . . by Signior Gasperini' (vn 1704);<sup>8</sup> 'a Set of Preludes in all ye Keys after a new manner by Mr Dean' (vn 1707);<sup>9</sup> 'Preludes to introduce the following Aires, in their several Keys' (rec 1709/1717);<sup>10</sup> 'Flourishes, by the most able Masters' (vn 1709);<sup>11</sup> 'Flourishes by the most able Masters, several of them in two Parts' (vn 1710);<sup>12</sup> 'a Flourish in every Key, by Mr Tenor' (rec 1712);<sup>13</sup> 'Preludes and Flourishes in every Key' (vn 1713/1715);<sup>14</sup> 'Preludes or Flourishes in all the Keys' (vn 1717);<sup>15</sup> 'a Flourish or Prelude in every Key' (rec 1729/c. 1730);<sup>16</sup> 'Preludes or Flourishes in all Keys' (rec 1733).<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, of this remarkable flurry of flourishes only those for violin by Thomas Dean and those for the recorder from 1729/c. 1730 have survived; the remaining references now serve only to tantalise assiduous researchers such as myself. There is also a manuscript set of flourishes/preludes for the violin in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.<sup>18</sup>

Writing in 1719, the French flautist Jacques Hotteterre le Romain had to go out of his way to point out that two different kinds of pieces were commonly called 'preludes'. 'One is the composed prelude, which is normally the first movement of a suite or *sonate*, and which really is a piece in the forms [of music]. Of this kind are also the preludes which are found in operas and cantatas, which sometimes precede and announce what must be sung. The other kind is the *prélude de caprice*, which is rightly the true prelude . . . [which is] created on the spur of the moment without any preparation'.<sup>19</sup> In England the improvised prelude may have borrowed its name from the movement that opens a French-style suite of dances, such pieces being very popular there during the last forty years of the 17th century.

But the term 'flourish', with which it had become synonymous, is much older. According to John Manifold, it was used as far back as the 16th century. In discussing military signals he notes that

the Flourish is a far less precise signal than the military ones; there is little evidence of its having any particular tune, and none of its having any particular meaning. It belongs more to the theatre than to the camp or court; within the theatre it can be played on trumpets, or cornetts, or (to judge by later practice) on any other instrument you please. To this extent, it is more a tone signal, or timbre signal, than a melodic signal . . . When instruments are specified, they are specified in the plural: 'flourish of cornetts', 'flourish of trumpets'. etc.<sup>20</sup>

Flourishes were apparently improvised and, moreover, quite short, since the dramatist had to call for 'long', 'lively', 'full' or 'great' flourishes specially.

Flourishing still flourished in the Restoration theatre, again being indicated by a verbal instruction. Purcell, for example, in his published full score to *Dioclesian* (1690) has the chorus sing 'Sound all your instruments' followed by the instruction 'Flourish with all instruments in C-fa-ut key [C major]'. In Purcell's first music for the English stage, that for Lee's *Theodosius* (1680), 'recorders flourish' in the opening scene. Again, the instruments are specified in the plural. In a manuscript essay on 'The Excellent Art of Voluntary' [i.e. improvising] (c. 1715-20), Roger North provides an insight into what such flourishing was like:

I shall begin with the manner of flourishing upon a key, with which masters take a liberty upon all



movements in the collections, the preludes proper have time signatures and are written in regular metre. They are longer and more virtuosic than the 'flourishes' discussed above. Many have accidentals or even cadence in the dominant; one has two changes of time signature (from C to 3/2 to  $\text{C}$ ). Here is the opening of one by Haym:



Incidentally, the four pieces labelled 'Prelude' in the second part of *The Division Flute* (Walsh & Hare & Randall, 1708), by Finger, D. Purcell and Pepusch, also turn out to be sonata movements shorn of their bass.

As Roger North explained, 'masters' (or in other words, professional musicians) played flourishes in public concerts to attune the ear of the audience to the key of the piece about to be performed. The surviving examples discussed above are presumably written-out examples of the kind of music they might have improvised, published for those unable to observe the 'masters' and be 'more exquisitely' informed. For both professional and amateur musicians, the playing of preludes, improvised or written-out, must also have served as a method of preparing themselves for the music they were about to perform: to warm and tune the instrument, to exercise the fingers, to test the acoustics of the room, and again, to accustom themselves to the key and its particular difficulties on their instrument. In so doing, as the French author Bordet was later to observe, it was better to create something melodious, 'so as to give pleasure to the listeners as well as to themselves'.<sup>25</sup> Another purpose can be deduced from the standard of difficulty of some of the Walsh & Hare collection: the demonstration of virtuosity. And indeed it is this facet of prelude which points the way to the future development of the art, for during the course of the 18th century the technical demands were to increase to such an extent that the early 19th-century preludes are often indistinguishable from studies or *études*.<sup>26</sup>

The recorder preludes of 1729/c. 1730 together with the remaining sixteen 'Select Preludes and Vollentarys' not included in the Schott edition have been edited by David Lasocki under the title *More Preludes and Voluntaries (England, c. 1700)* and will be published shortly by Nova Music, London.

David Lasocki has written a book with Betty Bang Mather, *The Art of Preluding, 1700-1830, for Flutists,*

*Oboists, Clarinetists and Other Performers*, which will be published shortly by McGinnis & Marx, New York (British agents, Peters).

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1. At a benefit concert for 'L. Grano' on 11 May 1722 at the Haymarket Theatre, 'Grano' (either Lewis Granom or his brother, John Baptist Granom, who was also a flautist and trumpeter) performed a trumpet concerto, a flute sonata and 'A Concerto on the Little Flute' (i.e. one of the smaller sizes of recorder). See *The London Stage, 1660-1800*, Part 2: 1700-1729, ed. Emmett L. Avery (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960), p. 677.
2. Lewis Granom, *Plain and Easy Instructions for Playing on the German-Flute* (London: Bennett, 1766).
3. From the title page to *The Compleat Tutor to the Violin* (London: Young & Cross, 1699). See Michael Tilmouth 'A Calendar of References to Music in Newspapers published in London and the Provinces (1660-1719)', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 1 (1961), p. 26.
4. *The Gentleman's Companion; Being a Collection of the newest Tunes for the Flute* (London: Hare, 1699). See Tilmouth, *loc. cit.*
5. *The Compleat Instructor to the Flute* (London: Young, 1699). See Tilmouth, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
6. *Nolens Volens, The second Book for the Violin* (London: Walsh & Hare, 1701). See William C. Smith, *A Bibliography of the Musical Works published by John Walsh during the years 1695-1720* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1948), Entry no. 72.
7. *The Fourth Book of the New Flute Master* (London: Walsh & Hare, 1703). See Smith, *op. cit.*, 113.
8. *Nolens Volens, the Third Book for the Violin* (London: Walsh & Hare, 1704). See Smith, *op. cit.*, 158.
9. *The Compleat Tutor to the Violin, The Fourth Book* (London: Young, 1707).
10. *The new Flute Master 7th Book* (London: Walsh & Hare & Randall, 1709). See Smith, *op. cit.*, 305. *The New Flute Master* (London: Walsh & Hare, 1717). See Smith, *op. cit.*, 510.
11. *The New Violin-Master* (London: Walsh & Hare & Randall, 1709). See Smith, *op. cit.*, 336.
12. *The Gentleman's Companion for the Violin or Hoboy* (London: Walsh & Hare & Randall, 1710). See Smith, *op. cit.*, 340.
13. *The Fifth Book of the Compleat Flute-Master* (London: Walsh & Hare, 1712). See Smith, *op. cit.*, 421. *The 5th Book of the Gentleman's Companion. Being a choice Collection of the newest Tunes for the Flute* (London: Walsh & Hare, 1712). See Smith, *op. cit.*, 423.
14. *The 6th Book of Nolens Volens, or the most compleat Tutor to the Violin* (London: Walsh & Hare, 1713). See Smith, *op. cit.*, 442. *Nolens Volens the 7th Book* (London: Walsh, 1715). See Smith, *op. cit.*, 472.
15. *The Compleat Tutor to the Violin* (London: Walsh & Hare, 1717). See Smith, *op. cit.*, 515.
16. *The New Flute Master for the Year 1729* (London: Walsh & Hare, 1729). *The Second Book of the Flute Master Improv'd* (London: Wright, c. 1730).
17. *The New Flute Master for the Year 1733* (London: Walsh, 1733). See William C. Smith & Charles Humphries, *A Bibliography of the Musical Works published by the firm of John Walsh during the years 1721-1766* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1968), Entry no. 1131.

18. Ms. Mus. Sch. e. 400.
19. Jacques Hotteterre le Romain, *L'Art de préluder sur la flûte traversière, sur la flûte-à-bec, sur le hauboïs, et autres instrumens de dessus* (Paris: author & Foucault, 1719). Modern edition ed. Michael Sanvoisin (Paris: Ed. Aug Zurfluh, 1966).
20. J. S. Manifold, *The Music in English Drama from Shakespeare to Purcell* (London: Rockliff, 1956), p. 26.
21. See John Wilson, ed., *Roger North on Music* (London: Novello, 1959), p. 143. I have modernised the spelling.
22. See Smith, *op. cit.*, 166.
23. See Smith, *op. cit.*, 283.
24. Edition Schott 10113 (R.M.S. 251).
25. Toussain Bordet, *Méthode raisonnée, pour apprendre la musique d'une façon plus claire et plus précise à laquelle on joint l'étendue de la flûte traversière, du violon, du pardessus de viole, de la vielle et de la musette* (Paris: author; Lyon: Bretonne, c. 1755).
26. See Betty Bang Mather & David Lasocki, *The Art of Pre-luding, 1700-1830, for Flutists, Oboists, Clarinetists and Other Performers* (New York: McGinnis & Marx, in process of publication).

# Digitalism

PAUL CLARK

Examples of the species, recorder-player, arise, sometimes spontaneously, more often through a process of evolution, in many various ways. Some folks were born musical, and it was inevitable that when a recorder crossed their path, they should play it. Some had musical parents, or at least determined parents, who thrust music upon them; they were 'bred up to music', the recorder sooner or later taking its place in their repository of musical arms. Others, conversely, have followed their offspring into the recorder's garden of delights. Even idle browsing in music shops has induced the onset of the recorder malaise. And so one might continue.

Which came first, music or the recorder? Presumably music, especially vocal music, was around for ages before the recorder appeared even in rudimentary form, the piping voice before the well-voiced pipe. And though the talk of voicing a flute has been relegated largely to the instrument-maker's workshop, it is still commonplace for tutors to encourage their pupils to make their flutes sing, and to sing you must first have the desired sound in your head. Which came first for you, the desire to make music or the wish to play the recorder? The question is important for it bears upon the kinds of recorder players we are. The desire to play the recorder seems to originate in different ways: we want to while away the hours, to be active, to be doing something, a sort of artistic fidgeting, to be able to read music (a literacy to be put to other uses later on, maybe), to be able to join with other people in music-making; initially it is the whiling, the doing, the reading and the belonging that are important, the music comes later. Maybe some look for a particular kind of sound that only the recorder can give, and here we begin to enter the area where the music, the sound, is of prime importance and other things are only means to this end. The older you were when the recorder struck you (for it does attack people quite late in life) the more likely it is that at the outset you had to do battle with the

monster, Notation; and notation divides us again, even as does motivation.

Apart from striking terror into the heart, wreaking havoc in the brain and exercising the mind sometimes almost to the point of disbelief, notation has two principal effects on the beholder: it suggests the movement of certain fingers or it evokes a particular sound. To the finger-players, all is well so long as the fingers are right. Breath may be too much or too little, or not uniform, the instrument may be sharp or flat or not in tune with itself, the mind of the player may be deranged (he may, for example, think he is playing a tenor when in fact he is holding a treble), but so long as the fingers are right (according to the chart supplied with the instrument) all is sweetness and light. I have heard the most avant-garde growlings and squealings from breathers whose lungs, or more probably whose diaphragms, could not sustain a pure level tone for the requisite length. These were players of many-to-a-part ensembles, each player emblemising (sic!) the part that several others were striving so manfully to present pure and clean. I have heard a player with a flat instrument proceeding through a whole piece in minor seconds with her colleagues of the same part, if not unaware of the discordance (one easily noticed by the same sort of player when it turns up in music like Colin Touchin's Sonata for Recorder Group), then at least insistent that she was fingering her new, expensive and therefore unassailable instrument with the correct digits. And I have heard a player survive a short movement blissfully unaware that he had played his whole line a fourth too low, thereby turning a trio into a quartet, and sporadically subverting the fundamental bass by dipping below it.

To the sound-player (note the hyphen, no uppishness intended), such foibles are an impossibility. Faced with the necessity of producing certain pitches he will first bring into tune an unco-operative instrument (which in any case he will probably know every quirk of), he will