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# The Modern Recorder Player

Volume 3

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ED 12270

**PREVIEW**  
Low Resolution

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## Introduction

In the introduction to Volume I, I mentioned the dramatic impact that the technical obstacles contemporary composers have had on the evolution of the recorder, and the techniques associated with it. One by one technical obstacles, which once seemed insuperable, have been mastered, if it is permitted to use the word 'mastered' where everything is in a state of constant change and flux. The only real technical difficulty I have had in writing this third volume was the sheer volume of sections of the two previous volumes that may be regarded as 'data', which is not a term based essentially on the needs of contemporary music, but rather on the needs of a more acute.

Although the problems discussed in this volume are, in a sense, they are not ancillary to the basic technical problems of the recorder, for they have been at the centre of the thing, and I could never have written the first two volumes. This makes the present volume at some points seem a little antelimitactic, but I cannot help it. I have done the project with the apparently more demanding technical disciplines, which probably would have had little acceptance of it, with the project in its previous volumes.

We have to admit that the recorder is a unique, in the classical (classical-orientated) genre, and that it has been set up almost entirely in music from the past, and has been set up in that manner more than in the present or even the future.<sup>1</sup> This is quite different from the situation in other instruments, in which we were trained always to be looking forward, rather than backward.

We really do not know ourselves. We are very familiar with baroque music and we can play it, and we can read all the notation of it, while at the same time we show a certain reluctance to play it, and we are not sure that it is really of our own time. But how can we be sure that we experience and respond to the various tuning systems, modes, tempi, instrumental timbres, etc., in the same way that people did in the baroque period?

How well do we really understand the principles of rhetoric that are at the root of baroque music? It is actually quite difficult to find information on this subject, which was considered of vital importance in the baroque period.

How well do we really understand baroque dance music? Do we really feel in our bones the differences between the various types, which were performed and enjoyed all over Europe, in anything like the same way we feel dance forms of our own century?

How can we be sure that we experience and respond to the various tuning systems, modes, tempi, instrumental timbres, etc., in the same way that people did in the baroque period?

Surely it is reasonable to expect that we should find reflected in music of our own day the emotions and preoccupations of our own time, rather than expecting to find these in music which can never be ours in any real sense. It is not surprising that our

<sup>1</sup> However, it is no longer unusual for me any more to get students who know practically nothing about early music, and who don't even want to associate the recorder with baroque music. They are only interested in contemporary music, folk music, jazz, and so on.

young people feel much more affinity with pop music, just because it is of *their* time, than with old sarabandes, courantes and fugues; indeed it would be nice if they were to take an interest in older music, but we cannot necessarily expect this from them. Isn't it striking that in the fields of pop, jazz and folk music there often is a (musically) more healthy and natural relationship between listener, performer and composer than there is in traditional "classical" music?

It seems that the majority of recorder players (as well as players of many other instruments) have problems with the sounds and structure of much contemporary music. However, it is important to realize that several thousand compositions for the recorder have been composed in the entire history of music up to that date. That is something we cannot afford to insulate ourselves from the music of the past or the present. It is of course sad that there is this large gulf between "producers" and the "consumers" but we do not have to accept this gulf as inevitable. I am necessarily generalizing, and fortunately there are several excellent recorder consumers/teachers here and there who are exceptions to the rule.

The essential question is whether a teacher is afraid of handing their students with their own fears. It is not that we are afraid of music today paying scant attention to the natural creativity of the child. It is generally accepted that, for example, if we want to help children to learn to write, it is best simply to give them paper and pencils, and let them do what they want to do. As soon as it comes to music we immediately impose a host of restrictions.

The apparently wise idea of free improvisation in any music may be something of which we, performers and consumers, are a little afraid. The most of us are not equipped to approach a different kind of music without a certain framework, or set of rules and limitations.

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Let us learn from the musicians who worked in the baroque period, who spent their lives perpetually developing and experimenting with composition and instrument-making, and where all aspects of music were constantly under discussion; we must be glad that this was the case. If we recorder players can manage to incorporate this ancient sense of *panta rhei* into the future with our own way of working and studying — always making graceful use of what others have done before us — we have an instrument with a great future. It is very inspiring and promising to see how the recorder<sup>1</sup> is achieving recognition in musical circles (other than baroque) as a normal contemporary wind instrument in its own right.

<sup>1</sup>In contemporary music circles there is an increasing use of the term 'blockflute' instead of recorder.

I hope this volume will help you to a feeling of the future of the recorder.

In Volumes I and II the treble recorder was used for all the examples and exercises chiefly because it is seen as the main solo instrument of the family. For modern music, however, the tenor is often a good alternative; the lower pitch<sup>1</sup> and wider bore often gives better results in special effects such as multiphonics, which are frequently required in modern music. Fortunately recorder makers are increasingly producing reliable and workable tenors, which in flexibility, speed of response and beauty of tone compare well with good altos.

<sup>1</sup> Don't forget that the real pitch of the recorder is actually an octave higher than written; it is only the harmonic structure of the sound which makes it appear to sound at the lower octave.