

Banchetto Musicale!

Recipe: Take four very talented Belgians. Add a carload of expensive bits of wood with holes in, several crates of Stella and a big bag of bananas. Mix in 90 enthusiastic amateurs and bucket-loads of music, energy and commitment. Simmer gently for several days and serve with optional haggis and whisky sauce.

And that was the Flanders Recorder Quartet in Scotland/Schotland – a wonderful weekend of music-making, including two superb concerts.

It all starts over a year ago after an Early Music Forum Scotland meeting. Lynne Hope has studied recorder in Belgium, tutored by some of the FRQ. They have never performed in Scotland; would we think about inviting them for a weekend? I take a deep breath and say yes...

And then there are months of sorting out the practicalities. Lynne is a calm organiser as emails fly between Dollar and Leuven. A vital piece of the jigsaw slots into place when the Edinburgh SRP branch agree to ask FRQ to tutor the Scottish Recorder Festival day. After months of cold grey weather, sunshine and blue skies finally reach Edinburgh at much the same time as Bart Spanhove, Tom Beets, Paul Van Loey and Joris Van Goethem. They have a packed schedule ahead of them!

Friday 24th May: Dollar, Scotland. Lynne's house is awash with around 50 recorders of all sizes. They cover the floor and explode from every bag. The cat retreats in some confusion. FRQ give a short concert to Dollar Music Society. Lynne prints out music and issues colour-coded timetables for the next 2 days. The guys start on the Stella.

Saturday 25th May: Edinburgh, SRP Scottish Recorder Festival. Over 70 recorder players turn up for a full day of workshops and the venue is buzzing. Bart gets us off to a great start with a massed session on Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto 2*. Already we get a sense of what good teachers (and lovely people) these musicians are... As well as Bach, the workshops include both renaissance and modern music, finishing with another massed session with Tom on Teschner's jazzy "*Seaport Jump*". Everyone I speak to is having a great time and we are all learning something new. I get a bit carried away at the Recorder Music Mail shop. The Scottish Recorder Orchestra gives a short performance under the baton of Eileen Silcocks. It's been a great day so far and it's about to get even better.

After a short break, the FRQ re-appear to perform their concert programme "*Banchetto Musicale*" to an audience of 120. Most of us have never heard a top recorder consort perform live and we are blown away – by their ensemble, intonation, musicality, virtuosity, energy and obvious enjoyment. The programme encompasses music from the early 15th century (*Czaldy Waldy*) to the 20th century (*I Continenti* by Jan Van der Roost) by way of Dornel and Bach. Vaughan Williams' "*Suite for Pipes*" is played on a delightful set of bamboo pipes made especially for FRQ by Angela Hopkinson, who has made a special trip

from Cornwall for this first public outing for her instruments. The final flourish is “*On the bottle*” by Frans Geysen, played not on recorders but on empty beer and wine bottles part-filled with water. We love it! We cheer, stamp and clap them back for 2 encores. Neil from Edinburgh SRP presents each of the FRQ with whisky, haggis and a neep (*see footnotes*). They look just a wee bit bemused.

Saturday evening, back in Dollar: disaster! The Stella has run out!

Sunday 26th May, Edinburgh: I get an early morning text message from Lynne – bring bananas! - good for energy before performing. We have over 30 people for a day of singing and playing early music. Tom takes a recorder masterclass on Telemann and Bart has instrumentalists working on diminutions. We have viol sessions, a consort song session, a recorders session and several mixed ensemble sessions for singers and instrumentalists. We play and sing Josquin, Bach, Gabrieli and Trombetti. The recorder quartet and trio I play with have coaching sessions with Paul and Tom, playing modern pieces; I confirm what I already suspected, I can neither flutter tongue nor click my fingers – both essential skills for playing contemporary recorder music!

By 4.15pm we are all exhausted. A few doughty people regroup to play, others go home for a wee lie down. Someone goes to the supermarket for more Stella. FRQ eat bananas and rehearse. At 6pm we regroup for another concert – this time a brand new programme, “A Chest of Flutes”, transcriptions of (mainly) early organ repertoire. This is a very different programme from last night, but just as stunning in its performance. We hear sublime music by Cabanilles, Preston, Fernandez, Cabezón, Ashton, Pärt, Brahms and Bach – all beautifully played. We continue the Scottish gifts theme with tartan scarves, Scottish beer and “See you Jimmie” hats. At the post-concert reception, Joris tries patiently to teach me to click my fingers – and fails. The effervescent Tom Beets has finally run out of energy.

Back in Dollar: packing! And Stella.

Monday 27th May: Lynne rounds the guys up for the drive to the airport. Paul is designated as Chief Tesselator for packing the car and does a great job of fitting everything in; shame someone forgot to shut the boot... All four FRQ members and their instruments are safely delivered to the airport. Lynne goes home to wash dishes, change beds and make a trip to the bottle bank. She has done a superb job as roadie/cook/driver/secretary and general factotum. The cat comes out of hiding.

It was, in short, a great weekend to be a Scottish recorder player. As one of the Saturday recorder players commented, “they were excellent teachers, good fun as well as informative, and their concert transported me to the highest realms of delight... I am definitely a fan now”. And the good news is that the Flanders Recorder Quartet had a great time too; they were impressed by both our enthusiasm and our sight-reading, and are keen to come back. So watch this space...

A personal selection of musical notes I took away from the weekend:

Varied articulation is key to making recorder music sound interesting. It's not just about playing the notes accurately, it's HOW you play them that matters. Ensembles need to spend time on this, experiment and then agree for performance.

Soloists should look for and follow the SKYLINE of the music.

Use different coloured highlighter pens on a copy of the score to show the STRUCTURE in the music (especially good for Bach fugues)

Ensemble tuning is very difficult! Tune to several notes, not just one, and be prepared to use alternative fingerings when needed...

There are huge numbers of possible alternative fingerings. Really, really good players learn them all and get to know the vagaries of their own instrument. The rest of us muddle through.

Practise difficult passages by starting off very slow (metronome beat 40) and very gradually increasing the speed. If you practise it wrong, you learn it wrong!

Practise by turning the main body of your recorder a quarter turn away from the mouthpiece. Finger the notes as normal - but they will all sound as the same note. This helps you to be much more aware of your own articulation, tongue/finger co-ordination and body movement.

If your music keeps falling off your stand, make a slight vertical crease halfway along the bottom edge.

Even top players occasionally forget something vital or have conflicting views on how to do things!

Alison Tollick

Alison Tollick is an amateur recorder player and Chair of the Early Music Forum of Scotland.

Lynne Hope is an experienced teacher who continues to study with leading recorder players including Tom Beets, Bart Spanhove and Philip Thorby, also masterclasses with Saskia Coolen and Bart Coen. She leads recorder workshops for the Early Music Forum of Scotland and will be one of the tutors on the 2013 Scottish Recorder Course.

Dollar is a picturesque small town at the foot of the Ochil Hills in Scotland, home to Lynne and her cat Monty.

Neep is a Scots word for the root vegetable known as a turnip in Scotland and a swede in England – traditionally served mashed with haggis.