

Connecting the Centuries with the Solo Recorder

*A Video Presentation for
the Society for Historically Informed Performance
www.sohipboston.org*

Emily O'Brien, Recorder

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| Ciaccona
from Violin Partita no. 2 BWV 1004 | <i>J.S. Bach (1685-1750)
arr. Emily O'Brien</i> |
| Ricercata quarta
from <i>Ricercate, passaggi et cadentie</i> | <i>Giovanni Bassano (1561-1617)</i> |
| Coasting on Daydreams (2015) | <i>Michael O'Brien (b. 1954)</i> |
| Troisième Suite op. 35
Prélude
Courante
Rondeau
Autre
Sarabande
Gavotte | <i>Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (1689-1755)</i> |
| Divertimento for solo flute
Introduction and fughetta
Variations on a Ground
Gavotte and Musette
Finale alla Gigue | <i>William Alwyn (1905-1985)</i> |
| Comagain
After "Come again, sweet love doth now
invite" by John Dowland | <i>Jacob van Eyck (1590-1657)</i> |

Notes:

We typically think of the Renaissance and Baroque as the core of the recorder literature. But much of our favorite solo repertoire from those eras is actually borrowed from other instruments - flute most frequently, but also violin or cornetto or other instruments. Today, the recorder continues to change and develop in new directions; in some cases almost without our realizing it. For example, many of the most common so-called "Baroque" models of lower recorders are really nothing like any actual 18th century instrument, and the ensemble contexts in which we use them are not much like any 18th century ensemble - even when we're playing arrangements of 18th century music and expect to hear stylistically appropriate musical choices.

But we also have more soloistic modern recorders, which are suited to performing a wider variety of borrowed literature, including later flute pieces which often have a range well outside that of a Baroque recorder.

Of course Bach's unaccompanied works are prime theft targets for every instrument; there is one partita for solo flute that recorder players typically claim as our own. But these pieces are so rich that no one can stop at just one. The wonderful Chaconne from Bach's 2nd violin partita has been transcribed many times for many instruments. I present here my own transcription for the Mollenhauer Helder harmonic tenor, which has a range that encompasses essentially all of the original range of the piece and requires minimal octave transpositions. Of course, as a non-polyphonic melody instrument, there are many choices to be made about how to handle the chords that a violin is capable of. There are many interpretations and many ways to treat these questions; I have done my best to balance the harmonic and rhythmic context and conventions for how the piece is typically performed against what I feel works well for the instrument.

The Bassano ricercars are another example of pieces that recorder players typically claim as our own that may be at least a little bit borrowed. The book claims to be suitable for all treble instruments; the pieces do work well for the recorder, and the practice material in the book is excellent. But Bassano was a cornettist, and that instrument is most likely what he really had in mind as wrote. While the book also contains ornamented versions of madrigals, the ricercars are purely abstract fantasies in themselves, without the strictures of a pre-existing melody or discrete movements in specific dance rhythms.

And likewise, "Coasting on Daydreams" is also an abstract instrumental fantasy. It was composed for me by my father, specifically for the Helder tenor, for my album "Fantasies for the Modern Recorder". Although it's the newest piece on the program, the piece it most resembles in form is the oldest. And it's the only piece performed on the specific instrument for which it was written.

The op. 35 suites of Boismortier were really written for flute, but today are performed at least as often by recorder players. Unusually, the music specifies that they may be performed either with or without the basso continuo part. They're lovely either way. The structure of this suite as a more abstract prelude is a nice preface to the Alwyn Divertimento. It was written for flute as well, but circa 1940 and for a very different type of flute. However, despite being written in a clearly 20th century style, it also includes many neo-Baroque elements that recorder players find familiar. Its fugue and its chaconne are clear

references to Bach's violin works, and even specify the kinds of voice-switching and arpeggiated chords that wind players employ when transcribing Bach's violin and cello works. It is, of course, technically demanding; but also very rewarding of the effort.

Lastly, van Eyck's Comagain is a bit of a recorder player's comfort food. Van Eyck's *Der Fluyten Lust-hof* is the largest single collection of solo music that's originally for recorder. This selection is a set of variations on John Dowland's madrigal; the text of the first verse is as follows:

Come again, sweet love doth now invite
Thy graces that refrain to do me due delight
To see, to hear
To touch, to kiss
To die
With thee again
In sweetest sympathy

In these times when we are often unable to be together, I felt that the nostalgic character of the piece and the desire for human contact made it fitting.

The Instruments:

Helder Harmonic Tenor by Mollenhauer (Bach, O'Brien, Alwyn)

Ganassi alto in g at A=466 by Ralf Netsch (Bassano)

Scherer alto at A=392 by the Von Huene Workshop (Boismortier)

Praetorius consort tenor at A=440 by Francesco LiVirghi (van Eyck)

Emily O'Brien
www.emilydomain.org