

BASIC REHEARSAL DECISIONS AND PROCEDURES

by Carolyn Peskin

This chapter is an abridged and reworded version of material presented by Kenneth Wollitz in *The Recorder Book* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1982). The material is used with the author's permission. For a more detailed discussion of the topics presented here, see Chapters 1, 5, and 6 in his book or the reprint of Chapter 6 in *American Recorder*, Vol. XXII, No. 4 (November 1981), pp. 103-111.

Preliminary Considerations

Where to play

1. Choose a quiet place.
2. Choose a room large enough for comfortable accommodation of chairs, music stands, and instruments.
3. Since carpets, drapes, and overstuffed chairs absorb sound, choose a sparsely furnished room with bare floors.
4. During the rehearsal, refrain from eating or drinking, which would cause saliva to flow into the recorder windway.
5. Play indoors. Wind, heat, and glare cause discomfort and interfere with playing.
6. Provide good lighting, and allow no more than two players per music stand so that everyone can see the music easily.

How to sit

For general rehearsals, players should sit in a fairly tight circle so that they can hear one another. In the late stages of preparing for a concert, seating should be the same as in the performance itself (probably in a semicircle).

Rehearsal programming

Begin the session with a familiar warmup piece. Schedule the most challenging piece during the first half of the session. Schedule a break after that piece. Start something new after the break. End the session with a familiar favorite.

Tuning

When attempting to match your tone with another player, listen for *beats* and try to eliminate them. Beats are the pulsation heard when two tones with slightly different pitches are sounded simultaneously. Beats are produced by interference of the sound waves emitted by the two sources. The greater the pitch difference, the faster the beats. (The beat frequency is equal to the difference between the vibration frequencies of the two tones.) In order to produce a beatless unison, ask the other player to hold a steady tone and try to match it by increasing or decreasing your breath pressure until the beats disappear. (If the beats get faster instead of slower, you are changing your breath pressure in the wrong direction, i.e., increasing when you should be decreasing, or vice versa...Try the opposite change.)

Beats can also be used to tune octaves but are harder to hear with octaves than with unisons. Instead of listening for beats, try to make the upper tone disappear into the lower one by changing your breath pressure. When the upper tone disappears, the octave is in tune.

Perfect fifths, perfect fourths, and major and minor thirds can be tuned by listening for *difference tones*. Difference tones are produced by the ear when two soprano or alto recorders sound one of those intervals. (The frequency of the difference tone is equal to the difference between the frequencies of the two tones making up the interval and is in the audible range.) The difference tone is heard as a low buzz. If the interval is out of tune, the buzzing will sound muddy and unpleasant. If the interval is in tune, the difference tone will form a harmonious chord, a major triad, with it, the difference tone being the root of the triad. Although the difference tone itself may be hard to hear, the clear, transparent quality of the in-tune interval should be recognizable.

For tuning a consort during a rehearsal, Mr. Wollitz recommends using the notes played with the thumb and three fingers of the left hand (i.e., low G for soprano and tenor recorders and low C for alto and bass recorders). The intervals to listen for will then be unisons (if there is more than one player on a part), octaves, perfect fifths, and perfect fourths. Here is his recommended procedure:

1. Tenors tune their low G to a beatless unison, pulling out or pushing in the head joint if necessary.
2. While the tenors continue playing, altos tune their low C.
3. While tenors and altos continue playing, basses tune their low C.
4. While everyone else continues playing, sopranos tune their low G.

When the ensemble is working on a piece, essential chords should be tuned. These include the opening chord (if everyone starts together), the final chord of the piece, chords at the ends of sections, and certain chords at the ends of phrases, such as those under fermatas in a Bach chorale. Here is the recommended procedure:

1. First tune octaves to the root of the chord.
2. Then tune fifths (the lowest one first) to the root.
3. Then tune thirds to the root.

Ensemble members should use recorders that are reasonably well in tune. (A recorder considerably flatter than the others in the group will force everyone else to pull out, resulting in poor overall intonation. An instrument considerably sharper than the others will have to be pulled out quite far and will not be able to be played in tune throughout its range. Such instruments should be avoided.) Players should also be familiar with their own instruments' idiosyncrasies. Slightly out-of-tune notes can be brought in tune with changes in breath pressure

and/or fingering. (Some sharp notes can be lowered by adding right-hand fingers.)

Playing in Time

Medieval and Renaissance music is rhythmically complex. This complexity presents problems for amateur consorts. Mr. Wollitz suggests a number of exercises to help players conquer those tricky rhythms.

1. If the individual rhythms prove difficult, speak them on a single syllable such as “dah” before attempting to learn the piece. If necessary, all the members of the ensemble can speak each line in turn while tapping or clapping a beat.
2. If the problem is not in the individual rhythms themselves but rather in getting the rhythms of the different parts to fit together, all the players should speak their own parts at the same time to help locate the difficult places, which can then be isolated and worked on.
3. Then proceed from speaking to playing. Everyone should play every part in turn on whatever instrument fits. Then divide the group in half and play various two-voice combinations.
4. As a final step, try an exercise that Mr. Wollitz calls “add-a-part.” This works well with sectional pieces such as Holborne dances. Start with all players on the top line, using their own instruments. Then repeat the section *in tempo* with everyone except the top-line players moving down to the second line. Then repeat again with everyone except the top-line and second-line players moving down to the third line. Continue this process until all the lines are covered. (Or you could just as well reverse the process, starting with the bottom line and progressing upwards.) This exercise enables all the players to become familiar with the other parts as well as their own parts.

Articulation

Articulation rules that apply both to soloists and ensemble members are included in Chapter 1 of *The Recorder Book*. These rules have to do with the amount of space between notes, i.e., the way notes *end*, not with the tongue strokes that begin notes. Single tonguing with a “d” stroke is assumed. Mr. Wollitz shows how to phrase correctly and make playing more expressive by varying the spacing between notes. Some general rules are summarized below:

1. Notes that proceed by leap should be more detached than notes that proceed stepwise.

2. Fast pieces with short note values need more spacing than slow ones with long notes.
3. The thicker the texture, the greater the separation should be.
4. Notes should be more detached in acoustically live rooms than in acoustically dead ones.
5. When playing vocal music with text underlay, try to make your articulation express the spacing and accent of the words.

Here are some further suggestions for increasing expressiveness:

1. Leave space between repeated notes.
2. Leave space between a pickup note and the following downbeat.
3. In pieces with fast tempo and short note values, leave a space between a dotted note and the short note that follows it.
4. For pieces in 3/8, 6/8, 9/8, and 12/8 time, shorten the last note of each triplet.
5. Shorten the note on the downbeat before a syncopation.

In Chapter 6 of *The Recorder Book*, Mr. Wollitz gives additional advice that applies specifically to articulation in ensemble playing.

1. A given melodic motive should be articulated the same way by all members of the ensemble. Working out desirable articulations should be a group project.
2. In Renaissance dances with shifting meters, the difference in meter should be emphasized through proper articulation. This is seen in pieces with hemiolas such as Holborne's "Muylinda." In 3/4 meter, articulate eighth notes as three groups of paired notes (dah-dut, dah-dut, dah-dut). Articulate eighth notes in 6/8 meter as two groups of three notes (dah-dut-dut, dah-dut-dut). ("Dah" notes are held out their full length; "dut" notes are shortened with the tongue.)
3. Articulation can be used to create the illusion of dynamics. In Renaissance dance music with repeated sections, you can create the illusion of playing the repeats more softly by putting more spacing between the notes.

Of course, you can also make your playing more expressive by varying the *beginnings* of notes through different types of tonguing. Mr. Wollitz discusses modern and historical compound tonguing briefly in Chapter 5 of *The Recorder Book*.

Modern double-tonguing is used mainly for speed. It consists of "t-k" or "d-g" syllables, the first stroke being done with the tip of the tongue and the second with the back of the tongue. Mr. Wollitz finds the "t-k" combination too strong and

explosive for the recorder. He recommends practicing with “diga” syllables. Speak them at first without playing. Say “digadoo,” then “digadigadoo,” then “digadigadigadoo,” etc. When you can say eight “diga” syllables smoothly and rapidly, you are ready to try playing those syllables on tunes with strings of sixteenth notes such as those in Rooda’s *95 Dexterity Exercises* (Hargail HRW-3 for recorders in C, HRW-4 for recorders in F). Play moderately fast at first and then increase speed gradually. Make your articulation as light and legato as possible. The “d” stroke should be indistinguishable in sound from the “g” stroke.

Modern triple-tonguing is used for articulating fast triplet passages. Mr. Wollitz recommends using “digada” syllables. Keeping your tongue close to the roof of your mouth will minimize tongue movement and allow you to triple-tongue faster.

Historical compound tonguing is discussed in Baroque method books. Articulations intended more for variety than for speed involve only the tip of the tongue. Quantz uses “ti-ri” and “di-ri” for stepwise passages. Hotteterre uses “turu.” For faster tonguing, Quantz uses syllables that involve both the tip and sides of the tongue: “did-ll” or “tid-ll” for double-tonguing and “did-ll-di” or “tid-ll-di” for triple-tonguing.

Detailed coverage of compound tonguing is beyond the scope of *The Recorder Book* and this handbook. The subject is discussed further in references listed in the bibliography.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Articles on Rehearsal Techniques

Ferguson, Suzanne. “Sight-Reading,” *American Recorder*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2 (May 1985), pp. 66-68.

The author states that most sight-reading problems involve rhythm. She offers suggestions to consort players about counting, keeping one’s place, and working out difficult passages.

Skins, H.R. “First Steps in Consort Playing,” *Recorder & Music*, Vol. I, No. 6 (August 1964), pp. 181-83.

Winters, Leslie. “The Making of a Recorder Consort,” *Recorder & Music Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. 5 (March 1973), pp. 165-67; Vol. IV, No. 6 (June 1973), pp. 196-98.

Covers breath control, ensemble, how to approach a new piece, phrasing, dynamics, and accents.

Wyatt, Theo. “The Techniques of Consort Playing,” *Recorder & Music*, Vol. IV, No. 10 (June 1980), pp. 288-92. Reprinted in *American Recorder*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1 (February 1983), pp. 3-6.

Wyatt considers playing a social activity. Primary concern should be not spoiling the music for others. Shows how to keep from getting lost by reading ahead and listening for bar-lines and cadences. Other topics include recognizing when something is wrong, using eye contact and body motion to achieve accuracy in ensemble, and improving intonation by tuning cadential chords. The key to successful ensemble playing is listening to each other and adjusting.

Wyatt, Theo. "The Well-tempered Consort.," *Recorder & Music*, Vol. IV, No. 12 (December 1974), pp. 431-32; Vol. V, No. 2 (June 1975), pp. 51-52.
First part deals with identifying appropriate players for the group. Second part discusses leadership, assigning parts, repertoire, and public performance.

Books and Booklets on Rehearsal Techniques

Carduelis, Susan. *Improve Your Consort Skills* (ARS Information Packet #4). American Recorder Society, 1990.
Discusses unison playing, tone blending, phrasing, leading versus accompanying. For each of the above topics, includes directions, musical examples, and suggested music for further practice.

Green, Barry, with W. Timothy Gallway. *The Inner Game of Music*. Garden City, NJ: Anchor/Doubleday, 1986. See Chapter 14, "Ensemble Playing" (pp. 189-205).

Spanhove, Bart. *The Finishing Touches of Ensemble Playing*. Alamire, 2000.
The first three chapters deal with tuning, playing in time, and playing expressively.

Primary Sources on Articulation

Hotteterre, Jacques-Martin. *Principes de la Flûte... (Principles of the Flute, Recorder, and Oboe)*, (Amsterdam, 1707), transl. Paul Marshall Douglas. Dover, 1968.
Chapter 8 discusses compound tonguing applied to various rhythmic configurations.

Hotteterre, Jacques-Martin. *Principes de la Flûte... (Principles of the Flute, Recorder, and Oboe)* (Amsterdam, 1707), transl. David Lasocki. New York: Frederick A. Praeger; London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1968.

Quantz, Johann Joachim. *Versuch... (On Playing the Flute)*, (Berlin, 1752), transl. Edward R. Reilly, 2nd ed. Schirmer Books, 1985.

Secondary Sources on Articulation

Blaker, Frances. *The Recorder Player's Companion*. Albany, CA: PRB Productions, 1993.
Part 4 discusses single and compound tonguing.

Boeke, Kees. *The Complete Articulator*. Schott, 1986.

A set of exercises, which apply the principles outlined in Walter van Hauwe's *The Modern Recorder Player*.

Houle, George. "Tonguing and Rhythmic Patterns in Early Music," *American Recorder*, Vol. VI, No. 2 (Spring 1965), pp. 4-13.

Author asserts that players before 1750 used varied tonguings for expressive purposes. Discusses articulations presented in early method books and summarizes double-tonguing patterns. Shows how knowledge of dance steps can help players analyze articulation patterns in dance music.

Linde, Hans-Martin. *The Recorder Player's Handbook*, 2nd (rev.) ed. (transl. Richard Deveson). Schott, 1991.

Chapter on recorder technique discusses four types of articulation: non-legato (detached), legato, portato (tongued legato), and staccato. Other chapters explain how articulation evolved from singing and speaking and show how the four types were used in the Baroque era.

Reiss, Scott. "Articulation: The Key to Expressive Playing," *American Recorder*, Vol. XXVII, No. 4 (November 1986), pp. 144-49.

Summarizes and classifies the articulation syllables found in Renaissance and Baroque treatises. Also recommends the use of historical syllables for other types of music and suggests variations on those syllables. Further discussion of this article appears in later issues of *American Recorder*: May 1987, pp. 83-85; August 1987, p. 126; November 1987, pp. 177-78; May 1988, pp. 74-76; August 1988, p. 128.

van Hauwe, Walter. *The Modern Recorder Player*, Vol. I. Schott (ED 12150), 1984.

Chapter on articulation includes a detailed explanation of tongue position in forming "T" and "D" syllables. Shows how to pair them in compound tonguing and later shows how to add "R" to form patterns with more than two syllables. Then shows how to end notes with legato, portato, and staccato articulation. Concludes with a brief discussion of "T-K" and "D-G" tonguing.

van Hauwe, Walter. *The Modern Recorder Player*, Vol. II. Schott (ED 12261), 1986.

Chapter on articulation shows how to solve various problems involving articulation.