

GETTING GIGS AND CHOOSING REPERTOIRE

by Carolyn Peskin

Introduction

Once the members of your group have mastered basic consort skills and have gained the confidence that comes from working together diligently for a considerable period of time, your ensemble is ready for public performance. But where do you begin? How do you find performance venues? How do you publicize your group? How do you select appropriate repertoire? Six members of successful performing ensembles give their answers to those questions in this chapter.

Getting Gigs: a Common-Sense Approach

The following paragraphs are excerpted from an article by Pat Darbous, PR person for the *Pastime Early Music Consort*, a six-member ensemble of recorder players, one of whom also plays viol. The ensemble is based in Latrobe, PA, a short distance from Pittsburgh.

Getting gigs involves a cooperative effort by all of *Pastime's* members. When looking for opportunities to perform, we have taken a common-sense approach. Our first step was to look inward to discover and tap our own talents and resources. Chris Ramsey, our founder and director, has many years of experience in early music. Sam Mraz owns a mini-van, which can transport our whole group plus instruments to our gigs. Leota Jones has a grandson with recording equipment. Rich Pawlish has the technology to produce CDs. Aimee Cheers has the computer skills to create business cards and promotional flyers. Pat Darbous has a mission, to research the possibilities for performance.

Our next and ongoing step was to look outward to find individuals and groups that might be interested in engaging *Pastime*. Because one of our members belongs to the Pennsylvania Music Teachers' Association, *Pastime* was recruited to perform at their convention, and a local music club asked us to perform at their Christmas meeting. Another opportunity came from a contact at an elementary school, where we performed and talked to all the students about early music, dance, instruments, and costumes. A friend who owns a business invited us to play at his establishment's summer open house, and ties to a community hospital led to still other engagements.

Another approach was to read through our state's listings of seasonal activities. We telephoned and/or wrote letters of introduction to people in charge of any activities that seemed even remotely related to what we do. The institutions we contacted were loosely categorized as follows: (1) museums, historical sites, and chambers of commerce in connection with Colonial and Renaissance festivals and other celebratory occasions; (2) medical institutions including regional hospitals, assisted-living facilities, and a mind/body wellness center; (3) educational institutions including public and private universities, a community college, and elementary schools; (4) hotels, restaurants, banquet halls, and country clubs that host weddings and other celebratory events; (5) religious retreat houses and convention centers; (6) music stores.

We also contacted the marketing director of a Barnes and Noble bookstore, which hosts book clubs; the director of worship of a large congregation, who is in charge of workshops and special events; the coordinator of an art center, which has several open houses each year; and the director of a conservatory, who begins each year with an open house for the new flower show.

The obvious question is: "What is the result of all this effort?" During the past year we have performed at a wedding, a Music Teachers' Association conference, a local hospital, a community Christmas program, and several festivals and business open houses. Our wedding gig resulted from a flyer placed at a private university, and a well-paying engagement at a Colonial crafts fair was obtained from the state's festival list. While we are paid for most of our performances, an occasional free performance can create community good will and can often lead to paying gigs.

We have also learned a good deal from our marketing efforts. Mostly, we've learned that these efforts need to be ongoing and require dedication, persistence, and a strong ego. We keep our eyes and ears alert to possibilities. Our newspaper, with county-wide reporting, is a wonderful resource. When an event with entertainment is advertised, we are quick to introduce ourselves for future events.

Church Gigs

Several authors whose articles are excerpted here wrote about their success in getting church gigs. Peter Ramsey, a church musician in Latrobe, PA, remarks, "The simple, unassuming sound of the recorder can add a dimension of humility and simple nobility to any prayer event in the faith life of the

church. Unfettered by keys, easily learned, and lovingly practiced, the recorder is an ideal choice for an instrument that inspires prayer.”

Richard Carbone, a recorder teacher, performer, and music director of the Bradenton (FL) Early Music Society, makes the following observation: “Finding a place to perform is actually one of the easiest steps. Venues are staring at you from every main street and village center in America. Foreigners coming to our country are always amazed at the forest of churches and synagogues in our communities.”

How to begin? Richard Carbone advises consort members to contact the music directors of their own congregations. These initial contacts will often result in brief performances in the congregation’s worship services, which may later lead to gigs at weddings, church conventions, and other occasions.

How to publicize your group? Here are Mr. Carbone’s suggestions for a consort’s director or PR person.

Start with the organist or choir director at the church where you first played. Most of these people are social beings; they form clubs and guilds, and as a result, many of them know one another. When there is a special need, they often call each other looking for suggestions and ideas. Ask the organist to mention your group to his or her friends in the field—when a wedding is being planned, for instance.

Make up business cards offering your services. Post them on bulletin boards in your neighborhood and have them ready to pass out to people who are interested.

Usually your local music store will have a wall or board where you can post a notice describing your consort, and you should certainly let the music store staff know of your group’s availability.

It may also happen that your musical friends will mention your group to the music committees in their own houses of worship, and so your consort’s career will grow.

Jean Hein, formerly a member of the music staff at St. Luke’s United Methodist Church, a large congregation in Oklahoma City, OK, formed a rapidly progressing recorder ensemble at her church by offering a class limited to adults who could read music and had prior or current experience with other musical instruments. The group’s first performing engagements were in the church’s worship service, playing a prelude or offertory selection or at Communion. They sometimes played with other groups such as a handbell choir, children’s choir, or

vocal ensemble. Here are Ms. Hein's suggestions for finding additional performance opportunities.

Be creative about possibilities within the church. We have performed in the St. Luke's "Sunday at 5" concert series. We have also played for madrigal dinners and boar's head festivals, adult Sunday School classes, a United Methodist Women's meeting, and a dinner before an Administrative Board meeting as well as in the narthex prior to the Advent worship service and at an art exhibit in the church gallery.

You may also want to perform in the community. Retirement living centers, nursing homes, and hospitals are all excellent places in which to play. We have played a program for a Methodist retirement community at one of their Sunday afternoon Advent services. We have also performed in private homes. A recital in a small concert hall would be another possibility. For some of these performing opportunities outside of the worship services, Renaissance or Baroque costumes could be added.

Another way to obtain church gigs is to place a notice in the local American Guild of Organists newsletter. Sheila Beardslee, a consort coach in the Boston area, used that approach. She offered a group of experienced players from the Boston Recorder Society who were willing to play free of charge. Nearly a dozen responses came quickly. A year later the group had 14 members, including two viol players and a reed player. They performed about twice a month in churches throughout the Boston area.

Choosing Repertoire

Supposing your ensemble has found a performance venue and has been assigned a block of time to fill. Your next step will be planning a program. What factors will you need to consider in selecting music for your program? Here is advice from Pat Darbous, whose *Pastime Consort* has performed in a variety of venues.

Planning an effective program demands that (1) the right amount of music has been chosen for the allotted time, (2) the chosen repertoire is suitable for the occasion, (3) the level of music is accessible to the performers, (4) the players are adequately prepared to play the chosen repertoire.

Ms. Darbous further notes that "a well-played simple program is far better than an ambitious disaster, and a good program is the best form of advertising." Here are her ideas for repertoire.

Pastime's basic repertoire includes favorites by John Dowland; pavans, galliards, and canzonas by William Brade; dances from Praetorius' *Terpsichore*; dances from Widmann's *Musicalischer Tugendtspiegel*; arrangements from Playford's *The Dancing Master*; and selections from the *Schott Recorder Consort Anthology*. For an occasional change of pace, Stan Davis has produced some delightful recorder arrangements of early-twentieth-century popular music. Each one of us contributes to the ensemble's repertoire by bringing music from our own collections. Since banquet halls are reluctant to endorse performers without a demonstration tape or CD, we have also produced a CD of some of our favorite pieces to present upon request.

Jean Hein gives us a detailed list of pieces she has used successfully with her church ensemble.

The St. Luke's Recorder Ensemble has played a variety of music over the past three years. Virtually all of the pieces have been arrangements of works written for other instruments. When we were just beginning to play quartets, we used collections of short, easy pieces such as *The Consort Collection, Vol. I*, edited by Larry Bernstein, and *Folk Dance International*, edited by Christa Roelcke. For Christmas music we began by playing carols in collections such as *More Carols for Krummhorns or Recorders*, arranged by John Phelps, and *More Ancient Carols*, arranged by Hans Neuberger. Both collections are written for SATB crumhorns or recorders with optional percussion. More recently we have used some of my own arrangements of traditional carols.

The following list contains full ensemble pieces (quartets or quintets) that I would especially recommend. Most are in the range of easy to medium difficulty and are readily available from your music supplier. They are for SATB recorder quartet unless otherwise noted.

Two Fantasias, G. P. Telemann, arr. Maurice Whitney;
Suite in F Major, G. P. Telemann, arr. Ulrich Hermann;
Seven Wedding Dances, G. P. Telemann, arr. Walter Bergmann;
Ten Songs and Dances of the Playhouse, Henry Purcell, arr. Claude
Simpson;
Suite from The Fairy Queen, Henry Purcell, arr. for SATB recorders
and
continuo by Hans Ulrich Staeps;
Two French Dances, arr. James Duncan Carey;

Mock Baroque: A Suite of Twentieth-Century Dances, for SATB recorders
(plus piano if no bass recorder is available), James Duncan Carey;
Capriol Suite, Peter Warlock, arr. by Stanley Taylor for SAATB(T) recorders with optional soprano.

Sheila Beardslee believes that a group of just about any playing level can perform provided they pick the right repertoire. She has used the following list of pieces for church worship services with a consort of upper intermediate and advanced players. Many of these pieces are available from the leading dealers of recorder music. Others can be found in hymnals and choir books. Some of the editions were prepared by Ms. Beardslee with the help of music software.

PRELUDE (a strong piece): motets by Jacob Handl, chorale/hymn settings by Praetorius, chorale settings by Michael Altenburg, Psalm settings by Sweelinck, fantasias by Byrd (5-part) and Parsons (6-part).

OFFERTORIES: *In nomines* by Taverner, Tye, and Ferrabosco; pavans by Holborne (“The Cradle” is a great Christmas hit!); seasonal carols (some nice arrangements in Eric Haas’s *Christmas Collection, Vols. I & II*).

WORKS WITH CHOIR: polychoral motets by Praetorius, chorale settings by Altenburg, selections from “Hymns and Carols of the Church” by Orlando Gibbons (found in the 1982 *Episcopal Hymnal*), “If You Love Me” by Thomas Tallis, “Sicut cervus” by Palestrina (most choirs know only part I; part II can follow as an instrumental response), shaped-note anthems by William Billings or other early American composers, and two that take a little more work—“Teach Me, O Lord” by Byrd and “Record of John” by Gibbons.

COMMUNION MUSIC (quiet, contemplative pieces): “Sicut cervus” by Palestrina, *In nomines* by Taverner, Tye, and Ferrabosco.

POSTLUDE (something short and perky): *Worcester Alleluia*, dances by Holborne or Brade, chorale/hymn settings by Praetorius, chorale settings by Altenburg.

Peter Ramsey notes that not all selections appropriate for church use need be sacred vocal music. He has found that London Pro Musica is an excellent source of suitable Renaissance ensemble music, and those editions are priced for the budget-conscious group. He is especially fond of the LPM edition of Susato’s *Danserye* (1551), which includes “pieces simple enough for elementary students and elegant enough for any celebration.” Mr. Ramsey

claims that the Susato dances can be equally effectively performed as a simple quartet or with several players on a part, and the organ can supply the bass line if a bass recorder is not available.

Richard Eastman, a member of the West Suburban Early Music Society (Chicago suburbs), reports that LPM editions were also used in a joint program with the Fox Valley Chapter of the American Guild of Organists at Our Saviour's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Naperville, IL. The consort repertoire included canzonas by Frescobaldi and Costanzo Antegnati, a ricercar by Palestrina, and French dances by Praetorius, and there was also a trio sonata by Salomone Rossi for two soprano recorders and continuo. Most of these were LPM publications.

Conclusion

Pat Darbous nicely summarizes the philosophy of all the authors quoted in this chapter.

Through our performances, we have exposed many people to early instruments and the totally wonderful sound of early music. Bringing early music to those unfamiliar with its sound, demonstrating recorders and viols to new audiences, and observing their enthusiastic responses are the stimuli that challenge us to keep seeking performance opportunities. Truly the rewards far outweigh the efforts involved in preparing programs and finding venues.

Articles Excerpted

Beardslee, Sheila and Laura Conrad. "Recorder Group, Will Play for Donuts." *American Recorder*, May 1996, pp. 12-15.

Carbone, Richard. "Getting Gigs." *American Recorder*, January 2002, pp. 18 and 32.

Darbous, Pat. "Getting Gigs: A Common-Sense Approach." Unpublished article.

Eastman, Richard. "Recorders in Church: An Experimental Partnership." *American Recorder*, November 1997, p. 21.

Hein, Jean. "Recorders in Church: Building a Church Recorder Ensemble." *American Recorder*, November 1997, pp. 19-20.

Ramsey, Peter A. "The Worshipful Recorder." *American Recorder*, September 2000, pp. 18-19.