

SECTION III: VARIETY IN CONSORT PLAYING

INTRODUCTION

Variety is an important issue for performing ensembles. Think of a concert as a musical feast. In order to be thoroughly enjoyable, a meal should include a variety of flavors, colors, and textures. Similarly, a variety of textures, timbres, and playing styles will make your ensemble's performances more interesting.

Varied timbres and textures are achievable with a recorder consort if enough players and enough members of the recorder family are included. A good deal of variety is possible with the basic four recorders (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass). My own quartet's repertoire includes a few pieces chosen to demonstrate timbral variety. We play a Susato dance arranged by Burakoff and Strickland for recorder duet. On the first statement of each repeated section we use soprano and alto, producing a bright sound. On the repeats we use tenor and bass, producing a darker timbre. We also like to include David P. Ruhl's *Canon for Four Basses* (an ARS Members' Library edition) in our programs. To show textural variety, we play a highly contrapuntal Bach fugue, followed by the homophonic "Blues" movement from Andrew Charlton's *Idyllwild Suite*.

The inclusion of a bass recorder in an ensemble greatly increases the amount and variety of music playable by the group. Ideally, each member of the consort should learn to play all of the basic four instruments. We are, therefore, devoting two chapters of this handbook (10 and 11) to the bass recorder, the one that is usually learned last.

Playing-style variety requires varied articulation. Silvestro Ganassi, in the oldest known recorder method book (1535), noted that flexible articulation is the key to expressive playing. The various early method books (Ganassi, Hotteterre, Quantz, etc.) all describe tonguing syllables appropriate for music of their day. Mastery of compound tonguing enables recorderists to play early music in a historically informed manner, and flutter-tonguing and other avant-garde articulations are required for certain kinds of 20th-century recorder music. Expressive articulation, however, is not merely concerned with tongue strokes. As noted in Chapter 8, varying the *endings* of notes can create the illusion of changing dynamics (i.e., more detached articulation for soft passages than for loud ones). A detailed discussion of recorder articulation is beyond the scope of this handbook, but references on that important subject are included in the bibliography at the end of Chapter 8.

Another way of adding variety to an ensemble's playing style is the use of historically informed embellishments. Renaissance dances with repeated sections fairly cry out for divisions on the repeats, and the so-called "essential graces" (trills, mordents, turns, slides, etc.) are truly essential for the proper performance of French Baroque ensemble music such as the Boismortier suites

for multiple alto recorders. Free ornamentation in the Italian style beautifies the performance of slow movements in chamber sonatas by Handel, Telemann, and other Baroque composers. Since the topic of ornamentation is such an important one for performers of early music, we are devoting four chapters (12, 13, 14, and 15) to it.

Although dulcet recorder tones are lovely, a whole program of recorder music could become a bit monotonous. Addition of singers and/or other instrumentalists would add spice to a rather bland musical feast. Chapter 16 provides valuable guidelines for mixed ensembles.