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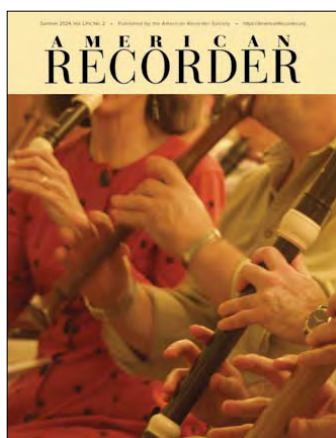
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# A M E R I C A N R E C O R D E R

## ON THE COVER

ARS Board playing session, Fall 2002. Photo by William Stickney Photography. Cover ©2024, American Recorder Society.



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**Editor's Note** • GAIL NICKLESS

My gratitude must go to all of my family, most especially to my husband Wayne and son Theodore—all were patient and supportive as 22 years of *AR* deadlines loomed.

Team work makes the dream work, especially having longtime volunteers on the team. Tom Bickley has written recording reviews for 19 years; Glen Shannon has produced *Members' Library* and Play-the-Recorder Month music editions for 22 years. Both write other reports and reviews, as well. Besides my eyes, others scrutinized each issue: over time, Martha Bixler, Amanda Pond and Cynthia Shelmerdine proofed articles and gave valuable feedback on unclear information and foreign language questions. (Don't blame them for errors or typos: those are mine!)

It's hard not to think how COVID isolation affected contributors to *AR*: my sense was that some people were paralyzed, but others were bored and looking for projects! Music reviews were a challenge to produce, with no groups meeting to testdrive music—but Victor Eijkhout, Suzanne Ferguson, Valerie Hess and Beverly Lomer managed. Bev also wrote a comprehensive article on articulation. People like Michael Lynn emailed an idea for an article on ornamentation (spun into a series, with later articles on other topics). Lobke Sprenkeling sent articles and videos on basic technique; she's still creating those. Thanks to you all! *Vita brevis, ars longa!* ❁

**President's Message** • CAROL MISHLER

How many people can you name who have worked for the same organization for 30 years? That's how long Gail Nickless has been with the ARS: Executive Director for eight years and *AR* editor for the next 22. This issue is her last before she retires.

Gail's tenure has given her knowledge of ARS history. She acts as our institutional memory, able to give background on past members and projects. She has contributed much to every ARS Board meeting in my memory.

When the ARS Board established *AR* Editorial Standards, she embraced them and rose to new challenges. When the layout was redesigned, she made valuable suggestions. She participated in hiring her successor, Geoffrey Burgess. Gail has worked with ARS members, *AR* contributors and numerous others. As many have observed, producing an *AR* issue is like herding cats. Gail has been a great shepherd for *AR*.

In recognition of Gail's accomplishments, the Board of Directors of the American Recorder Society, Inc., passed this resolution:

- Whereas: Gail Nickless has served the American Recorder Society, Inc., for 30 years, first as Executive Director (1994-2002), then as Editor of the American Recorder magazine (2002-2024) until her retirement, and
- Whereas: She imagined, sourced and commissioned articles for the magazine, which she then edited and proofed for publication to appeal to recorder players at all levels from beginner to professional, and
- Whereas: She obtained and selected beautiful, memorable covers for the magazine, as well as photographs and artwork, laying them out herself through various redesigns of the publication, and
- Whereas: Gail was awarded the Presidential Special Honor Award in 2014 from the American Recorder Society, Inc., for her exemplary contributions to the recorder community, and
- Whereas: The American Recorder Society, Inc., wishes to recognize and honor her long and valued service to the organization she has served so well, Be it therefore resolved, on this ninth day of April 2024, the Board of Directors of the American Recorder Society, Inc., expresses its gratitude and appreciation to Gail Nickless. ❁



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A M E R I C A N  
R E C O R D E R**Gail Nickless**

Editor

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Advisory Board

# AMERICAN RECORDER SOCIETY

## Peter Ballinger to receive ARS Presidential Special Honor Award

Peter Ballinger has been selected to receive the 2024 ARS Presidential Special Honor Award for his contributions not only to the recorder-playing community, but to the American Recorder Society. Ballinger served on the ARS Board of Directors (1967-69) and was Board President in 1967.

For 34 years, Ballinger and his wife, journalist and viol player Leslie Gold, created fine editions of music for recorders and viols as PRB Productions (PRB) in Albany, CA. The firm was known for its exceptional engraving, printing and finishing, with meticulously researched information about the music and its background.

Ballinger's love of recorders and knowledge of their music is reflected in his own compositions and arrangements. An example is his prize-winning *Double Quartet*, published by the ARS in 1992 in its Erich Katz Music Series.

Prior to closing in 2023, PRB also published music by composers such as Glen Shannon, Peter Seibert and Will Ayton—all well-known not only to North American recorder players, but also to players in other countries.

A chemical researcher by profession, Ballinger learned the recorder as a youth, inspired by hearing Carl Dolmetsch play in London, England, in 1948. As a teenage recorder and clarinet player, he copied out by hand the clarinet parts of symphonies so he could play along with recordings.

After moving from the UK to the Bay Area (CA) in 1959, Ballinger founded the Marin Recorder Consort, and wrote out all their arrangements by hand. As a member of the Goliard

Players early music ensemble led by the late Donald Pippin (known for his still-thriving Pocket Opera company), he performed for the Young Audiences program, visiting all of the junior highs and many of the high schools in the Bay Area over the course of three years.

In the 1960s and '70s, he performed frequently at the Old Spaghetti Factory in San Francisco, playing chamber music on alto and soprano for Pippin. At the 1970 Carmel Bach Festival, he played the first solo recorder part in J.S. Bach's fourth *Brandenburg Concerto*, on a new A=415 pitch alto that had arrived from England with only days to spare.

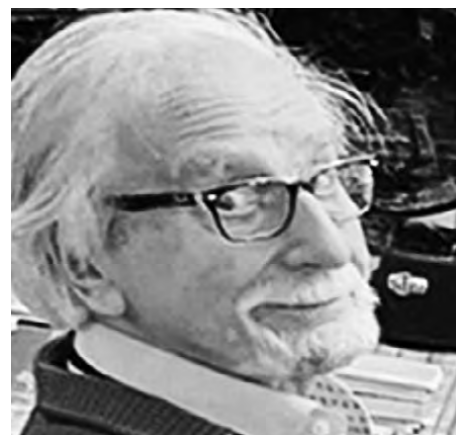
A faculty member at recorder workshops, Ballinger conducted several annual workshops in Mendocino, CA, that included intensive study of contemporary music for recorder ensemble.

Ballinger embraced music publishing early on, but without the goal to make it a business. In the 1960s, when good recorder consort arrangements were scarce, Ballinger created music editions on a Keaton music typewriter—which took hours of precision to produce a page of music.

After retiring from Chevron in 1987, Ballinger traded typewriter for computer. He began producing editions using the pioneering music software SCORE, which is known for the way it handles sensitive spacing of notes.

He and Gold met in 1998 and subsequently married. After 2000, the two created their editions completely in-house—edited, printed, trimmed, folded, stapled and mailed. Adding Gold's administrative skills helped to increase PRB's sales; PRB's catalog of newly researched early music also grew.

Which recorder editions appealed



▲ Peter Ballinger in 2023.

to Ballinger? “Peter Seibert’s *Ten Bass Hit* is unusual for ten bass recorders. *Carousel* was one of our earliest publications, by the late Leonie Jenkins. Hans Staeps was my favorite recorder composer, but we were too late for most of his editions, although we did manage to secure *East-West* for recorder quartet and guitar, one of his last compositions.”

Ballinger will receive the 2024 ARS Presidential Special Honor Award at the start of the ARS Great Recorder Relay on June 15 at First Presbyterian Church, Berkeley, CA, during the Berkeley Festival. The award ceremony will also include presentation of the ARS Distinguished Achievement Award to Hanneke van Proosdij. ❁

Greta Haug-Hryciw, with material from a June 2023 article by Nick and Sue Jones:

<https://americanrecorder.org/prb>

ARS Erich Katz Series:

<https://americanrecorder.org/katzeditions>

Hanneke van Proosdij to be honored:  
**AR Spring 2024**

## CHANGING NOTES

**Gail Nickless retires; new AR Managing Editor Geoffrey Burgess starts with Fall AR**

Longtime *American Recorder* editor Gail Nickless retires after this issue. Geoffrey Burgess will take over from her as Managing Editor and will work with a Layout Specialist, after Nickless's job was divided into two functions.

Nickless began working for the ARS in 1994 as its Executive Director, bringing skills she gained from being an arts administrator at Texas Tech University (TTU). A recorder and flute player with two music degrees from TTU, while a staff member there, she coordinated over 300 performances annually and produced publicity for the School of Music. She later advised student volunteers through the Student Activities office. Those volunteers organized and presented the campus's artists and speakers series—plus she advised one student committee that used desktop publishing to produce a newspaper, promoting those events to over 25,000 students, faculty and staff.

Nickless also served on a half-dozen boards over the years. This allowed her to apply her volunteer background, as well as experience in communication and administration, in her ARS work. After becoming the Society's only full-time employee, she performed any tasks needed, from database entry to representing the ARS at annual conferences of the American Orff-Schulwerk Association. She staffed a booth there as well as at the Boston (MA) Early Music Festival (BEMF) and the Berkeley (CA) Festival—events about which she has since written and compiled *AR* reports.

Constance Primus was President of the ARS Board that hired Nickless in 1994. "In the early 1990s, the ARS made some important changes in order to make our organization truly 'American.' We began to involve various chapters around the continent in



◀ Retiring AR Editor Gail Nickless.



◀ New AR Managing Editor Geoffrey Burgess. Photo: Emily O'Brien.

hosting our Board meetings, to make the organization broader in its scope. Then we moved our office from New York City after many years.

"We held a nationwide search to find a new Executive Director—a qualified person who lived in or would move to a centrally-located city with a large active ARS chapter. We found Gail Nickless (then Gail Littleton). She was the candidate selected to attend the Board meeting in February 1994 in Baltimore (MD) for Board approval....

"Gail lived in Texas but agreed to move to Chicago (IL) or Denver (CO); the Board chose Denver for our new office. She served as ARS Executive Director until 2002, then became editor of *American Recorder* for another 22 years. During all of this time, she kept our farflung organization informed—communicating and running it smoothly (sometimes almost an impossible situation!). She made connections with important early music and music education organizations. Most importantly, she was the friend of all of us who love the recorder! Thank you, Gail!"

Current ARS President Carol Mishler remarked, "Gail has been employed by the ARS for 30 years, eight as Executive Director and 22 as editor of *American Recorder*—over one-third of the ARS's 85-year existence! For many of us, she is the only editor we have known. Her long and valued tenure has enabled her to be a 'walking encyclopedia' of ARS history, practices and events. I have relied on her greatly for information on

all of these. I will miss her very much."

Nickless noted that she has counted on many volunteers within the ARS who pitch in to get things done. "We've always had a hardworking Board and staff, and also many volunteers who help with such tasks as running the Recorder Relay and the ARS booth at festivals, and who serve on committees like those that award scholarships and organize Play-the-Recorder Month. In my years with *AR*, our volunteers have also shared their knowledge in informative articles, created beautiful magazine covers, and helped proofread.

"There are also volunteers who send in news items or reports of activities everywhere year-round—but who especially report on the many offerings at summer festivals. This allows our readers to relive all of these events, making the people and activities described on the pages seem real—and hopefully creating a sense of the breadth of our community. *AR* is the product of the efforts of many, for which I am grateful."

Current ARS Administrative Director Susan Burns said, "It's been wonderful to work with Gail—she is a vast resource of ARS lore and a tireless advocate with a trove of ideas for improving the organization. I will miss her in so many ways."

While completing her last issues of *AR*, Nickless teamed up with Burns to interview candidates for both the Managing Editor and Layout Specialist positions—the latter search also involving new Managing Editor Burgess.

Beginning with the Fall AR, Burgess will solicit, select and edit articles, select AR covers, and work with the Layout Specialist on placement of music and visuals in the magazine layout.

Burgess brings his ongoing experience as the oboe editor of *The Double Reed*, a quarterly journal for players of double reed instruments. Born in Australia, he studied Baroque oboe in The Hague, Netherlands. Besides playing oboe, Burgess's recorder activities have included performing in the BEMF opera orchestra and in BEMF fringe events, as well as in Washington, D.C., and closer to his Philadelphia (PA) home.

He commented, "I'm thrilled to be joining the ARS as Managing Editor. I want to take the opportunity to applaud Gail Nickless for all her remarkable work as editor of *American Recorder*."

"Some members welcome the magazine as a source of valued information, advice and wisdom; for others it is an outlet where they can share their expertise; for all of us it is a way to connect to a broader community. My goal is to see that all of this will continue."

"Alongside my editing, I will not abandon my performing. When you see me on stage or at a festival around the country with an oboe or recorder in hand, please come up and introduce yourself! I hope to meet some of you at the Berkeley Festival in June."

"There are many faces that make up the ARS, and many stories still to be told. I'm particularly interested to learn what you value in *American Recorder*, and how I can best serve the Society's goals through its publication." ❁

Nickless to receive  
ARS Presidential Special Honor  
Award: <https://americanrecorder.org/docs/ARsum14body.pdf>

ARS names Geoffrey Burgess  
as incoming AR Managing Editor:  
[https://americanrecorder.org/docs/AR\\_202403\\_body.pdf](https://americanrecorder.org/docs/AR_202403_body.pdf)

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Recorder faculty to include: Miyo Aoki, Annette Bauer, Rainer Beckmann, Tish Berlin, Frances Blaker, Saskia Coolen, Cléa Galhano, Rotem Gilbert, Eric Haas, Valerie Horst, Lawrence Lipnik, Patricia Petersen, Wendy Powers, Sian Ricketts, and Gwyn Roberts. See website for details and complete faculty list!

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Muse Euterpe by Francesco del Cossa

# ON THE RECORD(ER)

News about the recorder

## Indiana University revives its pre-college academy

When Cléa Galhano was engaged in 2017 as recorder instructor at Indiana University (IU), she had the idea of reviving the Early Music Pre-College program, which had been founded in 1993 and run for 17 years by the late Marie-Louise “Weezie” Smith.

While Smith was still alive, the “Marie-Louise A. Smith Endowment for Recorder Pedagogy and Performance” was created to honor her and to provide

funds to continue her work. With monetary support from the fund as well as IU institutional support, the Historical Performance Academy made preparations in 2022 to start classes in 2023.

Galhano selected faculty members, so they could recruit students: Dawn Kalis, director and harpsichord; Miyo Aoki, recorder; and Erica Rubis, viola da gamba. Besides those instruments, others to be offered are Baroque violin, Baroque cello, lute, traverso, voice and Baroque oboe. All levels and ages of playing are welcome,

beginner to professional.

Money from the fund honoring Smith was used for public school outreach concerts in fall 2022. “More than ever, we need to educate and inspire the new generation of early music students. Programs like this can stir interest and help to guarantee our tradition of beautiful early music,” said Galhano. ✨

IU Historical Performance Academy: <https://jacobsacademy.indiana.edu/descriptions/historical-performance-academy.html>

Marie-Louise “Weezie” Smith (1938-2021): [https://americanrecorder.org/docs/AR\\_winter21\\_body.pdf](https://americanrecorder.org/docs/AR_winter21_body.pdf)

## S’Cool Sounds adds free student learning websites

With thriving programs in both New York City, NY, and Nairobi, Kenya, the nonprofit S’Cool Sounds (SCS) has further expanded its reach into digital learning. SCS already offers over 50 lesson plans from seven units, freely available online to music educators worldwide. The newly-added self-paced modules for recorder and ukelele (with other instruments planned) allows free access to student lessons.

In July, SCS founder/artistic director Nina Stern will return to Nairobi to help expand the flourishing SCS music program in the Kibera schools. With her will be SCS teaching artist Ruairidh Pattison, and SCS board member and musician Nancy Snider. Besides providing new instruments and uniforms for performances, all will attend four student performances, lead in-person workshops for teachers and help prepare students for future concerts and an upcoming festival. ✨

S’Cool Sounds:

[www.learnscoolsounds.org/](http://www.learnscoolsounds.org/)  
for-students; [www.scoolsounds.org](http://www.scoolsounds.org)



▲  
Miyo Aoki (standing) was a featured recorder player in public school programs as outreach for the Indiana University Historical Performance Academy. With Erica Rubis, viola da gamba, and Dawn Kalis, harpsichord.

## Zen-On Bressan plastic low-pitch alto recorder

A new plastic alto recorder model, the Zen-On G1A Bressan, is available. Designed by Japanese recorder makers Shigeharu Hirao and Hiroyuki Takeyama, it is made from ABS resin and is the first plastic alto available at low pitch (A=415; also made pitched at A=442). Features are a faithfully reproduced bore, undercut toneholes, arched windway and authentic look of the Baroque originals that were hand-made by Peter Jaillard Bressan. ✨

Sound files:

<https://earlymusicshop.com/products/zen-on-g1a-bressan-alto-recorder>

Review by Sarah Jeffery: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6zTKzyA8V4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6zTKzyA8V4)

## New Hesperus Collective

Currently known for its early music silent film scores, Hesperus has expanded to become an early music improvisation collective. Director Tina Chancey explains: “Most groups have three or four members, who focus on a limited number of early music genres, and add guest artists when they want to expand their repertoire. The Collective will be made up of 10-14 people, each of whom has experience in a few kinds of early music improvisation from Medieval through Baroque.” Concerts, organized around a theme, will feature different combinations of performers who collaborate on improvisations.

The Hesperus Collective is modeled on Eric Salzman’s multimedia music theater ensemble QUOG, of which Chancey was a member from 1974-80. ✨

Hesperus: [www.hesperus.org](http://www.hesperus.org)

Two articles on improvisation by Tina Chancey: [https://americanrecorder.org/docs/AR\\_fall22\\_bodyr.pdf](https://americanrecorder.org/docs/AR_fall22_bodyr.pdf)

## Erik Bosgraaf to lead LIFEM

The London International Festival of Early Music (LIFEM) has appointed award-winning Dutch recorder virtuoso and musicologist Erik Bosgraaf as its new artistic director. Bosgraaf appeared as soloist and director with the Wrocław Baroque Orchestra at LIFEM in 2023. This new long-term partnership will see him take the reins of the festival’s creative agenda.

Held each November in Blackheath, UK, LIFEM combines concerts, master classes, talks and competitions with a three-day exhibition of instruments by leading makers. The festival celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2023.

Bosgraaf is generally considered to be one of the world’s leading recorder players—definitely one of the most adventurous. He improvises, plays jazz, utilizes electronics and works with people in other areas of artistic endeavor such as cinematography. His repertoire extends from Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* to tomorrow’s music.

Bosgraaf’s recording of Jacob van Eyck’s *Der Fluyten Lust-hof* set a new

standard and led to his international breakthrough. Some 100 pieces have been composed for him, among which are 12 concertos. If not playing the recorder, he leads numerous orchestras from the harpsichord or—in classical and later repertoire for chamber orchestra—conducts from the front.

In 2023, Bosgraaf appeared at the Boston (MA) Early Music Festival, the International Handel Festival in Göttingen, Germany and LIFEM. Bosgraaf is a visiting professor at the Cracow Music Academy (Poland), Amsterdam Conservatoire (Netherlands) and Tsing Hua University (Taiwan), and gives master classes all over the world. He received the Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award in 2009, and the Netherlands Music Prize in 2011. ✨

Erik Bosgraaf: [www.erikbosgraaf.com](http://www.erikbosgraaf.com)

LIFEM, set for November 13-16, 2024, will include the Young Ensemble Competition and a recital by 2023 Society of Recorder Players/Moeck Solo Recorder Competition winner Jiyeon Bang: <https://lifem.org>



▲ Erik Bosgraaf. Photo: Marco Borggreve.

## HISTORY

## TWO AR EDITORS TALK

GAIL NICKLESS TALKS WITH BENJAMIN S. DUNHAM

These two editors shepherded a changing AR through 35 years of its 65 volumes.



Gail Nickless has been editor of *American Recorder* since 2002. She began working

for the ARS in 1994 as its executive director, and retires following this magazine issue, her 98th.

Even though playing the recorder was not a requirement for either ARS job she has held, Nickless has done so for nearly 50 years. Her adult recorder activities started in graduate school, when a fellow student suggested she form a consort to add recorders to an annual madrigal dinner. After that first public recorder experience (with two other players, both named Chuck), things could only improve as players were added to future groups. She performed with that consort for over 12 years, also playing recorder and Baroque flute with the faculty/staff Texas Tech Baroque Ensemble.

She also played piccolo with the Roswell (NM) Symphony Orchestra for a dozen years. Nickless holds a Bachelor of Music Education (flute emphasis), and a Master of Music Theory in Music Composition, both from Texas Tech University—where she also was an arts administrator.



Retiring in 2014 after 12 years as editor of *Early Music America* magazine, Benjamin S. Dunham

enjoyed an active career in arts administration and journalism, serving as the first executive director of Chamber Music America; executive vice president of the U.S. National Music Council; executive director of the American Symphony Orchestra in Carnegie Hall; director of public relations and publications for the American Symphony Orchestra League; assistant editor of the *Music Educators Journal*; and editor of *American Recorder* (1989-2002).

He performed on recorder and viola da gamba in early music ensembles in Washington, D.C., and in the South Coast region of Massachusetts, and has reviewed concerts and recordings for national and regional media. He served on the boards of the National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts and the Boston (MA) Early Music Festival, as well as the American Recorder Society and Early Music America. In retirement he researches and manages a website on the British artist James Alphege Brewer ([www.jalphegebrewer.info](http://www.jalphegebrewer.info)).

**GAIL** It was last summer at the Boston Early Music Festival when you pointed out that, between the two of us, we had edited 35 years of *American Recorder* (AR, now in volume 65).

You had become interim editor in late 1989 and your first issue as editor was June 1990. Unlike when I took over (when the ARS Board mostly wanted to continue the tone and ideas that already existed in the excellent publication you had been editing), you came in at a time of transition for the ARS.

**BEN** Yes, as I remember my first days as editor of AR (not as before: *The American Recorder*), the changes in the magazine reflected changes in the organization. *The AR* under the expert editing of Sigrid Nagle had developed along with the Society as an early music/historical performance resource, complete with footnotes (sometimes whole pages of them on consecutive pages) and extended translations of historical treatises. A tip-off was the practice of numbering the pages (including the covers) of the publication consecutively throughout the year, like some academic journals: Volume XXX #4, ended with page 166, ready for binding on the shelves of libraries.

The advent of Early Music America in

the mid-'80s (and its somewhat scholarly journal *Historical Performance*) encouraged the ARS Board to think more broadly about the recorder—not just recognizing its role in “authentic” music performance (whatever people took that to mean), but as an instrument that everyone could (and should) play and that had an important role in contemporary, popular and world music. The ARS Board also wanted to give more attention to the careers of young professional recorder players being trained in Europe and at American universities.

I was sensitive to these kinds of organizational concerns. After I had been assistant editor of the *Music Educators Journal* and editor of *Symphony News*, I had administrative positions where I was involved in building up membership and support.

With my first issue (**AR March 1990**), we opened up a news-feature section called “Tidings” and began a Q&A department. Then, to our regular departments—“Chapter News” (later “Chapters & Consorts”), “Book Reviews” and “Music Reviews”—we added a product review column called “Bazaar” and also “Recorders on Disc,” a column about recently released recordings. The September 1990 issue, headlined “Spotlight on Consorts,” was subtitled, “Coaching, Arranging, Love, Murder.” We ended the year with an issue devoted to “The Twentieth Century Recorder,” and began the next year with the first installment of “On the Cutting Edge,” a modern repertoire department written by Pete Rose. Later, we introduced “Teaching Tips” (Gene Reichenthal) and “Opening Measures” (Frances Blaker) about recorder technique.

When the war broke out in the Middle East in early 1991, Q&A answered a reader’s plaintive question, quoting Molière: “What is war but discord among nations. If all men studied music, wouldn’t it be a means of bringing them to harmony and universal peace?”

**GAIL** In my life before the ARS, like you, I had been an arts administrator with some background in desktop publishing (DTP) and generally working with printers and layout artists. We had that in common.

Before DTP, I had to type up text (saved to a 5.25" diskette) and drive a hard copy to our printer to be keyed in. Later I was able to transmit it via computer modem to the printer, which used a set format for shorter jobs like concert programs. In both cases, they called me to drive over and proof a hard copy.

I recall using early DTP programs—*Ready, Set, Go*, then *Aldus Pagemaker* (later part of the popular *Adobe InDesign*). Even being able to do the layout on a computer in the early 1990s, preparing to go to press was arduous: we printed out tiles for oversized pages, aligned them and then affixed them with rubber cement to paste-up artboard. We used an X-Acto knife to cut amberlith to indicate color.

When you started as editor of *AR*, was the work done by then on a computer rather than on a typewriter? Who did the layout and physical paste-up of the printed material?

**BEN** I vaguely remember living through all the different phases leading to full DTP. I had been art director of my college yearbook (and managing editor of its magazine), so I always enjoyed the magazine design and layout process. With *Symphony News*, the articles were set in lead “hot-type” on a linotype machine, sent to me as printed galleys to proofread, and then pasted up into page layouts with spaces where the printer would insert photos and illustrations. The typehouse then “locked up” the pages in trays stored in vast racks. The process of pasting up galleys into page layouts with rubber cement carried over into the era of “cold-type,” when pages with analog typeset text were photographed to create negatives. These were exposed to make the plates

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▲  
**1: Then-AR editor Ben Dunham and son Sam visited the American Recorder Society booth at the 1995 Boston Early Music Festival.** Gail Nickless took their photo standing in front of a flow chart where visitors could not escape without playing the recorder and then joining the ARS. The two demonstrated how the display worked by holding up their hands to answer the question, “Do you play the recorder?” “Yes,” said Sam (now 32 years old!). “Not yet,” said Ben. Each was guided to take the next step toward a more active involvement in music.

▼  
**2: Computer network and IT support for AR: husband Wayne Nickless.**

Probably a much-needed upgrade to Gail’s computer in 2015.

**3: Both Wayne and their son Theodore were regulars with Gail at the Denver chapter’s biennial Rocky Workshop in Estes Park, CO.** Theodore (now age 27!) was pressed into service as percussionist for jazz recorder tunes led by workshop faculty member Ken Andresen in May 2009.

**4: Even during a 2010 vacation with extended family at a theme park,** Gail was reminded by a comic strip character of her editor duties.



used in the offset printing process. During Vietnam, I was trained in the Army Reserve in offset process photography for making battle maps. I loved hanging around printing plants in those days.

Yes, I used a computer for text processing with the March 1990 *AR*, but very quickly, with the June 1990 issue, the days of driving dot-matrix-printed text over to a nearby typesetting house ended. My computer began to show me text in typeface fonts, spellchecked in a rudimentary way, and in place on the page—the dawn of desktop publishing. It all seemed to happen in a month or two; in less than a year, all the typesetters disappeared. I remember using a DTP program named *Ventura*.

The problems in those days could always be traced to the memory and processing capacity of the available computers ... glitches galore! Too many times a crash would make me redo hours of work! One stumbling block was using early optical character recognition programs to scan typewritten text mailed to me by the authors—never a flawless procedure!

A saving grace in this evolving process was having a knowledgeable and forgiving boss, one who could make allowances for the inevitable mistakes and back me up with her own expertise. That was you, Gail, and it might

be interesting to our readers to hear how these early days of our working together as editor and executive director affected your service to ARS.

**GAIL** In those days, you faxed me proofs of pages in layout, which I then corrected by hand (if necessary) and then faxed back to you. It's possible that, at first, I also faxed you the text for those pages, the ones you faxed to me to proof. Somewhere in the late 1990s, we began to have very basic email, so that I could send you plain text electronically.

Some things couldn't be done either by fax or email. The office printer cranked on for hours, printing the mailing labels for each *AR* issue (which were then sent via FedEx to the commercial printer).

You and I also talked on the phone, which helped, since we each worked in a bubble. I remember tossing around ideas for ways to make the copy fit in layout or about adding late-breaking events for a summer festival. I am certain you took up some slack in my early days with the ARS, before I got my bearings and we established a rhythm of working together.

I always knew when a magazine issue arrived in mailboxes—renewals started to fill the office mailbox, after that tangible reminder. The magazine has always been the most obvious and appreciated member benefit.

I came in as executive director after you had been editing *AR* for about five years. I remember that various people coordinated *AR*'s color covers, which were created by living artists, a practice I was later able to continue for a few years. How did you find cover artists, and how did you line up columnists and authors? People had to write you letters, rather than zipping off an email about a potential article.

**BEN** The magazine's interior design was created back in 1993 by Patrick Mitchell, who was the art director



The November 2001 cover of *American Recorder*, the first issue after 9/11

for the hot new business publication *Fast Company*. It was also his idea to commission new art for the cover from younger artists he knew, a little in the mode of *The New Yorker*. In 1996, Pat handed the job of commissioning cover art to his assistant Emily Crawford, whose mother happened to be Lisa Goode Crawford, the eminent American harpsichordist based at Oberlin College and Conservatory. Lisa and I once both sang in the University Choir at Harvard's Memorial Church, so this all felt "like family." Emily passed on the assignment to her friend Gillian Kahn of *Atlantic Monthly* in 2000. It was Gillian who placed three of our covers in the prestigious *American Illustration 19* anthology and the 43rd *Annual of American Illustration*. She found Adam Niklewicz, the artist for my favorite cover in this series—a dove holding a recorder as a symbol of peace (our first issue after 9/11, [AR November 2001](#)).

Developing content? Well, I knew a small network of performers, academics and instrument makers from years kicking around in the field and had a sense of what they might be interested in writing about. As I remember, many of the unsolicited article queries were suggested from overseas, like the articles of Anthony Rowland-Jones. Some of my favorite articles were written by active performers, on topics like discovering new repertoire, traveling abroad to play for new audiences, or working with young people and amateurs.

One of my best resources was an amateur recorder player and *emeritus* chemistry professor at Virginia Tech named Raymond Dessy, who with his wife Lee wrote on various technical subjects: the molecular nature of wood, the effect of moisture as we play, the psychoacoustics of the recorder, and the subject of amplification and miking. Of course, David Lasocki's annual reviews of writings about the recorder in other publications kept us internationally *au courant*.

**GAIL** When I was hired, my silver and Baroque flute teacher said he knew David Lasocki. Another friend was on Texas Tech's library periodicals committee, and seemed impressed by *AR*!

I remember those interesting articles from the Dessys on topics no one else would likely attempt. Now we go online for that type of information (as I did much more recently during COVID, for data on mist dispersal).

That causes me to think back to the first web sites that we had. I created the first ARS web site in the late 1990s, adapting an ARS brochure—and with a Denver chapter member who happened to be a retired rocket scientist sitting beside me. You figured out how to give *AR* its first online presence, a huge step.

**BEN** We first made *AR* available on the web with [AR September 2000](#), when we were printing with Cummings, a family-owned firm specializing in periodicals. This was a new initiative on their part to service regular clients. As soon as we started, it was easy to see the advantages of online publication for the usefulness of the magazine: active linking within the magazine, notation examples that really "played" via MIDI, and ads that took you directly to the advertiser's website. As a long-time editor and association executive, I could see that the web someday might replace association publications as the prime information source for their

members. I'm glad to see that the ARS has weathered that storm and remains a strong force for spreading the news online and in print about the joys of playing (and listening to) the recorder.

As the ARS entered the 21st century, with the ARS website you created and with the ability to upload our own "active" PDFs to a website set up for the magazine, it seemed as if a balance had been achieved between what I knew as an association editor and the brave new world of the Internet.

**GAIL** The ARS later merged those two websites into one, and has scanned all of the earlier issues—now *AR* is online right back to Volume I #1.

Thinking back to when Early Music America (EMA) asked you to take over their magazine—was it late 2001?

**BEN** Yes, EMA by then had replaced *Historical Performance* with its eponymous magazine—and I have to say, the chance to report on the wide world of early music (with a larger

budget for article honoraria and color printing!) appealed to me greatly and seemed like a natural step. I inherited *EMAg*, together with its style and its design, from Robin Perry Allen—who had been my assistant so many years before at *Symphony News* and then succeeded me there as editor. The changeover was a little hairy for me, because for a few months I was editing both *AR* and *EMAg*!

But your decision at that time, to move from ARS executive director to become *AR* editor, seemed far more daring—although I can fully understand why the Board, based on your success as an association manager, would have had confidence in your capacity to adjust.

**GAIL** Our son was entering kindergarten in 2002, so the timing seemed to have fallen into place, so that I would start working from home rather than from the modest ARS office.

It was certainly reassuring that you and I were editing similar publications, and also encountered some of the same DTP issues (like commiserating that italics in authors' articles never transferred from word processing to the layout, so those styles are applied manually). By then I think we both used *Quark XPress*.

Color ... for all of the years that you and I edited *AR*, the covers (a four-page unit) have been printed in color. I remember elementary music teachers saying that they hung the front covers up around their classrooms. *EMAg* had gradually added more color in the interior editorial pages. I recall standing by you at some summer festival and overhearing the go-ahead from EMA's executive director to run color from cover to cover! (Coincidentally, this is the first issue of *AR* to be printed in full color throughout.)

**BEN** In my first days with EMA, the budget for color only allowed it to be



▲ Ben Dunham and Gail Nickless, then and now:

**1:** 2002 at the Berkeley (CA) Festival, the changeover of editors.

Photo by William Stickney.

**2:** 2023 after the ARS Great Recorder Relay at the Boston Early Music Festival. Impromptu photo by Cléa Galhano, who suggested this article.

used on one side of a printed sheet, perhaps 12 or 16 pages. I could never remember which pages could take color without folding a mockup, numbering the pages, and marking with an X the pages that fell on one side of the sheet.

**GAIL** Before I tossed my hat in the ring to switch to editing *AR*, you and I talked about working from home, which was then not that common. The ARS had a physical office for years after that.

**BEN** Back in 1989, I spent a few days each week in a little midtown New York City office as executive vice president of the National Music Council. It was a seven-hour bus ride from my home near Cape Cod, so working only from home as *AR* editor appealed to me, as it later did to you.

My family experience after 1992, when our son Sam was born, was very much like yours, when you took over as *AR* editor. My wife, Wendy Rolfe, was (and is!) active as a modern and historical flute professional, so having a job editing *AR* that I could do from home, and in the hours I chose, made it possible to coordinate our child-rearing and professional schedules.

At one point after I had shifted to *EMAg*, the EMA office was in Seattle (WA), the printer was in Kansas, and my proofreader was studying recorder at The Hague, Netherlands—all in touch with me, 24/7, in Massachusetts!

**GAIL** My geography was likewise scattered among time zones—and at first, the magazine printer was in Toronto (when the U.S. dollar was much stronger than the Canadian dollar). Those were the days of slow, at first dial-up, Internet connections. After our Toronto printer had a site where I could upload a finished issue, I “slept” on a couch in my office, periodically getting up to move the mouse so the overnight upload kept going.

**BEN** Can you tell me about some of your best moments as *AR* editor?

**GAIL** In my years as editor, I’ve met fascinating people, even if only virtually. I became friends with some after we worked together. In my “goodbye” column on page 2, I mention only a few.

Without seeming morbid, I also felt a respectful affection for significant persons for whom I helped compile memorial pieces—people who laid the groundwork for our recorder community. There were also anniversary articles, like the interview for John Turner’s 70th birthday (*AR Winter 2013*), which led to ongoing correspondence.

Articles came to me in various ways. I noticed Tina Chancey’s emails recruiting students for her workshops on practicing, and asked her if that content might work as an article. She created four installments in the *AR Practice Project* (2019), plus multiple videos she made for the ARS YouTube channel. I have to mention Peter Seibert—precise in researching topics for chapter meetings, which he morphed into articles (with music on the ARS website) about William Byrd and Josquin des Prez.

There’s David Lasocki—not only his annual roundup, but his thorough article about Renaissance recorder players (*AR March 2004*) and one examining whether a daughter in the Bassano family of recorder makers may have written Shakespeare’s works (*AR Winter 2015*). Anthony Rowland-Jones could write about anything. Once I mentioned, in passing, that members complained about others not being able to count, so he came up with an article about how to develop that skill! His most dramatic articles packaged historical information and spectacular images of recorders from his travels.

Ewald Henseler (a German recorder player teaching at a Japanese university, writing in English!) wrote to me in 2008, offering an article on how the recorder came to Japan. This led to

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later image essays and covers, displaying his collections of stamps and other printed items with recorders (now in the Recorder Music Center).

That brings me to covers: I love any image by Bill Stickney (photographer for this issue’s cover; that’s me in red, at my first Board meeting as AR editor).

The AR November 2003 cover was a newly-discovered work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Rebecca Arkenberg, an ARS Board member who worked there, wrote a brief description of symbolism in that *vanitas* painting.

I also really liked the AR March 2007 cover, which I think the artist Lloyd Miller submitted to a competition.

As both ARS Executive Director and AR editor, it has been the people I have met who will remain with me—ARS members, recorder makers and performers I’ve met at festivals, creators of articles and covers, possibly as many as 75 ARS Board members and staff!

I have to mention that you were one of the first people I met when I traveled to Baltimore, MD, in 1994 to be interviewed. You and I discussed music out in the hall as the ARS Board members were closeted in a room, deciding whether to hire me. After I was “official,” we had a potluck dinner and a play-in with the local chapter. I was impressed that these people, of whom I had just become a part, did what they talked about! That feeling and priority stuck with me in my years as AR editor.

**BEN** What we both brought to the AR editor job was experience in association administration. Neither of us was likely to put our personal interests as editor ahead of those of the Society and the community of people it serves. For you, I guess, as for me, the new developments in technology and communication over the years created a way of doing our jobs that just didn’t exist before. This certainly contributed to our longevity as editors of these organizations’ magazines. ❁

# Instruments

## The Plastic Soprano Survey Results

BY WAYNE HANKIN WITH ALDO ABREU

Two professional recorder players set out to test 43 plastic recorders over a two-year period. Here are their findings.



Considered one of the major performers of early classical winds of his generation, Wayne

Hankin has performed on recordings and numerous concerts worldwide. Among his career highlights are: eight productions with Cirque du Soleil; film (Pixar's *The Good Dinosaur*, *The Lego Movie*); and television (*Breaking Bad*, Disney's *Princess Enchanted Tales*). His association with multidisciplinary composer Meredith Monk began in 1983; he has music-directed several of her productions, including conducting the Houston (TX) Grand Opera's *Atlas*.

He is the recipient of over 30 awards and grants from ASCAP, Meet the Composer, The National Endowment for the Arts and others. A teacher at major residencies like Chautauqua Institution (NY) and Interlochen Arts Academy (MI), he studied with Shelley Gruskin, David Hart, Michael Schneider and Matthias Maute. He most recently played with the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Email him at [wayne@jubomusic.net](mailto:wayne@jubomusic.net).



Aldo Abreu, the first recorder player to win First Prize at the 1992 Concert Artists Guild Competition,

has been soloist with orchestras throughout the U.S. Several contemporary works for recorder were written for him. Abreu has also explored the rich, but rarely heard, music by Latin American composers of the Baroque and Contemporary periods and has performed in numerous venues throughout the U.S., Europe, New Zealand, Australia, and his native South America.

Born in Caracas, Venezuela, Abreu holds the Performer's and Teacher's diplomas from the Royal Conservatory in The Hague, Netherlands; and a master's degree from Indiana University in Bloomington. His teachers have included Ricardo Kanji, Michael Barker and Scott Martin Kosofsky. He is a member of the faculties of the New England Conservatory in Boston (MA), Boston University, The Boston Conservatory and the Amherst Early Music Festival.

How did this project come about? There were two reasons. First, there are other articles recommending what to buy; most were subjective and don't give a clear enough picture. All of those previous writers of surveys relied only on their ears and not on tuning devices. Also, so few instruments were tested; I certainly wanted to test more. A thorough survey of this scope has never been executed, so it was time to test the major instruments available.

I have tested and consulted for companies over the years from Yamaha to Kelischek and Heinrich-Adler, so I've done this before and decided that there's a need to see what's *really* out there. Currently I still test for companies who have asked me to review prototypes (which are not listed in this survey). I go through my stringent testing and make recommendations; it's up to the company to decide whether they want to put that instrument on the market, with or without changes.

I needed someone else to work with me on this survey, to play the same instruments and evaluate them. I've played with Aldo Abreu for 30 years, and call him a friend. His education credentials are good, the method books he has written are quite fine, and his students are very accomplished. He's certainly the greatest recorder player to come out of Venezuela! It seemed natural that we would decide to do this together.

Times have changed. Once upon a time music salespersons could offer several instruments for a customer to try—not anymore. In the post-COVID era, it's unlikely a dealer will let a customer try several models. In many cases, it is take it or leave it. Buying a recorder now is almost similar to buying a toothbrush. I wanted to do a *specific* survey to help people make a better choice.

Let me share some of my speculation about the plastic soprano market.

Dollar Tree (\$T) sells the model that received the lowest ranking in this survey. I tested four of these, bought for \$1 each; they all tested badly.

I called the company to ask how many units of any product they aim to sell in a month. I promised not to share that information, but I can tell you the number provided to me far exceeds my own numbers below—not even close!

Here are my thoughts. There are 15,000 \$T stores in the U.S. alone; I've visited several. All had plastic instruments for sale—and, as you know, there is competition for shelf space. \$T would not keep selling something that just hangs on the store's wall.

They sell items made to move quickly.

My conservative estimate is that \$T sells at least 17 of these recorders, per store, per month. Over a period of a year, that's over three million units annually. That's a guess for just one possible supplier, but a real lowball guess. Remember, many other discount stores also sell low-cost plastic recorders. Total sales of plastic soprano recorders may be as high as six million units annually. With a population of 332 million in the U.S., that's about 2% of the U.S. population buying one.

Looking at 2023 statistics from the U.S. Department of Education, there are nearly four million students *each* in third or fourth grade, the two most common grades to start recorder in the U.S. You can project that the numbers are high, if even 10% of schools purchase recorders to utilize in their music education of students.

My second objective in conducting a survey was to warn people that these inferior plastics send the wrong message about the recorder, especially if those inferior models outsell the good ones that are out there (as I believe they do). There is a lot of information on the web. As teachers make a choice, they will go with a brand they know (perhaps Yamaha), or they will look for

“

Inferior plastics send the wrong message about the recorder, especially if those inferior models outsell the good ones.

the cheapest option, which is wasted money. Our survey was designed not only to steer people in the right direction, but also to further point out ways to buy a great instrument at a low price.

I would like to emphasize in this article that there are plenty of good choices in plastic sopranos, even if you don't have much money.

Aldo was a check on me, to be sure that I was not too opinionated about certain models. He played over half of the 43 or so models tested, about 25 recorders, as he trusted that he didn't need to review the ones to which I had assigned lower rankings. I brought my thoughts to him. We really did not have any opposing opinions.

I did make the case to Aldo that, if there were a good German-fingered recorder, I would recommend it—with the understanding that it's for a specific use, since the German system is still offered in some school music classes.

When Aldo and I played the *Monteverdi Groove* on the survey video, we had cut the list down to fewer than 20 models in the top category.

### Hear the recorders in a video

The in-depth survey results are the basis for a 22-minute YouTube video, *Plastic Soprano Recorders, Top Picks*, that reviews all instruments covered in our survey. It has three sections:

- Commentary: history, testing procedure, and observations on subjects like plastic vs. wood, for example.
- Performances with instruments that made the top category.
- Information, including a list of dealers and a rundown of the top picks.

Our performance section of the video records all instruments with no reverberation, compression or echo. It's not as good as hearing the instruments live, but it's the closest and truest sound we can offer.

The video has four performances featuring instruments that earned the *Player's Instruments* top ranking. All instruments from that category can successfully perform the styles of early music, classical, jazz and folk, plus you get to hear how the instrument sounds with accompaniment.

### Methodology

This article and the survey focus on helping consumers—beginners, teachers, amateurs and professionals—choose the right plastic soprano recorder. Over 43 recorders were tested over a two-year period.

The survey is done objectively and with direct playing, with little to no bias on any particular brand. Evaluations were shown to several recorder professionals and teachers, making sure the survey was conducted fairly. Over 800 people were interviewed before and after the survey was completed.

Our survey results were first shown to dealers and manufacturers, before debuting to the general public, in order to make sure we had information like model numbers and prices correct. Since this survey was completed, some of the dealers and manufacturers have invited me to endorse or recommend their product line. No company has influenced us to change or alter the results you see.

This study focused on the North American market, where the average young music student owns a soprano recorder. As a side note, in Asian and some European countries, the average student plays and owns multiple sizes of recorders—hence is a greater purchaser for instrument companies and dealers. An Asian recorder player spends at least 10 times more money

on recorders compared to an American counterpart. Most American teachers in the recorder market will choose quantities based on price, which have razor-thin margins, whereas European and Asian dealers enjoy higher margins based on multiple sales from sopranino to great bass instruments.

### Testing categories

The rankings fell into four groups:

1. **Player's Instruments:** You can't go wrong here. Any instrument on this list can do it all for the beginner, advanced amateur, teacher or professional.
2. **Acceptable:** These models are worthy: although not as good as *Player's Instruments*, they are still a good choice. They may have some shortcomings (like one- or two-piece recorders with no adjustment in bottom joints), or less ease in the upper register. These are suitable, reliable choices for beginners.
3. **The Drawing Board:** These instruments have some benefits, but were held back in ratings with major issues that will hold you and your students back as well.
4. **Toys:** Not recommended.

We based approval on thorough testing, giving points based on criteria that are listed below (PDF of the full data available on the ARS web site). Instruments that did well in these criteria are recommended. Options are open for companies that wish to improve their product lines. Most companies want to make models that produce good results. The survey shows where some companies need to improve and where they stand compared to their competitors.

**Model:** the company brand and model number.

**Price:** If a product has good quality as well as low price, that counts as points. Companies lose points if they



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sell products that are overpriced or represent poor value.

Plastic model prices range from \$1-58. Most models are in the \$3-16 range. The Mollenhauer wood Dream recorder, priced at \$156, was compared to its less expensive plastic equivalent Dream model at \$42. Several models ranked very high, even at prices as low as \$3-4. All Lyons models, MIE (Music is Elementary) Consort and the MPI Chorale were standouts.

A caveat: buying below the \$3 price range is not the best option. If one is on such an austere budget, check the inexpensive *Acceptable* models, where the MIE 24 at \$2.50 ranked the highest.

Old wood recorders on sites such as eBay are unknowns and not worth the money when compared to less expensive plastic models ranked as *Player's Instruments*. The wood Schreiber recorder of 1964 is a typical example.

- ◀
- 1: Lyons Premium Translucent
- 2: Suzuki SRE-530
- 3: Yamaha Ecodear
- 4: Mollenhauer Adri's Dream Recorder in plastic
- 5: Zen-On Stanesby
- 6: Hohner 9509 One-Piece
- 7: Canto 101
- 8: Aulos 903
- 9: Susato Wide Bore
- 10: MIE Consort Series 2903BX
- ▶
- 11: MPI Chorale Three-Piece German-fingered
- 12: Schreiber wooden recorder, c.1964
- 13: Angel
- 14: D'Luca Student
- 15: Harmony H147
- 16: Nuvo Recorder +
- 17: Tonette
- 18: Grover-Trophy Cambridge II
- 19: Dollar Tree

**Style:** Points are given to instrument styles that were best in their class. Points were not taken away for ugly appearance, which admittedly is subjective. If it plays well, then beauty is in the ear of the beholder.

Most plastics emulate material types: white for ivory, yellow for boxwood, brown for rosewood and black for ebony. Some models add imitation ivory trim to the head, body and footjoint.

Translucent models come in a variety of colors. Any Lyons model is recommended.

Period looks cover Renaissance (Mollenhauer), Baroque (Yamaha) and Modern (Hohner).

Unique among mostly Baroque examples was the Mollenhauer Dream, which is part Renaissance/part modern, all with red glitter. On the odd end of fine instruments is the Hohner 9509, which looks either novel or perhaps just strange. It's up to the player.

Flutophones and Tonettes were a style all their own. Nuvo is the most contemporary in looks, where style commands the attention of the consumer's eye.

**Fingering:** Baroque or English fingering tends to offer more keys in tune than does German fingering, and is preferred among professionals. Only two German-fingered models were tested: the MPI Chorale, which scored well, and the D'Luca Student, which didn't. If the focus is limited to playing only two keys in tune (C major and F major), then German fingering provides an advantage, with the least number of cross-fingerings required. We advise to aim higher and go for Baroque.

**Construction:** Recorders come in one-, two- and three-piece models. A three-piece has a removable head, body and foot. Two-piece recorders can only be adjusted from the top, and a one-piece is not adjustable at all. This can be bad if the instrument is out of tune with itself—or worse, with other



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If you see a \$4 plastic and a \$6 wood instrument, the choice is clear. Buy plastic.

instruments. The one-piece construction poses another problem for the pinky, since the foot joint cannot be moved. This forces the student to play in an awkward hand position.

Points were given to three-piece recorders and taken away for those only in one piece. Three-piece instruments are the best options—not only for intonation and pinky position, but also left-handed users, who may be excluded from playing in the case of one-piece recorders.

Single holes produce the low notes c" and d". Double holes offer additional notes at the bottom: c<sup>#</sup>" and e<sup>b</sup>".

Points were also given to models that show environmental concerns (the Yamaha Ecodear).

**Material:** Plastics began to be used to make recorders in Germany in 1936. Back then, Bakelite was hard, brittle and could break when dropped, shedding harmful chemicals from formaldehyde to asbestos. These migrated to England during World War II; early Schott sopranos sold well, despite poor voicing and crude sound—not to mention a tendency to melt in the sun.

The U.S. entered the field as early as 1939, with a cellulose plastic produced by Kodak (based on polymer film Eastman developed in the 1880s). The material was used by Frank Aman and the Tonette Company of Chicago (IL), a subsidiary of Gibson Guitars.

World War II had some side benefits for the music industry, as precision injection molding of aircraft parts began to be used to make instruments. Aulos introduced a plastic recorder in 1955, but plastic instruments in the 1960s

were mediocre at best. Things improved in the late 1970s, when Friedrich von Huene created the first modern plastic version of a Baroque Bressan alto for Zen-On. Other makers followed, making both Baroque and Renaissance models from ABS (a polymer called acrylonitrile butadiene styrene), and then introducing recorders in colors.

In about 2015, Yamaha made a recorder from Ecodear, an ecologically friendly composite material that is 70% plastic and 30% PLA resin (polylactic acid, a thermoplastic monomer derived from plants, which Yamaha recently reformulated as Terramac®; the Terramac® models were not part of this survey.) The Yamaha YRS-402B Ecodear ranks in the Material category as the best instrument tested.

Note: all plastic instruments are dishwasher safe and won't melt in your dishwasher.

Wood vs. plastic: in this material subcategory, the news is mostly good. There are many acceptable plastic recorders for any kind of playing condition—from classroom or recording studio, right up to the concert hall and for traveling. Most of our esteemed colleagues use them in a variety of ways.

Not only are they affordable, but plastic recorders are well-made and well-thought-out. For price, you're not going to find an inexpensive wood recorder equal to what good inexpensive plastics deliver. Good wood recorders require a lot of time and manufacturing handwork to bring them to a plastic cousin's level. Conclusion: if you see a \$4 plastic and a \$6 wood instrument, the choice is clear. Buy plastic.

**Bore:** Bore dimensions, whether cylindrical or conical, are listed. Wider bores tend to produce more volume (Susato Wide Bore).

**Range:** Points were given if the instrument plays two octaves or more. Points were taken away if the instru-

ment can't meet that criterion.

All of the best models can easily perform two octaves or more. Some models came up short (for instance, the Grover-Trophy Cambridge II, Harmony H-30S, Nuvo Recorder +, Flutophone and all \$T models).

**Windway:** Curved or straight? Most of the best models use a curved windway, which conforms to the shape of the cylinder/bore. Straight goes counter to that design principle.

Points were given for curved windways. No points were taken away, unless the windway looked crooked (as in the Grover-Trophy Tudor and the Harmony). In the final testing, many straight windways ranked very high when played (Lyons Premium). Hohner uses a straight windway with four drain canals to minimize moisture buildup; this did not compromise tone quality.

**Tone Quality:** This was a very important category. The sweet spot is where an instrument performs best from low to high. Blow too soft and it underperforms. Blow too hard and the notes spill into the higher harmonic. When finding the magic middle place, look for instruments that are focused, clear and bright. If the tone was focused, that instrument received a point. If it was shrill or flat, it lost points.

Most plastics produce a light sound quality. The Mollenhauer Dream stands out as the instrument with the darkest, richest tone in both wood and plastic models; those are worth the extra money because nothing else in plastic comes close.

A well-focused instrument gives you other benefits. Yamaha's Ecodear model allows the upper register to play with ease. The centered voicing of the Lyons Premium and the Suzuki enables a player to play longer phrases. MIE Consort offers exceptional tone, and the Yamaha YRS-24B provides great articulation possibili-

ties. Another standout is the Tribert, which allows both long phrases and seamless articulation in both registers.

On the other end, the Harmony H-30S did offer a nice lower register, but it gets reedy in the upper. Add condensation and the tone grows thin and wispy before it disappears altogether, taking a fair amount of air. This contributes to shorter phrasing, as well as becoming an ear ringer. Other models like Nuvo's Recorder + were simply shrill and flat. All \$T models were breathy and unfocused.

**Intonation:** This was the most important category. First, notes were tested on a tuner, but without trying to play the notes to match the tuner. Testing a single note is misleading. You don't tune to a tuner; you tune relative to other notes. After checking the tuner, more notes were played to see if they matched in relation to each other.

Any person can make most single notes play in tune, but it's advised to play a piece of music to see whether *all* of the notes line up properly. Next in this lengthy process, I played *Buffons* and *Joy to the World*, both scalewise tunes where I could listen for each note relative to the others. Aldo and I played the full range, so that all models were tested to play in tune at A=440 in at least 15 keys, to back up opinion. (Email Hankin for more about the evaluation process for this factor.)

All recorders require three levels of breath pressure: less in the low range, the most in the middle range, and less than that in the upper octave. One breath pressure does not work for all notes, which affects intonation as well. This is why many young students tend to spill notes into the upper register, creating shrill loud sounds.

Top score for Intonation was 24 points. With dead-on accurate intonation in the lower and upper registers, the Aulos 903 tested best with a score of 23. Seven other

models scored 20 or better.

Intonation in some was horrible, and those should never be considered to buy. On this lower end were the Harmony HR-304P, scoring at 3: it was in tune with itself in the lower register, but there proved flat to the tuner from c# to f#—not to mention the upper register had to be pushed out of its sweet spot to play close to in tune. The MIE 175W, a one-piece instrument, is not adjustable; therefore it played sharp overall, and scored at 2. Nuvo Recorder + played flat overall and scored at 1.

Some one-piece models successfully played at A=440, but most one-piece instruments fell in scoring for the third or fourth testing steps. Many teachers find a one-piece to be an advantage because there is less chance of students losing parts. If that's the case, limit your choices to Hohner or Canto.

The MPI Prelude received the lowest score, (-14). This one-piece instrument is incapable of playing in tune and proved sharp overall. Playing in the upper register became a lost cause, as many notes played a quarter to a half step too high. The \$T instrument couldn't make it through the test, with flat notes all over the place.

The Intonation scoring breakdown is:

21–24: Impressive

16–20: Very good

11–15: OK

6–10: Below average

0–5: Problematic

(-1)–(-14): Stay away!

Great instruments ranked in a range of 13-23. Average instruments scored 7-21; less than wonderful, 2-16; and the rejects were even in the negative numbers. When it comes to bad intonation, that's a deal breaker.

**Response:** Points were given for quick response, and taken away if a recorder was difficult to play. Nearly every model passed with flying colors, including some of the lowest ranked

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Top score for Intonation was 24 points.... The Aulos 903 tested best with a score of 23. Seven other models scored 20 or better.

instruments. Only \$T models proved difficult to play, even for a professional.

**Tone Expansion:** This category leans on the subjective feel of the player. A few models let the player press more air into selected notes to create a false crescendo. Most soprano recorders can't do that.

Tone expansion allows for more expressivity without the pitch wavering too far. Really good wood instruments are more capable of this, especially with tight voicing. Most of the instruments at this level can't do much to nuance the tone, but points were given to those that could. The MIE Consort and MPI Chorale provided the best possibilities for tone expansion.

On the other end, if an instrument's intonation is flat, tone expansion becomes narrow. The Nuvo Soprano recorder is such a case where flat notes have to be pushed, forcing tone spill; the Recorder + model proved worse.

**Ease of Playing:** Most models proved to be very easy to play, and received points. The Lyons R49BB allows for fast runs, making the instrument easy and fun to play from top to bottom. Even the low-price MPI Sapphire has a light touch, making it super easy to reach the high notes.

Since most sopranos are light in weight, we believe thumbrests are not an important feature. Some models come with an adjustable thumbrest, but if the instrument is held correctly it's not necessary. Unadjustable thumbrests can become a hindrance (like with the Flutophone). The Tonette and



**Craftsmanship:** Points were given if an instrument's appearance looks well-made (like the Lyons, MIE Renaissance and Nuvo Soprano). Nuvo got extra points for innovative ideas in its design. Points were taken away if the instrument had visible seams or was just a plain eyesore (Hohner, \$T).

Beauty outside and high craftsmanship inside were common in many models. Buying a nice looking instrument can, on first sight, make the player feel good—but does a good appearance make a well-playing instrument?

The D'Luca Student looks great on the outside, but has problems with its interior design. One of the best looking instruments is the Harmony H-30S, a Baroque-style ebony color with ivory color trim. With its Baroque fingering, fast response, fine physical feel, acceptable intonation, decent articulation and great price, it had the looks of a winner—but with its problematic reedy upper register, its tone quality makes ears ring. It turned out to be the worst entry of all three-piece models, rated in the *Toy* category.

Sometimes looks can indicate cheap quality. The Flutophone is shoddy inside and out, with seams showing everywhere. We won't even go into the \$T eyesore.

However, there were exceptions. One of the strangest looking models defied preconceptions and ranked high in our survey: the Hohner. Although Germany is usually stereotyped as producing high quality products, the craftsmanship on this instrument looks odd and unsubtle, accompanied by visible seams along the side. It turns out that looks aren't everything. It ranked in the top 20 and tested as our best one-piece instrument.

Again we make a nod to the plastic Mollenhauer Dream, unique with its red glitter, gold head/footjoint trim and tapered beak for good lip position.

Despite the Nuvo Soprano having ranked low in many categories, it ranked very high in craftsmanship

and appearance. It is an instrument full of promise for the future.

Looks are fun. Colors are fun—thrilling for a first-time player—but it's better to choose an instrument with a well-designed sound. The recorder can play all sorts of amazing things; if you progress in that direction, you won't need looks to keep you or your students interested.

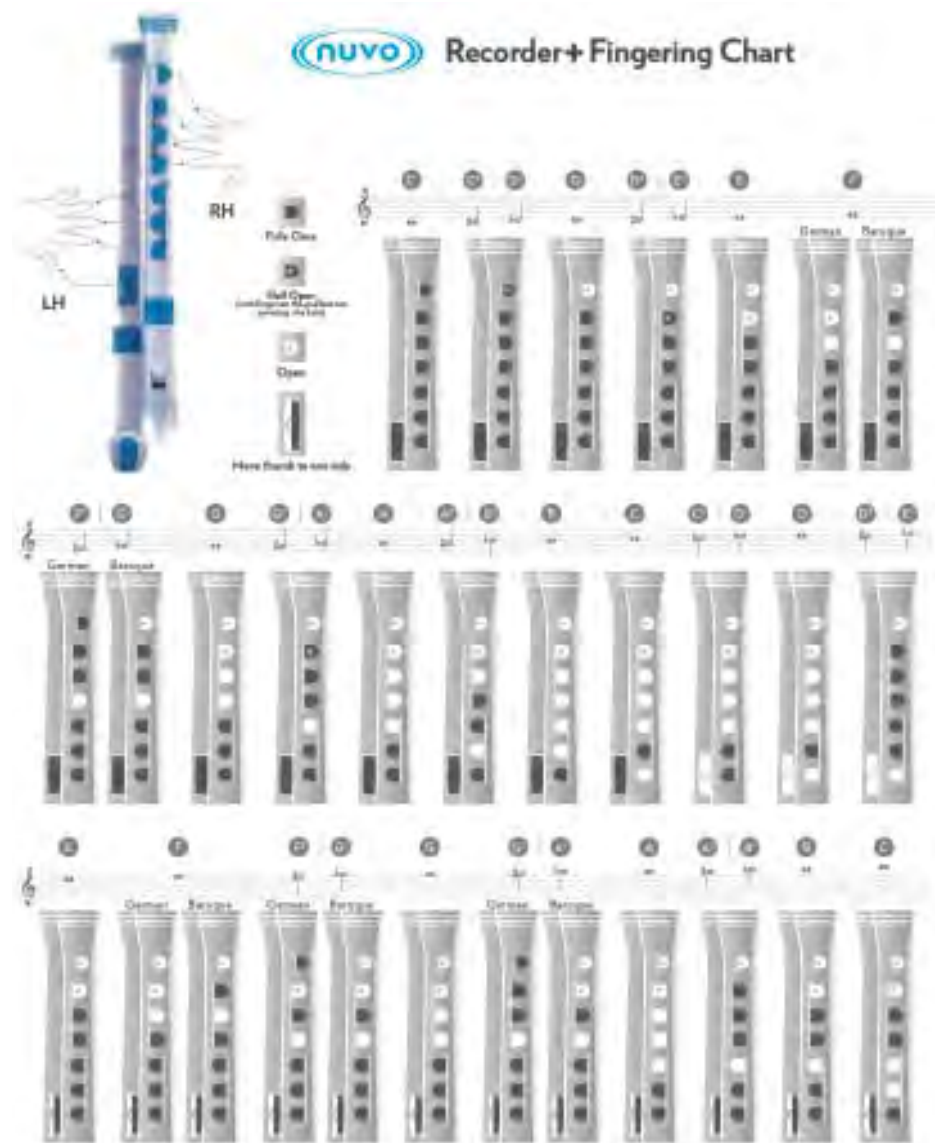
Are looks a gimmick? Our survey concludes: not if you pick the right one. Many a beginner eyes a first instrument, imagining all the possibilities. Dreaming is a good thing, but practice and progress will show that looks play second fiddle to playing well.

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Nuvo ... designed probably the best looking fingering chart.

**Accessories:** Points were given for nice additions (Yamaha and Nuvo for the cases) or a well-designed fingering chart (Nuvo Recorder +). Points were taken away if the cases look cheap or can lead to bacteria buildup, or if the package lacked essential items like a cleaning rod or fingering chart.

Other less common accessories include an address card, joint



grease, microfiber mop, adjustable thumbrest and a trill chart.

Special mention goes to Angel, which had a very nice fingering chart—but the winner was Nuvo, which designed probably the best looking fingering chart for any instrument.

The Aulos 323E did not include a cleaning rod; the Flutophone comes with nothing but the box it came in.

### Scores and rankings of all the instruments

Here is a brief summary of results. On the database, you'll see that extra points were given or others taken away, based on the major pros and cons. An average score would be 25 (for the Susato Wide Bore). Recommended instruments are in the first two groups. Those in the third and fourth groups are not recommended.

Top score was 59, for the Yamaha YRS-402B Ecodear. Lowest score was (-26), for Dollar Tree instruments.

★ Indicates unique qualities that outshone all other models in style, construction, tone expansion, versatility, intonation or price.  
X Indicates poor qualities like craftsmanship, ease of playing, response, intonation, tone quality, range or price.

Check the database for details.

To reiterate, a summary of the four categories listed here is:

- *Player's Instruments* with scores of 59-32: Can't go wrong. All of these models will do the job with fine sound.
- *Acceptable*, scores of 28-9: Good enough for a beginner. May have some drawbacks, but overall not bad instruments.
- *The Drawing Board*, scores of 10-0: With so many good instruments out there, these need to be improved to compete.
- *Toys*, scores of 0 to (-26): Avoid!

### PLAYER'S INSTRUMENTS

#1 Yamaha YRS-402B.....59★★★

Solid in sound. A very easy instrument to play. True solo quality. Plays with ease and is worth the money. A choice for the environmentally conscious.

#2 Lyons Premium.....53★★

Inspirational instrument brings out the best in the player. Highly recommended. There are a lot of decent instruments out there, but this instrument connects the notes seamlessly—that's why it's super easy to play.

#3 Pluma Suzuki SRE 530..... 47★

Impressive to look at and voiced for the soloist, its overall qualities will impress the pro and the listener.

#4 Music is Elementary

Consort Series 2903BX ...46★★★

Highly recommended. It does it all. Tone not as full as a good wood recorder, but plays with ease in the upper register.

#5 Yamaha YRS-24B..... 44

Yamaha's low-budget entry is a worthy solo instrument. If you want something light in tone and bright in its voicing, this instrument will do the job, especially outdoors.

#6 Tribert Soprano..... 43

This amazing instrument may not be the best sounding one, but it can do anything quite well.

#6 Yamaha YRS-20BB ..... 43

An exciting instrument for any kind of player. You can't go wrong.

#8 Zen-On Stanesby, Jr. .... 42★

Steady as a rock. After nearly five decades, this model has outlived many other brands. If you can get hold of one, preferably new, you'll see why today's new plastics have greatly improved.

#9 Mollenhauer

Adri's Dream Recorder.....41★★

Plays like a dream. A fine solo instrument that can find a place with other strong instruments. If you can't afford wood and want its darker sound characteristics, versus lighter plastics, this is the model to choose.

#10 Lyons R49BB ..... 40★

A successful lightweight. The Premium model is better, but this one is more than worthy, especially if you're looking for the cheapest thing around.

#11 Yamaha YRS-302B III ..... 39

It makes the player feel good with appealing tone and spot-on articulation—which justifies the price.

#12 Yamaha YRS-312B III ..... 38★

More soloistic in sound rather than ensembles. To master its intonation issues will require practice—this one is for players with adept tuning skills. Its very bright solo tone quality would be better in the hands of a pro than a beginner.

#13 Zen-On ZE-150BN..... 37

A joy to play. Pricy but it's a great instrument.

#13 Aulos 903 ..... 37★

One of the widest bores measured. Objectively, one of the finest instruments tested. Subjectively, one of the least impressive soundwise.

#15 MPI Chorale #211233 ..35★★★

Not the most beautiful tone—more appealing to the listener, less to the player. It's well-built for a lot of tasks. If you insist on buying German-fingered, this is the best one tested.

#16 Mollenhauer Adri's Dream

Recorder in pearwood ..... 34★

You get what you pay for. Double-hole model available for a few dollars more. Can play solo or ensemble.

## #16 Hohner 9509 .....34★X

This ugly duckling plays like a swan. Forget about the outside: beauty is skin deep. Its playing quality warrants the price. The best of the one-piece instruments.

## #18 Canto CR101 ..... 32

Can't deny this one is well-made. If only the tone color were less piercing.

## ACCEPTABLE

## #19 MIE 24 ..... 28★

Good all-around instrument for all playing situations.

## #19 MIE Renaissance ..... 28

Would fit nicely with a consort of Renaissance instruments in appearance and sound. The d<sup>'''</sup> issue can be remedied by slurring into the note.

## #21 Aulos 303A-E ..... 26

Aside from the pushing issues, this instrument is still impressive, despite some intonation challenges.

## #22 Susato Wide Bore Soprano .... 25

If Ethel Merman were a recorder ... if you're looking for a powerful sound that sticks out, this qualifies. If you're looking for something that can play more sweetly, look elsewhere.

## #23 MPI Prism ..... 24

Easy-to-play instrument that sounds nice and shows a lot of promise, but the f<sup>#</sup>s have to be fixed. If you're a school teacher and want a recorder that plays successfully at a quieter level, while limiting yourself to flat keys, this is clearly your best option.

## #24 MPI Sapphire ..... 21

One of the easiest instruments to play. If only those out-of-tune notes were fixed. Wear earplugs when practicing, learn the alternative fingerings for the f<sup>#</sup> and c<sup>#</sup>, stay away from the

bad keys and you're in business.

## #25 Harmony H147 ..... 11

Never completely zip the case, to avoid bacteria buildup. Pinky hole could be an issue with a beginning player. Lots of good things to say about this model. Sand down the thumbhole for this agreeable lightweight.

## #26 MIE 180PR ..... 10

Flat notes can be played in tune. Sound on the thin side but gets the job done.

## #26 Aulos 323E..... 10

An instrument that represents the good and the not-so-good. If your standards are not high, this instrument is acceptable. However, there are cheaper alternatives that play and sound better. Easy and fun to play, if you ignore the fine points of playing in tune. Better yet, spend half as much and get the Aulos 903.

## #29 MPI Classic #211202..... 9

A pro can make this instrument sound good, but intonation issues will create challenges for a beginner.

## THE DRAWING BOARD

## #28 Nuvo Soprano ..... 10★

Stylish and attractive in appearance, hence the one star ranking. Tone quality needs to be improved. In order for it to play in tune, the instrument has to be pushed beyond the sweet spot to shrillville.

## #30 Grover-Trophy

## Cambridge II ..... 9X

If you stay in the lower octave, this instrument is as good as any. A decent instrument, but there are better ones for less money.

## #31 MIE 175W ..... 7X

Light as a feather, fun to play; how-

ever, intonation needs to be improved. If only the headjoint were adjustable, the problem could be minimized.

## #31 Schreiber Selecta 1964 ..... 7X

We played this just as a comparison to the plastics. A 60-year-old vintage wood instrument that has held its own. Plastics have made major inroads in pitch, however. X designation is based on price.

## #31 D'Luca Student ..... 7

German system recorders always have intonation issues, and this one is typical of the problems therein. You can get a good well-tuned instrument for half the price of this one.

## #34 Angel Soprano 101 ..... 6

In spite of the shrillness issues, the intonation and voicing are its most impressive points. Good tone quality can be obtained if not pushed. Not up to professional standards.

## #35 MPI Antiqua #211219 ..... 0

A potentially great instrument undermined by being flat overall. Not suitable for ensembles despite its ease of playing. For solo use only.

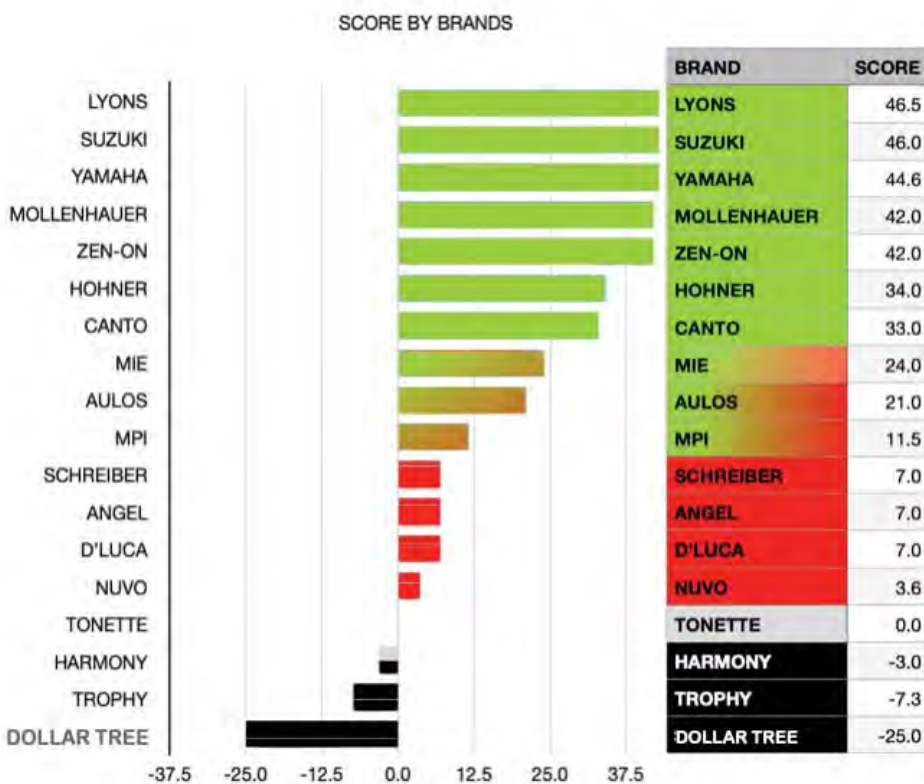
## #35 Gibson Tonette ..... 0

It is what it is and does not pretend to be a serious instrument. If you want to travel back in time and hunt for this piece of bygone Americana, go for it. However, you'll have to work out the chromatics on your own. Could it be improved? Yes. Is it easier to play than a recorder and worthy as an educational tool? Hard to say. Its time has come and gone—not to mention that it's challenging to find.

## TOYS

## #37 Harmony H-30S .....0XX

Looks aren't everything. Fix the voicing. Worst three-piece entry.



▲ Averaged summary showing best brands of plastic recorders

- 1: **Lyons.** Best value and the dominant player in the translucent market.
- 2: **Suzuki.** Although hard to find, the tone quality and ivory look is worth the search.
- 3: **Yamaha.** All models are of high quality. Worth the money, no matter which model you buy.
- 4: **Mollenhauer.** Innovative and of the highest quality. Worth the money, although out of the price range of most schools.
- 5: **Zen-On.** Finely made instruments, if you can find them (mostly used).
- 6: **Hohner.** Plastics are well-made, a little on the pricey side.
- 7: **Canto.** Far from the best, but a valid contender.
- 8: **MIE.** Quality varies. Be sure you know what you're looking for, whether for price or tone quality. Two models stand out.
- 9: **Aulos.** Good brand.
- 10: **MPI.** Quality all over the map, from worthy to unworthy.
- 11: **Old wood recorders like the Schreiber.** Expensive and cannot compete with the newer plastic models.
- 12: **Angel.** Cheap, which means many things.
- 13: **D'Luca.** A maker known for accordions, not recorders.
- 14: **Nuvo.** Just not in the same league of quality. Not recommended.
- 15: **Tonette.** Clearly the better instrument when compared to the Flutophone— if one insists on educating students with these pre-recorder instruments.
- 16: **Harmony.** One of the worst brands on the market.
- 17: **Grover-Trophy.** Not high quality.
- 18: **Dollar Tree.** Junk that takes away sales from brands of much better quality.

#38 Nuvo Recorder + ... (-2)XXXXX

Designed for beginners, especially those with physical or learning disabilities, it is pleasing to the eye rather than the ear. Could be used as a training instrument for the lower right hand. Out of tune and poor sound quality prevent it from playing a two-octave range. Silicon pads are very close to the holes, which may lower pitch.

#39 Grover-Trophy

Flutophone ..... (-14)XX

Has a unique sound, so don't write it off. Lots of problems keep it from playing in tune. Cannot compete with new models on the block. However, it's fun to play and can be effective in the hands of a professional. Not recommended for student education, as it introduces kids to bad intonation habits. Needs a serious update.

#40 Grover-Trophy

Tudor TD185..... (-17)

Not for professional use. Tone quality and uneven intonation in the registers make for a difficult instrument to love. In need of a serious makeover.

#41 MPI Prelude #211204B ... (-20)X

Another one-piece casualty. Great tone quality and response are undermined by major intonation problems. Not for professional use or ensemble playing. Needs to be made in three pieces with major intonation fixes. You can find something better. Not horrible, but all those sharp notes, and their alternative fingerings not listed on the fingering chart, will stop you from playing well.

#42 Harmony HR-304P..... (-22)X

Good response canceled by poor tone quality and bad intonation make this instrument hard to love. Fix the voicing and intonation.

#43 Dollar Tree ..... (-26)XXXXXX

Save your dollar.

# MUSIC IS ELEMENTARY®

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For All Your General Music Needs

Great Sound. Great Price. Best Quality.



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**MIE218** \$6.95 - Sopranino / 2-piece / Key of F

**MIE88** \$3.95 - Soprano / 3-piece / Key of C

**MIE302** \$17.95 - Alto / 3-piece / Key of F

**MIE248** \$49.95 - Tenor / 3-piece / Key of C

**MIE258** \$175.00 - Bass / 3-piece / Key of F

**MISSAT** \$69.95 - 4-Piece Recorder Set: Sopranino, Soprano, Alto, and Tenor

**MISSATB** \$215.00 - 5-Piece Recorder Set: Sopranino, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass

**Music is Elementary's** full line of premium quality recorders have a matte black finish and other features that rival more expensive wood recorders. The arched wind way allows for ease of play and consistent tone in all registers to make the MIE Consort Series the perfect choice for players of any level. The rich warm tone will enhance any professional recorder ensemble. The soprano model has improved design for better intonation. Each model includes deluxe leatherette case, cleaning rod and fingering chart. Baroque fingering.

[www.musiciselementary.com](http://www.musiciselementary.com)

## More recommendations

- Best looking ivory style: Suzuki
- Best translucent: Lyons Premium
- Best tuned instrument: Aulos 903
- Best Baroque ebony look: MIE Consort
- Best Baroque with ivory trim look: Zen-On Stanesby, Jr.
- Best original design category: Mollenhauer Dream
- Most environmentally conscious: Yamaha Ecodear
- Price value: \$3-5 for Lyons Premium, MIE Consort, MPI Chorale
- If you insist on a one-piece, despite its drawbacks: Hohner 9509
- Best tone expansion possibilities: MIE Consort, MPI Chorale
- If you insist on German fingering, despite some setbacks: MPI Chorale

## Conclusions and final thoughts

- Most major brands have at least one instrument that is worth purchasing.
- Pre-recorders are not up to standards and counterproductive to teaching good music habits (the Flutophone and Tonette, for example).
- Dollar Tree recorders take market share away from reputable dealers

- and legitimate instrument companies.
- Used wood recorders are a hit-and-miss market, since most transactions will happen over the Internet and purchases are made visually, not aurally.
- Cheapest instruments have a hidden cost.
- Many fine models can be purchased for under \$6 and can be promoted as, “spend a few pennies more.”
- Most instruments tested have good response.
- Translucents: Lyons and Yamaha lead the way.
- Well-made German-fingered recorders are a reality—but advantages in such a configuration are canceled by other drawbacks they create.
- Sponsored brands, from distributors and music retailers, have models that rank high, as well as others that don’t. Purchasers may be unaware of the difference between one model and another.
- Most listeners cannot distinguish between the sound of a wood recorder and a plastic recorder.
- An unknowing purchaser of a recorder has a 1/3 chance of buying an instrument that is not well-made.

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An unknowing purchaser of a recorder has a 1/3 chance of buying an instrument that is not well-made. Out of the 43 plastic recorders tested, 15 are not well-made.... Looking in the Player’s Instruments category, the difference between one instrument and another is like splitting hairs. Any of those models would do the job.

Out of the 43 plastic soprano recorders tested, 15 are not well-made.

- Although one-piece recorders are favored by some teachers—fewer parts to lose—most have disadvantages. They shut out left-handed players and cannot be adjusted for tuning.

Choosing an instrument is subjective, emotional and instinctive. It’s personal—how you feel when you play it.

Some teachers will buy strictly based on price without trying an instrument out, only to find that they have wasted their budget.

When you put an instrument to your lips and put air into the chamber, you should fall in love with it. There are many models tested that meet that criterion—but this is something you can’t test. Looking in the *Player’s Instruments* category, the difference between one instrument and another is like splitting hairs. Any of those models would do the job.

In the end, choosing an instrument is mostly based on how it makes you feel when you play it. ❁

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## RESOURCES AND LINKS OF INTEREST:

- Wayne Hankin makes the Jubo, a four-hole closed-end flute, designed as a simpler instrument solution to precede the recorder. You can read information, including more details about his aims in making this plastic soprano recorder survey: [www.jubomusic.net/jubo-recorder-survey](http://www.jubomusic.net/jubo-recorder-survey)
- A PDF of the database with test results, as well as a PDF containing further information (models not to buy, models not tested, claims made by some models, etc.), are on the ARS web site: <https://americanrecorder.org/extra>
- Video link for *Plastic Soprano Recorders, Top Picks*: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UXKoPxx9Xc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UXKoPxx9Xc)
- Yamaha’s Terramac© replaces Ecodear: [https://usa.yamaha.com/products/musical\\_instruments/winds/recorders/plant-based\\_plastic\\_soprano/index.html](https://usa.yamaha.com/products/musical_instruments/winds/recorders/plant-based_plastic_soprano/index.html)
- Thanks to: companies who provided products for this survey; Chris Rua, Steve Lundahl, Sarah Cantor, Corbett Hein, Brittany Bauman, Kate Barnes, Todd Johnson, Clare Condell, Matt Kerns, Barbara Weiß-Bellinger, American Recorder Society, Jody Miller, Gail Nickless

## Additional upcoming events

More about upcoming events (see listings online at <https://americanrecorder.org/workshops>, plus initial listings in the Spring issue of American Recorder)

### FESTIVALS

#### June 9-16

18TH BIENNIAL BERKELEY FESTIVAL & EXHIBITION (ARS)

Berkeley, CA

The ARS kicks off its Great Recorder Relay (June 15, 2-4 p.m., First Presbyterian Church) during the Berkeley Festival (BFX) with the presentation of the ARS Distinguished Achievement Award to Hanneke van Proosdij and its Presidential Special Honor Award to Peter R. Ballinger. Staged as a BFX fringe event, the free Relay showcases solo work and consorts, young performers and established virtuosos, classical works and contemporary pieces—just about anything you might want to hear. Come at any time during the Relay—but don't miss the start for the awards ceremony.

Besides hearing the Relay and meeting other members at the ARS table in the exhibition, recorder players will want to hear several BFX mainstage events: Alkemie (Sian Ricketts, recorder, on two events); Voices of Music (Hanneke van Proosdij, recorder, also on two events); and the Farallon Recorder Quartet (Miyoko Aoki, Letitia Berlin, Frances Blaker, Vicki Boeckman, recorders), playing on their own plus in a joint Festival closing concert with Parthenia Viol Consort.

Mainstage concerts are “pay-what-you-can,” an initiative from the San Francisco Early Music Society to remove income as a barrier to arts accessibility.

CONTACT:

[www.berkeleyfestival.org](http://www.berkeleyfestival.org);

<https://americanrecorder.org/bfx>

#### October 20-22

EARLY MUSIC AMERICA SUMMIT

Case Western Reserve University  
Cleveland, OH

Three days of presentations, workshops, panels, jam sessions, the 14th annual Young Performers Festival (YPF) and Emerging Artists Showcase, plus concerts from local ensembles.

The YPF will hold daily concerts featuring selected collegiate ensembles:

- Case Western Reserve University Historical Performance Ensembles, Cleveland, OH (event host ensemble)
- Indiana University Baroque Orchestra, Bloomington, IN
- Longy Baroque Flute Ensemble, Boston, MA
- McGill University Baroque Orchestra, Montréal, QC
- Oberlin (OH) Conservatory Historical Performance Ensembles
- University of California-Los Angeles Early Music Ensemble

CONTACT:

[www.earlymusicamerica.org/summit](http://www.earlymusicamerica.org/summit)

## Performances

Recorders, mostly with other instruments, coast to coast

### Recorders played by Farallon featured in U.S. premiere

Greek-Dutch composer Calliope Tsoupaki demonstrates her compositional brilliance in *Memento Nostris* (Remember Us). She's well known in Europe and has written over 100 pieces, mostly instrumental. Thanks to YouTube, I listened to some of her very-well-composed instrumental works. I was charmed to see that the famous Dutch recorder player Erik Bosgraaf is among those performing her widely-played instrumental piece, *Thin Air*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxAlc6XU5aE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxAlc6XU5aE).

Her choral music really grabs you. Its powerful expressiveness derives from both Western European and Eastern influences. It reflects her Greek roots and has a completely personal style that exudes a music that is timeless.

The Farallon Recorder Quartet (from the West Coast, here playing with two East Coast substitutes) and the Parthenia Viol Consort joined the Cantori New York choral group, all directed by Mark Shapiro, in performances of *Memento Nostris* on March 9-10 at Church of St. Francis Xavier in New York City, NY. By chance I chatted with a member of the viol quartet after their last rehearsal and was struck by her enthusiasm for and emotional reaction to the music.



In this intensely spiritual work, Latin and Byzantine texts as well as elements of contemporary and early musical traditions are beautifully woven into a source that leads the listener through both the grief and joy of emotional and spiritual lamentations and supplications. The brief opening section of the work, titled “Requiem Aeternam,” uses texts from Greek and Latin sources, including parts of mass movements. The main section, “Memento Nostri,” is influenced by ancient Greek funeral texts.

Scored for both SATB recorders and gambas, measures of this music vary in the use of the instruments to weave interesting different musical textures into the choral music.

The audience for both concerts was transfixed, totally focused on the music. The musicians and the audience were, for the duration, in a new universe. There was a noticeable delay in the onset of applause, I think because no one wanted the performance to be finished. ❁

**Nancy Tooney**, Brooklyn, NY

Calliope Tsoupaki:

[www.calliopetsoupaki.com/about](http://www.calliopetsoupaki.com/about)

Farallon Recorder Quartet: <https://www.farallonrecorderquartet.com>

Parthenia Viol Consort:

<https://parthenia.org>

### Live World Premiere of Jamie Allen's Nightingale Concerto

The main item on the March 10 concert of the Philadelphia (PA) Sinfonia was the *Nightingale Concerto* by Jamie Allen, with soloists Héloïse Degrugillier, recorders, and Phillip O'Banion, percussion. Written during the COVID pandemic, this work for recorder, percussion and string orchestra had a partial performance online. The March 10 performance of the entire work was



▲  
**1: Farallon Recorder Quartet and Parthenia Viol Consort.** (left to right) Annette Bauer, Miyo Aoki, Letitia Berlin, Daphna Mor, recorders; Lawrence Lipnik, Rosamund Morley, Lisa Terry, Beverly Au, violas da gamba; with composer Calliope Tsoupaki and Cantori New York director Mark Shapiro.

**2: Héloïse Degrugillier, recorders, Phillip O'Banion, percussion, and the Philadelphia Sinfonia, Gary White, conductor, playing Jamie Allen's Nightingale Concerto.** Photo: Steven Goldblatt Photography.

thus called the “live world premiere.”

Philadelphia Sinfonia is committed to bringing the recorder into the modern concert setting. This is the second time the group has featured the recorder in a new work, the first time being with soloist Tom Beets playing Graham Fitkin’s *Recorder Concerto*. “Congratulations on the first full performance and for giving us such a great piece of music to work with,” conductor Gary White commented to Allen.

Based on *Ode to a Nightingale* by English poet John Keats (1795-1821), the concerto’s eight movements correspond to the eight poem stanzas. The tone of the poetry varies from fanciful to melancholic, and Allen’s writing for recorder draws on all the technical capabilities of the instruments. In Degrugillier’s energetic, virtuoso performance, the birdsong in the alto, soprano and sopranino passages chirped evocatively, while the tenor and bass recorders spoke of the poet’s somber longing. The percussion, scored for a wide range of instruments from marimba to wood block, is as challenging as the recorder part. The two soloists together wove a rich fabric of sound.

Sometimes providing a foundation for the soloists, sometimes in dialog with them, the orchestra itself has a difficult part, which was ably performed by this top-notch youth orchestra.

The audience of about 350 responded with enthusiasm to the performance and gave a lengthy ovation to Allen, who was present for this premiere. Are we likely to see the recorder as a solo instrument on concert platforms throughout the world? A work like this—demanding as it is—certainly demonstrates that the recorder has its place in today’s orchestral writing. ✨

**Melissa Thomson**, Rydal, PA

John Keats, *Ode to a Nightingale*:  
[www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44479/ode-to-a-nightingale](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44479/ode-to-a-nightingale)

“Tom Beets gives North American premiere of recorder concerto by Graham Fitkin”:

[https://americanrecorder.org/docs/AR\\_Fall19\\_body.pdf](https://americanrecorder.org/docs/AR_Fall19_body.pdf)

Lost In Time Press has published two intermediate level duets adapted from *Nightingale Concerto*:

*Sunburnt Mirth* for SA and hand percussion; *In Fairy Lands Forlorn* for AT and hand percussion; the music includes QR codes linked to recordings by Daphna Mor, recorder, and Daniel Freedman, percussion:  
[www.lostintimepress.com](http://www.lostintimepress.com)

### **Voices of Music features Hanneke van Proosdij on recorder**

Voices of Music (Hanneke van Proosdij and David Tayler, directors) performed a concert on March 8 entitled “Music of Vivaldi, Bach & Telemann.” Van Proosdij and Tayler brought an outstanding 16-piece ensemble of winds and strings to First United Methodist Church in Palo Alto, CA. The program was also offered March 9 in San Francisco and March 10 in Berkeley. The ensemble performed on Baroque instruments at A=415, with all winds and small strings standing—a true Baroque setup.

The concert blasted out of the gates with Antonio Vivaldi’s “La Rustica,” RV151. The Adagio movement featured beautiful improvisations from violinist and concertmaster Augusta McKay Lodge. The next piece featured the Baroque oboes of Marc Schachman and Pablo O’Connell in the *Concerto in D minor*, RV535, also by Vivaldi. Its Adagio movement beautifully demonstrated the two oboes’ clarity and control as they handed the melodic line back and forth.

Recorder players were awaiting the *Recorder Concerto in F Major*, TWV51:F1, by G.Ph. Telemann, in

which van Proosdij left her customary position at the harpsichord, and picked up an alto recorder. I know this piece well, yet I have never heard it performed in concert; this was a real treat.

The Affettuoso first movement is regal and sublime, and features a number of “knee notes”: high f<sup>#</sup>, which one can only play by covering the recorder’s endhole with the knee or thigh. In the exciting second movement, Allegro, which ranks among the most challenging in recorder repertoire, van Proosdij played masterfully at breakneck speed, dancing on the edge. Spontaneous and appreciative applause burst forth at the completion of this virtuosic performance, without even waiting for the conclusion of the concerto.

A beautiful contrast to the preceding movements, the work’s third movement Largo, a recorder solo with only basso continuo accompaniment, moves to D minor and turns dark and mysterious. Two minuets then returned to the F major key in a light and cheerful mood, accentuating van Proosdij’s delicate recorder work.

Van Proosdij displayed fantastic breath control, playing incredibly long passages, which she ornamented playfully.

The sinfonia from J.S. Bach’s *Cantata*, BWV42, led to the interval, after which followed an unusual Vivaldi concerto in G major for oboe and bassoon, RV545, played by Schachman and Andrew Schwartz. The Vivaldi concerto in E minor for violin, RV278, was a chance for McKay Lodge to shine.

For the finale, van Proosdij once again traded the harpsichord for the recorder; Tayler put down his customary archlute in favor of the Baroque mandolin. Vivaldi’s *Concerto in G minor*, RV557, for two oboes and two violins, was arranged by the pair—a recorder for one of the two violins, McKay Lodge playing the other part. In the Allegro non molto first movement, van Proosdij’s alto recorder blended beautifully with McKay Lodge’s violin. The second movement,

Largo, was arranged to highlight Tayler's mandolin skills. In the third and final movement, a rollicking Allegro non molto in triple time, van Proosdij took up a sopranino recorder in order to balance with the full ensemble sound—and even on this small instrument, treated the audience to one more “knee note” (don't try this at home, for fear of dental damage!). A well-deserved standing ovation was cheerfully delivered for this outstanding performance. ✨

**Kraig Williams**, San Jose, CA

Voices of Music:

[www.voicesofmusic.org](http://www.voicesofmusic.org);

[www.youtube.com/@VoicesofMusic](https://www.youtube.com/@VoicesofMusic)

### A tasty dinner with Handel

In February the Portland (OR) Baroque Orchestra (PBO) presented live performances of a delightful short opera, *Dinner with Handel*. This *pasticcio* of music by G.F. Handel, Henry Purcell, Thomas Arne and Antonio Vivaldi was newly devised by the PBO artistic director Julian Perkins. He crafted the arrangements and recitative, in the same way that Handel himself may have reworked some of his own music; the libretto was by Stephen Pettitt. First performed to the live audience, the event was also recorded and temporarily available on YouTube, with the latter used as the basis of this report.

The musical pastiche was set for small forces—four singers and a very small group of instrumentalists clustered on the stage. The oboe/recorder players were Stephen Bard and Kathryn Montoya, plus Nate Helgeson on bassoon. In the YouTube version of the concert, one can actually clearly hear the sound of the recorders—what a pleasure!

Founded in 1984, PBO is one of the largest period orchestras in the U.S.

and celebrates 40 years in 2024. ✨

**Nancy Tooney**, Brooklyn, NY

Program, including “Cooking a Musical Pie,” with Julian Perkins and Stephen Pettitt: <https://portlandbaroqueorchestra.box.com/s/dycj2r6t2cud2xaojestx6i33d1k17f>

### Piffaro's perfect polyphony

Despite it being Super Bowl Sunday on February 11, the nave of St. Philip's in the Hills Episcopal Church in Tucson, AZ, was filled with a delighted audience of at least 250—all of us there to hear Piffaro, the 40-year star of American early wind ensembles.

The program was largely drawn from the beautifully produced *Harmonice Musices Odhecaton*, famed as the first collection of polyphonic music in movable type, published in Venice by Ottaviano Petrucci in 1501. The contra and tenor of each piece are on the top and bottom of the same page, facing the altus and the bassus on the following page, so that the four players can read from it at the same time. (You can see this for yourself on a scan of the original score, number 297366 at the top of this list: [https://imslp.org/wiki/Harmonice\\_Musices\\_Odhecaton\\_\(Petrucci,\\_Ottaviano\)#IMSLP297366](https://imslp.org/wiki/Harmonice_Musices_Odhecaton_(Petrucci,_Ottaviano)#IMSLP297366).) Although there are no texts apart from a title and sometimes a first line, many of the pieces are in fact well-known vocal chansons from the 15th century, attesting to the practice of performing vocal pieces on instruments.

Piffaro's artistic director since 2021 (after joining the ensemble in 2007), Priscilla Herreid, explained in her pre-concert talk that she arranged the program pieces for the instruments she thought best fitted them. Herreid based them on the clefs and her sense of the timbres that would be most

expressive: recorders, douçaines, sackbuts, shawms, a straight trumpet (about 8' long—one could see why instrument makers later decided to coil them up), lutes, percussion and a small bagpipe. Renaissance-style recorders took a prominent place in many of the two dozen or so pieces, ravishingly played by Priscilla Herreid, Héloïse Degrugillier, Sian Ricketts and Grant Herreid (all of whom played other instruments as well).

The influence of Johannes Ockeghem (1410-97) was frequently heard in pieces by Loyset Compère (1440-1545), Alexander Agricola (c.1446-1506), Jakob Obrecht (1450-1505) and Antoine Brumel (c.1460-c.1513). One heart-tugging group included the settings of *Je n'ay dueil* by Ockeghem and Agricola, along with Brumel's double setting of *Du tout plongiet/Fors seulement* and the solemn and exquisite elegy for Ockeghem by Josquin des Prez (1450-1521), *Nymphes des bois*. This was probably my favorite set of the program.

To contrast with the first half's polyphonic pieces, in the second half of the program there were homophonic pieces, which themselves were wonderfully varied in technique and in sonority—thanks in part to the instrumental timbres employed. A big-band set on the anonymous basse dance *Filles a marier* and a rousing rendition of the Sanctus of Ockeghem's *Missa "L'homme armé"* kept things from becoming too sweet.

The group's flawless playing made difficult pieces sound almost easy—inspirational for the numerous recorder consort players in the audience. ✨

**Suzanne Ferguson**, Tucson, AZ

Piffaro: [www.piffaro.org](http://www.piffaro.org)

“Piffaro to receive ARS Distinguished Achievement Award”:

<https://americanrecorder.org/docs/ARspr15body.pdf>

## Music of Latin America explored in Texas event

From March 1-4, The University of Texas at El Paso hosted a free Early Music Latin America Festival and Workshop. Supported by a National Endowment for the Arts grant, with partners Early Music America, the Viola da Gamba Society of America and the ARS, the event was organized by Lindsey Macchiarella.

Over two days, the workshop featured sessions led by various coaches, with classes of 4-8 amateur musicians playing pieces by composers such as Francisco Guerrero (1528-1599), Tomàs Luis de Victoria (1548-1611) and Jéronimo de Aliseda (1548-91), plus music from sources such as the Instituto Español de Musicologia.

Recorder players found themselves in recorder sessions expertly led by Daniel Meyers; at other times, they were in mixed consorts. Especially satisfying were those led by viol virtuoso Mary Springfels, who proved her understanding of recorder ranges by assigning parts with a well-thought-out plan. All faculty seemed to possess encyclopedic historical knowledge of the background of the sessions' music.

A well-attended free evening concert on March 2 featured all of the faculty—LeStrange Viol Consort with Springfels, viol, and sometimes Macchiarella playing viol or percussion; and multi-instrumentalist Meyers playing percussion and recorders. Estelí Gomez's clear soprano voice was featured on songs with text.

The program took the audience on a journey beginning around 1600 with Guatemala's polyphonic codices from San Miguel Acatán, showing the transatlantic musical exchange and also music used to convert the indigenous population to Christianity. Other music came from Peru's 18th-century Trujillo Codex (or Martínez Compañón Codex, after the Spanish priest

who compiled the manuscript of music plus botanical, anthropological and historical information). This haunting repertoire included songs sung by Christian *penitentes*, as well as lilting dances blending traditional Incan ideas with Christian beliefs. A carefree dance with lively percussion had a surprising text outlining how slaves were brought to the New World from Africa.

Ending the tour in the viceroyalty of New Spain (now Mexico), the ensemble offered villancicos, often performed

on liturgical feast days, composed by the Portuguese-born Puebla choral concertmaster Gaspar Fernández.

The final morning's session of all participants gave one last chance to enjoy this intricate and colorful repertoire, led by enthusiastic faculty. ✨

Gail Nickless, Las Cruces, NM

[www.utep.edu/liberalarts/music/outreach/musicology-area/emlaf-workshop.html](http://www.utep.edu/liberalarts/music/outreach/musicology-area/emlaf-workshop.html)



### Latin America Early Music Festival at The University of Texas-El Paso.

**1: Daniel Meyers, recorder.** In the evening concert with LeStrange Viols.

**2: Session led by Mary Springfels (left).** Participants, clockwise from top: Lindsey Macchiarella, Barbara Stark, Flora Newberry, Gail Nickless, Bryan Bingham. Photos: Annabella Mireles.

# Essential tips for recorder consorts

## Ensemble playing, part one



WRITTEN BY  
**LOBKE  
SPRENKELING**

Lobke Sprenkeling  
obtained her Bache-

lor's and Master's degrees as a recorder player and theatrical performer at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague and Utrecht Conservatory, Netherlands. She continued her studies at the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya, Spain, with a national scholarship from the Dutch *Culture Fund*. In 2016 she earned her music Ph.D. *cum laude* at the Universidad Politècnica de València. She also studied multidisciplinary theater from a musical perspective (Carlos III University, Madrid, and the Yale University Summer Program); her specific interest in the relationship between musician and body has led to her performing in and creating multidisciplinary works. She taught recorder at the pre-conservatory program (ages 8-18) of Conservatorio Profesional of València (2007-16), and has taught in Europe, Mexico and the U.S. (sessions with the recorder societies in Phoenix, AZ, and Seattle, WA, and for Amherst Early Music).

She currently teaches recorder at the Real Conservatorio Superior de Música de Madrid. In 2022 she released a CD and in 2023 taught at Lyon National Conservatory in France, in an Erasmus Program collaboration with recorder pedagogues Pierre Hamon and Sébastien Marq.

Info: <https://lobke.world>.

Whether you're just starting out or you've been playing for years, playing music together with others in a consort gives great joy and opens up almost infinite repertoire possibilities. However, sometimes it's difficult to know where to begin or how to improve as a group, especially if your group doesn't have a coach to guide you. In this article and the next one, we'll explore some key tips and insights to help you improve your ensemble playing skills.

### Setting a personal foundation

Before you dive into the music, it's important to establish a solid playing foundation for yourself. Find a comfortable posture (head over heart over pelvis, and if you are sitting, try to sit towards the front on your "sit bones").

Try to relax—tense muscles can always affect your playing. Especially in a group, it's important to go with the flow. However much you've been practicing with a metronome, humans do unexpected things and make musical decisions that will probably cause the tempo to fluctuate a little bit. If you're relaxed, you will pick up on the direction set by your fellow musicians—whereas if you're tense, you're probably not going to take in whatever is happening in the moment. That can mean that you may end up having difficulties playing together.

Focus on good breath support, taking a couple of slow long breaths. An important mindset for ensemble playing is to always remember

that listening is just as important as playing. Pay attention to the other musicians around you and focus on blending your sound with theirs. In a way, it's just like a conversation!

### Who starts and stops the group?

There is one general rule: in principle, the player of the first voice to play in the piece cues the entrances and the endings. This may or may not be the top line of the work being played.

From there on, however, it all depends on the type of music. For example, in homophonic music, the player of the first voice may lead it all, if necessary—although you can experiment with the group all moving together without having a clear leader.

Sometimes a different person may set the pace at the end, if several voices hold sustained notes while one voice has a moving (perhaps cadential) motive or if one part plays more moving notes during a *ritardando*. In these cases, it is vital to maintain eye contact with the person who has the moving notes. That person would also cut off the final chord.

However, in polyphonic music where each line has its own entrances, it depends much more on the individual movement of each voice.

It's best to sit together and analyze the music for such factors, so that you can decide what works best. Having a score available can help this step in the process. Sometimes, voices imitate others, or they elaborate on them. At other times, a voice comes in to say something different, like in an argument or as a surprise. Don't be afraid to take risks and try new things—that's how you'll grow as musicians and as a group.

### Practicing, both together and on your own

Sitting in a (semi)circle when playing is always a good idea; you can really

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Remember that studying a piece is not a matter of playing it from beginning to end, but instead marking the parts that don't work as well so that you can study them as isolated exercises.

hear each other well and attune to each other. In some pieces, the bass carries the ensemble along, especially in Baroque music where the bass is really acting as the basso continuo. The bass voice is important for tuning as well, which is why I encourage the bass players to sit in the middle, with the highest voices on the outer sides of the ensemble. This was historical practice in the Renaissance—hearing the bass helps to improve the tuning of the ensemble.

Perhaps for later music you can just sit in SATB order, so that you can hear the voice nearest your own part. It's all about trying different possibilities until finding one that works best for your ensemble and the specific piece.

At home, try to practice little fragments of your own part by heart. In this way, you will get to know it much better and you will be much more confident when you play with your fellow musicians.

If it's vocal music, you have a huge advantage: you can try to sing or recite your own line. You can place your breathing marks where there are commas and periods in the text.

It's also helpful to play from the score, in order to understand where the other voices are. This allows you to start listening more and reacting more when others enter, as you play from your own part.

Remember that studying a piece is not a matter of playing it from beginning to end, but instead mark-

ing the parts that don't work as well so that you can study them as isolated exercises. In this way, you'll make sure that the entire piece is well-rehearsed and that you don't get lost in the middle of the piece.

Listen to recordings of the piece. Record your ensemble and listen to that recording.

### Finding a tempo for the piece

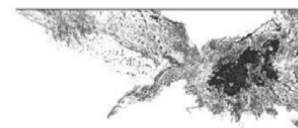
Starting a piece together at the correct tempo can be difficult, but with practice, you'll get the hang of it. Take a moment to breathe and focus before you begin, and trust that your preparation will pay off.

Remember, mistakes happen—it's all part of the learning process! Don't be too hard on yourself or your fellow musicians. Instead, focus on enjoying the music and sharing it with others.

First of all, imagine the right tempo. Feel the right tempo beforehand and try to stick to it.

Here are some tips to determine the right tempo for a piece:

1. Look at the fastest note values: they should be comfortable to play. Don't play faster at the beginning than the fastest phrase(s) you can play well!
2. If your piece is a dance form, dancers should be able to dance to that tempo. For several historical dances, you can find videos on YouTube with the actual dance steps being performed. It's true, however, that later Baroque instrumental dance forms were conceived much less as music for actual dancing.
3. The music should be performed at a tempo in which you can express the emotions of the piece.
4. How fast do the harmonies change? If they change very much and very often, probably the piece asks for a somewhat slower tempo.



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## Tempo and rhythm: getting in sync

When it comes to rhythms, remember that finding the tempo that helps you all stay together is the most important goal, even if one of you feels that a tempo is not the correct one. How should you tackle a rhythmically difficult passage? The solution is to go over a problem section together.

1. Imagine your line in the piece.
2. If it helps, clap or vocalize your rhythms according to, for example, the Kodály or Takadimi systems (mentioned in my article in [AR Summer 2023](#)).
3. Play without sound, only fingering the notes without blowing.
4. Play the notes pizzicato, very short—if you're not together, it's going to be very clear.

Here is where you can use a metronome, to help you understand and maintain the right rhythms and consistent tempo. In general, use a metronome if you need to, but also trust your instincts and listen to cues from each other. It's all about finding that flow together and creating a performance that feels unified. People are not machines, which is why you shouldn't rely on a metronome.

When I work with an ensemble, we leave the metronome out of the equa-

tion until we've worked on the piece for a while—then we use the metronome to see if there are sections where we slow down or speed up. It helps us to recognize fluctuations in tempo that might be unconscious and to decide if we actually want these fluctuations or not.

As you play, read ahead at least two bars, so that you see the musical lines and are prepared for what's coming.

Don't tap with your foot—just move your toe inside your shoe if necessary. Sometimes it's even a disadvantage to tap at all, because you won't follow tempi set by the others. It may even stop you from looking farther forward in the music.

Remember to play with good relaxed posture, noting how the music flows together. In general, it may help to watch the player who starts the piece and also who indicates the ending.

## Navigating rehearsals without a coach

Rehearsing without a coach can be challenging, but it's also an opportunity to grow as musicians. Create a collaborative atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable contributing ideas. Take the time to really listen to each other and work together to iron out any kinks in the music. Most important, have fun—after all, music

is meant to be enjoyed!

Prepare to rehearse by studying the piece (covering factors mentioned above), to understand it better and create a plan.

1. What time and place is the piece from? What do you know about the musical style?
2. Analyze the piece: is there imitation? Where does a motive first occur and when does it come back? Where does it change? How is the piece built up? Where is it going? Is there a climax? If you know a bit about tonality, how does that evolve? Minor tonalities tend to be more melancholic or “sad,” while major tonalities tend to be more “happy.” How do the tonalities make you feel? How do certain special harmonies make you feel? Are there specific silences in the piece? All of this is important because you're telling the music's story together.
3. Decide on the tempo.
4. Tune the chords at the beginning and at the end. (The fine points of tuning, as well as adding musical touches, will be covered in the next LEARN column.)
5. Go for it! ✨

## LINKS OF INTEREST:

- Lobke Sprengeling's web site: <https://lobke.world>
- Videos for some articles in this series: [www.youtube.com/americanrecordermag](http://www.youtube.com/americanrecordermag)
- This piece is part of Sprengeling's technique series, which has progressed through individual to consort skills.
  - Part 1: “Use of Air and Breath Control: The Respiratory System” / [AR Spring 2021](#)  
Use of air in everyday breathing and for good musical tone; exercises for correct breathing.
  - Part 2: “More on Breathing plus Posture and Hands” / [AR Summer 2021](#)  
Additional breathing exercises, good posture, embouchure and hand position.
  - Part 3: “Articulation” / [AR Fall 2021](#) added articulation to previous skills.
  - Part 4: “A Toolbox for Coordination of Air, Fingers and Articulation” / [AR Winter 2021](#) covered all skills learned so far.
  - Part 5: “Daily study habits & how to work on a new piece of music” / [AR Spring 2022](#) applied skills in daily practice.
  - Part 6: “How to play air and finger vibrato” / [AR Fall 2022](#) added an expressive element.
  - Part 7: “How to apply articulations to music” / [AR Winter 2022](#) Basic rules, and when to break them.
  - Part 8: “How to use double tonguing and apply it to music” / [AR Spring 2023](#)
- Also: “Using a metronome” / [AR Summer 2023](#); “After your first recorder lesson or workshop” / [AR Fall 2023](#); “Diminutions” / [AR Winter 2023](#)

# Music

Pieces you can play on those soprano recorders, as well as on others

- 
- |           |   |   |
|-----------|---|---|
| <b>01</b> | <b>Steinbock Fantasien, Op. 116/A and Ambos-Toccata, Op. 143/A (for Sabine Ambos)</b>                 | by Fulvio Caldini                               |
| <hr/>     |   |   |
| <b>02</b> | <b>Due Canoni, Op. 42/D and Sonatine canonica, Op. 91/L, for three recorders</b>                      | by Fulvio Caldini                               |
| <hr/>     |   |   |
| <b>03</b> | <b>Der Berkersche Psalter: A selection of 4-part movements from the first version of 1628</b>         | by Heinrich Schütz,<br>edited by Manfred Harras |
| <hr/>     |   |   |
| <b>04</b> | <b>Six Fantasias for Solo Recorder</b>  | by Rodney Waterman                              |
| <hr/>     |   |   |
| <b>05</b> | <b>Kharis</b>   | by Anthony Moles                                |
| <hr/>     |   |   |
| <b>06</b> | <b>Women's Compositions for Two Soprano Recorders and Women's Compositions for Two Alto Recorders</b> | compiled/arranged by<br>Deborah Greenblatt      |
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**KEY:** rec=recorder; S'o=sopranino; S=soprano; A=alto; T=tenor; B=bass; gB=great bass; cB=contra bass; Tr=treble; qrt=quartet; pf=piano; fwd=foreword; opt=optional; perc=percussion; pp=pages; sc=score; pt(s)=part(s); kbd=keyboard; bc=basso continuo; hc=harpsichord; P&H=postage/handling.

01

**Steinbock Fantasien, Op. 116/A** by Fulvio Caldini

*Edition Walhall FEA107, 2022. S or T. 6 pp (plus 2 extra pp for page turns). About \$8.85.*

**Ambos-Toccata, Op. 143/A (for Sabine Ambos)** by Fulvio Caldini

*Edition Walhall FEA201, 2018. A solo. 5 pp (plus 2 extra pp). About \$8.*

[www.edition-walhall.de/en/woodwind.html](http://www.edition-walhall.de/en/woodwind.html)

REVIEWED BY:  
**Victor Eijkhout**

In previous issues of *AR*, several compositions by Fulvio Caldini have been reviewed. While they are all in a certain minimal idiom, the pieces for larger groups are generally slower, and the solos/duets are typically faster. The current two compositions are solidly in the latter category: the *Ambos-Toccata* is a single movement at a metronome marking of 200, while the six-movement *Steinbock Fantasien* should be played around 225.

Caldini (born in 1959 in Arezzo, Italy) studied at the Conservatory of Music in Florence, and at King Alfred's College in Winchester, England.

His output for recorders began when he won the composition section of the 1992 competition of the Italian Recorder Society. That piece, *Fade Control*, Op. 47/C, was recorded by the Amsterdam Loeki Stardust Quartet; the group later commissioned another work. This was the start of many pieces he has since written for recorders.

During his career, Caldini has had involvement with the American minimalist composer Steve Reich, and cites him as an influence. The syncopated lines of Caldini's compositions are indeed somewhat reminiscent of such

Reich compositions as *Violin Phase*. On the other hand, he doesn't use Reich's trademark phasing technique, but rather the expanding and contracting phrases that one associates with another minimalist, Philip Glass.

In this case, the pieces being reviewed both exhibit heavily syncopated lines. Since the time signature changes practically every measure (3/8, 2/4, 5/8, 3/4, 7/8), the listener never gets into any "groove," but has to follow the internal flow of the line. In that respect, I liked the *Ambos-Toccata* more than the *Steinbock Fantasien*. The former has a clear logic in the phrases that are gradually transformed. This is far less recognizable in the *Steinbock* composition, and the overwhelming impression is of a stream of more or less random notes.

Caldini has a somewhat tonal style, which makes the music generally pleasing. The combination of the syncopations and time signature changes make these interesting pieces for listeners, while being unexpectedly playable at a high-ish intermediate level. ❁

Profile of Fulvio Caldini, by Suzanne Ferguson: [AR Winter 2020](#)

Walking with Gordon Jacob, a duet composed by Fulvio Caldini for members of the ARS: [AR Spring 2021](#)

**Victor Eijkhout** resides in Austin, TX, where he plays recorder in the early music ensemble The Austin Troubadours. The multi-instrumentalist and composer has two titles in the *Members' Library* Editions, as well as the Play-the-Recorder Month 2023 music. His other compositions can be found at <https://victorflute.com> and you can support his work through [www.patreon.com/FluteCore](http://www.patreon.com/FluteCore). See and hear samples of some of the music that Eijkhout reviews posted at [www.youtube.com/americanrecordermag](http://www.youtube.com/americanrecordermag).



## 02

**Due Canonì, Op. 42/D**

by Fulvio Caldini

*Edition Walhall FEA037, 2022. SSA. 3 pcs 8 pp ea. About \$14.40.*

**Sonatine canonica, Op. 91/L, for three recorders** by Fulvio Caldini

*Edition Walhall FEA083, 2021. S/nino A/T B. Sc 9 pp, 3 pts 3 pp ea (extras for page turns). About \$16.25.*

[www.edition-walhall.de/en/woodwind.html](http://www.edition-walhall.de/en/woodwind.html)

REVIEWED BY:  
**Victor Eijkhout**

If "canon" to you means *Frère Jacques*, the *Due Canonì* by Fulvio Caldini may seem perplexing. On the other hand, if you are aware of the various canonic devices that J.S. Bach employs in *The Art of Fugue* and the *Musical Offering*, you may start to understand the structure of these pieces.

Caldini's first canon is what Bach would have termed a "Canon per augmentationem": a canon where subsequent voices enter in ever longer note values. (Bach throws in contrary motion in the canon of *The Art of Fugue*, but not so Caldini.) He combines this idea with a Philip Glass-like technique of gradually extending phrases.

The second canon is augmented only in the third voice. The top voices are almost (but not quite) conventionally canonic. In general, Caldini is less strict than Bach in using these techniques.

So how does this sound? The first canon is quite chromatic, whereas the second one is roughly based on a pentatonic scale. Throw in the canonic devices, and the second canon comes across as a slowly shifting pentatonic texture—while the first canon is quite dissonant (sometimes even strident, given the choice of instruments). I

found this composition less immediately appealing, sonically, than other Caldini compositions—but certainly not without performance potential.

The *Sonatine Canonica* is similar to the second of the *Due Canonì*: it is only canonic in the top two voices, while the third voice plays (very) long notes within a very limited range. The canonic quality of the top voices is not very strict: after several beats, the second voice starts varying on the material of the first. Since this material is pretty repetitive, the whole composition does not feel much like a canon, but like a texture. The shifting bass voice provides some semblance of phrase structure—but still, the piece feels somewhat amorphous.

*Sonatine Canonica* is scored for soprano, alto and bass, switching to STB in the middle of the three movements. The top voices could be played on S and T throughout, but in a range at the top of the second octave for most of the piece.

Otherwise there are no technical difficulties. However, with the shifting themes and constantly changing time signatures, this piece is a good exercise in careful counting! ❁

Fulvio Caldini: [www.fulviocaldini.de](http://www.fulviocaldini.de)

## 03

**Der Berkersche Psalter: A selection of 4-part movements from the first version of 1628** by Heinrich Schütz, edited by Manfred Harras

*Basilisk RM28, 2022. SATB recorders, viols, other instruments, voice. PDF sc 45 pp, pts downloadable if desired, but not necessary. About \$24.75.*

[www.basilisk-edition.ch](http://www.basilisk-edition.ch)

REVIEWED BY:  
**Valerie E. Hess**

For this review, I was given the PDF

downloadable edition. On the Basilisk web site, one can buy a hard copy, at the same price as the PDF download—likely with international shipping costs for the hard copy. One has to decide whether to have a paper version shipped or use one’s own paper/printer ink to print out the purchase, or perhaps play from a tablet.

Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672) was a German early Baroque composer and organist. Many consider him as the most important German composer before J.S. Bach. Besides writing what is considered the first German opera, *Dafne*, he composed many works for the Lutheran church, especially for the Electoral Chapel in Dresden.

The *Becker Psalter* is a German metrical psalter (psalm set in meter and rhyme) with texts by the Leipzig theologian Cornelius Becker. First published in 1602 by Jakob Apel in Leipzig under the title *Der Psalter Davids Gesangweis*,

it was revised in 1628 and 1661, with multiple composers contributing works to the revisions. This Basilisk edition contains only Schütz’s selections from the 1628 version. The *Becker Psalter* was published as a Lutheran option to the prevailing *Huguenot Psalter* of the time.

The foreword fills out more extensively the background and purpose of the work, as well as Schütz’s approach to the music for the metrical Psalm texts.

There are 20 SATB pieces, with German texts provided. Laid out in a lot of “whole and half notes”—in a few places, with quarter and eighth notes—it looks very accommodating on the page, making this a good resource for beginning consorts.

Because of the generic SATB nature of each piece, there is a lot of flexibility for use with voices, recorders, viols or any other combination of instruments one could consider. It’s possible to perform multiple verses of each

Psalm using a different configuration of voices and/or instruments for each one. This would be a nice edition to read through at an ARS chapter meeting, as it would accommodate anyone and everyone.

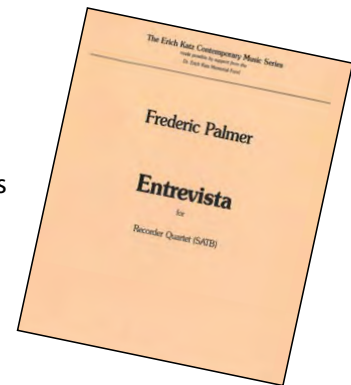
While parts don’t have to be downloaded, the link in the edition includes “alto up” as well as the tenor part written in alto clef for viols or violas. You can hardly find a more versatile score!

This work was popular even during Schütz’s lifetime, and I would concur that it would be a good addition to any music library, especially if the players were interested in performing German early Baroque music. ✨

**Valerie E. Hess** is an organist, harpsichordist and recorder player. In addition to music, she also writes and teaches on issues related to spiritual formation. She can be reached at [hess.valerie@gmail.com](mailto:hess.valerie@gmail.com).

## More music published by the ARS

The Erich Katz Music Series (*selections below*) originally included contemporary music titles that were winners or finalists in the ARS’s Erich Katz Composition Competition. Other music in compatible genres and of similar difficulty levels has been added over the years, as it has become available to the ARS. The ARS also publishes music in the David Goldstein Series and Professional Series. See and purchase all of these online at <https://americanrecorder.org/katzeditions>.



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Cecil Effinger, <i>Dialogue and Dance</i> (SATB, Level II-III). Sc & pts, 26 pp .....	\$10/\$18
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Frederic Palmer, <i>Entrevista</i> (SATB, Level II). 2 scs & 4 rec pts, 16 pp .....	\$ 8/\$14
Sally Price, <i>Dorian Mood</i> (SATB, Level II). Sc & pts, 10 pp .....	\$10/\$18
Jeffrey Quick, <i>Picnic Music</i> (SATB, Level II). Sc & pts, 32 pp .....	\$ 5/\$ 8

*(PDF version of all pieces above, plus a few other titles in this series, are also available online at Member pricing)*

04

**Six Fantasias for Solo****Recorder** by Rodney Waterman*Pardalote Music PARD01, [2023].**Alto, soprano. 10 pp. About \$8+S&H.*

<https://orpheusmusic.com.au/other-solos/7022-six-fantasias-9790902277303.html>

REVIEWED BY:

**Tom Bickley**

As a project during autumn 2020, the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Australian recorder player/composer/improviser Rodney Waterman recorded an album of fantasias. The dozen pieces were inspired by both the 18th-century Telemann solo fantasias and by the idea of a virtual revisiting of performance locations of significance in Waterman's life. (You can hear that album at

<https://rodneywaterman.bandcamp.com/album/twelve-fantasias-for-solo-recorder> and read my review in **AR Fall 2021**.)

After the success of the recording, Waterman decided to transcribe six of the fantasias into notated scores. Given that the recording is of his improvisations, this was not an easy task!

This edition is a creative exercise in providing a way for recorder players to enjoy playing Waterman's fantasias. Orpheus Music in Australia grades these as moderate in difficulty, which strikes me as appropriate—however, this is challenging music that requires strong technique and a good deal of practice to yield polished results.

It is important to note that the level of difficulty varies among these six pieces. From my experience as a performer and teacher, I sense that “Town Hall, Bendigo” fits my expectations for a player at a “moderate” level. “Bluestone

Chapel, Montsalvat” is similar and requires comfort with playing alto high G.

Both “Summer Stage, Lappeenranta” and “Carmelite Monastery, Kew” need skills similar to those needed for Jakob van Eyck's later variations or *ricercare* by Giovanni Bassano. Ideal for a moderate to advanced player interested in gentle use of extended techniques, “Small Hall, Denmark” recalls Waterman's “Grass Tree Study” pieces in his *12 Intermediate Studies for the Treble Recorder* (Orpheus Music OMP044).

“Boîte, North Fitzroy” needs advanced technique for articulation, speed and jazz aesthetic. The notation is clear and quite easy to read.

The composer recorded the fantasias on a variety of instruments and explicitly encourages performers to experiment with use of different recorders besides only alto and soprano. In this collection, Waterman identifies



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66

The level of difficulty varies ... “Town Hall, Bendigo” fits my expectations for a player at a “moderate” level.

the instrument he used for recording each fantasia. Partly because of ranges required, only “Summer Stage, Lappeenranta” in these transcription works on soprano recorder; the remaining five are for alto.

I recommend this collection for any moderate to very advanced level player. The music is attractive, readable, challenging and satisfying. I’m looking forward to bringing some of these into my performance repertory. ❁

**Tom Bickley** is a multi-instrumentalist/composer/teacher in Berkeley, CA. He is editor of the CRITIQUE: Recording department for AR.

05

**Kharis** by Anthony Moles

*Self-published, 2021/22. Solo woodwind, C instrument (S/T), or A with adaptation. PDF sc 4 pp. \$8.*

[anthonymoles@gmail.com](mailto:anthonymoles@gmail.com)

REVIEWED BY:  
**Beverly R. Lomer**

The title *Kharis* means grace in Greek. The program notes state the *Karites* or Three Graces are the goddesses of grace, beauty, joy, adornment, festivity, song and dance. They also oversee happiness, entertainment, sleep and rest. *Kharis* attempts to capture the liveliness of their spirits and musically represents the number three in a variety of ways.

The piece is dedicated to the Australian recorder virtuoso Alicia Crossley.

Composer Anthony Moles studied at Queensland (AUS) Conservatorium of Music, and also studied with composers Michael Smetanin, Graham Fitkin and John Psathas. He plays piano and occasionally performs his own music. Besides a small teaching practice, he is also a mental health worker.

*Kharis* was originally composed for a solo woodwind instrument. It fits within the range of C recorders, covering the entire range of the soprano or tenor, with much of it set in the higher register. With the exception of one short section, it also fits on alto recorder. I contacted Moles to get his opinion on playing that segment an octave up on alto; he indicated that it would be fine.

The tempo is lively, and the program notes in the score indicate that it is intended to have a spirited quality. The style is contemporary, but without any special techniques or notations. It is divided into several sections in which the melodies vary and are repeated.

There is quite a lot of alternation between duple and triple meters. The half note is marked as 108 on the metronome. The program notes indicate that the lyrical sections can be freer and that slightly slower tempos are allowed. There are several shifts into 9/8, 6/8, 5/8 and 7/8. The eighth note is marked as equivalent throughout. I did experiment with equating the half note (3/2, 2/2) with the dotted quarter (6/8, 9/8), and the effect was quite nice.

*Kharis* is a pleasing work, both interesting and fun to play. It is not especially difficult for intermediate/advanced players, but there are some more complex rhythms. It would appeal to those who appreciate contemporary styles, but who are not experienced in or fond of extended techniques. The program notes suggest that it would make a fitting encore or last piece in a concert. ❁

Anthony Moles:  
[www.anthonymoles.com](http://www.anthonymoles.com)

Recording of Kharis on soprano saxophone: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRq2HU-Ta-s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRq2HU-Ta-s)

**Beverly R. Lomer, Ph.D.**, is an independent scholar and recorder player whose special interests include performance from original notations and early women’s music. Her current collaboration on the transcription of the Symphonia of Hildegard of Bingen for the International Society of Hildegard von Bingen Studies was material for her **AR Winter 2023** article on playing Hildegard’s chants.

06

**Women’s Compositions for Two Soprano Recorders and Women’s Compositions for Two Alto Recorders**

compiled/arranged by  
Deborah Greenblatt

*Greenblatt & Seay, 2022. SS or AA. 66 pp each. \$15 each.*

[www.greenblattandseay.com](http://www.greenblattandseay.com)

REVIEWED BY:  
**Victor Eijkhout**

Recent years have seen a realization that there are many composers who have gone unnoticed for cultural and historical reasons. Fortunately, resources are increasing that can be used to discover these ignored composers. To add to this, here is a collection of pieces by women composers, arranged by Deborah Greenblatt. It includes relatively known names such as Fanny Hensel (born Mendelssohn, usually referred to as Felix’s sister) and Cécile Chaminade, whose flute *Concertino* is on every flutist’s repertoire list. There are also more obscure composers such as Florence Price, whose symphonic works have recently been revived, and Lydia Lili’uokalani, the last queen of Hawaii.

66

In 66 pages, this collection covers 16 women composers.

In 66 pages, this collection covers 16 women composers with both short and longer multi-movement pieces.

While I reviewed these duets in two versions for two recorders (SS or AA), there are also versions for two violins, violas, cellos, basses or mandolins. Therein lies a problem for me.

I feel that too many compromises had to be made to fit this music to two identical recorders. Since recorders have a more limited range than some strings, there may be voice crossings when there is no space for the accompanying voice to fit under the melody. There are also octave jumps to accommodate the limited range, and occasional slightly awkward passages in the low register. The arranger is primarily a string player, and I suspect that the violin versions are more idiomatic.

Also, since recorder players usually own multiple sizes, I wonder if these duets shouldn't have been set for soprano and alto. Curiously, the soprano and alto versions are all in the same key—thus passages that are in a comfortable register for the soprano are very low on the alto, or low notes on the soprano are moved up in the alto range, thus introducing voice crossings.

In all, there were several pieces I really enjoyed, such as an ambitious *Tempest* by Elizabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, and a sprightly *Puppet-Show* by Josephine Trott. Other pieces, such as *Totally Different Rag* by May Aufderheide and *Children's Carnival* by Amy Beach, feel more well-intentioned than well-executed, for the above reasons.

These duets are recommended with reservations. A creative player might bend the second voice into the next lower recorder and resolve some of the problems. ❁

## Recording

### Geography lessons: recordings focused on Seville, Spain; Venus Bay, Australia; and Finland

#### 01 The Orange Tree Courtyard

Using Renaissance music, The Royal Wind Music gives a guided tour in and around the Cathedral of Seville.

#### 02 Venus Bay Fireside Sessions

Australians Ryan Williams and Rodney Waterman, as Duo Windborne, explore present-day beaches of Venus Bay.

#### 03 RE

The Finnish Ensemble Gamut! moves up the scale, releasing their second recording, after *UT*.



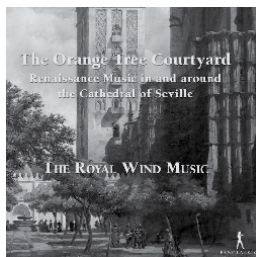
#### REVIEWED BY TOM BICKLEY

American Recorder Recording Reviews Editor Tom Bickley is a multi-instrumentalist/composer/teacher in Berkeley, CA. He grew up in Houston, TX; studied in Washington, D.C. (recorder with Scott Reiss, musicology with Ruth Steiner,

and listening/composition with Pauline Oliveros); and came to California as a composer-in-residence at Mills College.

A frequent workshop faculty member and leader at chapter meetings, he teaches recorder at the Bay Area Center for Waldorf Teacher Training; and Deep Listening for Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. His academic library career included service with the Smithsonian Institution Libraries, the National Endowment for the Arts, and California State University East Bay (as their Performing and Visual Arts Librarian). He performs with Three Trapped Tigers (with recorder player David Barnett), Gusty Winds May Exist (with shakuhachi player Nancy Beckman), Doug Van Nort's Electro-Acoustic Orchestra, and he directs the Cornelius Cardew Choir.

His work can be heard at <https://soundcloud.com/tom-bickley>, and is available on CD on Koberecs, Quarterstick and Metatron Press. Visit his web site at <https://tigergarage.org>.



01

## The Orange Tree Courtyard

The Royal Wind Music's 2023 album *The Orange Tree Courtyard* offers pleasure at several levels. The 11-member group's playing shows what can be done with a large ensemble of recorder players; the music, combined with notes by María Martínez Ayerza, provides a meaningful sound tour of the Cathedral of Seville in Spain; and, not least by any means, the 15th- and 16th-century repertory is a delight likely less familiar to many listeners.

Founded in 1997 by Paul Leenhouts, the Dutch ensemble plays Renaissance instruments mostly crafted by the late Adriana Breukink, with a few made by the late Bob Marvin. Their instrumentarium is known for including "Big Babe," a subcontra bass recorder in B<sup>b</sup>.

The 22 tracks on this recording are sequenced to evoke particular locations at the cathedral. Construction on this particular building, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, began in 1401 on the location of the Almohad mosque. In converting the mosque to a Christian cathedral, the builders retained the minaret as a bell tower. Upon completion in the late 16th century, the cathedral surpassed Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey, as the largest house of worship in the world. The magnitude of this building gives much room for the repertory on this album, as performed by a large ensemble.

The 11 locations/sections of *The Orange Tree Courtyard* place the music in specific spots, including

the tombs of composers Francisco Guerrero and Francisco Peraza. The album opens with a gorgeous improvisation on the Arabic mode *Raml-al-Maya* (track 1), played by lower voices (tenor down to subcontra bass). This is followed by a spritely version of the trio, *Propiñan de melyor* (with a g soprano added to the lower voices, track 2). A second version of the opening improvisation returns at the end of the album to bookend the cathedral tour with a sonic representation of its Islamic history.

The majority of the pieces, artfully arranged by Ayerza, demonstrate elegant polyphony woven with homophonic passages that characterize music from Seville across these two centuries. We hear the full range of instruments, though the general impression is of the richness of the lower voices, with alto and higher recorders added now and again.

This recording includes choral music, secular songs and instrumental pieces. I found *Medio registro alto (de) premer tono* (track 13) particularly ear-catching, for Ayerza's ornamentation and arrangement that places the lower and higher instruments in conversation.

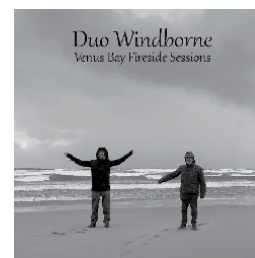
While one wishes to hear this music performed in the cathedral at Seville, the recording at the Van Houtenkerk in Weesp, Netherlands, accomplishes an engaging balance of reverberant acoustics and presence of the instruments. The booklet essay and detailed track/performer/instrument chart both add a great value to the listening experience. For that reason, I strongly urge purchase of the recording in CD format. ❁

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

*The Orange Tree Courtyard*: Renaissance Music in and around the Cathedral of Seville. The Royal Wind Music (Verena Bari', Francesca Clements, Kristy van Dijk, Hester

Groenleer, Marco Magalhães, María Martínez Ayerza, Juho Myllylä, Filipa Margarida Pereira, Daniel Scott, Irene Sorozábal Moroeno, Anna Stegman: all playing Renaissance recorders; María Martínez & Hester Groenleer, artistic direction). 2023, 1 CD, 60:48. Pan Classics PC10448. <https://royalwindmusic.org/media.php?p=144>; <https://the-royal-wind-music.sumupstore.com/product/the-orange-tree-courtyard> (CD about \$22+S&H); ArkivMusic (CD \$20.99+S&H); iTunes Store (mp3 \$11.99). Streaming available via Apple Music, Naxos, Spotify, etc. Complete album: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bPmr1RNekM&list=OLAK5uy\\_kYANwq5Oe-6JJSuYQgYwISDdhArJq2rY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bPmr1RNekM&list=OLAK5uy_kYANwq5Oe-6JJSuYQgYwISDdhArJq2rY)

Live excerpts from *The Orange Tree Courtyard*: <https://youtu.be/i4XCyxEaopM?si=xAC3q4kAbm2rIFni> Cathedral of Seville, 3D tour, maps, plans, etc., in the "Cathedral Guide": [www.lacatedraldesevilla.org/en](http://www.lacatedraldesevilla.org/en) Royal Wind Music: [www.royalwindmusic.org](http://www.royalwindmusic.org) (click at upper right for English)



02

## Venus Bay Fireside Sessions

From the large space of a cathedral and 11 players, we turn to an album of improvised duos recorded in a small studio. The Australian Duo Windborne's album *Venus Bay Fireside Sessions* contains 17 tracks of very appealing intimate music-making, all relatively short (the longest is 3:29).

To my ears, these pieces have a playful jazz-influenced aesthetic. The music bubbles with engaging themes and rich rhythmic figures and interplay.

Ryan Williams and Rodney Waterman first performed as Duo Windborne in December 2016. One of the pleasures of this album is that we hear not only 16 studio-recorded tracks from May 2023, but also the piece *Browns* (track 17) from a 2016 live concert. While both players demonstrate virtuosic technique on recorders, they also play low whistles (track 17) and Swedish Månmarkpipa flutes (track 9). Combinations of instruments used are listed in detail, both in the CD notes and on the Bandcamp website.

In correspondence with me, Waterman notes that his favorite combination is E<sup>b</sup> alto and a tenor in B<sup>b</sup> at a=415. The duo uses those instruments on tracks 3, 7, 11, 15 and 16. Hearing recorders pitched at a=392, a=415 and a=440 is an additional point of interest. The order of the tracks flows well, and the pitch level changes are not jarring at all.

Duo Windborne employs a variety of improvisatory techniques, including careful listening to each other, imitation, call and response, complementary articulations, effective use of silence, and varied instrumentation. Part of the musicians' process for this project was spending a long weekend at a friend's beach house in Venus Bay, a couple of hours' drive southeast of Melbourne, Australia.

The recordings were made by the fireside during that wet, windy, cold Australian autumn. Walks along the beach contributed inspiration for the music-making. The titles refer to locations in that area and were added after the recording sessions.

The session recordings were done by Waterman and Williams, and mastered by Mischa Herman. Their two instru-

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From the large space of a cathedral and 11 players, we turn to an album of improvised duos.... Walks along the beach contributed inspiration for the music-making.

ments are quite well separated, left and right in the stereo image, which gives the listener (especially with earbuds/headphones) a sense of sitting between the two players. It's a placement I find appealing for this project.

A great advantage to releasing music on <https://bandcamp.com> is that the album can be listened to at no cost at least three times. The CD notes are available also on the duo's Bandcamp site, and you can purchase downloads at higher than CD audio quality.

The design and layout of the CD cover fit the music very well, and also enhance the listening pleasure. Whatever format you choose, Duo Windborne's *Venus Bay Fireside Sessions* are a pleasure and worth close listening. ❁

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

*Venus Bay Fireside Sessions. Duo Windborne (Ryan Williams & Rodney Waterman, recorders). 2024, 1 CD, 40:42. <https://rodneywaterman.bandcamp.com/album/venus-bay-fireside-sessions> (stream at least three times at no cost; CD about \$13+\$9.81 S&H to U.S.; mp3, FLAC, ALAC, AAC, Ogg Vorbis, WAV, AIFF, about \$6.50); iTunes Store (mp3 \$9.99); Amazon (mp3 \$9.49). Streaming available via Apple Store, Spotify, Amazon Music, etc.*

More information:

<https://rodneywaterman.com> and <https://ryanwilliamsrecorder.com>  
Videos of Duo Windborne:  
[www.youtube.com/@rodneywaterman2964](http://www.youtube.com/@rodneywaterman2964)



03

RE

“Gamut” in general usage refers to the full range of something. That’s an expansion of the musical term *gamut*, first encountered in writing in English c.1450, referring to the lowest note of the hexachord, or six-note “scale” used by Guido of Arezzo. In music, that meaning expanded further to refer to the whole hexachordal system—and, more broadly, to the concept of a range of pitches.

Ensemble Gamut! embraces the term as they describe themselves as working “in search of new ways to perform early music.” The six notes of the hexachord (*ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la*) are the foundation of our solmization system. *Ut* was later changed to *do*, and now we know the sequence as *do, re, mi...* In keeping with this concept, Ensemble Gamut!’s first album was titled *UT*; this is their second, *RE*, and their third, *MI*, is in process.

In searching for those “new ways,” Finnish musicians Aino Peltomaa, Ilkka Heinonen and Juho Myllylä use the primary performance media (voice, lyre and electronics) and expand those via innovative use of all of their voices, harp, percussion, recorder and a Finnish shepherd flute. I hear this album as early music, and I find it very interesting that this trio’s work is marketed also as folk and world music. It’s a reminder of the fluidity of genres, and the continuing challenge in describing music outside of popularly understood categories. The sound of Ensemble Gamut! certainly fits into multiple categories,

and they are a group I recommend to friends interested in early, folk, world, meditative and ambient music.

The texts and music on *RE* concern St. Henry, an English missionary sent to Finland in an effort to convert the Finns to Catholic Christianity from Orthodox Christianity in the late 12th century. The trio works with material from the collection *Legenda Sancti Henrici*, as well as Karelian rune singing repertory and Bridgettine monastic traditions (including Marian devotion) from the *Cantus Sororum*. They conclude with the well-known *Personent Hodie* from the Finnish collection *Piae Cantiones*. Sources for each track are clearly indicated in the CD booklet.

The album *RE* engages the listener in a fantastic musical and textual journey. Drones accompany much of the music; individual instruments and voices come to the foreground; and the background includes beautifully subtle use of electronic processing of the live audio sources. On *Veri* (track 2), Myllylä (also a member of The Royal Wind Music) plays his Paetzold subcontra bass recorder through pitch shifting software to lower the sound two octaves. That track is notable also for the spoken performance by Finnish rapper/spoken word artist Paleface.

The music videos for this track and others are done with very high production values. I am particularly drawn to *Puu* (track 12) for the interplay of drones, harp and voice; and to *Psallat scholarum concio/Neity Maria Emonen-Mariatar/Beatus vir* (track 5) for the entrancing harp ostinato supporting the melody and for the subtle percussion. The quick tempo of the final *Personent Hodie* (track 14) brings a marvelous energy to the tune, familiar to many of us as a Christmastide hymn.

The complexity of the soundworld this trio creates makes moot the question of a “realistic” image of the

ensemble. Rather than a realistic sound, this is a beautiful surrealist sound. Their work merits listening at CD level of quality or higher. The CD booklet essay by Peltomaa is well worth reading. The booklet also contains details of sources and texts, both Finnish and Latin.

The three accomplished musicians of Ensemble Gamut! offer an innovative approach to this early repertory, which bears close kinship to much performance practice of Medieval European music. Theirs is certainly not the only way to approach this, but it is an option that draws listeners (and viewers of their videos) into the mysterious aspects of the music and time. I’m already looking forward to the release of *MI*. ❁

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

*RE. Ensemble Gamut! (Aino Peltomaa, voice, harp, percussion, soittu [Finnish shepherd flute]; Ilkka Heinonen, jouhikkos [Finnish/Karelian/Estonian bowed lyres], electronics, voice, percussion; Juho Myllylä, recorders, electronics, voice), with guest Paleface (Karri Pekka Matias Miettinen), recitation. 2022, 1 CD, 63:06. Eclipse Music ECD2022178.*

<https://ensemblegamut.com/re>;  
<https://ensemblegamut.bandcamp.com/album/re>

(stream at least three times at no cost; CD about \$17.22+\$8.61 S&H to U.S.; mp3, FLAC, ALAC, AAC, Ogg Vorbis, WAV, AIFF, about \$7.58); iTunes Store (mp3 \$9.99); Amazon (mp3 \$9.49).

Streaming available via Apple Store, Spotify, Amazon Music, Deezer, etc.

Videos of Ensemble Gamut albums:

<https://ensemblegamut.com/videos> and [www.youtube.com/@ensemblegamut/videos](http://www.youtube.com/@ensemblegamut/videos)

Ensemble Gamut!:

<https://ensemblegamut.com/about>

(navigate with three lines at upper right) *Cantus Sororum* and Bridgettine traditions: [www.voxsillentii.fi/11](http://www.voxsillentii.fi/11)



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## ARIZONA

Desert Pipes (Phoenix)  
Karen Grover  
[info@desertpipes.org](mailto:info@desertpipes.org)  
Tucson  
Scott Mason  
[mason\\_scott@ti.com](mailto:mason_scott@ti.com)

## ARKANSAS

Little Rock  
Carol Woolly  
[jim.carol@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jim.carol@sbcglobal.net)

## CALIFORNIA

Barbary Coast RO  
Glen Shannon  
[glen.shannon@k183.com](mailto:glen.shannon@k183.com)  
Central Coast RS  
Karen Bergen  
[karen.a.bergen@gmail.com](mailto:karen.a.bergen@gmail.com)

East Bay RS  
Susan Murphy Jaffe  
[thesmurph9@aol.com](mailto:thesmurph9@aol.com)

Inland Riverside RS  
Greg Taber  
[greg@tabercompany.com](mailto:greg@tabercompany.com)

Los Angeles RO  
Matthew Ross  
[matthewkross@cox.net](mailto:matthewkross@cox.net)

Mid-Peninsula RO  
Fred Palmer  
[fpalmer1419@yahoo.com](mailto:fpalmer1419@yahoo.com)

Nevada City RS  
Kathryn Canan  
[kacanan@yahoo.com](mailto:kacanan@yahoo.com)

North Coast  
Kathleen Kinkela-Love  
[kathleenkinkelalove@gmail.com](mailto:kathleenkinkelalove@gmail.com)

Orange County RS  
Charlie Jackson  
[cornetto45@earthlink.net](mailto:cornetto45@earthlink.net)

Redding  
Kay Hettich  
[khettich2014@outlook.com](mailto:khettich2014@outlook.com)

Sacramento  
Susan Titus  
[susanlee448@att.net](mailto:susanlee448@att.net)

San Diego County RS  
Vanessa Evans  
[vanessaallevn@cox.net](mailto:vanessaallevn@cox.net)

San Francisco  
Greta Haug-Hryciw  
[SFRRecorders@gmail.com](mailto:SFRRecorders@gmail.com)

## Sonoma County

Nancy Kesselring  
[kessel@sonic.net](mailto:kessel@sonic.net)

South Bay  
Kraig Williams  
[kraig.williams@alumni.stanford.edu](mailto:kraig.williams@alumni.stanford.edu)

Southern California  
Ricardo Beron  
[scrsricardoberon@gmail.com](mailto:scrsricardoberon@gmail.com)

## COLORADO

Boulder  
Diana Hinton  
[hrdiana2@msn.com](mailto:hrdiana2@msn.com)

Colorado RO  
Rose Marie Terada  
[contact@ColoradoRecorderOrchestra.org](mailto:contact@ColoradoRecorderOrchestra.org)

Denver  
Sharon Bolles  
[denverrecorder@gmail.com](mailto:denverrecorder@gmail.com)

Fort Collins  
Pattie Cowell  
[pattie.cowell@gmail.com](mailto:pattie.cowell@gmail.com)

## CONNECTICUT

Connecticut  
John Vandermeulen  
[johnpvd@gmail.com](mailto:johnpvd@gmail.com)

Eastern Connecticut  
Betty Monahan  
[betmon1@comcast.net](mailto:betmon1@comcast.net)

## DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Washington  
Monica Boruch  
[info@washingtonrecordersociety.org](mailto:info@washingtonrecordersociety.org)

## DELAWARE

Brandywine  
Roger Matsumoto  
[palladium4@aol.com](mailto:palladium4@aol.com)

## FLORIDA

Lakeland IRC Chapter  
Viola Jane Spencer  
[scamellia@aol.com](mailto:scamellia@aol.com)

Miami  
Ned Mast  
[miamiars@yahoo.com](mailto:miamiars@yahoo.com)

Greater Orlando  
Jacqueline Singleton  
[j.annsingleton@me.com](mailto:j.annsingleton@me.com)

Palm Beach  
Missy Rovinelli  
[missymcm@bellsouth.net](mailto:missymcm@bellsouth.net)

Pensacola  
Charles Tucker  
[tuckercharles48129@gmail.com](mailto:tuckercharles48129@gmail.com)

Sarasota  
Carol Mishler  
[mishlercarol@gmail.com](mailto:mishlercarol@gmail.com)

## GEORGIA

Atlanta  
Mickey Gillmor  
[info@ars.atlema.org](mailto:info@ars.atlema.org)

## HAWAII

Big Island  
Garrett Webb  
[palmsinkona@yahoo.com](mailto:palmsinkona@yahoo.com)

Honolulu  
Irene Sakimoto  
[isakimot@hawaii.edu](mailto:isakimot@hawaii.edu)

West Hawaii  
Marilyn Bernhardt  
[allmusic.marilynb@gmail.com](mailto:allmusic.marilynb@gmail.com)

## IDAHO

Les Bois – Boise  
Kim Wardwell  
[kwardwell10@gmail.com](mailto:kwardwell10@gmail.com)

## ILLINOIS

Chicago  
Larry Johnson  
[ll\\_johnson1239@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ll_johnson1239@sbcglobal.net)

Chicago-West Suburban  
Marguerite Re  
[margueritere@comcast.net](mailto:margueritere@comcast.net)

## INDIANA

RO of the Midwest  
Kathy Sherrick  
[kathy.sherrick@gmail.com](mailto:kathy.sherrick@gmail.com)

## MARYLAND

Northern Maryland  
Richard Spittel  
[richlous@aol.com](mailto:richlous@aol.com)

## MASSACHUSETTS

Boston RO  
Miyuki Tsurutani  
[info@bostonrecorderorchestra.com](mailto:info@bostonrecorderorchestra.com)

Boston RS  
Henia Pransky  
[info@bostonrecordersociety.org](mailto:info@bostonrecordersociety.org)

Recorders/Early Music Metrowest  
Bonnie Kelly  
[bonniekellyars@gmail.com](mailto:bonniekellyars@gmail.com)

Worcester Hills  
Julie Massi  
[massijm@gmail.com](mailto:massijm@gmail.com)

## MICHIGAN

Ann Arbor  
Kevin Gilson  
[kgilson2@mac.com](mailto:kgilson2@mac.com)

Kalamazoo  
David Fischer  
[david.w.fischer59@gmail.com](mailto:david.w.fischer59@gmail.com)

## Northwinds RS

Cynthia Donahey  
[hedgehog.cynthia@gmail.com](mailto:hedgehog.cynthia@gmail.com)

Western Michigan  
Jocelyn Shaw  
[redfernsshaw@gmail.com](mailto:redfernsshaw@gmail.com)

## MINNESOTA

Twin Cities  
Jean Allison Olson  
[jean@honeysucklemusic.com](mailto:jean@honeysucklemusic.com)

## MISSOURI

St. Louis  
Carl Serbell  
[cserbell@yahoo.com](mailto:cserbell@yahoo.com)  
Heartland RO (Warrensburg)  
Patrick Larkin  
[larkin@ucmo.edu](mailto:larkin@ucmo.edu)

## NEVADA

Sierra Early Music Society (Sparks)  
Maureen Groach  
[groachm@gmail.com](mailto:groachm@gmail.com)

## NEW HAMPSHIRE/VERMONT

Monadnock RS (Brattleboro)  
Kris Schramel  
[monadnockchapter@gmail.com](mailto:monadnockchapter@gmail.com)

## NEW JERSEY

Bergen County  
Carl Peter  
[bergencountyars@gmail.com](mailto:bergencountyars@gmail.com)

Highland Park  
Donna Messer  
[music@hpreorder.org](mailto:music@hpreorder.org)

Montclair  
Julienne Pape  
[info@montclairearlymusic.org](mailto:info@montclairearlymusic.org)

## NEW MEXICO

Albuquerque  
Bryan Bingham  
[bryanbingham@gmail.com](mailto:bryanbingham@gmail.com)

Rio Grande Recorders  
(Las Cruces, NM/EI Paso, TX)  
Gail Nickless  
[rgrecorders@gmail.com](mailto:rgrecorders@gmail.com)

Santa Fe  
John O'Donnell  
[jmodonnell@earthlink.net](mailto:jmodonnell@earthlink.net)

## NEW YORK

Buffalo  
Bonnie Sommer  
[bvsomm@yahoo.com](mailto:bvsomm@yahoo.com)

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Recorder Society of Long Island  
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New York City Recorder Guild  
Natalie Lebert  
[newyorkrecorders@gmail.com](mailto:newyorkrecorders@gmail.com)  
Rochester  
John Heyer  
[jhheyersp99@gmail.com](mailto:jhheyersp99@gmail.com)  
Westchester Recorder Guild  
Erica Babad  
[ebabad23@gmail.com](mailto:ebabad23@gmail.com)

NORTH CAROLINA  
Carolina Mountains RS  
(Hendersonville)  
Susan Hartley  
[deerhart123@gmail.com](mailto:deerhart123@gmail.com)  
Greenville  
Jon Shaw  
[jonwardshaw@gmail.com](mailto:jonwardshaw@gmail.com)  
Triad Early Music Society (Greensboro)  
Sabine Ford  
[triadearlymusic@gmail.com](mailto:triadearlymusic@gmail.com)  
Triangle RS (Raleigh)  
Sue Ann Wright  
[trianglerecorder@gmail.com](mailto:trianglerecorder@gmail.com)

OHIO  
Cleveland  
Edith Yerger  
[edithyerger@att.net](mailto:edithyerger@att.net)  
Central Ohio Recorder Players &  
Friends (Columbus)  
Vickie Starbuck  
[vstarbuck@gmail.com](mailto:vstarbuck@gmail.com)  
Toledo  
Charles Terbille  
[opcit@bex.net](mailto:opcit@bex.net)

OREGON  
Eugene  
Lynne Coates  
[coatesly@gmail.com](mailto:coatesly@gmail.com)  
Eugene RO  
Connie Newman  
[constancenewman@hotmail.com](mailto:constancenewman@hotmail.com)  
Oregon Coast (Newport)  
Jane Boyden  
[jane.boyden@gmail.com](mailto:jane.boyden@gmail.com)  
Portland  
Susan Campbell  
[info@portlandrecordersociety.org](mailto:info@portlandrecordersociety.org)  
RO of Oregon (Portland)  
Laura Kuhlman  
[shawm1550@gmail.com](mailto:shawm1550@gmail.com)

PENNSYLVANIA  
Bloomsburg Early Music Ensemble  
Susan Brook  
[susanc@ptd.net](mailto:susanc@ptd.net)  
Philadelphia  
Dan Franceski  
President@  
[PhiladelphiaRecorderSociety.org](http://PhiladelphiaRecorderSociety.org)  
Pittsburgh  
Helen Thornton  
[tharphappy@aol.com](mailto:tharphappy@aol.com)

RHODE ISLAND  
Jamie Allen  
[jamieamericanrecorder@gmail.com](mailto:jamieamericanrecorder@gmail.com)

TENNESSEE  
Knoxville  
Robin Stone  
[roblivsto@gmail.com](mailto:roblivsto@gmail.com)  
Greater Memphis  
Lyn Joyner  
[lyn.joyner@gmail.com](mailto:lyn.joyner@gmail.com)  
Greater Nashville  
Julie Mavity-Hudson  
[julie.mavity@gmail.com](mailto:julie.mavity@gmail.com)

TEXAS  
Austin  
Susan Richter  
[richter@haus.org](mailto:richter@haus.org)  
Ft. Worth - Cowtown RS  
David Kemp  
[4321.dekemp@charter.net](mailto:4321.dekemp@charter.net)  
Dallas  
David Podeschi  
[apfomji@gmail.com](mailto:apfomji@gmail.com)  
Rio Grande Recorders  
(Las Cruces, NM/EI Paso, TX)  
Gail Nickless  
[rgrecorders@gmail.com](mailto:rgrecorders@gmail.com)  
San Antonio RS  
Don Piper  
[sanantoniorecordersociety@gmail.com](mailto:sanantoniorecordersociety@gmail.com)

UTAH  
Salt Lake City  
Mary Johnson  
[john97john@aol.com](mailto:john97john@aol.com)

VERMONT/NEW HAMPSHIRE  
Monadnock RS (Bartlettboro)  
Kris Schramel  
[monadnockchapter@gmail.com](mailto:monadnockchapter@gmail.com)

VIRGINIA  
Greater Fredericksburg  
Emily Demsick  
[emily.demsick@gmail.com](mailto:emily.demsick@gmail.com)

Northern Virginia  
Edward Friedler  
[emfriedlermd@gmail.com](mailto:emfriedlermd@gmail.com)  
Shenandoah (Charlottesville)  
Margaret Newcomb  
[mn2k@yahoo.com](mailto:mn2k@yahoo.com)  
Tidewater (Williamsburg)  
Vicki Hall  
[vickihallva@gmail.com](mailto:vickihallva@gmail.com)

WASHINGTON  
Moss Bay  
Kay Norton  
[info@mossbayrecorders.org](mailto:info@mossbayrecorders.org)  
RO of Puget Sound  
Charles Coldwell  
[ROPS@seattle-recorder.org](mailto:ROPS@seattle-recorder.org)  
Seattle  
Karen Soma  
[info@seattle-recorder.org](mailto:info@seattle-recorder.org)

WISCONSIN  
Green Bay  
Denise Jacobs  
[djacobs@new.rr.com](mailto:djacobs@new.rr.com)  
Milwaukee  
Deborah Dorn  
[dorndeborah03@gmail.com](mailto:dorndeborah03@gmail.com)  
Southern Wisconsin (Madison)  
Greg Higby  
[gjh@pharmacy.wisc.edu](mailto:gjh@pharmacy.wisc.edu)

CANADA  
British Columbia (Vancouver)  
Tony Griffiths  
[bcrecordersociety@gmail.com](mailto:bcrecordersociety@gmail.com)  
Edmonton  
Judy Johnson  
[jatj@shaw.ca](mailto:jatj@shaw.ca)  
Okanagan RO (Kelowna)  
Bruce M. Sankey  
[okcentre@hotmail.com](mailto:okcentre@hotmail.com)  
Toronto  
[info@tempotoronto.net](mailto:info@tempotoronto.net)

ONLINE ONLY  
North American Virtual Recorder  
Society (NAVRS)  
Mike Richart  
[navrschapter@outlook.com](mailto:navrschapter@outlook.com)

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# A M E R I C A N R E C O R D E R

The mission of the American Recorder Society is to promote the recorder and its music by developing resources to help people of all ages and ability levels to play and study the recorder, presenting the instrument to new constituencies, encouraging increased career opportunities for professional recorder performers and teachers, and enabling and supporting recorder playing as a shared social experience. Besides this journal, ARS publishes newsletters, a personal study program, a directory, and special musical editions. Society members gather and play together at chapter meetings, weekend and summer workshops, and many ARS-sponsored events throughout the year. In 2024, the Society celebrates 85 years of service to its constituents.

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Your contribution is always welcomed.

- Send a letter to the editor
- Submit articles
- Send chapter news
- Submit photos for covers and articles

DEADLINES: Dec. 15 (Spring), March 15 (Summer), June 15 (Fall), and Sept. 15 (Winter).

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Articles may be sent as an attachment (doc or rtf preferred) or text in an email. Photos may be sent as unedited JPG or 300dpi TIF files (cover photos about 9.5" square x 300dpi; highlighting recorders; light background preferred; no cell phone photos).

TO SUBMIT: Email [editor@americanrecorder.org](mailto:editor@americanrecorder.org) or mail to AR, 632 Reed St., Philadelphia PA 19147.

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