



Victor Eijkhout

*in conversation with
Michael Graham*

Our centre-spread composition in this issue is by Victor Eijkhout, who combines his composition work with being a research scientist for the Texas Advanced Computing Center. He told me that his career as a musician is dominated by “Musical ADD” [Attention Deficit Disorder].

I cannot come across an instrument or style without needing to try it out. After progressing from recorder to flute, that being a more “serious” instrument, this affliction made me to varying degrees self-taught on piano, church organ, bass guitar, guitar, and lately “world music” instruments such as *xiao*, oud and *guqin*. I had a composing period in my high school years (the other day my *Allegro* for 11 Winds was discovered on IMSLP by an English ensemble and performed for the first time in 40 years), but I really have only been composing regularly, and then mostly for recorder, since about 2005.

Which other composers or styles of music are your main influences as a composer?

My influences range widely. Somewhat tongue-in-cheek I can claim my influences to be J S Bach, Charles Ives, and Autechre. The latter name, though British, may not be familiar to readers of The Recorder Magazine: they are a duo making fairly unique electronic music. Some of my compositions are definitely inspired by

electronic genres: my “Black Recorder” is inspired by the Black MIDI genre, and *Complechtre* is almost an IDM (“Intelligent Dance Music”) piece.

You write a lot for recorder ensembles in different combinations – what attracts you to writing for the recorder and how does writing for recorder differ from others?

Some of my recorder pieces come from a desire to write music for local ensembles: the chapter of the American Recorder Society that I conduct, and a quartet I play in. For instance, I started writing large group pieces because I don’t want to play 4-voice music with 20 people. Another consideration was that for quite a while we didn’t have any Contrabass recorder players, so I wrote a number of pieces with the C Great bass as the lowest voice. (When I finally acquired the first Contra in town, I wrote a showpiece for Contra and 3 Altos.) But there is also the conscious exploration: “I wonder if you can do this with recorders.”

What timbres or sonic colours are particular to the recorder for you?

I consciously try to expand the palette of colours of the recorder. For instance, I like to get the recorder to be rhythmical. When writing for a large ensemble, I try to contrast low against high recorders, using in

particular the higher instruments more as a “cherry on top” rather than their default position as the melody of a composition.

Have you collaborated with any recorder players or ensembles?

Occasionally I hear that professional players use my music for workshops. Since this mostly concerns pieces that can be downloaded freely on IMSLP, I don’t always hear of it, but I’d love to work more directly with players or ensembles. Of course, professional interest in my music is somewhat limited by the fact that I write more for 14 players than for four. One big exception: my Three Teahouses in Chengdu made it to the finals of the SRP Composers Competition in 2019, so your readers may have witnessed ensemble Block4 having a go at this piece.

Do you have any advice for players on how to approach Flow Counter Flow?

The main consideration is that, to the listener, the flow of notes should be almost seamless. That requires great rhythmic precision. The A2/T2 pairing should really connect to the phrases of the A1/T1 players. To get the first note of a phrase exactly on time, consider articulating – without actually sounding – a pickup

note coinciding with the last note of the other pair. Next, any group of 16th notes can be slurred. Tempo indications need not be obeyed strictly: they mostly express that, as the piece gets denser, tempo can come down a little; some advanced players may even start out faster than 130 beats-per-minute. At Section C the trill covers the three notes uninterrupted, but the breath should accent on the given rhythm: a kinda wah-wah-wah under the trill.

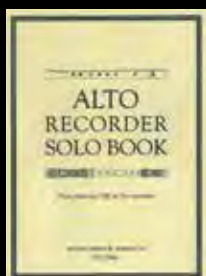
Many of our readers compose or arrange their own music – any top tips?

Don’t be afraid to explore. A chance question on the internet (“Is Ravel’s Pavane actually a pavane?”) got me into arranging romantic piano music for recorders. I’ve also dipped into popular music such as Albatross or “Music to watch girls by”. It’s a matter of finding music that resonates with you, but no genre is off-limits for arranging or composing inspiration.

Victor makes a lot of his music available free of charge on the vast online music database, IMSLP.org – you can also visit his home page which lists all of his compositions. Victor’s website also offers the option to “buy him a coffee” in return for his generosity: <https://www.eijkhout.net/>

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