

# Berkeley Festival a Treat For Recorder Enthusiasts



Swedish virtuoso Dan Laurin, center, poses with his Friday master class participants, from left, Olivia Hall, Gerry Greer, Jared White, and Bruce Teter.



Above left, from the left, violinist Enrico Onofri and recorderist/leader Giovanni Antonini of Il Giardino Armonico pose with Robert Cole of the Berkeley Festival. Above right, members of the recorder ensemble Sirena: from left, Frances Blaker, Roxanne Layton, Letitia Berlin, and Louise Carslake.



Above, on Sunday morning, Gene Murrow leads the "Pan-Pacific Recorder Play-In." At left, he and Valerie Horst try out square bass and contrabass recorders by Paetgold.



The recorder was front and center at the Berkeley Festival & Exhibition, held the first week of June at the University of California in Berkeley. A combination of festival events, ARS activities, and concurrent concerts sponsored by the San Francisco Early Music Society offered an opportunity to hear the recorder in many guises.

Holding center stage was the recital by Swedish virtuoso **Dan Laurin** on Saturday afternoon, June 8. Partnered by harpsichordist Edward Parmentier, Laurin dazzled amateurs and professionals alike with his command of the instrument and his interpretive commitment, prompting one seasoned recorderist to whisper: "I've never heard such technique in service of such imaginative musical ideas!" His all-Baroque program probably peaked early, with a rendition of Marin Marais' *Folies d'Espagne* that was pure wizardry.

Even more buzz at the Festival was created by the American debut of **Il Giardino Armonico**, the exciting Italian ensemble led by recorderist **Giovanni Antonini**. They had to scramble their two programs when a violist failed to make the trip, but their improvisatory, flamboyant style of string playing (which is somewhat reined in when Antonini's recorder is soloing) arrived intact. Those that believe reports of 18th-century string playing as being all-consuming, ecstatic events (J.E. Galliard on Corelli: "His countenance will be distorted, his eyeballs roll as in an agony, and he gives in so much to what he is doing that he doth not look like the same man") felt they had finally heard what all the fuss had been about. Others could not recognize their notion of Baroque style in the swirling, throbbing phrasing, and sat on their hands. A ciaccona for two violins and continuo by Tarquinio Merula totally transported most of the audience, and Antonini's polishing off of the Vivaldi C Major sopranino concerto, RV 444, had them standing and cheering at the end.

**Musica Pacifica's** Thursday concert promoted their newly released recording of Bach trio sonatas in a bracing performance of BWV 530, visited Italy (by way of a Salomone Rossi sonata for recorder, violin, and continuo) and France (in a characterful interpretation of a suite from Rameau's *Les Indes Galantes*), and concluded with Telemann's Quartet in G Major for recorder, oboe, violin, and continuo.

A new recorder quartet, **Sirena**, announced itself with a concert of Renaissance, Baroque, and contemporary music on Sunday, June 9. Members Frances Blaker, Letitia Berlin, Louise Carslake, and

Roxanne Layton sounded confident and secure as a Baroque ensemble, especially in a Vivaldi concerto and a Boyce symphony that featured Layton. Modern works included Hirose's *Idyll 1*, van Nieuwkerk's *Kadanza*, Arvo Pärt's *Summa* (arranged by Frances Blaker), and Paul Leenhouts' *Tango für Elise*.

**Frances Feldon** offered a concert of music from the French Baroque on Friday afternoon, assisted by David Barnett, Roy Whelden, Richard Savino, and John Schneiderman. Playing instruments by Morgan and Beha in works by Dornel, Philidor (both Anne Danican and Pierre), Couperin, Montéclair, and Michel de la Barre, Feldon produced a clear, focused tone, incorporating in an entirely natural way the techniques she has studied while writing her doctoral document on "aesthetics and vibrato in the French Baroque."

Perhaps the greatest concentration of recorder talent occurred on Saturday's fourth annual "Great Recorder Relay," organized by the American Recorder Society with financial support from its Andrew Acs Memorial Fund and with the help of Israel Stein, Britt Ascher, Ken Rubardt and members of the East Bay Chapter of the ARS. The series of forty-minute recitals began with works for unaccompanied recorder performed by Seattle's **Charles Coldwell**. Playing instruments by von Huene and Jean-Luc Boudreau, and introducing each number with well-considered commentary, Coldwell presented works that imitated bird songs: selections from *The Bird Fancier's Delight*, Boismortier's *Sixième Suite*, Op. 35, and "Engels Nachtgael" from van Eyck's *Fluyten Lust-Hof*, pieces that showed off his secure fingers, good intonation, and clear, round sound.

Second on the program was Second Wind, the Boston-based duo of **Roxanne Layton** and **Roy Sansom**, who never fail to make a connection with their audience, whether in works of deep emotion or high humor. They gave the West Coast premiere of Layton's *Canyons*, a work employing digital delay that was written in memory of her father after a hiking trip; introduced Sansom's *Twin Suction Vortex*, which pictures the moment that a tornado splits into two; and gave the world premiere of the work they commissioned from Pete Rose—*Pendulum* for alto and bass recorders. Taking its cue from the pendula in a clock museum, the work swings back and forth between the blues and a quotation from Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and plays with ostinatos, clapping percussion, and ethnomusical transformations.

## ARS Honors Martha Bixler

At the presentation of the ARS Distinguished Achievement Award to Martha Bixler at the Berkeley Festival on June 8, Constance M. Primus spoke these words of tribute:

This is a very special occasion—because, for the first time, the ARS is presenting its prestigious Distinguished Achievement Award to a woman—our own Martha Bixler!

While honoring Martha, however, we should also honor all of the women who have contributed their time and talents to the American recorder movement. The first to come to mind is Suzanne Bloch, who, in 1939, organized the ARS. Later, in the 1950s and '60s, Winifred Jaeger assisted Erich Katz in expanding the ARS from New York to California, all across the U.S. and Canada. Wini is still active with her chapter in the Seattle area. Also we should acknowledge Gloria Ramsey as a pioneer recorder performer and teacher on the West Coast, as Martha was on the East Coast. Gloria is still active professionally in Southern California....

But probably no one person has given more to the ARS than Martha Bixler.... She had a music degree from Yale, where she had sung in Hindemith's Collegium Musicum, and this had sparked an interest in early music.... In New York, she joined the Musician's Workshop, a small chorus that sang early music, conducted by LaNoue Davenport. When she heard LaNoue play the recorder, she thought (in her own words!), "My God, can the recorder really sound like that?" and decided to take lessons. Soon thereafter she played as part of LaNoue's consort, the Manhattan Recorder Consort, in a concert sponsored by the American Recorder Society.

Because of her strong musical background, she soon became an "Assistant Musical Director" at the ARS—which meant taking turns conducting meetings of the Society. "And," as she says, "then getting sucked into various other jobs—the first of which was to help LaNoue edit the *Newsletter*." So when the *Newsletter* was turned into a magazine she became the *American Recorder*'s first editor.

Martha was one of the first ARS Board members and served on the Board when the Society was incorporated in 1959. "After that," she says, "I was on the Board many times, but I was always heavily involved with the ARS whether on the Board or off...." Martha was ARS president from 1976 to 1980 and again from 1988 to 1990. She continues to volunteer for the Society as editor of the *Members' Library Editions* and ... by writing the ARS History. She says that she owes her entire career in early music (as a performer, teacher, writer, and editor) to LaNoue Davenport and the American Recorder Society. But, in turn, the American Recorder Society, and the whole American recorder movement, owe much of their vitality to Martha Bixler! Thank you, Martha, for your many achievements!



Left to right: ARS Executive Director Gail Nickless, Martha Bixler, and ARS President Gene Murrow.

The playing of Dutch-trained **Hanneke van Proosdij** exhibited first-class technique and rock-solid breath support in music by van Eyck and Schopp and in arrangements from the Susanne van Soldt manuscript (1599). Most intriguing were her own two pieces: *Reflections II*, a setting of a lyric by Pierre Mathieu (1562-1621) in which long, straight sung tones, clearly intoned by Amy Green, were commented on by the bass recorder, and *Mael*, ("conversation" in Old English) in which a bass recorder, spoken recitation, and ghetto blaster competed for attention, without understanding one another.

Next came the West Coast debut of the **American Recorder Quartet** (Corinne Hillebrand, Roxanne Layton, Judith Linsenberger, and Roy Sansom). They revived the For Four Recorder Quartet's inventive arrangement of Sweelinck's keyboard variations on "Unter der Linden grüne" (see AR, September 1990) and a new arrangement by Roy Sansom of Domenico Scarlatti's Sonata in D, K. 492, a wonderfully successful romp. Contemporary offerings included Stan Davis's champagne version of Paul Desmond's *Take Five*, and a gripping performance of Hirose's *Lamentation*.

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