

THE RECORDER PLAYER AND THE FLUTE MASTER

Encounters with Barthold Kuijken

Introduction

Barthold Kuijken is one of the leading performers on the baroque flute and often appears with such early music specialists as his brothers, Sigiswald (violin) and Wieland (viola da gamba), as well as with Paul Dombrecht (oboe), Robert Kohnen, Bob van Asperen and Gustav Leonhardt (harpsichord). In the past he has made several recordings with Frans Brüggen including Francois Couperin's Les Concerts Royaux. He himself has played recorder since he was a child and has even made a number of recordings on the instrument though he insists he is only an “amateur” recorder player. He is currently professor of baroque flute at the Royal Conservatories of Brussels and the Hague.

What follows is Kuijken's lecture and my follow-up interview with him during the “*Early Music Days*” in Sopron, Hungary from June 24- July 1, 2006. His lecture was attended by many recorder players, flautists, keyboardists, singers, dancers, and others enjoying this excellent summer music school and festival. My comments are (*in italics within parentheses*).

Part 1

Ornamentation Between Speaking and Singing

A LECTURE BY BARTHOLD KUIJKEN
SOPRON, HUNGARY
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I remember that when Program Director Maria Liszkay asked me to give the title of this lecture I said, “Ornamentation Between Speaking and Singing” and she found that pretty unclear, confused. It was a great advantage for me because then I could work with improvisation, association. I didn't know what I wanted to say yet, so I left it unclear.

This title, “Ornamentation Between Speaking and Singing” I could bend in all directions. And since I'm a musician and not a musicologist, don't expect a scientific lecture from me. Don't expect any recipes: this is how it must be, this is how it could not be. I don't want to do that, and I declare myself unable to do that. But I want to have a look at ornamentation partly because I've often felt that it is not always clearly understood what the function or the possibilities of ornamentation could be.

The first thing is that somehow ornamentation seems to be very fundamental to human beings. We paint our own bodies: makeup or any other kind of paint, tattoos, piercing, clothing, jewelries, whatever. We seem to need ornamentation. And we even ornament tools. Even harpsichords and flutes are ornamented. We ornament our houses. We even ornament our graves.

Now, if I look at ornamentation today, or at the “ornamentation” people wear, it strikes me

that ornamentation has become very egocentric, personal. It's like shouting, "Look at me!" In earlier times, ornamentation often seems to have had more ritual or symbolic meanings. It could be linked to sun, moon, earth, gods, elements, etc. So, not only, "Look at me!" as now, but really also, "I try to make a connection between me and things around me which are probably bigger than me."

I'm always very touched when I go visit some "primitive" archeological exhibits, to see that those people used ornamentation obviously with an aim of expressing something, giving a meaning, making a connection. And it might be in that sense that our good old Quantz is using the terminology "essential ornaments." So, those essential ornaments seem to express our essence, our being. I think we always could remember that an ornament is not an easy thing, just another trill, another appoggiatura, a little vibrato, but that there could be something more behind it.

When I hear ornamentation today – it's enough to listen to a Couperin piece or something like that – all too often I feel that they sound rather like a thin layer of varnish over a piece, or some superficial babbling instead of reinforcing the piece. And in that way I often hear that ornamentation really shows that we are bored with the piece as it is and may try to make it a little bit better by adding some frills: a kind of *horror vacui*, the fear of an empty space.

So, if this lecture would have any purpose, it would be to go against this sense of inflation or devaluation, and try to have "re"valuation, trying to find, or to give, significance to ornamentation. I don't know how it is in Hungarian, but in English, and in many other languages, another word for significance is "sense." And sense has so many other words derived from it like sensibility, sensitivity, sensuality (even non-sense...) They all mean something slightly different, but they're all linked to that same word, sense.

We have, of course, the idea of direction (*pointing*). We have the idea of goal, purpose (or the absence of it: "It makes no sense"). Our Flemish and Dutch word "*zin*" (the translation of sense) also has a very physical meaning: when we say, "*Ik heb geen zin*" it means, "I don't want to, I have no lust, no desire, I have no pleasure in doing it." We speak about the five senses, again strongly linked to the body. And then in Flemish and Dutch we also have the word *zin* as a translation for the grammatical unit, phrase. It's all one word: *zin* is a phrase, is the pleasure you have, is the purpose you have. We have a very poor language, you see, there is only one word for so many things!

If I were to try to make a synthesis of all these meanings, I could have something like: a phrase, a grammatical phrase, without direction, without goal, without purpose, without wanting, desiring to express something, without appealing to our senses – to my senses when I speak, to your senses when you listen – makes no sense.

And then, in fact, just as the word sense is linked as much to language grammatically, as to body, I would link ornaments to language and to body. If ornament is linked to language, it must take up its function in language. It must become organized in syntax, in grammar, in vocabulary, in pronunciation. It becomes part of language, not something like ketchup, which you can pour over it indiscriminately. On the other hand, if ornament is to be linked with body, it's something you feel. Feeling is a kind of movement. Let's not forget that emotion and movement come from the same word *movere*, that's latin which is, "to move." So, emotion is not a latin sticker on a pharmacy bottle, but is something physical happening with you, in you. In all languages we say, "I am touched, I am moved, I am raptured, I am transported, I am . . . whatever, out of myself, etc". So, if we really remember that emotion is physical, we might have made a big step.

It has now become fashion even in psychology to have a kind of opposition between "brain and belly". Between, let's say, intelligence and guts... But, we all too easily forget that it's all you, all me. It is my belly, it's my head. It's my guts, it's my intelligence. So, we don't need to see them as enemies fighting each other, they could just as well shake hands and collaborate. My brains have body and my belly has brains, hopefully!

In music, I think that ornamentation is active on both these levels: it belongs to brains (structured language) as well as to the emotional body language. Ornaments can help us to express these things, to communicate these things, because anyway music, or theatre, whatever art, is a language. It's something made to get a message across to somebody else. And if ornaments can help us there, so much the better.

I must give meaning, just as well to my improvised ornaments as to my carefully prepared ones. In ornamentation the composer has been so kind to provide for us, take Bach sonatas, it's just the same: we must let ornamentation operate on both of these levels, intelligence and emotion. They'll become more complete and express our total being, not remain just a little outward thing, a finger movement which makes a trill between F# and G. But, then we have to recognize written out ornaments as ornaments, and not as main notes.

I'll move a bit closer to the title, "Ornamentation Between Speaking and Singing." Let's first have a look at speaking, and ask ourselves, "How do we speak?" If I listen to radio or television news speakers, they say with exactly the same voice:

300 PEOPLE KILLED IN AN EARTHQUAKE. TODAY NICE WEATHER.

And since we listen so much to radio and television, we almost start to speak like that. And, of course, when we speak like that, we play/sing like that just as well. Everything nice and even, no exceptions, no risks, everything clear, no problems.

Another more recent and dangerous development are microphones and loudspeakers so that teachers, lawyers, priests, actors (even popular singers) don't bother to develop their voice anymore. They can speak just badly and everyone will understand them, or will hear them at least. Whereas in earlier times, if you were a teacher or a priest, you had to study eloquence, you had to study rhetorics. It was part of your job. Now, in modern theatres, above the stage they have little microphones, and in the public area you have little loudspeakers so that not even actors need to train their voice anymore as they used to do.

I remember that as small kids we had some records at home, of classical french theatre pieces (Molière, Racine), performed by "La Comédie Française" in Paris; they were speaking with incredibly great inflections of pitch and lots of vibrato. If you listen to the speeches of General de Gaulle, for instance, he would speak of, "*La Fra-a-a-nce!*" (*spoken with crescendo and vibrato*) and now they would say, "La France." (*spoken flatly*)

There are still recordings of actors like De Vriendt or even more Moissi, from the beginning of 20th century in Vienna: when you hear them, you think of Japanese Kabuki. When Arnold Schoenberg uses his famous "Sprechgesang" in his Pierrot Lunaire, he's basically writing down what these people at the time were doing anyway: he didn't really invent anything, he just tried to write it down.

Do poetry recitals still exist here in Hungary? A whole evening of one person reciting poetry (by memory), not a poet reading from his own works. I remember that I heard these when I was a kid: they didn't speak with an even, flat television tone, there were lots of inflections and dramatic things and wit, etc. As with those early theatre recordings, this kind of declamation would sound strange today, we'd accuse it of being exaggerated, unnatural, whatever that is... But there is a great difference between speaking and declamation, which we tend to forget.

I give these examples to show that when we use the word "speaking," we think we all know what we are talking about, we expect everybody to understand what we mean. But apparently, one century ago speaking, or public speaking, was not what it is today. So I should admit that I don't know what "speaking", on itself, means.

We might have the same problem with the other word, "singing." That, what we call good singing, beautiful singing ("bel canto") today was not necessarily considered good singing the day before yesterday.

We could ask the question, "Why do we sing?" or "When do we sing?" We might just as well say, "I love you", we don't need to *sing* it. Maybe we need to sing if words are not enough. If we are so happy that we can't just say "I'm happy," then we start singing. That means also that in such a moment your emotion becomes stronger than in speaking. You need more pitches or you need more notes for one syllable. The more emotion you have, the longer your coloratura becomes.

How can ornaments help us in this singing/speaking business? Let's first look at the difference between "essential ornamentation" and "at random alternatives" – literal translations of

Quantz's "wesentliche Verzierungen" and "willkürliche Veränderungen". Essential ornaments are the little things you could express with a sign, a little appoggiatura, a gruppetto, etc., whereas in free ornaments you add lots of notes.

When I look at ornamentation treatises explaining about the trill and mordent, etc., it strikes me always that they sometimes describe the function of these ornaments in contradictory terms: they can either be underlining or stressing the word, or otherwise make an easy gesture, an easy transition to the next word. Of course, ornaments also can help relatively inexpressive instruments such as a harpsichord or the organ (I don't dare say the recorder..., I mean instruments where you don't have so very much influence on the sound: you do have some, and you always would wish you had more). So on those, let me say very brutally, inexpressive instruments, ornaments can help you to fake flexibility, to fake duration, to fake accents.

I will give a very simple example, a piece by Francois Couperin, a harpsichord piece (*plays the first measure or two from the first movement of the first "Concert Royal" on the harpsichord*). If the first note of the melody, one that needs duration, is played unornamented, it "dies" pretty soon. So what is Couperin doing? He puts a mordent on it. We could then choose either to have that mordent as an accent on the beginning, or put it later as a faked swell. On an Italian harpsichord with relatively short sound, we probably should make a longer mordent than on a longer-sounding later French harpsichord. But, when I play that piece on traverso, I have more choices. Of course I can play the ornament which Couperin printed. I can play a short mordent (or a longer one, but that's more noisy than I want). Then I also have the possibility of shaping the note with a *messa di voce*, I could even do something the harpsichord really can not do: add a flattement. In fact, I don't need that ornament. When Couperin writes a mordent, this probably shows that he feels something must happen, that the sound must stay alive. On the harpsichord I cannot just play an unornamented note because it dies.

Now it is nice that the same ornament, this mordent, which as the name says, "bites", besides being used for stressing a note, also is used for making a very nice, easy transition (*plays example on flute*). Now it's not an accent, it's the opposite: without it, the passage would be too square. It's good to see and to realize very consciously that all ornaments can be played in so many different ways.

Appoggiaturas, too, can be very much stressed or very caressing and light. One of the most beautiful examples of a long appoggiatura is the flutes' b natural in the final c-minor chord of Bach's St. Matthew's Passion. But just as we don't know what "speaking" really means, the word "appoggiatura" can mean so many different things. Even authorities such as Quantz and C.P.E. Bach don't always agree... (also about other ornaments)

Let's analyze the case of the appoggiatura, and make a series of distinctions:

- appoggiaturas can fall on the beat or before the beat
- if before the beat, they can resolve before, on or after the beat
- they can be long or short (let's not yet talk about how long...)
- they can be accented or unaccented.

I tried to put that in a scheme, and find 14 different possibilities (not yet considering how long a long appoggiatura should be, or whether the appoggiatura itself should stay even, make crescendo or diminuendo, or be itself ornamented...)

Appoggiatura

<i>ON</i> the beat	{ Long		{ + accent
	{		{ - accent
	{		
	{ Short		{ + accent
			{ - accent
<i>BEFORE</i> the beat	{ Long	{ <i>resolution before</i>	{ + accent
	{	{	{ - accent
	{	{	
	{	{ <i>resolution on</i>	{ + accent
	{	{	{ - accent
	{	{	
	{	{ <i>resolution after</i>	{ + accent
	{	{	{ - accent
	{	{	
	{ Short	{ <i>resolution before</i>	{ + accent
		{	{ - accent
		{	
	{ <i>resolution on</i>	{ + accent	
		{ - accent	

These realizations of the appoggiatura sound different. Basically different. Importantly different. Of course this looks very “brain”, but at least gives an idea of the multiple possibilities to choose from. But if there is a choice, we have to choose, the importance often lies in the fact of choosing, more than in the particular choice we make. I will need to make a conscious, efficient choice, in order to best translate my meaning/feeling to the audience.

We could make the same kind of analysis of trills, of gruppettos, etc. You could do that yourself just as well as I can. I don't need to do it now, here...

One remark about trills: I would conceive that a trill happens when you are so emotional that you couldn't hold your voice “s t e a d y” (*spoken with a trembling voice*). The same for vibrato. The trill is an organized vibrato, if you wish.

And then, just to make things more complicated, have a look at Francesco Geminiani's Violin School, because he will make combinations of up to four or five of those little ornaments, one after the other, all on the same note. And happily he tells us what they should express. It's very nice because Geminiani's one of the only ones who would really say what each ornament should express, not only how we should make it. I will read just one example, where he speaks about a “beat” (a mordent). He says, “This is proper to express several passions as, for example, if it be performed with strength and continued long, it expresses fury, anger, resolution, etc. If it be played less strong and shorter, it expresses mirth, satisfaction, etc. But if you play it quite soft, and if you swell the note, it might then denote horror, fear, grief, lamentation, etc. By making it short and swelling the note gently, it may express affection and pleasure.” In other words you can do everything with it... and what you do with it should be what you want an ornament to do to the audience.

Here is an example of Geminiani's combinations of ornaments: a quarter note with a little appoggiatura, holding, mordent, with a turn, and then a little exclamation with a crescendo. And that's one note. So instead of playing just cool, we would do something like (*plays the aforementioned highly ornamented note on the flute*). But it was a very bad example of mine because I only played the outside of it, but not the inside.

So, just let me put the things together. You could say that all those essential ornaments operate on the level of syllables. It is one note which is ornamented, one syllable. We could even

say that each ornament represents a kind of initial consonant of a syllable. We can sound a bit “P”, a “Q”, an “R”, an “S”, a “Z”, etc. So making an ornament actually means: pronunciation. (It's very funny to see that in many singing treatises, pronunciation is the very last chapter – I'm afraid that many instrumentalists and singers don't always read as far as that last chapter, or don't always *study* as far as the last chapter...)

Now syllables only make sense if they are organized in a phrase, so we have to talk about phrasing as well. There is an interesting concept which was formulated at the end of the 19th century by Hugo Riemann (you might know his famous *Musiklexikon*; he was one of the important German musicologists of that time). One of his dogmas about phrasing in music was that you should go towards a climax by pushing. One of his other rules is that “music goes per upbeat.” That means, reading that argument backwards: if you don't play “per upbeat”, you're not a musician. He adds that, when a melody moves up, it makes a crescendo and accelerando, or when it goes down, it makes a ritardando and diminuendo. These same phrasing principles I hear in 99% of musicians today, Early music or Modern music, it's just the same, that kind of drive behind it, pushing your way through it, crescendo when you move up.

It's so strange that a generation or so before Riemann you could still read the “good” notes can wait. A good note can come . . . late. Not, a good note “cancomelate”. I won't say that Riemann's ideas are bad. I would say that it was probably very well for the music of his time, but not necessarily for Early music. So, apparently, taste changes. And, of course, taste does not change from the 5th to the 6th of July. It takes a couple of generations. You feel this move towards more linear phrasing happening from the end of the 18th century. Indeed, the longer crescendos, something very new and revolutionary at the time of their “invention” (Mannheim school, middle of 18th century), would become fashion and they would eventually become the governing principle, whereas the more “elastic”, more differently shaded phrasing with “good” and “bad” notes, and “good” and “bad” subdivisions, seems to disappear in these greater waves of extended crescendo-diminuendo. Together with this more detailed phrasing, the speech elements of music must get lost. We *can't* have any more differences between accented and unaccented syllables: when you start to make long general crescendos, the text is gone.

Why I am saying all of this is, in fact, to show that in ornamentation – coming back to the theme – these small ornaments will actually underline your pronunciation: you do not need the heavy sauce...

Now the free ornaments can help us to express what is lying under the text: the emotions. And if we flatten them out so nicely in one line, there is not enough differentiation to tell which word is really important, which syllable is important. Intervals can show us which note deserves an ornament, which notes are emotionally important (if you get excited, your voice will change its pitch). Not only the notes falling on the “good” beats can carry ornamentation, also “bad” notes can become interesting because of context. One example would be the beginning of Bach's flute sonata in E major. The ornamentation he makes (in the first measure of the first movement) is clearly an ornamentation of that G# on the 4th 8th note. According to the rules of good and bad beats, the B (first note of the phrase) is good, the G# is bad, F# is good, etc. But he writes an ornament on that so-called “bad” note. That must mean that in his supposed text, this “bad” G# note was rich enough, so emotionally rich, that it *needs* an ornament. Any suggestions for a text where the second syllable expresses something touching?

(A person in the audience suggests the hot weather.)

Yes, but I mean exactly on these pitches, in this rhythm.

(Another person suggests, “It is much too hot.”)

You wouldn't have “is” for this kind of ornament. It *iiiiis* much too hot.

(A Dutch person suggests, “Such ni i i i ice weather.” Kujken works with this, but it was clear perhaps to only the few native speakers of English in the audience that “nice” is a bland word, maybe unworthy of ornamentation.) Such nice weather, such nice food, such nice people: “nice” becomes unimportant. It's about weather, about the people, about the food. We could accept that also, but then we cannot make an ornament on G#: it should then fall on the following note.

Already from a small example like this one, it is clear that the complete picture, with the combination of essential ornaments to underline the subtle changes of our text, and free ornamentation to express the emotions under the text, cannot be expressed on the printed page!

(Another, elder, audience member, not a musician, then asks, "You mentioned De Gaulle before. Was Hitler, for example, a master of ornamentation or not?")

Yes, to bad purpose, I think, but he was a master. Not all masters are good masters. He was a master of manipulation, you could say. I mean he could speak so that people would believe him. And . . . unfortunately they did believe. But the same is true of any musician, of any politician, of any actor: if you can speak in such a way that you are convincing, that the message you have gets across, then I think that you have done your job. But we are responsible for the message we give. Also as a musician we choose whether it is nice *weather*, or *nice* weather. We choose where we want to put the stress, where we *need* to have an ornament to make clear what we say.

And what I try to do, to express, in fact, in this lecture is also, let's accept the idea that ornaments can be useful, that they are not something foreign to music, but something intimately belonging to music. If we don't recognize them as ornaments, they become useless, senseless, nonsense. It's the same for singers and for instrumentalists: we have to find our own text. My main suggestion for practicing: start with vocal music. Start with a text in your own language and play it until the very last drop of emotion or sentence, sense, significance has come out. Just take any Schubert lied or Bach "Aus Liebe" or whatever, know the text intimately, and sing or play that vocal part until the text really gets out, fully felt and articulated, with pronunciation and declamation. But you'll notice that in "Aus Liebe", those two words "Aus Liebe" come always on different harmony and on different intervals: so many different kinds of "Liebe"! This looking at the different settings of the same text will make text repetition meaningful, understandable or at least bearable. You don't want to hear (you even cannot sing) always the same "Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben"!

At the end of this talk about ornaments, we could say there is no music without meaning, without text, not even Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words" (*a collection of piano pieces*).

Good luck!

Part 2

Advice for a Recorder Player

A FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW
WITH BARTHOLD KUIJKEN
ON JULY 1, 2006

The other recorder players studied with Anneke Boeke, as I have enjoyed doing the previous two years. But since Kuijken does not come to the Early Music Days every year, I wanted to meet and study with him this time. As it turned out, I was the only recorder student in a class of traverso and modern flute players. All of them were working on either J. S. Bach Sonatas or Telemann Fantasias. During the first of my two private lessons with Kuijken, I worked on the Telemann F major Sonata. For the second lesson I chose just to sit and ask questions about his lecture, the art of rhetoric, becoming a better recorder player, buying new recorders, and the voice flute.

Bill Blackford: I would like first to clarify a few things from your lecture. Could you tell me more about La Comedie Francaise?

Barthold Kuijken: La Comedie Francaise was the most official, famous French theatre troupe in Paris. It was an institution. If an actor said he would belong to La Comedie Francaise, it's like, you play at least in the Berlin Philharmonic, something like that. That was the status of La Comedie Francaise. That's the top you can get. And they produced records of the great classical French plays. And that was a kind of authority. Part of the aim of producing those records was just to show how it is done, not it *should* be done, but how it *is*. It was not a question. Like in Paris Conservatory, it sometimes was not a question, but rather a statement: That piece you play like this. And, of course, no mistakes! Come on. You play it until you got it right and then you have the next piece. That was a certain the way of teaching.

Rote memory?

Yes, just a kind of practice it until you are able to do it. So that was just to say about these records of theatre. I would love to find them, but we don't have them anymore. I checked, but they are gone. Probably I should be able to find them.

You mentioned Hugo Riemann writing about 'music going per upbeat' and that when a melody moves up, it makes crescendo and accelerando or makes a retardando and diminuendo when moving down. What did you mean?

Well, when the melody moves up, they would have you make a crescendo and accelerando. When it goes down, the opposite. As if melody were the only thing which counts and would not go anymore by harmonical stress, by rhythmic organization within a bar, but melody, melody, melody, melody, melody. Is there a bass? Where? Where? So, this very cheap way of phrasing that automatically when the melody goes up, you make a crescendo and you speed up, you push, in all possible meanings. And when melody goes down, you just do the opposite. And I think this is so incredibly simple, and you hear it done in Early music, in Modern music, all the same. In fact, if you listen to recordings, you realize that is a very efficient way of phrasing. Everybody can understand, even, I would say, musically illiterate people will feel, "Okay, something happened." And I have known so many conductors who say, "We meet at bar five." That's it, and then from there on we go down, and

then you have the next meeting point, which is a bit primitive, somehow.

After my next question trying to clarify something, Kuijken doesn't remember the exact words he had used in his lecture and says,

But, I mean, I cannot give a lecture from a fully written out text. I'm absolutely unable to do that. And I refuse, also. So, what I have is a kind of outline, just words, or an order of ideas more or less, a structure. Because it's hopeless. If I start to *read* a text, I don't want to say *that, now*. I wanted to write that five days ago or the night before.

And if you had it written out, you think you could just copy it and say, okay read this, and give it to the people.

Yes, exactly. Shouldn't that be the same for a composer? That, if we play just as if you would read a written text, then we can just as well, as performers, make a photocopy of the piece and hand it to the audience and say, bye, bye. Yeah? They can, I mean certainly here at a summer music school they can all read music, so why should we need to play it? We can give it to them, have them read it. So, there must be something extra, probably, as a performer. We need just a little bit of, maybe improvisation, or something which makes that text different from like it was just photocopied.

I work as an elementary school teacher full time. I will not have the opportunity to study at a conservatory nor probably ever study with a professional recorder player, so I need to know how I can study baroque recorder music on my own with the goal of being the best player I can be given my situation. Can you tell me about the fundamental things I must know and do? What would the best conservatories require of me? What do you require of your students?

Well, basically you don't need a conservatoire to become a good musician. I mean, Bach never went to conservatoire and he was not such a bad musician. Mozart either. So, a conservatoire has become something of an institution. But, in earlier times you would probably become an apprentice to somebody who could play well. Like a carpenter... if you wanted to become a carpenter as a young boy of six or seven, probably you first had to dust his workshop and then go through it. This is only what would have been the ideal situation. In a way you could even say you don't even need to be able to read notes in order to be a good musician. I know so many people who could not read and are fantastic musicians. Among the great singers there are a number of those who have to have their accompanist play the tune for them until they know it, and then they sing it and it's so beautiful. Notation is helpful, at the most, not more: the notation *is* not the music. This is for me one of the essential things – and we have to learn to read it and decipher it somehow.

So, if you would go about that just alone, I would say first thing I would do probably is learn to play the piano. You learn a “complete” instrument and you should also ask your piano teacher to give you some lessons in elementary harmony. How you go from one chord to the next. Of course, there are books which explain that to you, but it's often more easily done just by the example. I think it is *so* essential for all that music you love, because it is *based* upon harmony, and it doesn't exist without it.

How very few pieces are there for just one solo instrument, in the 18th century? Violin and cello have some, but even not many if you remember that there are a couple of million violin sonatas, and you might find twenty solo pieces. For the flute it's even much less. We have just twelve little fantasias by Telemann, some Bach & son and a few other things which are really bad music, and basically that's it. So, composers were wise enough to know that a melody all alone without a bass doesn't work. We would not have Schubert Lieder without a piano. Evidently, there was a piano. So, we could say that after the Gregorian chant, pure isolated melody disappeared. It first got organized into polyphony, and/or needed a “fundament” of a chord instrument. Between

Gregorian chant and Debussy there are almost no, or virtually no, pieces for one unaccompanied instrument without very strong harmonic roots.

String players can play 'organ' by double stopping the strings, of course, which they have to do in Bach pieces, and flute players had to suggest that, since we can't play that. And it takes a Debussy to have a piece which is not based on harmony. Think of *Syrinx*: it seems to float and make sense without a piano under it. Even it's pretty impossible to write a good piano accompaniment to it. Some people tried and it's always miserable. So during a long stretch of time everything was based on harmony: the vertical idea of notes sounding together.

So, that's why I would learn the keyboard. Once you learned the piano, it doesn't need to be very well, but just well enough that you can help yourself, play your recorder sonata first on the piano so that you *know*, you *feel* in your own body, with your two hands together, which notes sound simultaneously and how that feels. Recognize what happens to your recorder "melody". Even without being able to play the keyboard, you can go to the keyboard and play a chord of just two notes, just with two fingers (*plays an interval on a harpsichord*) How does that feel? (*another interval*)_Or how does that feel, or how does this feel? (*another interval*) In what place of your body do you feel "touched"? Each time your melody is sustained by another harmony, it shows another emotion. Although once you know it, it's not only the emotion, it becomes the intention, also. When I do it like this, that noise speaks to me and makes me feel something.

Now as a performer, I see these kind of things on the paper. I see that the bass has a C# while the flute plays a C natural, and I have the experience, I know what that means, so the emotion will precede the sound, and that's why I can express it. If I play only the other way around, that I am moved by what I hear, I'm one beat too late. It's like in speaking, you better know what you are going to say before you say it!

Can you think of some required listening or reading? I have the Quantz book, but you mentioned Mattheson in one of the lessons. What about his books or others?

Mattheson – too many words. Mattheson is at least one meter of books in pretty tough German. And, if he would be a fantastic composer, I would be curious to know what he has to say. If I hear his pieces and they are so, let's say, mediocre, then I always have a kind of (*sighs*) I don't know. Do you want to read all of that? Some of it is, of course, interesting, but Quantz is a *very* good book for that. You could have some of the French, the Hotteterre treatise would be good, a very good kind of antidote against Quantz. And with these two you go a long way. I always like very much the C.P.E. Bach harpsichord treatise, but of course that's a repertory in which recorder had no place anymore, or hardly.

But would it help if I wanted to study keyboard?

It would certainly help if you'd want to study keyboard. It's a tough book. I mean, it's a book where he goes fast. Studying keyboard should be done with somebody, so that you can be shown immediately in real time.

What are the most common mistakes made by recorder students and/or professional instrumentalists who play baroque music?

Well, my first thing would be that too many people don't listen to harmony. And by not being aware of harmony, they lack a fundamental sense of rhythm because rhythm is not something automatic, but is provoked by a harmony which has tension and which has to relax. (*gesturing with his hands*). It's like a heartbeat. It's not an automatic boom, boom, boom, boom, boom! So, for me these are the most common mistakes you hear all over the place. One of the other things I often find with recorder players and other wind players, is that articulation isn't always very thought of. I mean, (*mumbles some words as an example*). But if you would use articulation really with the aim of

declamation, it would be better. It's the difference between just talking or being on stage and reciting poetry, for instance. We could not just talk flatly. So, articulation is certainly one of the main points.

How can I best approach the recorder as professional musicians may have done in the 18th century and avoid unknowingly using approaches from later periods?

Well, this is the kind of thing which you would read about in Quantz, when he speaks about how long notes should be, where the stresses would come, etc. We must recognize that music of all times has a kind of grammar and syntax, and that as a language changes through times, our syntax and grammar of music has changed, also. Obeying Quantz, who is incredibly complete, would get you indeed a very long way, and quite different from what we often hear today, also in Early Music. But we have this idea, as I said about Mr. Riemann, that we have to lead somewhere, we have to push somewhere, we have to go somewhere in a way which is a bit impatient, maybe. I could imagine that . . . before a . . . good word . . . you take . . . time. Not, youtaketime. Something like this. Is that an answer?

What must I know about rhetoric? Are there common phrases or rhetorical devices in baroque recorder music which I must know, and if so what are they, or how can I come to know them?

There I would say *easy!* Take vocal pieces of the time you want to play. So you could take any simple Handel aria. If you like to play Handel sonatas, go to a library, pick out one of his operas, have a look at the arias there. They have text, and it will usually be Italian, but you are able to find some English, if your Italian is not that good, because it makes no sense to me to play vocal music if you don't know the text. I would be ashamed singing in Russian, but so many singers do it all the time. I mean, if they have to sing "Boris Godunov", they will have to sing it in Russian, [and] they have no, not the faintest idea of what they're singing, but they learn it phonetically, which is strange to me. I couldn't. So, that means if I would work with Handel at this moment, if your Italian is not good, well try to find an English work of Handel, for example "Messiah". And then speak the text he has written for the sopranos, let's say. Speak it, and speak it as you find it written in the music. Goes up, goes down, with rhythm etc., and you come very close to declamation. So if you can *speak* a text to its fullest expression, then play it afterward, the same. Vocal music is the easiest approach to everything.

It would be the same for me teaching young children, whatever instrument. I *really* would not want to start to have them play scales, etc. Let them play tunes they know with words they know, so that immediately their phrasing falls at the right place because it speaks, it smiles to them. And if they have a crazy piece of which they have no text, make one. Just now, try to make one which feels right, where the good words come at a good spot, etc., which they feel makes sense somehow, and let them play, or let them make a text. It can be stupid. It's absolutely no problem. And you could even then have the experiment of having them make two completely different texts for the same melody and see how different they would have to play it, which is for me a good lesson: in an instrumental piece, there is no text, so I could try to imagine one, or another one, or another one, or another one, and I have to choose. And, of course, after a certain point you do not invent *real* text, but you have learned to pronounce the music in such a way that it becomes like speech.

Music is not speech. Music is music, thank God, and it can express so many things you cannot express in speech. That's why there is music. I mean, if we could express everything in words, there should be no music. It's the same as painting. Painting must be there because it can get things across you can not get across another way.

What lessons of rhetoric can I learn from studying baroque painting, architecture, or poetry, lessons that would be applicable to my playing of the music?

Well, just look at them. Look at the castle and imagine how music would fit there. You look at Versailles castle and is that the place you want to hear Stravinsky? It could sound very well. It's fantastic music, Stravinsky, that's not the problem, but maybe it's not ideal location for it. And so you could level down, a little bit, look at Eszterhazy (*the palace not far from Sopron where Haydn lived and composed much of his music*) you see it's kind of imitation of Versailles, but poor in comparison to Versailles. It's incredible, Versailles. So, see that things have been imitated. Paintings show the way people were dressed. How would you move in those dresses, for instance? And what kind of colors were supposed to be there? We have so many dark paintings of the beginning of the 20th century. It's all black and dark brown, and it has been different in other times.

I'm always surprised that people who perform baroque music now still wear the black tuxes and black dresses. But if you look at the clothing of the baroque period, it's very colorful. I wouldn't expect people to wear period clothing, but that seems to make a difference to me if you're looking at very beautiful colors as opposed to everybody in black. That changes my mood.

Yes, it does, and so in a certain way I totally agree. On the other hand, the advantage of that is that the individuality of the performer is not sticking out so much. I think that originally the aim of the uniform, as much in military service as in orchestral service, is to just forget that there are individuals wearing it. That can be used to very bad effects, but I always think that, in fact, we play music for the ears, so I don't care so much about the eyes: don't want to play for television, play for radio, I'd say. And people who are not seeing you should understand your message just as well as people who see you.

Up to now I've been playing a plastic Yamaha.

It's not a bad instrument by the way. I must confess that when I saw you pulling out that flute I thought, "Nooo!", and then heard it and said, "Uh huh, much better than I thought."

And it's very handy if you travel because if you lose it or break it, well it's twenty dollars.

Yes, and it resists to all kinds of weird climates.

Like hot and humid southern China.

Yeah, I mean, I've never been there, but can imagine. So, I remember that after one concert tour ages ago, one of my flutes was completely ruined because we went from very humid New Orleans to very dry Toronto and back to Atlanta and this kind of things. And, of course, hotel rooms overheated and dry. At least one flute was completely lost: the bore had changed too much. I then asked a couple of flute makers, please, could you imagine making a good plastic flute. One tried, but it was not good enough. The material was not interesting enough. Somehow, very strange, you had the feeling that you had a good middle register, but no high end and no low end. Not that you couldn't play the notes, you could actually play them very well. But the resonance, maybe the way the material helps to create or sustain overtones or undertones wasn't interesting. I heard not the fundamental of a note, but 1st, 2nd, 3rd harmonics, but not higher than that, the sound seemed chopped off up and down, so I never played it much, unfortunately. I tried one concert because the real thing is the concert. You can not try it at home. It was fun to do. People thought I was playing an ivory flute (*laughs*) and no, it's plastic! (*more laughs*) But then if you want good wooden

recorders. . .

Yes, and I wanted to ask you if you have a list of things that you go through when you check an instrument that you want to pay a lot of money for?

Well, if I'm going to spend a lot of money, I want to fall in love, basically. So, if I pick up an instrument and already the touch of it doesn't please me, I would say no. That's first thing for me. Then I play it, and when it doesn't give me appetite for more: no thank you. That's absolutely not an insult to the maker, it's just that like with one person you accord very well and with another, not at all. No one is to blame for it. So, that would be very first that comes from me. How does it look, how does it feel? When I take it in my hands, is there "lust"? That word, "zin" from my lecture. And then I would be pretty severe on tuning. If I hear that there are real tuning problems, I would hesitate more. But sometimes the character of a flute is so strong that you might accept some problems. It's like people: rather lots of character, even partly "bad", than no character at all.

What about "breaking in" a new instrument? How much or how little would you play on it during the first few days, weeks, or months? I mean, is it ten minutes a day, twenty minutes a day?

Well, it depends. Those people who say only ten minutes a day, only twenty minutes a day, are wise because some people get a new instrument and they are so much in love with it, they would play it all day and then at some point, of course, it gets too humid. The wood wants to swell too much. It can't. You get problems, even distortions in the bore, or it just cracks. How much to play, how much not to play, depends a bit on the wood, the way it has been treated, etc. When I play a flute, and I feel that it becomes more tough at the joints, I cannot take it apart easily anymore, I have two options: Either I stop playing, dry it out (in open air, of course, better not in the box nor in the sun or near the fire), and let it rest. Or, I take off some thread so that it doesn't get too tense. Usually, I would say that I go by the feeling...

I must confess I have known situations where the day after receiving a flute, or a piece of a flute, I had to start recording sessions where you play 6 – 7 hours a day. It's not healthy for the flute, but I had no choice. But then be very careful and do take care of it. When you feel that the joints become too stiff, stop.

And then wood wants to be fed, so a good wooden flute should be oiled when you feel that it is dry, that the wood is not nice to touch anymore, inside as well as outside. Certainly inside. You could dampen a cloth in oil. Just put it in oil and go through the instrument. With recorders you must be a careful that you don't put too much oil in the windway or block, etc. That's why I wouldn't throw the recorder in an oil bath! I could do that, I do that pretty often with traversos, because you can clean out all that you don't need. After a period of intensive use, when the flute feels dry and doesn't look or doesn't feel nice anymore, I'd take off everything: the thread, key, take out the cork, then put it in a oil bath for two-three days. Remark: let the flute thoroughly dry before, preferably a couple of days or a week, otherwise the moisture in the walls of the instrument can't get out anymore because of the oil. If it's relatively soft wood, like maple, fruitwood or even boxwood, it will take up a lot of oil, you can easily leave it in the bath for a couple of days. If it's much harder wood like ebony, it won't swallow so much: then there is no need to keep it in the oil so long because it doesn't drink. And then I would take it out, let it drip, and then clean it. The oil which hasn't penetrated into the wood after another day or two, should be cleaned away, as much in the bore as in the embouchure and finger holes.

And then if I have time, I let it dry again for a week or so, so that the oil really has time to harden, to settle there, and then play it. It's very good for an instrument. But the whole process, everything together, would take up to a ½ month or so, which is the best I can do. It's something I would do shortly before holidays, for instance. I know that I won't be playing anyway, so you pamper your flutes.

Could you recommend any traverso literature that would be particularly suitable for the voice flute, especially any trio sonatas with oboe or violin?

I would say none, to be honest.

None?

No, because the problem is this, that voice flute, of course, officially had the same range as the traverso, but the “center of the voice” lies lower. On most original voice flutes I have played, the D fingering (of the alto flute, sounding B), is about the highest note which normally sounds quite well. You *can* play higher fingerings, but they sound like a baritone, wanting to sing tenor. It can be painful. That is why I don't think voice flute is such a good alternative for a flute. And, in my opinion, it has been *heavily* overestimated. *Heavily* overestimated, but people want to use it because, it offers something different from the normal alto. That's fine, but look at the very, very small number of original pieces which call for voice flute. I mean, there are these couple of suites by Dieupart, there's one quintet by Loeillet, and I think that's it.

There's a chamber concerto by Boismortier that seems to be written for voice flute.

Could be – I do not know it. I could imagine to find two handfuls of pieces, so that is is not ½ % of the number of alto recorder pieces. That's why I always find that voice flute is something, rather well . . .

Senseless?

Kind of, kind of. It's almost limited to England. I don't think I know any non-English piece for voice flute, or not written in England. So, when they speak about Denner voice flutes, I can't really believe that. I believe that is a tenor recorder on high pitch, on church pitch.

Blezinger says specifically that his is *not* that.

Since I'm not a recorder player (alright I play some recorder sometimes, but I am not a full-time professional recorder player) I feel very free to talk about it. I could very well imagine that recorder players are not always happy, or recorder makers are not always happy when I say that, but just from the historical point of view, I would be very much astonished seeing good old Denner producing instruments for which there is *no* literature. This seems to be a weird thing to do if you are in business. (*some of the traverso students chuckle*). I can't help it!

But, of course, I think they needed recorders in high pitch Sunday afternoon playing psalms. Further, the word 'voice' flute is interesting. For me it is a kind of alternative which was used mainly in England for playing all the favorite arias for the voice. There are opera arias everybody would know, and they would whistle in the street, and every amateur musician would play them at home, with or without continuo. Who cares?

You see the same thing for traverso. You can have whole operas transcribed for flute solo. That's not for playing in public, for performance, they are just for egotistic self pleasure. It's like people used to play whole Wagner operas on the piano because there were no records, no radio. One of my uncles did. He bought everything arranged for piano, or even four hand piano because his daughter played well. And so they would just play whatever there is, symphonies, operas, but of course, you wouldn't ever think of playing that in public. It is a kind of souvenir, a kind of, “Ah, that was the tune!”

And I think voice flute's main function might have been exactly that because it's the range of

most soprano parts. From D1, you go up to B2, and it takes a Queen of the Night to go up much higher. So that's, I think, where the voice flute is most at home. In other words, it would certainly not be my first choice to buy one. That's not to tell you, you shouldn't, but since you asked my opinion, I'm just straight forward saying it.

I would rather invest twice as much money in a very good alto recorder, than dividing it between a good, or average good, alto recorder and a voice flute. It's like I wouldn't really buy a baroque bass recorder, either. They do exist, and I'm absolutely certain that people would have played continuo parts in 4', and there's this one C.P.E. Bach trio sonata, but it's use is somehow so limited that you better get one really good alto.

Thank you.

You're welcome. Did I pass the examination?!

Conclusion

It is a pity that I am not better able to show in this writing Kuijken's colorful way of speaking, the way he uses pauses, letting the good words wait, his inflections, tone, awareness of acoustical surroundings, his rhetoric. And it was just as much a pleasure listening to him during each and every student's lesson. I think all of the students in his class were equally impressed.

However, there were those, professional and student alike, at the Early Music Days who thought that Kuijken doesn't really like recorders. And indeed there were things he said which might lead some to believe that. He insisted that he is only an "amateur" recorder player when he clearly is much more. In his lecture he refers to the recorder as a "relatively inexpressive instrument", and he claims that the voice flute is suitable for "none" of the literature written for the baroque flute. But before I comment on that, I think it is also interesting to consider the following quote from a November 30, 2005 Ernesto Schmied interview with Frans Brügger which appeared in Goldberg Magazine:

“Could you say something to the recorder players who read Goldberg? You were one of the main 'guilty parties' responsible for the resurgence of this instrument.

Yes, of course (he laughs recalling those days). I was invited to the United States by the American Recorder Society because I had been chosen (he raises his eyebrows, arms and whole body in a clear, rhetoric gesture) Recorder Player of the Millennium (more laughter). Isn't it strange? You can't get away from it. I told them I didn't want to go and they didn't understand! I have chosen a new life. I didn't tell them this, but I'm telling you now, the truth is I can't stand the sound of the recorder any more (still more laughter).”

Certainly, Kuijken's words are not as severe as Brügger's. Kuijken does not hate the recorder. In fact, when a traverso student was ashamed also to admit being a recorder player, Kuijken told her there was no shame in that, whatsoever. Probably his frank talk about the recorder is healthy. Perhaps we recorder players sometimes need a little more harsh truth about our instrument's capabilities and shortcomings. And maybe in this way of getting a different, more critical perspective of the recorder we can approach our instrument in a fresh, more informed way.

Postscript by Barthold Kuijken, November, 2006

Of course I do not hate the recorder, or the recorder players – why should I be such a racist? It is perfectly true that I do not like all recorder playing (but who does?), mainly when I feel that the (historical/musical/instrumental) link between the instrument and the music is not very strong. In “real” recorder pieces, no other instrument could do better, if the composer has done a good job. But in many arrangements the recorder does not seem to be the ideal tool for that particular job... and then the instrumentalist and/or the instrument easily become a goal in itself. I’d feel the same discomfort and disappointment when a piano, flute, violin, saxophone... player plays the instrument instead of the music, or only tries to play him/herself, at the expense of the music or of the composer. I feel there is a difference between private, amateur playing and public, professional playing: as an amateur, I can be thoroughly egotistic, play for my own pleasure: nobody has to listen... As a professional I feel a kind of responsibility both towards the composer (try to avoid disfiguring his work) and towards the audience (give them first-rate value, don’t underestimate them; if I feel that the original version of a piece is “better” than my flute arrangement, I won’t play it again in public...)

Again: did I pass the examination?