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Susanne Fröhlich: research report

Welcome to a short report of my research project, which is about an instrument most of you will know and will also probably have played at least once in your life: “the recorder”.

My name is Susanne Fröhlich and I have started an artistic-scientific research at the University of Art in Graz in October 2015. The main topic of my research is: “The recorder in the 21st century”, so it is a kind of perspective research and mainly about modern recorder models, especially one model, the Helder Tenor, named after the Dutch recorder maker Maarten Helder.



As recorder player you are very much trained to perform on a big variety of recorders, which differ in size, kind and material. The recorder itself has a very long tradition and although it always adjusted to the sound ideals and music aesthetics of its time, today most of the recorder players mainly perform on copies of historic models – of course, these instruments are modified e.g. for bigger concert halls and the combination with modern instruments – but in general you could say, that these are still historic models, especially because of the bore, which makes around 80% of the instruments capabilities.

Many of you will remember the recorder as a quite simple instrument and especially when it comes to range, dynamics and balance as a quite limited instrument. If we e.g. take a tenor recorder made after an original instrument by Jacob Denner, this means:

- 1.) soft low notes in the first octave
- 2.) forced 3rd octave
- 3.) only limited dynamic possibilities



In the late 60's Friedrich von Huene already experimented with keys and long bores, as well as Yamaha in the late 80's. Both instruments definitely have more volume in the low register, but at the same time have the same characteristics in the 3rd octave like a baroque recorder. Fact is, their bore is still too close to a baroque model.



However, as professional recorder player you learn how to deal with these limitations and to search your way around them. And to be honest, I always felt quite comfortable with the many different early music recorder models I had and I never thought about changing anything. But a few years ago I have met the German recorder player Johannes Fischer, who was already busy with the Helder Tenor for quite some time and he literally turned my world upside down. When I heard him play, I knew that from this moment on, there is no way back and I really started to question the possibilities of my instruments, but also the limitations of the recorder and to rethink what I have done so far and where I actually want to vision the recorder in the future.

So, this is where my actual research starts. In this past year, it was very important for me to focus on a few aspects and I would like to introduce them to you now:

1. a) First of all to get an overview of the history of the recorder, especially to look into the developments during the 20th century.

In general, I can say that there have been experiments with very promising futuristic recorder models. Most of them disappearing quite quickly or even not being present on the market at all. Of course there are many reasons for this, like e.g. political and economic situation, interest but also openness of the performers, the technical capabilities of the makers, the possibilities and the sound of the instrument itself.

- b) Secondly to learn about the history of the Helder Tenor, meaning, the vision behind it and the whole process of its development.

It is interesting for you to know that the recorder maker himself was quite frustrated by the little possibilities of expression in sound of the recorder, which means limited dynamics, limited range, low volume in the low register, loud and uncomfortable high register.

Of course there would be much more to tell about this topic, but I would rather like to go on to the practical part of my research, which is of course as important as the theoretical part.

In the last year I have been busy to get an idea of all the possibilities of the Helder Tenor, especially regarding the new features:

- Bore and key system: e.g. forte-fingerings, principle of pure harmonics and its new fingerings in the 3rd octave
- Piano key: smooth dynamics
- Sound unit: enables me to change the sound colour in general, but also the sound volume while playing

This practical research is divided in several steps:

1. Collecting pieces, which were written for the Helder Tenor and the analysis of their musical material, especially regarding the extra possibilities the Helder Tenor offers.
I have found 37 pieces so far. Unfortunately, not all of these pieces are written very specific for the instrument. Some of them could be even performed on another modern Tenor recorder.
2. Collaborating with composers to enlarge the repertoire, but also to exploit the new possibilities of performance practice.

3. Searching for pieces which were written for no specific tenor recorder, but give something extra being played on the Helder Tenor.
4. Finding pieces which were written for other wind instruments, are flexible enough to be performed on a different wind instrument and therefore challenge me to enlarge my performance practice.

For this online version of my research report, I would like you to follow this link to my BLOG, where I have collected audio examples in order to be able to listen to the evolution of sound of the recorder. It is a piece written by Isang Yun in 1993, called "The visitor of the idyll" and you will hear an excerpt from bar 11 to bar 26.

Link:

<https://susannefroehlichrecorder.wordpress.com/2016/05/30/evolution-of-sound/>

My website:

www.susannefroehlich.com

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