

Heyens / Bowman
Advanced
Recorder Technique

*The Art of Playing
the Recorder*

Volume 1

*Finger and
Tongue Technique*

Gudrun Heyens

Advanced Recorder Technique

The Art of Playing the Recorder

Volume 1: Finger and Tongue Technique
Translation: Peter Bowman

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„The Piping Boy“ (1769)

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The “Art of Technique” and the “Technique of Art”

“**Advanced Recorder Technique**” is intended for advanced alto recorder players who are seeking rigorous practise material for developing their instrumental and musical skills. It is a continuation of the two volumes of **Fun and Games with the Alto Recorder** (Schott Ed. 12703–12707). The elements of recorder technique covered in those volumes will continue to be developed here with particular emphasis on musical recorder playing. Modern playing techniques are not included; the focus is on learning techniques suitable for early- and high-baroque recorder music, bearing in mind that these, and above all the “technique of practising”, are also relevant for the realisation of modern recorder music.

The exercises included here correspond to the requirements of the recorder’s original literature and are intended mainly for the alto recorder. However, numerous recent editions of early baroque violin music arranged for soprano recorder, now an established part of the repertoire, have necessitated the serious treatment of this instrument too. A number of the exercises can therefore be played not only on the alto but transposed for the soprano recorder as well.

In addition to inspiration, imagination and emotion, all forms of artistic expression depend upon overcoming certain technical problems without which the translation of an idea into a visible or audible work of art would be impossible. To what extent the techniques of the various art forms – physical control in dancing; brushwork in painting; voice production in singing; articulation and body language in acting, in other words the craftsmanship, can be called “art”, may be judged in different ways. In each case these intellectual and physical skills must receive special attention from the artist. Investing time and energy developing them to their limits is clearly worthwhile with regard to an end result which should be a positive musical experience for both artist and audience.

Regarding the recorder, and assuming a “normal” physical constitution, we can say that with knowledge and training the necessary manual skills can be developed to a certain level; the “Art of Technique” here means “craftsmanship”.

Recorder playing technique can be divided into four categories: finger and tonguing techniques as well as breathing and sound production techniques.

This volume deals with the first pair and therefore makes specific demands on the student. These reveal themselves not in the difficulty of the exercises themselves but rather in the task of dealing with the techniques imaginatively – not simply “practising” in order to complete the daily routine but from the beginning using the material as a medium for expressive, musical playing. For the player this assumes not only talent and commitment to practise but, for the musician, some further essential skills – self awareness, imagination and self criticism – which should be present through all the exercises.

The present work does not submit as a primary objective to the “faster – louder – higher” school of playing but rather searches for the musical intent of each individual element. We hope with “**Advanced Recorder Technique**” that within the purely technical material the player will be able to discover and transform the musical parameters: sound; movement; tension/relaxation; stress; intent, and from that learn to deal musically with the individual technical elements (scales, arpeggios, trills etc.). Serious and continuous work developing creative technical skills as an essential part of the daily practise routine will, alongside regular music making, take about a year. All the exercises should then be part of the recorder player’s practise repertoire which can be memorised and recalled at any time.

Gudrun Heyens

Glossary of Terms

American English

Thirtysecond note
Sixteenth note
Eighth note
Quarter note
Half note
Whole note
Soprano recorder
Alto recorder

British English

Demisemiquaver
Semiquaver
Quaver
Crotchet
Minim
Semibreve
Descant recorder
Treble recorder

1 Finger Movements

Trilling Exercise

T = Whole tone
S = Semitone

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*) Fingers should lie very lightly on the recorder when trilling in the low register so that the finger which is making the trill can glide easily back and forth over the hole. This movement is controlled via a small movement of the wrist.

**) Trills which do not speak when slurred may be practised using the tongue.

Trilling

Trilling aids the warming-up process in general and the warming-up of your fingers in particular. However, the priority here is the analysis of individual finger movements between notes. The purpose of the exercise is not to play through the sequence of trills from start to finish but rather to select individual bars.

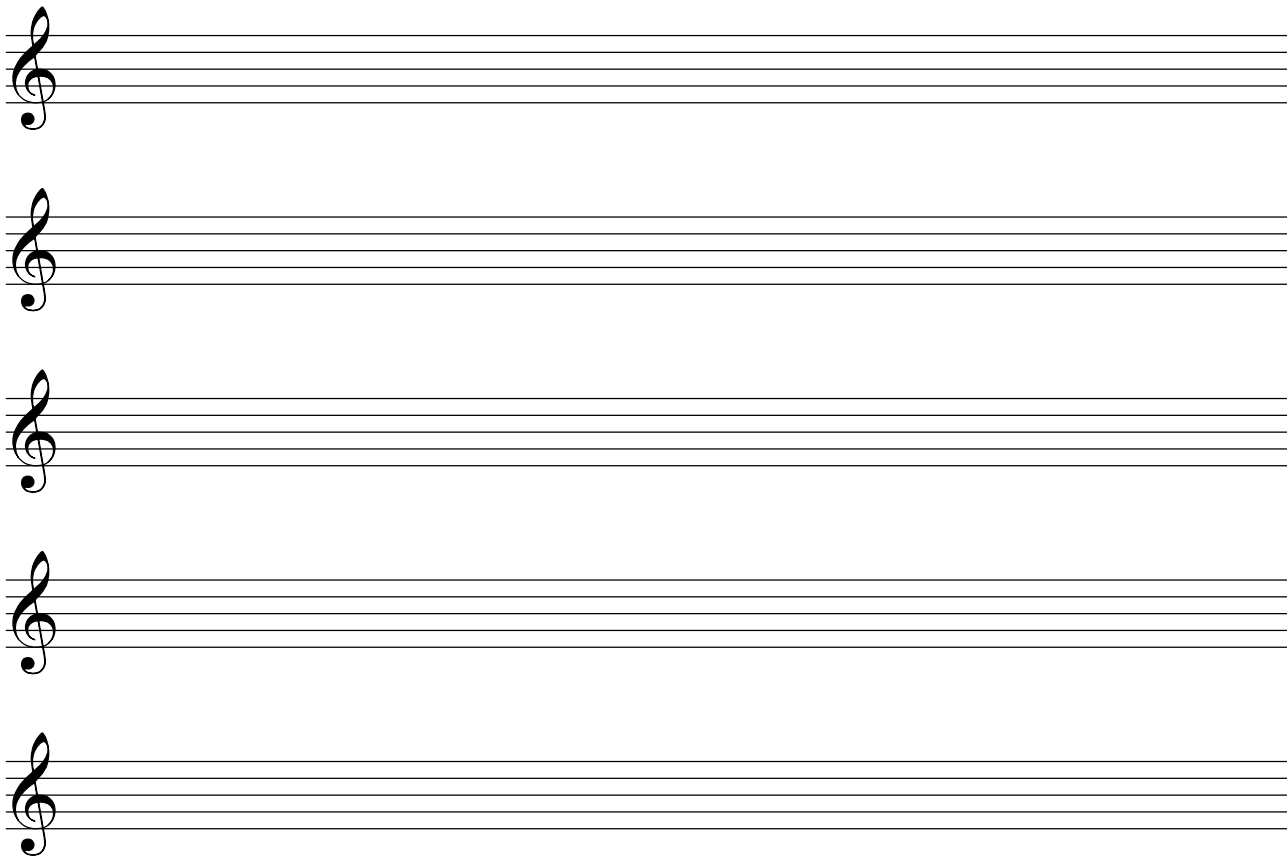
Do not use alternative fingerings as is common for the performance of trills (see the Fingering Chart) but focus carefully on training the precise co-ordination of several simultaneous finger movements.

- Begin neither with the very lowest nor the highest register; it is easier to start with the middle regis-

ter. Progress from there to the more complex finger combinations. Make a note of any particular problems and begin your next day's practice with these.

- Breathe in slowly and deeply. Begin the trilling movement slowly, only gradually becoming faster.
- Where the tempo is fast ensure smooth and even finger movements. If the movement becomes irregular begin again with a slower tempo.
- Play from memory and in front of a mirror so that you can observe your hand position and "get a feel" for your fingers.

Space for notes and your own exercises



Tip:

for all exercises in which notes occur that can be played by covering the end-hole of the foot joint (F sharp³, A³, E):

Find a good sitting position which does not restrict your breathing but which allows you to bring your instrument close to your knee or upper thigh. Raise

your foot on to the tips of your toes so that the bell-end of the recorder can be covered by your upper leg. This allows minimal and controlled movement of your upper body enabling the notes to be played without endangering your teeth.

Finger- and tongue-techniques are inextricably linked to one another. Training virtuosic finger work requires real awareness of tongue movement because for each note in a series (e.g. a scale) there must be a tongue stroke, with one exception: legato playing.

For this reason the following remarks concerning articulation have been deliberately given precedence over chapter 3, “Scales, Arpeggios, Chromatic Scales”, which focuses on finger technique. Detailed instructions regarding tonguing for use with the scale exercises can be found in that chapter.

Articulation (the way in which syllables and words are spoken) gives our speech colour and expression and makes it more or less “interesting”. A speaker with clear and distinct pronunciation, who varies the rise and fall of his voice, will be listened to much more attentively than one who expresses himself monotonously, without varying either pitch or volume or who mumbles indistinctly. Exactly the same is true for recorder playing: knowledge of musical figures and their distinct and lyrical presentation through the use of articulation, dynamic, agogic stress and movement make the playing colourful, informative, appealing and moving (i.e. emotional).

In order for articulation to be able to differentiate clearly between the content of the musical figures a sophisticated tonguing technique is required that has control over a range of articulations from hard to soft and short to long.

Legato

True legato is the easiest kind of articulation to define: all joined notes (those occurring under a single slur) are formed without the help of the tongue. The individual notes sound when the fingering changes whilst the breath continues in an unbroken stream.

Staccato

Staccato is an articulation which shortens individual notes. The extent of the shortening depends on the character of the music. Staccato notes can be played with either soft or hard tonguing. They can also be finished either with a tongue stroke, which has the effect of making them sound tense and exact, or without using the tongue, which makes them sound light and airy. The range of possible articulations is enormous. A light, “leggiero” staccato which is “relaxed” can be obtained by finishing notes with a fast movement of the tip of the tongue. Breath control also plays a role here as each note can be formed with an extra small impulse of the diaphragm. The air pressure can also

be kept constant with abdominal tension so that the tongue strokes produce an apparently unbroken stream of staccato notes.

Non-legato

All of the above also applies to non-legato playing. Notes can begin either with a hard or soft tongue stroke and end before the start of the following note. This should be clear enough, however there are several possibilities for the realisation of non-legato:

1. The note finishes with a clearly audible tongue stroke: *doot doot*
2. without finishing with the tongue: *doo doo*

The length of the silence between the notes is variable. Take care with the finishing tongue stroke: use only the *tip* of the tongue. As an exercise try to say the following: *ye-tttt*. Note that the sides of the tongue lie against the back teeth, as when you say “yes”. For the *tttt* the body of the tongue remains in the “yes” position – only the tip of the tongue moves.

Portato

Moving only the tip of the tongue is also very important for portato playing. In order to be able to realise the extreme smoothness of this articulation, which is very similar to true legato, the exercises e.g. the scales, should first be played legato (slurred). In the process of this concentrate on “feeling” the function of your breath: it creates the notes. If it is too weak a break in the sound is unavoidable because the tongue stroke, which normally provides the impulse for the note, is missing. The flow of breath must be able to be varied: stronger, weaker, faster or slower depending on pitch and register. The tip of the tongue sets little markers in an unbroken stream of breath.



Initially it may be difficult to feel the two “tracks” of this action. It might be helpful to transform the “doo” articulation syllable into the gentler “loo” tonguing or even to create a mixture of the two.

Rule: Legato serves as a basic sound model and blowing exercise for portato articulation.

Legato = joined, slurred

Non-legato = not joined, separate

Staccato = short, often with a hard attack

Portato = notes are “carried” from one to the other (portare *It.* = to carry)

Notes Regarding the Exercises

Major Scales

In order to have as much practise material as possible begin all major scales with the lowest note of the scale available on the instrument. This will not necessarily be the tonic note. Play each scale up in octaves and, again in octaves, back down. In this way it is possible for fingers and tongue to work for longer with each scale, despite the limited range of the recorder.

Major Arpeggios

Only the tonic arpeggio of each scale will be practised. Again, begin with the lowest available note of the arpeggio even though this may produce an inversion. Go back to the second note of the arpeggio and begin again, working up to the highest note available.

Chromatic Scale

Chromatic scales should be practised up and down over the range of an octave. Begin with the tonic note of the scale.

Minor Scales

The minor scales are practised in triplets and within the range of an octave. They must be played through three times before the tonic note again falls on a strong beat. Use the same pattern for both harmonic and melodic minor scales.

Minor Arpeggios

The same principle as for major arpeggios applies.

Chromatic Scales

The chromatic scale begins with the tonic note of the minor scale.

Practise Tips

- Read and understand the principles of the major/minor (Fmaj/Dmin) “technique block” described above and then organise your practise session accordingly. Learn the patterns from memory. Once internalised it can be transferred to all keys. Advantage: your practise material is always available. Consider Fmaj/Dmin as a unit, particularly with regard to your concentration span. Begin with F major (including the chromatic scale) in a slow tempo, ensuring a steady beat and playing without stopping to take a breath. Pause before beginning the minor scale which should also be

played in its entirety without a break. Do not over-react if you make a mistake or if you have to stop. Becoming irritable if something goes wrong does not help. Instead, remain calm and try to play the *next* scale correctly. The amount of breath you need will depend upon your opening tempo. If necessary, place in breath marks and try to get to the end of the passage by breathing only at the places marked.

- Establish your starting tempo with a metronome and make a note of it. In this way you will be able to check your progress more easily.
- Do not forget to think and do not play faster than you can think! For example: as you reach the highest note in an octave run of a major scale, inwardly tell yourself the first note of the next passage before actually playing it. In other words, do not just play by ear!
- Nevertheless, always listen to your sound. Describe it, consider it. Your ear should not simply be satisfied with the correct pitch, you must also be aware of the sound *quality*.

Tips for Fingerwork

Fingers should always move quickly up and down, then immediately relax. The movement need not be great; when not active the fingers remain relaxed above their holes.

As a control: someone holds a ruler 3 cm (1½ inches) above your fingers whilst you play. The more rhythmic and precise the finger movements, the neater and more accurate the co-ordination with your tongue.

Tips for Tonguing

Play a light, springy “*ti ti ti*”. (short “i” as in “bit”)
Concentrate only on the beginning of the note; do not tongue the end of the note. The note remains open, not rigid and static as in staccato (“*tit, tit, tit*”).
Reminder: the difference between a note which is finished with a tongue-stroke and one which sounds open lies simply in the exact point in time at which the upwards movement of the tongue takes place. If this happens precisely at the end of the note it will sound “cut off”. However, if the tongue movement occurs at the last possible moment before the beginning of the next note – and it must be very fast – then the note will not sound as though it has been finished with the tongue. You could say that the tongue stroke occurs not at the end of the first note but at the beginning of the second. Imitate with your tongue the sound a table tennis ball makes when dropped and left to bounce for several seconds.

When you are satisfied with the co-ordination of tongue and fingers try to alter your articulation to a soft, broad portato. Ensure that you use a firm stream of breath which is well directed.

Preliminary Exercise

Play each of the octave runs in pure legato and observe the movement of your breath. Try two extremes:

1. a strong crescendo to the highest note



2. a decrescendo upwards



Does the highest note speak easily when played *piano*?

Now play

3. with an even breath throughout



and observe that you do not necessarily need high breath pressure to play high notes on the recorder.

Play the chromatic octaves in groups of four. This will help rhythmic orientation:



Now with Articulation

1. Play with a broad portato and articulate the high notes softly, as though playing legato.
2. Play again, this time with short articulation and an increasingly harder tongue stroke as you get higher. Which sounds better?

Articulate the minor scale clearly in triplets (ta ti ti, ta ti ti) so that you do not lose track of the beat. Listen carefully to ensure that the stress on the first note of each triplet is gained by lengthening the note and not by blowing harder (accenting).

Articulate the arpeggio exercise in accordance with the triplet figures, first clearly (ta ti ti, ta ti ti), and then portato the second time through.