



Heyens / Bowman

Advanced Recorder Technique

*The Art of Playing
the Recorder*

Volume 2

Breathing and Sound

Gudrun Heyens

Advanced Recorder Technique

The Art of Playing the Recorder

Volume 2: Breathing and Sound
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ED 9762

Volume 1: Finger and Tongue Technique
ED 9761

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Order Number: ED 9762

Cover: Nathaniel Hone (1718–1784)

„The Piping Boy“ (1769)

BSS 51566

Volume 2 of *Advanced Recorder Technique* is concerned with breathing and sound. A technique for breathing is introduced which deals exclusively with the particular requirements of blowing on the recorder both as a *physical action* and as *creative note-shaping*. It is intended for advanced recorder players, recorder teachers and amateur musicians who want to develop awareness and confidence in their use of breathing.

All exercises and explanations relate directly to developing the skills necessary for playing the recorder. *Intonation* is given priority over *physical skills* and from this it follows that exercises for developing awareness of the breathing apparatus are provided rather than a programme of physical training.

I have avoided the inclusion of a chapter on the essential anatomical, medical and physiological basics of breathing-technique. Instead, my concept relates directly to the medical approach found in Margot Scheufele-Osenberg's *Die Atemschnle*, Übungsprogramm für Sänger, Instrumentalisten und Schauspieler, Schott, Mainz ED 8705 (ISBN: 3-7957-8705-x) (*Understanding Breathing*, A programme of study for singers, instrumentalists and actors). This excellent, comprehensive and easy to read publication contains valuable information and provides useful advice where breathing problems occur.

Gudrun Heyens

Glossary of Terms

American English

Thirty-second 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 Physical Sensitivity

When the body is actively involved with sport, drama or music, when it is used as an “instrument”, it is essential that we learn to become physically aware and internally sensitive.

By “internal sensitivity” we mean the perception of delicate inner movements and events when feeling physically “normal”, i.e. at and beyond the pain threshold on one hand and enjoying a feeling of well-being due to a state of extreme relaxation on the other. Our various lives and experiences with their conscious and unconscious learning processes during childhood and puberty mean we perceive “physical sensitivity” individually and subjectively – there is no common measure. Any kind of teaching concerned with inner physical processes is, therefore, difficult and complicated.

Much about a person’s general and current physical and mental condition, however, can be read from his outward appearance – the way he moves, speaks, stands and plays his instrument. The psychologically trained eye of a doctor allows him to draw conclusions from the way a patient moves, for example, about the presence of illness or neurosis. In the same way an experienced music teacher knows that the production of a certain sound is the result of the student’s particular physical disposition. He is also capable of drawing conclusions about the student’s physical sensitivity from her instrumental sound. Nevertheless, he will never know exactly how the player herself physically “felt” at the moment of tone production.

Teaching which involves physical contact between teacher and student would therefore appear to be the most successful method: it would be possible for the teacher to see and to *feel* (by touching) before assessing and making a judgement. Despite that, his diagnosis will also be subject to limits, in as much as he cannot see inside his student and the student herself (especially if she is a beginner who for the first time is having to focus on internal sensitivity) finds it difficult to describe subtle inner sensations. The teacher is initially confronted with imprecise, vague terms which make further work difficult.

This method of confronting the problem as a rule leaves woodwind teachers, as with singing teachers, no alternative other than to continue the work using such imagery as will enable the student correctly to perform a particular action intuitively, thereby sharpening the perception of the accompanying physical sensation until it can be remembered and repeated. Teaching, where direct physical contact between teacher and student must be avoided, turns out in this case to be particularly difficult because of the absence of any possibility for the teacher to check and control, leaving the student entirely dependent on her own powers of judgement. It therefore becomes even more important for her seriously to try to comprehend the teacher’s verbal and pictorial imagery and to engage with other techniques for developing the imagination.