North Queensland Recorder Society

Newsletter, October 2014

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Preamble

Apologies for the short notice before the Play Day this coming Sunday 2 November. Your newsletter editor has been chasing vultures in the Pyrenees and neglecting his NQRS duties.

We had a busy time of it in early August with the Weekend Workshop, Schools Workshop and Australian Festival of Chamber Music, so see Recent Activities for a summary and a few photos.

Malcolm has written a fascinating article on relatives of recorders so check out Recorder Country Cousins.

Next Play Day

The next Play Day is on Sunday 2 November 2014, 2:00pm-4:30pm at St Josephs School, Fryer Street, North Ward. Heather Coleman is leading this Play Day with the theme "Folksongs - some favourites and some new". Folksongs and dances have made a fundamental contribution to the development of music over the centuries, so it's lovely to go back to the original material.

Folk Songs Travelling Around the World

We have introduced a Black Box Concert as a fun and enjoyable way to finish our Play Days. It's like a Blackboard Concert in that you are encouraged to volunteer to play a solo or ensemble piece to the group. It differs in that the name of each piece is written on a piece of paper and put in a Black Box and a performer of each piece selects the next one from the Box. So, if you have a piece to share, bring it along.

Please bring recorders, music stands, something to share for afternoon tea and a contribution to cover expenses: $5 for adults and $2 for under-18s. Check http://nqrs.org.au/pages/playday_201405.htm for details and map. We look forward to seeing you there.

Recent Activities

August, always a busy time in Townsville, was particularly so for us this year. For the second year running, the Australian Festival of Chamber Music invited the society to participate in the family concert on Saturday 2 August. This time the local children were involved in Peter Maxwell Davies' Cinderella. The photo shows the recorder players, led by Valerie, with Piers Lane, Genevieve Lacey and Dean Olding from the Goldner String Quarter as conductor. By all accounts it was a great success.

The next event was the Thursday evening AFCM concert on 7th August at St Joseph's Church in Fryer Street, North Ward, in which Genevieve Lacey played. Thirteen members of the society and Robyn Mellor attended and we then repaired to Valerie's place nearby for dinner. Genevieve was able to join us for a relaxing evening, below.

Robyn was in town of course for our Weekend Workshop the following weekend, 9-10 August. It was lovely having her back as lead tutor and judging by the photo below, she enjoyed it as much as we did.

Her theme was **Ground Basses, Chaconnes, Variations and Other Compositional Delights** and this proved to be an excellent foundation for her expert tuition with an emphasis on technique and the interpretation of baroque music.

The workshop was so absorbing that your photographer failed to take any photos during the actual training, so we have to make do with a few shots taken during a tea break.

Finally, on Monday 10 August, Robyn led the successful and well attended Workshop for Schools.

This year, we had only one out of town visitor at the Weekend Workshop, but, combined with the Workshop for Schools, we balanced the books and came away inspired and invigorated.

Recorder Country Cousins

By Malcolm Tattersall.

I had an idea that the recorder, being very portable, had been taken all over the world and incorporated into local folk music while it was on the decline in Europe. Is that wrong?

Mostly wrong, I'm afraid.

Taking one step back before taking two steps forward: it is possible to draw a family tree of woodwind instruments and the part of it we're interested in has two main branches: "transverse flutes" (flutes, fifes, etc) which make a sound by blowing across an open hole, and "fipple flutes" which have whistle-type mouthpieces (recorders, tin whistles, etc). Within this scheme, the recorder is specifically a chromatic fipple flute with seven finger holes and a one thumb hole.

There are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of simple flutes (both fipple and transverse) in folk traditions all over the world - most cultures have one or more, usually made of wood or bamboo (Wikipedia lists and depicts lots of them – see references below). The vast majority of them are not chromatic, that is, they can't play all the notes of our chromatic scale. Most of them, in fact, play only the notes of the commonest scale used in music of the community, whether that's diatonic (i.e. our major scale), pentatonic or a scale we don't have a name for.

The tin whistle (or penny whistle) is a good example which will be familiar to many of us. If you pick one up and try to use recorder fingerings to go from (e.g.) B to Bb, you will find that the added fingers hardly change the note at all and your only option is to half-cover the A hole, which is awkward and unreliable. It is beautifully agile in its home key but if you want to play in another key you may have to pick up another whistle.

The recorder was developed from a diatonic folk instrument in Europe before 1400 as a cylindrical-bore instrument (the "Renaissance recorder") and was significantly redesigned just before 1700 as a conical-bore instrument (the "Baroque recorder") to improve the high notes but was nevertheless displaced in art music by the transverse flute within another fifty years, not to reappear until the Early Music revival soon after 1900.

What of its country cousins? Folk musicians typically made their own instruments or bought any instruments in circulation in orchestras or military bands, so the likelihood is

that they kept on playing the simpler fipple flutes which by that time had already co-existed with recorders for several centuries, or took up the transverse flute as the best factory-made substitute. We know that's what happened in Irish traditional music, where the transverse flute (usually the simple-system models used in military bands until the early 20th century) and the tin whistle were normal and the recorder was unknown.

Of course, once the recorder was revived and entered mass production for school use it became another readily available option for folk musicians, so in the last half-century recorders have been used in folk music as substitutes for folk equivalents. (I did it myself in Melbourne thirty years ago, and I was by no means the only one.)

In roughly the same time-frame, however, folk traditions got very messy indeed. One the one hand, lots of them were obliterated or transformed beyond recognition by mass media and popular music. On the other hand, many of them enjoyed self-conscious "revivals", led largely by literate urban people, which attempted to preserve them but (inevitably) altered them in the process. The upshot is that you can't trust *any* current practices to reflect traditions which existed prior to about 1950.

All of the above focuses on Europe, where the recorder was a native instrument, but the recorder was taken to Europe's colonies in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries along with all the other European instruments. Nick Lander tells the story well (see references) so I won't repeat it here but in general the recorder did not displace local flutes (fipple or transverse) in traditional music in those countries either. Indian villagers, for instance, kept on playing *bansuri* in the markets while their colonial masters played recorders in their drawing rooms.

References:

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