

Boston Early Music Festival 2021

BEMF21 goes virtual

REPORTS WRITTEN BY
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WITH ADDITIONAL
WORDS FROM GAIL NICKLESS

At a time when we could all use “Music of Solace & Joy,” the Boston (MA) Early Music Festival (BEMF21) had to decide months ahead whether the COVID-19 situation would allow in-person events in time for its 21st biennial festival in June 2021, or whether concerts would remain virtual. Opting for safer online events, planning proceeded—and eventually grew into an event of larger proportions than initially discussed.

Held June 6-13, the 40-year-old week-long event comprised archival video of two acclaimed opera productions, plus 14 newly recorded concert performances from world-class artists and ensembles. More than 10,000 tickets were initially sold, with a similar number of views on the BEMF YouTube channel—which also includes free videos of auxiliary events such as pre-concert talks (available until the end of September). Videos of the main concerts remained online for ticket purchasers through July 11.

<https://bemf.org/2021-festival/schedule-of-events>

BEMF21 playlist on YouTube:

www.youtube.com/c/bostonearly/playlists



Erik Bosgraaf, recorder, and Francesco Corti, harpsichord

The recorder was front and center in the person of Erik Bosgraaf, Dutch performer extraordinaire, who has been rocking the recorder world for a number of years. Only once has he played in the U.S.—in 2013, playing Vivaldi with the Dallas (TX) Symphony Orchestra, and also presenting a workshop with the Dallas ARS chapter.

There was a great sense of anticipation and excitement when he was

booked to give a virtual concert as part of BEMF21. Although often provocative and forward-looking in his choice of repertory and use of multimedia effects, the likable musician chose to take a straight-ahead look at the familiar Telemann recorder sonatas with harpsichordist Francesco Corti. The concert was recorded in a former brewery in Berlin, Germany, now repurposed as a performance space; the sound was excellent.

Bosgraaf performs on instruments made by the late Ernst Meyer and

his sons. Interestingly, three of the sonatas—the two in F minor and the sonata in B^b major—were played on an unusual boxwood recorder in E^b pitched at a'=415. (Yes, you read this correctly!) Bosgraaf really likes the sound of the E^b alto recorder and wanted to demonstrate the beauty of these sonatas in their original tonality on this instrument.

The remaining sonatas (in C major, C minor, D minor, F major and A minor) were eloquently performed on Meyer's copies of altos after Bressan, in boxwood and grenadilla.

These sonatas skillfully mix Polish elements with basic French and Italianate Baroque/Rococo styles. As a keen advocate of Telemann, Bosgraaf has a deep understanding of this music.

In his especially excellent performance of the D minor sonata, his playing clearly illustrated the contrast between the emotional, ornamented Italianate style of the opening movement, compared with the following Presto and its elements of Polish style—syncopation, shifting accents, repeated notes, and chromatics.

Bosgraaf's artistry, technical facility and emotional commitment to the music made for a concert of sheer sonic delight. A favorite part of this program was not with any single sonata, but rather absorbing their totality. It was an acoustic realization of a necklace of lovely Baroque pearls: each pearl slightly different, but each beautiful in its own way.

www.erikbosgraaf.com
www.youtube.com/user/anonymous2220

Pre-concert talk with Erik Bosgraaf and Francesco Corti: <https://bemf.org/2021-festival/festival-concerts/bosgraaf-corti>



Douce Mémoire

Denis Raisin Dadre, director of the superb Renaissance ensemble Douce Mémoire, was a most welcome return visitor to BEMF21. The group is widely and deservedly praised for its technical mastery, beauty of sound, and depth of feeling for Renaissance music.

For the 500th anniversary of the death of Leonardo da Vinci, Raisin Dadre developed a concert that links specific Leonardo portraits to music he could have heard around the time he was working on each painting.

In his day, Leonardo himself was known to be an accomplished improviser on the lira da braccio—but, of course, there is no written record of his improvisations. Raisin Dadre's grasp of the importance of music to

Leonardo's production of paintings is borne out by the careful choice of music offered by Douce Mémoire to illuminate the selected portraits.

There was relatively little music written by Italian composers in Leonardo's era, since the elite northern Italian nobility were listening to music written by Franco-Flemish composers. Some highly regarded composers from that tradition were hired by nobility to enhance the status of their courts: Josquin des Prez (c.1450-1521), Heinrich Isaac (1450-1517) and Hayne van Ghizeghem (born as early as 1445-died 1497), among others, spent time in courts of Milan, Florence and other locales. Raisin Dadre did identify some lesser known Italian composers of that era for musical selections, as well as some anonymous vernacular

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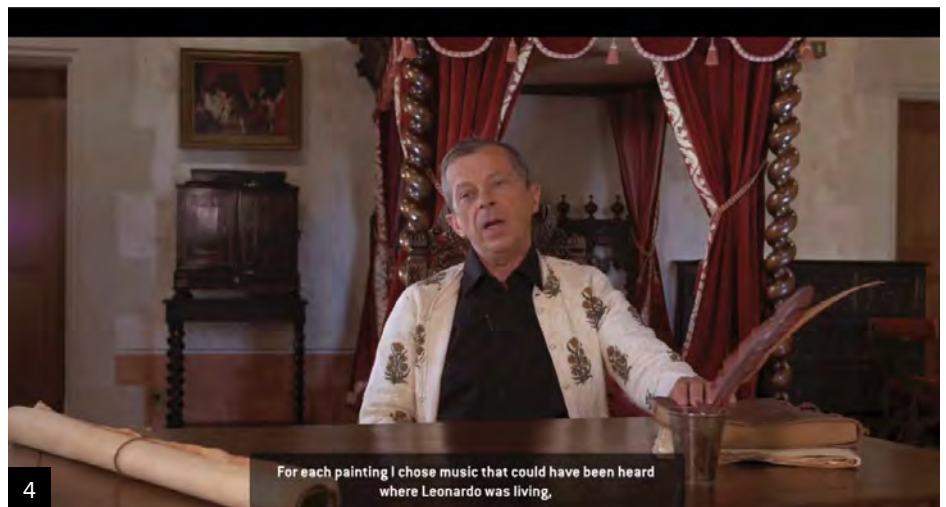
Each of the featured Leonardo portraits was paired with appropriate music.

music.

Each of the featured Leonardo portraits was paired with appropriate music. The virtual concert was recorded at Le Château du Clos Lucé–Parc Leonardo da Vinci in Amboise, France, Leonardo’s last residence. The program is well thought out and well performed, and thus difficult to limit discussion to just a few pairings.

Raisin Dadré played on several recorders including an alto in G by Bob Marvin; an alto in G of Francesco Li Virghi, copied from the engraving of Virdung’s treatise (c.1500, the earliest known work that discusses musical instruments and music theory; this alto would be accurate for Leonardo’s time); and Li Virghi’s copies of a consort of Venetian recorders preserved in Vienna (alto in F, tenor in C, and bass in G). All are pitched at $a'=464$, with meantone temperament. Raisin Dadré’s burnished sound on all recorders blended beautifully with the strings and singer.

One portrait, *The Annunciation*, was musically “interpreted” with three compositions. In the anonymous instrumental work *Vergine Immacolata*, Raisin Dadré was prominently featured on tenor recorder in C. He played this relatively simple tune with feeling, and his embellishments were lovely—as was the delicate interweaving of his musical line with that of Baptiste Romain on lira da braccio. Another musical work in this set was an *Ave Maria gratia pleni* by Italian composer Marchetto Cara, with Raisin Dadré on bass recorder in G in a sensitive dialog with Clara Coutouly, soprano, plus the strings.



◀

1: Erik Bosgraaf, recorder; Francesco Corti, harpsichord.

2: Pre-concert talk. Erik Bosgraaf, recorder, and Francesco Corti, harpsichord, at the Musikbrauerei, a former brewery repurposed as a recording studio in Berlin, Germany, <https://musikbrauerei.com>.

▲

3: Douce Memoire. Denis Raisin Dadré, recorder.

4: Pre-concert talk for Douce Memoire. Denis Raisin Dadré, recorder, in the lush surroundings of Le Château du Clos Lucé–Parc Leonardo da Vinci in Amboise, France, Leonardo’s last residence, <https://vinci-closluce.com/en>.

Hayne van Ghizeghem’s rondeau *De tous bien playne*, whose lyrics praise the fine qualities of a lover’s platonic “mistress,” was well matched to Leonardo’s *Portrait of Ginevra de’ Benci*. Ginevra was from a wealthy family, well-educated, and known as a poet and learned conversationalist. One of the most famous vocal works of the

Renaissance, *De tous bien playne* was offered here in a delightful realization by soprano and strings of this well-known tune. Raisin Dadré on bass recorder joined the ensemble for the repeat of the A section. The vocal quality of his playing had a respect and balance well-suited for performing with a singer.

Leonardo's portrait *La Belle Ferronnière* is represented by music that felt less "Platonic" than that intimated by *De tous bien playne*. The woman is not identified by name, but the painting clearly presents her as a member of the nobility; her features project strength and power. An Italian might say "*udite amanti*" (lovers beware)! One work paired with the portrait was the anonymous *O Mischini* (wretched ones). The text reflects the emotion of a distraught lover in a tormented manner. The duet of voice and bass recorder, backed by the strings, expressed an understated emotional tension. The recorder embellished its line in a musical dialog with Coutouly—emotive and beautiful!

This program segment also included two instrumental works featuring Raisin Dade. One, the *Ballo Petite rien*, is a very lively work, in which he danced along on alto recorder with the lira da braccio and other strings. Another instrumental piece, *Noi siamo galeotti*, also moved along, but is a bit more reflective. Raisin Dade again carried the melody line on alto.

Douce Mémoire gave a magnificent performance for BEMF21, providing a fascinating window into a distant era and evoking a very special spirit from the past. The musicians were phenomenal, and the creativity and beauty of the performances as well as the lush concert site (overlooked by a copy of the *Mona Lisa*) took one's breath away.

Douce Mémoire: Denis Raisin Dade, recorders, director; Clara Coutouly, soprano, Miguel Henry, lute, Baptiste Romain, lira da braccio, Bérengère Sardin, Renaissance harp

www.doulcememoire.com

<https://bemf.org/2021-festival/festival-concerts/douce-memoire>



1: Kibera students in Nairobi, Kenya, perform for the American students.

2: Students across the U.S. Playing via Zoom during the BEMF21 Family Event.

3: Kibera students in Nairobi, Kenya.

Nina Stern looks on (at upper right) in the photos.



The spark lit by devoted teachers—and nurtured by community events ... inspires young people to grow up enjoying music, participate in making music, develop a life-long appreciation for music, and also cultivate an awareness of what it means to support the arts.

Free exhibition/ concurrent events

Since 1981, BEMF has hosted its world-famous exhibition; this was available for BEMF21 as virtual booths to view June 6-13. At least in the ARS booth, attendance was spotty, but other vendors (service organizations, instrument builders and/or music sellers) may have had a stronger response. Other free virtual events of interest to recorder players were a multicultural outreach event and a master class.

ARS welcome video
for the virtual exhibition:
https://youtu.be/CC_8zRQJYnQ

FAMILY DAY WITH BEMF DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT NINA STERN

BEMF executive director Kathleen Fay opened the session, *Recorders Beyond Borders: Boston Meets Kenya*.

"I firmly believe that the spark lit by devoted teachers—and nurtured by community events [like this one] inspires young people to grow up enjoying music, participate in making music, develop a life-long appreciation for music, and also cultivate an awareness of what it means to support the arts. I'm overjoyed to welcome Nina Stern to the BEMF team, leading our

efforts to foster young musicians."

Stern has quite a distinguished pedigree. The American musician graduated from the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Switzerland with a soloist degree in recorder. After playing recorders, historical clarinets and chalumeaux for years as soloist and orchestra member, in 2012 she was appointed to the faculty of the Juilliard Historical Performance program in New York City, NY.

In addition to classical music, she has performed and recorded traditional music of Eastern Europe, Armenia and the Middle East.

Perhaps more important, Stern is widely recognized for her teaching innovations: she is the founder and artistic director of S'Cool Sounds, a hands-on music program that initially focused on the diverse underserved public elementary schools in the New York City area. It envisions "a world in which all people have access to the transformative experience of making music together."

Stern has noted that most cultures use drums and flute-type instruments to make music. Thus S'Cool Sounds programs have children of ages 8-13 begin with soprano recorders. In keeping with her belief that making music together builds community, from the beginning the students play in ensembles. They are introduced to music of many cultures, often suggesting tunes they would like a class to play. Currently there are programs in 29 New York City public elementary schools serving over 7000 students; these have spread to other locations in the U.S. including Chicago, IL, and the West Coast.

More recent international outreach has included a 2010 invitation by a local humanitarian program in Kenya to introduce a music program for children in Kibera, an informal settlement (slum) in Nairobi. Connections made between student ensembles in

New York City and those in Kibera include playing music from each other's cultures.

In addition, the program has partnered with an organization for Syrian refugees in Jordan, and in 2013 joined an international team of musicians to partner with Village Healthworks, a group that promotes the importance of music for children's health. To help overcome the effects of civil war in Burundi, Stern and noted recorder performer and teacher Reine-Marie Verhagen, from the Royal Conservatory at The Hague, were both part of this initiative.

For the BEMF21 Family Day program, Stern united students from three different schools in Kibera—Facing the Future, Garden of Hope, and Center of Hope—all of whom have displayed great perseverance and dedication in the face of the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

She was also delighted to bring together students from four different U.S. cities—New York City, Boston, Montclair (NJ) and Seattle (WA)—for a virtual live ZOOM performance. Stern reported that the students on both continents worked hard with their teachers and in weekly coaching sessions with S'Cool Sounds teaching artists. She gave special thanks to recorder teachers from near and far who helped with this inspiring project.

These students across the U.S. and in Kenya were excited to meet each other virtually and say "hi" at *Engaging Communities: Recorders without Borders*. The American students played a popular Swahili love song, *Malaika*; the Kenyan students reciprocated with *Sloop John B*, a Caribbean folk song made popular by American groups including the Beach Boys.

Family Day Event: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Csyb3OylrCs

www.scoolsounds.org

Video of Burundi music team, including Reine-Marie Verhagen, with local students, in classes and presenting a multicultural concert: www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7H79nPBxw8

RECORDER MASTER CLASS

The format of the BEMF21 virtual master classes was that performances were pre-recorded, with live coaching and conversation between performers and teacher over Zoom. It wasn't ideal, but it did have the advantage that the teacher could cut a long piece short to leave more time for discussion.

Erik Bosgraaf's master class was offered in collaboration with the ARS.

Ruth Levitsky, sopranino recorder, selections from *The Bird Fancier's Delight*, a collection published by John Walsh

Levitsky played three selections: "Sky-lark," "Starling" and "Parrot." Bosgraaf began by discussing the purpose of these pieces—to "teach" captive birds to sing "better," which he suggested was pretty arrogant. He also demon-

strated the bird flageolet, the instrument for which these pieces were originally written. It's about a quarter the size of the sopranino, and has four holes in front and two on the back.

Bosgraaf recounted a story, where an interviewer convinced him to "compete" with a bird, and the interviewer recorded them—Bosgraaf is sure the bird won the competition.

Turning to how to perform these pieces on the recorder, Bosgraaf said that a lot of what is notated is ornamentation on quite simple tunes, and there's no reason we should stick to the ornaments suggested by Walsh. He gave an example of what he would do with "Starling," and then Levitsky tried it. She said the free ornamentation was "more fun."

Jiaqi Zhang, soprano recorder, Georg Frideric Handel, Sonata in B minor, HWV367

Jiaqi is seven years old, and played the Handel sonata with piano accompaniment. Bosgraaf discussed how best to approach this music: you should think of the dance and actually move around to it, then make up words so that the articulations are more natu-

ral. They worked on how to produce a Baroque trill: start on the upper note, then speed up, and the resolution is like a "welcome home."

Jamie Allen, alto recorder, Ryohei Hirose, Meditation

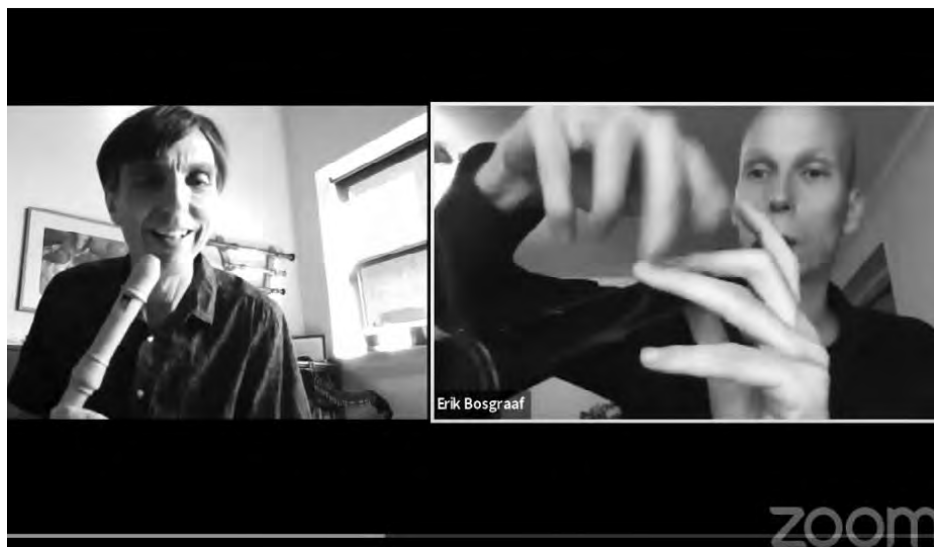
Bosgraaf said that because this piece is called *Meditation*, the musician should play it as though you're playing for yourself. When one meditates, you often find that after a while you aren't as Zen as you would like to be; there's a kind of meltdown, and then you put head and body back together. The performer should sound in control at the beginning and end, so that the out-of-control section stands out.

Music like this shouldn't sound like Telemann—for instance, the trill should start very fast right away (he demonstrated a two-finger fast trilling method that works with the trilled notes in this piece). The piece should be played with a shakuhachi-like technique and airy tone.

Alex VanTassel, soprano recorder, Richard Harvey, Concerto Incantato, V. Incantesimi

Particularly with advanced students, a master class teacher will very often start by asking what they want to improve about their playing. It's easy to see the rationale: if someone is taking lessons regularly, the teacher knows a lot about what students' interests and what they work on. If you've heard a student play for only five minutes, you can think of lots of things that could be improved, but you wouldn't necessarily know which ones they can or want to work on this month.

Bosgraaf asked the young musician VanTassel what she wanted to do with this piece; she answered that she wanted better intonation and more varied articulation. He talked about using a note played on the piano to test your intonation. He also worked with her on air flow, asking her to ex-



▲ Master class with Erik Bosgraaf, recorder. Jamie Allen looks on as Bosgraaf demonstrates a two-finger fast trilling technique.

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Anyone can play fast; but it takes a lot of work to play both fast and beautifully. (It was easy to think about this idea, later that evening when Bosgraaf played Telemann sonatas in his recorded concert.)

hale until she felt out of air, and then see how much more she could play—which turned out to be a lot longer.

He also suggested that she had played the cadenza too fast: the audience can't hear the details if the music is rushed. Try to play fast and gentle, not fast and aggressive.

Bosgraaf remembered when a teacher said to him, “Anyone can play fast; but it takes a lot of work to play both fast and beautifully.” (It was easy to think about this idea, later that evening when Bosgraaf played Telemann sonatas in his recorded concert.)

Teresa Deskur, alto recorder, Georg Philipp Telemann, *Fantasia No. 1*

One advantage to having people submit videos is that you get to see where they live. Deskur was recording herself in a room with lots of guitars hanging on the walls, so Bosgraaf asked her if she played. She said they were her father's, and she played with him sometimes. Bosgraaf suggested a piece by Toru Takemitsu for guitar and bass recorder (*Toward the Sea*, originally for alto flute and guitar).

The two discussed breathing, which should be relaxed and should not be an attempt to inhale more than is necessary.

This fantasia is in two parts: the prelude, which can be played very freely; and the fugue, which should be rhythmically very exact, especially when playing the theme. Bosgraaf suggested that, when playing the very

high notes, those notes can be shortened, because otherwise they come out sounding louder and detract from the theme. The ending of the piece should be a light-hearted goodbye.

Virtual fringe concerts

Presented by emerging and established artists alike, the typical BEMF fringe concerts offer hundreds of musicians the opportunity to share their talents with a large community of early music professionals and enthusiasts. To continue this tradition, BEMF21 offered a week of virtual fringe events just after the main festival—32 concerts, presented to the public free of charge and available for viewing through the end of September 2021.

Recorders were not represented in the numbers that they have been in many years past, likely because many of the video concerts were recorded months beforehand when COVID-19 still prevented many wind players from performing with others. Nonetheless, there were some excellent recitals to view.

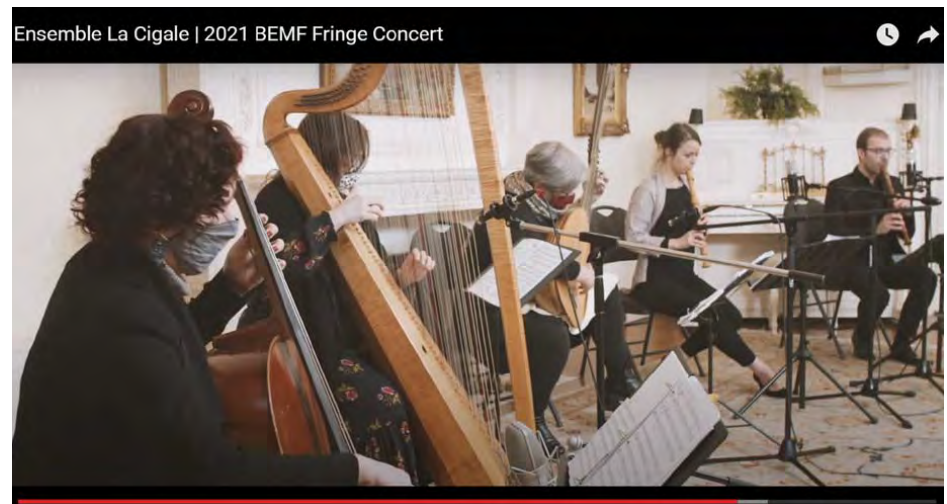
<https://bemf.org/2021-festival/fringe-concerts> (through September 2021)

ENSEMBLE 44, JONAH AND THE WHALE Ensemble 44 was founded to explore the works of women composers of the Baroque era. The Boston-area early music performance scene is definitely enriched by this group, with its imaginative programming, the inclusion of performers with different backgrounds, and its commitment to a relatively unknown repertoire.

The core group consists of recorder, violin and continuo, making it an ideal ensemble for trio sonatas. The fringe event program began and ended with ably performed trio sonatas by Italian composer Isabella Leonarda (1620-1704). The dance movements were especially lively, as the performers have experience playing for actual dancers.

For this concert about Jonah and the whale, they were joined by two singers. After pieces featuring each vocalist as soloist, both were joined by the violinist in Ravenscroft's *We be three poor mariners*, and by all of the instruments on the chorus of John Dowland's *Up merry mates*.

Ensemble 44: Nouri Newman, recorder; Ishmael Stefanov-Wagner,



▲ **Ensemble La Cigale.** Final selection on fringe concert recorded at Montréal's Maison Forget: Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-87), *Trios pour le coucher du Roy*, with Marie-Laurence Primeau and Vincent Lauzer, alto recorders.

violin; Hannah Davidson, viol;
Kathleen McDougald, harpsichord;
with guests Kendra Comstock,
soprano, and David Mather, baritone
[http://studio44boston.com/
ensemble_44.html](http://studio44boston.com/ensemble_44.html)

ENSEMBLE LA CIGALE,
LES DÉLICES DE LA SOLITUDE
From Montréal (QC), early music
Ensemble La Cigale offered a musical
and literary meditation on solitude,
playing French chamber music from
the time of Louis XIV with occasional
interspersed readings of poetic texts
of the period, in French with English
subtitles.

Introduced by artistic director
Madeleine Owen, the ensemble mem-
bers were all masked except for the
recorder players, of whom Vincent
Lauzer especially played a prominent
role in a program liberally sprinkled
with recorder.

Flanked by a banjo grandfather
clock and an ornately carved early
upright piano, the ensemble arranged
itself in front of a wall with a fireplace
and several paintings at the historic
Maison Forget, originally built in
1884 as the residence of the financier
and senator Louis-Joseph Forget in
the heart of Montréal's affluent Square
Mile. Microphones were placed in
front of each player, with the sound
occasionally becoming slightly
distorted in the high recorder range.
Multiple camera angles made for a vi-
sually interesting program, occasion-
ally showing other parts of the house.

On its musically varied program,
the ensemble sound was best on *Les
délices de la solitude, Sonate V*, by Mi-
chel Corrette (1707-95). Featuring all
five musicians, there was a nice bal-
ance among all parts, and the lower
tessitura of the viol (played by Ma-
rie-Laurence Primeau) with Lauzer's
bass recorder gave a warm sound to
the room's excellent acoustics. The
contrasts between the melody in viol

and in bass recorder, and then dou-
bled in the Presto movement, showed
why the program took its name from
this work.

Ensemble La Cigale: Vincent Lauzer,
recorders; Marie-Laurence Primeau,
viol & recorder; Sara Lackie, Baroque
harp; Marie-Michel Beauparlant,
Baroque violoncello; Madeleine
Owen, theorbo & artistic direction;
Françoise Davoine and Michel
Faubert, guest readers

<https://ensemblelacigale.ca>
www.vincentlauzer.com/english.html
Lauzer with Pacific Baroque Orchestra
(posted through June 2022): [www.
earlymusic.bc.ca/events/concerti-
virtuosi-feat-pacific-baroque-
orchestra-vincent-lauzer-recorder](http://www.earlymusic.bc.ca/events/concerti-virtuosi-feat-pacific-baroque-orchestra-vincent-lauzer-recorder)

CHRISTINE LIN, EAST TO WEST
Christine Lin is a Taiwanese recorder
player who was based in the UK for
several years. After studies in recorder
performance at the Royal Academy
of Music in London, she relocated
to New York City a few years ago to
pursue a performance career. Cur-
rently she is finishing a Master of Arts
degree in music at Columbia Univer-
sity. She prepared an engaging virtual
performance with a very interesting
set of instruments.

Both George Philipp Telemann's
Fantasia No. 7 and the *Cinquième
Suite* of Pierre Danican Philidor were
played on an alto at a'=415 by Martin
Wenner, the latter work accompanied
by Adam Young on viola da gamba.
She performed on a Ganassi-type
soprano recorder for *Sonata Prima* by
Giovanni Battista Fontana and *Philis
en son bel Atente* by Jacob van Eyck.

Lin has a very secure technique and
an attractive sound in the lower regis-
ters. One can certainly envy her flying
fingers in the more challenging parts
of the Van Eyck!

Giovanni Bassano's *Ricercata Quarta*
was played by Lin on a lovely G alto

by Freiburg (Germany) maker
Monika Musch. Its sound was a
perfect choice for this music.

On J.S. Bach's *Organ Trio Sonata*,
BWV528, arranged for alto recorder
and keyboard, with organist James
Wetzel, Lin played an alto at 440 by
Japanese maker Hiroyuki Takeyama.
These performers played in virtual
lockstep, with the recorder seeming
almost to be a part of the organ. The
duo had an excellent, well balanced
sound that was simply beautiful.

In a complete change of pace, Lin
presented an anonymous 13th-cen-
tury *Kyorei*, a very old form of Japa-
nese music that is notated in columns
rather than horizontally. The 440
tenor in C by Takeyama provided a
good sound on music that originally
might have been played on some type
of a bamboo flute. The work uses
relatively short musical patterns that
repeat, but are never boring—instead
the effect is mesmerizing. Her use of
breath mimics traditional bamboo
flute technique. For the video imag-
ery in this piece, she played behind
a transparent scrim showing the
column notation.

All in all, her recital was an impres-
sive contribution to a remarkable
BEMF21.

www.christinelinmusic.com