The Berkeley Festival and Exhibition

Geoffrey Burgess, Tom Bickley, and Linda Skory

A festival is a time for sharing music in the community. At each event of the Berkeley Festival and Exhibition (BFX) (June 6–14), whether mainstage or fringe concert, in the exhibition, or at one of the pop-up performances of Tallis's famous *Spem in Alium*, friends met to discuss what they had heard, what they intended to hear, or what they had to miss due to scheduling conflicts – because, as the cornucopia of BFX's offerings was filled to overflowing, it was simply not possible to catch everything. This report can only hope to give a general overview and a sampling of recorder-related events.

The signature image used on posters, t-shirts and other promotional material was a figure in extravagant Baroque dress and wig in a suggestive dramatic pose. This was John Taylor Ward in his drag persona of The Countess, which he presented at one of the mainstage concerts in the middle of the week. What did this image say about the festival and its goals? And in turn, what does it say about the current state of early music? First, it should be pointed that although "Early Music" was dropped from the Festival's branding some years ago, BFX remains to all intents and purposes a celebration of early music in all its cultural and ethnic diversities. In this year's incarnation, directed by Derek Tam, that diversity included drag. Was "An Evening with The Countess" the first drag show in an early music festival? Perhaps.

Drag performance comes in a multitude of forms. It frequently involves taking on another identity, often with the most improbable connection to the performer's everyday self, to build deeper connections between real and perceived identities. That echoes early music's goal to deepen our modern musical personalities by taking on the stylistic conventions of a previous era. In his program annotation, John Taylor Ward spoke of playing with things familiar and distant. In reality, he is a distant descendent of the composer Nicholas Lanier (1588–1666), and there is a gendered distance separating him from The Countess. Exactly who she is, and where she might stand in history was left to the audience to decide. Likewise the performance straddled the serious and mock exaggeration. There was plenty of buffoonery (Taylor in drag singing the monster Polyphemus's aria "Ruddier than the Cherry" from *Acis and Galatea* by Handel being most memorable), but it was not clear whether one should laugh or cry at the tragedy-in-drag, particularly when it came to Lanier's remarkable tragic melodrama *Leander and Hero*, which musically emulates the best of Monteverdi.

◀ John Taylor Ward as The Countess.

The small band of violin, gamba, and continuo led by Stephen Stubbs provided tight support to Taylor's poised singing, and Tshedzom Tingkhye's Baroque-inspired choreography. The program sashayed its way through different styles, languages, and centuries from Elizabethan England to Louisquatorzian France and back to Baroque England, with no more than a flick of The Countess's limp wrist.

The Recorders Emerge

At first, it seemed that there would not be a strong recorder presence at BFX, but as the fringe program filled out, more and more recorderists came out of the woodwork.

An octet of acoustic and electronic instruments with a scat singer may not seem the most natural habitat for a couple of recorders, but this is the composition of Mixus Mundi, which performed on Sunday June 6 at The Dome Center for Art, Music and Dance. Founded and conducted by long-time recorder professional and educator Frances Feldon, the group demonstrated a free and creative approach to music of all eras and genres. The recorder section comprised Feldon and Tom Bickley, a well-known proponent of eclectic music, and a name familiar to readers of this journal. Mixus Mundi presented a program with the aim of showing that any music can be deconstructed and improvised freely in a way that treats melody, rhythm, and tempo as equally important. Just as unconventional was the venue. The Dome is a repurposed industrial site that greeted the audience with a bank of black

and white TVs, a large wooden model airplane overhead, and a visit from a small terrier. The program ranged from Medieval (Guillaume de Machaut) to Baroque (J.S. Bach), and from Contemporary (John Zorn b. 1953) to Traditional (an Egyptian *Rast*). The musicians, including the amplified recorders, performed extensive and inventive riffs. In keeping with the group's philosophy, Frances asked the audience to choose a feature of the venue as the subject for the final free improvisation. The consensus was for the airplane. It was a reminder that there are new and different opportunities for the recorder.

The following day was more replete with recorders. Beginning the afternoon, the Barbary Coast Recorder Orchestra, directors Glen Shannon and Greta Haug-Hryciw, presented a program titled "Moodscapes" at the First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley. Starting with *Alpine Moods*, composed by Shannon in 2024 for a recorder orchestra in Switzerland, the ringing of tuned cowbells distributed among the audience echoed the trilling of the 20-plus recorderists on stage. The program proceeded to draw the audience into a series of pieces that paint specific emotions and moods: from morning – Elgar's delightful *Chanson de Matin* – to early music by late Renaissance composer Martin Peerson and the Gothic sounds of Guillaume Dufay, to *Riffs* by Andrew Challinger (1986) and the John Lennon favorite *I am a Walrus* – all "orchestrated" for a full complement of recorders from smallest to largest. Dotted through the program, sopranino solos, played by invited guest, ARS president Jody Miller, soared high above the foundation of contra-bass recorders standing proud at the rear of the orchestra. Rounding out the program, Gounod's delightfully ironic *Marche funèbre d'une marionette* sounded like the circus had arrived

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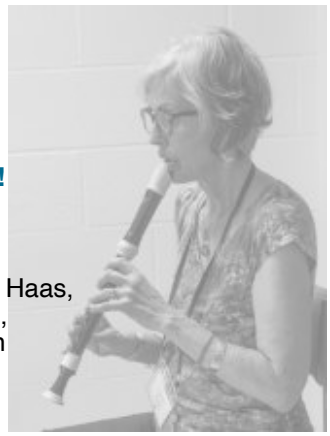

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◀ Barbary Coast Recorder Orchestra.

▼ BCRO bass and contra-bass section.

in town with carousel, organ barrel, and marionette-clown smiling in his melancholy.

Several members of the BCRO also participated in the Recorder Relay, which followed in an adjoining hall after a short break. While attentive and always encouraging, the audience was somewhat disappointing in size. Had the event been scheduled on a weekend, more people would likely have been encouraged to attend, but Monday afternoon was the only time during the busy festival week when an appropriate venue could be secured.

The Relay began with Jonathan Harris exploring music related to birdsong by Jacob van Eyck and Paul McCartney, which he recalled from memory on his Renaissance-style recorders. Then ARS board member David Benefiel, playing a magnificent contrabass by Friedrich von Huene, joined Ellen Johnson and Nancy Kesselring in a 4-movement sonata by Gottfried Finger. Six local players paid tribute to Dan Lapsansky, a beloved member of the community who had recently passed away, in three pieces for lower recorders, including a pre-release airing of one of the pieces in the special Member's Library Edition in memory of Susan Burns. Glen Shannon's arrangement of *Star of the County Down* demonstrated the adaptability of his harmonization for use by high and low consorts.

Calling themselves DJLD after their first initials, Dan Chernikoff, Juliette Faraco, Lee Tavrow, and Dan Bloomberg gave renditions of two Bach works for recorder quartet. This was followed by Lydia Fredkin playing charming 19th-century music composed originally for the recorder's close relative, the czakan. Birdsong was again the theme of the bracket presented by Quodlibet, comprising Nancy Grant, Cindy Keune, and Mary Ellen Reed. William Byrd's *The Greedy Hawk* showed to what degree the elegant, and often highly sophisticated music of the 16th century is suffused with avian themes.

Two soloists presented different approaches to playing on your own. Dan Bloomberg showed that J.S. Bach's *Partita* for solo flute BWV 1013 can stand on its own in a transposed version for recorder, and David Vallelunga entertained the audience with renditions of 16th- and 17th-century pieces with digital accompaniments that he had created and pre-recorded. Composing an accompaniment is one thing; playing to a recording of it is another skill that David showed can be mastered.

The Relay ended with two pieces by Glen Shannon, played by the composer and Jody Miller. *High Spirits* is ironically for two bass recorders, and high As in *Gin Rickey* for two altos required both players to indulge in some skilled choreography (see photo!). A fun way to conclude an afternoon of varied and entertaining music making.

The Relay was also the occasion for Jody Miller to officially announce Mark Davenport as the recipient of the 2026 ARS President's Honor Award. Mark was not present, but will be presented with the award at the Twin Cities Recorder Guild chapter meeting on Sunday, September 20 when Mark will serve as guest conductor. The afternoon's activities concluded with a Play-In led by Jody Miller, Glen Shannon and Greta Haug-Hryciw.

These recorder events organized by ARS conflicted with an event put on by Seattle Historical Arts for Kids. Returning to the Berkeley festival for the first time since 2018, the organization's concert featured four recorder-playing sisters in a movement of Heinichen's *Concerto* for 4 recorders, and concluded with a tutti set of Handel dances that left all grinning from ear to ear.

On Tuesday June 9, the Women's Antique Vocal Ensemble performed "A Treasury of Jewish and Arabic Music" to a large and enthusiastic audience at St. John's Presbyterian Church, Berkeley. The program included works by Salamone Rossi as well as repertory reaching back to the 7th century CE and into the 20th century. Six instrumentalists joined in various pieces, providing drones and melodic figurations to enhance the strong choral sound. Recorder player Jennifer Randolph was featured

◀ **Jody and Glen with their knees up for some high A-jinks in *Gin Rickey*.**

in the medieval Arab-Andalusian piece *Li Habibi* and the 17th-century Sephardic piece *Durme, durme*.

An event that spoke more than any other to the community aspect of the Berkeley Festival was the Memorial Concert for Sally Blaker. The mother of recorder player Frances Blaker and cellist Barbara Krumdieck, Sally had been an active facilitator of early music in the Bay Area. A cellist herself, Sally made sure that her enthusiasm was shared by all who came into contact with her. She did this by organizing musical parties, such as the monthly early music open-mike evenings that did much to cement community among enthusiasts in the area. The concert began with her daughters playing in the recorder and cello sections of the orchestra in a movement of *Brandenburg Concerto* no. 4, Tish Berlin playing recorder alongside her partner Frances as extended family. After two moving settings for solo voice and viol consort by Johann Christoph Bach (1642–1703), sung by Karen Clark and Caroline Armitage, the program ended with Georg Muffat's splendid passacaglia from his 1682 collection *Armonico Tributo*, with the recorders providing colorful additions to the 5-part string writing.

Another outstanding recorder highlight at BFX took place in the Loper Chapel on June 10. Júlia Vasconcelos Abdalla and Angelo Nagao da Silva Francisco, two young Brazilian players who form DuoElo Barroco, demonstrated their worthiness as winners of the inaugural Anna Laura Early Music Award at the 2025 Winter Festival in Campos do Jordão, Brazil. In their Berkeley recital they presented stylish and beautifully prepared performances of duets by Telemann and Boismortier on recorder and traverso, with exemplary breath control, fine tuning and creative use of sonority. Matching phrasing and articulation is not easy, but DuoElo has perfected the art – even when one player switched from recorder to traverso. In addition to duets, they played solos by Telemann and Bach. Júlia played a Telemann flute fantasia, transposed to d minor for alto recorder; Angelo took on the challenge of playing a prelude for solo cello by J.S. Bach in a transcription for flute by Frans Brüggen. The final Telemann duo sonata showcased their virtuosity.

▶ **Jody Miller guest soloist with the BCRO.**

June 12 brought Letitia Berlin assisting at a recital of music by Handel titled "By George!" with creative arrangements of arias from *Semele* and *Giulio Cesare* and a potpourri sonata comprising movements for recorder and cello in turn by Handel and his Dutch contemporary Willem de Fesch (1687–1761).

That evening, Judy Linsenberg added virtuosic bravura and dramatic flair to "The Ornamented Voice." Presented by Musica Pacifica, a Bay Area early music fixture for 30 years, the program title referred to elaborations of vocal lines, and the instrumental embellishments that both supported the lustrous tones of soprano Paulina Francisco and punctuated the well-chosen vocal excerpts in music exclusively by women composers.

While there was not so much direct dialogue between voice and instruments, Francisco's masterful navigation of the range of styles and languages was matched with no less aplomb by recorder player Linsenberg, and the other members of Musica Pacifica. The program notes gave brief biographical highlights of the careers of the women composers, whose lives spanned the *seconda prattica* of early 17th-century Italy to Enlightenment Berlin. Some of these women composers remain virtually anonymous, despite the caliber of their achievements in the male-dominated arena of musical composition. Others, like Barbara Strozzi, Francesca Caccini, and Elisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre, have recently gained renown. One of the most intriguing of the graces heard was a woman who called herself "Mrs. Philharmonica," presumably to disguise her aristocratic status. In the first movement of this lady's trio sonata, Linsenberg wove a gossamer thread of ornaments around the rich harmonic texture, and by switching from voice flute to soprano, she

heightened the energy of the final Presto. It was not as easy to breathe life into the pedestrian sonata movement by Anna Amalia of Prussia, the sister of Frederick the Great.

Elsewhere, there was plenty to tempt recorder players. At the Exhibition, which more than anywhere served as a central meeting place, the ARS table was between Seattle Historical Arts for Kids and Amherst Early Music, with Leatherman Recorders, Lazar's Early Music shop, and Greta Haug-Hryciw's Musical Miscellanea, Early Music America, and two clarinet and chalumeau makers' stands all in close proximity.

Other Woodwinds

For those curious about other historical instruments, BFX provided opportunities not only to hear a range of woodwinds but also to attend a fascinating demonstration of hurdy-gurdy and musette by Curtis Berak and Bruce Teter.

On Wednesday night, June 10, clarinetist Thomas Caroll joined musicians from Philharmonia Baroque to perform music by Mozart and Backofen on a main-stage concert. The program led to a perennial favorite: Mozart's *Quintet* for clarinet and strings, K. 581. What made this performance special was the use of an instrument modeled after one that Anton Stadler, the man for whom Mozart wrote the piece, is known to have played. Carroll, who made the instrument himself, explained that this instrument, known as a basset clarinet (not to be confused with the basset horn – see below), never caught on. In order to reconstruct it, the only evidence to which he had recourse was a unique woodcut engraving. Put simply, this is a clarinet with a downwards extension that allowed Carroll to play certain passages that had been rewritten for the normal clarinet in Mozart's late quintet. The program began with a quintet by Johann Backofen (1768–1830) for basset horn and string quartet. This instrument extends the clarinet even further downwards, which Backofen's work, one of the rare pieces to feature it as a solo instrument, used to great advantage.

Clarinets were joined by other wind instruments in Music of the Regiment, an East Coast group of fairly recent formation, which presented a concert topical for the American 250th anniversary. As Derek Kim said in his introductory remarks, "In a world that is currently rather fraught, don't we all need the soothing sounds of pairs of clarinets, horns, and bassoons?" And indeed, one of the themes of the story told in this concert was that, as much as stirring patriotic enthusiasm and bellicose energy, "military" bands in Revolutionary America served to appease overwrought spirits and undercurrents of insurrection. While it is not possible to know exactly what music the American bands played, their repertoire would have closely emulated what was being heard in Europe. Johann Christian Bach's *Military Quintet* and François-Joseph Gossec's *Bataille* were the most obvious imitations of battle scenes; Mozart's *Serenade* K. 375, most obviously music of entertainment and pacification.

▶ **Judy Linsenberg, recorder; Elizabeth Blumenstock, violin; and Paulina Francisco, soprano in the Musica Pacifica concert, "The Ornamented Voice."**

This was one of several Festival events related to American cultural heritage and the 250th anniversary, others being a presentation of songs by Irving Berlin, Lorenz Hart, Richard Rodgers, George Gershwin et al. and a foray into marches, hornpipes, gallops, and cotillons from the early days of American independence.

Clearly BFX is not just about early music and recorders! The resplendent Vajra Voices provided an uplifting experience as they sang chants by Hildegard von Bingen with their customary full-voiced passion. A mini-festival featured three organs built to specific historical specifications. The Festival also made a point of presenting groups that explore historical musical performance from outside the Western canon. On Saturday June 13, Melody of China brought joyous renditions of traditional tunes from different areas of China. Despite the group's largely foreign sonic world – with two bowed *erhu,* and *dizi* and *xiao* flutes playing the melody, accompanied by plucked *zhongruan*, the *sheng* mouth organ, and *yangqin* zither – a cello, which often playing a harmonic counter melody, was a reminder that cultural hybridity is inescapable. The *dizi* is a strong-toned transverse flute; the *xiao* qualifies as a fipple flute, but as with the Japanese *shakuhachi*, the player's lips form an embouchure.

The Show Goes On

The Albany Consort has been active for 52 years under the leadership of Jonathan Salzedo and his partner, recorder player Marion Rubenstein. This year the group presented two programs. The first, on Tuesday 9 brought enthusiasm to a program

◂ Tish Berlin and Frances Blaker in a moment of concentration in the Sally Blaker Memorial Concert.

of Telemann, Handel and Bach. The magnificent First Church of Christ Scientist, designed by Bernard Ralph Maybeck (Berkeley's only heritage-listed building) provided ample room for the large orchestra of 6 violins, 2 violas, 3 cellos, double bass, 3 flutes, 2 oboes and 2 bassoons, with Salzedo presiding at the harpsichord.

In a Telemann concerto for 2 flutes, and 2 oboes, Rubenstein on recorder was matched by Lars Johannsson on transverse flute, and the oboists Sand Dalton and Tyler Morrison did a good job of balancing with the flutes. After selections from Handel's oratorio *Athalia*, with noteworthy support from the orchestra in the overture and magnificent chorus from the end of Part 2, the program concluded with one of the creative surprises for which Salzedo is known: Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto* no. 3 with a full orchestra of strings PLUS winds. For the first movement, Jonathan adopted Bach's own reworking for Cantata 174, but replaced the horns with flutes (an enlighteningly satisfactory solution to avoid cracked notes!); for the slow movement he arranged an aria from Cantata 182 with an obbligato recorder part and the alto voice part given to viola; in the third movement he added his own wind parts.

In contrast, two days later, the Consort performed as a septet. Three works built on repeating bass patterns by Monteverdi, Purcell, and Biber comprised the first part of the program, with Rubenstein's recorder adding to the instrumental accompaniment of violin and continuo. The last two pieces were Couperin's "Chaconne ou Passacaille" from *Les Nations* (with tenor recorder in the ensemble), and a *sonata da camera* by J.G. Janitsch, played by alto recorder, oboe, viola, harpsichord and cello.

On the last weekend of the Festival, Kraig Williams returned to the Fringe with his Peralta Consort in a program called "Natural Intelligence, or A Musical Chat with the Original GPT – Georg Philipp Telemann." The main recorder offering was a Concerto for recorder and viola da gamba, with Kraig as recorder soloist, and Michael Relland on gamba.

The Festival's grand finale brought back large-scale opera production to the festival after several years' absence. Handel's *Alcina* was performed twice on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon in a semi-staged concert version in Hertz Hall on the UC-Berkeley campus. Kudos to Derek Kim for bringing such a high-quality performance together with minimal rehearsal! Soloists, and Festival Opera Chorus and Orchestra all acquitted themselves admirably. It helped that the score was Handel's most widely performed opera, with arias that are every singer's stock-in-trade. Not surprisingly, all the singers had their parts memorized, allowing for effective – if economic – stage action. This version prepared the company for fully-staged performances the following week in Walnut Creek. Recitative dialogue was lively. Shawnette Sulker was particularly alluring in her coquettish antics as Morgana. The cast went to great lengths to incorporate imaginative ornamentation, and bring the text forward in the recitatives – both essential ingredients in effective performance of Baroque repertoire. Oboists Matthew Hudgens and Daniel Deitch blended well with the violins, despite being placed at the opposite side of the stage, and took up recorders at appropriate moments.

In Handel opera, we can expect cross-dressing, and even in a semi-staged version without costumes, gender bending adds to the dramatic intrigue. Handel created some roles for castrati, and some male roles for women. (The reverse – men playing women – was not an option in *opera seria*.) In *Alcina*, he composed the two heroic roles: Ruggiero for the castrato Giovanni Carestini, and Bradamante for female alto Maria Catarina Negri. The Berkeley production opted to use women for both of these roles: mezzo Courtney Miller sang Ruggiero, and contralto Sara Couden Bradamante. The part of the young Oberto, originally sung by a boy soprano, was taken by the non-binary mezzo-soprano Nina Jones. ❁

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