The Flute in Chamber Music

When Wally Kujala called to ask if I would give a talk here at this convention he gave me free reign as to subject matter. I'm not sure I realized what I was getting into when I choose the topic "The Flute in Chamber Music", ~~for it's a bit like trying to cover all the music of the 19th century in a doctoral thesis~~. Be that as it may I will attempt to present a few examples from various periods beginning with the baroque, let you hear snatches of the music and discuss the techniques involved.

Betty Bang Mather has pointed out to you the characteristics of the baroque flute, how some notes are strong and others weak, and of course this made a tremendous difference when it came to a composer's choosing a key in which to write. The strong notes being those natural to D major, it was customary to stay quite close to this key, and when Bach wrote his Musical Offering, which is in C minor, he made use of several weak notes and in the process gave us a piece of considerable technical difficulty. As usual he was blazing new trails, throwing out fresh challenges. Anyone who has played the baroque flute and experienced the thrill of performing with colleagues on the baroque violin, baroque oboe, recorder, viola da gamba and harpsichord has the satisfaction of knowing that it was for this instrument the music of this period was composed. The qualities which many people were later to consider disadvantages, such as soft tone and weak as well as strong notes, were the very qualities which appealed to composers of the period.

Of course it is vital that one perform in a relatively

small hall, for one of the charms of this music and the instrumentation involved is that there is a feeling of intimacy, no need to "belt it out", a la orchestral playing. The baroque flute, along with the recorder, will inevitably be the weakest member of any ensemble, so the other instruments need to adjust their dynamic level accordingly. ~~However~~, it behooves us to work for as full a sound as possible, particularly in the low register. ~~This of course would also apply to the modern flute.~~

If you are not fortunate enough to have a viola da gamba with whom to work, suggest to your cellist he play without the peg. In any case

Since original editions of baroque music contain few articulations it is essential that care be taken to match identical or similar passages in the various parts. Sometimes an articulation which seems logical for one instrument may be awkward or impossible of execution by another and at such times musicians must be willing to compromise. There are other times, of course, when differing articulations will be used for variety.

Likewise it is obviously essential that there be a meeting of minds with respect to the use of vibrato. If we begin with the assumption that vibrato in baroque music should be used primarily for stress or to make a passage especially beautiful, the result will be quite different from that normally achieved as a by product of our basically 19th century background. Let me play for you a brief excerpt from the Telemann Quartet in G major for transverse flute, two bass viols and continuo as an example of an attempt made to match vibratos. Note also the use of messa di voce (a note held for half or a whole bar, with crescendo and decrescendo).

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Those of you with perfect pitch may have been disturbed at hearing this in what seemed G♭ major, but in fact this is due to the use of low pitch, in this case A 410, slightly more than a half-step below A 440. We have found the tone quality of all the instruments to be more mellow, more free at low pitch, and definitely prefer it to modern pitch.

One of the most fascinating aspects of baroque music is the opportunity to embellish and improvise on the basic notes provided by the composer. The first page of the sheet I have passed out is a score of the third movement of the Handel Sonata in F major. Listen to what Frans Bruggen does to this simple melody and notice how skillfully the harpsichordist Gustav Leonhardt follows in turn.

TAPE TAPE TAPE
Twelve Methodical Sonatas - Telemann Baerenreiter

No matter what the period, it is most helpful if all the performers have access to and study the score, not only for an understanding of the musical structure, but also to determine the importance of various notes and phrases. I'm sure many of you are familiar with the story of the string bass player ~~from~~ of the Metropolitan Opera orchestra who sat in the audience for a performance of Carmen and next evening rushed to his colleagues in the pit exclaiming, "You know the part of Carmen where we go F C , F C , well there's another tune going on at the same time, C,D CAAAGAB♭ A.

Now admitedly that was an extreme case, but I shall never forget playing flute quartets with three talented young people, each of whom seemed determined to blow louder than the other and none of whom seemingly had any thought for what might be important. In particular one often runs into a situation where flutists sing loud and clear

on long notes and play moving notes as though they were merely a means of getting to the next long note, when in reality the reverse would be much more appropriate. And of course the width of one's vibrato also plays an important role in determining the prominence of a particular note.

Another instance I recall vividly was an otherwise excellent performance in London of the Mozart Piano Quintet in which the pianist and all the winds, with the exception of the oboe, blended beautifully. The oboist, using a wide, often slow vibrato, dominated the scene and, while he phrased very musically, ruined the whole performance.

Of course one is greatly helped in his sorting out the important and less important when he is dealing with a composition like the Quintet op 26 of Schönberg. Schönberg has helped us by indicating ~~(second sheet)~~ principle themes (H) and secondary themes (N). And he is better than most composers in marking up the dynamics in the principal voice, but we still have found it necessary to point up the parts beyond his markings in order to achieve some degree of clarity.

TAPE

The seating arrangement can also play an important part in balancing an ensemble, and naturally one will attempt to put the weakest instrument in the most advantageous position. ~~(I have come to the conclusion that a baroque flute gets maximum projection when the performer is more or less facing the audience, a factor somewhat less important with the modern flute.)~~ In seating a woodwind quintet one must consider the particular auditorium. In the hall where the Oberlin Woodwind Quintet normally performs

we are positioned close to the back wall and so have the French horn seated on the right, back one seat, rather than in the middle, to avoid having his sound bounce off said wall.

Tempo can only be determined from a study of the complxity of all parts. A particular problem in this regard is the tendency of all of us to practice our individual parts too fast, because we are unable to hear in our mind all the other parts and have the feeling the piece will not hang together at a slower tempo.

Pitch also presents special problems, which differ greatly whether playing with strings or winds. It has been my experience that while in a woodwind quintet one must make a special effort to keep the top register as low as possible, even to the extent of using special fingerings, Al Tipton used in a piece like the Piston Quintet for Flute and Strings one can let the pitch rise considerably higher and still be "in tune", as it were. Of course we are all conscious no matter whether playing with winds or strings, ~~one~~ that we must always make a special effort to keep the pitch sufficiently high in piano passages. I guess I am most astounded at the large number of otherwise excellent performers who consistently play flat in the low register, whether soft or loud. As I indicated earlier it is vitally important for purposes of balance that the flutist have a full, resonant tone in order that he may dominate the ensemble, when appropriate, and this without blowing sharp. Equally important is the ability to play pianissimo, as few woodwind quintets do. In this regard I shall never forget the first time I played under Leopold

Stokowski, while in the Cleveland Orchestra. He was absolutely insistent on the orchestra's playing pianissimo, and while the wind players in particular were sweating and straining (not to mention bitching like mad) the effect was startling. There really is so much more we could do in this respect. Here again Al Tipton certainly set a beautiful example for us.

I would like to discuss for a few minutes some of the techniques used in contemporary chamber music. One of the most interesting pieces which we have performed in recent years is Ton Bruynel's Signs for Woodwind Quintet and two soundtracks. The soundtracks are a recreation of the tones and sound effects produced by the instruments of the quintet, reproduced at differing speeds and time intervals.

These sounds emanating from the tape recorders have been visualized by ~~Gerard Leonard Van Den Erenbeemt~~ a Dutch artist in a most fascinating way. You already have a copy of the first page of the score and I will place three more on the stands here in front. These clouds (A) represent the sounds of a flute warming up by blowing straight into the mouthpiece, (Y) is a flute playing very softly, resulting in high floating sounds, (R) is a flute rattling its keys, (P) is an improvisation on the flute of series which are played staccatisimo and blowing sharp and which contain as many intervals as possible, and finally, (K) is short puffs of breath into the mouthpiece of the horn, the palm of the hand tapping the mouthpiece.

First I'll play just the sound track alone.

TAPE

Now let's add the instruments of the quintet and play the same section once again. Note that the first puff of air

emanates from the instrumentalist rather than the tape, and that some 30 seconds after the beginning Bruynel uses another in his bag of tricks, flutter tonguing.

TAPE

Bruynel has used many special effects ~~in the instrumental parts themselves~~. In addition to the aforementioned blowing air through the flute and flutter tonguing, there are also multiphonic sound (page 7), glissandi (page 11) and key clacking (page 12). In addition he has structured his piece without bars and with only a general indication of the time values desired. He has, however, indicated the time required for certain sections (for example the first instrumental statement is 13") and throughout the piece has more or less had a clock running (see score) to indicate when and how alll parts fit together.

There are three examples of improvisation, the first in the top three voices only, strictly controlled as to notes and with suggested rythms (page 17) , shortly threreafter a free improvisation for some ten seconds ending with chromatically falling semitone trills (improvisation door opening-page 18) and somewhat later a full half minute of free improvisation (pulling something out of a hat-page 20).

The piece is brought to a close with extremely high tongued notes in the flute, accompanied by siren like squawking reeds and tape sounds something like the north wind on a cold winter's night. Let me play the final section of the piece for you, and I'll begin approximately 30 seconds before the first improvisation to set the mood.

TAPE

That's a real shocker, isn't it?

To end on a lighter note and to give you a modern, albeit jazz, version of something similar to what Frans Bruggen did in the Handel Sonata in the way of embellishment let me play for you Goodenough's arrangement for five flutes and string bass of Thelonious Monk's Round Midnight. You have the original lead flute part as your last sheet. The lead flutist who is doing all the embellishing was at the time of this recording a freshman pre-med student at Oberlin. I think he's quite imaginative and interestingly enough the basic idea of a relatively simple beginning, gradually growing more and more complex and finally ending with a simple final statement of the theme is quite like what one might do with a piece in the baroque era.

Now Thelonious Monk's Round Midnight-