

SUMMER SCHOOL OF EARLY MUSIC 2011  
PRACHATICE, CZECH REPUBLIC

Not really knowing what to expect as an amateur recorder player I took the bus from Prague Na Knížecí on Sunday the 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2011. On an impulse I had signed up for the Summer School of Early Music in Prachatice, a beautiful medieval town in South Bohemia about two and a half hours by bus from the Czech capital.

After a warm welcome by the staff and the first meal in the residence there was an information evening in the grammar school, where all the classes were going to be taught. This year, already the 13<sup>th</sup> time the annual event took place, there were 12 classes in total, most of which were for recorder (lectured by Peter Holtslag, Carin van Heerden, Jostein Gundersen, Kerstin de Witt, Alan Davis, Julie Braná, Jan Kvapil, Monika Devátá and Ilona Veselovská) but there were also classes for baroque flute (lectured by Peter Holtslag and Julie Braná), baroque oboe (lectured by Carin van Heerden), harpsichord (lectured by Edita Keglerová), early singing (lectured by Rebecca Stewart and Paul Shannon) and Renaissance dance (lectured by Helena Kazárová). The information meeting was followed by a meeting of all the participants of the ensemble class by Monika Devátá I was assigned to. There it was decided who would play with whom and a time schedule was set up. This, combined with the daily concerts, pretty much filled up the entire week.

On Monday it all truly started: already upon entering the grammar school it felt like being in the movie 'Fame' with all the groups of two or more players practising in class rooms, changing rooms and hall ways throughout the school. It was so much fun playing in a quartet, discussing - in a mixture of Czech, German and English - which emotions we thought the composer had put in the pieces we had chosen and the various ways in which we could express these emotions. There were also the slightly dreaded, yet very informative improvisation lessons, and of course the piece de resistance: working on the Canzon á 12 by Giovanni Gabrieli with all the participants of the ensemble class. It was a magical experience making the three choruses come together and hearing the piece grow during the week working towards the performance in the student concert on Saturday afternoon.

Every evening there was a concert by one or more of the lecturers, sometimes joined by the ensembles they play in. The music performed ranged from the 14<sup>th</sup> century (played exquisitely by Ensemble Currente – will they publish their own Codex some day?) to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including the premiere of 'Written on Water' composed by Alan Davis only last year. It greatly improved my (beforehand practically non-existing) appreciation for modern recorder music. Also memorable was the Renaissance Dance concert with the audience joining in after the concert, where we could demonstrate our skill in the Pavan acquired in the dance class that morning and learn the basis steps of some other Renaissance dances. What I specifically liked about the concert of the children's class was some of the children telling their own stories making use of (parts of) the recorder in many different ways. Even though the fairytales were in Czech, you could understand them very well, albeit with a short explanation in English, through the various sounds accompanying the stories.

Other fond memories are of making new acquaintances – and even though communicating with them was sometimes difficult, this added to the fun and we always understood each other in the end - and sharing a glass of medovina (i.e. mead), which broke down the language barrier even further.

I returned home having enjoyed a week in a wonderful world where, in total contrast with everyday life, nearly everyone seemed to play the recorder. The whole experience made me realize that there is still so much more I need and want to learn and I intend to do this, mainly at home in the Netherlands, but definitely in Prachatice as well. I can recommend any one with an interest in Early Music to go to Prachatice. It is a great way to meet fellow musicians and I think even the most advanced player will be challenged by and find inspiration at the Summer School of Early Music.

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