

What are Fomrhi members doing at the moment?

To promote the sharing of information, and as a general conversation starter, members were asked what they have been doing recently. At length it has seemed best to publish this as a multi-author Comm. Don't hesitate to write in if you are inspired by anything you read here!

Jeremy Montague

The Secretary has asked us to say what we're doing. I've been, and am, writing articles for other people, such as the just-published Cambridge Encyclopedia of Brass Instruments, and a Festschrift and some other things.

I've also been writing a lot of short posts for my own website, www.jeremymontagu.co.uk, about all sorts of instruments, some ethno, some historic, and many just general. Some of them are old FoMRHI Comms that I thought might interest other people, and one or two have been revised as more information comes to light, such as the one on The Oldest Organ in Christendom about the 12th-century or so organ pipes from the Latin Kingdom period that were found at Bethlehem.

I also put my most recent book, The Conch Horn, on the website because publishers said it was too specialised. That's available as a plain pdf download or in Kindle and Mobi formats, as are my autobiography, my only effort at fiction (Wendy, a silly set of stories about a dragon with a lot of musical references), and also a set of lectures about the Industrial Revolution and Music.

There's still a backlog of posts that my son hasn't yet had time to put up on the website, and I'm gradually writing more.

Some my son has listed as Books, some as Online Guides, and others are listed just as Downloads. They're all of them free downloads, just put there in the hope that some people might find them interesting or useful. Have a look: www.jeremymontagu.co.uk.

Peter Madge

Q. What is the most challenging technical practical problem you have been trying to solve in your workshop? Did you succeed?

Making it easier to pitch octaves on the recorder. Yes-success.

Q. Have you discovered any useful techniques that you believe might be novel or unconventional yet achieve the desired outcome?

Yes. See my paper "Modification Of or For Recorder Blocks" published by *FoMRHI* June 2006

Q. What are your opinions about what makes a good sounding instrument? How do you seek to achieve this in your work?

Dense timbers produce the most acceptable sounds.

Jurn Buisman, Museum Geelvinck / Geelvinck Music Museums

Q. What project(s) have you been working on over the last year?

We have had a new venue for the last 18 months: Geelvinck Music Museum Zutphen for historic pianos of the 18th and 19th centuries. In addition, we work on a project for cooperation between music and musical instrument museums in the Netherlands. Part of our museum is a workshop for restoration of historic pianos. We also stimulate emerging professional craftsmen (and women); piano technicians.

Q. Which historical instruments have you been inspired by over the last year?

Historic pianos and related instruments such as reed organs, player pianos, glass harmonica and clavichords.

Q. Which historical instruments or makers do you think offers a challenge to accepted ideas or notions that deserves wider exposure?

Dutch historic pianos and glass harmonica / chord

Q. If you could ask a single question to a past historical maker about their practice, what would it be and who would you ask it to?

Do you coach emerging professionals for a next generation of craftsmen?!

Q. Have you discovered any new sources of knowledge applicable to your area of interest?

We have our own library of historic pianos and we use a lot internet.

Q. Which aspect of the instruments you are interested in arouses the most passionate debate and controversy when discussed?

Authenticity and performing on historic instrument or just preserving instruments

... and questions in particular for instrument makers?

Q. What is the most challenging technical practical problem you have been trying to solve in your workshop? Did you succeed?

A square piano which was fully restored but kept having problems with tuning during performances. It is a riddle why this cannot be solved.

Q. What are your opinions about what makes a good sounding instrument? How do you seek to achieve this in your work?

Some instruments just have this “je ne sais pas” and others just don't.

Q. Is there anything you would like to ask other *FoMRHI* members about?

Visit our museum in Zutphen: www.geelvinck.nl

Basil Foraud

The project that has been absorbing me for some time is building a bandora, based on an NRI drawing No 1, of the seventies. I have recently finished an orpharion based on the Palmer instrument in Copenhagen. Lessons learned on this instrument are being applied to the bandora.

The two surviving orpharions and the citterns in the Hill Collection in the Ashmolean Museum have been my inspiration, together with a pack of photos that Peter Forrester so kindly sent to me when I was making a cittern many years ago.

The wire-strung instruments that survive and the documentary evidence around them indicates to me that maybe the wire instruments are underused today.

My question of a past maker such as John Rose would be about how they cut the neck joint on the bandora. Both of mine will be a butt joint . . . very hard to do as the surfaces are convex/concave.

No new sources of info, but David Millers Comm No 214 on 'Diderot's False Tables' was useful in useful in fixing the end blocks to the sides and assembling the back ribs over the mould.

Temperament is the issue that most struggle with when I explain that my frets don't match the equal temperament of guitars.

My most difficult challenge was setting up the action of the orpharion. Being so concerned with the clearance between string and fret, and not making the bridge too high, for right hand comfort, I didn't make a sharp enough angle over the bridge saddle, so the base end buzzes if I am not careful. I need to remove wood from the bridge.

As to materials used, having started out using reversible glue for everything, I am now thinking about using modern glue more, and using reversible glue for soundboards and fretboards only.

Varnishing is an issue for someone working without a professional training. The cittern was varnished with NRI pine resin varnish, very beautiful due to its high refractive index, but the drying time is for ever. The neck was waxed with canuba wax, but over time this has got mucky and needs to be cleaned off. The orpharion was varnished with several coats of half strength oil based polyurethane (satin), then cut back with T-cut, it looks good and feels nice too. The fingerboard is ripple sycamore, left natural, treated with two coats of sanding sealer and a few coats of Briwax, it still looks and feels good and is unmarked after two years of regular use. I play with an Early Music band, so finishes have to be robust, and able to cope with the odd knock and bump. We have to cope with limited performance space, and panic as instruments get shoved into cases as the rain arrives.

What makes a good sounding instrument? I don't know is the short answer! I source the best materials I can, especially pine for the soundboards. Real care is taken over the joints. Lots of tapping to get a good response as the instrument is made. I have tried to make the backs and tops vibrate in the mid frequency range of the instrument, but this will change with final shaping and gluing up, plus varnishing. The physics of how it probably all works guides me more than anything.

Finally, if anyone's Comms could offer help over bandora construction, rose construction for say a vihuela, or a proper "gothic" harp, I would be very interested.

As an amateur I feel guilt over being more of a taker than a giver, also I have limited time to make so things grow slowly. I can't thank enough those who are prepared to share their insights with us all.

Q. What project(s) have you been working on over the last year?

The arching of the bellies of bent-stave (English) viols, on the basis of the (very few) surviving Jacobean viols where we may have some confidence that the original arching is still potentially observable, despite alterations.

Q. Which historical instruments have you been inspired by over the last year?

I have paid particular attention to the Henry Jaye bass viols (1619) in the RCM, restored by Kessler but mostly in its original configuration, and admirable for its sound and very easy articulation (even though it had incorrect stringing when I last played it).

Q. If you could ask a single question to a past historical maker about their practice, what would it be and who would you ask it to?

Obviously Jaye or Rose: "What precise arching were you aiming for in your viols, and how many of the staves did you heat-bend in order to achieve that shape?"

Q. Which aspect of the instruments you are interested in arouses the most passionate debate and controversy when discussed?

For me, at least, the crucial question is at what point English makers decided to improve the design of the (presumably Italian) imported viols they were using (e.g. from the royal collection of instruments). This could tell us a great deal about the sound we might aim for in playing Tye and Byrd viol music.

... and questions in particular for instrument makers

Q. What is the most challenging technical practical problem you have been trying to solve in your workshop? Did you succeed?

Bending the two staves on 'either side of' the middle stave on an English-type bent stave viol front. I have made around 5 of these, and they are getting better (all playing)...

Q. Have any of your choices of materials you work with changed over the last year?

Not really, but the growth-ring density on viol bellies, and the corresponding quality of sycamore for appropriate bridges, still needs further thought.

Q. What are your opinions about what makes a good sounding instrument? How do you seek to achieve this in your work?

A good viol in my opinion must have a smoothly graded sound quality across the whole range (no big steps), and give a sound with a full and even overtone structure, with a very ready speech.