

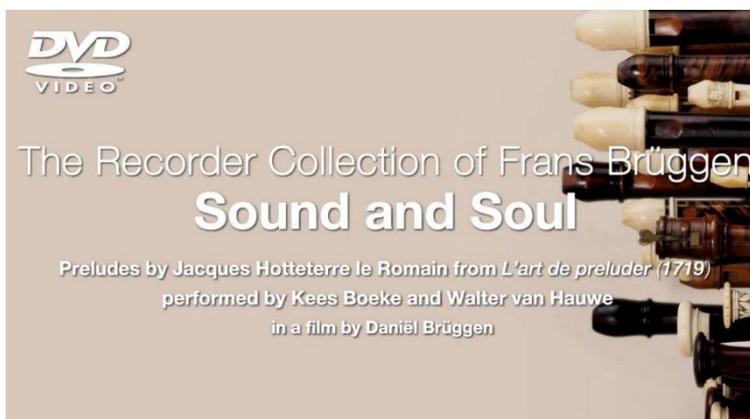
Sound and Soul, the DVD about the recorder collection of Frans Brüggen

The famous Dutch recorder player Frans Brüggen (1934-2014) collected during his life a fine collection of superb historical woodwind instruments. The main part of this collection consists of 17 baroque recorders by French, English, German and Dutch makers. Many players and instrument makers asked Brüggen if they could play and examine the recorders. For their benefit, and to protect the instruments from damage caused by measuring too many times, the Australian recorder maker Frederick G. (Fred) Morgan (1940-1999) made drawings of them, which were published in 1981 by Zen-On Music Co. LTD (Tokyo) as 'The recorder collection of Frans Brüggen'. These drawings became almost as famous as the instruments themselves. They are not easy to read: there are no explanations to the drawings, which are made in a free style (Morgan didn't follow official technical standards), some inside knowledge of recorder making (and experience in measuring) helps greatly for a better understanding. The album with the drawings on loose sheets (410 x 275 mm) is not easy to come by (Zen-On has no representation in Europe, as far I know), you might try it on internet with the title or with the ISBN: 4-11-540600-3 and find prices up to 100 British pounds.

And now, almost 40 years after the drawings, a DVD is published (again by Zen-On, and again it cost me a lot of time to find a way to buy it) on which the sound of all the recorders has been recorded. The title of the DVD is 'Sound and Soul', and the subtitle is confusingly the same as that of the album with drawings: 'The recorder collection of Frans Brüggen'. The DVD has a number: ZD-985253 (for PAL format, common in Europe). There is also a version for NTSC format, with the code ZD-985252, more technical information can be seen on the Zen-On website: https://www.zen-on.co.jp/world/recorder_collection_dvd/. There you can also see and hear short excerpts of the recordings. The initiative for the DVD was taken by Machtelt Brüggen Israëls, (I take this from the preface to the booklet with goes with the DVD) to fulfil the wish of her late husband that the recorders were not to meant just to stay in a case, and be looked at; they are there to be played too, even if briefly, to resurrect as much as possible the sound and the soul of baroque musique. The filming for the DVD was done by Daniël Brüggen (a nephew of Frans), the instruments were played by Kees Boeke and Walter van Hauwe.

The recorded instruments are:

1. Recorder in Bb ('tenor fourth flute' in stained boxwood, with brass key, at a=410 Hz), by Thomas Stanesby Junior (1692-1754)
2. Recorder in c' (tenor in c in ebony with ivory rings and a silver key, at a=396 Hz) by Martin(?) Hotteterre (d.1712)
3. Recorder in c' (tenor in c in stained boxwood with ivory rings, at a=398 Hz) by Dupuis (fl. 1692)



4. Recorder in d' (voice flute in d in stained boxwood with ivory rings, a= 403 Hz) by Peter Bressan (Pierre Jaillard; 1663-1731)
5. Recorder in d' (voice flute in d in maple, at a=408 Hz) by Peter Bressan
6. Recorder in c' (tenor in c in church pitch, in plumwood with horn rings, at a=473 Hz, or a voice flute in d in low pitch) by Johann Christoph Denner (1655-1707)
7. Recorder in f' (alto in f in boxwood with ivory rings, at a=411 Hz) by Jan Steenbergen (1676-1752)
8. Recorder in f' (alto in f in stained boxwood, at a=406 Hz) by Thomas Stanesby Senior (ca. 1668-1734)
9. Recorder in f' (alto in f in boxwood covered with tortoise shell and with ivor rings, at a=403 Hz) by Johann Heitz (1672-1737)
10. Recorder in f' (alto in f, with long foot, in stained boxwood with ivory rings at a=406 Hz) by Peter Bressan
11. Recorder in f' (alto in f, with shorter foot, in stained boxwood with ivory rings, at a=403 Hz) by Peter Bressan
12. Recorder in g' (alto in g in low pitch in ivory at a= ca.417 Hz, or an alto in f in high church pitch) by Johann Benedikt Gahn (1674-1711)
13. Recorder in c''(soprano in c in stained boxwood, at a=406 Hz) by Robert Wyne (1698-1774)
14. Recorder in c'' (soprano in c in boxwood, at a= ca. 413 Hz) by Jan Steenbergen (1676-1752)
15. Recorder in c'' (soprano in c in eboy with ivory rings, at a= ca. 413 Hz) by Richard Haka (ca.1646-1705)
16. Recorder in d'' (sixth flute in d in ivory, at a= ca. 420 Hz) by Thomas Stanesby Jr. (1692-1754)
17. Recorder in f'' (octave flute or sopranino in f, in ivory, at a= ca. 406 Hz) by Benjamin Hallett (1713-1753)



Walter van Hauwe playing the alto recorder of Steenbergen ('still' from the DVD).

What do we see and hear on the DVD? On each recorder a short prelude from *L'art de préluder*, opus 7 by Jacques Hotteterre, is played at first. Then follows a session of the individual tones of the instrument, from the lowest tone to two octaves upwards, always two tones in a row. For instance on an alto recorder: f1-g1, then g1-a1, a1-b-flat1, and so on. This procedure gives a good picture of the sound and pitches, for instance in which register the recorder sounds at is best. On the video you can see how Kees Boeke and Walter van Hauwe are playing the instruments, but it is not so clear for each and every note to see which fingerings were used. That is a pity, especially for the fork-fingered tones, which are surely not all identical for all recorders. And I would have liked to hear more interval playing, to get a better impression of the so-important thirds and fifths, and also of the octave intervals. The educational value of the DVD would have enormously improved with that. The question is for which people this DVD might be interesting. Surely for instrument makers, perhaps for a few professional players or some advanced amateurs who are interested in authentic sound of the recorders. For them, I have some advice: try to listen open-mindedly to the sound of the instruments (using good quality equipment), but don't look at the screen of your computer or television. Do in the meantime a different job, read a book or what you ever can do (or even close your eyes), but do not concentrate too much on the music. And doing so, suddenly, you are hearing something special, a beautiful sound which is coming through into your head. And that is likely to be from a recorder which is especially interesting or suiting you. I call that subconscious or free listening. It can help instrument makers who are often so busy with critical or technical listening!

There is no spoken information on the DVD. But during the playing sessions, the recorders are filmed in detail, both front and back, from lower to upper end (but never is the whole instrument as such visible, always only a section). With the 'print screen' function on your computer, pictures of the recorders can be extracted from the videos.



'Still' of the alto recorder by Thomas Stanesby. The middle hole (actually hole 4) is filled in by Frans Brüggén with some wax, as is the case on several more holes on the other recorders. There was a problem: because of the taking print screen from a moving film, the round holes became oval in the still. The problems are less severe for the heads of Haka's soprano and the alto in g by Gahn (next pages). The stills show fine details of the instruments, which adds useful information to the drawings by Fred Morgan and is a great help for copy makers.

With the DVD comes a booklet with descriptions of all seventeen instruments. The text is by the experienced Japanese recorder maker Fumitaka Saito (he lives in Amsterdam). And this booklet contains a lot of interesting information, about the maker of the instrument, some technical aspects (for instance voicing details and bore profiles) and sound characteristics. Some recorders are described more comprehensively (such as the tenor fourth flute by Stanesby Junior), a few with only a couple of lines (Steenbergen's soprano recorder). But that is not so much a problem; it is so instructive to look over the shoulder of a skilled recorder maker (and player) at the instruments. And the information adds hugely to the annotations on the drawings by Morgan.

Some observations and complications

On two recorders, the alto recorder by Gahn and the soprano by Haka, the middle joint had to be pulled out for the playing session quite a bit (ca. 1 cm) to correct serious intonation problems. The tables with pitch measurements by Morgans reveal indeed that the top of the first register sounds much too sharp (the tones played with only one or two of the upper holes closed), see the table with pitches and fingerings of the soprano recorder on the previous page: the b1 (b'), c2 (c'') and d2 (d'') are much too sharp compared with the other notes. Pulling out the middle joint is indeed a good remedy to solve that. But that also causes a gap in the bore which is better to fill up with a small ring, to avoid other intonation problems. I don't know whether that was done for the DVD playing session. Frans Brügger suggested to me when I examined (long ago) the four Dutch recorders in his collection, that the lower joint of Haka's soprano might have been shortened. That is possible, for the socket is now 0.8 mm longer than the socket of the head (an indication that somebody has fiddled with the tenon), and the thumbhole is rather close to the shoulder. But on other soprano recorders by Haka this hole position is not so much different. Another reason for the intonation problems might be shrinking of the wood above the thumbhole: that means at the tenon (where the wood is thin, here 1.3 to 1.8 mm) or on the lower part of the head. And here I am missing some important information on Morgan's drawings: he gives for most recorder parts for the internal (bore) and external (balusters and so on) diameters only one value, presumably the maximum diameter. That means that there is only a very restricted insight into the shrinking of the wood (or ivory) of the instruments. And just that shrinking can be very irregular, leading to the intonation problems.



Head of the alto recorder in g by Johann Benedikt Gahn ('still' from the DVD).

Saito makes some interesting remarks. About the alto by Gahn: "On many historical instruments, the interval of the first octave from the lowest tone (g1 for the Gahn) to the g2 is rather wide. In some cases, the extent of deviation due to ageing is less pronounced but with most recorders, as also with this instrument, there is considerable deviation, such that

it cannot be controlled by the breath alone. The position of each tonehole seems to have been determined not by the correct tuning but by delicacy of expression and beauty of appearance. In order to play the recorder with correct intonation, players are required to cover several more toneholes than normally used, or adjust the size of the holes with wax.” Saito also says that by regular playing the deformations in the ivory parts may disappear and that the recorder produces its nice sound without using wax.

About Richard Haka (c. 1646-1705) says Saito that he made instruments in the transition between the Renaissance and the Baroque period and that he is one of the makers who contributed greatly to the development of the recorder at that time. But the design created by Haka was not taken over by his own apprentices (such as Van Aardenberg and Steenbergen) and the following generations preferred instead making their own design. About the soprano recorder: one of its characteristics is the very small top chamfer (according to Morgan only 0.5 mm long, and very flat; he also mentions the almost invisible block chamfer). The window is also very short (3.2 mm), which all results in a thick sound. Those are the words of Fumitaka Saito. But what does Fred Morgan say? “Very gentle tone, not loud, clear, easy, free of chuff, rich in harmonics, giving reedy overlay to a basic full & round quality. Lack of a block chamfer keeps the sound soft. Easy speech on c4.” Frans Brügger recorded ‘Engels Nachtegaeltje’ by Van Eyck on this recorder. It is interesting (but not mentioned in the booklet) that the same lack of chamfers can be seen on several Italian baroque recorders (see the dissertation of Inez d’Avena Braga, downloadable from the website of the University of Leiden, <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/33729>). Were those makers inspired by Haka’s instruments, or were they both working in the tradition of renaissance types of recorders?

What can we learn about all this sound descriptions, and did the Saito’s and Morgan’s observations match with what I actually heard on the recordings of the Haka soprano? Very virtuoso pieces of music, the instrument tolerates quite a bit change in breath pressure, is also very stable. But is it a thick sound? Compare it with the soprano by Wijne, that instrument is more elegant in sound, very clear and pure. I have made some copies of the Wijne soprano, and it was satisfying to hear that the pitch of the tones were very much the same.

There is much more to tell about the instruments, for instance about the compromises the builders has made to get the best balance in tone quality and tone range in the longest recorders. The lowest note on the tenor by Dupuis sounds much too high, much more a c#1 than a c1 (the next tone is a d1, so the step is a semitone). Saito gives an explanation, but doesn’t mention that the same happens on many baroque oboes from the first generation.

The future of the Brügger collection

The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam has negotiated for several years concerning the recorder collection. But in the end the family decided to keep the instruments. Well, that is perhaps disappointing, but still better than if the recorders should have been sold individually and dispersed over the whole world. There is also the problem with restrictions about playing and examining musical instruments in museum collections, Maybe that the heirs of Frans Brügger were just withheld because of these restrictions to sell the recorders to the museum.

One last remark about the DVD: I bought a copy via Music Shop Europe (Heerenveen, Netherlands), it costed me about 45 euros.