



## Some Things Old and Some Things New in Recorder Methods and Technique Books

by ARS Member Beverly Lomer

Frequently asked in social media recorder groups is the question: *How does one select a recorder method?* That depends, of course, on what instrument[s] a student plans to learn, musical background, and availability of a teacher.

Drawing from the “Music Reviews” that have been published in *American Recorder* and consultations with professional teachers, I hope to offer both tried-and-true and newer publications options for you.

### **For Beginners**

For self-studying students with no music experience, there are several methods that introduce and explain the elements of music. Of the older publications, two stand out: *The Recorder Guide* by Johanna E. Kulbach and Arthur Nitka and *The Best Recorder Method – Yet?* by Albert Gamse. Both give clear and fairly complete explanations of clefs, note names, rhythmic values, and accidentals. They also include information on holding the recorder and articulation.

### **Beyond Basic Fingerings**

There is, of course, much more to learning recorder than mastering fingerings, and for this reason several professional teachers continue to use Hugh Orr’s *Basic Recorder Technique*. This multi-volume series is available for both C and F fingerings. Anne Timberlake, Pat Petersen, and Jennifer Carpenter like it for its extensive written descriptions of technique (with photographs), excellent step-by-step pedagogy, and attention to difficult fingerings and period music.

### **For Beginner/Intermediate Players**

Some recorder teachers, including Anne Timberlake and Jennifer Carpenter, use the series *The Sweet Pipes Recorder Book* by Gerald Burakoff and William E. Hettrick for beginning-intermediate students. This series, available for both C and F fingerings,



introduces new notes systematically using both familiar folk tunes and renaissance/baroque tunes. Jennifer L. Anderson's *An Introduction to Playing the Recorder* and *A Continuing Course in Playing* are newer additions to the body of recorder methods.

### **Duets**

Duets are a fun way to study and advance on recorder and the above methods each include them. The *Sweet Pipes* series is limited in that it offers duets only at the end, while *The Recorder Guide* and Anderson's books introduce these early. Anderson takes the less usual path in using examples from later classical composers. Some of the very best renaissance duets and trios are contained in *The Best Recorder Method – Yet*. They are pleasingly polyphonic without being overly challenging. They make for great performance pieces for students and less experienced players. For more advanced players, Adrian Wehlte's *Methodische Etüden für 1-2 Altblockflöten* is an extensive set of studies in duet format. They are challenging with difficult keys, but most worthwhile in easing one's fear of chromatic music. The lines can also be played solo.

### **Intermediate**

A recent publication for soprano, Ludovica Scoppola's *Method for Descant Recorder* does not address music fundamentals or technique, but if used with a teacher, it covers all of the notes and contains a great many examples that are progressive to a solidly intermediate level.

Another staple among recorder teachers is Frances Blaker's *The Recorder Player's Companion*. Blaker's book does not focus on learning notes, but rather presents exercises focusing on breath, fingers, and articulation. There is no music present, but well-presented explanations and exercises designed to help develop proper recorder technique. This is a great addition to your practice routine.

As students progress past the basics, working with technical studies is essential. G. Rooda's *95 Dexterity Exercises and Dances for Recorders*, available for both C and F fingerings, is an excellent resource. The scale and arpeggio studies are not overly difficult, and they encourage facility in playing passagework. Aldo Abreu's 3 methods - *Finger Exercises*, *Warm-Ups and Technical Exercises*, and *Articulation Etudes* (2 volumes) are difficult but perseverance with them really helps with breath control,



sound quality and performance of chromatic elements. Finally, one last recommendation for modern etudes is Joel Levine's *Between the Lines* – 8 jazzy

sounding contemporary studies that employ a lot of tricky rhythm and chromaticism. Though they are study pieces, they are also quite musical.

These suggestions are a sampling of what is available to recorder players. Several [ARS Business members](#) offer method books for sale. The ARS recently added a dedicated link on our website to [Reviews of Methods and Technique](#), and we also are working on a more comprehensive annotated bibliography. We welcome input and mini-reviews from professional teachers, which can be sent to me at [BeverlyLomer@gmail.com](mailto:BeverlyLomer@gmail.com).

***Beverly R. Lomer, Ph.D.** is an independent scholar and recorder player whose special interests include performance from original notations and early women's music. She is currently collaborating on the transcription of the Symphonia of Hildegard of Bingen for the International Society of Hildegard von Bingen Studies. She is active in ARS as the President of the Palm Beach (FL) Recorder and Early Music Society and plays with several local ensembles.*

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