



ERS newsletter Vol I no 1. June 2014

It was suggested by the Board that we do something about a newsletter - so I'm doing. I hope that in future members will be moved to contribute articles, reviews of music or recordings or instruments, letters, anecdotes. I don't promise literature and don't even promise regularity. I'm not even sure exactly what kinds of things it will contain, but I DO know what I want to say in the first one (it will be brief, as will they all).

#### WORKSHOP BY VINCE KELLY

I really want to rave about Vince Kelly's recent workshop. This was one of the last events of the season (I don't know which season Nordegg falls into), and those of you who missed it will regret it. It was one of the most stimulating workshops I've been to EVER – and I've been to a LOT of workshops. Vince's topic was *sprezzatura* – not an everyday concept, and he made it absolutely fascinating. He began by quoting from Baldassare Castiglione's book about *The Courtier*. This manual for proper behaviour was a textbook of Italian manners of the late Renaissance (and I'm not sure whether it was descriptive or prescriptive). There are a lot of things a well-brought-up-person should be able to do, but the main thing about it all, was that whatever is being done it must appear absolutely effortless. That's what signals the great difference between an aristocrat and a mere hack (I haven't quite got the terminology right here, but it's a bit tricky to put this into modern terms. If you'd been there, you'd have heard Vince say it much better). Any preparation must be done in secret, so that to an outsider, the accomplishments will appear innate and nobly so. It takes someone of great ingenuity and learning to adapt this idea to music, but Vince, of course, did it, with examples that we played and listened to ranging from Holborne (and I don't think Vince was JUST pandering to my well-known proclivity) to Chopin to Bach. I suppose one way of expressing the concept would be 'taste'. Music has to be *tastefully* effortless, and when Vince had us listen to various performances of a Chopin piece, it became clear that taste is not an immutable concept.

But to come back to Holborne; what we were made to realize is that any contemporary who was playing his music got only his (and among the many snippets Vince tossed out was the fact that recorders were not considered very feminine instruments) part. One of the Holborne pieces we played had a very complex rhythmic structure: should it be in 3 or in 2? We tried it both ways, and realised that sometimes it's one and sometimes the other. But how on earth would you know if you

couldn't see the other parts? Because, having nobility of purpose, you would exercise your spirit of *sprezzatura*, of course!

As we tried a Bach prelude, Vince told the story of an organist who had been panned by Bach and got his own back by wondering in public what had happened to the chorale in the ornaments of a nameless composer – easily recognizable by the cognoscenti as Bach. We knew exactly whereof he spoke when we played the prelude. Where on earth was the chorale?

Vince's carefully prepared presentation covered a wide range of subjects: the distinction between professional and amateur composers, traditions of performance, the position of the musician in society, to mention some, and incited one to think about all these things and their relevance to our recorder playing. It was a rich and enriching afternoon, and made me realize how very lucky we are to have Vince among us.

#### VARIA

We're lucky in other ways, too. Lucky that we have a pool of talented musicians who are willing to conduct the recorder orchestra for the annual Gala Concert. It was Lois Samis Lund who took on this role this year, and provided the theme for the concert – The Real Canadian Water Music. Lois herself had arranged some of the music we played, and as we watched a video of the performance (Lois set a new bar by throwing a pot-luck picnic for participants) we heard how very well it sat for recorders.

Another stroke of luck is to have an annual Festival of Early Music. This year's offered a variety of concerts that showcased various early instruments and voices and included opportunities to dance and play.

Next up is, of course, the Nordegg retreat. Sometimes there have been as many as 30 participants; last year there were fewer than that, but people said they had enjoyed it enormously. Please think of coming and think of leading a group.