

Recorder/viol Workshop, Carmel Valley, California November 2009

Judy and I indulged ourselves once again at a wonderful week at tiny Hidden Valley Centre for the Arts in Carmel Valley. We had a leisurely drive down the stunning California coast road from San Francisco, stopping off to see an old recorder-player friend in Santa Cruz. Judy took some great pictures! Accommodation at the Centre is in simple, two-person rooms, and the food, as it was last year, is excellent.

The format of the workshop, headed by Tish Berlin, was similar to last year's (it needs no fixing): technique class first thing in the morning; choice of session in the late morning and early afternoon; orchestra rehearsal in the late afternoon; organized activity in the early evening and ad hoc group playing until 10 p.m.

There were, however, some changes: for starters, the umbrella organization is no longer called Elderhostel (smacks too much of geysirism) and has now become Exploritas. That initiative notwithstanding, we are all, shall we say, mature participants, which means that most of us have had years of recorder ensemble playing, and are mostly pretty competent (the week was billed as being for upper intermediate and advanced players).

And two of the faculty were new to us: Lisette Kielson, President of the American Recorder Society was there from Illinois, and David Morris, viol player extraordinaire from Berkeley. The technique class is a matter of chance, and Judy and I were both in Lisette's class, which meant that I took classes exclusively from new people, as I had chosen David Morris's Stylic History and Lisette's Sonatas and Canzoni.

In the technique class we concentrated on tone and fingering (we all got hung up on a fiendish little G-A \flat -G-A \flat -G-A \flat -B \flat twiddle on the alto in a deceptively simple-looking Croft sonata). People thought I was nuts doing David Morris's class, because there was NO PLAYING in it. But David is a passionate historian of music and delivered intriguing insights into differences between Continental and English styles, for example. This being a passive sort of class, nothing was expected of us at the end-of-week concert.

Lisette worked us incredibly hard in the sonata/canzon class; we did Grillo, Pachelbel, Schmeltzer and Bach, Bach, Bach, with a Capriccio by Sweelinck as our party piece at the concert. Judy was very happy with her classes, particularly Louise Carlake's 'Mille Regretz'.

Frances Blaker conducted the orchestra with her usual verve, getting us, to my ear at least, miraculously tuned to viols and harpsichord. She had no music of her own this year, alas, but we did perform an interesting 'In Nomine' by Harold Owen. The challenge was the 'Flaterie' and 'Postilions' from Telemann's 'Tafelmusik'.

We were dazzled by the brilliant faculty concert. The four recorder players: Frances, Tish, Lisette and Louise Carlake, took our breath away with a break-neck performance of the Telemann Concerto for 4 Recorders and David did wizard-tricks on the viol.

On Wednesday afternoon we took two friends off in our rented car and had a blissful picnic and wander around Point Lobos National Park, and saw whales spout in the distance and seals and sea lions bask in the foreground.

About a third of the students were Canadian, and, if I may say so, we acquitted ourselves rather well at the open mike on the last night. The MC was Tony Griffiths from Vancouver, who was very good at drumming up participants and holding the whole thing together: the group from Kelowna put on a very funny sketch; I did a Dylan Thomas number and we all joined together for a

rousing chorus or two of 'Un Canadien errant'. Not terrifically recorder-relevant, but good entertainment. I'm certainly going to try to go again next year.