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Wendell B. Dobbs

Marshall University, dobbs@marshall.edu

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Jean-François Beaudin: Borrowing from the Old World and the New

Wendell Dobbs

The modern flute world is full of innovation. Every year brings a new assortment of changes intended to improve the design or functioning of the modern flute—a new headjoint or a new material, a design innovation such as the vertical flute or a new contrabass flute. Much more subtle are changes to the design of 18th-century style flutes. Generally, modern makers of these instruments take careful measurements of particular antique flutes that are recognized for ease of playing and copy them. The innovations are most likely subtle—a new wood, gentle tweaking of the embouchure or a tone hole, or cosmetic refinements.

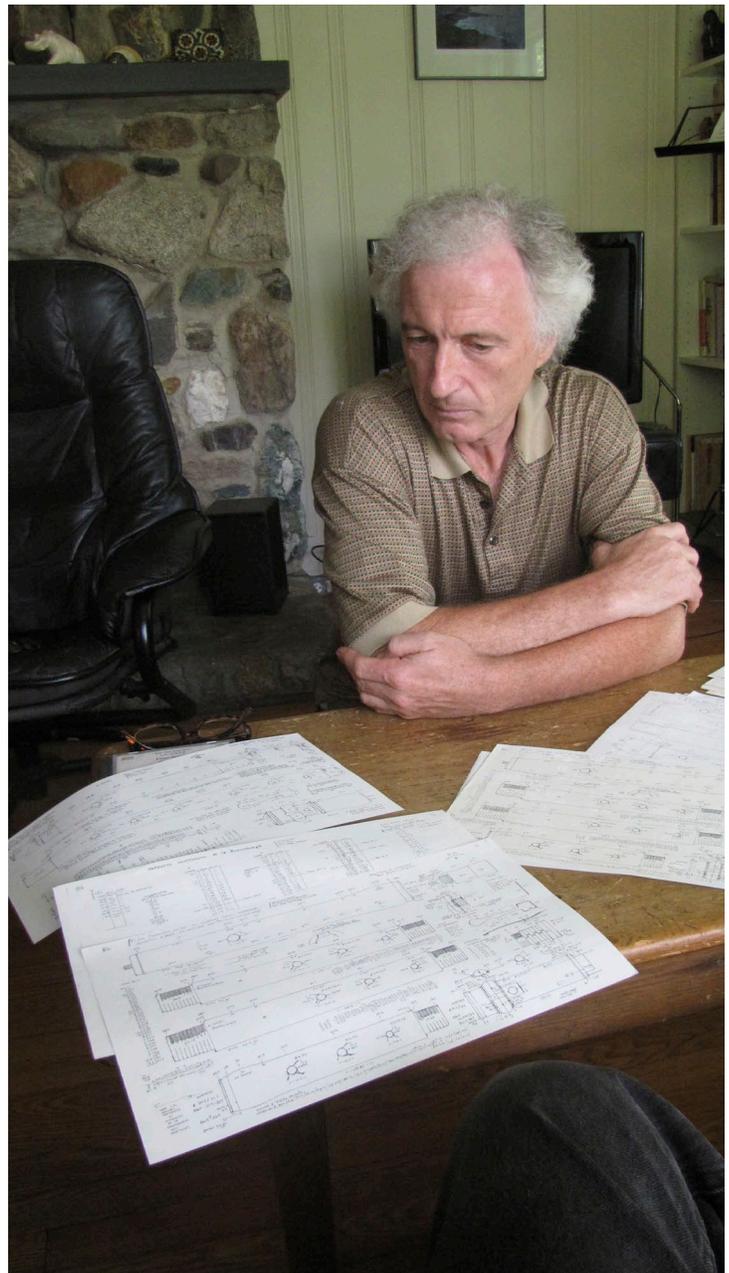
Such is not the case with Jean-François Beaudin's new world – old world flute, that is, his new style of 18th century, one-key flute—as he calls it, his “modern traverso.” With his new design he has thrown away the rulebook developing a one-key flute with more power and easier intonation.

Jean-François grew up in the French-speaking community of Montreal. His father was a photographer who loved jazz and his mother was a painter and wove tapestries. She also played recorder and introduced Jean-François to the recorder and its music when he was ten. “We were four children at home and very close in age and we took recorder lessons with my mother. Then she asked a teacher to come and we were all together taking lessons.”

He enrolled in music courses during the two school years that preceded college and then when it came time to start making career choices he continued his path with early music. “I found beauty and harmony in that music and I wanted to keep that beauty in my life.”

In the mid 1970's he began studying with Jean-Pierre Pinson, a well-regarded recorder player and musicologist from Bourges, France who had immigrated to Montreal. Soon after, Pinson invited him to teach at a summer academy in Poitiers. Jean-François continued his studies with him for the next two years at the University of Montreal (1976-77).

In 1978 Jean-François was admitted to the Royal Conservatory of The Hague in Holland where he studied recorder with Brazilian Ricardo Kanji. After a semester he



Jean-François Beaudin with technical drawings (photo: Wendell Dobbs)

added the flute class of Bartold Kuijken and flute studies started to supplant his interest in recorder. “Early music at that time was a sort of modern musical adventure because there was a lot to discover. It was exciting like archeology. In French we say, ‘like finding beneath the dust the jewelry box of Cleopatra.’”

Where his instruments were concerned Jean-François was happy with his recorder but was very dissatisfied with his flute. In the Conservatory at The Hague there was a small woodworking shop with a lathe and a few tools used mostly by the students of oboist Bruce Haynes. Luckily, Australian instrument maker Frederick Morgan was living nearby in Amsterdam (1978-80) at the request of Frans Brügger where he was making and drawing recorders. There began Jean-François’ serious work as a flute maker. He met Morgan while accompanying his teacher Ricardo Kanji on a visit to the Morgan workshop. Later, on one of his occasional visits to The Hague to teach classes in instrument making, Jean-François brought Morgan several pieces of ebony. Morgan reamed them with his Stanesby Junior design reamers that he had patterned after Frans Brügger’s ebony original. Jean-François then completed the flute, turning the outside on the lathe and even adding real ivory rings. He played that flute for the rest of his studies at The Hague.

During his second year at The Hague a secondary skill emerged. Jean-François began making schematic drawings of flutes. Measuring antique flutes and making accurate drawings is an essential part of the instrument maker’s craft. Kuijken recognized his potential and lent him his G.A. Rottenburgh flute for four days to measure and complete a technical drawing. “It was and still is the most famous baroque flute in the world.” According to Ardal Powell, “Jean-François Beaudin . . . helped establish Kuijken’s Rottenburgh as an ad hoc standard ‘baroque’ flute by freely distributing a detailed measured drawing of the instrument (1979) for other budding makers to replicate.”¹

Upon returning to Montreal in 1980 he established recorder classes at McGill and Concordia Universities and a pre-college class as well. In addition, he continued his

work as a draftsman and craftsman measuring, drawing and making flutes. Flutes by Johann Joachim Quantz (1697-1773) became his specialty, and Beaudin measured and made drawings of Quantz flutes in Washington, D.C., Berlin, Köpenick and Paris. Though Quantz never put his personal stamp on his instruments he did number them chronologically. By comparing different instruments Jean-François was able to draw certain conclusions about the evolution of Quantz’s flute making. In particular, he discovered that later instruments had subtle innovations such as a weighted footjoint to compensate for the imbalance caused by the added weight of Quantz’s tuning slide in the headjoint. He also discovered a subtle swell in the middle of Quantz’s headjoints (often obscured by the tuning slide). The feature improved intonation. Curiously, he discovered the same innovation in the Rottenburgh flute that dates from a later era. Jean-François’ drawings of the Quantz flute at the Library of Congress can be seen at <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query> (search for “Quantz” and click on the photograph).

Jean-François became sought after for his draftsmanship and received a number of commissions from museums and institutions to measure and draw the instruments in their collections. “With a Canadian government assistance, Beaudin went on to study a series of ninety-six historic flutes by 1992.”² His Quantz flute reproduction became a favorite among the growing community of baroque flutists. In particular, Quantz scholar Mary Oleskiewicz produced recordings of Quantz’s flute sonatas and duets (Jean-François Beaudin performing as second flute) on Beaudin’s Quantz reproduction.³

In 1983 Jean-François returned to Europe for a year, performing with many great musicians in the emerging early music community there. He continued his flute making in Paris, using the shop of a friend, Olivier Cottet. Upon returning home his frustration with the softness of the 18th century flute became acute, and he set aside his flute making around 1988 and became enchanted with the modality of music from India, especially the Carnatic system, practiced in the southern city of Madras.

He spent six months studying with a flutist in Madras. Their flute or *venu* is made of bamboo and had great power and projection. Here was the genesis of Jean-François’ new one-key flute design. “The start of my project was not the Boehm flute, but the south Indian bamboo flute.”

In 1994 Jean-François received another grant from the Canadian government to work for one year on his new design. Part of the grant proposal was a return to Madras for one month to collect instruments for study. “I wrote to my flute teacher to contact his flute maker to bring me a bunch of flutes and I chose 15 of them, all sizes, and there was a long one as well. I measured all of them.” Though the measuring was difficult, the irregular nature of bamboo posing a great challenge, Beaudin was able to draw valuable conclusions on bore size and tone hole size and placement. He then revisited Boehm’s research regarding the headjoint bore profile. Indeed, the final design is similar to that of Boehm’s—a conical headjoint bore that becomes smaller at the embouchure, and a cylindrical body. “So, I started my research in 1994 and I was still discovering new things this last year. Now, I consider it perfect.”

Jean-François Beaudin’s flute comes in three pitch levels A-392 (one whole step below modern pitch), A-415 (one half step below modern pitch) and A-440 (modern pitch). Unlike conventional 18th-century flutes the pitch cannot be changed by replacing one middle joint with alternate *corps de rechange*. Instead, you must have three different instruments to address the three pitch levels. The headjoints are not interchangeable. He does anticipate several innovations in the near future. First, a metal tuning slide will permit subtle changes in pitch. Second, a more rectangular embouchure hole will add even greater reinforcement of the tone. A third innovation will be a piccolo in all three pitch levels and a fourth will be a flute pitched at A-430, a popular pitch for classical era music.

The design is reminiscent of the Hotte-terre design flute with the long cap on the end of the headjoint, a thick barrel joint, a one-piece body and a thick footjoint. Jean-François maintains that the thickness of three elements—cap, barrel and foot—are essential to tone resonance. Early versions

retained the two-key design of the Quantz flute. However, more recent research on proper venting of the highest F natural has made the technically demanding two-key design inessential. The new venting permits its replacement with a single key. He makes his flutes of grenadilla (African Blackwood) though he has explored other woods such as mopane for the barrel, cap and foot providing a distinctive contrast.

Jean François' goal in developing his flute was simple, "I wanted to make a flute with more power, more projection, and one which required less correction for intonation. How can you express yourself [for instance] with a low G sharp like that [found on the traditional 18th century flute]?" Born out of this practicality Beaudin's flute is sure to meet with resistance from those who might object to the instrument's unusual appearance or who adhere to a particular aesthetic of sonority. Indeed, at question is the notion of whether the 18th century flute—sound and design—should evolve or remain locked in time. Challenges to the latter concept are posed by an increasing number of modern compositions for the traverso and by its application in popular folk genres, developments that scholars interested in reviving authentic performances of 18th century music would not have foreseen or perhaps understood just a few decades ago.

Though a bold departure, Jean-François Beaudin's one-key flute is finding its way into the mainstream. Japanese flutist Masahira Arita and French flutist Philippe Allain-Dupré have regularly played the Beaudin flute (Arita since 2004). In recordings, Mindy Rosenfeld uses her A-392 Beaudin flute in her multi-ethnic work with the Baltimore Consort while Norbert Rodenkirchen, flutist of the Sequensia Ensemble in Cologne, Germany performs both ancient and modern music on his Beaudin flute at A-440. Baroque flutist from the United States Colin St. Martin has been particularly pleased with the increased resonance, "Often early music orchestras will be over staffed in strings. Beaudin's flute's tone is more commanding and indistinguishable from the traditional baroque flute in such situations. In effect, the audience likes it more because they can hear it better."



"The Beaudin Flute" (photo: Wendell Dobbs)

Notes:

¹Ardal Powell, *The Flute* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 257.

²Powell, 257-8.

³Mary Oleskiewicz, David Schulenberg, Stephanie Vial, Jean-François Beaudin, *Quantz: Flute Sonatas* (Naxos, 2003).

Wendell Dobbs has completed his 27th year as Professor of Flute at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia www.marshall.edu/cofa/music. He founded the John Marshall Fife and Drum Corps and serves as the Principal Flutist of the Huntington Symphony Orchestra and The Ohio Valley Symphony. He performs with his colleague guitarist Júlio Alves in the Violauta Duo.

From Early Music America: Maria Coldwell, Executive Director of EMA will step down in September 2012, after 10 years of leadership. José Verstappen, Artistic Director of Early Music Vancouver, will receive EMA's Howard Mayer Brown Award for lifetime achievement in the field of early music; Arthur Haas will receive the Thomas Binkley Award for outstanding achievement in performance and scholarship by the director of a university or college early music ensemble; and Chatham Baroque is the recipient of the Laurette Goldberg Award for lifetime achievement in early music outreach. These awards will be presented at the EMA Annual Meeting and Awards Ceremony at the Berkeley Festival on June 9, 2012 at 2:30 p.m. in the Drawing Room of the Berkeley City Club, 2315 Durant Ave., Berkeley, CA.

The 14th annual Baroque Flute Boot Camp will be held from July 29 through August 4 in Seattle, Washington. This year's camp will be led by Flute Faculty Janet See and Kathie Stewart, while Director and Founder Kim Pineda takes a one-year hiatus from the camp. www.baroquenorthwest.com/nfbfc.html