PART I HISTORY, MUSIC AND TECHNIQUE

1 *The revival*

It is easy to make the mistake of thinking that we in the twentieth century have been solely responsible for the revival of early music and even easier to see the revival of the recorder as a sort of fairytale reawakening effected overnight by a touch of Arnold Dolmetsch's magic wand. That the recorder is now so widely played is, in fact, the result of a long and slow process of growth which has not one, but several, simultaneous sources. When one looks at the historical evidence, the roots of this interest in 'old' music, which is now such a booming part of our music industry, can be traced back to the early nineteenth century. Most writers on this topic regard the 1829 performance in Berlin of Bach's St Matthew Passion, conducted by the twenty-year-old Mendelssohn, as a significant landmark in the rediscovery of the music of the past. Nor was this an isolated phenomenon, but rather the inevitable and eventual practical expression of the German interest in Bach and his music which had been growing for the previous thirty years (Haskell 1988, 13–15).

By the 1890s the revival of early music (meaning music of the late Renaissance and Baroque) was well established in Europe. Most capital cities had series of 'historical concerts' which were attended by fashionable society, and large collections of original instruments had been assembled in countries such as Belgium, England, France, Germany, Holland, Italy and in the United States of America. Apart from some isolated exceptions, however, no serious efforts had yet been made to discover how these instruments were made or exactly how they were intended to be played. The recorder was very much in the background, overshadowed by the better-known instruments such as viols, lute and harpsichord.

ARNOLD DOLMETSCH

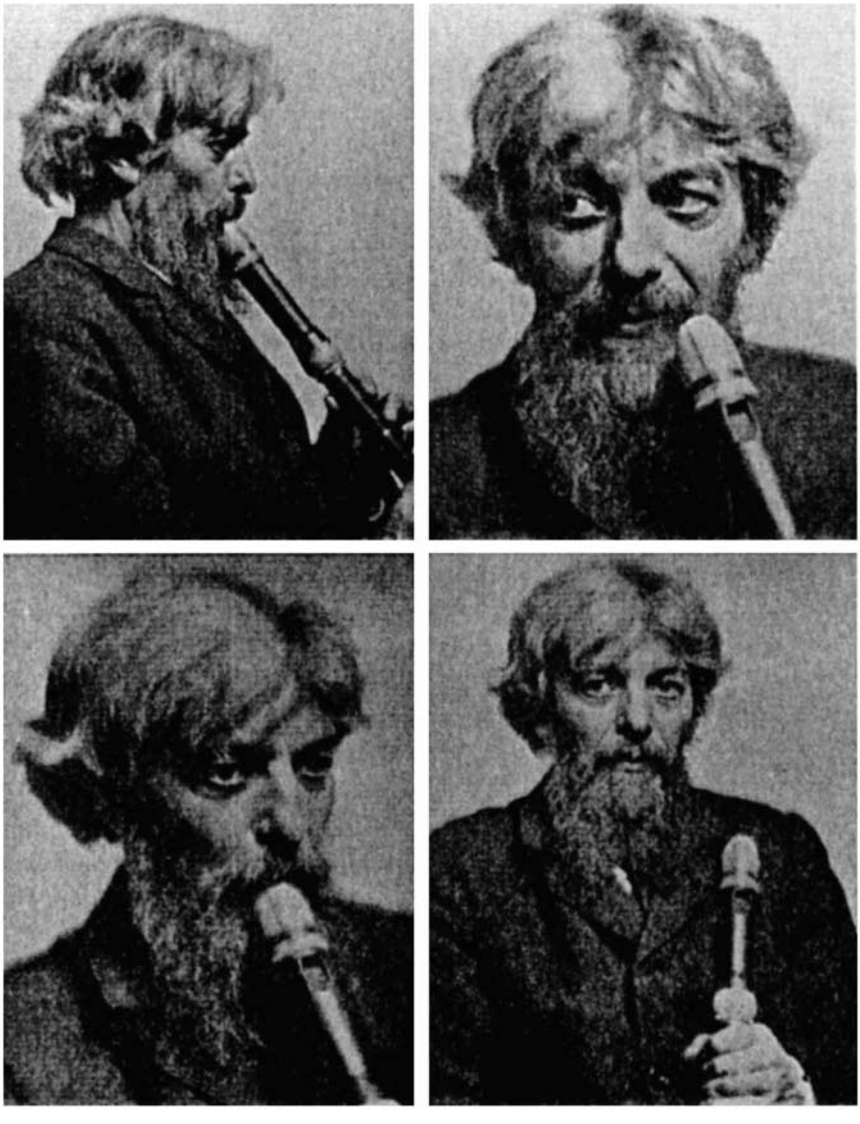
This well-developed but mainly antiquarian interest in old music and instruments began to give way towards the close of the nineteenth century to a growing feeling that there must be more to these quaint museum pieces that our ancestors thought so highly of. One of the first to see that this music was

once a part of the people's daily life and could become so again was Arnold Dolmetsch (1858–1940) (Plate 1), a French instrument maker,musician and scholar who settled in England in 1883. Dolmetsch came from a family of piano makers and organ builders and was thus trained as a craftsman and piano tuner by the time he reached his teens. The seeds of his interest in old instruments may have been sown while he was a student at the Brussels Conservatoire from 1879 to 1883. His first study there was the violin and his musical tastes as a young man leaned very much towards Brahms and Berlioz. He did, however, try out some of the instruments from the Conservatoire collection and recalled attending a lecture-demonstration at which recorders were played with disastrous misunderstanding of their fingering, resulting in a round condemnation on the part of the audience of the instruments and of the unmusicality of the players of those bygone days (Campbell 1975, 12). This was probably the first time Dolmetsch heard recorders being played, but it was not until more than twenty-five years later that he began to take a serious interest in the instrument.

In 1883, hearing of the opening of the Royal College of Music in London, the twenty-five-year-old Dolmetsch arrived with his first wife and baby daughter, Helène, to pursue further studies. At the RCM he came into contact with many great names: J. F. Bridge, Hubert Parry, C. V. Stanford, Jenny Lind and Sir George Grove, the college's first director. In the late 1880s he began to be interested in the music of Purcell, Handel and Corelli and his curiosity quickly led him to seek out the correct original instruments on which to play the music. He picked up old instruments in auction rooms and, using the skills acquired as a boy in the family business, restored them to playing condition. He searched the libraries of the British Museum and the Royal College of Music and unearthed many forgotten masterpieces. In 1891 he began to give his 'Historical Concerts', in which viols, lutes, harpsichords, virginals and other early instruments were introduced to the public for the first time, playing the music which was intended for them in a manner as authentic as it was then possible to be. Dolmetsch was at this time in his mid-thirties, a charismatic figure full of energy and conviction. His enthusiasm for all early instruments and his passionate zeal in communicating his discoveries brought him a considerable following among the intelligentsia in London, among them W. B. Yeats, Oscar Wilde, Walter Sickert, Walter Crane, Augustus John, William Morris, Herbert Horne, Edward Burne-Jones and George Bernard Shaw. The latter was a consistent supporter and a regular attender at Dolmetsch's concerts. Knowing what a discriminating music critic Shaw was, and how quick to debunk anything phoney, one feels that Dolmetsch's work must indeed have been impressive.

While the musical establishment remained massively aloof, Dolmetsch continued with his own personal mission, the authentic interpretation of early music on the instruments for which it was written. (Curiously, these

influential ideas about authentic performance practice, which were at first applied exclusively to early music, are now being used to re-examine the music of composers like Brahms who were living and writing when Dolmetsch was a young man.) From the beginning it was crucial to him to marry the music to the correct instruments, played according to the instructions of the period, so that while others conducted dry musicological



1 Arnold Dolmetsch

experiments with old instruments or played old scores on modern instruments, he brought the music to life. Dolmetsch's work created a climate of interest which fostered the growth of early music and instruments but it must be realised that the recorder was never one of his main preoccupations. It was not until 1905, when his reputation as a performer and instrument maker was well established, that he acquired his first recorder and it was fifteen years later, when he was aged sixty-two, that he first made one.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Credit for the revival of the recorder has sometimes been attributed almost exclusively to England and to the Dolmetsch family in particular, but there is, in fact, clear evidence to show that the movement began independently in England and in Germany and possibly in other European countries also. As in all such cases of the development of human ideas and resources, the revival of recorder playing was an idea whose time had come and an examination of the background shows a chain of events and influences which fostered further development. While it has generally been assumed that the recorder became completely obsolete when it lost ground to the transverse flute in the late eighteenth century, there is now a body of opinion which suggests that it did survive, like an endangered species, in various isolated pockets. Hermann Moeck (1978), in his account of the recorder revival in Germany, cites several examples from the nineteenth century which lend weight to this argument. He also holds that while recorders ceased to be made and makers' knowledge of the subtleties of bore design and voicing was lost, much of the basic tradition of recorder making was preserved in the production of related instruments such as the French and English flageolets and the czakan. These instruments were widely made, sold and played in the late nineteenth century, although as popular instruments for amateurs they were not part of any 'official' musical tradition.

Before the revival really began to gain ground there were a number of fairly isolated instances of recorders being played. These are documented by Hunt (1977), Moeck (1978) and Haskell (1988). The first of these was a performance by a group from the Brussels Conservatoire at the International Inventions Exhibition held in the Albert Hall galleries in South Kensington, London, in 1885, of which the *Musical Times* reviewer commented:

> From the point of view of abstract musical effect, the efforts of the players of course varied greatly. Some of the effects were beautiful as well as curious, while others were only curious. In the latter category must be placed the sounds produced by the eight *flauti dolci* in a Sinfonia Pastorale from 'Eurydice' by Jacopo Peri, a composer generally considered the originator of opera . . . The pupils of M. Dumon's class handled

them well, but the effect resembled a description of a street organ now happily but rarely heard. (*Musical Times*, 1885)

Hermann Moeck (1978) records the existence of the Bogenhausener Künstlerkapelle (Bogenhausen Artists' Band), a group of seven friends, mainly amateur musicians, who first formed themselves into a band in the 1890s to play, on original instruments, Handel, Scarlatti, Gluck, Mozart, etc. In the years up to the outbreak of the Second World War, the 'Bogenhausen-ers' became an established part of the musical scene in Munich, playing for civic receptions and festivities and broadcasting. In 1925 they were 'legit-imised' to the extent of being invited to perform at the Munich Bach Festival.

In Britain during the 1890s and early 1900s, the research and lectures of Canon Francis Galpin, Dr Joseph Cox Bridge and Christopher Welch drew some attention to the recorder in musical circles but very little was then known about the manner of playing the instrument or the music written for it. Indeed, in 1901, when Dr Bridge gave a lecture and demonstration of the four recorders by Bressan which are now housed in the Grosvenor Museum in Chester, he and his fellow performers were so baffled by the function of the thumb-holes that they covered them with stamp paper and used whistle fingering (Hunt 1977, 129).

REDISCOVERY OF RECORDER MAKING

As interest began to grow in all early instruments, it began to be apparent that there were not enough original instruments available in playing condition to meet the demands of those who wished to have them. The question of redis-covering the skills to make them began to arise and here again it is now clear that this was a problem addressed at much the same time in several countries, most notably England and Germany. Arnold Dolmetsch undoubtedly led the field in instrument making and performance at the turn of the century. His lecture-recitals were by then taking him and his family on tour in Britain and on the Continent, as well as to America, and he was fully engaged in making early instruments of all kinds when, in 1905, he acquired an early-eighteenth-century boxwood and ivory recorder by Bressan at a Sotheby's sale. He had not, at this stage, investigated any of the early wind instruments, but a sea voyage to America gave him the time to teach himself to play it using an eighteenth-century tutor book. From then on he used it regularly in his con-certs (Campbell 1975, 164–6). The famous story of the loss of this recorder at Waterloo Station in 1919 by the seven-year-old Carl Dolmetsch is well known* (Campbell 1975, 208–9). It precipitated Arnold's far-reaching

* There is an apparent anomaly of dates here. The recorder was lost, according to Arnold Dolmetsch's diaries, on 30 April 1919. Carl Dolmetsch was born on 23 August 1911 and thus was indeed aged seven at the time, as he remembers. From this has arisen a widespread error

decision to attempt to add a recorder to the other instruments he had made, since he found he now could not do without it in his concerts. This proved to be by no means easy, but after a succession of experiments and failures Dolmetsch finally succeeded in making a recorder that satisfied him and the first models went on sale in 1920. Among the purchasers at this early stage were George Bernard Shaw; Judith Masefield, daughter of the poet John Masefield; the cartoonist Edmund X. Kapp and Sir Bernard Darwin, son of Charles Darwin (Carl Dolmetsch, personal communication).

In Europe, Willibald Gurlitt (1889–1963) was one of the first musicians to take a practical interest in early music and to realise the importance of playing it on the appropriate instruments and not their modern equivalents. In 1920 and 1921 he began to lecture at the University of Freiburg on 'Instruments and instrumental music in the Baroque period' and to give a seminar on Michael Praetorius's *Syntagma Musicum*. As well as commissioning a reconstruction of a 'Praetorius organ' from the firm of Walcker and Co. of Ludwigsburg (Haskell 1988, 57), he borrowed the famous set of Kynseker recorders from the Germanisches Museum in Nuremberg and had copies of five of them made by the same firm (Moeck 1978). Knowing nothing of Arnold Dolmetsch, who was at very much the same time making his first recorder, he and his students used them to play seventeenth-century consort music. Another musicologist, Werner Danckerts (1900–70), also had copies made of the Kynseker instruments by the Nuremberg woodwind maker, Georg Graessel, in 1921. Subsequent copies made at his request were played at lecture-recitals in various parts of Germany in the 1920s (Moeck 1978). The Nuremberg instruments were not comparable in quality and preservation with Dolmetsch's Bressan, however, so copying them proved difficult and the end result was not very successful.

One of the first recorder players of note in Germany at this time was Gustav Scheck (1901–84). He began playing recorder and baroque flute in the 1920s, having studied under Gurlitt in Freiburg. In 1930 he began what became a famous partnership with August Wenzinger, the viola da gamba player, and Fritz Neumeyer, the harpsichordist, which pioneered the performance of old music on authentic instruments at low pitch. In 1934 Scheck was appointed to the staff of the Berlin Hochschule für Musik; Hindemith was at that time professor of composition there and had two years earlier composed his *Trio* for recorders. As we shall see, many of Hindemith's composition students later went on to write for recorders. Between them, Scheck and Gurlitt trained many of the next generation of recorder players, the pioneers of the early music movement and, in particular, of the twentieth-century repertoire

(made even in Dolmetsch publicity literature) that the recorder was lost in 1918 and the first 'new' recorder was made in 1919, a year earlier than the real sequence of events.

2 The recorder that started it all. Arnold Dolmetsch's boxwood and ivory treble, made by Bressan in London, c. 1700

for the recorder. Among their pupils were the player and teacher Ferdinand Conrad; the recorder maker Hans-Conrad Fehr; the musicologists and teachers Linde Höffer von Winterfeld and Hildemarie Peter; and the player, composer and teacher Hans-Martin Linde. They can thus be said to have initiated the serious study of the recorder and its music, not just in Germany, but in many other parts of Europe where their pupils subsequently worked.

MASS-PRODUCTION

In 1920, having developed a successful design for an alto recorder, Arnold Dolmetsch in England began to investigate the possibility of making the other

sizes also and at the second Haslemere Festival in 1926 he was able to unveil a consort of soprano, two altos, tenor and bass recorders (Campbell 1975, 219–20). These were fine instruments which sold well to professional musicians but they were expensive and it is possible that the instrument might have remained exclusively in the rarefied province of 'serious' early music but for the growth of amateur and school recorder playing on the Continent, particularly in Germany, in the 1920s and 1930s. The popularising force in Germany was the Youth Movement, an umbrella name which came to be applied to several organisations such as the *Hausmusik* movement, the *Singbewegung* and the *Wandervögel*, all of which aimed to promote domestic and school music-making. The Youth Movement later became tainted with Nazism but in its beginnings in the first two decades of the twentieth century until Nazi ideology prevailed, it was an innocent manifestation of a desire to reject the artificial values of an increasingly mechanical age. The leaders of the Youth Movement, like those of the Arts and Crafts Movement in England with whom Dolmetsch was acquainted and with whose philosophy he was very much in tune, wanted to return to simple spiritual values and seek truth and beauty in all aspects of everyday life. Music was an important tool and the appeal of the recorder and other members of the pipe family was immediate. Repertoire mainly consisted of folksongs and dance music, but increasingly close links with the early music movement also had their effect and during the thirties many works in the *Hausmusik* genre made their appearance.

Similar movements in other European countries in the 1930s had very much the same 'back to nature' aims. The Pipers' Guild in Britain promoted the making and playing of bamboo pipes. Their president, Ralph Vaughan Williams, wrote a very fine *Suite for Pipes* (1939), now usually played on recorders. In France the bamboo pipe movement was popular also and a collection of pieces entitled *Pipeaux 1934* was commissioned by Louise Dyer from composers such as Milhaud, Roussel, Auric, Ibert and Poulenc. Similar attempts were made elsewhere in Europe to introduce the various forms of six-holed pipe. Ultimately the recorder prevailed, presumably because it was the most musically satisfactory member of the family.

If Arnold Dolmetsch is credited with the revival of recorder making in England, Peter Harlan (1898–1966) is generally regarded as his counterpart in Germany. Harlan was a violin maker who set up his own musical instruments business in Markneukirchen in the Vogtland region in 1921. Over the years he has acquired a slightly dubious reputation as the person responsible for devising the so-called 'German', as opposed to baroque or English, fingering for the recorder, but it is the present writer's opinion that without Harlan's role in ensuring a supply of instruments for the growing recorder movement in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, instruments which began to be imported into England in the late 1930s, the present picture of recorder

playing world-wide would look very different indeed. When Fritz Jöde, one of the leaders of the Youth Movement, wanted a supply of cheap recorders, Harlan, who had been a member of the *Wandervögel* in his youth, was willing to do what he could to assist and also, of course, saw an excellent business opportunity. It has always been believed (Hunt 1977, 130–1) that Harlan's recorders were bad copies of a Dolmetsch instrument which he purchased on a visit to the first Haslemere Festival in 1925. Moeck (1978), however, basing his information on conversations with Harlan after the Second World War, refutes this, stating that Harlan never actually made recorders himself and had already commissioned a copy of one of the instruments in the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik, Berlin, as the basis for his first design. This was then executed by a workshop in the Vogtland region and, according to Moeck, went on sale in early summer 1926. However, he certainly did order a recorder on his visit to Haslemere and when it was sent to him in due course he studied it closely.

Harlan, therefore, acted as the middleman, adjusting his designs to meet the requirements of his clients from the Youth Movement and farming the orders for low-priced, mass-produced recorders out to a number of instrument-making firms in the Vogtland region, an area long established as a centre for the woodwind-making industry. Recorders quickly began to be made by, or under the aegis of, other firms. Among these were such well-known names as Bärenreiter, Herwig, Heinrich, Adler, Mollenhauer, Nagel and Moeck, many of them still in production today.

DESIGN PROBLEMS

Historical accuracy was not a priority with Harlan and he saw no reason why the recorder should not be 'improved' to suit his purposes. This attitude, which now seems so ill-advised, must be seen in the context of its time. The quest for authenticity is a phenomenon of the second half of the twentieth century rather than of the first and Harlan was not the only one, either then or since, to advocate modifications to the recorder which are now seen as inappropriate. His 'German' fingering system was an attempt to simplify the forked fingerings that are necessary on baroque recorders. The result was that while his recorders could be played in tune in the lower octave of the home key, they were out of tune in the higher octave and in other keys. The system, therefore, presupposes that the instrument is used only to play diatonic music with a range of one and a half octaves or so in the home key. Unfortunately, this fingering system, which actually does very little to alleviate the struggles of the beginner, also has regrettable consequences for the sound quality, a result of the change in bore shape which accompanies it. The end result is an inadequate instrument which lends itself to low standards of playing and

musicianship. These cheap mass-produced instruments are, unfortunately, still being made.

Another controversial question for the German recorder makers in the late 1920s and early 1930s was that of tuning. Surviving original instruments were made, as we know, in various historical low or high pitches which might be a semitone or more different from modern pitch. Harlan and his colleagues did not always fully understand this, though they were aware of it, and early copies of recorders were made in almost every possible key (Moeck 1978). After a certain amount of confusion, recorder consorts in A and D, and C and F became accepted as the norm and eventually, because it was appropriate for the performance of early music, the C/F tuning which is nowadays regarded as standard, won the day.