DENSITY 1.08 *

Gladly I write down some thoughts about the modern traverso or Beaudin flute. To me, who never touched a modern flute, it opened up a repertoire I always wanted to play (Debussy, Ibert, Varèse, Takemitsu, Piazzolla, Franssens) but never worked on, since I don't like the sound of the iron flute, unless James Galway plays it. But before I go into details I'd like to introduce myself. As I said, I never played modern flute. When I was 13 years old I started to play recorder and traverso after learning classical guitar and piano as a child. My first teacher was Johannes Bornmann, then a student of Konrad Hünteler. The foremost player in our area was Wilbert Hazelzet, playing with Musica Antiqua Köln. He is still the player I admire the most. Now I look back on more than four decades of traverso experience.

The first Beaudin flute I played was one that has been traveling Europe on its own for some years, so players can try it out and get to know it. A friend introduced me to it and I was intrigued from the first note on. At first I saw the Beaudin flute as a key that would unlock modern repertoire to me 'early musician'. So the basic requirements were an instrument at high pitch (442 Hz as European standard) and with a C-foot in a modern design. Jean-François Beaudin agreed on building just that and it was a interesting experience to develop the C-foot. He suggested various key arrangements and I opted for the most ergonomic one. To me it was quite obvious that the flute should feel like a normal traverso with the Eb-key as the most important key in normal position. For the lower notes the little finger should slide down the flute. I never liked the solution of early 19th century flutes (H. Grenser) where the finger has to climb up a little mount of keys. For the hand this is a very unnatural movement. As a second option I also got a Quantz-style foot with double d#/eb-keys.

I play on a head joint with a large embouchure that has a recorder-like sharp straight edge. The tone has incredible dynamic possibilities from the softest pianissimo to a forte louder then I ever imagined playing on a transverse flute. Volume is not a problem any more working with guitar, harp, piano, organ, strings.... and all this with a very stable intonation. The trick seems to be the long foot joint. It is much longer then a normal traverso-foot and the bottom note isn't tuned by cutting it off at the right length. There are two open holes between the key-covered holes and the end of the foot. These are for tuning the bottom note. This extra length gives more stability and also improves the 3rd octave. It is no problem to play the instrument with ease to the 3rd octave Bb (and higher on a good day).The tuning is excellent and the oval finger-holes are easy to cover.

What strikes me most is that I can produce a tone without any wind noise at all. The embouchure helps to play very focused. This experience has done a lot of good for my Baroque traverso playing. I don't except windy unfocused sounds. It reminds me a little about an exercise singers do by singing long notes against a burning candle. If it flickers they know that not all air is transformed into sound. This is what I try to imagine when I blow into a traverso.

The sound has all the characteristics of a traverso. It can be incredibly gentle and you can take back your playing to almost nothing without the risk to crack a note. The intonation never suffers if you do so. You also can get quite loud, which is obtained best by giving more air with a relaxed embouchure. 'Blowing harder' is not such a good idea, because you loose the richness in overtones and it just gets louder. There are differences in the sound quality of simple and forked fingerings as on every traverso, which is very nice. You never think that it sounds like a modern flute.

Baroque traversos are lovely instruments and it certainly is great fun to play them, to collect them and to have the 'correct' instrument at the right pitch for each place, period and repertoire – but: When do we play in an intimate hall or a church with acoustics to support us? Do we have a chance to make ourselves heard next to strings that have higher bridges and higher tension than in the 18th century, wound strings and a much louder sound? Why do we always get looks full of pity when our colleagues

claims that they've been holding back a bit to give us a chance?

This are some of the reasons for me to have a Beaudin flute at 415 Hz too, and to make it my principal instrument for Baroque gigs. As with every traverso, the longer (lower) the instrument, the easier it is to play. All the good things I knew from the 442 flute are true even more for the 415 version. The high notes are even easier and you can play in a very tender fashion. The only question you should be able to answer positive is if you have enough air. These instruments are happiest if you have big lungs and an ample air supply.

Some players might ask how 'authentic' the use of a modern traverso is. In Baroque orchestras most instruments around me wouldn't withstand a close look either if the Baroque police came to check up on authenticity. The strings have mostly a 1799 set-up, lute players use synthetic strings and the woodwinds are scaled versions of mid to quite late 18th century models. Most flute players turn to late Palanca flutes in these situations, because they are the loudest. Why not play a flute that is pure joy to play, easy to listen to and that has all the subtle qualities of an 18th century flute? In the real world of Early Music in the 21st century, in churches full of carpet and halls with many hundred seats, the Beaudin flute proved to be a wonderful partner to carry musical ideas much further then a historical 'copy' could do in these conditions. I'm very grateful to Jean-François for giving me a choice....

* 1.08 is the density of African Blackwood