

The double recorder - type Ars Nova

The double recorder is well-known from pictures, frescos and pottery of the ancient greeks, romans and etruscan people. In fact it was popular with antique high cultures. In the Middle Ages in Europe it was regarded as being an instrument of the joculars and travelling musicians.

The name double recorder could indicate two separate three-hole-pipes played by one musician. This type of instrument was called *aulos* by the greeks, *tibia* by the romans and *memet* by arabic people. The *zummara* that is still common nowadays in northern africa has both pipes tied together with a leathern ribbon. In former Jugoslawia, in Bulgaria and Albania one finds the *dvojnica*: here both pipes are carved out of one wooden block.

In Oxford near All Souls College a double recorder from the 15th/ 16th century was found: it is made from one piece of wood and consists of two parallel pipes tuned in fifths.

The most simple type of a double recorder (i. e. moldavian shepherd's pipe, indian flute) is composed of one pipe without finger holes – for playing the bordune – and another pipe with 5-6 finger holes. A more advanced double recorder has 2-3 holes to enable the player to change the bordune, and also 5-6 holes on the other pipe for playing the melody. Instruments like that having been found in Oxford make it possible for the player to perform melodies in parallel fourths and fifths, as well as changing pipes while playing the melody - and thus boosting the ambitus.

Francesco Li Virghi developed a double recorder of the Ars Nova type which has the before named qualities: The two pipes are tuned a fourth apart, thus playing melodies in parallel fourths and fifths is possible. The lower right pipe normally plays the bordune and the left one the melody. But both can change their task – even within one piece.

With the following exercises and pieces for the double recorder I want to give ideas and assistance for how to start playing the double recorder. Besides practising the exercises it will be as exciting to improvise in the same manner as to exceedingly finding own ways and feeling more „at home“ on the instrument.

The first challenge are the new fork fingerings for the left hand. For that reason I only used one or two bordune pitches in the beginning. While concentrating on playing exercises and easy melodies against one drone you will get used to the posture, the distribution of air pressure on both pipes and - last but not least - the intonation. The next step will be playing parallel fifths. Parallel fourths are obvious given that the pipes are tuned a fourth apart. Playing in unison and octaves is an effective means to gain even better control on intonation by experimenting with the right air pressure for each pipe. Independence of the movements of both hands is needed when playing two parts in counter-movement – a very good brain-gym! You will find exercises and arrangements of melodies to each above named topic. This is only a start – meant as an invitation to explore the double recorder and its possibilities yourself!

While improvising on one bordune you easily come in the area of playing modale phrases. However, this is not a treatise on medieval improvisation and interpretation! The arrangements serve the purpose of learning how to play the double recorder. They do not mirror historical performance practise in any case.

If you want to use the arrangements in concert or a similar event I will be pleased if you mentioned my name.

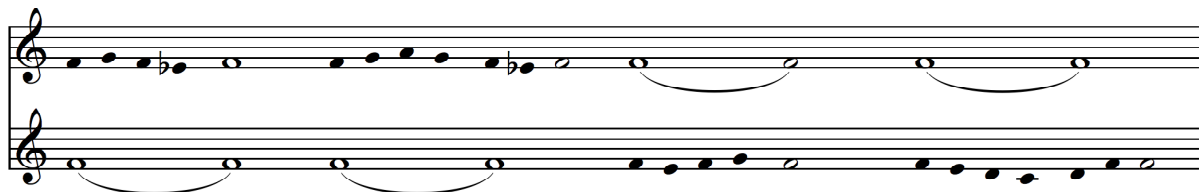
Lucia Mense, 3/3/2011

Melodies on F (fa)

If you take the double recorder for the first time, the question is: how can I hold the instrument in balance without too much effort? The usual posture of a recorder with the right thumb as supporting finger does not work, because both thumbs are on duty: they have to open and close a hole. With both pipes drifting apart the feeling for balance must be re-organised. Thus my recommendation is to first finger the following exercises without playing. The hand that holds the bordune supports the posture of the recorder as to allow the other hand to play the melody without tension in the fingers. The hand responsible for the drone holds the recorder with the thumb, forefinger and middle finger (if involved)

The next interesting question concerns the tuning: start with playing F on both pipes. Which pipe needs more air pressure? Interesting friction results from playing neighbouring pitches in the short motifs. Use the difference tones as a means to control the tuning.

Explanation of the notation: the left hand plays the upper line/ the right hand the bottom line notes without stem indicate to play freely concerning the rhythm



The fifth F – c (do):

Hold the recorder only with your right hand! If not, especially the changing between c (do) and d (re) tends to become an artistic challenge.

Try to solve the problem of tuning the F octave by experimenting with the amount of air pressure for the two pipes as well as with the position of the thumb.

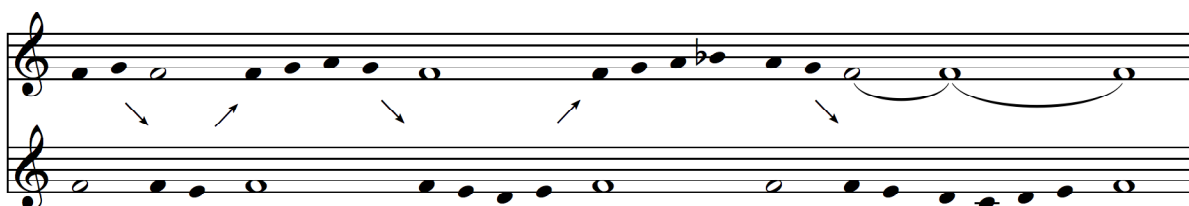


Now it is time for your first improvisation!

The exchange of the „melody“ between the left and right hand:

The arrows show the progress of the melody.

The rule is still: the hand that plays the drone holds the recorder! That means a permanent change of tension and relaxation with the melody jumping left and right.



Now: enjoy your own improvisation!

A study for the upper octave:

Musical notation for an upper octave study, consisting of two staves. The upper staff contains a sequence of eighth notes with various accidentals (flats and naturals) and rests. The lower staff contains a sequence of half notes, all of which are beamed together and have a slur underneath them.

Your first dance in F – with the drones F and G.

Another arrangement of the same dance is following in the chapter „Unisono and Octaves“

Danse Real

(manuscrit du Roi, Paris bibl. nat., fr 844)

Musical notation for the piece "Danse Real", consisting of five systems of two staves each. The key signature is one flat (F major/D minor) and the time signature is 3/4. The notation includes various note values (quarter, eighth, and half notes) and rests. The piece is divided into two sections: "1. ouvert" and "2. clos".

1. ouvert

11 2. clos

21 1. ouvert 2. clos

31

41 1. ouvert 2. clos

More virtuosic exercises to get used to the (fork) fingerings in the F mode:

et cetera

- How to practice:
1. Start with fingering the exercises without playing. Organize the posture as to allow the active hand to move without tension in the fingers.
 2. Use different rhythms.
 3. Extend the exercises to the upper register
 4. Look for other motifs and play them as a sequence.

The cantiga „A Santa Maria“ is a nice example for iambic rhythm in the F mode.
Playing „Aos seus accomendados“ you face an example of a melody jumping from one pipe to the other – follow the arrows.

A Santa Maria mui bon servir faz

(Cantigas de Santa Maria)

A San - ta Ma - ri - a mui bon ser - vir faz, pois o po - der e - la do de-

11 Fine

mo des - faz. Ond' a - ve - o d' es - to que en Con - tur - bel fez San - ta Ma -

21

ri - a mi - ra - gre mui bel por un mon - ge bo - o cast' e mui fi - el,

31 Da Capo

que viu de di - a - bres vi - ir mui grand' az.

Aos seus accomendados

(Cantigas de Santa Maria)

A - os seus a - co - men - da - dos De mor
a Vir - gen tost' a li - vra - dos

11

tes e de pri - jo - es, e por a - ques - to, va - ro es, sempr' os

21

vos - sos co - ra - co - es en e - la se - jan fir - ma - dos.

The Round „Sumer is icumen in“ (from Reading/ England) asks you to also play the upper register on the left pipe. With the right hand you can use both possibilities of drones.

Sumer is icumen in

(England, ca. 1310)

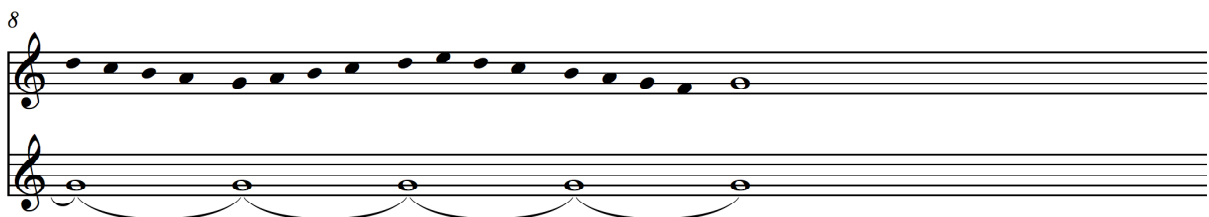
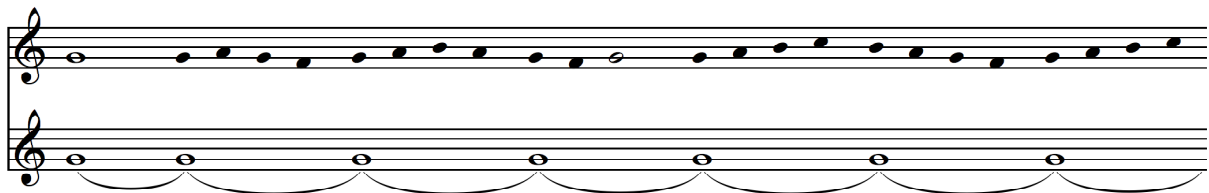


Melodies on G (sol)

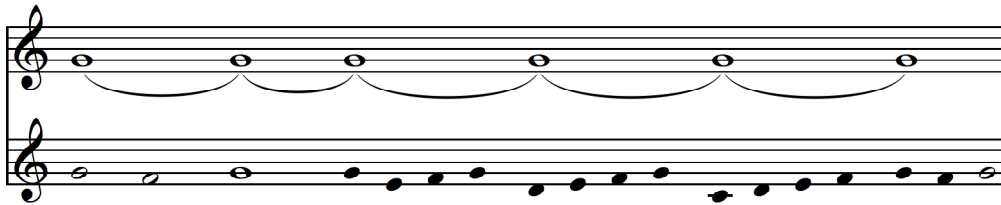
Playing on the drone g the fork fingering for b (si) is introduced.

But the bigger challenge is the posture while playing the drone G with the right hand. You can either slide with the thumb downwards and use it as a support. Or support the recorder with holding the ring-finger under the pipe if the thumb has to move freely. It is wise to practice both techniques – for more difficult pieces to come.

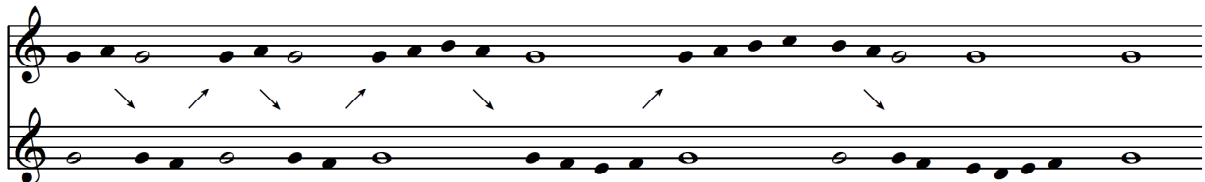
By playing the following exercises in G you can practice the different ways of supporting the recorder (finger first – then play!). Do not forget to pay attention to the tuning and the difference tones in relation to the drone G.



If you play the melody with the right hand the task how to hold the recorder is much easier: Your left forefinger and thumb can be responsible for this task.



If the melody changes between both pipes it is a good idea to support the recorder with the right ring-finger.



To get to know the melody of „Mors vite propitia“ you can start practising by only playing it on the drone G. The changing of the drones later on is easy if the left hand knows what to do. Use the right fore-finger to support the recorder as to easen the movements of the left hand fingers.

In the third line other suggestions for variants of drones are given.

Mors vite propitia

(Codex Egerton 2895, British Museum, London)

11

23 Variante

In the following you will find more virtuosic exercises. Again it is worthwhile to first finger the motives without playing. Both ways of supporting the recorder can be practised. Pay

attention to the changement of the left hand to the high register: try to keep the balance of the double recorder. Of course it is a good idea to also play the exercises slowly and listen to the tuning.

As a next step you can change the rhythm from long - short to short - long.

The image shows three musical exercises in 6/8 time. Each exercise is written on two staves. The first two exercises have a simple melody in the right hand and a single note drone in the left hand. The third exercise has a more complex melody in the right hand and a rhythmic pattern in the left hand. Arrows point to specific notes in the third exercise.

I will use the next sequence of exercises again in the chapter of parallel fifths. It will be easier then for the left hand to know it in advance...

The image shows three musical exercises in 6/8 time. Each exercise is written on two staves. The first exercise has a melody in the right hand and a single note drone in the left hand. The second exercise has a melody in the right hand and a rhythmic pattern in the left hand. The third exercise has a melody in the right hand and a single note drone in the left hand.

„Veni sancte spiritus“ is a new challenge for the balance of the two pipes: the fifth g-d at the beginning of the piece that reoccurs every second or third bar can be frustrating.

My recommondation is: 1. play the melody first while fingering to the drone D. Pay attention to the left middle finger: it can exert slight pressure and give stability.

2. Play the melody again, now with the drone G.

3. After you get used to the finger positions and the means to keep the balance play the song with the different drones given for the right hand..

Veni sancte spiritus

(Codex Egerton 2895, British Museum, London)

Ve-ni san-cte spi-ri - tus spes om - ni-um. Et e-mit-te ce-li - tus. Ve-ni san-cte spi-ri - tus.

8

Pers-cru-a-tor in-cly-tus es tor-di-um. Ve-ni san-cte spi-ri - tus spes om - ni-um. Con-fer lu-men

15

Variante 1

cor-di - bus. Ve-ni san-cte spi-ri - tus. Ve-ni sanc-te spi-ri - tus spes om - ni-um.

Variante 2

Variante 3

Ve-ni san-cte spi-ri - tus spes om - ni-um. Ve-ni san-cte spi-ri - tus spes om - ni-um.

An encore in g dorian (with b flat/ si b):

Cuncti simus concanentes

(Llibre Vermell de Montserrat)

Cun - cti si - mus con - ca - nen - tes: A ve Ma - ri - a. Vir - go

10

so - la e - xi - sten - te en af - fu - it an - ge - lus.

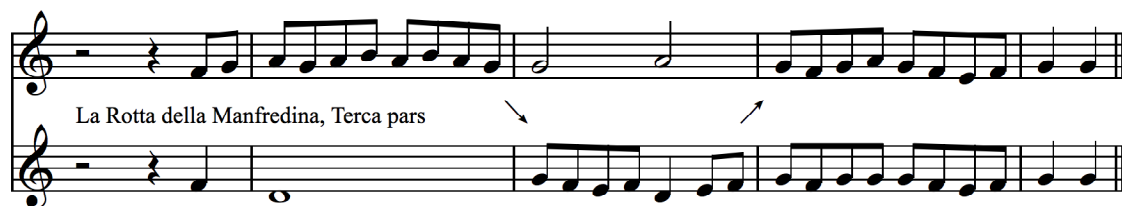
Playing unisono and octaves with both pipes

If you play unisono or octaves it is more than obvious that you need to try out which pipe needs which amount of air pressure. This is a good exercise for less delicate cases!



These sections from the „Rotta della Manfredina“ and from „Los set gotxs“ are being played in unisono of both pipes in several bars. Look for the complete arrangements of the pieces in the chapter about parallel fifths.

Be aware: it is not possible to play an a with the right pipe! (i. e. La Rotta, bar 4)



Here is another version of the „Danse real“ from the *manuscrit du Roi*, now with more octaves between the two voices.

Danse Real

(manuscrit du Roi, Paris bibl. nat., fr 844)



The fun of playing parallel fifths

It is most exciting to play parallel fifths on a double recorder!

How to play parallel fourths is more than obvious because the two pipes of the double recorder are tuned in fourths apart. You can also play the following exercises in parallel fourths. Normally, when arranging melodies it is more interesting to use parallel fifths.

These are the most common sequences of fifths:

Play the e flat on the right pipe with fork fingering or half opening the second hole:



Do you remember the cantiga „A Santa maria“? Try to play the verse in parallel fifths. You can also play the exercises of the chapter about the melodies in F by doubling the motifs with fifths.

The arrangement of „Los set gotxs“ from the *Llibre Vermell de Montserrat* concentrates on parallel fifths, short drone sections – you already know the bars that are in unisono.

Los set gotxs (Llibre Vermell de Montserrat)

arr. Lucia Mense



When playing the „Rotta della Manfredina“ you can also use parallel fifths. The melody jumps back and forth between the pipes.

It is worthwhile to try to arrange the „Rotta del' Lamento di Tristano“ now!
(also manuscript London, Add. 29987)

La Rotta della Manfredina (Manuskript London, Add. 29987)

arr.: Lucia Mense



The image shows two musical exercises, 'Secunda pars' and 'Terca pars', each consisting of two staves. Each exercise has two variations: '1. aperto' and '2. chiuso'. Arrows indicate fingerings and directions.

Two voices in counter-movement

After playing melodies in parallel fifths the counter-movement of both hands is a challenge for the brain and needs good concentration.

My suggestions are:

1. Finger the exercise and pay attention to coordinated the movements of both hands
2. Play the exercise slowly without the indicated rhythms and listen to the melody of the difference tones
3. Play the exercise as it is written. Also change the rhythm.

A musical score for a counter-movement exercise in 3/4 time, consisting of two staves. The melody in the right hand moves up while the melody in the left hand moves down.

A musical score for a counter-movement exercise in 3/4 time, consisting of two staves. The melody in the right hand moves up while the melody in the left hand moves down.

Play the f sharp with the right thumb or the standard fingering.

A musical score for a counter-movement exercise in 3/4 time, consisting of two staves. The melody in the right hand moves up while the melody in the left hand moves down.

A musical score for a counter-movement exercise in 3/4 time, consisting of two staves. The melody in the right hand moves up while the melody in the left hand moves down.

Resonet in laudibus

(Wienhäuser Liederbuch, Kloster Wienhausen, Band 6)

arr.: Lucia Mense

Re - so - nect in lau - di - bus cum io - cun - dis plau - si - bus sy - on cum fi -

11

de - li - bus: ap - pa - ru - it, quem ge - nu - it Ma - ri - a.

The last piece, the „Trotto“ from the manuscript London, is not easy for the left hand.

My suggestion is::

1. Play the whole piece on the drone G. Get used to the fingerings of the left hand.
2. Find other possible bordune pitches.
3. Practise the sections with parallel fifths and octaves.
4. Practise ouvert and clos and afterwards the whole arrangement.

Now, you are ready to experiment with arrangements of other Saltarelli, Danses and Estampies! (i.e. from manuscript London or manuscrit du Roi, Paris)

Trotto

(Manuskript London, Add. 29987)

arr.: Lucia Mense

prima pars

1. ouvert

2. chiuso

9

secunda pars

17

terca pars

24

quarta pars

§

Musical notation for the fourth part, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music features a melodic line in the upper voice and a supporting bass line. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

32

quinta pars

§

Musical notation for the fifth part, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music features a melodic line in the upper voice and a supporting bass line. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

