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Shawm Technique

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As for the two domed buildings in the background of Epifanio's engraving, I wonder if they are to be connected at all with the little domed temples in von Kulmbach's earlier engraving or those in the portrait of Alberto Pio? To my unpractised eye the domes in Epifanio's illustration look to be part of a continuous architectural background for Parnassus and the grottoes. They seem to mark the corners of a trellised arcade running across the back of the setting as well as upstage to right and left. Caryatids, similar to those clearly visible at the sides of the stage, can be seen supporting part of the arcade extending towards centre stage at the back of Parnassus. The arcade will have been part of the garden on which, according to Bastiano dei Rossi's description, the curtain rose. Parnassus and grottoes will have appeared in front of the arcade with its domed corners.

Finally, an acknowledgement and a recommendation, both to Roy Strong's *Splendor at Court: Renaissance Spectacle and the Theater of Power* (Boston, 1973), in which may be found illustrations of all of the works I have mentioned, as well as much else of interest to students of renaissance dance and music.

LEE T. PEARCY, Jr., *Department of Classics, Saint Olaf College, Northfield, Minn. 55057.*

Stella M. Newton's reply will be printed in our next issue.

Shawm technique

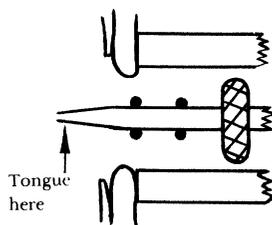
I have a Günter Körber soprano shawm and have noticed through recordings by David Munrow's consort that they sound softer than mine. As I think this must be a problem of reeds as well as technique I would appreciate further guidance.

ANA SEIBERG, *10 de Mayo 1149, 2000 Rosario, Argentina.*

Carl Willetts replies:

I assume you refer to the soprano (descant) pommer rather than the descant shalmi. The soprano pommer is normally supplied without a pirouette and the shalmi with. Apart from my article on shawm technique in *Early Music* (July 1977), there are further relevant points:

1. Do not judge loudness and balance of instruments from commercial recordings. In the recording studio it is possible to make a shawm sound soft enough to balance well with a lute and bass recorder but it is not so easy in the concert hall! I heard several pieces played by David Munrow both live and on record and the shawm usually sounded softer on record.
2. For most purposes the shawm ought to be played loudly to blend with other shawms, bagpipes, sackbuts, etc. To do otherwise belies the shawm's true nature. It may be necessary to play the large sizes quietly when accompanying voices in church but a small shawm may sound strangled and more like a bad oboe.
3. Good reeds for Körber soprano pommers are made by Albert Reinhardt, D-5021 Königsdorf, Sperlingweg 7, West Germany.
4. To play loudly, open out the gap between the blades of the reed using the adjusting wires and blow very hard. Using a (home-made) pirouette will help your lips to keep in the high wind pressure. David Munrow played soprano and also pommers without pirouette as far as I can remember but still produced a big sound in the concert hall, probably helped by well developed lip and cheek muscles.
5. To play quietly, use low breath pressure and keep the pitch up by squeezing the reed with your lips. For long periods of quiet playing (so as not to annoy the neighbours when practising!) close up the reed with the adjusting wires.
6. There is one mistake in the article that I would like to draw your attention to. That is in Figure 3 (page 347), where the arrow should point to the *underside* of the tip of the reed and not the tip itself, thus:



To tongue on the very tip of the reed will hurt both the reed and the tongue!

Please do not hesitate to write again if you have any further questions.

CARL WILLETTS, *Foreman, London Shawm Band, 69b Portland Avenue, Gravesend, Kent DA12 5HJ.*

Renaissance viols

With reference to the articles by Michael Morrow and Ian Harwood on the renaissance viol and its music (*EM*, vol 2, nos 3 and 4), it may interest your readers to know that it is now possible, I believe for the first time in some 350 years, to hear the type of consort of viols described by Hans Gerle in 1532.

Martin Edmunds, who has specialized in making copies of renaissance viols, has recently completed his first large bass in A, commissioned by Musica Antiqua of London, whose concerts will now regularly include the sound of a consort of viols consisting of a tenor in A, two basses in D, and a bass in A (modern nomenclature), each playing on its top three or four strings only, as described by Michael Morrow in his article.

Instruments used by Musica Antiqua are copies of 16th-century Italian viols, made by Ian Harwood and Martin Edmunds, differing in many important respects from the 'baroque' viols on which most renaissance music is now played—having narrow, thick necks, no sound-post, etc.

Those interested in hearing this 'new' sound in concerts can write to the Secretary, Musica Antiqua of London, 25 Campden Hill Road, London W8.

PHILIP THORBY, *Director Musica Antiqua of London, 25 Wilton Square, London N1 3DL.*

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