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THE AVANT-GARDE FLUTE: A HANDBOOK FOR COMPOSERS AND FLUTISTS, by Thomas Howell
(Volume 2 of THE NEW INSTRUMENTATION series, edited by Bertram Turetzky and Barney Childs)
University of California Press, 1974 (£4.00 or \$10.95)

THE OTHER FLUTE: A PERFORMANCE MANUAL OF CONTEMPORARY TECHNIQUES, by Robert Dick
Oxford University Press, 1975 (£6.75)

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The evolutionary process by which composers have made progressively greater demands upon players to extend their techniques and to cultivate ever more *recherché* effects has developed in this post-Cage era to a stage where many musicians now look upon any sound that can be coaxed from an instrument as being capable of a legitimate musical application. In the light of the extensive experimentation which has been carried out, many well-established notions as to the fundamental nature of various instruments have needed revision. The double bass must surely be the most extreme example: where formerly it was seen as one of the most limited of instruments, it must now be viewed as perhaps the most fantastically rich in resources. The case of the Boehm flute is less spectacular, but nonetheless striking. The familiar picture of the flute as being strictly monodic, confined to the semitonal scale, with a limited timbral range, has undergone drastic revision; none of these limitations now holds good, and many other unsuspected capabilities have had to be taken into account.

The literature on these new possibilities has until now been restricted. The most familiar exposition has been Bruno Bartolozzi's idiosyncratic but lively and readable *New Sounds for Woodwind* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), which indicates the nature of some of the new techniques, but being a general study, is able to give only a small selection of the special fingerings, etc. Two articles by John C. Heiss dealing with flute multiphonics (quasi-chordal structures) have appeared in *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. V, No. 1 (1966), and Vol. VII, No. 1 (1968). Another useful, though quirkily-presented, short guide is *Special Effects for Flute* by Sheridan W. Stokes and Richard A. Condon (Culver City, Cal.: Trio Associates, 1970).

All the above give glimpses of the available possibilities, but what has been needed has been a comprehensive and systematic guide to the bewildering range of timbral, microtonal and multiphonic resources which have become available. The publication of both *The Avant-garde Flute* and *The Other Flute* is therefore very welcome; they go a considerable way towards satisfying the needs of composers and performers who are interested in working with these new techniques.

Although the authors present their material in somewhat different ways, and with differences of emphasis, the two books cover essentially the same ground. The following topics are dealt with in both: an explanation of the workings of the Boehm flute; standard fingerings for the tempered semitonal scale and trills; alternative fingerings for the semitonal scale (Dick's list is very much fuller than Howell's); fingerings for the quarter-tone scale and other

microtonal intervals (Howell places a special emphasis upon the 31-note-to-the-octave scale); glissandi for open-hole flutes; the effect of embouchure on dynamics, pitch and timbre; natural harmonics; multiphonics; singing and playing; whistle-notes; coloured noise; percussive sounds; flutters; the effect of amplification. Dick describes in addition the use of head-joint alone, and makes some tentative comments on the substitution of other sound-sources for the head-joint. Between them, the coverage of the two books is very complete, and I can bring to mind only a few possibilities which are not mentioned in one or the other: the use of a mute (adhesive tape at the sides of the embouchure-hole); stopping the end of the instrument (producing a clarinet-like pedal note with interesting possibilities for harmonics); and, as my own contribution to the area of substitutes for the head-joint, the charming effect of playing violin or guitar pitch-pipes through the embouchure-hole.

It would be as well to point out that to produce many of the sounds described in either of the books one needs a flute with (i) a low-B foot-joint, and (ii) open-hole keys. An instrument with both these features must be considered the optimum, but even the common-or-garden variety with closed-hole keywork and a C foot is capable of producing a huge gamut of sounds.

The similarity in content of the books invites direct comparison, and for those flute-players who can afford only one of the pair, I can unhesitatingly recommend *The Other Flute* as my 'best buy'. In matters of presentation, Dick has a quite considerable advantage over Howell, whose book is a reproduction of a typescript with diagrams in a hand which is not always very clear. Dick's, by contrast, is a first-class typeset production with lucid diagrams of a readable size. (Dick's fingering charts are the clearest and most logical that I have come across; I should like to see his notation become standard.) Dick's explanations, too, are perspicuous and to the point, whereas Howell is rather too discursive for a reference manual.

Howell's book is by no means without its merits, however: his treatment of multiphonics, for instance, would be very useful to someone wishing to investigate the subject in depth. With his favoured 31-note scale he aims for a more accurate transcription of pitch than does Dick, who is satisfied with a 24-note scale.

Each book is accompanied by a demonstration record. Here again, Dick scores with a more useful selection of examples, which are better played and recorded. One side of his record is taken up by a performance of his own composition *Afterlight* for flute alone, which attempts to place in a musical context some of the new resources (a score of the piece is provided as a supplement). Although the recordings prove several of the effects described in the text to be surprisingly successful (the percussive sounds, for example), I found many of the demonstrations disappointing. What appeared so exciting on paper often turned out in practice to be something of a damp squib. Composers interested in employing the new techniques should therefore take to heart the advice of both authors that they should seek the collaboration of a flautist before attempting to make extensive use of the contents of the books, in order to sort the practicable and effective from the impracticable and feeble.

I cannot help but admire the industry and perseverance of both authors for carrying through their immense, albeit computer-assisted, task of codifying the multiphonics (Howell gives 1,826), and I am grateful that there is now available what must be a near-exhaustive listing. I do, however, think that these sounds have received attention disproportionate to their value as compositional material. They are unreliable and difficult to produce; their arbitrary and inconsistent nature precludes their use in any genuinely polyphonic sense; and of all the new resources I find them the least attractive considered purely as sound. Such a radical departure from traditional sonorities implies a radical rethinking of the context into which they are to be placed. The attempt to incorporate multiphonics into such a simple structure as *Afterlight* — a piece in direct line of descent from Jolivet's *Cinq Incantations* — I find quite unsatisfactory. My object is not to denigrate Dick's very instructive and spirited essay in these techniques, but to indicate that the new resources cannot simply be grafted on to the old stock. The new sounds demand new formal procedures, and offer a considerable challenge to composers' ingenuity.

To a certain extent 'the other flute' is merely a stopgap solution of a problem which has wider implications. The ideals of consistency of tone and fidelity to the tempered chromatic scale which guided Boehm's structural modifications in the last century brought into being a reliable instrument that was agile and free-speaking, with a pure and homogenous tone. The contents of these books indicate a questioning of these ideals, but they do not go to the heart of the problem: the instrument itself. What is really required are new kinds of flutes — and I use the plural deliberately — which are built to take account of our changing aesthetic standpoint.

Many of us look towards the example of traditional oriental

flute playing, which retains something vital which the Western flute has lost along the way towards the blind alley of refinement and finish in which it now finds itself.