



Spring 06 Issue 8



TWO-MINUTE TALK

## Recorder revolution

QUARTET NEW GENERATION (QNG) IS STRETCHING THE DEFINITION OF THE RECORDER TO ITS OUTER LIMITS. MUSO MEETS ITS FOUR PIONEERING YOUNG MEMBERS

### How did you all meet?

**Susi:** Heide and I are from the same hometown and had the same recorder teacher. Sometimes we even played together!

**Heide:** I met Hannah when I was studying in Berlin, but then she went Amsterdam for a student exchange – and didn't come back! It was there she met Susi (who was studying in Amsterdam) and Andrea. They founded the group with another fourth member in 1998, and when that member left in 2002 they asked me to join them.

**Hannah:** The professional recorder world is very small – you meet each other during master classes. In the end we met in two of the very best places to study the recorder in Europe.

### Why did you decide to form the quartet?

**Heide:** We all like ensemble playing. A quartet is a well-balanced formation – although we are four very different

women, we complement each other very well. But that doesn't mean we never fight!

**Andrea:** It's all about having common goals and ambitions. We're a good mixture of personalities – very different and very individual, but caring and contributing. That makes a group stay together.

### Do you prefer doing early music or contemporary stuff?

**Susi:** Amsterdam is a very important place for contemporary chamber music at the moment, so when we met we started out playing only contemporary music. Then we wanted to participate in this competition in Germany, and for that we also had to play early music. It made us realize how relevant this music is to our contemporary works, so we decided to start mixing it into our programs.

**Andrea:** To play I prefer early music, but I enjoy the modern stuff as well.

**Hannah:** I've found our collaborations with young composers particularly inspiring. By working with them we can really create our own personal style.

### Who are some of the most exciting composers you've worked with?

**Susi:** In the US it has definitely been Daniel Bernard Roumain.

**Hannah:** A very interesting one was our collaboration with the Greek composer Marianthi Papalexandri-Alexandri. She had no idea about the recorder before we worked together – she just took a plastic instrument and experimented with sounds with an open mind, like a child. She had very precise sounds in her head – the challenge was to find them on the recorder. The result was the piece *Still Life*.

**Heide:** Another time we stayed with her in a former concentration camp near Berlin and put together her ideas with our sounds. It was great.

### Is there anyone you haven't worked with but would like to?

**Heide:** Tan Dun or Helmut Lachenmann. But also with choreographers, dancers, DJs...

**Susi:** Since our main goal is to work with young composers, we haven't yet had the chance to work with anyone really famous.

Helmut Lachenmann would be my dream.

*(continued)*

**Hannah:** I'd like to work with the King's Singers, or the Kronos Quartet. Maybe they're reading this...

**You've performed a work influenced by drum 'n' bass. I can't imagine how that works...**

**Hannah:** We have a set of very special modern bass recorders – they are square and have a more dirty, windy sound. The Dutch composer Michiel Mensingh heard us playing on them and was very excited by the sound – he immediately thought of drum 'n' bass music.

**Heide:** With amplification you can get a really groovy bass sound. And you can use the keys, as well as articulation sounds, to add percussive elements to it.

**Susi:** The work he wrote is very fun and exciting to play. Actually it won a very important composition prize in the Netherlands.

**You play on 20 different recorders. Don't you get confused sometimes?**

**Andrea:** Sometimes you pick up the wrong recorder by mistake – one with a different pitch, or one that belongs to one of your colleagues.

**Susi:** To be honest we do take the wrong recorder on stage sometimes! It's only a big problem if that particular recorder is tuned a half or whole tone higher or lower than the other three instruments. But that's also the great thing about this instrument – there are endless possibilities for choosing a certain instrument for a certain piece. For instance, I have a tenor recorder on which I only perform Japanese music – and once I

even bought a recorder especially for one contemporary piece, because it fitted so perfectly!

**Is the recorder an easy instrument?**

**Andrea:** It is easy to at least produce some kind sound in the beginning, but to perfect it is as hard as any other instrument. Unfortunately I can't really compare, because I've never tried to play another instrument with the same approach.

**Susi:** A lot of people think that the recorder is the best instrument to start with, before learning a 'real' instrument. In my opinion it's a very big mistake to think like that.

**Hannah:** I actually don't think it's the best instrument to start children on. You have to be very sensible with the air pressure, which can be a big effort for young kids.

**Do you think it can ever be thought of as a 'modern' instrument?**

**Susi:** A lot of people are actually still asking if the recorder can be thought of as a 'real' instrument, so this question is already an improvement! The instrument does have some limitations, especially because we very often have to use baroque recorders while playing modern music. But there have been a lot of extended techniques invented and discovered for baroque models since the 1960s. One of the big advantages of the recorder is that you can use it in electronic music – the sound is so pure that you can sample it without any problems.

**Hannah:** For sure. Next to the accordion and cello, it's one of the instruments for which the most music has been composed in recent years. The recorder revolution started around 1960,

so in some ways it's a very young and modern instrument.

**Heide:** Maybe it's up to us to bring early and contemporary music to our audiences in a way that will make them feel like it's something very fresh and new, without having to overhaul the instrument – maybe without having to even think about the instrument any more.

**If you were a vegetable what would it be?**

**Hannah:** An artichoke!

**Heide:** A chilli pepper.

**Andrea:** An avocado. And Susi would be a pumpkin.