

ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

Bolette Roed on her recorder by Fred Morgan



“The instrument I’ve recorded the Bach Suites on is a Fred Morgan voice flute in D, A415. It’s one of my best instruments as it features a deep, warm tone and remarkably clear, high register. One of the main challenges with recorders is a compromise between a powerful lower register, and clarity or responsiveness towards the higher end of the spectrum. The famous Australian recorder maker, Fred Morgan, was masterly in finding the optimal balance in his

instruments - the low register is always powerful and audible, while the highest notes still remain remarkably clear and flexible. In my view, it was the perfect instrument on which to record this part of the Bach repertoire. The alto recorder didn’t offer the same level of warmth reminiscent of the cello, for which the Suites were originally written. I had to make a conscious decision to stray away from the original key in order to get the colour and sound I wanted.

The instrument has a lowest note D, and so in terms of size sits between the alto in F and the tenor in C. It was around in Baroque times, and was especially in use when playing repertoire written for the traverso flute (also a D-instrument). We know of a significant number of surviving originals by various woodwind instrument makers, including Peter Bressan, one of the main makers of recorders. My instrument is based on the Bressan original, in combination with a model by Thomas Stanesby, another famous maker.

I think the voice flute has an amazing soothing ability. The warm sound to me brings a sense of calmness. This specific instrument is made of boxwood, which was a very common choice of wood in the Baroque times - we also know that maple was often used. Recorders can also be made from harder woods like granadilla, which give a quite different sound. You can almost imagine granadilla being this very dark and dense wood, whereas the boxwood is a softer type of wood, but still compressed, still strong in its construction - this gives for me the perfect blend of a warm and yet focused tone. If you go towards the other direction of even softer woods, like fruit trees, such as pear or plum, you get a sound which is more malleable, less concrete and a bit more diffuse. It’s amazing how much the choice of wood influences the sound.

Every instrument is a very personal choice: you grow somehow together with the instrument and you have a different approach to playing each one of them. Each recorder has its own unique personality, so depending on what I’m playing I know which instrument I prefer because of the sound and atmosphere it creates.”

Bolette Roed’s Bach Suites recording is released by Ondine on June 15

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