

By Meret Bitticks

# Baroque Style

## for the Suzuki Flute Teacher

Last summer Suzuki Flute teachers from the United States, Canada, Peru, and Taiwan joined Baroque expert Courtney Westcott for a week of “Ear Cleaning” at the Great Lakes Suzuki Institute. Baroque music makes up a significant portion of the Suzuki flute repertoire, but some discrepancies exist between our performance practice and more scholarly traditions. This class gave teachers a chance to engage directly with the differences. Participants were treated to recordings of the Suzuki repertoire by master Baroque artists and compared Suzuki editions with urtext versions and manuscript facsimiles. Perhaps most valuable were the open discussions about general Baroque style and its practical application in the teaching studio.

Counting the Minuet from the B Minor Suite only once (it occurs in Books Two and Six) there are currently nine minuets in the Suzuki Flute repertoire between Books One through Six. Dancing a minuet proved to be an excellent beginning for the class. Participants experienced firsthand how the two-bar phrasing in a minuet corresponds to the dance; on their six-step circuit, the dancer pauses (and dips a little!) on the second and sixth beats, and does not accent the fourth step or downbeat of the second measure. When phrased this way, the second measure becomes weaker

than the first, and the two combine to have more forward motion and an overall lighter feel. Unlike a march, Westcott clarified, the accents in a minuet are not vertical but rather step horizontally. She quoted J. J. Quantz’s 1752 treatise *On Playing the Flute*, saying minuets should be “played so that it almost lifts the dancer up.” Each participant had an opportunity to experience this lift; while one teacher played a minuet from Book One, the others danced. Everyone had a chance to see, hear, and feel the appropriate phrasing. After all, the minuet existed to propel the dancers, something that can be hard to remember when struggling through one with a student.

While the class worked on the coordination needed to dance the minuet, the Suzuki articulations were already being changed. Westcott asserts that ninety-nine percent of the time, a player in the Baroque period would not choose a slur-two tongue-two articulation like the ones found in the Book One minuets. One idea she suggested was tonguing ascending groups of four eighth notes in the early minuets, which makes the line sound more active. Conversely, descending with pairs of two-note slurs will help deflate the line. Westcott often chose three-note slurs in ascending lines of six eighth notes and offered it for groups of four that had a skip of a third or more. She was careful to remind us

that skips of more than a third are not usually slurred.

As the repertoire advanced, questions about the concept of *notes inégale* (a style of tonguing in which every note has its own syllable and therefore slightly differing lengths) arose. “When you have a group of four notes, it’s important to come up with a tonguing pattern that gives each note its own shape and weight,” Westcott said. “Have a concept of how you want the groups—the technique will follow that concept, not the other way around.” She then gave an example of a syllable grouping she uses for this technique: teh–deh–reh–tuh (loosely). While *notes inégale* may not be appropriate for most students, it was enlightening to consider it as a general concept for our own playing.

Beginning with the discussion on altering written articulation in the Suzuki repertoire, the class also offered an opportunity to debate the best lengths of grace notes or appoggiaturas. In her Book One class at the same institute, teacher trainer Kelly Williamson advocated demonstrating the different possibilities for grace note lengths (on the beat and: an eighth note; half the value of the note; or two-thirds of the value) and allowing the student to choose. She maintains that if done with the caveat that sometimes they will have to do it another way (for example, at institutes), the option

promotes flexibility and autonomy in students. Williamson suggested that posing the choice to a group class will ensure that students will cultivate this flexibility. Westcott was also flexible in her treatment of grace notes, but quoted C. P. E. Bach's statement that an appoggiatura takes the value of the note it is attached to and the original note takes on the value of the grace note. We all agreed that the short, "flicky" grace notes from the recording are stylistically inappropriate and to be avoided.

From there, the class moved to trills and the best performance practice regarding placement including whether or not to start from the note above. "A trill is a way of stressing or accenting a note," Westcott said, suggesting we evaluate whether the note really needs or deserves a trill. She agreed that Baroque trills nearly always start from the note above, but if a trill is approached by its upper neighbor, the approaching note could get tied into the start of the trill. Trills attached to a lower neighbor grace note (ex. F-G) should be played to include the upper neighbor (ex. F-G-A-G trill.) General rules for trills became particularly important when studying the Blavet Sonata from Book Four, which includes examples of when an upper note should get tied into the trill (second movement, m. 2) versus when the trill occurs on a strong beat and therefore allows for the upper note to be repeated (second movement, m. 3.) Accidentals in French music were called "prime targets" for extra ornamentation, usually in the form of trills. Given that Suzuki students begin using trills in Book Two (Minuet in B Minor) the style and practice of them were well worth discussing, even though the Suzuki and urtext editions were accordant.

The Blavet Sonata is also a prime example of the need to look at the urtext editions, especially for upper book repertoire. Westcott pointed out several errata, including wrong notes in the Suzuki edition. She also noted that Blavet, as a flute player, was quite particular about breath marks as well as ornamentation. While a manuscript edition exists for the Blavet, Barenreiter publishes a good modern urtext. Other notable discrepancies between the Suzuki repertoire and their urtext counterparts include the Telemann Minuet from Book Two, which was originally for recorder; octave changes in the Handel Allegro from Book Four; and most of the articulation in the Gluck pieces (often known as Minuet and Dance of the Blessed Spirits) including the tie into the recap in the Minuet from Book Two.

Courtney Westcott presented fair and considered assessments of our Suzuki editions. She worked with us teachers as players first, making sure we understood the style and offering many useful analogies for teaching style. Her description of the quarter-note two-note slurs in the Rondo from the Bach B Minor Suite (Book Five) as a duck hitting the water, "fat, not accented," was a particularly lovely insight. She also spoke a lot about whether a note looks forward, meaning it is connected to the following note or whether it relates more to the previous note, i.e. looking back. While Westcott has clearly justified reservations about our Suzuki editions of Baroque music, she has taken

Book One training and obviously understands the method itself. This helped the class feel more like an open forum, and allowed for a safe environment to experiment and share experiences.

I am lucky to work in a program that promotes a sense of collaboration, and upon returning to Chicago, my Suzuki flute colleague was anxious for me to share what I had learned. We decided that the articulation change in the early minuets made a lot of sense for our students, especially in that they were both more stylistic and consistent and therefore easier for students to learn. We are working on the changes in group class, and so far, older students have been very receptive to the new articulations. Likewise, the Blavet seemed ready for an update, and in my experience with three or four different students, changing the articulation to three note slurs solves a lot of technical problems. Middle book repertoire that works well in groups such as the Gluck and Handel were harder to consider altering, both because of the questionable value of time spent drastically changing pieces already learned but also because of uniformity in group playing with students from other programs.

Until new Suzuki books with greater attention to urtext originals come out, individual teachers must evaluate what modern scholarship means to their students and teaching. As someone who had little concrete Baroque training in school, I really appreciated learning general guidelines for how to approach Baroque repertoire. If we want the Suzuki Flute Method to remain relevant, we need to produce knowledgeable students who can perform in a variety of styles. While Westcott's class was not a comprehensive overview of Baroque style, it certainly passed along valuable new additions to the Suzuki flute teacher's bag of tricks for the advancing student. ❧



**Meret Bitticks** maintains an active schedule as a soloist, chamber musician, and clinician in the U.S. and abroad while on faculty at the Music Institute of Chicago and DePaul University. Ms. Bitticks has joined Trio Chicago and Friends for international concert tours, including the United Arab Emirates and Australia, and is a regular member of the Chicago-based woodwind quintet, Quintopia. As an educator, Ms. Bitticks advocates for quality music instruction regardless of age or background. In this capacity, she volunteered at two music camps in Haiti and has taught at several workshops and institutes in the United States and Canada. In 2013 Ms. Bitticks became the first flutist to receive a Certificate of Achievement for excellence in Suzuki instruction from the Suzuki Association of the Americas. She also traveled to Matsumoto, Japan to work with Suzuki Flute Method founder Toshio Takahashi. Ms. Bitticks studied under Mary Stolper at DePaul University and Katherine Borst Jones at Ohio State to earn her master's and bachelor's degrees, respectively.