

# MPRO

## The Past Twenty-Five Years (1988-2013)

### Part 2

by  
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The past twenty-five years have not only seen major changes in recorder playing but also a major transformation in technology. In 1988, desktop computers were becoming more common, word and music processing programs were becoming available, the sounds of musical instruments could be synthesized, recorded and digitally stored through a process called MIDI, e-mail communication was gaining popularity, the Internet was making its appearance and digital imaging was in progress leading to scanning and the capability of digitally storing anything that could be photocopied. These technical innovations had a decisive effect on MPRO. All of the music that I arranged or transcribed for the orchestra after becoming its music director was generated using music processing programs. This had several advantages over handwritten manuscript: The format was similar to professionally engraved notation that made it graphically consistent, properly spaced and free from idiosyncrasies. It was very time efficient since repeated figures, phrases or whole sections could be copied and pasted instead of being manually inputted, transpositions could be accomplished with a few keystrokes and parts could be extracted from a score automatically and virtually without transcription errors. Even more important, music files could be played through a computer, creating a mechanically correct rendition and allowing for assessment, correction and experimentation towards a finished product. As music processing programs became more sophisticated, MIDI files could be imported as well as exported. Any piece of music found among the growing number of MIDI files available on the Internet could now be converted into a music file and then edited or arranged. Any music file could be turned into a MIDI file. Moreover, it was also possible to import printed music that was scanned as well as music in PDF format, and PDF files could be generated from music files. Meanwhile, it became possible to attach virtually anything that could be stored digitally to an e-mail message. This transformed the way the orchestra distributed music to its members and how the members practiced and prepared the music for rehearsals and concerts. Beginning with the orchestra's 2009-2010 season, music was sent to the membership by e-mail.

Three seasons later, all but three members were receiving music this way. Thanks to MPRO member George Greenwood, the 2009-2010 season also initiated the distribution of the orchestra's current music in MIDI format to the membership. This enabled all those with e-mail to hear what that music sounded like, practice it with all parts sounding and, using various computer programs, adjust the tempo and eliminate parts to better learn and prepare it on their own. At the same time, the repertoire available to MPRO was vastly increased, since anything that was available in MIDI or PDF format or any printed music that could be scanned was capable of being imported into a music processing program, edited or arranged for recorders and then exported as a PDF file, MIDI file or printed hard copy.

In 1988, the master for the orchestra's newsletter was assembled by manually cutting and pasting various pieces of text and graphics, and photocopies of this master were then sent to the membership by U.S. mail. This created a patchwork look to the newsletter's format with various typefaces, point sizes and margins next to each other. When Dick Davies assumed the position of newsletter editor at the beginning of the 2000-2001 season, issues began to be composed using a word processing program. This gave the newsletter a more consistent and professional appearance and made it possible for issues to be converted into PDF files and sent the membership by e-mail, which began during the 2009-2010 season. PDF files of the newsletter also had the advantage of including color photographs, could be e-mailed to various organizations interested in MPRO's activities, were easily archived on the orchestra's website and saved the orchestra the expense of photocopying and postage. The 2000-2001 season also saw the introduction of group e-mail for MPRO thanks to Christopher Flake, the orchestra's membership officer. Group e-mail made it possible for any MPRO member to communicate with all of the others by sending a message to a single e-mail address. It also made it possible to easily send music, MIDI files and important information to the membership and allowed the orchestra's board and music director to exchange ideas and for the board to vote on issues without the need to call a meeting. Finally, the 2000-2001 season marked the beginning of MPRO's website, which was created and maintained by the orchestra's webmaster, Dan Chernikoff. The website was not only designed to serve the membership but was also MPRO's open door to the world through the Internet and included the orchestra's rehearsal schedule, concert dates, information about its workshops with registration forms, current and past newsletters, a history of the orchestra, pictures and descriptions of small ensembles in which members of the orchestra played, applications for MPRO membership or renewal, a resource page containing

recorder fingering charts and instructional materials as well as links to a host of recorder-related websites. The website later contained links to YouTube videos of MPRO performances and most recently a collection of my compositions and arrangements for recorders. By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, advances in technology had transformed the operations of MPRO, and the orchestra's positive responses to those advances have kept it a thriving musical organization in today's world.

During the late 1980s, changes were also taking place outside of music and technology that had an equally important impact on MPRO. The rents being charged for rehearsal and performing venues were increasing, the requirement that the orchestra have liability insurance to use those venues was becoming standard and the amount of insurance required was rising as well, which meant higher premiums. Moreover, some venues were only available to not-for-profit organizations. This put MPRO into a difficult position: Its expenses were growing, any donations made to the orchestra were not tax-deductible, thus severely limiting the pool of potential donors, and the rehearsal and performing spaces that it could use were potentially restricted as well. MPRO president, Diana Fischer, came up with a solution to this problem. The orchestra would become an affiliate of the San Francisco Early Music Society and thereby share in that organization's not-for-profit status and insurance coverage, all for the price of the society's annual membership fee. This occurred in 1994 and was crucial to the continuation of the orchestra. It also gave MPRO wider recognition through its association with a major Bay Area musical organization. In 1999, the orchestra became a consort affiliate of the American Recorder Society, thus linking it to a national organization and giving it nationwide recognition.

Where does MPRO go from here? It all depends on how well the orchestra adapts to future circumstances. As long as the recorder retains its current status and popularity, MPRO can continue, provided it keeps pace with the recorder movement and external changes that affect it. But, at the same time, the orchestra cannot remain passive. It must contribute to the development of the recorder orchestra, the advancement of recorder playing and the overall musical experience of its members. And here is where a look at MPRO's history might prove useful. The term, "recorder orchestra," began with MPRO, and this was more than just part of the orchestra's name but also a concept. MPRO must keep expanding upon this concept by continuing to experiment, innovate and help define what constitutes a recorder orchestra. Moreover, MPRO needs to consider reviving the kind of recorder education fostered by Angela Owen, not only for its benefit to the community but also to bring new recorder players into the orchestra. While

MPRO is not an educational organization, it can suggest, encourage and support private and community programs that introduce people to recorder playing. Finally, MPRO must continue and even expand the opportunities that have come with membership over the past fifty years. These include encouraging and assisting those interested in playing in a small ensemble to either find one to join or form one with others. And MPRO must not forget the social aspect of recorder playing which was responsible for the formation of the orchestra with the recorder picnic organized by Bill Barnhart in the spring of 1962. Half of a century can be a long time, but hopefully it is only the beginning for MPRO.