

ON THE CUTTING EDGE

A Visit with Nik Tarasov

By Tim Broege, timbroege@aol.com

Among the touted features of the biennial **Boston Early Music Festival** is the Exhibition. This is a trade show featuring the wares of various publishers, instrument makers, software providers and retailers. A favorite area to visit during this year's festival was the **Mollenhauer Recorders** booth, where a generous number of recorders from the extensive Mollenhauer line are displayed and available for playing.

I had the great pleasure of visiting the booth and spending time with **Nik Tarasov**, the designer of something quite new and exciting in the recorder world: the **Elody** recorder. This new instrument is described in the Mollenhauer promotional brochure as "an instrument akin to the

Modern Harmonic Alto recorder with an innovative, cool design, strong tone, and built-in adaptation" as an electric recorder.

Tarasov explained that the prototype of this recorder was developed four years ago, and the instrument has been on the market for several months. I spent some time playing and examining several Elody models, and can attest to the accuracy of the promotional language.

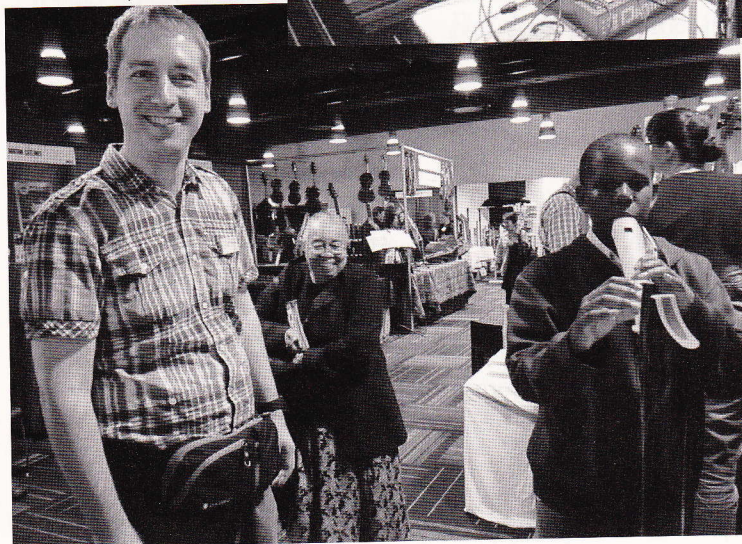
The recorder does not look like a traditional alto, since it is not round. It has a tapered triangular shape, with real edges, although the interior bore is cylindrical. The body of the instrument is not turned on a lathe, but assembled and shaped using fine cabinetry techniques.

A dozen decorative patterns are available for the Elody. Tarasov explained that he wanted a totally new look for this recorder, in order to catch the eye of non-traditional players such as rock and pop music fans, as well as of children. The decorative finishes are hand-painted and quite striking.

I played one of the recorders with the "Dark" finish, featuring shadowy colors and two pairs of staring eyes made from imitation diamonds (zircons) mounted on the body. I also tried one with



Broege (l, above) discusses the Elody with former AR editor Ben Dunham (while Paul Leenhouts visits with Patty Thompson at the ARS table, behind); young and old tried the Elody, under the smiling guidance of Nik Tarasov (l, below).



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the "Lovely" finish, featuring delicate colors and butterflies.

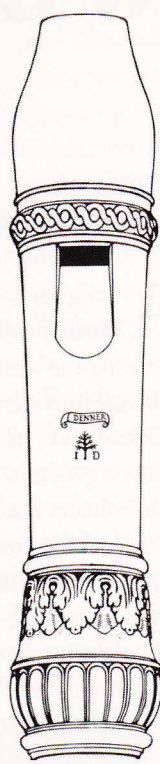
Perhaps most striking is the "Space" design, depicting a starry sky against a night-blue background with a metallic gloss varnish. Imitation diamonds again add to the visual effect. In coming years, Tarasov expects additional color schemes to be added, as well as the possibility of custom designs if requested.

Quite candidly, Tarasov admitted that he has always dreamed of playing recorder with a heavy metal rock band (some of his favorite music) and he wanted a recorder that would look appropriate in such a setting.

This is all well and good, but the ultimate questions are how it sounds and how it works. After playing the Elody instruments for a while, I can describe the timbre as strong and flute-like. The recorders have roller keys for F# and G# plus an extra roller key for low E (!). Tarasov wanted the recorder to match the pitch of the lowest guitar string (so important in heavy metal rock).


As a modern harmonic recorder, the Elody has a third octave using special fingerings. Response is excellent, tuning is first-rate, and the recorder is delightful to play in purely acoustic mode (completely unplugged).

But the real fun starts when you "plug it in." Elody has a built-in pickup, with a mini-jack to standard guitar (RCA) jack cable. The cable is plugged into a mini-jack receptacle in the head joint. The guitar jack can be plugged into an amplifier, sound processor,



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MIDI keyboard or any device that can receive the plug.

At the Mollenhauer booth, a rock-guitar-style special effects box was provided with sounds controlled by pedals. I tried the sequencer effect, creating layers of sounds from a simple repeated pattern; the octave doubling effect, allowing me to play with both an octave above and octave below the note I was fingering; the super "fuzz tone" effect that turned what I was playing into rock guitar sound; and a magical percussion effect that added a drum-like initial attack to what I played (reminiscent of some of the classic Hammond B-3 organ sounds).

This was great fun, indeed. I detected no distortion in the sound (listening through headphones as I played); a "straight" recorder tone can also be amplified to balance with horns, strings or other amplified instruments.

At last, the recorder can take its place in any of today's mixed ensembles—jazz, pop, rock, contemporary—

without fear of being drowned out. Production of other sizes of Elody recorders is not contemplated—not only because of the three-octave range, but also because lower ranges can be produced through sound processing.

Essentially handmade and custom-designed, like any fine custom instrument, the Elody is not inexpensive. Whether the new versatility the instrument offers is worth the price is up to the individual considering a purchase.

I have no doubt young people will love it, and I already can foresee plenty of use for it in the worlds of jazz and film music. I urge recorder lovers to give it a try: Elody may truly be the "next big thing" in the recorder world.

Hats off to Nik Tarasov and Mollenhauer for this exciting new product. For information and sound samples, visit www.elody-flute.com. Hear the Elody played in a live performance by Chingwei Lin in an excerpt at www.youtube.com/americanrecordermag.