

EARLY MUSIC INNOVATIONS

THE ELODY RECORDER

'Melody, but with an E at the beginning, for electric!' says Nik Tarasov of Mollenhauer, explaining the name of his new 'electrifyingly cool recorder' in a series of promotional videos that can be found both on YouTube and on the Elody's dedicated new website.

In essence, Mollenhauer's latest recorder venture is a pearwood alto recorder, flattened, edged and streamlined, with a connecting point at the side of the head joint and a pick-up system integrated into the body. It comes with a cable like an ordinary electric guitar plug, which can be attached to an amplifier via a common effects unit such as a smartphone app (the iPhone has a good interface). Thus, it can be amplified and enriched with sonic effects ranging from soft reverberative glow to caterwauling distortion – not to mention having a palette of possibilities of pitch modification. It is also entirely functional when played ordinarily.

Tarasov (you may have caught him demonstrating his new creation at Greenwich festival in November) is the developer and face of the instrument, and is quite obviously passionate that the recorder should find a place in contemporary pop and rock music. The Elody is well adapted to band playing by the location of the pick-up inside the body – amplifying recorders externally is a perennial problem, because other instruments also end up being picked up. Also, the range is extended down to low E by a third key (in fact the range is

extended in both directions) – useful when sharing tonal space with a guitar, as the latter also has E as its lowest note.

Tarasov says that the vivid, colourful designs – stars and moons on blue, lurid pink, skulls, zebra stripes, tiger stripes, metallic paints, bold yellow zips, spiders' webs and bright red with yellow flames – are inspired by electric guitar designs. Once pointed out, this is of course quite obvious, but the analogy isn't immediately discernible at first glance. In fact, so incongruous is such primary-coloured painting on a recorder that the effect is rather childlike, which is a great pity as it rather diminishes the 'cool' aesthetic that Mollenhauer is obviously hoping to sell to youngsters who fancy being in bands. I showed the promotional videos to several of my students, many of whom liked the principle but none of whom could find a design to suit. Those youngsters who fancy being in bands would seem to represent a large swathe of the target market, so this may prove a stumbling block. The many videos on Mollenhauer's YouTube channel BlockfloetenPodcast are accruing impressive numbers of views, but many of the comments seem to support this caveat: 'I like the idea of this ... the painted design not so much,' says one viewer. Personally, I rather like the spiders' webs, but then, as my partner said, 'you would'.

Young players aren't the only market by any means, though, and I can certainly see the sonic versatility of the Elody



finding a place in the session music scene, in film music and in the more experimental end of the folk scene, as well as in some pop and rock. I can think of a couple of larger folk groups whose flautists and whistle players would welcome it as a doubling instrument, too, with greater tonal range.

The prices might preclude widespread recorder experimentation, which is rather a shame. The Early Music Shop is currently stocking the Space and Lovely designs, retailing at £1,799.95, and the Dark design at £1,825. However, the level of research that has gone into the development of these instruments is obviously impressive, added to which, the painting is hand-finished, all of which necessitates such figures. Perhaps one might hope that if the instruments do well the prices might come down somewhat in time.

The Elody's unique look is inspired by electric guitar designs



For more information go to www.elody-flute.com.

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