

## Recorder Technical Work & Basic Repertoire

- Gregory Lewis, Murray Conservatorium, Albury

### Scales in Thirds

Without fluent scales in thirds, in all keys, it is impossible to develop the sight-reading skills necessary to learn new music quickly. In short, you will simply not get past Grade 6 without confident technical work.

Rather than learn all the “easy” scales first, master each one as presented, in chromatic order. You need to play A# at sight without thinking “that’s the same as Bb”. Work until you can play every scale at 60 beats per minute. Start slowly to avoid any wrong notes.

I think it helps to recite the note names in each scale, ascending and descending, for the first few days before playing it. The fingers are easy but the brain work of remembering the key signatures is not. Don’t play it until you can say it.

### Basic Soprano & Tenor Arpeggios

Arpeggio patterns are fundamental to the core repertoire of the recorder. Fast music by Bach, Händel and Telemann is often built on rapidly changing arpeggios. This idiomatic style of writing for the recorder survives into modern literature.

These exercises present triads and inversions in all major and minor keys. Aim for a speed of about 40 bpm in dotted minims. Of course, begin MUCH slower. Your learning speed should be as slow as necessary to avoid any wrong notes.

Speed is irrelevant until you can’t go wrong with the finger patterns.

### Scales - Grades 5 to 8

The AMEB technical book presents scales for each grade with differing top notes. For example, in lower grades a high G is not required on alto. This means memorising slightly different scales each year, adding a few more high notes each time.

However, the AMEB explicitly states that it is acceptable to play scales over the entire range of the instrument at any grade. I think this is a much better strategy since your Grade 5 scales will then be in an identical format for the next three exams.

The scales here are from the Grade 8 syllabus. I have written them with accidentals to help you avoid wrong notes in the early stages. Scales are the most challenging part of any instrumental exam – you can’t afford to waste time unlearning wrong figure patterns.

## Spiders

**Caution:** Please wear hearing protection when playing these exercises on soprano.

A limiting factor in fluent sight-reading is often recognition of enharmonic equivalents. The note C is easy to play but the appearance of a B# in a new piece usually causes brain fade and a flurry of twitching fingers.

These exercises aim to develop strong note reading skills plus extended arpeggio patterns in all keys. Each page presents fourteen arpeggios and inversions, all beginning on the same note. Major, minor, augmented, diminished, Dominant 7th, minor 6th and major 6th arpeggios are included in all 12 keys.

This is a major undertaking and will be a significant challenge to any recorder player. Again, learn each page as it comes rather than isolating the “easy” keys first.

It would not be unreasonable to spend several months working on these until you can play without hesitation. Take it slowly, saying the notes aloud as you learn each arpeggio.

## High Notes

I have included the full range of the recorder up to high A on alto and high E on soprano. These are commonly used in modern recorder music and should be at your fingertips.

My fingering chart is included with these exercises. From Grade 5 you should be familiar with the alternatives and use them whenever necessary for speed or slurring. Arpeggios in particular can often be simplified with alternative fingers.

High F# on alto and high C# on soprano are tricky. On my Aulos soprano and alto, and Yamaha bass, the following finger pattern works well, though it is slightly sharp on the alto. This does not work at all on some of my other recorders.

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The only way to guarantee these notes is to play an alto high G or soprano high D while covering the bell opening against your knee. This is awkward but achievable if you are seated. The sight of players doing this while standing is so distracting that it is in my view more preferable to switch recorders or rewrite the part if you must stand and perform.

## Learning for life

My morning routine is to play this complete set of technical work. This takes me about an hour since I go slowly to ensure accuracy. Each week I swap between the soprano and alto versions.

My experience has been that my sight-reading and spider reflexes for enharmonic equivalents have both greatly improved. In my view this set of exercises should be part of a weekly schedule of home rehearsal for all advanced players, even when the technical preparation for examination purposes has long faded.

## Advanced Recorder Tutors

Many fine books exist for incorporating tricky finger patterns and increasingly complex rhythms into your prefabricated set of recorder skills.

Most of the books listed here contain exam items. They cover a range from AMEB Grade 5 to university level studies. All are in my weekly playlist. A thorough knowledge of these plus daily scales and arpeggios will provide all you need to progress to an advanced level of recorder playing.

Bova	24 Exercises for alto recorder 126 Daily Exercises for alto recorder
Bruggen	Five Studies for Finger Control (alto)
Colette	12 Melodious Exercises (soprano) 8 Melodious Studies (alto) Melodious Studies Vol. 2 (alto)
Davis	15 Studies (alto)
Duschenes	12 Etudes (alto) Method for recorder, Book 2 (soprano or alto)
Linde	Modern Exercises (alto)
Staeps	Note Patterns (alto)

## Core Repertoire

Along with the tutor books which should be studied in their entirety over several years, you must also add concert items of appropriate difficulty. Some will be examination pieces but you should also try music by composers from the Baroque and from the past 90 years.

Carl Dolmetsch and Joseph Saxby reignited an interest in recorder music in the late 1930s. This has grown exponentially due to their efforts and the work of the great players listed below. Recordings by these performers demonstrate the bulk of our repertoire.

Please listen to recordings by these artists. Concerts are often available on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com).

Erik Bosgraaf, Frans Bruggen, Saskia Coolen, Genevieve Lacey, Dan Laurin, Hans Martin Linde, Hidehiro Nakamura, Michaela Petri, John Turner, Dorothee Oberlinger, Marion Verbruggen and Ruth Wilkinson.

A regular input of expert performances will help you grow as a musician. Find pieces you enjoy, get the sheet music and play through it, even if it is at a greatly reduced speed. Just getting your mind and fingers around the notes in the correct rhythm will be of benefit when you later prepare this music for recitals. Sight-reading something new each week is a particularly effective study technique.

Baroque music can be downloaded free at [ims1p.org](https://www.ims1p.org) – become your own teacher!

## The Music of Aldo Bova

Bova maintains a presence as an online recorder teacher. His YouTube channel contains tutorials, recitals and links to recorder concerts. He is also an active composer of new advanced music for recorder. I often visit this site to improve my knowledge and skills.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/unagondolaunremo/>

Bova publishes a wide variety of music for students of Grade 5 standard and above. I have many of his books and have found them to be immensely useful.

He self-publishes in PDF and hard copy formats. Books are printed on demand by Lulu and generally arrive inside a week. Cheaper PDF files are available for instant download.

<http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/aldobova>

Here are my brief comments on the books I own, in order of publication. Approximate Gradings are my own since none of these books appear on the AMEB lists, yet...

### 2012 Virtuoso Pieces for Alto Recorder Vol. 1

Three professional level compositions are included. *15 Variations on a Theme by Paganini* is excellent. This could be used in an HSC recital as the technical demands are not extreme. It is a welcome addition to the modern concert repertoire.

In some cases Bova's YouTube playing is him just reading through his music, mistakes and all, plus commentary so you can get a better understanding of why he wrote it. Here Bova makes a serious effort, brilliantly performing the alto version as published here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N25VDSjJ83E>

and the soprano version here, published in *21 Themes and Variations*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tq10H0rw80Q>

### 2013 24 Fantasias

The first volume of 12 are *in stile moderno* with the second set of 12 *in stile antico* using the Telemann Fantasias as a model. All are for alto.

The modern set are for advanced players with ears attuned to modern dissonances, extremely wide melodic leaps and rapidly changing tonalities. In a classic example of the aphorism "form is liberating" Bova writes new music using the exact rhythms of Baroque masterpieces. It's fun to suddenly recognise the rhythm of a Bach piece as you begin to get your fingers around the unpredictable melodic ideas.

The antique set are I think good an introduction to the Telemann set and work well as intermediate recital pieces. Difficulty ranges from Grades 5 to 7. Bova is fond of the top notes from F# to A. Some rewriting may be required depending on your instrument.

All recorder players should know the original Fantasias as they are part of our core repertoire. If you enjoy this style of music then certainly you should be trying Bova's recreations of this High Baroque form.

### **2013 24 Duets for Alto Recorder**

This is another of Bova's *in stile antico* books, imitating the style of Telemann's duo sonatas. These short but challenging works are around AMEB Grade 5 or 6 level on the lower parts. Some higher parts require either a masterful command of the extreme upper alto register or else the ability to read soprano down an octave.

If you enjoy the art form of the Baroque duet these are capable recreations.

### **2016 50 Duos**

This is a mixture of duets for differing combinations, from soprano to bass, of about Grade 5 or 6 standard. The book includes 13 easy Czech folk dances where the upper and lower parts are balanced and 13 Basso Ostinatos when the bass lines, sometimes on tenor, are often quite rudimentary, below extended often virtuosic solo lines.

I enjoyed the final three Sonatas for two altos. The parts are equally challenging and contain more varied musical ideas than the earlier compositions.

### **2016 44 Inventions for Soprano and Tenor**

In the style of slightly modernised Bach Inventions these short original works are about Grade 4 or 5 standard. Lots to choose from, all in easy keys. I think the range of rhythmic ideas will make an excellent sight-reading book. The use of tenor throughout is a bonus. One per lesson for a year seems about right.

Bova has also published alto duet arrangements of Bach's 15 keyboard Inventions. I have not purchased these yet.

### **2016 126 Daily Exercises for Alto Recorder**

This is a compendium of music that Bova prepared for his own students. They range from about from Grade 6 upwards. The format is a set of short études to be played daily for a week before moving on, covering a self-directed course of 18 weeks.

Although only for alto there is no doubt that this book covers the fundamental technique required for serious players. If you have the willpower to stick with this for a few months you will have definitely "lifted your game" in arpeggio patterns, scales, double tonguing, wide leaps and enharmonic equivalents.

Recommended for those with a performing career in mind.

### **2016 21 Themes and Variations for Recorder TBA**

### **2017 24 Exercises for Alto Recorder**

This is an excellent follow-on to the 12 Etudes by Mario Duschenes. This book takes students through the fundamentals of recorder technique at about Grade 5 and 6 level.

All exercises are achievable at a steady tempo. Bova is clearly trying to help students establish quick recognition and automatic finger patterns for common figurations. This is an excellent training book for serious students moving toward more advanced repertoire.

### **2017 32 Pieces for Soprano Recorder**

There are two volumes, both containing 32 short pieces at about Grade 5 or 6 standard depending on the chosen tempo. All are in easy keys and provide an excellent source of material for self-directed home study.

This is a welcome addition to the soprano and tenor repertoire. It's a nice break from playing Van Eyck.

### **2017 The Well-Tempered Recorder**

This is a major work containing 24 short Preludes and Fugues in all keys for alto. Most are at Grade 8 standard although there are a few here and there at about Grade 6.

The fugues are inspired by the single line fugues of Bach, beginning with a characteristic opening motive followed by a development that stretches over the entire pitch range of the instrument.

As with all of Bova's work he does not provide any articulations, allowing players to experiment with their own ideas. The composer's suggestions can be gleaned from his own YouTube performances.

This book is a significant addition to the professional recorder literature. Although the style obviously looks back to the Baroque, the opportunity for advanced players to explore worthwhile music in all keys is a rare and wonderful event.

**2017 24 Préludes for Alto Recorder                      TBA**

**2017 4 Trios for Alto Recorders                      TBA**