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Recorders in Bach Cantata 161, *Komm, du süße Todesstunde*

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AS A RECORDER PLAYER, I was much interested to read Bruce Haynes's splendid article "Questions of tonality in Bach's cantatas: the woodwind perspective" (this *Journal* 12 [1986]: 40–67) when it appeared, and I have referred to it several times since then. Haynes concludes that the best solution for performing Cantata 161 in C major is to use flutes instead of recorders. He notes that Dürr had suggested the possibility of playing the cantata in D at A-440 with alto recorders in *f'* at A-415 and strings tuned up a step, but he adds that the result is a loss of the bell imitation of the open strings in the final chords.

I have played the opening aria from Cantata 161 for alto, two recorders, and continuo several times in the past, but never had the opportunity to play the whole cantata until recently. The opening aria works well with alto recorder in *f'* playing the first part and tenor recorder in *c'* playing the second. This is the solution used on recordings of the work with which I am familiar, and it works well except for the fact that the tenor recorder cannot play the high *e'''* in m. 70 of movement five, and the alto recorder cannot play the low *e'* in the second full bar of the final chorale.

The original recorder key for this work was *E^b Cammerton*, a minor third higher than *Chorton C*. This makes it just right for playing this cantata on voice flutes (tenor recorders in *d'*—see Dale Higbee, "On playing recorders in D, being a short history of the odd-sized recorders, and concerning the revival of the voice flute and sixth flute," *American Recorder*, XXVI/1 [Feb. 1985]: 16–21).

The only practical problem relates to the prominent high *d^{'''}*s (equivalent to *f^{'''}* on the alto recorder in *f'*) in mm. 66 and 69 of the fifth movement. On some alto recorders this note is quite well in tune when fingered $\oplus 1-3 45-7$, using $\oplus 123-5-7$ for top *g'''*, and it works fairly well on the Bressan voice flute formerly in my possession (now in The Dale Higbee Collection at The Shrine to Music Museum, Vermillion, S. D.), but it works best on the smaller-sized recorders. This fingering generally does not work on modern voice flutes, however, and using the knee to close the bell opening for another fingering of this note is very

awkward with an instrument the size of the voice flute. Hence, it seems to me that the best solution is to use an alto recorder in f' for Flauto I and a voice flute in d' for Flauto II, or use two voice flutes throughout except for movement five where Flauto I would use alto recorder. Use of the voice flute permits playing all the notes, and its tone quality more closely matches that of the alto recorder than does the sound of the tenor recorder in c' .

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