

Under Foreign Skies

Double-Reed Week in Torcé Vivier en Charnie, Normandy

Back in *Double Reed News* 49, Peter Kerr warned the world that the twenty-first annual Gloucestershire Double Reed Workshop would be transported to France in July 2000. He reports that “perhaps surprisingly”, this ambitious brainchild of Janet Baldwin took place and it was a tremendous success.

To make travelling worthwhile, the usual weekend event was expanded to a week, although people could of course cut down their stay if circumstances dictated. Numbers were naturally lower than when held at home, but the chance to study with **Neil Black** and **Janice Knight** whilst on holiday in France still attracted twenty oboists. The bassoonists were a very select group and it was a pity that there were no student attendees. But for me personally it was magnificent – a week of **Roger Birnstingl** and **Penny Pay** almost to myself!

In addition to the tutors, Ian Crowther came with his family and shop and did a steady trade in music and reed equipment. Also Chris White came with his family and tools and so was on hand for his expert adjustment of instruments. (A busman’s holiday if ever I saw one, as he was much in demand.) Meanwhile, Zena, Alison and Claire prepared wonders in the kitchen.

The days took on an informal structure of lessons and master-classes in the morning, then reed-making or lessons or chamber music in the afternoon. There were only two bassoonists brave enough or mad enough to volunteer for their master-class (Simon Payne and myself respectively) and since we are both to perform the Mozart *Concerto* shortly, we had both prepared this work. To spare the listeners from the comments twice, Simon very bravely played the Berwald instead!

There were three concerts organised for the end of the week. The first was a marvellous one in the local St Suzanne Church, given by the teachers. This attracted a



*The percussion section and some of the oboes in the mass play-in.
Conductor – Bill Bell*

photographer from the newspaper *France Ouest*. Perhaps the most interesting piece was the *Quartet* by Elis Pekkonen for oboe (**Neil Black**), oboe d’amore (**Janet Baldwin**), cor anglais (**Graeme Adams**) and bass oboe (**Janet Knight**). The second concert was an informal concert in the Music Room where, in addition to double-reeds, we had a violin piece, a piano duet and a choir! Finally we had an Open Air Band Concert in St Suzanne Park: amazingly, it did not rain, although the wind played havoc, despite the use of every local clothes peg!

So what were the highlights of the week? The interaction and playing with great instrumentalists, of course. But also the conversation, the laughter, the cheap drink and boules made it all memorable. My family needed a holiday to recover! And, since Janet Baldwin has said it will be her last, will there be another Gloucestershire Double Reed Workshop? Well, we are in the process of succession planning, and DRN will be the first to know – watch this space!



Roger Birnstingl (L) and Peter Kerr

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