

Introducing the Recorder to Children

by Pamela Vandewalker

Recorders are wonderful instruments! They can be easily used in a children's choir setting. Children love to play instruments and the opportunity to play a wind instrument at an early age is a special treat. Recorders are great because they are convenient to store, inexpensive, sturdy, and easy to play. Children are thrilled to play instruments in an ensemble setting. Let's examine some of the basic ideas about using the recorder in children's choirs.

HISTORY

Children will appreciate knowing a little about the recorder as a descendent of the pipe. The pipe is the simplest of all wind instruments. It is simply a tube (willow, cane, or bamboo branch) with holes cut in the sides. Air is activated by being blown past the holes. When certain holes are covered, specific notes emerge as the distance the air travels changes. You might share different woodwind instruments that produce pitch by the same principle with the children. A school band director and high school band students in your church will enjoy visiting and explaining their instruments to your recorder players.

The pipe is one of the first instruments mentioned in the Bible. Have the children look up Genesis 4:21 to find out more information. Also, have the children refer to Psalm 150:4b.

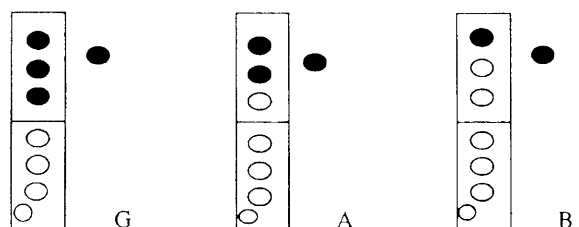
In years past Bible times, the recorder emerged from the pipe and was very popular in the 1500's and 1600's. The recorder might be considered as a type of whistle flute. It is end-blown and has a whistle-like mouthpiece. Recorders come in various sizes: soprano, alto, tenor and bass. If you have access to the various size recorders, let children examine them and hear the ranges of pitch. There may be a recorder ensemble nearby that will present a brief program to help spark interest in the recorder among your children. Explain to the children that the flute emerged from the recorder and has greater dynamic and pitch range.

PLAYING THE RECORDER

The recorder is held with the left hand on top and the right hand on the bottom. Cover the thumbhole on the back of the recorder with your left thumb. Cover the three holes closest to your mouth with the first three fingers of your left hand. Place your right thumb near the middle of the recorder; it should be used to support the instrument. The four fingers of the right hand will cover the remaining holes to make specific pitches. NOTE: Make certain that your fingers completely cover the holes. If the holes aren't covered completely, air leaks out and the recorder may make a squeaking sound.

To make a sound on the instrument, the lips are placed firmly around the mouthpiece and air is blown softly into the instrument. The tone should be soft and light. Each sound can be started with a "too." The sound is released by the tongue touching the top of the mouth behind the teeth.

Specific pitches are made by different holes being covered. This fingering chart shows what holes should be covered to produce these treble pitches.



IDEAS FOR INTRODUCING CHILDREN TO PLAYING THE RECORDER

Students should learn the "B," "A," and "G" notes first and practice them many times. After the children have studied the fingering chart and begun to practice playing the notes, you may wish to teach simple melodies by rote. Here is one procedure that you might use:

- Play a phrase on the recorder for the children.
- Say the notes played.
- Say and finger the notes.
- Have the students say the notes.
- Have the students say and finger the notes.
- Have the students play the phrase.

There are many excellent recorder resources available. Many children may already have recorders from school. Also, the elementary school music teacher may have resource materials that you can review before making your decisions on what to purchase.

Summer music weeks are an ideal time to introduce the recorder to children and then follow up with a recorder class in the fall. Recorders can provide a way for children to work in small ensembles with other choir members both at church and in their homes. Try teaching recorders to the children in your church. You will broaden their music education while allowing them to experience Psalm 150:4.

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