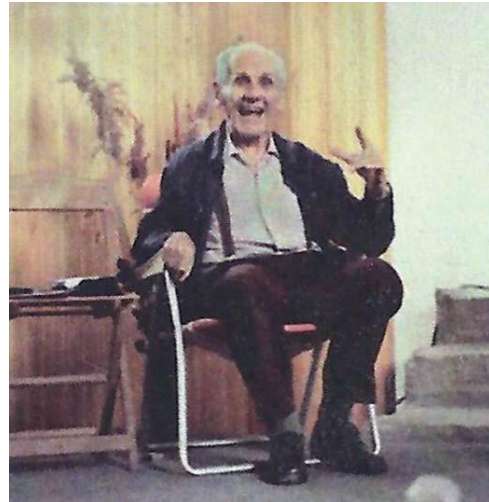


To the gym with Marcel Moyse

Mia Dreese

Marcel Moyse (1889-1984) was not an easy person, and certainly not for his students. He did not tolerate opposition or student's contributions to his lessons. It is said that after graduation his students were at a loss because they had never learned to think for themselves.

During his summer courses in Boswil, Switzerland, though, Moyse was very lucid and clear to his students. In the very short period of one summer he presented his exact ideas on articulation, phrasing, finger technique and musical interpretation.



In his exercise books he also explains thoroughly how the different studies should be used. It is a pity that he has never written a complete flute method with text and explanation. People who want to get acquainted with Moyse's vision on flute playing are dependant on stories handed down by students who experienced Moyse's lessons or on the books by Trevor Wye.

In a short series of articles I will explain some of Moyse's exercises in the way I saw him do it. I was rather unhappy during the first summer course I followed with him because he picked me out to play very often and commented on everything I did, but after a year or so I fully realized how very much I had learned from him in that summer. (And many years later I also realized that this was his way of treating people whom he considered promising flautists.) Even now, after all those years, I take up one of his books every day and I can work (and play!) with it for hours. The mere working with those notes, the given articulation, dynamics and all is more important than the results it brings. It is like going to the gym for your weekly workout. It's worthwhile just doing it!

As a first exercise I have chosen one by Reichert¹ that Moyse uses in his 'How I stayed in Shape'² on page 9.

1 *Em* *B⁷* *B⁷* *Em*
p
mf *p*
Em *G13m⁷* *Am* *F13* *Em* *B⁷* *Em*

This exercise is made up of broken triads, all slurred, technically not very difficult. Moyse puts the metronome on 72 for the crochet. In every one of Moyse's exercises there is a harmonic progression so you are always making music that is nice to listen to. The dynamics follow that harmonic progression.

If you can have a piano play the harmonic chords with you, you can pay special attention to the intonation. (If there is no piano available it is good to try anyway!).

It also works very well if example 1 and 2 are played together as a duet by two flutes.

The exercise is short and easy to remember, so playing it by heart (and ear!) is not too difficult and a good exercise, too.

Example 2 is the basis, the foundation of the piece. Play it with a beautiful, clear and focused tone and take care of all notes being in tune.

Note that the first and third beats in a bar are the important ones. The second and fourth beats must be lighter, as they are played in baroque music.

In fact, many of Moyse's comments fit perfectly in the current practice of baroque performance. For instance, he would say: "make a diminuendo on a rising roulade" (see example 4) and "make a note shorter if the next note is the same pitch".

In Moyse's time this was a common practice, but nowadays, with most people playing in a more romantic manner, always producing a full tone, it is good to be reminded of other possible ways of playing.

Listen to recordings of the conductor Karl Böhm to hear what I mean.

What are the difficulties in example 1? To start with: the slurs over the large intervals. Most flautists can make nice slurs going up, but in a big leap down in pitch it is difficult to avoid a gap when 'gliding' to the lower octave. Coming from the third octave try to keep your embouchure as relaxed as possible and let the breath support (diaphragm) control the slur down. This way you will hear the same timbre in both octaves. If you use only your lips to change from the high to the lower octaves, the colour will change.

This embouchure and breath support exercise will also help to keep the big leaps before the slurs perfectly in tune.

The high octave tends to be sharp, the lower octaves flat (or sometimes sharp). Again, train your harmonic ear by listening carefully and take notice of phrasing, dynamics and the musical structure of this short piece.



Whereas some slurs in example 3 have a crescendo, in example 4 you have to make a diminuendo on them because they go from the heavy to the lighter beat (first to second beat diminuendo, third to fourth beat diminuendo). Listen carefully to the tone quality (don't squeeze your lips but use the support of your breath), to the intonation and pay attention to the slurs (do all fingers change at the same time without 'bloopers'?) And don't raise your fingers too high above the keys. That alone makes it feel like a difficult exercise.

Now play example 1 again with the things you learned from the other exercises in mind. Don't expect results at once but in time you will realize that it sounds a lot better. Look for similar exercises or think them up for yourself.

And always remember why you are taking all the trouble: To make your tone and music beautiful for others to listen to.

Moyses would say:

“Kiss the people, for if you don't, they'll never kiss you!”

¹ Mathieu André Reichert – Tägliche Übungen für Flöte op. 5. Schott FTR 102.

² Marcel Moyse – How I stayed in Shape. Schott ED 8526.

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