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## Twelve Etudes for

**Alto Recorder** by Letitia Berlin  
and Frances Blaker

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REVIEWED BY:

**Beverly R. Lomer**

This set of 12 etudes for alto recorder is an exciting new offering from Letitia Berlin and Frances Blaker. Recipients of the 2022 ARS Distinguished Achievement Award, the duo are well-known professional recorder players and teachers. Together they have a wealth of technical experience.

Berlin received her Bachelor of Arts in music from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and earned her master's degree in early music performance practice from Case Western Reserve University (OH). Her mentors and teachers include Inga Morgan, Saskia Coolen, Marion Verbruggen, Carol Marsh and Ross Duffin.

Blaker earned Music Pedagogical and Performance degrees from the Royal Conservatory of Music in Copenhagen, Denmark. She has studied with Eva Legêne and Verbruggen.

Together they formed the duo Tibia, which explores music for two recorders, adapts music for two instruments, and commissions and composes new duet pieces. They also play with the Farallon Recorder Quartet, as well as Calextone and Ensemble Vermillian. In addition to performing, they are frequent teachers at chapter meetings and workshops including Amherst Early Music Festival. Both have served on the Board of the ARS.

The selections in this edition were composed as part of a practice challenge that they held after a workshop. There is no one theme that links the

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exercises. Rather they address a variety of topics, such as breathing, air flow, finger action, articulation and high notes. The recorder player can work on them in any order.

Tempos are not fixed. The cover notes advise playing at a speed at which you can master the music and only then advancing to another selection.

The edition is divided into four parts: Fingers, Tongue, Tone and High Notes. Part I includes arpeggio studies in two keys, half steps and whole steps, one etude in D<sup>#</sup> and one devoted to playing intervals of a sixth.

The second section on tonguing is brief, with only one piece. Part III on tone covers exercises for an open throat, flowing air, breath and dynamics. The last section comprises two studies of high notes.

These etudes are accessible to intermediate and advanced players. The rhythms are fairly straightforward and are not particularly difficult, especially if one follows the composers' advice to play slowly until the notes have been learned.

The biggest challenge lies with the inclusion of frequent and less usual chromatic notes. Most of the etudes are not dry types of exercises, but are instead quite melodic, which makes them very pleasant to play.

This collection touches upon a number of areas that are important to recorder technique. It does not aim to "do everything" and that is one of its best features. The exercises are on

point with each of the topics. They take time to master, but the effort is worth the work. The edition is highly recommended. ✨

**Beverly R. Lomer, Ph.D.**, is an independent scholar and recorder player whose special interests include performance from original notations and early women's music. She is currently collaborating on the transcription of the Symphonia of Hildegard of Bingen for the International Society of Hildegard von Bingen Studies. Her upcoming feature article will reflect some of that work, as it relates to playing Hildegard's music on recorder. Her other recent features have covered madrigals (AR Fall 2018) and articulation (AR Fall 2020).