

## BANKING ON THE BAROQUE

The life of a bank regulator can involve a lot of travel, which turned out to be a plus for Claudia Holmes. In the quiet of hotel rooms, she had ample time to practice her recorder. One of her recorders, that is, and one of a healthy collection of early instruments that have provided her with enormous gratification. Well, most of them.

“I have 10-12 recorders, three harps, a mountain dulcimer, which I’m still learning how to play, and some noisy instrument I forget the name of now—a reed instrument, and obnoxious-sounding,” said Holmes, 68. “It’s not a shawm. It’s a double reed. I haven’t mastered the art of playing a reed instrument well, so it’s probably a good idea I decided to ditch the oboe.”

Retired from the banking industry, Holmes devotes hours a week to her beloved instruments, rehearsing with a recorder ensemble in Lakeland, FL—north of her home in Lakewood Ranch—and performing at retirement homes and for music clubs. She is a member of the Sarasota chapter of the American Recorder Society.

Her experience with early instruments goes back to her childhood in Paraguay, where her family had moved from Germany before World War II. Holmes’ father played recorder, as eventually did his daughter. She continued to play during college at Clarion University in Pennsylvania, where she majored in German and minored in music history, but she set her hobby aside while raising a family. Only when her three children were grown and she was working as a bank regulator did her passion for early music again intensify.

She was introduced to the early harp in 2014, when she attended the Early Music at Mideast Workshop at LaRoche College in Pittsburgh, near where she’d lived before moving to Florida in 2004. “I hadn’t really thought about it until that opportunity arose,” Holmes said. “The first time I sat down with harp, I said, ‘I want to do this.’



There was something about the feel, the sound of the strings, just the feeling that it gave me when I plucked those strings. It’s such a beautiful sound.”

Her travels on behalf of early music have taken her to the Mountain Collegium, a festival that instrument maker George Kelischek founded 45 years ago, and to Germany, where she visited Mollenhauer Recorders in Fulda to purchase a rosewood tenor and rosewood soprano.

Holmes said her practice sessions in hotels greatly enhanced her satisfaction as a soloist, including appearances with keyboard accompaniment for Unitarian church services. “I realized that not only gave me practice time and the chance to learn my material really well. It also

gave me confidence to perform comfortably and speak comfortably. The key is knowing your material. That’s really helped my public speaking and public performance.”

What has also helped has been her increased confidence transcribing works for recorders—especially unfamiliar music she hears on a Baroque radio show—via a notation software program. “I feel there’s so much to discover there. I transcribe it and take it to my group in Lakeland. I feel like I’m sometimes proselytizing. But so many people don’t know about early music, and if they learned about it more, they’d appreciate it, too.”