

Brendan O'Donnell – Recorder & Early Music

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Described as a “virtuoso, scholar, [and] presenter ... of rare charm and lucidity” by the press, recorder player and chamber music specialist Brendan O'Donnell is dedicated to bringing both early and contemporary music to life for a 21st-century public. As a soloist and as a founding member of both Bowerbird Ensemble in Australia and Cembales in Germany, he has earned a reputation for direct communication and thoughtful programming, inviting his audiences to experience and enjoy music they might otherwise never encounter.

Performing in churches and cabaret clubs, in concert halls and on dingy stages normally reserved for DJs or late-night comedy, Brendan regularly aims events at young adult audiences, foregoing traditional concert venues in favour of settings that encourage intimacy, interaction, and dynamic presentation: with Bowerbird Ensemble he has played in The Rhino Room, The Promethean, and Carclew Youth Arts Centre (raising funds for Opportunity International) in Adelaide; with Cembales, in a historical building site in Würzburg (in conjunction with LeerRaumPioniere and Klangkartei) and Herbrand's Club in Cologne (a fundraiser for Lebensdurst-ich).

Brendan has performed as both soloist and chamber musician with Ensemble Galante, Adelaide Baroque, Adelaide Chamber Singers, Syntony, and Accademia Arcadia, and has taken part in the Adelaide Fringe Festival, the St. John's Feast of Music, and the acclaimed Woodend Winter Arts Festival. After leaving Cembales at the end of 2016, he performed regularly in Germany with Ensemble Raccanto in locations such as the Barocksaal in Benediktbauern Abbey and the Neues Schloss in Meersburg, culminating in a performance in the Leipzig Bach Festival. He was also chosen to present his solo program “Seeking Australia” as a part of the European Recorder Players' Society conference in Bolzano, Italy in 2019.

He is an experienced teacher: for 8 years, Brendan taught at music schools in Bavaria including the DOrff-Werkstatt in Andechs and the Musikschule Hallbergmoos-Neufahrn, alongside substantial private teaching and ensemble coaching. In 2019 he tutored together with recorder virtuoso Susanne Ehrhardt during the recorder course Musiktage am Chiemsee in Germany, and in April 2022 was a tutor at the Orpheus Recorder Gathering in Armidale, NSW. He also gives workshops for the Society of Recorder Players SA and provides coaching for advanced students and ensembles in Adelaide.

Brendan has played recorder since the age of four. Growing up with early musicians as parents, he had many opportunities to perform in professional circles during his teenage years, but initially studied political science rather than music after completing high school. His passion for the recorder was reignited a few years later – though he had never stopped playing and performing – and he went on to study at a tertiary level: first in New Zealand with David Coomber and Kamala Bain, later in Salzburg with Dorothee Oberlinger and Matthias Lunenburg, where he completed a master's degree in 2013.

While in Europe he continued to educate himself through courses, masterclasses and private lessons with leading recorder players including Dan Laurin (SE), Han Tol (NL), Bolette Roed (DK), and Andreas Böhlen (DE), and has attended several courses on baroque improvisation led by violinist Davide Monti (IT).

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