

SJS collegium musicum offers subtle baroque

By Paul Hertelendy
Music Writer

A COLLEGIUM Musicum is an exercise in ubiquity.

There's a Collegium Musicum at UC-Berkeley, and another at USC. There's a Collegium Musicum at Stanford, and another at the Eastman School.

"I started a Collegium Musicum at San Jose about 10 years ago," says SJS faculty member Vernon Read, whose ensemble is performing at the San Jose Museum of Art Sunday afternoon. There must be about 50 of them in the country. I think there should be one on every college campus!"

The Latin name *collegium musicum* dates back to the heyday of Georg Philip Telemann in pre-Bach Leipzig. The composer's "musical college" met Sundays in coffee houses, playing through not only his own music, but also that of his colleagues and (presumably) predecessors in informal explorations.

With Telemann's lead as his cue, Dr. Read's San Jose Collegium Musicum plays renaissance and baroque music with equal amounts of aplomb and popularity. When it last performed at the museum, not even a drenching January rainstorm could prevent a full house of baroque-enthusiasts from turning up to revel in the new sounds of old music.

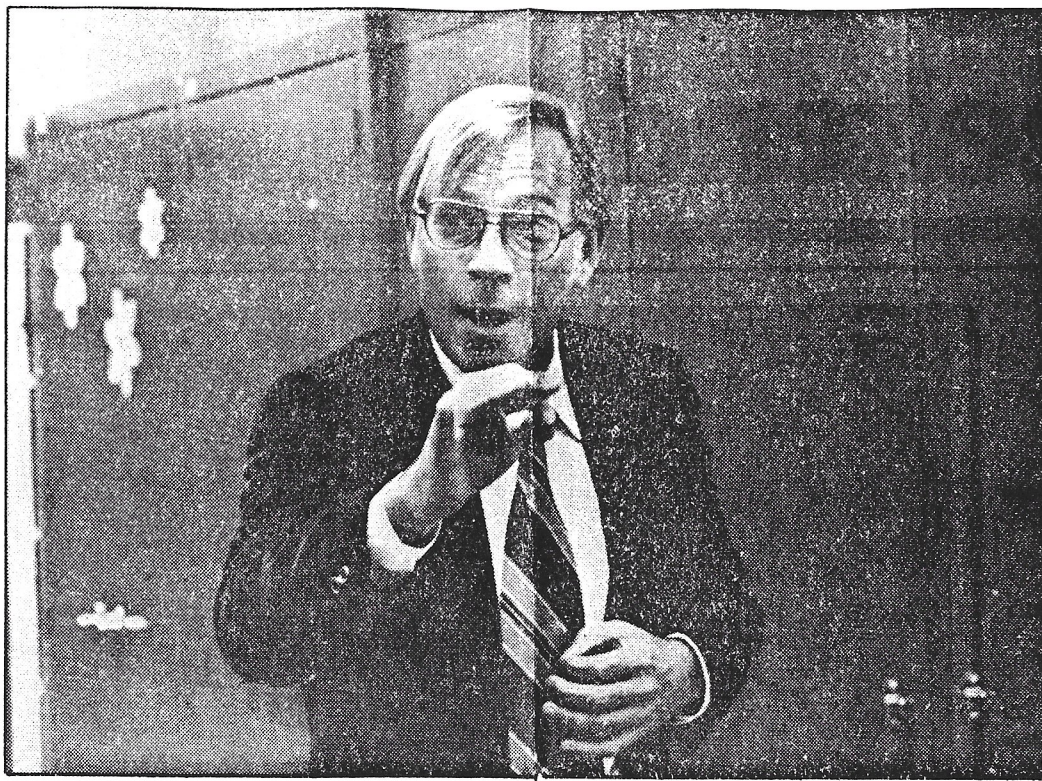
Read has yet to put his finger on a good lute, but his ensemble already has a good replica of a 16th-century Italian virginal (harpsichord), along with a blended battery of shawms, rebecs, vielles, viola da gamba, krummhorns, portable pipe-organs and of course recorders.

These recorders require neither video, tape nor electricity; they are end-blown wooden flutes performed by thousands of amateurs in the modern-day baroque revival. "It is the easiest instrument to play — badly," moaned one recorder player after more frustration in his early lessons than he had bargained for.

The instruments are exotic; even the stringed and fretted gamba bears only the faintest resemblance to its latter-day counterparts, which were redesigned to produce high volume in much larger halls.

In the baroque, however, small is still beautiful. The bowed renaissance instruments like the rebec can almost fit in your pocket. The sound is equally delicate, unless of course you get an instrument like the buzzy, kazoo-like krummhorn, or the double-reed instrument known as the racket which is just about as tall as it is fat.

Whether or not a racket is enough to get you unstrung, such instruments are the delight of



Emil Edgren — Mercury News



Vernon Read, top, director of collegium musicum, and musicians.

music-appreciation teachers planning their next examination. One professor at another college with a viola da gamba in mind still chuckles over a bewildered student's exam reply which ran, "A bowed, fretted instrument of the baroque era is a Vasco da Gama."

Read's group has one virtue of which Telemann would have been very proud: Every one of the 11 instrumentalists also sings. In those days the voice made itself heard a lot more, and Read's players are determined to recapture the sound.

COLLEGIUM MUSICUM of SJS under Dr. Vernon Read's direction, in free concert at the San Jose Museum of Art at 4 p.m. Sunday. Music of Obrecht, Monteverdi, Dowland, Dufay, Senfl, and Anon.

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