

# Early Music

## REVIEW

Number 150

October 2012

Part II

ISSN 1355-3437

Price £2.50

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Early Music Review is published in  
alternate months

The International Diary is published every month  
except January

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I came across an article in *The Times* recently that reminded me of the power of Beethoven's symphonies in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (novel 1962; film 1972). This is generally considered to be a positive feature, but in the novel it reinforces the violent obsessions of the young criminal. It is unusual for "classical" music to be associated with criminals: it tends to be a sign of the refined upper class or intellectuals, though with hints that they are in some way unusual. Lord Peter Wimsey played Bach on the harpsichord and Sherlock Holmes, who is more classless, played the violin and wrote a treatise on Palestrina.

Wagner's music was dragged into Nazi aesthetics, though not everything that a dramatist writes represents his own beliefs. He is also famous for his erotic music, though I find the mingling of sex and death in *Tristan* a bit of a dramatic cliché. One of the most curious associations between music and sex (*Fifty Shades of Grey*) has hit the sales this summer (will J. K. Rowling knock E. L. James off the top of the best-seller lists?) and has surprisingly given a boost to recordings of *Spem in alium*. I must confess that I have never associated it with any sort of sex, let alone bondage. Frustratingly, one has to read through to page 493 before finding the scene, though Tallis's name is dropped much earlier. A background of literature and music is spread through the book, presumably to make it seem more respectable. Several other pieces are mentioned, of which only the Lakmé duet is in any way erotic. I can't see any such emotion in the Pachelbel Canon – I hope they used my edition! I've no experience of evaluating such books, but the music is available separately, and I doubt that a mixture of Tallis, Pachelbel, Delibes, Verdi, Villa-Lobos, Sinatra and Springsteen is a satisfying programme. Meanwhile, it would be interesting to hear if anyone has associated erotic experiences with *Spem*...

CB

## SUMMER FESTIVALS

### LEIPZIG BACHFEST – 7-17 JUNE 2012

Andrew Benson-Wilson

#### 7th June: Bach, Reger, Zimmermann

This year's Leipzig Bachfest celebrated the 800 year history of Bach's Thomaskirche, its school, choir, and musical legacy, not least with the music of Bach and his fellow Kantors. With more than 120 events spread over 10 days, this was an enormous enterprise, attracting huge audiences, including many watching on giant screens in the Markt. The festival opened in Bach's own church with his joyously swinging Praeludium and Fugue in C (547) played on the 2000 'Bach' organ by the Thomasorganist, Ullrich Böhme, the only glitch for me being his addition of twiddles to interrupt the dramatic silences that Bach so clearly intended. The young voices of the sailor-suited Thomanerchor, the Thomasschülerinnen and the Leipziger Universitätschor then came to the fore, respectively, with *Singet dem Herrn* (sung with impressive clarity of line and purity of tone), Heinz Werner Zimmermann's 2009 *Das Te Deum Deutsch* (an approachable and musically eclectic work, but one that doesn't break new ground) and Reger's vast *Psalm 100*, performed in Hindemith's de-Regering version from 1955. The Gewandhausorchester joined in the Reger, producing enormous power in the frequent climaxes. Reger's roots as an organist were clear – like César Franck he registers, rather than orchestrates his chorale and orchestral works. The concert was directed by the current Thomaskantor, Georg Christoph Biller.

#### Leipzig Students

A welcome contrast to Reger came in the first late-night concert when Hamburger Ratsmusik (a six-strong viol consort with violin and theorbo/guitar) gave a programme of music by the former students of Leipzig University, Theile, Schein and Rosenmüller and their contemporaries. This was in the Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche, an extraordinary building with an imposing neo-Renaissance exterior and an interior that looks as though it has been excavated out of solid chalk. They produced a well-balanced sound, with each player getting the chance for solo spots. They seem to have brought their own cabal with them – a small group of people sitting right at the front insisted on keeping every round of applause going for very much longer than was appropriate. Their efforts just sounded awkward.

#### 8th June: Early St Matthew

The winner of this year's Leipzig Bach Medal, awarded by the City of Leipzig, went to the Japanese conductor Masaaki Suzuki. In return, he gave them a performance of the Matthew Passion in the Thomaskirche with his Bach Collegium Japan and the Tölzer Knabenchor. It was sung in its early version, with the first part ending with the

four-part chorale *Jesum lass ich nicht von mir* rather than *O Mensch*; the aria *Ach! Nun ist mein Jesus hin!* sung by a bass rather than alto; and with a lute used as continuo for the bass *accompagnato* and aria *Ja freilich/Komm, süßes Kreuz*. The chorale in the opening movement was sung by a small group of boys combined with the Bach organ, sited in the south aisle about two-thirds of the way down the church from the large west-end gallery where the rest of the choir and orchestra were positioned. In the first aria, Robin Blaze showing just how perfect his voice is in balance with the two flutes. Johannette Zomer also impressed in the second aria. Gert Türk's Evangelist told it how it was without acting as a storyteller, leaving the drama for the words of Jesus, which were given a rather more prominent orchestral halo than usual. Soprano Hana Blažiková excelled in *Aus Liebe* (with a superbly controlled opening long-held note), as did Hiroya Aoki in *Können Tränen*. Peter Kooij was the bass in *Ja freilich/Komm, süßes Kreuz* with its theorbo accompaniment. The Evangelist's mention of Judas was accompanied by the Nokia tune, the culprit preferring to leave it ringing rather than taking the more honourable approach of turning the bloody thing off and going outside to hang him- or herself. Masaaki Suzuki's direction combined precision with expression.

#### 9th June: Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra

##### *In memoriam Gustav Leonhardt*

Ton Koopman brought his Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra to the Nikolaikirche together with the excellent soprano Dorothee Mields, for three challenging soprano cantatas and the Overture in C, in a concert in memory of Gustav Leonhardt. Dorothee Mields is a real find. The purity of her tone, in an Emma Kirkbyish fashion, added innocence to her singing, notably in the opening recit and aria of Cantata 199, *Mein Herze schwimmt im Blut*. The lengthy programme was made even longer by the disruption of having to move the continuo organ on and off the stage several times – a simple re-ordering of the works would have prevented this. The last work was an oddity, and didn't go well with the rest of the programme – the frolics of Phoebe and Cupid in *Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten*. With such a fine singer, it was sad that the bizarre keyboard playing of Ton Koopman should have been so prominent. Apart from his frequent added ornaments (pure Koopmanisms with little connection to accepted Bach ornamentation practice and adding nothing musically) we had to suffer his irritating habit of treating the harpsichord as a percussion instrument. We know that Bach's fingers could hardly be seen moving when he played, but Koopman's fingers were launched at the poor keyboard from way above the keyboard, landing with a crash that caused the keys to bang against the key-bed in a way that was frequently louder than the sound of the harpsichord itself. No wonder it had to retire for a rest every now and then!

### Concerto Palatino

The late-night concert combined the cornets and sackbuts of Concerto Palatino with the strings of Ensemble La Dolcezza in a programme of Pezel, Schein and Reiche. Attractive as these composers' works were (particularly Schein's *Beati omnes qui timent Dominum*), they were all pipped to the musical post by a sequence of innovative works from Scheidt's 1621 *Ludi musici*. This rather long late-night concert was made longer by the time taken for some of the performers to find their way up to the organ gallery for several groups of pieces.

### 10<sup>th</sup> June: Funeral Music

Death was the theme of the concert by Vocalconsort Berlin (Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche) with their programme of funeral music by the likes of Schein and Schelle (both Thomaskantors), JM Bach, Schütz and ending with JS Bach's *Jesu, meine Freude*. The opening choice of Schein's *Da Jakob vollendet hatte* was good, its gradually unfolding and expanding texture leading towards the rocking passage at *und weinet*. Schein's close friendship with Schütz was evident in his Gabrieli-inspired *Unser Leben*, although *Die mit Tränen säen* was rather more progressive with its rising chromatic phrase giving a twist to the joyful melody. Schelle's beautiful simply setting of *Komm, Jesu, Komm* (an extended and complex chorale fantasia, with a different melodic idea for each section) was in sharp contrast to JSB's working of the same text. But my favourite piece was Johann Michael Bach's *Halt, was du hast*. Organist Tineke Steenbrink played two Bach works very effectively on a tiny continuo organ, the small sound in this large church drawing the listener in.

### Guglielmo's Goldberg

A later concert in the imposing Bundesverwaltungsgericht was Luca Guglielmo giving a very impressive performance of the Goldberg Variations. His quiet playing posture, ability to carry off the bravura passages with apparent ease, and a refreshing lack of showmanship all aided audience concentration. I liked his gentle use of rhetoric, as in Variation 11, and his exploratory lingering in variation 25, just long enough to relish the conflation of sounds that the chromatic bass reveals.

### Ortmerssen at St Thomas

The distinguished Dutch organist Jacques van Ortmerssen's organ recital on the Bach organ of the Thomaskirche explored the works of the generation after Bach, including his son Carl Philipp Emanuel. He started with Johann Christoph Kellner's jovial Praeludium in C with its tinkle-bell opening soon shattered by the sound of the full organ. The chorale prelude *Was Gott tut* followed, in a version by Kellner's father, through whom many of Bach's work have become known. Krebs is one of the most interesting of the Bach students. His chorale preludes are attractive works, as evidenced by *Herzlich lieb hab ich dich*, although his large-scale free works can push the Bach idiom to rather tiresome lengths. One of his less contrived efforts is

the Toccata in E, with its virtuosic opening pedal solo. The *Empfindsamer Stil* at its height was represented by CPE Bach's Sonata in A minor. Perhaps unfortunately for the younger generation, Jacques van Ortmerssen ended his recital with the master himself, putting the work of his successors into the shade. In an unusual construction, we heard the delightful double-pedal chorale prelude *Wir glauben all* (which may well be by Krebs) inserted between the two parts of the well-known Praeludium and Fuga in g. Van Ortmerssen's playing was subtle, sensitive and musical, his restrained approach allowing the music to speak with a voice that owed more to the composer than the interpreter.

### 11<sup>th</sup> June: Collegium Musicum concert

The Altes Rathaus (which contains the famous Bach portrait) was the venue for the concert "The likes of which has never been heard hereabouts" by Café Zimmermann, recreating a typical concert by Bach's Collegium Musicum in the 1730s. The concert title is from the advert for the first such concert. After a Handel Overture, we had CPE Bach's Cello Concerto (Wq 172), the mood set by the dark, yearning unison melody of the central *Largo* being rather spoilt by a seemingly endless cadenza that ventured into musical territory that CPE would never have envisaged. Fasch's inventive Overture in B flat (FWV K:B5) showed the *Empfindsamer Stil* in full flow. Johann Gottlieb Janitsch was briefly plucked from well-deserved obscurity for his Harpsichord Concerto in F, a rather formulaic work that never really let the solo instrument off the leash. Nonetheless, Céline Frisch was an impressive soloist, not least because of her attractively brief cadenzas. As with some other concerts in the festival, ending with JS Bach really does knock the others into the shade. In this case, it was his invigorating Overture in D. The players were on fine form, although I would have preferred the percussionist to have spent less time striking poses for the audience, and more time ensuring that his timpani were in tune.

### 12<sup>th</sup> June: Thomas organist

Ullrich Böhme has been the Thomasorganist since the Bach year of 1985 and was instrumental in the building of the new Bach organ in 2000. His recital on that organ featured composers associated with the Thomaskirche, starting with a flourish with Andreas Düben's *Praeludium ex E vel A pedaliter*, played on an ear-battering full pleno complete with the 16' and 32' pedal reeds. A selection of works by Ammerbach featured some curious registrations, not least a *Passamezzo italiana* that included a rather unauthentic 16' pedal. Kuhnau's "David and Goliath" Biblical Sonata could have been the opportunity to explore the wide range of colour stops of the Bach organ, but the chosen registrations were general rather dull. Inevitably, it ended at full blast, with the addition of the *Glockenspiel* and the inevitable 32' pedal reed.<sup>1</sup> There was a move to

1. The *Biblical Sonatas* were published for *Clavier*, and any performance on the organ is likely to have been domestic. CB



the west end Sauer organ for some works from not very distinguished later 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century composers before a return to the Bach organ for the final Praeludium and Fuga in Eb – a relentless performance that really did Bach's music no favours. The third section of the fugue was far too fast for the enormous registration used – which included, of course, the 32' Posaun Bass.

### 13<sup>th</sup> June: Hasse *Cleofide*

One of the highlights of the festival is the annual visit to the historically important 1802 Goethe Theatre in Bad Lauchstädt, west of Leipzig, for an opera performance. This year it was Hasse's *Cleofide*, given a fascinating re-working by the Batzdorfer Hofkapelle with actor/director Michael Quast and conductor Michael Hofstetter. The opera was premiered in 1731 in the Grosses Königliches Opernhaus in Dresden's Zwinger Palace, possibly with Bach in the audience. Hasse had just become Kapellmeister to the Saxon Court, and had also recently married Faustina Bordoni, who sang the title role. The libretto was a modification of a Metastasio original *Alexandro nell'Indie*. Michael Quast's production combined the worlds of Hasse and Goethe, the latter in the use of a version of the little puppet theatre that the young Goethe had been given as a boy and which started his interest in the theatre. That stood to the right of the stage, with Quast, in Goethe-period dress, providing a narrative and manoeuvring the puppets, dressed in Baroque style, on the little stage to mirror the action of the sung recits and arias. These were presented on the left side of the stage, the singers, in modern all-black, singing from scores with only occasional moments of acting. The puppets were passive during the arias, allowing a concentration on the music. Quast's "walking recitative" gave the story of the opera, snippets of the plot, and, for those with better German than mine, contemporary references and moments of obvious hilarity. Hasse's original 4-hour span was cut to about 2½ hours, and two of the roles were dropped, leaving four singers and the actor/narrator. Enough of the sung recits were included to indicate the interaction between the various protagonists and to make musical sense. The work included moments of intense emotion and drama, much of it focussed on Faustina's role as Cleofide – even in duets, she had a prominent role. The arias were tuneful, with inventive accompaniments and orchestrations reflecting the characters and moods, including Alexander's final aria *Cervo al bosco che piagato* accompanied by horn and lute (Stephan Katte and Stephan Rath). Flautist Jana Semerádová also had a prominent role. The original band included such notables as Pisendel, Quantz, Weiss, and the horn-player Schindler. Of the four singers, soprano Yeree Suh in the Faustina role and countertenor Yosemiteh Adjei as Alessandro impressed me the most. This was an imaginative and inventive way to present an opera.

### 15<sup>th</sup> June: L'Art du Bois

The young group *L'Art du Bois* gave a delightful programme of music by Schein, Sweelinck, Scheidt, Kaspberger, Rosen-

müller, Telemann and Bach in their pre-lunchtime concert in the Alte Handelsbörse. The flute/recorder players, Margret Cörner and Lena Hanisch, were well supported by a continuo group of organ/harpsichord, theorbo and viola da gamba, each of whom had solo moments. This was a very well presented event, well played, with a good spoken introduction to the pieces, nicely grouped sequences of works and clear indications to the audience as to when to applaud – something many groups and performers fail to do. There was also a nice bit of, possibly unintentional, humour when the keyboard player plucked a couple of recorder mouthpieces from his trousers.

### Saint Thomas Choir, New York

For the evening concert, New York's English-style Saint Thomas Choir, directed by John Scott, stopped off on their European tour with a programme that combined 800 years of music at their Leipzig namesake with music from England, ranging from Sheppard, Gibbons and Byrd to Jonathan Harvey, Francis Grier, Britten and Parry. The nod to their hosts came with works by Bach, Hiller and Schumann, the last with one of his Fugues on the name Bach, played well by Frederick Teardo on the Sauer organ, using a carefully controlled crescendo that thankfully failed to reach full organ. Bernard Rose's 'Feast song for Saint Cecilia' featured a very fine, but unnamed boy treble. On the other hand, they managed to follow the very English tradition of having a prominent and vibrato-laden countertenor, most noticeably in the duet in the 3<sup>rd</sup> verse of Gibbons' 'Great Lord of Hosts'.

### 17 June: Dispute over Indulgence and Art

An afternoon concert in the Altes Rathaus (17 June) featured the Merseburger Hofmusic and Bach's coffee and tobacco cantatas, divided by Stölzel's cantata for bass 'Toback, du edle Panacée vor heldenmütge Seelen'. Marie Friederike Schoöder, soprano (a previous prizewinner in the Leipzig Bach Competition), Tobias Berndt and Andreas Scheiber, bass were the key singers, with Ulrike Wolf taking the prominent flute role in the Coffee cantata. After the interval we heard Bach's Contest between Phoebus and Pan (*Geschwinde, geschwinde, ihr wirbelnden Winde*), with its gorgeous aria for Phoebus, *Mit Verlangen*, here sing by Tobias Berndt.

### Excursions

One nice feature of the festival is the trips to places of musical interest close to Leipzig, each including one or more concerts or recitals. The first of these (8 June) was an organ-biased tour to Halle, with a tour of the town and the Handel birthplace and a demonstration of the two organs (one with Handel and one with Bach connections) in the Marktkirche. The large west-end organ has a fine case dating back to 1712 which now encloses a rather undistinguished modern organ; Bach had a hand in designing the original instrument. By far the more interesting organ is the little one positioned about the altar, built by



Reichel in 1663/4. Despite its size, this delightful instrument produced a bold, clear and rich sound from its six stops, filling the church with sound. This was the instrument which Handel first learnt to play from the then organist Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow, whose anniversary year it is. The Marttkirche organist Irénée Peyrot played a couple of Zachow's works, together with a Handel suite, originally intended for harpsichord, but sounding splendid on this fine organ.

The following day's visit was to a pair of historic buildings and included an attractive concert by the local singers of Hallenser Madrigalisten, their light and unaffected voices allowing the music to shine through.

Lignite mining was the theme of the trip on 11 June, with a visit to towns that had been affected by the vast mines in the region around Leipzig. The 1755 Friederici organ in Grossdeuben was originally in a church that was destroyed for the sake of mining operations. As is typical of organs of this period and region, there were four 8' ranks which could be used in any combination to produce a wide variety of sumptuous sounds – a sound world that Bach would have known and loved. Unfortunately the short concert (for organ and trumpet) was clearly intended to demonstrate the ability of the performers rather than the organ, and was all very loud and showy-offy.

The key visit was to Freiberg (12 June), home to one of Europe's most famous historic organs, the 1710 Gottfried Silbermann organ in the Cathedral, one of his first instruments. There is also a smaller 1719 Silbermann organ in the side gallery, moved from the Johanniskirche in 1939. Domorganist Albrecht Koch demonstrated both particularly effectively in the case of the smaller organ. We also heard another Silbermann organ in the St Petrikirche.

#### 16<sup>th</sup> June: OAE – Bach, Hiller, Mozart

The last two evenings of the festival both featured groups from the UK, starting with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment's concert in the exotic palm-house setting of the Nikolaikirche. This was a curiously eclectic programme of Bach, Hiller and Mozart. The opening Bach was the B minor Overture, the player's gentle and refined tone giving an elegance and sophistication to the music. I had heard the same piece played the same afternoon on one of the concert tours, rather badly, on modern instruments and in a completely incorrect idiom, so it was a relief to hear Baroque music played with a proper sense of the build up of little motifs, rather than long romantic phrases. Lisa Beznosiuk was, as ever, outstanding as the flute soloist. This was followed by the Double Violin Concerto, with Kati Debretzeni joining the leader, Margaret Faultless, as soloists. Hiller was one of Bach's successors as Thomaskantor, but his Sinfonia in F (from his *Cantata on the Arrival of the High Sovereign*), with its predictable progression of ideas, did not encourage me to rush off to

find the score. After a change of bows, the OAE returned to end with Mozart's Symphony 40.

#### 17<sup>th</sup> June: B minor Mass

As is traditional, the festival ended with a performance of Bach's B minor Mass in his own church, on this occasion given by the English Concert and Choir, directed by Harry Bicket. This must rate amongst the finest performances of this work that I have heard. Although it seems that Bach never heard it performed, he would at least have recognised the instruments and the pitch used in this performance, but perhaps not a "choir" in the modern sense. Positioned in the west-end gallery of the packed church, the choir and orchestra were on amazing form, and produced a thrilling sound in the more powerful choruses, notably with *Cum Sancto Spiritu*. Ursula Paludan Monberg was exceptional as the horn soloist in the preceding *Quoniam tu solus*. Other prominent instrumental contributions came from the leader, Nadja Zwiener, Lisa Beznosiuk, flute, Katharina Spreckelsen, oboe, and Mark Bennett, trumpet. Of the five solo singers, Iestyn Davies was by far the finest, not least for his controlled vibrato and purity of tone. Harry Bicket had an exquisite sense of the architecture of the work, with some very effectively controlled links between sections (particularly between the *Crucifixus* and *Et resurrexit* and the lead into *Et expecto*). He also carefully controlled the staging, with soloists staying put until a suitable break in the music, and the choir's standing and sitting very well coordinated. They later performed the same work at the Proms.

Next year's Bachfest is from June 14–23. Programme details are available at <http://www.bach-leipzig.de/index.php?id=26&L=1>. Booking opens on 15 October, unless you are a Friend – of the Bach Archiv, that is, not of me!

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#### INNSBRUCKER FESTWOCHEEN DER ALTEN

##### MUSIKBACHFEST –

8-26 AUGUST 2012

Andrew Benson-Wilson

#### Monica's Air

This year's Innsbruck Festival of Early Music focussed on the music of different cultures, ranging from Latin America via the Orient to Scotland. The festival lasted from 8th to 26th August, and I was there from the 17th to 24<sup>th</sup>, timed so that I could review two of the three operas that the festival puts on. My first concert was several miles west of Innsbruck in the fairy-tale baroque splendour of Stiftskirche Stams with Coro Maghini Turin's concert devoted to the music of Frescobaldi *L'aria della Monica*. Monica got an early look in as a solo soprano processed slowly from the back of the church, singing the original song – which tells the story of a young girl forced to be a nun. From such unpromising textural beginnings grew a wealth of musical offerings from many composers,

including Frescobaldi's *Missa sopra l'aria della Monica* and, perhaps better known, his *Partite sopra l'aria della Monica*. We heard both works, alongside Marini's *Sonata sopra l'aria della Monica* and organ and instrumental music by Frescobaldi, set almost in liturgical order. The Mass, written for two 4-part choirs, in this case with a violin apportioned to each with continuo (here organ, viola da gamba, violone and trombone) is an impressive large-scale work. Frescobaldi integrates the two choirs rather more than Gabrieli, with more use of homophonic writing and less of the to-an-fro *cori spezzati* writing of Gabrieli – only in the Benedictus is that idiom used. The choir, by no means specialists in the early repertoire, produced a sumptuous and coherent sound, although occasionally the rather bottom-heavy continuo became a little too prominent.<sup>2</sup> The organ playing, by Madiangiola Martello, was excellent, both in her solo works and as continuo.

#### 1561 Ebert organ + cornett

Although Innsbruck's Hofkirche contains two of the world's most famous Renaissance organs, they are rarely used in the festival. This was partially compensated for with a late-night concert featuring the 1561 Ebert organ together with William Dongois playing cornetto from the tiny organ loft as well as, for a few pieces, by the altar with harpsichord. Unfortunately for audience members not in the know, the festival's programme book gave no information about the organ. The programme ranged from the expected Italian works to the Spanish Correa de Arauxo and the North German Scheidemann. Such an organ breathes flexibly, controllable by the player (if he knows what he is doing), and imparting a delightful singing quality to the sound. Composers of the time obviously knew this, and wrote accordingly. What was lovely about hearing William Dongois play with the organ was that he was imparting exactly the same gentle flexibility to his cornet playing – for example at the end of the first piece, when his gentle vibrations slowly subsided in stasis. Another very attractive aspect of this concert was to hear the sound of a proper organ, rather than the silly little continuo organs that are usually heard. The organist was Hadrien Jourdan, playing with the sensitivity that the organ demanded.

#### and the prize is... Poppea

The first of two operas that I saw was the BaroqueOpera-Jung production of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, starring competitors from last year's International Singing Competition for Baroque Opera: Pietro Antonio Cesti. The promise of rain meant a last minute transfer from the open courtyard venue into the Kammerspiele of the Tiroler Landestheater, a space with rather unfriendly acoustics for the singers. A sparse staging with minimal props enabled us to focus on the individual characters portrayed – and portrayed to outstanding effect by this young cast, with some of the best acting and singing I have heard in many

an opera. The historic Poppaea Sabina and Nero were relatively young at the start of the story – Poppaea about 28, and Nero about 21, similar ages to many of these singers. Rather than the scheming and manipulative figure that Poppea is often portrayed as, Emöke Baráth (last year's first prize winner) came over as a slight, rather fragile figure, even if her hair did make her look like a young lion – a nice contrast of images. That characterisation came into focus in her scene when Ottone tries to regain Poppea's affections with Emöke Baráth quite magically evoking the range of human emotions that the historic Poppaea might have been feeling, assuming she wasn't the nightmare devil-woman so often portrayed. Of the other ten singers, special mention must go to Tehila Nini as Nerone, Rupert Enticknac as Ottone, Gianluca Buratto as Seneca, Jeffrey Francis enjoying himself as Arnalta and Anna Maria Sarra as Drusilla. The impressive young orchestra was made up of students from the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis.

#### Jolanta Sosnowska

The first of the lunchtime concerts that I attended was in the tiny Nikolauskapelle in the Schloss Ambras and 'Violine in der Kapelle', with Polish violinist Jolanta Sosnowska giving a powerful and full-bodied performance of solo violin works that perhaps owed more to the musical culture and training of her homeland than to the niceties of the current performance practice for the likes of Bach and violone (especially if 16-foot) and trombone with Telemann. Two composers of interest were the Salzburg-based pupil of Biber, Johann Joseph Vilsmayr and Dresden's Schütz pupil, Johann Paul von Westhoff. The former was very much in the *Stylus phantasticus* tradition of Biber, the latter more mainstream Baroque. Although Jolanta Sosnowska started with an attractively fluid sense of rhythm, her playing soon became more mannered, exaggerated and unstylistic, notably in the Bach's third Partita, where added accents disrupted the flow.

#### Deborah York

Back in the spectacular Spanischer Saal of Schloss Ambras, the evening concert took us to Scotland with the eminent soprano Deborah York exploring the wide-ranging repertoire of music from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries based on Scottish songs. As well as the songs, we had violin pieces based on the songs, unfortunately played at the same time as the songs. On paper this might have seemed a good idea, and one or two examples would have been fine, but all too frequently the clashes between the far too dominant playing of the violinist (from the backing group, Musica Antiqua Roma) and Deborah York's exquisitely pure voice were just too much to take. That said, there were some fine accompaniments from Veronica Febbi and Giulia Nuti, the former playing harps, the latter harpsichord and, quite spectacularly, recorder. Some of segues seemed a bit clumpy, but the delightful singing of Deborah York more than made up for any shortcomings.

2. The current view that gamba, violone and trombone are not continuo instruments, though could double the vocal bass parts. CB

### Watch the Bassoon!

The Spanischer Saal was even hotter than usual for its next concert, with the local group *moderntimes\_1800's* concert, *Slawische Tänze*. We were to have heard three works by the Dresden musician Johann Christian Röllig, but in a programme change this became a single, sadly rather undistinguished *Divertimento* for 2 violins and continuo. As well as the inevitable Telemann we also heard Handel (a concerto for oboe and bassoon<sup>3</sup> with a very lumpily played *Menuet*) and Zelenka's Trio Sonata for Oboe, violin and bassoon. The bassoon player clearly saw himself as the undoubted star of the evening, giving little waves to people in the audience and wearing the sort of silly look-at-me glasses that really do not help people like me to take him seriously. Perhaps unsurprisingly, his playing was far too loud and was concluded by an embarrassing display of brow-mopping that would have looked awkward from a circus entertainer.

### A Fancy Compagnie

One of the Innsbruck traditions is lunchtime concerts in the little open-sided Musikpavillon in the Hofgarten. The one I heard was from A Fancy Compagnie, a multinational recorder group that, despite its name, included nobody from England. 'The Queen's Humours' was the title of their offering, with music from the usual suspects, the highlights being Michael East's 'Amavi', William Newark's 'But why am I so abused' and John Wilbye's 'Weep, weep, mine eyes'. They demonstrated fine use of articulation and ornamentation and tone control, avoided the usual perils of recorder groups. Rather dramatically, the sky blackened and the concert started in rain, the sun coming out, rather appropriately during 'Amavi'.

### Chinese Baroque

After a delayed start because of one of the most dramatic thunderstorms that I have ever experienced, the festival's cultural exploration shifted sharply eastward for the concert in the Jesuitenkirche (22 Aug). Under the title of *Konzert in der Verbotenen Stadt*, the curiously-named group XVIII-21 *Le Baroque Nomade* gave a concert that was very similar to one I heard in London's Purcell Room in 2007. On that occasion, credit was also given to the members of the Chinese ensemble, *Fleur de Prunus* and they also provided the oriental colour on this occasion. Rather appropriately, the concert started with a huge battering on an enormous drum. The encounter between East and West was strikingly apparent as violin, gamba, theorbo and harpsichord competed and combined with a carillon yǐnlúo, orgue à bouche, pipa, flûte xiao and flute dizi in a programme of works by musical missionaries such as Matteo Ricci, Joseph Marie Amiot and Teodorico Pedrini. Their reception at the Court of the Emperor of China in the Forbidden Palace was not always positive. Although the emperor learnt the harpsichord, he also "took flight with his hands over his ears" on hearing a consort of

recorder, harpsichord, bass viol, violone and bassoon played by Jesuit missionaries. Perhaps their musical prowess was hindered by having to play on their knees, but I have to say that I didn't find the western musical examples particularly inspiring. However the Chinese instruments were fascinating, as were the amazing declamations from the 17<sup>th</sup> century Chinese poet and Catholic convert, Wu Li.

### Lautenclavier

For me, one of the highlights of the festival was the concert 'Lautenclavier in der Kapelle' (in the Nikolauskapelle of Schloss Ambras), with Peter Waldner playing his own copy of a Hildebrandt lautenclavier, build by Keith Hill in 2000. The acoustics of this small space was ideal to reveal the astonishing tone colours of the instrument, which sounded like a slightly muffled version of a clavicymbalum combined with a virginal – indeed, it almost seemed as though it was sounding like a virginal when used to play English music, and a clavicymbalum in the German works. The three stops produce a multi-layered, rather than a homogenous sound, the 4' stop sounding like a mixture of bell-like tinkles and the rattling of little chains. There couldn't be a better advocate for this instrument than Peter Waldner, his sensitive interpretations showing a lovely sensitivity to the ebb and flow of the music. He finished with Buxtehude's virtuosic tour de force *Partita on La Capricciosa*.

### ISCBOPAC

An annual component of the Innsbruck Festival is the snappily titled International Singing Competition for Baroque Opera: Pietro Antonio Cesti. This year was the 3<sup>rd</sup> such competition, and attracted around 80 competitors, two-thirds female. There were two preliminary rounds before the final, which took place as a public concert in the concert hall of the Tyrolean State Conservatory with ten finalists. The overall standard of singing was generally high, although several of the competitors in the earlier rounds hadn't grasped the fact that the competition was focussed on both Baroque and opera. Although they were singing in a concert context, a number of them didn't display any obvious inclination towards staged opera, and/or sang in a style that was more suited to a much later repertoire. Rather surprisingly for me, my own three first choice singers gained the top three prizes. The first prize went to soprano Sophie Junker (giving an outstanding performance which immediately engaged the audience); second prize to baritone Edward Grint (with his powerfully confident and expressive voice); and third prize, and the audience prize, going to the Polish soprano, Natalia Kawalek-Plewniak (an extremely impressive young singer with an obvious talent for both baroque singing and opera). The first two may be known to some English readers – for example, Sophie Junker won the 2010 London Handel Festival Singing Competition. The Atle Vestersjø Young Talent Award went to the Israeli soprano, Einat Aronstein. The first two prize winners were also awarded engagements in Vienna, and

3. Any guesses for the HWV number? I can't think of one.



countertenor Jake Arditti an engagement in Italy. The three main prizes are 4,000, 3,000 and 2,000 Euros, together with a Young Talent Award of 1,500 Euros and an audience prize of 1,000 Euros. Of the competitors in the earlier rounds that didn't get through to the final, I particularly liked soprano Marie Smolkova, mezzos Aurélie Frank and Danielle Nichole Rohr, countertenors Magid El-Bushra, Bartek Rajpold and Michel Czerniawski, and tenor Andrés Montilla Acurero. All the competitors have the chance to be selected for next year's BaroqueOper-Jung production of *Dido and Aeneas*.

#### Bontempi: *Il Paride*

The festival ended, for me at least, with a second opera, the five-act *Il Paride* by Giovanni Andrea Bontempi, an Italian castrato who became a composer and, eventually, assistant to Schütz in Dresden. *Il Paride* was his first opera for Dresden, and Dresden's (and, indeed, Germany's) first Italian opera. It was staged in 1662 in the Dresden Schloss for a Saxon-Brandenburg wedding and featured 14 male singers sharing 31 roles – in this production, reduced to 10 singers and around 20 roles. The story is the wedding of Paris/Paride and Helen/Elena, complete with its well-known back story of the Goddess of Discord, the Golden Apple, Paris's tricky choice and the unfortunate Enone, left behind as her lover heads off to conquer Helen. The subsequent story was enacted on the following nights of a four-day celebration. The opera is theatrical in its concept, with a rapidly changing kaleidoscope of contrasting scenes and an almost continual flow of music, mostly in a late-flowering Monteverdian idiom. The Innsbruck staging and direction (from Christoph von Bernuth) was both clever and appropriate, but it was the cast that deserve the highest honours, notably mezzo Luciana Mancini as Enone with several beautifully sung arias, culminating in the heartbreaking *Ma perche non uccido* – a prelude to her suicide. Mariana Flores (Discordia), Raquel Andueza (Pallade), Hannah Morrison (Venera and Amore) also impressed. Dominique Visse was, well, Dominique Visse, starting with a Worzel Gummidge incarnation. Also impressive was the dancer Katrin Hansmeier, as Amor, who was on stage for the whole performance. Countertenor David Hansen (Paride) had rather too much vibrato for my taste, and his edgy tone became slightly harsh in upper register. The orchestra was L'Arpeggiata with Christina Pluhar directing with the help of her theorbo. I think this is the first time that I have heard them playing early music 'straight' without the addition of clarinets and contemporary Italian folk songs. Pluhar's direction and imaginative accompaniments were excellent, from the opening solo drummer to the various dance movements, ending with their trademark *La Folia*.<sup>4</sup> This was a joint production with *Musikfestspiele Potsdam Sanssouci* where the first modern performance of *Il Paride* had been given in 2011.

#### FLANDERS FESTIVAL – ANTWERP

##### *Laus Polyphoniae*

Andrew Benson-Wilson

#### 26<sup>th</sup> August: Gabrieli *Ex Cathedra*

Antwerp and its annual flagship Renaissance music festival *Laus Polyphoniae* traces its roots back to post-war concerts held in the Rubens House. Since 2006, the administrative base of the organisation has been in AMUZ (Augustinus Music Centre) which incorporates the baroque church of St Augustine and its spectacular neo-Byzantine Winter Chapel (now a bar) and is used year-round for early music concerts. This year's festival focussed on the music of the countries alongside the Adriatic Sea and lasted from 24 August to 2 September. I could only get there between 26 and 31 August, slotted between the Innsbruck Festival and giving a concert of my own in England. I arrived in time to hear the Birmingham based group *Ex Cathedra* with *Concerto Palatino* (in their 25<sup>th</sup> year) and His Majestys Sagbutts & Cornetts, directed by Jeffrey Skidmore, in a programme celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Giovanni Gabrieli (St Pauluskerk). The ceremonial *cori spezzati* vocal works were from the two volumes of *Sacrae symphoniae*, interspersed with instrumental pieces and focussing first on music for the Mass and then on Marian works. The performers were sited below the impressive baroque organ case and gallery at the liturgical west end of the church, allowing the possibility (and the logistical nightmare) of having some works, and some parts of works, performed, sometimes rather precariously, from on high. It is difficult to pick out highlights from a concert like this, but I particularly liked the way that Jeffrey Skidmore structured the *Litaniae B. Mariae virginis* with its endless succession of *ora pro nobis*'s before the concluding *Agnus Dei*. It was fascinating to hear a whole succession of Gabrieli cadences – he nearly always articulates the final held chord by having one or more of the parts adding a punctuating note.<sup>5</sup>

#### 27<sup>th</sup> August: Croatian renaissance

After this start at the head of the Adriatic, the lunchtime concert the following day moved down the eastern flank to feature music from 16<sup>th</sup> century Croatia in 'O magnum mysterium' given by Ensemble Phoenix Munich in the mediaeval chapel of the old hospital of Elzenveld (28 Aug). The Venetian influence on coastal Croatia was clear in the works of Andrija Motovunjanin (aka Andrea Antico da Montona), publisher of the first volume of Italian keyboard music, Franjo Bosanac (Franciscus Bossinenses) and Andrija Petris (Andrea Patricio). Although there were attractive vocal contributions from Franz Vitzhum and Daniel Auchincloss, Ensemble Phoenix Munich as a whole seemed under-rehearsed, with a number of intonation and other slips and apparent uncertainty both within and between pieces. The bass singer, whose voice didn't really

4. But are the opening drum and closing *Folia* really part of the score?

5. This programme has circulated to various venues and has been recorded by Hyperion: I caught a smaller version at the Stour Festival: see *EMR* 149, p. 15. CB

match his colleagues', was also almost always far too loud for effective balance.

### Beneventan chants

The evening concert featured Ensemble Organum and a programme of Beneventan Chants from the south of Italy (St Andrieskerk, 28 Aug). Clad in white robes, but with rather scruffy looking trouser bottoms and shoes peeping out underneath, the seven singers processed around the church in a rather random fashion while chanting Eucharist hymns and a Mass for Easter from the 12<sup>th</sup> century Benevento manuscript, with a small group of Old Roman chants in between. I have always found Ensemble Organum rather difficult to fathom. I have heard them singing a wide range of repertoire from many different traditions, but they always sound the same. Either their scholarship has shown that, for example, Corsican, Gallican, Carolingian and Mozarabic vocal traditions were very similar – or they have a one-size-fits-all approach to their singing and use of ornaments (although their strong vibrato made it difficult to work out what was an ornament and what was just a wobble). I have also never quite worked out whether they are highly trained professional singers, coping with the very hard job of trying to sound like the sort of throaty, off-key, wobbly-voiced bucolic monks that one might find in a remote monastery – or whether they are just ordinary folk singing to the best of their, rather limited, ability. One example was their processional singing, when it seemed to me as though the chap at the back started to sing when the voice of the one at the front reached him, resulting in a curious phasing to the sound. Many passages featured what could best be described as microtonally spaced heterophony – but was this deliberate? But whatever, the sound was evocative, if rather strange, with a few moments of Bulgarian-style throat singing.

### 29<sup>th</sup> August: Julije Javetić

The neo-Gothic splendour of St Joriskerk was the venue for the lunchtime concert by the local vocal group Vox Luminis. Following their commissioning of musicological research (by Catherine Deutsch), they presented sacred music interspersed by madrigals by the Renaissance Dalmatian composer Julije Javetić (Giulio Schiavetto), who flourished in the 1560s. Javetić's motets are generally in four or five voices and seem to have their roots in Venetian and Franco-Flemish polyphony, an example being the slow unfolding of the imitative voices of the opening *Asperges me*. The repeated *iacentum* in the concluding *Ave maria* of his *O magnum mysterium* showed his ability to build tension in his music, an aspect that Vox Luminis's director Lionel Meunier explored well. Vox Luminis produced some very fine consort singing, with clean, unaffected voices and some well placed cadences. They also made good use of the space, singing the madrigals from the two side aisles, and placing the singers of the *Sancta Maria, oro pro nobis* and *Ave Maria* cantus firmus lines (in *Ave sanctissima Maria* and *Suspice verbum*) from just behind the main group of singers.

### Odeo

One of the flagship events of the festival (the pressure on tickets meant adding an additional late-night performance) was the performance by Zefiro Torna & Corpo Barocco in St. Augustine Church in the AMUZ centre (29 Aug). Conceived and choreographed by Sigrid T'Hooft, the programme was entitled 'Odeo', in honour of the 1530 octagonal music room, Odeo Cornara, in Cardinal Cornara's residence in Padua, now known as the Chigi Palace and the residence of Italy's Prime Minister. The music came from various settings of texts from the *Libro delle Greghesche* by Manoli Blessi (the pseudonym of Antonio Molino, a 16th-century Venetian poet, composer and theatre producer). His eclectic poetry was written in an invented language called 'lingua greghesca', a mixture of Venetian and Greek dialects. Using the architecture of St. Augustine Church, with the chancel at one end and a semi-circular arcade supporting the organ loft at the other, a dancer and an actor (Karin Modigh and Luca Lomazzi) performed burlesque entertainment in style of the *commedia dell'arte*, while the singers and instrumentalists (positioned either side of the nave) performed the musical settings (and, towards the end, got involved in the action), ranging from simple folk to sophisticated madrigal style by the likes of Willaert, Gabrieli, de Rore and de Wert. The audience sat, collegiate style, either side of a central aisle where the action took place. Although there were times when I had trouble relating the texts of the songs to the action being depicted, the concept was sound and it was an imaginative way of presenting music. There was some attractive cornetto playing from Marleem Leicher.

### 30th August: Early Baroque from Croatia

The Venetian influence on Croatian music in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century was further explored the following lunchtime with the concert by the four singers and four players of Suonar Cantando, directed by the Croatian violinist Bojan Čičić (Elzenveld Chapel). The Croatian composers included Francesco Usper (aka Sponger), a pupil of Gabrieli who ended up as organist of San Marco and whose music is now being revealed through recent research at Oxford University; Ivan Lukačić, who studied in Italy but returned to become organist at Split Cathedral (a church, incidentally, formed from a Roman mausoleum in Diocletian's Palace); and Vincenz Jelić, a pupil of Ferrabosca in Graz. These composers were contrasted with native Italians such as Bassano, Sorte and Puliti. As well as the excellent violin solos and diminutions from Čičić (a violinist I have long admired), there were attractive contributions from cornettist Gawain Glenton and Eligio Quinterio, lute. It was nice to hear Mahan Esfahani play the little box organ's 4' Principal stop down an octave – a sound that is so organ-like, but is not often heard on such instruments. Of the singers, soprano Esther Brazil had the most impact, her attractive, articulate and agile voice being particularly impressive in Jelić's beautiful *Deus canticum novum*. The countertenor had the sort of vibrato-laden voice that really does not do it for me.

### 30<sup>th</sup> August: Glagolitic Liturgy

We moved, musically, to one of Croatia's most attractive Dalmatian islands for the evening concert (St. Jacobskerk) from Faroski Kantaduri, a group of traditional singers from Hvar who are apparently well-known in world music circles. Their quasi-liturgical performance of Glagolitic (Old Slavonic) chants was based on a Slavonic tradition dating back to a Papal decree in 1248 that allowed the use of the local vernacular and Glagolitic alongside Latin. Dressed in full liturgical garb (complete with a colour-coded hierarchy, palm leaves and olive branches, candles and a processional crucifix), they processed and chanted their way around the church (a pilgrimage church on one of the routes to Santiago de Compostela) to reflect the music and rites that local fraternities enact during Lent and Holy Week. The ritual reached a climax when what I had taken to be two very large handbags turned out to be huge rattles with large metal hinges that clanged noisily against their wooden backboard as the crucifix was exchanged for a cross, presumably a symbolic image of the risen Christ. The music was fascinating, and ranged from unison chants, organum, microtonal slithers around and up to notes, to more traditional harmony, but all at a low sonorous pitch. One particularly attractive work was *Zazivi*, with its repeated low refrain of *Gospodine pomiluj nas*. Although there were a few moments of vocal subtlety, it was mostly sung full-belt. I did wonder how committed believers might react to this theatrical re-enactment of a liturgical rite, but I suppose it is no different from mediaeval groups dressing up as minstrels.

### Willaert with bagpipes

The late night concert in the church at AMUZ was given by the four male singers of Capilla Flamenca with bagpipe player François Lazarevic under the fascinating title of 'Adrian Willaert on bagpipes'. As well as celebrating the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Willaert's death, this concert also raised the question "Why did Petrus Alamire draw bagpipes on the *Missa Benedicta* by Adrian Willaert?" Although the question wasn't exactly answered, the aural investigation was a fascinating and evocative one. It started in almost complete darkness with a sound like a distant snake charmer as the bagpipe player processed from the back of the church to the chancel stage. We then had a number of Willaert motets and an *alternatim* Magnificat, each with the ornamented plainchant played on the bagpipes – which later joined in with the sung motets. [Is that why the serpent was invented? CB]

### 31<sup>st</sup> August: Behold, I tell you a mystery

My time in Antwerp finished with a little lunchtime lute music from Alfred Fernández, exploring the music of Francesco Spinacino – "a Great Lutenist veiled in Mystery" (AMUZ 31 Aug). Spinacino was born in an Italian village near the Adriatic sea, and his music was published in Venice in 1507 – and that is all we really know about him. His two volumes of *Intabolutura de lauto* (1507) are the

earliest examples of printed lute music, and Recercares (varying widely in style) from those books formed the backbone of this concert, paired with transcriptions of vocal works by Josquin des Pres by Enriquez de Valderrábano. This was a wonderfully peaceful concert – it would have made an ideal late-night event. Alfred Fernández was already on stage as the audience filed in, slowly walking around the chancel stage, tuning and quietly playing his lute. When he sat, his head was almost resting on top of the lute, a lovely indication of the link between a musician and his instrument. His subsequent playing of the actual pieces was magical, his delicate touch and delicious sense of musical rhetoric giving a real sense of direction to the music. And after some of the showmanship that I had witnessed in one of the earlier concerts, it was a delight to see a musician who was totally involved in his own music making. That really does engage the audience, in the right way, far more than look-at-me antics that some people seem to feel they need.

The concerts are only a small part of the Laus Polyphoniae festival, which also included an International Young Artists Presentation and a vocal summer school. This was my first visit, but it is a festival that I will look forward to attending again.

### CRICKHOWELL MAY MUSIC FESTIVAL

Andrew Benson-Wilson

The Crickhowell Choral Society was founded in 1981 by a local GP who gathered a choir from amongst his patients. For around 18 years, they have organised an annual Crickhowell May Music Festival over the May Bank Holiday weekend. They have built a sufficient reputation to attract the loyalty of key singers like James Gilchrist and Catherine King, who both appeared in both the key concerts of this year's weekend. This year's programme was of particular interest for early music fans, although folk fans also got a spot with a pre-weekend folk night.

### The Grand Tour I

The weekend proper opened in the parish church of St Edmund with a challenging programme 'The Grand Tour: Versailles & Venice' (5 May) with music by Lalande, Lully, Galuppi, Monteverdi and Vivaldi, with the choir's director, Stephen Marshall, conducting the choir and the Welsh Baroque Orchestra. After Lalande's *De profundis* we heard Lully's 1668 tragédie lyrique *La grotte de Versailles*. The pastoral romance idiom had become something of a joke by the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, although Lully treated the subject seriously, and evolved a musical thread that tied the various elements together. One of the highlights of the evening was Catherine King singing the opening show aria (*Superbo di me stesso*) from Galuppi's 1747 *L'Olympiade*, demonstrating gorgeous tone colour and beautifully articulated runs over a wide vocal range. Monteverdi's *Zefiro torna* followed with the pair of tenors James Gilchrist and Peter Wilman, the former being in a particularly



expressive mode. The evening finished with a little known Vivaldi work, *Dixit Dominus* RV 807, rediscovered in 2005 in the Dresden State Library. The core of the work comes in the central three movements, starting with the virtuosic tenor aria *Dominus a dextris* followed by the trumpet calls of *Judicabit in nationibus* and a lovely gentle aria for alto, the two arias sung by James Gilchrist and Catherine King. This was a challenging evening for the choir, with a complex repertoire that was almost certainly unfamiliar to most of them. Although there were some moments that are best glossed over, they certainly rose to the occasion in the big numbers

### The Grand Tour II

On the following evening, the Grand Tour arrived in Vienna to hear music by Schubert, Mozart and Haydn, with some Scarlatti thrown in. It seemed as if there was a different choir singing, as a more familiar repertoire produced an obvious confidence from the start with Schubert's extended Offertorium *Intende voci*. Again James Gilchrist excelled in his solo passages, set against the full choir. This was a fascinating and, again, a rarely heard work by a master musical craftsman. The soloists had the chance to let their hair down in the following pint-sized version of *Die Zauberflöte*, starting with the impressive bass Robert Davies using some good acting skills to make much of the fact that his pipes were misbehaving. I had been a bit uncertain of Elin Manaham Thomas's voice during the previous concert, but she came into her own in Pamina's *Ach, ich fühl's* and her duet with Robert Davies praising, appropriately, the merits of being man and wife – or wife and man. In sharp contrast, the evening finished with Haydn's *Missa in honorem BVM* – the 'Great Organ Mass'. To reflect the fact that the original mass setting would have been sung with liturgical interventions between the movements, verses from Domenico Scarlatti's beautifully melodic hymn *Iste confessor* were interpolated – a nice pallet-cleansing idea that worked well, like blending different courses in a well thought out meal. The previous soloists were joined by Catherine King. The organ soloist wasn't named in the programme notes (but I think it was Andrew Wilson-Dickson). His slightly curious-looking continuo organ case turned out to hide an electronic device. More curiously, also unnamed was Stephen Marshall, the indefatigable conductor of both concerts and the Crickhowell Choral Society's director.

### Bach at St Catwg's Church, Llangattock

As part of the Festival, the Sunday morning service included Bach's Cantata 108, *Es ist euch gut*, written for this, the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter. It was nice to see the majority of the congregation sitting quietly throughout the final Bach organ voluntary. The weekend finished with a concert by a young Welsh string quartet playing (on modern instruments) Mozart's often rhythmically anarchic Quartet in G, K.387, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement of Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden'. For works that treated each of the four instruments more-or-less equally, I was

surprised that the first violin (who gave her name to the quartet) sounded quite so dominant, particularly in the upper register, frequently clouding the musical contributions of her three colleagues, Katy Rowe, Niamh Ferris and Lucy Simmonds.

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### 'Mughams, Purcell and period Bruckner' D James Ross at the Edinburgh International Festival

Over several years the Edinburgh International Festival has reflected the healthy interest in Scotland in early music, and this year a series of hour-long concerts in Edinburgh's magnificent Greyfriars Kirk was devoted to some of the best early music and world music groups. Scotland's own Concerto Caledonia showcased the quirky Tobias Hume, while His Majestys Sagbutts and Cornetts joined forces with Concerto Palatino to mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Giovanni Gabrieli's death. Iestyn Davies accompanied by Arcangelo performed music by Handel and Porpora, and two concerts by the legendary Ricercar Consort celebrated Purcell, Tye and Byrd.

#### Ricercar Consort

For the Purcell concert, the consort was joined by altos Robin Blaze and Carlos Mena in a beautiful sequence of duets, solos and instrumental works. A symphony for two treble recorders and continuo from the unfinished song "We reap all the pleasures of love" introduced the lovely duet "Sweetness of Nature" from *Love's Goddess sure* in which the male voices blended exquisitely with the recorders. The G minor Sonata 6 (1697), composed for violins, worked splendidly on recorders displaying the effortless virtuosity of consort's recorder players.

The hidden treasure of the programme turned out to be "Here let my life", a melodically ravishing song built upon a descending ground bass for solo voice and obbligato recorder, given a mouthwatering rendition by Robin Blaze. Carlos Mena's full-voiced alto did more than justice to the familiar and delightful "Strike the Viol" before both singers and recorder players fairly sparkled in the ornamented show-piece "Hark how the Songsters of the Grove" from *Timon of Athens*.

The concert concluded with John Blow's *Ode on the Death of Henry Purcell*. If Blow's music inevitably suffered from direct comparison with his greater contemporary, this transcends its rather worthy text to achieve a degree of expression which was cleverly exploited by the performers.

#### The Quasimovs from Azerbaijan

Also part of the Greyfriars series was a number of world music ensembles, often exploring the 'classical' music of their own specific traditions. One such was the Azerbaijani Alim Qasimov Ensemble, which under the direction of the Qasimov vocalists, father and daughter, presented a short

secular song followed by an extended section from a *Mugham*, a suite of related pieces designed to appeal to a range of emotions. Accompanied by Tar (lute) and Kamancha (fiddle), with input from Balaban (double reed) and Naghara (drum) and playing Dafs (frame drums) themselves, the two singers employed a stunningly ornamented vocal style to illuminate their fascinating music. Alim Qasimov used his remarkable head voice in the same tessitura as his daughter's mezzo-soprano range for spectacular declamation in a style which was never less than riveting. A capacity audience, led by some connoisseurs of this music, applauded loudly and extensively.

### David & Jonathas

In addition to the specialist 'early' section of the Festival other period ensembles have found their way into the Festival's mainstream. The Sixteen were presenting a concert performance of Purcell's *King Arthur*, but William Christie's Les Arts Florissants beat them to the plum engagement of a staged run at the Festival Theatre. Choosing their Festival d'Aix-en-Provence production of Charpentier's *David and Jonathas*, these established masters of French Baroque opera promised much. Indeed the singing from the ensemble's superb chorus and a line-up of superlative soloists was utterly beguiling, with dense ornamentation so naturally part of the performance that it never interfered with the communication of emotions. Pascal Charbonneau's high tenor voice combined vulnerability and heroism in his portrayal of David, while Ana Quinans as his lover Jonathas was vocally and dramatically equally convincing. Neal Davies was a broodingly memorable Saul, well supported by Kresimir Spicer's Joabel and Frédéric Caton's Achis. A charming cameo appearance as the witch by the mercurial Dominique Visse recalled many past pleasures.

A constant stream of idiomatic and tasteful sounds from the orchestra pit ensured constant aural delight, particularly in the series of laments in the concluding section of the opera. However, and this is no small reservation, the staging by Andreas Homoki and Paul Zoller was, to put it mildly, a missed opportunity. The stage set – the interior of a huge wooden box which expanded and contracted in size – proved very much a one-trick pony: once you have shown a character's psychological distress by having the walls close in on him, with this set all you could do was do it again, and again, and again. Bafflingly borrow your costumes from *Fiddler on the Roof* and any statements you make in your programme note about the opera exploring the psychology of the main characters are fatally undermined. There were isolated moments of wit, but this production seemed to combine expense and banality in equal measures.

### Herreweghe's Brahms and Bruckner

Finally, the mainstream orchestral series in the Usher Hall was infiltrated by the period instrument Orchestre des Champs-Élysées and the Collegium Vocale Gent under

their director Phillippe Herreweghe for a performance of Brahms and Bruckner. Opening with the little-known *Gesang der Parzen*, which proved to be an interesting late work by the master, these leading forces then tackled Bruckner's powerful *Te Deum*. A superb line-up of soloists and an incisive and beautifully blended contribution from the chorus ensured that this radiant work received a stunning performance. Bruckner's Ninth Symphony formed the second half. I had expected the narrower-bore brass or reduced key woodwind to provide the main aural interest, but surprisingly I was most struck by the silken sounds of the gut-strung strings. From the front of the dress circle I was able to see Herreweghe's score, which was a mass of high-lightings in several colours and pencil notes. In a completely professional way he converted this deep knowledge of the score into a flawlessly integrated reading which was fabulously detailed and deeply moving.

This Bruckner and Brahms spectacular was for me the highlight of the 'authentic' part of the Festival and it is ironic that it was one of the more poorly attended. On the other hand it was very encouraging to see the huge Festival Theatre filled to capacity for the French Baroque opera and more excitingly still Greyfriars Kirk packed for a highly enterprising series of early and world music concerts.

### LONDON CONCERTS

Andrew Benson-Wilson

### Fenton House Early Keyboard Ensemble Competition

The final of the biennial Fenton House Early Keyboard Ensemble Competition (this being the 3<sup>rd</sup>) took place on 3 May in the challenging acoustic of Fenton House's front room and its monumental 1770 Shudi & Broadwood harpsichord. Four groups got through to the final, which started with Ensemble Trianon (Yu-Wei Hu *flute*, Pia Pircher *viola da gamba*, Jadran Duncumb *theorbo* and Aiden Philips *harpsichord*). They played Bach's Sonata in G (BWV 1039) and demonstrated very different approaches on how to treat a musical line. Although the gamba often had a key role in duet with the flute, it frequently overpowered the more delicate flute tone. They were followed by The Akenside Players (Anne Marie Christensen *violin*, Rebecca Eves *violin*, Amélie Addison *cello* and Masumi Yamamoto *harpsichord*), playing Boyce's Trio Sonata No. 7 in d minor with its almost operatic extended opening Andante. Masumi Yamamoto made use of the Venetian swell on the harpsichord, although only in contrasting loud and soft, rather than a crescendo. They played very well together as a group, demonstrating a fine sense of musical flow. They also engaged well with the audience, not least by their spoken introduction to the music. The youthful group Hesper (Mary-Jannet Leith *recorder*, Magdalena Loth-Hill *violin*, and Richard Moore *harpsichord*) gave an excellent performance of Abel's Trio Sonata (Op.16/1), bringing out the contrasting moods of the four movements well and achieving some very well placed cadences. Richard Moore

used the swelling capabilities of the harpsichord to good effect in the opening Moderato and Mary-Jannet Leith gave an engaging spoken introduction to the music. The group Royal Interiors (Rebecca Vučetić *recorder*, Kaisa Pulkkinen *harp*, Elektra Miliadou *cello*, and Katarzyna Kowalik *harpsichord*) finished the evening with Telemann's Trio in Bb (TWV 42:B4), again using the Venetian swell in on/off mode. The judges were Catherine Bott, Menno van Delft, Sophie Yates. The winners were The Akenside Players with Hesperi winning the audience prize.

### "Why do the Nations"

The Danish Embassy, along with the European Parliament Commission Representative in London, requested the pleasure of my company at a concert given by the European Union Baroque Orchestra (St John's, Smith Square, 9 May) to celebrate Europe Day 2012 – on the day when, just around the corner, the Queen's Speech had just announced a Bill to further distance the UK from Europe. This was the last concert of the 2011 incarnation of EUBO before the 2012 contingent take over. After lengthy speeches about the Coal and Steel Commission and 'fiscal consolidation' we had a mellow arrangement of the 'Ode to Joy' played on period strings. I suppose it was inevitable that German music was given priority, with Bach's 3<sup>rd</sup> Brandenburg Concerto and the aria "*Schlummert ein*". The Danish bass-baritone is a recent graduate and has yet to grasp the vocal conventions of the music of Bach and Handel et al, and featured a style with frequent *portamento*, more appropriate for a much later period. Scheibe's rather slight Sinfonia in Bb was contrasted with Torelli's Sonata in D for trumpet and strings (nicely played by Sebastian Philpott) and a burst of Handel at the end – did I hear the word 'incorruptible'? There was no Greek music.

### *Apollo et Hyacinthus*

The Classical Opera Company opened the launch concert for their latest CD (Cadogan Hall, 14 May) with Mozart's designated (and delightful) little 1<sup>st</sup> Symphony. This may have been the one he wrote less than a mile away in the "rarefied air" of Chelsea in 1764 when Mozart was eight. Two of the posse of available singers then showed their wares in three Mozart concert arias, with Andrew Kennedy expressing the defiance of *Va, dal furor portata* (written in London the year after the 1<sup>st</sup> Symphony). Katherine Watson followed with the two arias that Mozart wrote in 1766 in The Hague on his journey back from London to Salzburg, both using texts from Artaserse – *Per pietà, bell'idol mio* and *Oh, temerario Arbace... Per quel paterno amplesso*. Katherine Watson was to be the most impressive singer of the evening, not least as one of the few singers who could attempt a proper trill without resort to mere vibrato, and also for her ability, rare for a soprano, to provide high-pitched cadenzas without screeching. The focus of the evening, and the subject of the new CD, was *Apollo et Hyacinthus*, Mozart's first opera, written at the grand old age of 11. It was written to be inserted within a school play, to be sung by schoolboys,

with only one part for a broken voice. Each character has one aria, nicely summing up their emotional state, but the highlights of the work are two duets. As well as the singers already mentioned, we also heard Martene Grimson, Lawrence Zazzo, Andrew Radley and David Shipley, a slightly different cast from the CD. This is an engaging work, and Ian Page directed in his usual sensitive and undemonstrative manner, his gestures making clear his attention both to the singers and to the music. Although this concert was clearly not part of London's current obsession with all things sporting, there was a reference to death by discus.

### Tallis Scholars at The Field of the Cloth of Gold

A couple of days later (16 May) Cadogan Hall was moved back in time to become the Field of the Cloth of Gold, with music reflecting the grandiose 1520 challenge match between Henry V and the French Francis I. Opening the musical batting for the two sides were Jean Mouton and William Cornysh. Although he wasn't mentioned on the score sheet, John Browne also batted alongside Cornysh, despite being dead by the time of the 1520 match. Then, as now, the difference between the two countries couldn't have been more different, for example with Cornysh's *Ave Maria* opening homophony quickly dissolving into complex and almost mediaeval-like interplay between small groups of voices. Mouton's *Ave Maria* was arguably more renaissance in character, although we still had little patterns developing between the low and high voices. John Browne interrupted play with his *Salve Regina*, with its long, low melismas on *Filium* and a striking duet between the upper and lower voices in *Virgo dulcis, O Maria*. Cornysh closed play with his *Magnificat*, as his voices gradually became more and more entangled, the low voices making particularly effective contributions. Whether deliberate or not, Peter Phillips seems to have arranged his voices in pairs so that one voice attempts to mollify the effect of the other. This was most notable in the alto pair where one voice dominated more-or-less throughout the evening, notably in Mouton's *Ave Maria* and *Salve nos*, the latter almost becoming an alto solo. With that exception, all the other singers were impressive, most noticeably Amy Haworth *soprano*, Caroline Trevor *alto*, Christopher Watson *tenor* and Rob Macdonald *bass*.

### Chiaroscuro Quartet

One of the finest period instrument string quartets to emerge from the younger generation has been the Chiaroscuro Quartet (Alina Ibragimova, Pablo Hernán Benedí, Emilie Hörnlund and Claire Thirion). They made a comparatively rare UK appearance at Southampton's Turner Sims concert hall (27 May) playing works by Mozart and Schubert, opening with the Adagio and Fugue in C Minor (K546). The excellence of these four players was immediately apparent, both technically and, more importantly, musically. The rather sinister Adagio was made the more powerful for their restraint while the inherent drama of the fugue lifted it well above its



contrapuntal marvels. Mozart's E flat Quartet, K.428, revealed one the greatest assets of the Chiaroscuro Quartet – their ability to play quietly (spoilt for me on one occasion by an extraordinarily lengthy bout of sweet-wrapper opening from the old dear sitting in front of me). Their *sotto voce* Andante con moto was serene, as was their approach to the sforzando moments in the following rather plaintive *Menuetto*. The romantic ethos and wide emotional range of Schubert's 'Rosamunde' quartet (D804) was immediately apparent – there seemed to be a surprise around every corner. The Chiaroscuro Quartet's name is well chosen, for they relish the multiple shades of colour, tone and volume in their playing. I had not been to one of the Turner Sims Sunday afternoon tea-time concerts (with tea and buns during the interval) before, so was fascinated to hear the warnings from the manager before the start for people to 'relax – there will be buns for everybody'. It seems that there have been incidents. There is a nice video of the quartet at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liFzg3bzbSo>.

### Combattimento

Although I couldn't get to the main evening event, I watched a shortened lunchtime extract from *Combattimento*, a performance of Monteverdi's 1624 *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* by the Guildhall Lutes and Voices, directed by Andrew Lawrence-King, who teaches the early harp at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (and elsewhere around the world). The event, for such it was, took place in the Great Gallery of the Wallace Collection (25 May) as part of their exhibition "The Noble Art of the Sword: Fashion and Fencing in Renaissance Europe". Under the eye of "The Laughing Cavalier" and Poussin's "Dance to the Music of Time", the Guildhall students gave a fine performance of the work, with the three singers acting out the story, Alessandro Fisher excelling in the prominent role of Tasso, the narrator, with Alba Bosch and Eduard Mas as Clorinda and Tancredi. This fascinating project also involved a couple of sword consultants and a dancing master.

### Pasticcio Olympics

We were back on sporting territory at the Queen Elizabeth Hall (28 May) when the Venice Baroque Orchestra brought their *pasticcio* version of Metastasio's *L'Olimpiade*, with arias from no fewer than 16 different composers. All the recitatives were omitted, leaving us with a protein-rich diet with no carbs (an opening Sinfonia, 20 arias, one duet and two choruses) – the emotion without having to bother too much with the plot (which is mind-bogglingly daft anyway). In this aspect, it wasn't a true 18th century *pasticcio*, which would normally have been provided with recitative links cobbled together by a local librettist and composer. But a written plot summary was provided for those brave enough to attempt to follow it. The arias were by Caldara, Vivaldi, Pergolesi, Leo, Galuppi, Perez, Hasse, Traetta, Jommelli, Piccinni, Gassmann, Mysliveček, Sarti, Cherubini, Cimarosa and Paisiello. Of the six singers, each taking an individual

part, sopranos Ruth Rosique and Luanda Siqueira and tenor Jeremy Ovenden impressed me most. Mezzo Romina Bassa might also have done so had she not resorted to some of the weirdest gesticulations I have ever seen from a singer. These were not operatic acting gestures, and were far more extreme than the gestures singers sometimes use in recording sessions or lessons as an aid to their singing. She also refused to look at the audience, and sang straight to her score. She seemed very ill at ease, fidgeting and rustling through her score while others were singing. As for the music, despite a few rather dull arias, there were several highlights, notably Vivaldi's dreamy *Mentre dormi*, with its distinctive held horn notes, Hasse's *Siam navi all'onde argenti*, Pergolesi's *Tu me da me divide* and Galuppi's *Gemo in un punto*. The 21-strong orchestra (which only included two women) played with characteristic fervour and intensity and coped well with the stylistic variety. Particular mention should go to bassoonist Stefano Meloni. By the third act, the players were beginning to tire – only the continuo group had a slightly easier time of it than usual. Director Andrea Marcon kept the pace going well – not an easy task with aria piled on aria.

### [A]spire, [con]spire, [re]spire...

I was only able to get to one of the Spitalfields Summer Festival events this year, and chose a particularly curious one, a combination of contemporary and improvised electronic music with music for organ, piano and voice given under the banner of 'Spire' (St Botolph's without Aldgate, 21 June). This is not really the place for a review of the electronic items, but the organ contribution got off to a shaky start with an unrelentingly frenetic reading of Bach's *Komm, Heiliger Geist*. Despite Spire's insistence that they matched their programmes to the space and organ, not one piece was specifically suited to the organ, which dates back to c.1705. John Beaumont came close when he sang three pieces by William Byrd to the accompaniment of the organ, but the contemporary pieces didn't do the organ any favours. Ligeti's *Harmonies* was unpleasantly shrill, rather than evocative and atmospheric, although Diana Burrell's *Lauds*, for organ and electronics worked better. What surprised me was the programming – it seemed to be a series of unrelated items strung together. The audience were encouraged to move around during the concert, although it was noticeable that the magnetic lure of the exit door became too strong for several as the evening progressed. There is so much potential for cross-cultural programmes like this, and for using the organ and church acoustic imaginatively, but this wasn't it.

### L'Orfeo

La Nuova Musica was formed about five years ago. Their latest outing was to bring a concert performance of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* to an unfortunately only half full Kings Place (23 June). The highlight, by a long chalk, was the outstanding singing of baritone William Berger as Orfeo, notably in the central five-stanza aria *Possente spirito*

singing with emotional power and expression and with a perfect understanding of the declamatory style of the writing. None of the other singers came close to Berger's high standard, with excessive vibrato being an issue for many. Although it was un-staged, more thought could have gone to the interaction between the protagonists – more than once, Orfeo tried to sing to Euridice, only to find her hidden away behind the harp with the chorus. These days, one can hardly put on the work without the full complement of 2 cornetts, 5 sackbuts, 5 strings and the continuo requirements of the score. Having a pair of cornettists who can manage the short recorder passages is a good idea, not just for economy but to prevent the director adding them elsewhere! I particularly noticed the two violins (Tuomo Suni and Sabine Stoffer), and harp (an impressive Joy Smith, who also provided some percussion by sitting on a box and hitting it). The director David Bates joined in on a second harpsichord, but generally only when his conducting allowed it rather than when the music required it. I was looking forward to hearing the sound of a regal, but there wasn't one – the sensuous sound of the lirone (however well played by Emilia Benjamin) really doesn't quite do to accompany the Gods.<sup>6</sup> The biggest problem with the performance was the conducting, with badly cued entries (leading on one occasion to the five sackbuts entering one by one as they realised where they were) and confusing signals, such as desperately trying to get the ensemble to play quieter by finger-wobbling, and holding his hand up in what is a very obvious sign for everybody to stop playing altogether. In one of La Nuova Musica's early concerts, several of the players did indeed stop when given this signal. Although they seemed to have got used to it now, it is a gesture that should perhaps be thought about.

#### Dr Dee

The involvement of several period players drew my attention to *Dr Dee* a "16<sup>th</sup> century folk opera", first performed at last year's Manchester Festival. It has now been substantially revised and moved to a short spell at The Coliseum, courtesy of English National Opera, directed by Rufus Norris. The big name, and one that attracted a rather younger audience than the usual ENO oldies, was Damon Albarn, he of Blur and Gorillaz (who I believe are 'rock groups' M'Lud, initially Britpop but later veering towards Indiepop). It was a curious affair, a mixture of musical, opera, play, video show and spectacular, loosely based around the life of the said Dr Dee, an Elizabethan mathematician, astrologer and, it seems, spy who, after coming under the influence of the spirit medium, alchemist and general weirdo, Edward Kelley, went in to dramatic decline, ending his life demonised and in poverty. If you didn't know the story, or weren't following the synopsis, it would have been difficult to work out what on earth was going on. Their joint 'discovery' of the language of the angels (the Enochian

language) was one of a number of events that were portrayed by large scale and impressive projections.

The singers seemed to be drawn from the contrasting worlds of the musical, theatre, rock and opera, with the distinctive counter-tenor voice of Christopher Robinson, Anna Dennis and Steven Page being foremost amongst the operatic contingent (as Kelley, Katherine, Dr Dee's daughter, and Walsingham respectively). Victoria Couper showed promise in her early appearance as the young Katherine, before reverting back to the chorus. Dr Dee was played and sung by an actor whose CV suggested no singing experience at all, with the inevitable consequences. As for Damon Albarn, my daughter will probably kill me for writing this, but I thought he had a reasonable tenor voice covering a range of several notes, but outside those few notes it got a bit painful. The orchestra was divided between the pit and a smaller group, including a number of period players on a platform towards the rear of the stage, who sadly were so grossly over-amplified that any sense of period sound was completely lost – they all sounded like poor electronic versions of themselves. As for the overall impression – "Wall to wall kitsch" was a comment overheard during the interval.

#### Grands & petits motets

The Academy of Ancient Music continued their 'Musical Revolutions' series with the French Baroque in their last concert of the season (at the Wigmore Hall, 27 June) performed, as is apparently traditional, with their companion choir. Richard Egarr gave one of his jovial pre-concert talks, warning us of the "erotic experience" that we were in for, notably from the singing of three sopranos, Italian fashion. Their programme neatly compared pairs of Lully's *grands motets* and *petits motets*, the former pair (the *De profundis* and the grander *Dies irae*, opening and closing the concert respectively), both written for the funeral of Louis XIV's wife, Marie-Thérèse in 1683. Either side of the interval we had *Regina coeli laetare* and *Salve Regina*, with beautiful singing from the three 'erotic' sopranos, Charmian Bedford, Elizabeth Drury and Philippa Hyde. The two altos, Jacqueline Connell and Susanna Spicer, also made fine contributions for the *grands motets*. This was something of an occasion for the AAM's two flautists, Rachel Brown and Guy Williams, who had both, many years ago, ordered copies of flutes based on an original by Pierre Naust. As these were pitched somewhere between A396/7, they are unusable for the normal 'French' pitch of A392 used nowadays and have rarely been played with other instruments. The willingness of the AAM to adopt their pitch made this an ideal outing for them, giving a warm, mellow contribution to the flute parts of the *grands motets* and in the two instrumental works of the evening, Charpentier's *Sonata à huit* and Marais's *Suite No 3* in D. the latter with the pairs of violins and flutes alternating and combining, in pairs or singly, in the rich instrumental texture. Richard Egarr directed with his usual musical

6. But which Gods? The lirone is mythologically associated with both Orfeo and Apollo, and Monteverdi links the regal with the underworld, CB

sensitivity, underlain with a barely concealed sense of humour. This was broadcast live by Radio 3.

*The two grands motets were edited by Brian Clark for The Early Music Company Ltd.*

#### Masterclasses for harpsichord-playing directors

The English Concert and Harry Bicket gave the second of their masterclasses for young harpsichordist directors during a four day residency open to visitors to The Foundling Museum, and culminating in a public concert on the Friday (29 June). The four fledgling conductors (Tom Foster, Jeffrey Grossman, Tamar Halperin and Pawel Siwczak – from the UK, USA, Israel and Poland respectively) were put through their paces by preparing works by Corelli, Handel, Bach and Rameau for the final concert, some of the multi-sectional works ending up with more than one director. For a continuo player, it can be complicated enough fulfilling the accompanimental role – and how many people in the audience realise that all the player usually has is the bass line, the rest being implied by the harmony and, if he is lucky, a full figured bass. So directing an orchestra at the same time would seem to require more hands and arms, and brain power, than evolution has so far provided us with. One of the early lessons was that, when sitting at the harpsichord, your arms need to be high if the orchestra are to see anything at all, let alone your beat. That problem solved, the player then realises that the players will, by and large, do exactly what his conducting tells them to do – whether or not that is what the brain intended. They may also have to deal with questions in rehearsal like “what note should that be?” or (hopefully rather less often) “Did you like what I did in bar x? – the latter coming, perhaps understandably, from a player towards the back in a role that is often overlooked. I managed to see all but one of the conductors during their rehearsal period, and was very impressed by the difference in their style and confidence in the final concert. I don’t know how the works were allocated, but some of the students had a relatively easy ride, with music that, once started, more-or-less directed itself. In contrast, Tamar Halperin was landed with one of the hardest conducting tasks ever – the Act II showpiece finale of Handel’s *Alcina* – the accompanied recit and *Ombre pallide*. This extraordinarily complex piece has a huge range of different emotions, and was sung beautifully by soprano Rachel Wheatley and directed with a clear sense of emotional involvement and technical surety. In contrast, Tom Foster seemed born to direct jovial works like Handel’s Concerto Grosso Op 3/2, Bach’s gorgeous *Mein gläubiges Herze* from Cantata 68 (finding the time for some jolly little organ riffs) and the concluding Rameau *Contredanse*. Pawel Siwczak directed Bach’s recit and aria *Bäche von gesalznen Zähren* with an excellent range of gestures and a fine awareness of the singer as he shaped the melodic line. Jeffrey Grossman shared in the opening Corelli Concerto Grosso Op 6/10, making very good use of his upper body and with excellent eye contact with the players. He then directed tenor Joshua Ellicott in the aria

*Ma pur voi lusingate* from Handel’s *Rodelinda*, and its dramatic *accompagnato* recit. Of course, the focus was on the young harpsichordist directors, but honours must also go to the English Concert’s leader, Nadja Zwiener, not only for her supportive and friendly approach to the masterclass, but also, along with Claire Duff, for her violin playing. Cellist Piroska Baranyay also deserves a special mention for her playing of the piccolo cello in *Mein gläubiges Herze*. Harry Bicket worked with the four students with good humour and sound advice, and the players of the English Concert proved themselves to be a friendly bunch.

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#### THE PROMS

Prom 7 (18th July) Handel – *Water Music* & *Music for the Royal Fireworks* Le Concert Spirituel, Hervé Niquet.

PSM 2 (28 July – Cadogan Hall) Suites from Lully – *Armide*, Desmarets – *Circé*, Marais – *Ariane et Bacchus*, Campra – *Tancrède*, and de Lalande – *Symphonies pour les soupez du roy* Les 24 Violons du Roy / Sir Roger Norrington

At this year’s BBC Proms, I witnessed two ‘reconstruction’ concerts – one featuring very familiar music performed by less familiar forces, the other consisting entirely of Proms premieres with an orchestra hardly more familiar in its make-up. The first saw Hervé Niquet and his Le Concert Spirituel bring their massed versions of Handel’s open-air orchestral extravaganzas *Water Music* and *Music for the Royal Fireworks* to the Royal Albert Hall at a free Late Prom, whilst at the second one Les 24 Violons du Roy – a collaboration between the Royal College of Music and the Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles, directed by Sir Roger Norrington – took to the stage at Cadogan Hall with a matinée programme focussing on music of the French court around the turn of the eighteenth century.

Le Concert Spirituel’s ensemble for this concert featured 80 players, with multiple winds – nine each of horns and trumpets, eighteen oboes, eight bassoons and two contra-bassoons – falling about half-way between the numbers used for the original performances (c. 50 for the *Water Music*, c. 100 for the *Fireworks Music*). Les 24 Violons du Roy, as is evident from the name, replicated the original numbers of the eponymous historical orchestra of the French court with even more accuracy, though naturally with the addition of the wind and percussion sections required by the repertoire. But the real interest lay in the French-style string sections which it employs – Dessus (6), Hautes contre (4), Tailles (4), Quintes (4), and Basses de violon (6) – the instruments specially commissioned, reconceived (in the absence of extant instruments from the period) on the basis of Mersenne’s description in his *Traité de l’harmonie universelle* (1627). Le Concert Spirituel, too, featured specially manufactured instruments: in addition to using natural brass playing in a mean-tone



temperament, the woodwind instruments were based on London instruments used at the time, to match the tuning. As is easy to imagine, at times the tuning produced notable clashes between the wind and string sections.

Le Concert Spirituel began with the three suites – in F, D and G, respectively – of the *Water Music* (only the second time in the history of the Proms for all three putative suites, to be performed together), followed by the *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. Their performance was full of colour, including frequent and strong dynamic contrasts, accents and heavy use of crescendo and vibrato effects which could at times feel a little over the top, as for example in the 'Presto' of the Suite in F, or in the subsequent 'Air' (which the usually sustained horns pierced with accents rather than floated above).<sup>7</sup>

I found the use of massed forces – to this extent – more convincing in the *Fireworks Music*. Originally performed with a smaller orchestra, though still exceptionally large for the time, I find the *Water Music* has a more elegant 'edge' to it, whilst the *Fireworks Music* is a more straightforward showstopper – and the wall of sound which hit the audience in this piece, particularly in its outer movements, was so exciting that the inability to hear individual parts so well from the sheer overall volume was not particularly bothersome. I didn't really make friends with the massed oboes, the sound of which turned opaque in comparison to the clarity natural to the instrument when in less of a crowd. On the other hand, the multiple recorders employed in the final suite of the *Water Music* produced a wonderfully mellow, organ-like tone, impeccably played. The horns, whilst embracing their raucous French hunting sound world, struggled to make their articulation heard in the hall, but the strings and massed woodwind were almost surprisingly nimble. The chimes and bells employed in the final 'Gigues' of the *Water Music* were to my ears a rather French effect, more at home in the repertoire of the other concert (at which ample percussion was employed). The *ad lib* doubled timpani cadenza preceding the 'Allegro' in the 'Overture' to the *Fireworks Music*, on the other hand, worked well.

Le Concert Spirituel's performance suffered from some imprecise openings and finishes, no doubt in part due to the numbers involved – and many openings simply couldn't be heard because of Niquet's keenness to push on with the music well before the frequent applause had died down. Niquet is a characterful conductor, and this repertoire is extravagant to match: but I drew the line at the exaggerated inhalations, clearly audible across the hall and highly distracting, with which he accompanied the 'Minuets' of the final suite of the *Water Music*.

Les 24 Violons du Roy's mixed programme showcased the orchestra with a selection of suites from courtly entertainments of the French Baroque by five different

composers – Lully, Desmarets, Marais, Campora and de Lalande: the work of each full of treasures, richly varied and orchestrated, and its performance practice requiring painstaking study from the players. The constantly changing, frequently contrasted dramatic and orchestral pictures made for an enchanting afternoon: to pick a few favourite moments, I would go for the majestic melancholy of the final 'Passacaille' of Lully's suite, the hypnotic 'Chaconne' which ended Marais's, and de Lalande's virtuosic 'Grande pièce royale' which rounded off the programme. On the whole, the orchestra's balance and colour was very pleasing, and playing both expressive and responsive, although the ensemble suffered from occasional tuning issues and specific problems with balance (the latter particularly with the often barely audible flutes). A happy medium can be difficult to find: here, the breaks between the sometimes very short movements could be distractingly long in relation.

On account of the nature of their respective BBC broadcasts, both concerts featured interviews with the conductors. The ones with Sir Roger, dotted between the different pieces, had sufficient time given to them to be both informative and insightful, including the shrewd observation that there was so much music accompanying the strictly choreographed courtly life at Versailles that it "must have been quite tiresome, I should think."

Outi Jokiharju

**Prom 8 (19 July): Handel *Judas Maccabaeus*** Soloists, Choir of the Enlightenment, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Laurence Cummings *dir*

'Damn your iambics!', Handel is alleged to have shouted at Thomas Morrell, librettist of *Judas Maccabaeus*. One can see his point. Neither libretto nor plot lives up to the music, but one is used to that sort of thing with Handel. In brief, for those unfamiliar with the plotline derived from the Apocrypha, the Israelites are oppressed by the King of Syria, who defiles their temple and institutes pagan rites. In mourning for their leader Mattathias they elect Judas, who leads them to resounding victories over Syrians and over the invading armies from Samaria before the news is announced of a new Egyptian invasion and Judas once again rallies his army. Meanwhile, back in the restored temple, a priest is instituting the Feast of Lights when auspicious signs are seen over the altar and news comes of the glorious rout of the invaders; praises are duly sung for Judas. Constructed as a compliment to the Duke of Cumberland on his decisive conquest at the Battle of Culloden over Bonnie Prince Charlie, it is entirely historically contingent, and though it went down a storm in Handel's lifetime, the relentless barrage of nationalistic fervour is hard work for a modern audience. Or so I thought, until the Olympic opening ceremony a mere week after this performance showed me that our appetite for that sort of thing is as strong as ever. Perhaps its programming this season was apposite. Either way, I couldn't help feeling

7. They were probably an invention of Thurston Dart around 1950. CB

one would have gained a great deal more from the story had it been an opera rather than an oratorio; there are some splendid baddies in the original story who don't get a look in in oratorio (not one is even portrayed) but from whom Handel could have derived great operatic mileage.

However, there's no denying that his choral writing here is absolutely first-rate, nor that the Choir of the Enlightenment rose to the challenge superbly. Their dramatic role as the Israelitish people means they boast much of the pathos-laden, emotionally responsive text and music of the work; and there is so little of it that each choral entry had real impact. Their mourning for Mattathias was utterly convincing, and their dynamic range at 'Fall'n is the foe' terrific.

John Mark Ainsley as Judas was on excellent form, as was Alasdair Miles, substituting for Christopher Purves as Simon/Eupolemus. Christine Rice and Rosemary Joshua as the Israelitish Man and Woman respectively seemed to take a little longer to warm up. Much-deserved plaudits abounded for Tim Mead as the Priest; his 'Father of Heaven', complete with lowered lighting, was very lovely indeed. Laurence Cummings directed with his customary panache, giving elegant, continuous phrasing gestures that drew an orchestral performance that was motoric but not overlaid with undue accentation. If the Albert Hall is going to charge £4 for a programme, though, it ought to ensure that it prints the correct version of the libretto. *Catherine Groom*

**PSM 1 (21 July): J. S. Bach arr. Mahan Esfahani *The Art of Fugue*** Academy of Ancient Music, Mahan Esfahani harpsichord/director,

'We shouldn't use the past to hide from the present', said Mahan Esfahani. Quite right. But though this was a very recent arrangement of the Art of Fugue by Esfahani himself, it wasn't so much Bach viewed through a present-day prism as Bach viewed through an early 20th-century one. It was Debussy who first elevated timbre to structural status, Schoenberg who coined the term *Klangfarbenmelodie* to refer to the kind of musical pointillism that was the logical extension of this elevation, and Webern, of course, who orchestrated the six-part *ricercar* from Bach's *Musikalisches Opfer*, using instrumental colours to pick out here an individual note, there a group of notes and thus to bring them out of the texture. Now it's Esfahani who has extended this idea to whole instrumental lines, taking the Webern *ricercar* as a point of departure but attempting to find sounds that illustrate his own experience, as a harpsichordist, of the work's lines; 'kinaesthetic colours', as he put it in conversation with Christopher Cook.

His raw material was the single strings of the Academy of Ancient Music, departing from any 'Bachian' instrumentation with the inclusion of single, rather than double, winds and of Sam Goble's cornetto. The players were

dispersed in semi-circular fashion around Esfahani, winds and strings intermingled, presumably in order to create a colouristic kaleidoscope and to allow us to experience each instrument's own sonic qualities without preconception of its usual textural role.

The trouble was that, whilst Esfahani clearly knows his Debussy, his Schoenberg and his Webern well, I didn't feel quite so convinced that he really knows the instruments with which he's working. It is anachronistic to criticise either the performers or their director for failure to gel as a Baroque ensemble when gelling as a Baroque ensemble was precisely what they were supposed not to be doing, yet any wind player accustomed to daily striving for a blended sound will understand why separating the winds affected their tuning badly. Overall, an interesting and worthwhile experiment in orchestration, but for me, timbral structure was not interesting enough to compensate for the loss of the strong sense of Bach's own directional structure that resulted from this sonic fragmentation. *CG*

**Prom 26 (2 August): J. S. Bach *Mass in B Minor*** Soloists, Choir of the English Concert, The English Concert. Harry Bicket *cond*

In his pre-recorded interview with Charles Hazlewood, Harry Bicket discussed the notion of the B Minor Mass as a kind of testament to Bach's life's work. Monteverdi's composite Vespers aside, that's an uncommon enough notion amongst pre-Romantic composers, and so presciently Victorian in its outlook is it that the Albert Hall seems somehow an entirely appropriate place for the B Minor. It's not the kind of Mass setting where one misses the liturgical element when the music is taken out of context, after all, because its very proportions make it so unlikely ever to have been performed liturgically in its entirety. So a Proms performance seems a splendid idea. And yet the venue leaves the conductor with a set of rather tricky interpretative decisions. Assuming that the character of a given performance of a B Minor Mass should be evident from its opening Kyrie, which way do you go? You can't make it a roof-raising heart cry of humanity, because with the best will in the world, you're never going to raise the roof of the Royal Albert Hall. But neither can you go for intimate, caressing, yearning, because half the audience is simply miles and miles away. So it's perhaps not surprising that overall, Bicket's rendition wasn't the most personal and highly characterised performance I've ever heard (that accolade must go, for me, to the first of Brüggén's two live recordings from Poland). And I would love to hear a recorded version of the work by the same forces; I imagine it would be very different. Yet it was highly, highly accomplished.

The Choir of the English Concert was on fine form, thanks partly to some sympathetic choral fixing. Often a predominantly young choir, the mixture of ages of singers on stage was entirely in keeping with the spirit of the work as

the plea of all humanity; and the resultant warm sound was a joy. They had a particularly splendid moment at 'Confiteor unum baptisma'; and the opening tenor fugal entry in 'Cum Sancto Spiritu' was absolutely spot on.

The English Concert featured some warm string playing, but the venue never really flatters period winds, and if you're going to have three flutes instead of the scored two in the 'Domine Deus, Rex coelestis', presumably for venue-related volume reasons, it's important that they should be in tune with each other. There was some very fine solo playing from Ursula Paludan Monberg, horn, and leader Nadja Zwiener. It was only slightly unfortunate that in the latter's solo 'Laudamus te', with soprano Carolyn Sampson, the pair's imitative articulation frequently didn't match. Chances are, though, that that was because Sampson was a last-minute substitute; and when Sampson is your last minute substitute, you don't complain. She was radiant, of course (and presumably, as Soprano II, not even in her usual B Minor Mass stamping-ground), as was counter-tenor Iestyn Davies. I've tried and tried to refrain from making any jokes about his lovely bottom, but I'm afraid I can't. Bass Matthew Rose was disappointing, particularly since I'd recently seen him make a splendid, spine-chilling Claggart in Billy Budd at the ENO. Of course his voice isn't 'too big' for Bach in itself, and certainly not for the venue, but the 'block' of sound that had made his Claggart so formidable didn't transfer to sympathetic phrasing in Bach, and his 'Et in Spiritum Sanctum' frequently stressed the wrong syllables of the text, which was irritating. Tenor Ed Lyon was suitably heroic at the top of his range, yet pleasingly flexible. CG

**Prom 53 (22 August): 1612 Italian Vespers** I Fagiolini, English Cornett and Sackbutt Ensemble, The City Musick, Robert Hollingworth *dir*

'Early, Italian, sacred, polychoral' late-nights are often the high points of the Proms season in my book, because so frequently this is really the only 'early music' that works like a dream in the Albert Hall. I realize that fairly specious reasoning probably has to do with a semi-conscious and half-baked association of the enormous domed South Kensington roof with the domes of St. Mark's, Venice, but I'm sticking to it, and I can fully sympathize with the tendencies of many directors to stick choirs here, there and everywhere around the building. Interestingly, though, Robert Hollingworth took a very different approach, feeling that northern Italian polychoral music is frequently misunderstood as requiring sonic fireworks and consonants leaping round the building, when really Gabrieli's writing and that of his compatriots contains considerable conversational subtlety that can only be properly respected when the singers are able distinctly to hear each other.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, he answered the demands of the size of the building not with his singers'

physical geography, but with their quantity. It was the Mantuan Ludovico Viadana who made the suggestion of adding supplementary choirs to the texture to emphasize moments of textual grandeur, and this idea of 'auditory cornflour' (Hollingworth's splendid metaphor, I'm afraid, not mine) was seized upon with gusto by Hugh Keyte when tasked with the reconstruction of the two Gabrieli works in the programme.

The postulated 'Vespers' of the evening was a festal service of unspecified northern Italian location (the interesting programme note by Hugh Keyte on the Battle of Lepanto and its commemorative feasts is too complex to précis here, but is still available online and well worth a read) and larger-scale liturgical works by Viadana and Gabrieli were interspersed with solo items by Bassano and Grandi and a Monteverdi 'Salve Regina'. Generally speaking, I tend towards a preference for Italianate music to be delivered in fuller-blooded voices, but was forced to eat my words by Julia Doyle's crystalline delicacy; small but perfectly formed, she spared us the overbearing top line that so often beleaguers polyphony. A particular highlight for me was cornettist Gawain Glenton's ravishing rendition of Bassano's divisions on Palestrina's 'Introdixit me rex', the absent text coming from the Song of Songs; the evening was indeed delicious overall. CG

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#### THE PARLEY AT CAMBRIDGE Clifford Bartlett

The Cambridge Early Music Course has taken place for two weeks in August for many years, and during that period, concerts are put on to take advantage of the presence of the tutors. I attended the concert on 8 August "Music for the Dresden Court" in: Trinity College Chapel; the performers were Gail Hennessy *oboe*, Sally Holman *bassoon*, Judy Tarling, Henrietta Wayne, Jane Rogers, Mark Caudle *str qtet*, Peter Holman *hpscd* with Clare Wilkinson *alto*. The programme was a mixture of pieces whose music in general is familiar if not necessarily the composers, with some rarities and concluding with the well-known.

I must confess that I wasn't feeling at my most comfortable. My upper left arm was aching, perhaps from carrying something awkwardly earlier that day; it would have kept me awake even at the most boring concert but it distracted me at this one where sleep wasn't on the agenda. Each half began with Telemann, both imaginative pieces, but very different. The opening was an oboe suite TWV 55: ero, which has similarities with the better-known recorder overture TWV55: a2. The work could well be named a concerto (except that it has six movements) and it kept me metaphorically on my toes wondering at the rhythmic variety. How might a Polish ensemble have played the first movement of the *Concerto alla Polonaise* TWV43: G7: possibly with a little more folk-fiddling panache, but perhaps that was reserved for later movements.

8. I couldn't put it better myself, and the long sentence works. CB



The novelty was the concerto for oboe and bassoon in B flat by Antonin Reichenauer (c. 1694-1730). It was probably the least interesting piece in the programme, but still worth hearing – and if you are intrigued by the combination, you can buy a CD with both of them and other music by him (Supraphon: SU40352) and check Google for scores. The Handel Trio Sonata in D, HWV 393, is one of those which Chrysander added to op. 2, thus confusing identification (as with op. 1) and raising suspicion of its authenticity. It hasn't been completely accepted into the canon, but it sounded genuine enough.

Clare Wilkinson, whose solo work in "our" *Messiah* so impressed me last year, sang three items. An early *Salve Regina* by Hasse had an amazing initial "Salve", though the cadenzas seemed to trivialise the text. I wasn't alone (judging from interval chat) – those of us with protestant backgrounds can find it difficult to take the catholic church's 18th-century's close relationship with opera – but whether notated or created by Clare, she was fully into the style of the piece, with a technique that enabled her to make it musically convincing.<sup>9</sup> Nor was I entirely happy with Zelenka's *Lamentatio II* (ZWV 53/6), where the musical form subverted the textual structure – but again, no complaint about the music itself or the singing. Finally, everything came together with the *Qui sedes* from Bach's B-minor Mass, which was written for, though not necessarily performed in Dresden. It's rare to hear a movement like that in isolation, but it made a marvellous conclusion: the best music, with eloquent oboe d'amore playing by Gail matched by Clare's beautiful and stylish singing. Before the Bach, I thought I heard her singing an A for the strings to tune to – in fact, it was (as expected) Gail on the d'Amore: the sounds were amazingly similar.

Finally, congratulations to the quartet. Occasionally I felt that single violins were not quite enough in a building as resonant as Trinity Chapel – Bach often had two copies made of his vln I & II parts. But that would only be a serious consideration down the road at King's and might imply the need for a 16' bass as well. The strings played together brilliantly, and the whole event was an illuminating presentation of chamber music in Dresden. Peter Holman is a master at putting together such programmes.

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### Carolina Baroque 1988-2012

#### William Thomas Walker

A review of the concert in his honour on 5 August 2012 is accessible at <http://cvnc.org/article.cfm?articleId=5688>. I quote here the first and last paragraphs.

Carolina Baroque's concert in the lovely Chapel of St. John's Lutheran Church, Salisbury NC, was bittersweet

because it was the ensemble's final concert. The group was organized in 1988 by the distinguished recorder virtuoso, Dale Higbee, and was ending twenty-three seasons of remarkably imaginative baroque music programming. While J.S. Bach and George Friderik Handel were centerpieces of Higbee's tastes, French and Italian composers were never ignored. In 2011 the then 86-year-old musician announced his retirement and the disbanding of the ensemble: its final concert was on 5 August 2012.

Dale Higbee's biography is worth knowing. The Vermont native served in World War II at the age of 19, was wounded in Northern France, and awarded the Purple Heart in 1944. After the war, he graduated from Harvard University and earned a PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Texas in Austin. Flute lessons from Georges Laurent, Arthur Lora, and Marcel Moyse and recorder studies with Carl Dolmetsch helped develop Higbee's musical talent. He was an active performer with many orchestras and chamber ensembles besides his musicological activities with many organizations including the American Recorder Society and American Bach Society. He is one of the two US governors of the Dolmetsch Society. During its 23 seasons, Higbee's Carolina Baroque not only presented its season in Salisbury but also released 32 CDs of those concerts. This has been an amazing achievement.

*I've met him in the States and here; he is a fascinating person, and I'm sad that the time has come for him to retire for a second time – he retired from his first career many years ago. He has been a subscriber to EMR since it started. The Dale Higbee Collection of 18th century recorders and 18th & 19th century flutes and flageolets can be seen at the National Music Museum at Vermillion, South Dakota. He visited us a few years ago, and he enjoyed a meal at one of the riverside pubs on the Ouse. I haven't seen him for some years, but occasionally hear from him: I hope he is in good health.*

CB

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We were sorry to hear that Chris Hedge died on 20 August after a long illness, though that wasn't necessarily the cause of his sudden death. He subscribed from our first issue but I only met him three times. We had long phone conversations about violin playing and many other musical topics, often with intriguing, idiosyncratic approaches. He was particularly keen on string quartet playing, and enjoyed the new Peters edition of the Haydn quartets that I provided for him. He led a regular quartet for some 20 years; this included another subscriber, Andrew Banks, (who informed us of his death); he had also played with Richard Carter before he moved to Vienna. (Coincidentally, Richard is mentioned twice on p. 3 in this issue.) He left strict instructions that there should be no funeral or memorial service, but a chink in his wording might permit a musical gathering.

CB

9. I have recommend to her on p. 9 a Lamentation by Porpora.