

BELSIZE BAROQUE

Director: Paul Nicholson

Gardens of Pleasure

Saturday 22 March 2014
St Peter's Church, Belsize Park, London



Sketch (c.1779) by Thomas Rowlandson of a singer and orchestra serenading the public at Vauxhall Gardens

Visiting the Belsize Park Pleasure Gardens in the 1720s was no risk-free pursuit. A 1721 advertisement for the Gardens reassured the well-to-do middle classes that there were ‘12 stout Fellows [...] Arm’d to patrol betwixt London and Bellsize to prevent the Insults of Highwaymen or Footpads which may infest the Road’. There was even a special coach service for the residents of Hampstead:

And for the convenience of single Persons or Families who reside in Hampstead, there are coaches prepar’d to ply betwixt the 2 places; which, by the least Notice given, shall attend at their Lodgings or Houses for six-pence per Passenger.

Upon surviving their commute, the ladies and gentlemen of the surrounding areas could lose themselves in the ‘wonderfully Improv’d’ gardens that were filled with birdsong the whole day through, according to publicity. Similar to the celebrated Vauxhall Gardens, Belsize Park consisted of groves, archways and walks; the latter, reported Thomas Brown’s 1760 *Works Serious and Comical in Prose and Verse*, were often places for amorous encounters, with the unlit maze of avenues being so complex that ‘the most experienced mothers have often lost themselves in looking for their daughters’.

There was a huge variety of spectacle, ranging from tightrope walkers to fireworks and public concerts, all of which could be accompanied by tea and coffee at competitive prices. The music performed in the gardens was reported as being ‘not too refined for the general ear’ by eighteenth-century commentator James Boswell, and, on occasion, the musical extravaganzas taking place in the Pleasure Gardens of Georgian London attracted vast crowds: contemporary reports claimed that an audience of 12,000 had assembled for a performance of Handel’s *Music for the Royal Fireworks* at Vauxhall’s Spring Gardens in 1749.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

Acis and Galatea

1. Sinfonia – 11. ‘As when the dove’

Music by Handel begins tonight’s concert. The pastoral opera *Acis and Galatea* (HWV 49) existed in several guises before Handel settled on a two-act version in 1739. The story depicts the love between the nymph Galatea and the shepherd Acis; their relationship in the second act is thwarted by antagonist Polythemus, a giant seething with jealousy of Acis. All ends well, though, when Acis is resurrected at the close of the opera: this common plot device took the name *deus ex machina* (‘god from the machine’) to denote the miraculous nature of such intervention. The opening **Sinfonia** is unlike Handel’s French-style overtures, and instead of majestic dotted rhythms and fugal episodes it takes the form of an energetic presto, featuring oboe motifs amidst semiquaver passagework for the violins. ‘**As when the dove**’ is one of several arias in which Galatea sings of her love for Acis, and is the penultimate aria of Act 1; the lilting triple-time voice melody is accompanied by the oboes and violins.

The Triumph of Time and Truth

‘**Guardian Angels, oh, protect me**’ is the final aria from Handel’s oratorio *The Triumph of Time and Truth* (HWV 71). Beauty sings of her wish to pursue virtue in spite of the allegorical characters Pleasure and Deceit. The oratorio is a reworking of earlier Italian versions, and dates from 1757.

Semele

The opera *Semele* (HWV 58) contains many of Handel’s most celebrated arias: ‘Hence, Iris, hence away’; ‘Myself I shall adore’; ‘Oh sleep, why dost thou leave me?’; ‘Where’er you walk’; and ‘**Endless pleasure**’. Semele – the mortal mother of Dionysus – is in mutual love with Jupiter, much to the dismay of Jupiter’s ever-jealous wife, Juno. Semele’s arranged marriage to Prince Athamas is interrupted by Jupiter at the close of Act 1, upon which Semele rejoices at being rescued by her lover.

Thomas Arne (1710–1778) Organ Concerto no. 4 in B-flat major

1. Con spirito – 2. Minuetto – 3. Giga

In addition to vocal music, instrumental concertos were often heard in London's pleasure gardens. Thomas Arne is likely to have performed some of his organ concerti during his tenure as director of the orchestra at Vauxhall between 1745 and 1777. While the chamber organ may seem an instrument consigned to church performances, organ concertos became a familiar outdoor spectacle on summer evenings, following Jonathan Tyers acquiring an organ for the orchestra at Vauxhall after becoming the proprietor in 1729.

interval

John Stanley (1712–1786) Concerto for Strings in A minor, Op. 2, No. 5

I. Largo–Allegro – II. Allegro – III. Adagio – IV. Allegro moderato

Left blind in one eye after a childhood accident, John Stanley led a precocious early career. He became the organist at St Andrew's Holborn aged 14, and by the age of 17 had earned a Bachelor's degree from Oxford University. The autumn of his career was suitably grand as Master of Musick to King George III, by which time he had published ten collections of music. His second opus of string concertos had been completed by 1745; the Concerto No. 5 in A minor resembles a French overture in its slow opening, leading to a quick-paced fugal conclusion. The following adagio features solo passages for violin, as does the succeeding allegro in the tonic major. The final movement is also in A major, where Stanley varies the bass line underneath a repeated theme in the violins.

William Hayes (1708–1777) Cantata No. 4, *Chloe's Dream*

1. (recit.) Love into Chloe's chamber came – 2. (aria) And now Amyntor young and gay – 3. (recit.) The transport o'er – 4. (aria) But waking is it thus?

William Hayes spent most of his professional life in Oxford, where he served as organist at the University Church. He composed a set of six cantatas in 1748, the fourth of which is performed tonight. Entitled *Chloe's Dream*, the

cantata describes a young girl dreaming of ‘the joys that happy lovers reap’, before waking in the second aria to lament her maidenhood.

Anon. Concerto Grosso in F major

1. Largo – 2. Allegro – 3. Allegro – 4. Allegro

Handel’s celebrated set of Op. 3 concerti grossi was first published in 1734 by John Walsh, but the works mainly consist of material composed over a decade earlier from Handel’s employment by the Duke of Chandos. The Concerto no. 4(b) in F major has disputed authenticity; Walsh originally included it in Op. 3 under Handel’s name, but removed the concerto shortly after publication. The concerto begins in a familiar French-overture style, with solo passages for oboes. An allegro follows, before a largo featuring solo oboes, bassoon and violin. The concerto draws to a close in lively triple-time, providing a vivid evocation of the outdoor entertainment of three centuries past.

Programme notes by John Bowker



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First violins

John Bowker

Sally Heath

Edmund Taylor

Janet Smith

Second violins

Ana Vale

Luke Fowler

Catherine Wyatt

Violas

Lisa Bucknall

Simon Hill

Debbie Miles-Johnson

Cellos

Corrina Connor

Andrew Welsh

Violone

Paul Ratcliffe

Theorbo

Quentin Miller

Harpsichord/organ

Paul Nicholson

Oboes

Susan Cooksley

Joanne Houghton

Bassoon

Hilary Ougham

Paul Nicholson's musical career consists of a variety of activities in chamber music, solo performance as an early-keyboard specialist, and as a conductor. As a member of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment he appears in all these guises. A native of Liverpool, Paul initially studied harpsichord and organ at Dartington College of Arts before reading music at the University of York. His tutors included John Wellingham, Roy Truby, Nicholas Danby and Colin Tilney. He is now a regular broadcaster on BBC Radio 3 and, as a Hyperion artist, his work has involved guest appearances as director and soloist with The Parley of Instruments in music by Arne, Linley and other English composers, as well as solo keyboard recordings of music by Handel, Philips and Roseingrave. Paul is also active as a festival director, at both the London Handel and the Tilford Bach Festivals, and he is associate musical director of the London Handel Orchestra.

The voice of English soprano **Marie Macklin** is fast becoming a favourite among Britain's finest choirs and orchestras. Marie's lifelong love of music began at the age of nine when she became a girl chorister in Wells Cathedral Choir. Her achievements to date include winning the BBC Radio 2 Choir Girl of the Year competition, performing live on BBC 1 from the Royal Albert Hall before the Queen at the Royal Festival of Remembrance, as well as performing as a soloist on numerous other television and radio broadcasts. Recent concerts include a recital of songs by Warlock, Ireland and Head at Home House, Mozart Missa Solemnis and Vivaldi Gloria with the Ealing Choral Society, and Vaughan Williams Mass in G Minor with the Bath Choral Society. Marie studies with Julie Kennard, a professor at the Royal Academy of Music.

John Bowker is a graduate of Trinity Laban and Oxford University. While studying modern and baroque violin with Clare Thompson, John Crawford and Walter Reiter, John performed in venues ranging from the Foreign Office, London, to Daqing Opera House, China, and the New York Subway. He has appeared as a soloist with the Trinity Laban Baroque Orchestra during the London Handel Festival, and participated in broadcasts with harpsichordist Steven Devine for BBC Television and Radio 3. Since becoming a leader for Belsize Baroque Orchestra in 2012, John performs regularly across London with violinist-directors Matthew Truscott and Adrian Butterfield.

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