Belsize Baroque Newsletter

February 2018

LAST YEAR

2017 was a quite extraordinarily full and varied year for the orchestra. A total of eight concerts with four different musical directors, and two coached playing days kept players on their toes (literally, since some directors have had the players standing throughout the concert).

This is the second annual newsletter from Belsize Baroque. It is intended to give all who play in, and all who support, the orchestra a sense of what we have done and where we are going. Please feel free to come back to us with your comments; we depend completely on your commitment and enthusiasm to make the orchestra a success for both players and audience.

PLAYING DAYS

Last year we organised two coached playdays.

Directed by Bojan Cicic, one of the days provided an opportunity to run through some challenging and unfamiliar music, which later appeared on the concert programme.

In addition to working on baroque string technique, Catherine Martin focused on style and technique of the early Classical period.

A fundraising concert in January enabled us to continue our Belsize Baroque scholarship scheme into this year. Over eighty people came to the stunning Robert Adam townhouse of Elizabeth and Robert Boas (for whose hospitality we are extremely grateful) in Marylebone, to hear some unusual concerto formations - Bach's for three violins, Vivaldi's for four violins, Telemann's for recorder and transverse flute, and a fine Vivaldi concerto for two oboes.

This concert, which also featured a rare outing of the music of William Hayes (Oxford Professor of Music in the mid-18th century and a keen composer of theatre music) was directed by Persephone Gibbs.

Paul Nicholson directed our March concert, which contained two more Vivaldi concertos, his cello concerto in B minor, and the lovely C major concerto from La Stravaganza. Zelenka's majestic sinfonia commemorating the coronation of Charles VI of Bohemia as Holy Roman Emperor paved the way for Bach's breathtaking Third Orchestral Suite (whose trumpet flourishes require no ceremonial justification).

More rarely encountered repertoire was the theme of the concert directed by Bojan Cicic in July. A suite by the prolific opera composer Johann Sigismond Kusser was followed by two remarkable pieces by Jean-Féry Rebel, Les Élémens with its startling opening tone cluster, and Les Caractères de la Danse, which tells us all we need to know about how the various French baroque dances related to each other. This concert was followed by a garden party in the grounds of St Peter's.

It was back to more familiar territory of Bach and Telemann for the concert directed by Timothy Roberts in November, but with two great cantatas, nos. 8 and 78, featuring four vocal soloists. One of the cantatas called for the mellow tones of the baroque oboe d'amore, and two of these also had solo roles in a concerto by Telemann.

Two recorders joined Ada Witczyk, our leader, in a spirited performance of the Fourth Brandenburg Concerto. No one can say that Belsize Baroque, for all our sometimes adventurous choices of repertoire, does not perform mainstream baroque!

Members of Belsize Baroque also took part in four concerts which were not formally sponsored by the orchestra. One was in the inaugural series of the innovative Baroquestock Festival in Hampstead, co-founded by Belsize Baroque member Nicolà Barbagli (as this celebrates the joint pleasures of music and food, our programme was entitled A Taste of the Extravagant).

April saw a small-scale Belsize Baroque performance of the St. John Passion in Hampstead Garden Suburb. In October we gave a concert for Cancer Research UK in the Grosvenor Chapel, Mayfair, containing music by Purcell, Telemann, Vivaldi, Albinoni and Handel,. The fourth was a programme of Purcell in St Peter's Church with the Hampstead Chamber Choir.

SCHOLARSHIP

Kate Agostino, who was awarded the Belsize Baroque Leadership scholarship in 2016, led the orchestra in the first half of 2017, and played some spectacular solos in our concerts.

You may already know that Ada Witczyk, who received the Leadership bursary in 2016, was awarded the 2017 scholarship and has been leading the orchestra since the autumn.

We are fortunate, thanks to the generosity of our sponsors and the funds we have raised, to be able to offer this scholarship scheme. It is an important part of our aim to give young professional players specialising in historically informed performance the chance to lead an orchestra, work with a wide range of musicians who include committed amateurs, and get added experience of solo performance under our range of directors.

Our award-winners have commented that they feel this gives them significant experience outside their specialist musical training, and that they value the 'family' atmosphere of an orchestra comprised of a broad spectrum of skills and backgrounds. From the orchestra's viewpoint, we are fortunate to have such talented young musicians to work with.

CALENDAR

JANUARY 21ST
Early Classical Programme

Directed by Bojan Cicic

MARCH 15TH
Collaboration with Orlando Chamber Choir

Directed by Peter Foggitt

MARCH 17TH
Handel Festival workshop and concert

Directed by Laurence Cummings

JUNE 23RD
Summer Concert

Directed by Simon Standage

SEPTEMBER 30TH
Concert directed by

Catherine Martin

NOVEMBER 25TH
Concert directed by

Catherine Martin

DIRECTORS

One of the attractions for players is the experience of working with a range of musical directors, each of whom provides a unique angle on the music and how to perform it. All our directors have established outstanding reputations in their fields and we are fortunate to be able to engage them, and to find that they all seem to relish the challenge of working with amateur as well as professional musicians. In 2017 we had two violinists as directors and two keyboard players (Bojan Cicic and Timothy Roberts were 'new' directors for us).

HARPSICHORD

Earlier in the year we acquired a fine continuo harpsichord, which St Peter's kindly allows us to keep in the church. The instrument is an early work of the eminent maker and harpsichordist Colin Booth, who has refurbished it for us.

It is built on the Italian model, has two sets of 8' strings, and can transpose easily from Baroque to modern pitch. So we now have a fine-quality flexible instrument of our own, which carries well in the acoustic of St Peter's.

2017 was an extraordinary year, and we must thank all of you who have made it possible: those who have helped raise the money to fund the Scholarship scheme and stage the concerts, the 'fixers' who provide the sectional players, those who support the concerts by keeping the books, organising the music to play from, publicising our concerts, maintaining our online presence, obtaining advertising, helping with the venues and the programmes, and, not least, the players themselves. The support of Fr Paul Nicholson and the churchwardens at our regular venue, St Peter's Belsize Square, has been invaluable.

To kick off 2018, we put on a well received concert in January 2018, directed by Bojan Cicic. As you will have seen from our Calendar we expect to have another busy year including our participation in the Handel Festival in March, under the direction of Laurence Cummings.

YOUR ORCHESTRA NEEDS YOU

You will see from the description of 2017 that the orchestra has a full and varied schedule, and of course it has to be operated on an on-going basis throughout the year.

There are a myriad of tasks; are you willing to help? You can give as much or as little time as you choose, every contribution is valuable. Do contact veronese68@hotmail.co.uk or call 07711666270.