

CREATING AN EARLY MUSIC ENSEMBLE

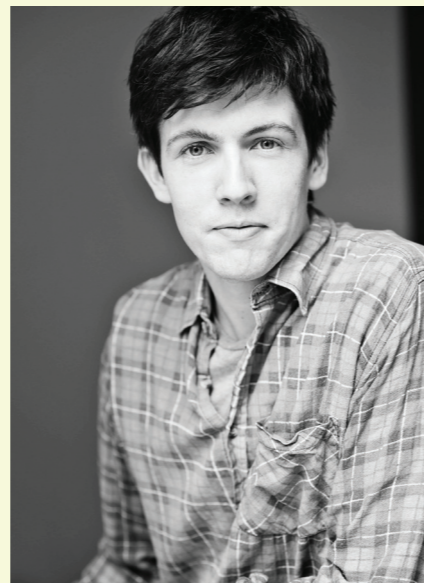
An open forum, and part of a regular column with:

Julian Forbes

Perhaps more than any other genre, Early Music attracts musicians keen to start their own ensembles. There are a number of reasons for this which I can see. A first is an illustrious example: William Christie, Jordi Savall and John Eliot Gardiner were all entrepreneurs; a second is provided by personal research interests, with musicians forming groups expressly to take on a particular area of repertoire not served by established ensembles.

The most important, however, is arguably the imperative of creating work. Although it has greatly expanded as an employment sector, the Early Music scene still cannot offer the security of the Classical symphony orchestra or the opera house chorus. There are not enough chairs, and those chairs do not perform frequently enough, to guarantee livings all round.

With Early Music now established and respected as a performance discipline, the numbers of students taking specialist courses has greatly increased and so, in consequence, has the number of performers. The scene is thus getting quite crowded and, as such, the business of founding an ensemble is now one which I think merits serious thought. Over



the coming issues, this column aims to invite that thought from you, the readership, and present it for our mutual aid. It is thus not so much a column as a forum, and it is hoped that most of its content will be generated by you.

In this issue, I shall instigate a number of “threads” and invite your response. I should mention that the threads themselves are not sacrosanct and may well be modified subsequently if it seems that would be useful. In the next issue, I shall present your responses, linking and/or contrasting them as necessary. The advantage which this forum will have over on-line cousins is, therefore, thus an editorial presence. This is not meant to be patronising or prescriptive. Admittedly, *Musica Antiqua's* readership is a body of which, as yet, we here at the MA offices on floor 100 of The Shard have no experience – but of course we

know that your contributions are going to form a more coherent body of opinion than the heroes of Private Eye's “From the Message Boards.” Nonetheless, fans of institutions such as the BBC Radio 3 message-boards and the UK Parliament will acknowledge that even the most august caucus is capable of degenerating into a custard-pie punch-up. My hope is that by extracting and juxtaposing your contributions, a slicker and more nimble discussion will emerge.

As regards format, I am proposing two rules. Firstly, that I should quote your

contributions verbatim. Second, that your contributions will be anonymous but not unspecific. That is to say, if a member of the Academy of Ancient Music makes a contribution, it will be attributed to “a member of a UK period orchestra and choir”. I am aware that this makes the transcript run the risk of appearing like one of those novellas by Heinrich von Kleist in which Lady O., resident in the town of Q., has an unpleasant encounter with a C., but, again, I think it reduces the risk of the discussion becoming waylaid by individual vendetta.

I am very much looking forward to your response, and hope that something of real use to the community will develop. If my mailbag proves somewhat disappointing in this first instance, I reserve the right to pump-prime it with a few direct appeals for answers to personal contacts. So – over to you. Please contribute as variously and as verbosely as you like. The Early Music community is home to very many intelligent, articulate and opinionated people. If even a relatively small number contribute, I am confident that the results will be entertaining and useful in equal measure.

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