



History and Ethos of the Lufthansa Festival of Baroque Music

Lindsay Kemp



My first encounter with the Lufthansa Festival of Baroque Music was not as an audience member, and nor was it in any professional capacity. In the mid-1980s, I shared an office at the BBC with Tess Knighton, the co-founder and first Artistic Director of the Festival, and her phone (fortunately not much needed for this particular BBC job!) was forever ringing on Lufthansa business. There were no voicemails then, and if she was out I would answer on her behalf, and find myself speaking to artists I knew and admired (Trevor Pinnock, Monica Huggett, Joshua Rifkin) but never imagined I would meet. It was only natural that I should soon find myself perched on a pew at St James's Piccadilly to hear them in concert.

The early days of the

Lufthansa Festival were entirely associated with St James's. Tess's husband Ivor Bolton was the Director of Music at this fine Wren church, and together they had founded the Piccadilly Music Festival there in 1984. At that time Lufthansa had their London offices in Piccadilly, and were enlightened enough to underwrite a small series of baroque chamber music which formed part of the main Festival, seeing it as an ideal way of maintaining cultural connections between Britain and Germany. These concerts, it turned out, were the most successful part of it, and the die was cast; by 1985, the Piccadilly Festival had become the Lufthansa Festival of Baroque Music.

In those days, simply being a festival devoted to 17th- and

18th-century music on period instruments was enough to give you a distinctive profile. The pool of talent in London was strong – strong enough, for instance, for Ivor to found his own ensemble, St James's Baroque, and conduct them in memorable performances of Handel oratorios, Bach Passions and Vivaldi serenatas. They continue to play an honoured part in the Festival to this day. But that was not all. Sponsorship from an airline meant there was an opportunity to make the Festival a celebration not just of homegrown talent, but also a forum for the best in period performance from overseas. As early as 1986 it was welcoming one of the star ensembles of baroque music, Musica Antiqua Köln, and in those first few years foreign groups and performers such as The Bach



Lindsay Kemp - Artistic Director

Ensemble, Ton Koopman and Capriccio Stravagante arrived at St James's to open our ears to new sounds, approaches and performing philosophies. It remains the Festival's most determined programming aim to maintain this refreshing balance between leading performers from the UK and musicians from abroad – if we don't have at least one London debut a year we will feel we have failed.

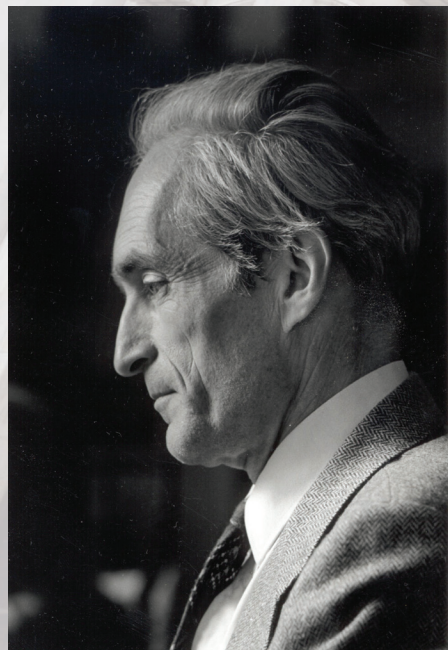
Attending a concert at St



Paolo Pandolfo (2010 Festival)



Gustav Leonhardt (2011 Festival)



James's in early summer could be a delightful experience. It is an enchanting space for a concert, especially when the evening sun shines in through the upper-storey windows. Piccadilly and its environs, however, have become an increasingly noisy environment (I remember a European Championship semi-final between England and Germany inspiring unprecedented noise levels from The Red Lion pub across the road), and when Tess Knighton stood down as Artistic Director in 1997, her successor Kate Bolton instigated the move to the Festival's current home at St John's, Smith Square. The advantages in relocating to a properly sound-proofed concert hall with full facilities were obvious, but what a superb setting its grand pillars, barrel vaulting and Venetian windows make for baroque music! Philippe Herreweghe loved it when he came in 2008, and was excited to return for Bach's B minor Mass last year. Many more have said how much they like performing there.

Kate Bolton's ten years at the helm continued to emphasise the Festival's must-haves of high quality performers and a pro-actively international outlook, but also widened the focus when it came to repertoire. Renaissance and Classical music began to find imaginatively programmed ways into the concerts and so, more radically, so did world music and folk. The 2001 and 2002 festivals in particular found room for concerts from the Sirin Choir of Moscow, the traditional Turkish ensemble Sulukule, fruity Corsican Chant from Ensemble Organum and a sunny recital from Neapolitan song specialist Pino de Vittorio. In later seasons there was even jazz from the Jacques Loussier Trio, while the hall Steinway was

Tickets for the Lufthansa Festival are selling fast. To see a detailed concert and lecture line up for this year's Festival, view MA's performance calendar, our inside front cover, or, check out the Lufthansa Baroque Festival website: www.lufthansafestival.org.uk

put to good use in 'Bach and Beyond' recitals from the likes of Andrei Gavrilov, Alexandre Tharaud and Alfredo Perl. Kate's years also established our fruitful relationship with Westminster Abbey and its choir, and brought some early London appearances from big names such as Andreas Scholl, Magdalena Kožená and Anna Caterina Antonacci.

Having watched and enjoyed all this over the years, I couldn't believe my luck when I was invited to take over the Festival in 2007; I'm not lying when I say that if I could have chosen to be artistic director of any one festival, this would be the one. The opportunity it provides to do something different, to put quality at the top of the list of considerations alongside the search for performers and styles that we might not otherwise hear in London is an immensely privileged and exciting one. And to know that you have the power to programme something which can get not just the early music community buzzing but a more general public too

– as has happened in recent seasons with, for instance, La Venexiana's Monteverdi Vespers, Herreweghe's B minor Mass, or last year's warmly moving recital by Gustav Leonhardt (as it turned out, his last in the UK) – is a truly great feeling.

But of course, I wanted to make my own changes too. First of all, I decided that I wanted to refocus the Festival on baroque repertoire. There's quite a lot of it, after all, and plenty of room to fit in audience favourites such as the *Water Music* or *Zadok the Priest* or the Vivaldi *Gloria* alongside more *recherché* items and the odd late-night experiment, such as Pamela Thorby improvising with jazz pianist Huw Warren and folk-singer Olivia Chaney. Secondly, I love having the freedom to play with themed programming. Coherence, variety and sellability are the challenges you set yourself when you pick a theme like 'The Triumph of Peace' or 'Hanseatic to Adriatic' or (in this Olympic year) 'Contests, Competitions and the Harmony of Nations', but tilting at them



Elizabeth Wallfisch & Albert-Jan Roelofs will perform at the 2012 Festival



La Serenissima will perform at the 2012 Festival



Musica ad Rhenum will perform at the 2012 Festival