

Early Arts Update

The Newsletter of the Early Arts Guild of Victoria Edition – September/October 2008

FINE END FOR 2008 EARLY MUSIC IN THE VERY ROUND

Soon after his last performance for Early Music in the Very Round, in July 2003, John O'Donnell left to give recitals on historic organs in Germany.

Such is the international standing of the artist who will return to Brighton on Sunday, September 7, to give the final concert in this year's series at St Cuthbert's Presbyterian Church in Wilson St.

His program, based on *Parthenia*, the earliest book of English music for the virginals, will include works by William Byrd, John Bull and Orlando Gibbons who were members of the Chapel Royal and major figures in a golden era of English keyboard music.

Parthenia was dedicated to "Masters and Lovers of Music" This final concert at Brighton for 2008 promises that happy combination of music lovers in the company of a master performer!

Booking is not required for the one-hour concert which will commence at 2.15 p.m. Admission \$5 for those aged 18 and over.

HOW ABOUT A WAR DANCE FOR CHRISTMAS?

Helga Hill will have some explaining to do when she writes the script for this year's Guild Christmas Pageants which will be staged at Trinity Uniting Church in Brighton on November 30 and at Armadale Uniting Church on December 7.

The Rippon Lea Renaissance Dancers are currently preparing Arbeau's spectacular sword dance, *Les Buffons*, for its first performances in ten years. And these will take place at the Christmas Pageants!

So shortly after 2.15 p.m. on November 30, or December 7, we will discover what a war dance has to do with the season of peace! The November newsletter will have details. [Bookings on 9699 8417.](http://www.earlyart.org.au)

RARE SCARLATTI WORKS GESTURED FOR SYDNEY

Two Serenatas written around 1700 by Italian composer Alessandro Scarlatti will be presented with the gesture of his time at Verbrugghen Hall, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, on Thursday, October 30.

The project was initiated by Conservatorium musicologist, Dr. Alan Maddox, who will be music director and co-ordinator. It is based on research by Australian scholar Dr Marie-Louise Catsalis.

Helga Hill will gesture and direct the production – her appointment followed-on from a workshop she gave at the Conservatorium last year. Since July she has been visiting Sydney each week to be with the vocalists selected for the project.

Serenatas, a type of one-act opera, were often written for a particular event. Records suggest that *Fede, Idolatria e Furore* (Faith, Idolatry and Fury), one of the works to be performed in Sydney, will be having only its first performance since Scarlatti's time.

The other serenata, *Il ratto di Proserpine* (Abduction of Proserpine), has enjoyed only one modern airing.

The overall aim of the project is to highlight the link between music and action in the staging of drama.

"In opera, music and drama should work together for maximum impact", Dr. Maddox commented. "Putting together period musical style and historical acting creates a dramatic synergy that gives a whole new way of seeing - and hearing – baroque music".

For Helga Hill the promotion of gesture in Sydney is an important step along the way to the restoration of the art. "By October the singers will have acquired skills that will last a lifetime", she said.

The Scarlatti project will give Sydney music lovers their first opportunity to enjoy local artists performing with gesture.

EARLY MUSIC STUDIO PLAYS KEY ROLE IN GUILD'S WORK

The annual round of performances staged by the Early Arts Guild would be hard to maintain without the support of the fine singers and instrumentalists being developed by the University of Melbourne's Early Music Studio.

Natalie Maroki, Jennifer Cook, Nicholas Dinopoulos and Timothy Jaques were Studio vocalists who appeared at Brighton this year.

An equally skilled bevy of instrumentalists included Adam Masters (baroque oboe), Christopher Evans (viola da gamba), Marion Barraclough (recorder), Mimi Chan (organ) and Pei-Jun Tan (harpsichord).

Professor John Griffiths and his associates at the Studio are deserving of admiration for the major part they play in enlivening Early Music in Melbourne.

They are also deserving of our support. From October 9 to 19 the Studio will be holding its fourth annual Spring Early Music Festival.

It is an event that provides a veritable feast for the early music devotee and a wonderful starting point for those wishing to investigate the genre.

The festival program will range from a lute master class and a recital by international artist Hopkinson Smith to a first performance since the 16th century of motets written by French nobleman, Simon Boyleau, who was chapel master at Milan Cathedral.

For information about the many festival events phone 8344 3023 or contact vwatts@unimelb.edu.au

N.Z. ARTS WRITER REVIEWS NATIONAL GALLERY EVENT

Finding a critic who is qualified to speak about the early arts – music, dance or gesture – is not easy.

The Rippon Lea Renaissance and Baroque Dancers, the Early Music Consort of Melbourne and vocalist Merrin Torpy, who performed for the Guild in the National Gallery of Victoria on June 15, were fortunate to have in the audience the leading New Zealand dance authority, Jennifer Shennan.

Her review of the program that marked thirty years of renaissance dancing in Melbourne has been published in the September edition of *On Stage* magazine. Phone 9699 8417 for a copy.

TAKE YOUR PARTNER FOR A BALLO, A BRANLE OR A JIG!

The best feature of renaissance dancing is that it has something to offer everyone because it was the social dance of its time. And the surviving repertoire ranges from relatively simple round dances to the complex choreographies of the Italian courts of the late 16th century.

Thoinot Arbeau, a priest, left us a treasury of French dances in his *Orchesography*, which was first printed in 1589. There was a reprint in 1596 - which says something for the popularity of this collection of *new dances* and *dances from my childhood* – as Arbeau described them.

His dances are readily accessible to the beginner because of the seeming simplicity of a number of them. But this is deceptive. Hard work over a lengthy period is demanded if these works are to be performed with the grace and etiquette prevailing in the upper levels of renaissance society.

Dance and music were then seen as an essential part of education. Arbeau makes it clear that a person who danced without grace or an observance of etiquette would be deemed to be uneducated.

Caroso, Negri and other Italian court dance masters of the late 16th century also instructed on etiquette.

But the requirement that they constantly write new and ever-more-complex choreographies for courtiers who danced daily has left a more challenging task for the modern dancer. And dances devised for marriage celebrations, court entertainments and other special events advanced the art of dancing to new heights.

For 30 years Melbourne's Rippon Lea Renaissance Dancers, directed by Helga Hill, have studied and performed works from all levels of this repertoire.

Research for the group's presentations is based on the original writings of Arbeau, Caroso, Negri and various other choreographers. Copies of manuscripts and early dance publications dating from 1450 to 1750 are held in the Early Arts Guild's *Early Music, Dance and Theatre Archive* at Middle Park.

From February, places will be available for longer term dancers at Wednesday evening classes which are held in East Kew. Intending applicants are invited to call the Early Arts Guild on 9699 8417. Previous dance experience is not essential, but it may not be possible to costume persons of larger build.