

THE ORGAN

SUR LES CHEMINS DE LA MUSIQUE ANCIENNE...

27-31 March

The world of early music inevitably rouses passions on all sides, no less in the South of France than in Britain. Taking the pulse of current ideas from both musicologists and musicians was the aim of *Sur les chemins de la musique ancienne...* which ran from 27-31 March and featured performances, exhibitions, lectures and round table discussions based at the new Odysud convention centre outside Toulouse. Opening with concerts by Ensemble

Mai 2008



THE ORGAN



André Gabriel

Organum and the chamber orchestra of Toulouse, the main events came over the weekend. I arrived in time for a guided tour to the collection of instruments in the care of André Gabriel which demonstrate the evolution of various instruments, particularly within the folk tradition. Gabriel himself took us round and quickly demonstrated his boundless enthusiasm and knowledge. Grasping instruments in passing he demonstrated them for us as well as indicating the links both to classical instruments and their more populist forms which came out of the

Revolution. I wish we had had a little more time, for the individual instruments were worthy of closer inspection, including a collapsible harmonium for easy transportation!

A lengthy round table discussion followed, which rehearsed arguments now familiar within the early music scene and with consensus forming around the need to continue to explore through practical experimentation rather than rely on theory.

This was put to the test later that day when *Les Sacqueboutiers* gave a performance heavily biased towards the colours of sackbuts and cornets. They easily proved their point, however, in the splendid arrangements of works by Castello and Qualiati, and brought a new *frisson* to Monteverdi. *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* benefits greatly from the power and authority of the cornets, and the gravitas of the sackbuts. Combining this with the fine voices of Adriana Fernandez, Juan Sancho and Furio Zanasi made for a totally convincing experience. Yasuko Uyama-Bouvard provided the continuo on chamber organ and harpsichord, moving effortlessly between the two. The two dancers were effective in *Il Combattimento* but less so in the unfocussed cavort-

ing to fill out Qualiati's *Carro di fedetta*.

That the acoustic in the Odysseus auditorium proved very sympathetic for early music perhaps reflects contemporary awareness of the difference an acoustic can make to the impact of the players. This was well demonstrated over the next few days when we were able to hear Jean Gilles' *Requiem* under very different circumstances. *Les Passions* are based in Montauban and gave an open rehearsal of the Requiem in the town's pleasant if overtly 19th century theatre. While the woodwind cut through with ease, the singers, particularly the chorus, sounded under powered and lacking in body: nothing technically wrong and the musical quality was high throughout, but it was not as bright or clear as the forces would imply. I was concerned that moving it into St Étienne in Toulouse might make it sound even thinner, given the small forces available, but how wrong I was. A high platform in the far west end of the old building proved ideal. Choral sound seemed almost doubled in size, focussed and placed securely and brightly. Soloists, who had been good the night before, suddenly blossomed. If the string sound was not quite as warm this was only a very slight loss when ►

Mai 2008

THE ORGAN

compared to the gain in overall impact and vitality. Soloists were drawn from within the chorus of *Les Elements* and were impeccably well balanced. Jean Gilles' musical line is deceptively easy, both to sing and on the ear, but the cumulative impact is stunning. It is no wonder this was the favourite Requiem in the 18th century, used by Rameau and Louis XV among many. Jean-Marc Andrieu goes from strength to strength with *Les Passions* and the number of recordings are increasing rapidly.

I am glad to note that there will be three more performances of the *Requiem*: Wednesday 13 August. Heures Musicales de l'Abbaye de Lessay (Manche). 21h Saturday 23 August. Festival de la Chaise-Dieu (Haute-Loire). 21h Sunday 24 August. Festival International de musique sacrée de Sylvanès (Aveyron). 17h and from 25-27 August the work will be recorded in the church of St Pierre des Chartreux, Toulouse, by Harmonia Mundi. Needless to say we can look forward to a review in a later edition. **BH**

Mai 2008

