

## COMMUNICATIONS



### REPORTS

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ANDREW ASHBEE (Snodland, Kent) and PETER HOLMAN (University of Leeds) write:

The Viola da Gamba Society's *Thematic Index of Music for Viols* has now been added in its entirety to the Society's website at <www.vdgs.org.uk> and comprises all additions and corrections to November 2008. In future it is intended to update the work annually. Some of the files are large and will be split into smaller units at the next update. Copies on CD-ROM can still be made for those who would prefer this format.

Volume 2 of *The Viola da Gamba Society Journal*, online at the same site, is devoted to topics from after the 'golden age' of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Bettina Hoffmann conducts a semantic investigation into the words used for the viol in Italy from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. She concludes that the news is mostly bad for those who want to play Italian music on the viol, but she succeeds in throwing much-needed light on a murky area. Her paper needs to be read by all those who label instruments in museums, edit Italian music of the period, write about it and, above all, perform and record it. John Robinson provides us with the first detailed study of the Leyden *lyra* viol manuscript, now in Newcastle University Library, and a nineteenth-century partial copy of it, now in the National Library of Scotland. It is an important source of Scots tunes arranged for the viol, although it also contains English music, by Henry Purcell and his contemporaries. Peter Holman surveys what is known of the musical activities of the novelist Laurence Sterne, routinely said in the Sterne literature to have been a bass viol player. This serves as an introduction to Claire Berget's study of the links and parallels between Sterne and Charles Frederick Abel. She argues that both were leading exponents of the period's cult of sensibility, and that Abel's playing had its counterpart in 'musical' features of Sterne's novels.

So far, the *Thematic Index* has neglected eighteenth-century composers, but it is hoped to expand coverage of them from 2009, including more on Abel, C. P. E. Bach, Franz Benda, Carl Heinrich and Johann Gottlieb Graun, Franz Xavier Hammer, Johann Gottlieb Janitsch, Christoph Schaffrath and Joseph Benedikt Zyka.

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ERIN HELYARD (McGill University) writes:

The Arte Musica Foundation, in collaboration with the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and McGill University's Schulich School of Music, organized four days of concerts, lectures and film presentations in Montreal from 18 to 22 March 2009 to commemorate the bicentenary of the death of Haydn. Central to the festivities was a complete performance of Haydn's sixty-eight string quartets by a variety of ensembles. Each concert included a representative selection of quartets from different periods of Haydn's career, and on all days there were free pre-concert talks, films, lectures and other educational activities.

Ten concerts in Schulich School of Music's Pollack Hall formed the backbone of the festival, with sterling performances by the Alcan, Arthur-LeBlanc, Brentano, Claudel-Canimex, Festetics, St Lawrence, Super-Nova and Ying String Quartets. 'Marathon' concerts featuring student ensembles from Canadian and American universities and conservatories took place at the Museum of Fine Arts, with audience members being admitted on the hour and half-hour.



Twelve additional cultural events were programmed by Isolde Lagacé (General and Artistic Director, Arte Musica Foundation), and featured discussions by prominent musicologists, historians, music theorists and performers. Highlights included a brilliant opening lecture by James Webster (Cornell University), who discussed various aspects of ‘work’ and ‘play’ in Haydn’s works, concentrating on the quartets. Taking his cue from contemporary descriptions of Haydn’s personality, which often underlined opposing physiognomies of ‘earnestness’ and ‘humour’, Webster looked at how various dialectically related binary oppositions could be seen to characterize Haydn’s work, from contrapuntal rigour to galant elegance and from a professional to an amateur orientation.

William Caplin (McGill University) and Webster presided over a workshop on Op. 54 No. 1 with the Schulich School of Music’s resident student quartet. Webster opened the proceedings with a discussion of the opening movement and the problems of analysing the exposition and the extraordinary recomposition of the recapitulation. Caplin gave a fascinating presentation on the saturating presence of chromatic pitch combinations throughout all four movements of the quartet, taking note of transformational processes and how these pitch groups emphasize important structural joints.

László Somfai (Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, Budapest) presented a provocative lecture on ‘Crucial Performing Aspects of Haydn’, with the Festetics Quartet on hand to perform excerpts and demonstrate various aspects of performance practice. It was a wide-ranging and highly informative study directed towards present-day performances and performers of Haydn quartets, and Somfai ended with a plea for quartet performers to concentrate on entire opuses of quartets, not just single famous pieces, in order to understand better the precisely marked intentions of the composer.

One of the final highlights of this festival was a seminar directed by Tom Beghin (McGill University) with the participation of Webster and Somfai. Entitled ‘Modern-Day Performing of Haydn’s Chamber Music’, this event took up some of the challenges issued by Somfai on the previous day as Beghin worked with a graduate student ensemble on a reading of Op. 33 No. 5. Using ideas on the faults and virtues of conversation in eighteenth-century salon culture as a point of departure, Beghin elicited lively debate about what makes for convincing performances, underscoring the different yet complementary perspectives of performer and listener alike.

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BERTA JONCUS (University of Oxford) writes:

A new interdisciplinary electronic resource, *Ballad Operas Online* (BOPO), hosted by the Oxford Digital Library (<<http://www.odl.ox.ac.uk/balladoperas>>), was officially launched internationally in July 2009. This project, designed and co-directed by myself and Michael Burden, has been funded by the John Fell OUP Research Fund and the British Academy.

*Ballad Operas Online* provides the first synoptic view of ballad operas and their music, cataloguing roughly two hundred operas – almost all produced between 1728 and 1736 – and their previously uncharted repertory of about 3,500 musical numbers. Through their popularity, ballad operas commercialized song on a scale and with a coordination between media that had never before been known. Ballad operas erased the boundaries between low- and high-style airs, widely distributed singers’ images to market their productions, and, for the first time, broadly disseminated Handel’s compositions in the public sphere. Ballad operas also contain delightful music, examples of which are available through the project’s audio samples. The resource establishes the significance of this song market for audiences and composers, and aims to stimulate further research into the co-dependencies between the theatrical, musical and print industries of eighteenth-century London.

The resource’s web pages explain this repertory’s background and display examples of ballad opera notation, play books and frontispieces; singers’ portraits and other iconography associated with ballad opera are also shown. The catalogue captures data on both individual operas and their music. Operas are catalogued by headword, under which details of the work are listed. Besides standard bibliographic