

MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT

AUGUST 2003

AN “ORGANIZED” TRIP TO HOLLAND

by Jan Greenough



The Grenzing Organ at Brussels Cathedral
Photograph by M. Reckling ©MagicImage, Spain

It's 6.00 a.m. on a crisp spring morning in Oxford, England, and the streets are quiet and empty of traffic. In St. Giles a small group of people are boarding a bus: nothing out of the ordinary, but these travellers are distinguished by one common feature. As well as a suitcase, almost every one of them also carries a music case bulging with “the shoes.” The Oxford and District Organists Association is off on its annual pilgrimage.

There's a routine security check at the Dover ferry port. The policeman looks down the bus at the preponderance of grey heads, asks our destination (“Holland, to play church organs”), decides we probably aren't terrorists or smugglers, declines to examine our luggage, and sends us on our way. A few hours later, all 28 of us are sitting in Brussels Cathedral, listening to a short recital by Xavier Deprez.

The point of the trip, however, is not merely to listen but also to have the privilege of playing. The Grenzing organ is billed on our itinerary as “only for the fit and agile with no fear of heights,” as the ascent to the cramped console, hanging on the north wall of the nave, is via a steep, narrow staircase and a walk outside on the parapets! Not everyone feels able to tackle this feat of mountaineering, and after a few short pieces we set off into Holland.

We're staying in Gorinchem (a place name which seems to be best pronounced simply by clearing the throat enthusiastically) and from there we make forays to surrounding towns. In most churches the resident organist gives us a brief recital, and then our players change their shoes (to the narrow, smooth-soled ones

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MANY VOICES

by Ted Rust

Sometimes it helps to think of music in terms of voices. A single piece of music may have one or several different voices, each with its distinct musical personality. Music containing different voices can be hard to follow if its voices are run together and all played in the same manner. One way a performer can heighten the listeners' experience of the music is to make each individual voice distinct, immediately recognizable, and consistent in personality, like the characters of a drama.

A performer's tools for characterizing a voice include tone color, dynamic range, rhythmic energy and articulation. Finding a particular combination of those that suits each voice as the composer has defined it, and using it consistently each time that voice appears in any instrument or register, clearly signals its identity. The point is not to stamp its features on a rigid mask, but rather to establish each voice as a living character that can take on a life of its own in the imagination, interacting and evolving within the drama laid out by the composer. This is not as complicated as it sounds. Like a face or a walk, a musical voice is much easier to remember and reproduce in its entirety than is any one of its features — a way of smiling or swinging the arms, a particular intensity of vibrato — in isolation. Some music such as chant, hymns and much popular

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SILHOUETTE

by Robin Lynn Pratt

Tonight I am in the audience for a change, in the second row, leafing through the program for a local women's choir. The seating is completely filled, and the concert is just minutes from beginning. Last year, I sang with some of these women, before my new job coincided with rehearsal time, and these are the moments I remember getting the jitters, just before filing onto the risers in front of the waiting audience. *Did I put my music in the right order? What if I forget the changes we made last week?* These are the moments our conductor, Roberta, would tell us we'd do just fine, and remind us to smile.

Standing on the risers with Roberta facing us, I would feel myself begin to relax. If there was a part where we had repeatedly missed our cue, her eyes would alert us,

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THE IN BOX

NEW HORIZONS UMBRELLA

Editor,

Two meetings have been held to plan the formation of a New Horizons Music Association. The name will reflect that there are New Horizons Orchestras as well as bands and that there are New Horizons organizations in both Canada and the United States. New Horizons organizations will probably be started in additional countries in the near future.

There are three main reasons to form an association:

- (1) the great support we have had from the National Association of Band Instrument Manufacturers and the National Association of Music Merchants;
- (2) an association would make good use of the extraordinary organizational ability and experience of our members; and
- (3) although I look forward to spending much of my time with New Horizons organizations and events in the years ahead, it would be prudent for New Horizons to be less dependent on me.

The first board meeting of the new association will take place before or after the Chautauqua meeting in September.

I would be pleased to receive any comments or suggestions.

With best wishes,

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New Horizons Bands and Orchestras provide playing opportunities for older adults in many cities. To find one in your area, more, contact Roy Ernst or consult the New Horizons web site at www.newhorizonsband.com/.

BRANDENBURGS IN HUDSON

Whee! We just had a Bach Brandenburg Play-In in Hudson, New York, sort of halfway between

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Poughkeepsie and Albany. It was held in the Hudson Opera House, which is undergoing renovation, and with enough done to make people excited about the final thrust — the auditorium with proscenium and excellent acoustics. It was handled simply: a \$5.00 registration fee covered postage and mailing, copying, a modest amount for the Opera House, coffee/tea service, and the rest went to the conductor.

The conductor was Simeon Loring, who attracts people, and brings out the best in them. He attracted some soloists and people who know him from various points in upstate New York.

We opened Sunday afternoon at 1:00, and started about 2:00, ending at 5:00. Refreshments were easy: a cheese board, crackers, grapes, cookies, and chunks of good chocolate, with decaffeinated diet sodas and the Opera House coffee and tea system. We had 31 other musicians besides the conductor and soloists.

We encouraged friends and neighbors to drop by and listen, and they did. We played four of J. S. Bach's *Brandenburg Concerti*, Nos. 2, 3, 4, and 5. I and one of my adult students played continuo.

The Brandenburg Play-in was a great success. We're going to do again next year! Contact me if you are interested.

Gloria Terwilliger
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Hudson, NY 12534
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CHORALE PRELUDES FOR CELLO ENSEMBLE

Tom Fattaruso's superb cello arrangements of Bach organ works have been widely performed in the San Francisco Bay area for several years and are now being offered for sale. Tom has released his first volume, containing 32 of J.S. Bach's chorale preludes in a handsome, very legible and playable transcription. A score is available in addition to the set of the four individual parts (Cello I, II, III, and IV). Details are at home.onemain.com/~tfat/cppage, or write to

Tom Fattaruso
6645 Gatto Ave.
El Cerrito, CA 94530.

NEVER TOO LATE by Ruth Cazden

THE BEST ADVICE I EVER GOT

“Ruth, when playing chamber music you have three jobs: to play in time; to play in tune; and to play with good tone. Sometimes, all you can do is play in time.”

My dear friend Leo, who is musical right down to his toes, offered me this sage advice the first time I attempted to play chamber music. At age 45 I started taking violin lessons. Not having played as a kid, I was starting from scratch and “scratch” does indeed describe those early sounds from my fiddle.

My number one goal was to play chamber music. This wasn't a hard choice. Tom, my better half, had been playing cello in the same string quartet for over twenty years. I wanted to share the joy of making music with friends (hoping they'd still be my friends afterwards).

After sawing away for a year, I was excited when Leo brought me some simple student quartet arrangements (mostly half notes, quarter notes and — oh no! — eighth notes) and gave me the opportunity to try them out with members of the quartet.

Every day for two weeks I practiced those parts, wanting to be perfect for my chamber music debut. Then the big night came and, after four measures, I was hopelessly lost, getting behind while valiantly trying to correct wrong and out-of-tune notes. That's when Leo told me his little secret.

Today, twelve years later, this is still my approach to chamber music. My first attention is focused on rhythm. Am I where I'm supposed to be? Am I playing at the same speed as the rest of the group? Only if that's working well do I focus on intonation and tone production. If I play an F when an F# is required, it sounds awful, but the group stays together and moves ahead. If I hesitate for a pitch adjustment, I wind up in the wrong place and the group falls apart.

The Well-Tempered Limerick, a collection of musical limericks by Virginia C. Albedi, includes this gem:

This gigue sends me into a swoon.
I'll be fit for psychiatry soon,
To choose I am loath
But I cannot do both—
Do I play it in time or in tune?

In a recent discussion, Ted Rust, publisher of this newsletter, pointed out that a note played perfectly in tune is not at all in tune if played in the wrong place. Amen!

When playing chamber music I use two methods, nicknamed “soft count” and “hard count,” to play in time. The normal mode is soft count. I keep time,

listening carefully to the other members of the group, adjusting my count to what the others are playing. If I have eighth notes to someone else's sixteenths, my count isn't metronomic; it's fluid, adjusting to the pace of the other player's faster notes. If those sixteenths are rushed and the rest of the group speeds up to accommodate them, I'm not playing in time if I'm half a beat behind everyone else, even though my eighth notes are metronomically correct. Marching to the beat of my drummer doesn't work well in chamber music.

But sometimes I must resort to the “hard count.” I have to count my part as metronomically as possible, not being swayed by the other parts. This might occur when I've got the only syncopated line or when there are threes against twos. In those passages I mentally count my part as strongly as possible, ignoring the conflicting and confusing rhythms around me.

There's an example of this in Ernst Toch's *Serenade for Three Violins*. At one point in the Andante (below), Violin III has a lovely simple melody, all eighth notes and quarter notes. Violins I and II play obligato-like decoration, alternating between eighths and triplets, some of which are tied-over. If I don't “hard count” that Violin III part, my colleagues have a tough time finding the 1-beat. Then we get separated and someone gets to the double bar ahead of the others.



There's no prize in chamber music for a first place finish!

Ruth Cazden of El Cerrito, CA is a regular contributor to *Music for the Love of It*. In her day job she gives training seminars for insurance workser.

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VOICES continued from page 1

song employs a single voice, offering the performer a challenge to stay in character as the melody moves through changes. In more complex music such as musical theater or African drumming, there are multiple voices but a different singer or player for each one.

In most art song, choral and instrumental music, on the other hand, the performer is expected to switch seamlessly from one voice to another, and to recognize when a voice is being passed from one performer to another, with the implicit responsibility to match the inflections and color of the voice as defined by its immediately preceding performer. Usually a voice has its own characteristic melodic contour and harmonies. The performer needs to select an appropriate palette of sound for each voice and use it consistently each time that voice returns. The composer may provide guideposts such as dynamic, tempo and expression marks to define a voice and signal a shift from one voice to another, but these may be absent or may be given only at the first appearance of a voice.

In European Baroque instrumental music, multiple voices are common, and the performer has to recognize them without much help from the score. Bach's two-, three- and four-part fugues in *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (G. Henle Verlag no. 256) provide wonderful examples. The "Canzona" movement of Henry Purcell's *Golden Sonata* (Edition Peters No. 4242a) is music in which each player has to play four distinctly different voices (three appear in the following excerpt). A successful performance will not only distinguish the four voices within the individual parts, but will connect them from part to part, so that each is recognizable as itself, regardless of which instrument is playing it at the moment, giving the effect of four voices, not twelve.

I recently prepared Robert Schumann's *Romances* for oboe and piano, opus 94 (G. Henle Verlag, no. 427) for an informal home concert. Knowing that Schumann was suffering from late-stage syphilis, attempted suicide a few years after composing the *Romances*, and later died in an insane asylum, my first concept of the piece was that it represents one emotionally unstable speaker in the throes of mercurial shifts of mood, from nostalgia to regret, ironic humor and terrifying bursts of rage, spelled out in abrupt dynamic shifts, jarring key changes and inhuman register leaps: a madman. But this approach felt unsatisfying and disrespectful of Schumann's genius. Is there no underlying unity to this piece? Should I play it like a first-year drama student auditioning for a mad scene?

I found a clue to a more satisfying approach in Schumann's prose. His very clear and insightful critical essays for his *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (New Journal for Music) were framed as debates among an imaginary group of friends, the *Davidsbündler* (the League of David, who slew Philistines). Among them were Florestan (Schumann as a warmly bubbling, gullible enthusiast), Eusebius (Schumann again, as a cool, skeptical rationalist), Chiarina (Clara Wieck Schumann) and Felix Meritis (Mendelssohn).

The voices I have mentioned are used consistently in the *Romances*, and are easily recognizable each time they appear, sometimes interrupting each other. All three *Romances* start in the key of A, first minor, then major, then minor again, but always in a regretful voice. I think this is Robert speaking — as he must have wished and feared to — of his illness and imminent death. When they move to F, the voice is Florestan, sentimental and exultant, or Felix, competent and cheerful. In E, it is Eusebius, puncturing Florestan's sentimental illusions; in C it is Clara, lyrical and loving. All are on hand for the opening of Romance III:

The interlude of Romance III (below) is a love song for piano solo. It starts in F (Florestan or Felix) and resolves in C (for Clara).



The voices respond to the opening voice from their own points of view in each *Romance*. Robert replies at the end of each with a quieter transformation of their material. To me this represents Schumann's reluctant acceptance of his condition and his fate. The ending of *Romance III* recalls Clara's love song:



So by recognizing its several voices, the piece no longer sounds like the ravings of an isolated madman, but becomes a drama in which a central figure tells his friends and family that he will be leaving them, they respond, and he empathizes deeply with their feelings.

Music makes the passage of time feel both inevitable and satisfying. It can draw us along with insistent progressions of rhythm and harmony or beguiling melodic lines, with structural regularities or extra-musical story lines. As performers, though, we also need to be attentive to the different voices in which those attributes are embodied, so as to allow the music to flow forward in the listener's imagination.

Oboist Ted Rust is the publisher and co-editor of Music for the Love of It.

SILHOUETTE continued from page 1

a measure early, and she'd mouth the words along with us. If the harmony was beginning to slip, she'd turn one ear slightly toward us as if to say, *Come on, tune it up...* And when a big entrance required precise timing, Roberta would shake her head side-to-side the tiniest bit, *Wait, wait, wait*, and then her eyes would open wide, *Now*.

As these singers fill the risers, I turn around in my chair to watch the conductor enter. Seeing her, from my seat in the second row, makes me a little sad that I am not up on the risers tonight. When she finally stands to face the choir, all I can see is her silhouette, and I feel as though part of the concert is blocked from my view.

As Roberta raises her arms, I catch myself taking in a deep breath, in readiness. (It's a really good thing I don't know the words to this piece!) She begins by summoning a single, clear note from the sopranos, then from the altos. Turning her palms face-down she hushes the notes to a whisper, then calls for several more, weaving them into a rich tapestry of sound. Through the glass behind the risers, the rays of early evening set a misty background for the words: *Lift thine eyes to the mountains...* I have goose bumps as the music fills me.

Wrapped in this music, I wonder, *Should I try to rearrange my schedule so I can sing in a choir again?* This feeling is so energizing. But I also know just how much time and energy it takes, and for now, I have had to make other choices. *Maybe next year...*

The next song is listed as a Spiritual Medley and I recognize the name of one soloist on the program. *This couldn't possibly be the shy woman I sang with last year.* Her voice never rose above our collective sound. But sure enough, as the song begins, there is Jesse, delivering a powerful phrase about freedom and hope. I see her blush just a little, but her eyes return to the conductor, then back to the audience with renewed confidence, and I realize I can see Roberta's expressions on the faces of these women.

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This silhouette before me, the black tailored suit, the burgundy blunt haircut, take on new dimensions for me now as I look back and forth, from her outline to the faces beyond. I can *feel* when she is wide-eyed, guiding them through tricky terrain and when she is beaming, thrilled with their agility. In a small way, I do feel part of this again.

With each song, the darkening backdrop pulls closer, and now it is black outside as the choir begins a piece called “The Witches’ Trio,” adapted from *Macbeth*. *Double, double, toil and trouble*. There are sounds of fingers snapping, clicking and even whistling. This is very unusual, but captivating. I like it. The singers are bending all the traditional rules, holding on to their hisses at the end of ‘hex’, moaning notes that clash and build into a bonfire of sounds, howls and cackles. It works so well that I can feel the heat of their fire on a stormy night as they cast their last spell into the blackness.

The moment this piece ends, the audience is on its feet in thunderous applause. The singers are flushed and their conductor stands to the side and takes a bow. Her face is brimming with the echoes of the music they have made together tonight.

These are the echoes that follow me, long after the concert. They remind me of all the music I have been a part of over the years, in a choir, with a small group of friends, or just by myself. I know that when the time is right, I’ll find a way to be on the other side of that silhouette once again, shoulder to shoulder with my fellow altos, whoever they may be.

ORGANIZED **continued from page 1**

necessary for pedal work) and queue decorously for their turn to try the instrument. In fact, the Brussels organ, an architectural and engineering curiosity built in 2000, is not much liked by our party, who find its tone rather harsh. They prefer the 1736 Moreau organ in Gouda, with its clean acoustic, and the dazzling variety of the Robustelly/Smits in Helmond.

In the eighteenth century the principal cities of the Netherlands vied with each other to build the largest organ in their main church, and much of the cost of these great instruments was borne by the civic authorities rather than the church. This goes some way to explaining the riches we find in every town. In the Petruskerk in Woerden we find two instruments, a two-manual west-end organ built in 1768 by Batz of Utrecht, and a delightful six-stop choir organ. This enables us to maximise our time there: while someone is playing one organ, someone else is preparing the registration at the other. The resulting recital is almost continuous.

The Dutch Reformed Churches are pleasant places to spend time: usually whitewashed inside with clear glass in the windows, they are light and bright and exquisitely clean. Many have barrel-vaulted wooden roofs painted a subdued grey-green. Our Sunday entry to the Roman Catholic Sint-Janskathedraal at ‘s-Hertogenbosch is delayed by a First Communion service, but we spend the morning at the Pels works (experts in organ building for the Mid-Western States and the far East), seeing every stage from design to voicing and building. The cathedral is worth the wait: the organ case is an extraordinary example of Renaissance architecture, complete with a mechanical “Dance of Death” built into the clock. The instrument inside is largely eighteenth-century; the cathedral organist stands by to help our performers select the right stops for each piece, culminating in a meditative performance of Vierne.

Our day in Utrecht is a landmark, distinguished partly by a visit to the Speelklok Museum — not, as we had expected, a mere collection of musical toys, but an amazing museum of real instruments, demonstrated with verve and humour by Dr Haspels, an international authority. We are accompanied there, and to three churches, by the resident organist of the Nicolaikerk, Stephen Taylor, an Oxford organ scholar who has “gone native” so thoroughly after his many years of residence in Holland that he now speaks English with a Dutch accent!

Visiting three organs each day packed the trip with interest; even the bus journeys are filled with discussion about the registration of the organs and plans for the most appropriate repertoire for each. Our players, mostly amateur organists who play in town and village churches around Oxfordshire, enjoyed the opportunity to try their skills on a wide variety of instruments, mostly much larger than they are used to. Their only complaint is that they would have liked to have more time to experiment, to practise, and to explore the instruments.

As a keen audience rather than a player, my memories are mixed: hundreds of flickering candles around the statue of Our Lady of ‘s-Hertogenbosch; the biggest Easter garden I’ve ever seen in the Sint Martinskerk in Cujik, with literally tons of earth, a fountain, and some small trees planted in the nave, clearly a tribute to the Dutch urge to establish land wherever possible; the astonishing generosity of the various church people we met, serving us coffee and cake (and on one occasion wine and cheese) and answering our questions in impeccable English. And above all, over and over again, in every church, the amazing richness and variety of the music from the King of Instruments.

Playing with the Professionals

is the blanket title for three new workshops to be held in the Czech Republic, each slightly different to the other, offered by **Intermusica**. They are probably unique in that top professionals with considerable pedagogic experience play WITH amateur musicians throughout. General information is available on www.intermusica.org.

Four ensembles—a new approach is organized by VBMA (Verein Bergsträsser Musikseminare) and features the Martinu Quartet of Prague. Contact: candy.boller@t-online.de or Fax +49 8106 232719.



Castle Lnare, West Bohemia

Playing with the Czech String Trio and Chamber Music in Castle Lnare are organized by MusicEnterprise. MusicEnterprise can recommend two other

workshops which are for music students rather than amateur musicians: the ***String Quartet Course*** with the Wihan Quartet, held in Mahler's birthplace in South Bohemia and the ***Summer Master Courses*** of Maria Hixova, held in Prague. Contact pipergeo@pt.lu or Fax +352 223585.



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