

expression and technical possibilities. Interestingly, it superseded as a scientific compromise (ie. hybrid) and often started life as a 'cut down' bass violin. With its reduced resonating body size and consequent shorter vibrating string

lengths, acoustic purity is sacrificed in order to obtain the requisite low pitches similarly demanded of the more ideally proportioned bass violin. (The sonority of the cello is, therefore, 'thinner' at the bass end than its forebear.) The bass violin uses the French and English tuning – a whole tone lower than the cello – g, c, F & Bb. (The top string of the bass violin is the same pitch then as the bottom

string of the [much smaller treble] violin!) The bass violin is played with an underhand bow grip, as is testified to in many 17th and early 18th century paintings and, as was the norm for any bowed stringed instrument, held da gamba (de jambe).

### **The Viola da Gamba** (*basse de viole*)

Viola da Gamba is a generic term that denotes bowed stringed instruments that commonly have as their make-up a pear-shaped soundbox, six or more strings, a flat back and a fretted



fingerboard. The ribs (sides) are wider than those of the violin and there is no extension of the belly or the back beyond the ribs. The sound holes may be C or flame shaped as opposed to F shaped. Like the violin, the viola da gamba exists

as a family of different sizes corresponding roughly to the four human voice types – treble, alto, tenor and bass. Da Gamba refers to the mode d'emploi: all sizes are held by the leg. By the mid-seventeenth century, except in England, the concept of a family of viole da gamba "playing in consort" was outmoded. The one size of viola da gamba that continued to enjoy favour was the bass viola da gamba, the size we

now commonly refer to as the viola da gamba or simply the gamba. Sonatas and fantasias were written for it, JS Bach wrote some very significant solos for it in his Passions and Cantatas and the great French virtuoso gamba player, Marin Marais, wrote over 600 works for it. It also shares a vital basso continuo role with the bass violin and the cello.

Tim's bass violin (copy of Gaspard Bourbon, Brussels, 1702) was made by David Rubio (Oxford, 1978)

Anthea's viola da gamba was made by Gary D. Bridgewood (London, 1987)

# NEWS Salut!

August 2009

## **The Sun King: August Concert**



Lavish musical concerts were a feature of life at Versailles. Designed both to impress and intimidate aristocrats and visiting foreign dignitaries, these performances represented an important political function. Music at Versailles expanded to include opera, dance and theatre, and it soon became a centre of inspiration and catalyst for the development of the arts throughout Europe. This concert explores the elegant French style that was to inspire composers such as Telemann, Handel and JS Bach.

## **Meet our Musicians: Jane Sheldon**

Jane has been singing professionally since the age of 15. After training with Gondwana Voices and the Sydney Children's Choir, Jane made her professional debut in 1998 with Halcyon and the Sydney Alpha Ensemble. She has gone on to work with some of the finest ensembles and musicians in Australia and beyond, including the London Philharmonic Orchestra in the UK premiere of Elena Kats-Chernin's Wild Swans. A track from Jane's 2004 recording of the work, made with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, reached No.1 on the UK iTunes classical music charts.

In Australia, Jane has been a guest artist with many acclaimed ensembles, including the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, The Song Company, Synergy, and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. In 2006 she appeared as guest artist at the inaugural Flametree Festival at Arthur Boyd's Bundanon, voted Best Australian Festival of 2006 by readers of Limelight magazine.

## Instruments of the Sun King

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Jane's first solo album, *Song of the Angel*, was released by ABC Classics in 2002 and she has continued to work for the label as a solo artist, appearing on *Swooning*, *Allegrì Miserere*, *Prayer for Peace*, and *The Classic 100*. She is also a guest artist on Teddy Tahu Rhodes' Aria Award-winning album *The Voice*.



Jane has worked on a number of scores for theatre, film and television, including Christopher Gordon's Golden Globe-nominated soundtrack for telemovie *On the Beach*, and the recent release *Like Minds*. A recording of *Allegrì's Miserere* Jane made with Cantillation was featured in Bangarra Dance Theatre's acclaimed 2004 production, *Clan*. Jane's voice was recently featured in John Galliano's Spring 2009 ready-to-wear show.

As an ensemble singer, Jane works with the highly acclaimed choral ensemble Cantillation, with whom she appears in Pinchgut Opera's productions and with whom she sang for Emma Kirkby's Australian tour of 2005. Jane has also appeared with ACO Voices, the Australian Chamber Orchestra's chamber chorus.

Solo appearances this year include performances of *The Origin Cycle* in the US, Canada and Australia. *The Origin Cycle* is a work commissioned with philosopher of science Peter Godfrey-Smith, in which seven Australian composers set text from Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

As soloist in the world premiere performance of Nigel Butterley's *Spell of Creation* at the Sydney Opera House, Opera Opera's David Gyger commented: '...the most exhilarating moments of solo singing all night... came... from young soprano Jane Sheldon, who negotiated the fearsome stratosphere assigned her with impressive musicality, soaring beauty and great skill.'



Few documents remain today that help us gauge the complete richness of the orchestra that Jean Baptiste Lully created, directed and made the greatest. Enough is known, however, to at least make a fair attempt at its "recreation". Fortunately we do know enough about all the different types of instruments that were readily available and it is with this in mind that we present this «Sun King» program. The timbres created in this program, through the various combinations of the recorder, transverse flute, violin, te viola da gamba, bass violin and harpsichord are in essence very French and achieve a very different result from similar treatment given to them by Italian or German counterparts. We draw your attention especially to the two species of bass instruments:

### **The Bass Violin** (*basse de violon, violone*)

The Bass Violin – the true bass instrument of the violin family –

is essentially a late sixteenth to seventeenth century instrument that affords the performance of bass lines, from that period, the resounding richness and depth that they justly demand. Until the demise of the bass violin in 1720s, its presence as the single bass meant the double or contra bass was uncalled-for in most instrumental ensembles or orchestral settings. Today's far more common instrument, the violon(c)cello, is its Italian diminutive – meaning a small bass violin (and not vice versa with the bass violin being a larger version of the 'cello'). As the bass violin, through technical demands placed on it by progressive composers, gradually became emancipated from only co-operating on the bass line, its physical dimensions were found to be an impediment to the technical advances required of the player. Accordingly, the cello became ever more fashionable as performers and composers became aware of its more violinistic capabilities of

