

A Passion for Words

by Colin Milner

For this concert we are delighted to welcome Colin Milner, who will play the part of an 18th century gentlemen, with readings about Handel written by his contemporaries.



Words, particularly in association with music, have been a passion in my life.

Perhaps it all began with learning nursery rhymes as a child, or singing hymns at Church, or maybe singing songs around the piano or pianola at the home of either of my two sets of grandparents. But by the time I started appearing in musicals at Marsden High School in Sydney during my early teens – beginning with ‘Annie Get Your Gun’ - I was hooked. The school musical was an established tradition at Marsden, put in place by Richard Gill, the well-known conductor and music educator, during his early teaching years there and continued by his successor Graeme McMartin, who taught me Music for five years.

It was this experience that inspired me to study singing, beginning at the Conservatorium in Sydney from the age of eighteen. The many fine voice teachers I subsequently encountered in my life, here in Australia and overseas, have led me on a wondrous journey of discovery in the world of song.

My six years at the Conservatorium coincided with studies towards Arts (majoring in History) and Law degrees at the University of Sydney, which grew out of a further set of academic interests from my school years. This was another world of words altogether, and yet I realise now how intertwined it was, in reality, with my experiences in the world of song. For both gave me a sense of the power and possibilities of communicating through words that has never left me.

Words are magical, whether using the spoken or sung voice, or in written text. And, together, words and music can forge a powerful, symbiotic relationship. From the corroboree of the Australian Aboriginal peoples to the Christian sacrament of Holy Communion to the use of dialogue plus music in movies, human beings have found many ways to combine and contrast words and music in forms of artistic expression.

Since my early days of study as a singer, I have experienced the joy of working with words and music in a wide spectrum of forms – musicals, operas and operettas, plays, art song, sacred music. In more recent years, without ever giving up singing, I have focussed even more on words themselves, by studying at the Actors Centre in Sydney and returning, after a long break, to creative writing. But, in both these endeavours, music remains as a source of inspiration and a spur to action, as I am led on to new opportunities to perform and write.

Performing a number of readings at Salut! Baroque’s forthcoming The Force of Genius concerts will give me a special opportunity to pursue my love of the spoken and written word in association with music. In these concerts, the readings will be but one element of words to combine with the vocal artistry of Tobias Cole and the music provided by a wonderful ensemble of Baroque instrumentalists – all heightened for the audience by reading the insightful program notes written by Tim Blomfield - to weave some real magic for us all.

NEWS Salut!

May 2008



Congratulations to the winners of our special subscriber competition: Lutz & Eva-Maria Samlow (weekend for two at the beautiful Orient Point House) and Anne Lander (set of 6 Salut! CDs).

“The Force of Genius”

Our next concert focuses on Handel and his London period. It was a time of great intrigue and rivalry: between opera companies (The Royal Academy of Music, directed by Handel, versus the “Opera of the Nobility”, directed by Nicola Porpora and supported by the Prince of Wales); between composers (particularly Handel and his well documented feuds with Bononcini); between musicians (in 1727, a season of Bononcini’s opera *Astianatte* was forced to close early due to a disturbance during one of the performances. The prima donnas Faustina Bordoni and Francesca Cuzzoni (known as “The Rival Queens”) came to physical blows on stage in front of the Princess of Wales, leading Charles Burney to remark at the time, “It seems impossible for two singers of equal merit to tread the same stage a parte equale as for two people to ride on the same horse, without one being behind.”).

But the real superstars of the time were the castrati. The extraordinary voices of singers such as Farinelli and Senesino commanded exorbitant fees and had men and women swooning. Handel created 17 roles for Senesino at the King’s Theatre – and for once the bitter rivalry between artists doesn’t seem to have eventuated. One story has it that when Senesino first sang opposite his rival Farinelli, he was so overcome by the beauty of the voice that he embraced Farinelli, stopping the performance and surprising the audience, who had grown accustomed to public displays of feuding.

Tobias Cole - Counter Tenor



Photo by Michael Thome

For this concert we are delighted to welcome Opera Australia star Tobias Cole to perform some of the music composed for castrati superstars of the time. Tobias is one of Australia's most distinguished countertenors. He is an honours graduate of The University of Sydney, where he studied singing, composition, conducting and musicology. A Churchill Fellowship enabled Tobias to continue his vocal training at the Royal College of Music in London. He also received a Queen's Trust Achiever Award for operatic studies in London. In 2002, he was the first countertenor to win Opera Foundation Australia's Metropolitan Opera Young Artist Study Award, spending three months at the Met in New York.

Tobias' experience with choirs began at the age of eight when he joined the choir at St James' Church, King Street, Sydney. He became Head Chorister of St James' as well as the Chapel Choir of Newington College. As a boy soprano, Tobias sang in two operas with The Australian Opera, and with Sydney Philharmonia Motet Choir.

Companies Tobias has performed with include Opera Australia, The Queensland Orchestra, Canberra Choral Society, Sydney Philharmonia, Chicago Opera Theater, West Australian Opera, Pinchgut Opera, Opera Queensland, English Bach Festival, Queensland and Adelaide Symphony Orchestras, London Handel Festival, University of NSW Opera and the Renaissance Players.

As a countertenor Tobias has sung with a number of choirs and ensembles including Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, The Song Company, The Australian Chamber Singers, Sydney Chamber Choir, The Llewellyn Choir and St Paul's Cathedral Choir, London. In London, Tobias studied movement and mime and has performed in Canberra as an actor, in the title role of Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*, and actor/singer in the title role of *Barnum*. Tobias is the Musical Director and conductor of Oriana Chorale in Canberra, where he lives with his wife and three children.

Finding Music



Handel's handwritten *Messiah*

Obtaining music for performing at our concerts isn't always straightforward. Because of the specialised nature of baroque music, we often need to source music from shops in places such as London and Amsterdam. A bit of detective work is often also necessary to track down scores. And there is also the expense – the total cost of music for one concert can be up to \$500.

Music for "The Force of Genius" has come from Saul Groen in Amsterdam (possibly the best general early music shop in the world for music), The Scarlatti Project (a group of musicians and academics, including Australian harpsichordist Rosalind Halton, who produce excellent scores of vocal music), and King's Music in Cambridgeshire in the UK. I wanted to buy a copy of Handel's aria *Ombra mai fù* from the opera *Serse* but I didn't want to buy the entire score – the aria being a 3-minute piece from an opera that lasts for more than 3 hours. I asked Clifford Bartlett at King's Music whether he was able to help, and he very generously attached a copy of the music

to his reply email, saying it wasn't worth his time to send an invoice!

For the aria *Ah! non turbi il mio riposo* from Gluck's opera *Telemaco*, we thought we had exhausted all possibilities of tracking it down and wouldn't be able to include it in the program after all. The score seemed to be out of print and efforts to find a second hand copy were not proving successful. In the end, the music was easier to find than we had anticipated, and we found two copies – one in the Sydney Conservatorium library and one in the music library at Harvard University. It is a beautiful aria and well worth the effort it took to find – we hope you enjoy it.

When buying music, there is sometimes a choice between buying modern editions or facsimiles (copies of the original compositions). Modern editions have the advantage of being easier to read and is written out in full score (rather than just the individual parts), which is more helpful for ensemble playing. However, modern editions sometimes also include the editor's additions or suggestions – which are not always good, particularly in older editions. Facsimiles are sometimes difficult to read (especially if the composer or copyist was working to a tight deadline) or contain mistakes. However, considering that this music was entirely written by hand (not to mention in pre-correction fluid days!), it is surprising that there often aren't more mistakes in the parts.

Where possible, we prefer to work from facsimiles – it is exciting to be able to read from copies of the actual parts that were written and originally performed during the baroque period – sometimes when the ink on the paper was still wet! And where necessary, Tim has become a whizz at transcribing parts to make them more readable.

