

# Salut! NEWS

November 2007

## Welcome to our November edition of Salut! News!



Thank you for your support in 2007. We look forward to welcoming you again in 2008. Our concert brochure for next year will be available soon – in the meantime, here's a preview of one of the brochure images.

We are also designing a new website, which will be online after our November concerts.

## Change of Venue Reminder – *The Italian Voice*, Canberra

Please note the change of venue for our Canberra performance of *The Italian Voice* due to storm damage in Llewellyn Hall. Our concert on Friday 16 November will now be held in the Fairfax Theatre, National Gallery of Australia. Subscription tickets and tickets already purchased for Llewellyn Hall are of course valid for this performance.

## Meet our Musicians: Nadia Piave



If the Sound of Music had been a musical called *The Sound of Singing* then the nuns would've found themselves all deliberating "what do you do with a problem called Nadia?"! As a singer in the 21st century I find myself blessed (and sometimes cursed!) by a desire to sing *everything*, and the truth is, I do! Early Music however has been a lifelong love affair to be sure – my Masters thesis was a research paper and performance based on the stage practices (musical and otherwise!) of the singing actresses of the 17th century English Restoration stage. So Purcell and his 'progeny' – Bess and Altisidora and various milkmaids – are all dear, dear friends. Italian music of the same period and earlier has also given me the opportunity to sing exquisite texts as well as tunes. But apart from rejoicing in the vibrant (and sometimes vunderfully *vibrato*-less!) music of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, I have the great joy of singing everything from 'Mediterranean'

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World music (with my own trio – voice, guitar and W accordion) to programs of blues and laments, and Cajun songs and *airs de cours* with lutenist Tommie Andersson, to Argentinean tangos and *lunfardo* songs, Persian folksongs, madcap Cabaret with pianist Sally Whitwell (will I ever live those YouTube snippets down!) and even 14th century lullabies accompanied by bass violin (thank you Tim Blomfield) and *yidaki* (didgeridoo – thank you Les Saxby). I also have the great joy of teaching singing to individuals and taking choral groups, one of my great successes being the Blake Dawson Waldron *Choristers at Law* lunchtime singing group! Teaching makes me a better performer and performing makes me a better teacher, and I think that's how it's always going to be for me.

And one last tidbit to whet a palate other than musical: I wear a hat as a *SMH Good Food Guide*-rating ice cream and gelato maker (I'm Italian, after all!). It's a long story, and would need a newsletter all of its own, but suffice it to say, look out for my new ice cream venture with my mum in the Hunter Valley – *Hunter Valley Heavenly* featuring a deliciously Celestial Pistachio Crunch!

Life, like music, has so many different flavours – let's enjoy as many as we can! ☺

## The Lute & I

by Andrew Byrne

*No other invention, ancient or modern, is more seemly for consorts nor more desirable for symphonies, nor more admirable to the ears of listeners. Time destroys not the sweetness of its sounds, neither do fickle inventions seduce men's affections from it, however rare, unusual, nor more easily learnt these may be.*

So said Robert Fludd of the lute, writing in England during its Golden Age, the turn of the 17th century. Four hundred years later in Australia, few things are rarer, or more unusual, than a lute. But for “fickle inventions”, and things more easily learnt, we are spoilt for choice!

I grew up in Cairns, in Far North Queensland, surrounded by mangoes, mosquitoes and monsoons. I first discovered the lute in Brisbane around 1996, whilst studying illustration at the Queensland College of Art. Amidst my manifold musical meanderings, I had already been arranging and performing baroque lute music for the modern classical guitar for some time. Then I met an elderly local



*Allegro.*

guitar maker who told me that he had produced a replica 17th century guitar, a *vihuela*, and various other things. He said they'd had been sitting, untouched, in his workshop ever since the varnish had dried some decades ago. He very kindly asked me if I wanted to feature them in an upcoming recital, and I gratefully acquiesced. I had already been reading about and listening to as many recordings of these instruments as I could.

I found everything about them utterly fascinating & beautiful: as musical instruments, and as mere *objets d'art*- but also as precious, lost pieces of cultural heritage deserving of wider exposure. It seemed a terrible crime that such things, ubiquitous in paintings and the iconography of Western civilisation, could languish unseen, unheard for so long. I felt a little cheated that it had taken so long for me to find them myself, when they were so self-evidently fabulous. In an euphonic epiphany, I realised that here was my Rubicon. A vista opened before me of exotic new sound worlds, of strange frail things with two heads, too many strings, and *outré* tunings, – *outré*, that is, to the uninitiated, but marvellous once understood. I was lucky enough during this period to have been loaned, by several very kind people, a 5-course baroque guitar, a 13-course baroque lute, and assorted renaissance instruments, which allowed me to develop a familiarity with the tunings, idioms and repertoires of each instrument side-by-side, and to seek a way of finding how they may have fit into the puzzle of musical life and taste in previous centuries. To hell with drawing! I contacted Tommie Andersson and had two lessons with him during '97 and '98, before entering Sydney Conservatorium the next year, the first person to do so on baroque (or any) lute. I then spent three years enjoying the benefits of excellent guidance and tuition under Tommie and other world-class period musicians.

After graduating in 2001 I was privileged to receive an Italian scholarship for a year's further study at the Early Music Institute of a music school in Milano. At precisely this time, I was introduced to a gentleman of impeccable bearing who offered to assist in keeping the wolves from the door during my first year abroad. This happy confluence of fate and fortune also brought me within visiting distance to my mother's relatives in Piemonte, lending to the experience something of an air of homecoming, enabling me to really absorb the traditional dimensions of the place from an insider's view-point.

That's how it started. I was helped along during these years, as now, by the generosity, encouragement and advice of friends, family, mentors, colleagues, and sponsors, without whom the whole scenario could only have ever been a pipe-dream, especially for one coming from so Tropical a clime.

Falling in love, as the poet said, is easy. But a honeymoon doth not a marriage make, especially when one is instrumentally polygamous – or indeed promiscuous, as a modern lutenist must be. People expect you to play songs by Dowland, solos by Bach, continuo for *everything*, and all of it well! The fact that each country and century (and in some cases, decade) had its own sort of lute is part of what makes the thing so difficult, but so incredibly interesting and revealing. To honour all of one's obligations to the repertoire, one needs at least three Renaissance lutes, two or three different baroque lutes, an *arciliuto* as well as a *liuto attiorbato*; a 14-course & 19-course Italian theorbo or chitarrone in A, a French theorbo in D, an English theorbo in G, a renaissance guitar, and two different baroque guitars. Then one can start to branch out and explore the really interesting ones, like the cittern, the *ceterone*, the *angelique*, the *chitarra tiorbata*, the *Pandora*, the *Orpharion*, the *Penorcon*, and the rest. I presently possess four instruments: a renaissance lute, a theorbo, a baroque guitar, and a baroque lute, (with sixty-two strings between them) each with vast and unique repertoire, utterly diverse tunings, different tablature notations and playing techniques. Each is indispensable. They all happen to have been built by excellent Australian luthiers (Peter Biffin, John Hall, John Dale and Stephen Murphy), three of whom stopped building lutes decades ago, and one of whom lives in Provence. This and other factors makes repairs and maintenance a bit tricky. Keeping them all strung, tuned, maintained, cased, and so on is an ongoing labour of love, and, at times, of frustration; living on the opposite side of the planet to good specialist makers and repairers of these instruments tests one's mettle no end, not to mention the housekeeping.

And, that's right, then one must *play* them as well. "Keeping one's chops up" on each of them to the point of comfortable improvisation (for continuo), in four different tunings and stringings, with four different playing techniques, in half a dozen different national and historical styles - all this, in twenty-first century Australia! It's a tall order. For example, aside from visible physical differences, a

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theorbo's highest-pitched string (b) is third from the edge of the fingerboard (then one, then four); a baroque guitar's lowest-pitched string is usually on the middle courses, sometimes right next to the highest-pitched (it can be strung six different ways), a baroque lute's open strings on courses one to six are a d minor chord; and a renaissance lute requires a totally different plucking technique to all of the above.



Since the middle ages, the lute was identified with the Celestial Lyre of Orpheus/Hermes/Apollo/Amphion/King David (on Sundays), or of the Cosmic Harmony. As the only instrument capable of playing polyphony and chords with dynamics until the invention of the pianoforte, it was considered the jewel amongst instruments, second only to the human voice. It stands at the very centre of European courtly musical tradition from the beginnings of history, to the end of the eighteenth century, where, with the fall of the *ancien regime* which had supported it, its cultivation declined and vanished for over a century before re-discovery in the 20th century. Its golden period was from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, the period which saw the birth of tonal harmony and the true flowering of vocal and of instrumental music. The very first book of solo instrumental music ever to issue from the printer's press, (shortly after its invention, and the necessary number of Bibles had been stamped) was for the lute: Spinacino's *Intavolatura di Lauto* which

was published exactly 500 years ago this year. The development of baroque music through opera and recitative is inseparable from the invention of the theorbo (a large lute designed to accompany vocal music) by the Camerata of Florence in the 1580s. Historically, gifted lutenists were spoken of in extravagant terms, and paid absolute fortunes. Francesco of Milano (who was lutenist to no fewer than five Popes) was dubbed "*il divino*", an appellation otherwise reserved for the likes of Michaelangelo and Leonardo. Albert de Rippe, lutenist to

Francois I, was paid a salary surpassed only by that of the Minister for Defence. There exists a one-off manuscript of Denis Gaultier's lute pieces, bound and clasped in brass and soft green leather, uniquely illustrated by Le Seur & Brossard, at great expense, and entitled by its compiler *La Rhétorique des Dieux – The Language of the Gods*, for his private enjoyment. And Bach's great friend, the lutenist Sylvius Leopold Weiss, was, for over a decade before his death, the single highest-paid instrumentalist of any kind in all of Europe, *the* star of the all-star Dresden *Hofkapelle*, a band which had counted Veracini, W.F. Bach, Pisendel and Quantz in its ranks. The last documented court lutenist, C.G. Scheidler, is thought to have died in Vienna around 1815, shortly after composing variations on the *Champagne Aria* from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. With his passing, an unbroken tradition of lute-playing and lute-making which had spanned the best part of a thousand years was laid to rest. ☉

## Support Salut! with a tax deductible donation

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