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Jordi Savall captivates again at Perth Festival



By Sandra Bowdler, 20 February 2018

Jordi Savall's second concert in this year's Perth Festival could not, at first blush, be more different than the first, on the previous night. The latter featured a mix of song, dance and playing on multiple familiar and exotic instruments. This concert featured only Savall, on treble and bass viol (*seriatim*) and Andrew Lawrence-King playing a Spanish baroque harp, and took place in a much smaller (but elegant) venue. It did however have much in common with the first in terms of musical scholarship and the themes developed, notably exploring pre-Baroque European music and its relationship with that of the New World. It differed in including European music from not just Spain, but also Britain (Scottish composer Tobias Hume, Dowland) and France (Marais). It can also be noted that, despite the reduced forces and limited modes, this concert also showed a great a richness of variety, in musical selections, textures and moods, just in a completely different way.



Jordi Savall

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As on the previous night, the concert began with music by Diego Ortiz, again featuring folías, passamezzos and romanescas by bass viol and harp, starting gently with increasing tempi and complexity before a flourishing end. The last movement (passamezzo modern) seemed to include a snatch of *Greensleeves*, a tune known from the 16th century and associated with a passamezzo ground.

This was followed by excerpts from Hume's *Musical Humours*, distinguished on this occasion by Savall "playing with wood", applying the wooden part of the bow to the strings of the viol, and also switching to a pizzicato attack. A series of short movements linked the opening *A Souldier's March to A Souldier's Resolution*, concluding brightly with a very light tapping on the instrument. The harp sat this one out, and Lawrence-King returned for his solo turn, in which Dowland was represented by *Lacrimae Pavan*, a very delicate moment, followed by a series of galliards concluding with the Earle of Essex Galliard.

Viol – treble in this case – and harp reunited for Spanish Baroque music by Cabanilles and Pedro de San Lorenzo bracketing another version of *Greensleeves*, a rather different tune than that with which we are mostly familiar. Returning to the bass viol, Marin Marais, that most celebrated of viol players and composers, contributed a set of dances, beginning with a prelude, two menuets, two muzettes and a sautillante (like a saltarella). "Muzette" would seem to be a version of musette, indicating music like that of a bagpipe, and indeed these items featured a buzzy drone-like effect in the bass. In turn again came works for the harp, one by French early 17th-century composer d'Anglebert, the other by his Italian contemporary Corbetta. The latter was a *Fantasia de Chaconne* (or ciaconna), another dance form of considerable significance in Baroque and later music. Lawrence-King led into this with a recitation from the "Island of Chacona", a set of verses compiled in 17th-century Spain, referring to a magical island somewhere in the New World, similar to the Land of Cockayne, or the 20th-century trope of the Big Rock Candy Mountain. Here all manner of food and drink are available in abundance, and each man is equipped with six serving girls, with new ones every week. Obviously this is not an undiscovered feminist masterpiece. It seems unclear whether the idea of the heavenly island led to the naming of a carefree dance form or vice versa; in any case, Lawrence-King's intricate fingerwork created such a feeling.

Selections from "Ryan's Mammoth Collection" (Boston 1883), a compendium of traditional reels and jigs from the British Isles, featured the bass viol this time with an explicit bagpipe tuning. The way Savall was able to produce an impression of a continuous drone was remarkable. Some furious bowing produced a speedy lead-up to its conclusion. Another New World collection of rather more antiquity, the Codex Trujillo (or Martinez) from Lima in the later 18th century (which includes a picture of a harp which is the spit of that used by Lawrence-King) brought us right back to Latin America, with two tonadas and variations on the song Cachua serrenita – fast moving, highly rhythmic and totally engaging. An enthusiastic reception from the full house (there were even punters in the gallery, a rare occurrence) produced an encore, variations and improvisations on a French theme. Another captivating show from Savall and Lawrence-King.

Reviewed at Perth Government House Ballroom, Perth WA on 18 February 2018



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PROGRAMME

Works by Hume

Works by Dowland

Works by Marais

Works by Ortiz

Works by Cabanilles

Works by de San Lorenzo

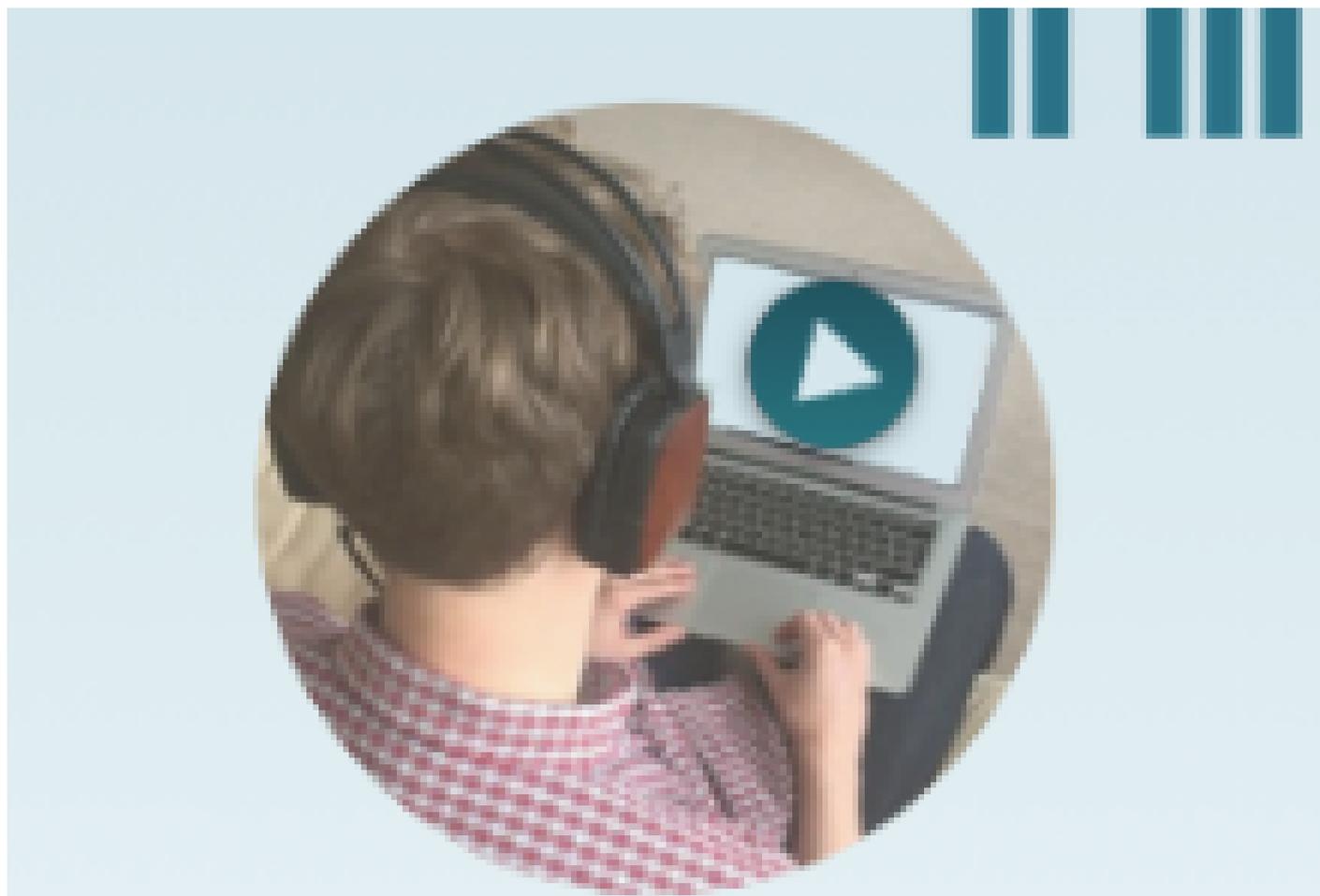
Works by D'Anglebert

Works by Corbetta

PERFORMERS

Jordi Savall, *Viola da Gamba*

Andrew Lawrence-King, *Harp*



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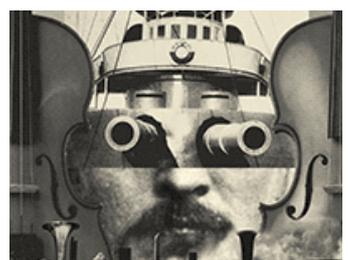
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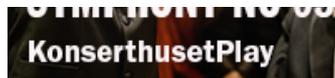
Sandra Bowdler was born and educated in Sydney, and has pursued a career as an archaeologist since graduating from the University of Sydney in 1970. She is now Emeritus Professor of Archaeology and a Senior Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Western Australia in the School of Social Sciences and the School of Music. Since attending a production of Handel's opera Alcina at the Sydney Opera House in 1982, she has become a devotee of the works of GF Handel, and Baroque music generally. In 1996 she began writing opera reviews for online outlets, graduating to more professional sources by 2000. In 2007, she inaugurated Festival Baroque Australia in Perth, Western Australia, Australia's first Baroque music festival. Under that banner, she curated two festivals and several concerts in Perth.

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