



Saturday 27th October 2007

Handel & Purcell - Arias, Ode & Anthems

Buckfast Abbey

with

James Bowman (countertenor)

The Divertimento String Ensemble

Statements received from seasoned audience, choir and ensemble members:

- '...I can't tell you what a privilege it is to be involved in a concert of this quality. Bowman has a magic about him that's truly inspirational.
- '...working with James is really a great musical experience and I fell VERY privileged to have been part of it'.
- '...*Counterpoint* shone in the *Coronation anthems*...never too overblown and always clear and exciting in delivery.
- '...I am still on cloud 9...James moved me to tears emotionally on not one, but two separate occasions'.
- '...Purcell's *Hear my prayer* was so intense and measured, contrasting in an excellent way...the climax towards the end of the work was outstanding.'
- '...The quality of James Bowman's voice is stunning in its beauty and passion'.
- '...I love James's delivery...his control and the way in which he holds sway with his audience is mesmeric'.
- '...one of his great skills is being able to take a fairly ordinary aria like Handel's *Where 'ere you walk* and turn it into a quite breathtaking work of art. I heard the piece in a completely different light...I can't thank you enough for being able to bring James to sing to us each year.'
- '...will we hear his like again? He is a consummate performer and held us all spell-bound whenever he came forward to sing. *Pena tiranna* really was as good as the programme notes infered.'
- '...and the choir rose to the occasion with great style. Every word could be heard clearly and the passion of your delivery was not dimmed by the addition of your splendid band.'
- '...this must be the fourth or fifth time that I've heard Purcell's *Come ye sons of Art*, away - including a *King's Consort* version several years ago - but I can in all honesty say that *Counterpoint's* rendition on Saturday was the best I have heard'.
- '...I heard all four *Coronation anthems* when *Counterpoint* performed them in Exeter Cathedral last year but the combination of the choir and the orchestra with *My heart is inditing* and *Let thy hand be strengthened* in Saturday's concert was electrifying. The power and majesty of these works was fully realised - although I must admit to yearning after more unaccompanied *Counterpoint*, which is my first love!

July, 2007

Counterpoint enchants the audience at Locmaria

Quimper, France

For 18 years *Counterpoint* has been crossing the channel to present a series of concerts in Brittany. On Thursday evening, as always, David Acres' group of singers enchanted the audience at Locmaria church in Quimper.

In 1990 it was the choir *Kanerien Pen Ar Bed* who invited *Counterpoint*. Today it is the *Jef le Penven* choir, through Serge Duigou and others, who welcome these semi-professional singers from Devon. A *Counterpoint* concert is always enchanting, and on Thursday the choir was once again astonishing, with a programme of rarely heard music.

First a semi-chorus of men's voices, like monks in a medieval abbey, gave us an intense *Nunc Dimittis*. Then a young countertenor with a superb celebration of the Virgin. And leaving behind the austerity of these first two pieces, *Counterpoint* took us to Spain with a tambourine rhythm that would probably have been known to the pilgrims of Montserrat. The whole of this first part of the concert, each motet, each religious work, from the *Ave Regina* of Guillaume Dufay, to the superb and sensitive *Lugebat David Absalon* of Nicolas Gombert, or the splendid *Timor et Tremor* of the great Lassus, allowed the choir to show the variety of its singing. Mens voices, womens voices, the whole choir together delighted us with the colours of this ancient music and its beautiful polyphonies.

The second half of the concert was devoted to the Renaissance and more recent works with wonderful interpretations of motets by Byrd and Gibbons. Then three superb extracts from Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and the marvellous *Vox Dicentis* by Naylor. And what else can we say about *O Magnum Mysterium* by Morten Lauridsen - its beauty gave the audience the opportunity for meditation, emotion and happiness. Finally, as the icing on the cake, the choir, with great



élan, gave us some unforgettable moments such as the magnificent extract from Elgar's *Enigma Variations* and Eric Whittaker's *Sleep*.

Eliane Faucon-Dumont, *Le Telegramme*, 30th July 2007



Saturday 23rd June, 2007

A Musical Journey

Choral Music, c.1050-2000

Buckfast Abbey

I found myself in Buckfast Abbey by default on Saturday 23rd June. Friends had told me about Counterpoint and knowing about my love of renaissance music, they told me that I would love the music your choir perform. How right they were. My wife and I were transported from the opening moments with the men chanting near the High Altar, to the closing climactic notes of Whitaker's *Sleep*. The feelings we experienced were heightened by the beauty and depth of the choir's powerful performance. Outstanding!



Saturday 3rd March 2007

The Life and Death of King Charles I

Sacred & Secular Music
from 1600 to 1649

Buckfast Abbey

with

Adrian Carpenter (organ)

- Saturday's performance was exquisite! Not least the programme - as always, so intelligent and informative, I defy anyone to say they hadn't learnt anything from it - a taster of things to come ... interspersed with such well executed organ pieces, It was the SINGING! A texture of sound so rich and smooth, there were times I felt I could reach out and touch it. (Michael Oliver)
- My wife Jean and I have been coming to listen to Counterpoint for the past fifteen years. Your concerts are very important to us. We have both sung in choral societies and choirs in the past and what we like most about your choir is the depth of emotion the voices bring to the music. The Ramsey, Byrd and Padilla motets were highlights for us - we can never get enough of '*Circumdederunt!*' (Trevor and Jean Wilson)
- Is this the best Counterpoint concert ever? Our friends and the people who were sitting around us all seemed to think so! Every concert that the choir puts on is a revelation. We love the choice of music but the passion evoked by the singing of the choir is still the reason why we feel that your Buckfast concerts are the 'Best in the West'! (John Pengelly)



Saturday 28th October 2006

Requiem for the Fallen

Buckfast Abbey

with

Andrew Millington (organ)

Canon Ken Parry (poetry readings)

- ... we enjoyed everything about Saturday's concert, from the readings to the trumpet and organ playing and to, of course, the usual splendid choral singing.

... the singers were really on top form and it's difficult to remember when, if ever, they have sung better.

Thank you all for a most memorable and moving evening. (Angela and Alan)

- Congratulations on the wonderful evening of music you produced at Buckfast on Saturday evening. Barbara and I were quite overwhelmed and grateful to be there. Thank you for asking me to take part. (Canon Ken Parry)
- ... I can only say thank you, thank you, thank you, for the amazing concert last evening. I know I say it every time but you just get better and better.
The selection of music was at times haunting, and on reflection, soul searching.
We really liked the inclusion of the poetry readings, - the gentleman's voice was just right.
And then of course there was the trumpet, well what else can I say?
More, more, more, please. (Mary and Pat)
- ... Saturday night was ultimate! ... It was 'tingle city'. I heard so many comments of praise among the audience inside and outside the Abbey. As I was leaving, there was a girl





Saturday 1st July 2006

Masters of Baroque Music

Buckfast Abbey

with

James Bowman (countertenor)

The Divertimento String Quintet

HEAVENLY MUSIC!

A truly outstanding concert was given at Buckfast Abbey on Saturday, 1st July - when Counterpoint's skilful and deeply-musical director, David Acres, presented their latest contribution to a large and extremely appreciative audience. These hugely-talented singers, together with the astonishingly beautiful voice of James Bowman and brilliantly accompanied by the Divertimento String Quintet, enraptured those fortunate enough to have acquired tickets to hear them in the wonderful acoustics and surroundings of Buckfast Abbey, on a perfect summer's evening. Entitled *Masters of the Baroque*, the music included works by Handel, Vivaldi, Bach and Ugolini.

The sheer perfection of musicianship was nothing short of miraculous - and afterwards was variously described as "out of this world", "transporting" and "magical"! It was definitely their 'best ever' concert [we say that every time!] and their devotees are already looking forward to the next one, which will be on Saturday, 28 th October at Buckfast Abbey and is entitled *Requiem for the Fallen*. (Annette van Oppen)



Thursday 8th June, 2006

The Coronation of King George II, 1727

Exeter Cathedral

- ... congratulate you on a fine performance of the 'Coronation of King George' ... It was truly magnificent in so many ways. Of course the cathedral was so much the right building for it, allowing us to soak in all that sound!

... The trumpets were very fine indeed and the drums added considerably to the feeling of anticipation ... quite magical even before the singing started!

The Coronation anthems always stir one immensely but your interpretations did this without the anthems being 'over sung', and in such a steady, measured way that allowed the excitement to build gradually!

I do congratulate you on the high standard of the singing, just wonderful voices, and at one stage the counter tenors came through particularly magically. (Letter from Paul, Devon)

- I think you hit the jackpot on Thursday evening with the wonderful rendition and performance of 'The Coronation of George II 1727'. You must have been so proud of the singers, the organ music, the drums, trumpets and the silky narration.

It was a wonderful evening. All the comments I overheard afterwards, were so positive and admiring. The quality of your production and use of the nooks and crannies in the Cathedral to create some memorable sound effects, resulted in a concert to be remembered. (Letter from Graham Deasy, Chair, Exeter Cathedral Parents Association (Matthew Locke Society))

- Many thanks for joyously fulfilling all your avowed aims in Counterpoint's music-making; last night's concert was a great delight, with a thrilling use of the Cathedral's spaces - particularly memorable were those first fanfares from the West end and the lovely singing of the Tallis Litany from the East end and processionally back to the Crossing. The final sound of drums beating towards the Chapter House wonderfully echoed this. (Letter from Richard, Exeter)



Saturday 17th December 2005

Christmas Carol Service

Buckfast Abbey

An hour of beauty is too short! Thank you for heaven on earth! (Michael Cullen)



22nd October 2005

The Coronation of King George II, 1727

Buckfast Abbey

Like everybody else in the capacity audience at the Abbey on Saturday evening, we were completely entranced with the sheer quality of Counterpoint.

Such words as 'gusto' and 'wellie' sprang to mind, but clearly these terms should not be applied to such eminently professional musicians!

It was apparent however that they were all enjoying themselves immensely and your 'Zadok' must have been the best-ever rendition.

We were left wondering how much better Counterpoint would have been when compared to the actual event all those years ago. Thank you all so much from my crowd. (Di and Bill)



July 2005

Tour of Brittany, France

- L'église Notre Dame des Carmes, Pont l'Abbé

This choir, specialising in sacred music, has mastery of an amazing repertoire stretching from the 15th Century to the present day. The strength of the voices is matched only by their sensitivity and subtlety. All types of voice were present, fine light sopranos, marvellous male countertenors, superb tenors and the deepest basses. (*Ouest France* - August 2005)

- L'église Saint-Budoc, Beuzec-Cap-Sizun

The vaulted roof of the Saint-Budoc church resounded on Saturday with the 'voices of angels from paradise'. Led with an iron hand in a velvet glove by their director David Acres, Counterpoint gave great pleasure to the Breton public by presenting works not often performed in France. This English choir, who perform regularly in Brittany, demonstrated their power and technique through a choir of equal numbers of men and women. Unusual for this side of the channel there are six countertenors who, with the whole choir, brought great joy to the audience in their interpretation of composers of polyphonic sacred music from the 15th century. (*Ouest France* - August 2005)

- Quimper Cathedral 'The Splendours of Polyphony'

On their last visit in October 2003 the Counterpoint Ensemble left us wanting more. On Friday this English choir sang in Quimper Cathedral and it was a true delight. With a gentle but firm gesture, David Acres invited his singers to strike up 'Loquebantur variis' by Thomas Tallis. The choir gave the joyful illusion of chiming bells. The choir then proceeded to enchant its public, and we were able to fully appreciate the beauty of all the voices. Light sopranos, rich countertenors, inspired tenors and basses adding depth and colour here and there, we truly bathed in happiness. From the moving Drop, drop slow tears by the inspired Orlando Gibbons, through to the marvellous light and shade in Circumdederunt me dolores by the Mexican Padilla, and on to the austere and blazing light of Rachmaninov's Ave Maria, Counterpoint showed us the many splendours of polyphony. (*Le Telegramme*, Brittany - August 2005)



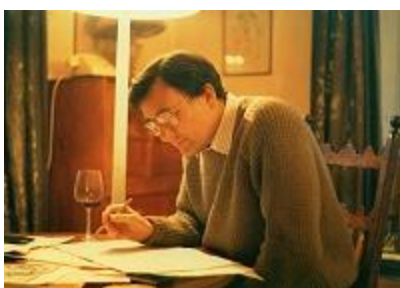
28th May 2005

Armada Concert

Buckfast Abbey

A pair of hoary old choristers arrived at Buckfast Abbey on Saturday evening, not knowing what to expect [it was their first time at a Counterpoint concert] but being prepared to make constructive criticism or even give advice if required! To say that we were pleasantly surprised is a huge understatement because the evening was simply beyond our highest expectations.

What an array of beautiful voices with each one so obviously enjoying giving great pleasure to the 'full house', with such confident precision and clear diction. (Bill Ridgeway)



5th March 2005

Thank you so much for an absolutely wonderful concert on Saturday. It was the most sublime sound, superb blend, control and expression. I was transfixed by the Mawby, the Tavener *Bridal Chamber* and by much of the Sanders pieces. Do also tell Lucy how much I adored the *In Paradisum*.

And it was the most stunning and moving rendering of the Purcell that I have ever heard or taken part in...



John Sanders (1933–2003) – In Memoriam

Buckfast Abbey

Very uplifting. Thank you, Heather Kershaw

More information about John Sanders is available from [The Sanders Society](#)



22nd September 2004

Counterpoint with James Bowman

Exeter Cathedral

- ...I write to thank and congratulate you for your inspiration in sponsoring such a spell binding concert in the Cathedral yesterday evening with Counterpoint and James Bowman. It was a memorable performance throughout and one which, despite the hour, kept the audience spellbound and engaged from the first to the last note. (Letter to Roger Wilkinson (concert sponsor) from Adrian Miller, Solicitor, Foot Anstey Sargent, Exeter)
- ...This was superb! It was magnificent. The audience was entranced. It left us speechless... except to say, please keep four tickets for the [forthcoming] Buckfast concert...as I'm sure it will be a sell-out. (Letter from Annette van Oppen, Topsham, Exeter)
- ...many, many congratulations on a superb concert last night. I enjoyed all the pieces but in particular the Padilla motets - and the Tourdion! The Tallis [*Spem in Alium*] made a stunning finale. It was a wonderful way to start the [Exeter Cathedral] appeal. (Letter from Andrew Millington, Director of Music, Exeter Cathedral)
- ...The performance was superb and clearly must have involved tremendous planning and practice. I was overwhelmed by the sound produced by the enlarged choir. Judging from the comments of the people sitting around me, all singers to some degree it appeared, interestingly enough, I was not alone in having enjoyed a wonderful and profound concert. Well done to you and the choir - looking forward to more! (Letter from Marjorie Bailey, a long-time supporter of the choir)

From past appearances

2003 and before

- 'The church was full for Counterpoint's concert in the Romanesque Church at Locmaria. There was a particular emphasis on intimate works with intense variation, allowing the full expressiveness of the voices to be heard. The Perotin le Grand performed by a small male group had an austere and luminous beauty. The tenderness of 'O vos omnes' by Gesualdo was perfect for the ensemble singing of the whole choir. The soprano line in the classic 'Funeral Ikos' by Tavener is full of energy and contrasts. The highlight of the concert was the splendid 'Quae est ista' by Ugolini, a polyphonic firework display. We must mention the marvellous 'Lux aeterna' by Elgar in which the choir excelled. And then the icing on the cake: 'The Reproaches' by John Sanders, a prayer, performed with intense emotion, a superb end to the concert. As we've come to expect, Counterpoint exceeded all our expectations. If paradise exists, Counterpoint will be performing at the entrance... (*Le Telegramme* 27/10/03)
- This is just to say that Gary and I thought that the concert which Counterpoint gave last Saturday was superb - so many absolute gems, concluding with a magical performance of Hear my Prayer. We are very fortunate to have a choir of such quality in the South West. (Jane & Gary)
- Your concert in the Cathedral this May provided a truly wonderful evening and I have heard so many comments from those who felt it was one of the best concerts held in the Cathedral for many years. Congratulations, I am certain that if you decide to repeat the event next year it will again be a sell out!! (Sir Gordon Shattock)
- ...we merely had to sit back and let the glorious sounds emanating from the 30-strong singers (a critically acclaimed Chamber choir from Exeter - under its able conductor, David Acres) drift across to us. As for the tapestry of sound, it did indeed sound like heavenly voices, and I for one pray that when I finally make it through those pearly gates, one of those heavenly choirs will be the immensely enjoyable Counterpoint...and, as if by confirmation, the audience at the conclusion of the concert continued their applause until the very last member of the choir had left the auditorium. (David Flatau - *Estuary Magazine*, Devon 2000)
- British Choirs are considered to be the best in Europe. Who could contradict this after hearing Counterpoint last Monday at Saint-Vinoc as part of the *Festival des Chapelles du Cap-Sizun*. How could we not be moved by their voices which dissolve, then emerge, then exhale in a splendid redolence of sound that elevated the soul. David Acres has obviously been the force and guide behind what was truly a revelation for many in the audience. (*Ouest France*)
- Last Tuesday the Kervin Chapel resonated for two hours with some of the most intense religious music. The Counterpoint Choir from Devon (England) performed a concert which delighted and dazzled the approximately 200 people present. To find such enchanting music in such a magnificent venue is a rare event. David Acres demands a lot of personal investment from his singers, a high technical ability, a good knowledge of music, as well as the ability to express high emotion and work together. The result lives up to his expectations: a vocal group of great cohesion and wonderful sensitivity. (*Ouest France*)
- I do hope you were in Exeter Cathedral last night. You would be hard put to find a better performance of Haydn's great oratorio, *The Creation*. If there were faults, I never heard them. The performance by the Bournemouth Sinfonietta and that outstanding local choir Counterpoint, was warm-hearted and dramatically strong; atmospheric and lively; conducted by Tamas Vasary with enough tension to make the big choruses outstanding. Compulsive listening from start to finish. (*Express & Echo, Exeter*)
- A small chamber choir, Counterpoint is fortunate in both the individual quality of voices and the thoughtful direction of its conductor David Acres. The equality of the voices was especially beneficial to the close-knit textures of one of the evening's most notable performances in John Tavener's *Funeral Ikos*. This beautiful work found Counterpoint alive and resonant to the lines for the *Funeral of the Clergy*. The concert finished with the deeply moving *Requiem* by Herbert Howells. In this performance, Counterpoint revealed their true potential. They are a very fine group indeed. (*Western Morning News, Devon*)

- On Sunday evening, Counterpoint from England literally enchanted over 300 music lovers gathered in Quimper Cathedral. The concert was truly captivating as the singers and their director took us on a heavenly stroll through sacred music from the 13th to 20th Century. All the time the members of Counterpoint were approaching perfection. This is so rare that it deserves to be emphasised. In truth, a fine evening! By its consistent balance, by the flexibility of the singers and by the compelling authority of the conductor, Counterpoint gave us a magnificent musical lesson. (*Le Télégramme, France*)