

# Salut!

NEWS

May 2007

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

Congratulations to the winners of our special subscriber competition: Lesley Band (weekend for two at the beautiful Orient Point House) and Tom Whitton (set of 6 Salut! CDs).

Please note the change of venue for our Canberra performance of The English Concert due to storm damage in Llewellyn Hall. Our concert on Friday 1 June will now be held at University House, corner of Balmain Crescent and Liversidge Street, ANU. Subscription tickets and tickets already purchased for Llewellyn Hall are of course valid for this performance.



## Special concert at the Art Gallery of NSW:

Salut! has been invited to present its acclaimed "Samuel Pepys" program at the Art Gallery of NSW as part of the 2007 "Resonate" concert series. The concert will be preceded by a champagne reception and private viewing of the Arts of Islam exhibition.

We will be performing at the Art Gallery on Friday 29 June at 8pm.

A second performance may also be held on Sunday 1 July at 8pm (this is still to be confirmed).

For more information about this series please contact the Art Gallery of NSW: ph 9225 1700.



## Meet our musicians: Rachael Beesley— Baroque Violin

For our next concert "The English Concert", we are delighted to welcome back Rachael, especially with her hectic schedule.

*Where did you grow up and go to school?*

I had a wonderful time growing up in Balwyn in the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne. As with my mother, aunts and sister before me, I went to Fintona Girls' School in Balwyn for my 12 years of schooling. I began the violin at the age of 6, along with two other girls from my year. All three of us are now professional violinists living in Vienna, Australia and the Netherlands! So my school years were

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filled with music lessons, eisteddfods, music camps, youth orchestras, callisthenics, school plays, netball and athletics; all made possible by dedicated parents! The best part was in my final year of school, at the tender age of sweet sixteen, being the only girl enrolled in the local boys' school orchestra!

### *What made you take up the violin?*

I had heard it was the most difficult instruments to play but was very disappointed when someone told me later that the French Horn was more difficult, but it was too late!! Having a wonderful teacher in Florence Lee and yearly AMEB exams kept me inspired through my years of schooling. Once during school we were asked to consider our future career choice but it was so obvious to me that I was a musician, that I would write down shop-lifter or police officer just to humour the teachers!

### *Tell us about some of your work in Europe.*

Well, here is a typical sample from last year:

#### *08.05.06 Week 19*

Arrive safely back in Rotterdam after New Dutch Academy (NDA) tour to Australia. Bit of teaching at home and at the Con. Travel to Geneva for my sister Shauna's birthday.

#### *15.05.06 Week 20*

Visit friends in Basel. Return to Rotterdam, attend concerts in Delft and Den Haag. 11 hour teaching day.

#### *22.05.06 Week 21*

Tour to Bad Arolsen, Germany with NDA. Intense rehearsal week, great cheap food in beautiful restaurant overlooking Castle. Great concert. Travel to Brugge for Liszt, Grieg and Tchaikovsky program with Anima Eterna – great fun on period instruments.

#### *29.05.06 Week 22*

Chocolate binging time in Brugge (Chocolate Ginger Buddhas are still my favourite). Concert in Eindhoven at the Philipszaal – one of the best concert halls in Europe. Day at home then travel to Regensburg, a lovely old German town, then early morning departure for Bergen, Norway.0

#### *05.06.06 Week 23*

Fabulous few days in Bergen, lovely visit with aunt and uncle. Very 'cool' city on the harbour. Light until 1am. End of week, successful meeting at the Con with the other violin teachers.



Examinations then begin NDA rehearsals for Bach concerto.

#### *12.06.06 Week 24*

Concerts in Tilburg University and Den Haag. Weather warming up! Teaching, teaching, teaching. Another meeting (in Dutch) to introduce concept of Flow into Con curriculum. Begin rehearsals for La Petite Bande, Mozart project in Leuven.

#### *19.06.06 Week 25*

La Petite Bande concert in Istanbul – stunning old venue. Fabulous to see the markets, mosques and people milling about in Istanbul – best view from top of hotel! Travel to Normandy next day.

#### *26.06.06 Week 26*

Wow, 3 free days!! Time to update my iPod with the next season of repertoire. Then trip to Echternach in Luxembourg for last Mozart concert. Gorgeous gourmet breakfast sitting outside with stunning view over valley.

#### *03.07.06 Week 27*

Travel to Paris – have never been so hot in my life...the metro is a nightmare!

Great rehearsals with Les Arts Florissants, as have spiffing young British conductor taking rehearsals. Beginning of heat wave and no air-conditioning in rehearsal spaces. Ahh! Travel to Athens...wonderful! Gum trees, blue skies, dry air...just like Canberra really! Rehearsals over, then time for a case of the Turkey tummy.

#### *10.07.06 Week 28*

2 free days in Athens...wow, saw Acropolis, Ancient Roman towns, Temple of Zeus and many museums and art galleries – all at a leisurely pace, by myself!

Fab hotel to dive back into for air-conditioned comfort...at just 470 Euros a night!

2 successful performances, well appreciated by the Greeks. Travelled onto Oxford, found key to B&B under the front step, and outside my room a lovely gum tree! Attended master class in Oxford with the 85 year old Kato Havas, amazing! Wondered around bookshops and saw all the graduates milling around in their gowns in 30°C heat!

#### *17.07.06 Week 29*

Hellish bus trip to Cambridge (yes, I was warned!) but lovely swim in the Cam that evening to cool off, together with ducks, nudes, swans and punts!

Another hot travel back to Rotterdam, 2 days to do washing and cleaning and teaching. Travel to Leuven for Don Giovanni rehearsals. Stinking hot now and rehearsing for 8 hours a day in airless room at 32°C and about 90% humidity!

#### *24.07.06 Week 30*

More rehearsals...6 days of them actually, then a painful 8 hour bus trip to Beaune. Thought of practicing not fun but get some done anyway! Then a whole free day...go swimming in fab outside pool...quasi Balwyn pool, delicious!

#### *31.07.06 Week 31*

9 hour drive home then tax time...huh!! 1st August and summer is over! I've been asked to co-write a book on Flow for Musicians. Last concert of Don Giovanni in Brugge, so

# Why the bass violin? PART 1

by Tim Blomfield

As the proud owner of the only bass violin in Australia, I came to play the bass violin via a rather circuitous route. It was about 1981 when the concept of the “baroque” cello began to seep into my consciousness. Recordings of baroque music played on ‘authentic/period’ instruments had been trickling through the Australian airwaves for several years prior to that. Being an avid radio listener, my imagination was pricked by all this new period instrument fuss and naturally I began to wonder, “What’s the difference?” and, “Why are they doing this?” As my instrument was the cello, I began to wonder what the difference was between a “normal cello” and an “instrument of the period”.

I began delving into 17th & 18th century paintings. I didn’t have to go far – being still in the 33 rpm LP record era, records often had wonderful, large prints of masterworks on their covers. Take, for example, a recording of Anner Bijlsma playing works by the most renowned composers of 18th cello sonatas – Vivaldi, Geminiani and Boccherini. On its cover was my first inspirational print by Dutch artist Pieter Claesz, *Still Life with Musical Instruments* (Haarlem ca.1650 – see next page). Was the bass stringed instrument that looms large in that painting in fact a “baroque” cello? Various experts advised me that it was. But why did it have five strings, a bridge with its feet spread much further apart than I had ever seen, and the relative depth of the ribs (sides) much deeper than on what Anner Bijlsma himself appeared to be playing in a photo on the reverse side of the cover?

To make matters even more confounding, the recently formed *English Concert* with Trevor Pinnock came to our shores for a tour presented by Musica Viva. Were any of the cellists in that ensemble playing on instruments that looked like the one that Pieter Claesz had represented in his still life? No! In another tour, Musica Viva presented *Quadro Hotteterre*. Was Wouter Möller, the cellist in that ensemble (and former student of Anner Bijlsma) playing on a Pieter Claesz look-alike? No!

By the Bach Tercentenary in 1985, the period instrument movement was in full swing in Europe. Performances by

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*Rachael Beesley continued*

back to the choccy shop! Attempt a run/walk along river... nearly keel over!

*07.08.06 Week 32*

Finally booked holiday this morning! Will stay in Holland but live it up at Hotel New York for a night then go to Limburg for two nights in a castle complete with sauna! Then for some easy living on of the islands off the North coast of Holland called Scheirmonnikoog. Try and say that one three times fast!

*What do you like about coming back to Australia?*

Seeing my Mum, my cat, the sky, the sea, my friends, my colleagues, my home. ☺



period instrument ensembles and orchestras were becoming increasingly “authentic”, as well as quite frequent. In that year, Musica Viva obliged again, bringing to Australian concert venues the recently established *Orchestra of the 18th Century* with Frans Brüggen, as well as Anner Bijlsma himself performing the Bach cello suites. However, none of the cellists in these concerts walked onto the stage with cellos of the ilk that I had peered at in dozens more paintings from the 17th & 18th century (and in 99% of them being played with an underhand bowgrip).

In March 1983, I had hungrily taken delivery of the baroque cello I had commissioned John Hall (in Newtown) to build me. With this instrument it seemed like John had taken far more notice of such paintings than any I had so far seen in live performances. He had given my cello the following disposition: a shorter, fatter neck; a short, flatter fingerboard; and a bridge with low curvature – strings and feet spread wide. The only appreciable differences I could observe in all these other baroque cellos was that the spikes had been removed (but not the housing and mechanism for them), the players used bows with a narrower ribbon of horsehair and swanbill tips but they held them with overhand grip, further away from the heel.

In due course, I discovered why all these baroque cellos were as they were. In the 17th century, cellos were of the

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dimensions specified in Pieter Claesz' painting. As the cello gradually emerged out of its cocoon and its role as purely the bass instrument of the violin family, and assumed some of the qualities of the soloistic violin in the 1710s & 20s, it was necessary to reduce its physical dimensions quite significantly so that players could "get around" on it more easily. This meant that the fifth string could also be dispensed with as it was now possible to work with the left hand in the upper registers of the top string.

This led me to the realisation that etymologically, the word cello is just an Italian diminutive ending for violoncello. In the 17th century, there were no violoncellos, only violones. Or in English – Big or Bass Violins! The violoncello, in fact, was a hybrid instrument, developed for the player's convenience and the composer's whim. However, because of the hybrid sound qualities that this new 18th century instrument possessed, namely less fundament in the bass end of its sound spectrum, and what some commentators observed to be its ability to move both player and listener alike with its more human, vocal qualities, the violoncello soon did the violone out of a job. The violoncello was capable of still supplying a fair bassline and support to an instrumental ensemble, whilst also being able to readily assume either an emotive or soloistic position. In terms of "sound" fashion, the violoncello was the latest, sexiest thing in the violin family, and even had "kids" of its own – like the violoncello piccolo and viola pomposa.

With that discovery made, I was ready to forgive all those excellent baroque cellists who had already done such a great job in inspiring me to be sure that my greatest desire was to follow a similar path as they – to become a baroque cellist. Playing on either their 18th century "cut-downs" of 17th century violones, or 18th century hybrids (violoncellos) themselves, these great players were all producing fabulous performances of the repertoire that was purposely made for and had arisen as a result of the violone being "cello-ed". Now



Still Life with Musical Instruments, Pieter Claesz, ca. 1650

that was something that the artist Pieter Claesz had never known or heard about.

So, what then of the (Pieter Claesz style) violone or bass violin? How did it sound? What music did it perform and what was its musical function? I had to find out!

I discovered that Henry Purcell, and all the court musicians of Charles II and of Louis XIV, never heard a violoncello play. Subsequently, I also became aware that in 17th century Germany, unless musicians had travelled to Italy, they would have only been familiar with the "Baß Geige". And in Italy, the general rule for makers such as Antonio Stradivari and Andrea Amati was to manufacture violones, not violoncellos – so that anyone in possession of one of their highly prized instruments today is only in possession of its 18th century, refashioned, cut-down version. In the 18th century – in his famous Flute Treatise – JJ Quantz writes about violoncellists performing on two sizes of instruments: a small one (violoncello) for solos or chamber music and a large one (violone) for use in orchestras.

The gauntlet had been laid down; to play bass parts in an historically informed way, and to more fully experience the sound realms of 17th & 18th centuries, I had to lay hold of a violone (or bass violin). ☺

(Part 2 in our next edition of Salut! News!)

## Support Salut! with a tax deductible donation

With the end of the financial year approaching, making a donation to help support Salut! is also tax deductible. Your support allows Australian musicians to pursue their passion for performing baroque music. Donations can be made either by cheque or credit card.

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