

MUSIC IN THE UNIVERSITY: CONCERT SERIES 2017-2018

ABERDEEN EARLY MUSIC COLLECTIVE

FRAUKE JÜRGENSEN: Soprano

AMANDA BABINGTON: Musette and Baroque Violin

CLAIRE BABINGTON: Baroque Cello

PROFESSOR DAVID SMITH: Harpsichord

KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL

Thursday 28th September, 2017

I had thought that by now I was too old to discover anything new about music, especially in the Baroque Era but I was wrong. I knew the word *musette* from early piano lessons, when pieces were often entitled *Gavotte and Musette*. I knew that the word had something to do with some sort of bagpipes and the piano pieces called *Musette* usually had a kind of bagpipe-like drone in the left hand against a rather folksy tune in the right hand. This Thursday however, the Aberdeen Early Music Collective at the University introduced me to an extraordinary instrument which I had never heard until now, the *Baroque Musette or Musette de cour* played on Thursday by Amanda Babington. The Early Music Collective can have any number of performers, often including a large ensemble in the past, but today's line-up consisted of just four performers, soprano Frauke Jürgensen, along with Amanda Babington on musette and violin, Claire Babington on cello and David Smith on harpsichord.

The concert was entitled *La Naissance de la Musette*, which was also the title of the opening work by Michel Corrette (1707-1795), best known to me as an organist. The text of this work is associated with *Les Fêtes Galantes*, an idea that runs through much French poetry, music and paintings across the ages. The poem tells of how the God Apollo invents what he calls 'the gentle Musette' in order to sing out the ardour of love. The text was sung in marvellous dramatic style by Frauke Jürgensen. She captured much of the rapture, passion and excitement of the words in her powerful and expressive singing. I was both astonished and delighted by her smooth trills which enlivened the performance.

A continuo part gave firmness to the performance played by Claire Babington and David Smith. Amanda Babington on this occasion played the genuine musette. A little bit of research on the net suggested that the sound of the musette was something like an oboe, and the chalumeau or chanter was not entirely unlike that but for me, it was really an entirely new sound. I was familiar with the Breton Binioù, having lived for a year in Rennes. The Breton pipe bands also included players of the Breton chanter or Bombarde, which is related to the shawm. Thursday's musette played by Amanda sounded just a bit like that but really, the musette has a sound all of its own, and of course the bombarde does not have a drone. I was surprised to learn that the musette was regarded as an instrument of the French aristocracy and it was a favourite of Louis Quatorze, where it was referred to as the *musette de cour*. For me, the sound had a somewhat rustic quality suggesting wild woodland landscapes and this of course fitted in perfectly with the text of Corrette's *La Naissance de la Musette*. I was quite carried away by the sound.

As we were told, not all music including the idea of musette uses the instrument itself, and the second piece in the programme, *Sonate première pour violon* by Jean-Féry Rebel (1666-1747) was one such piece where other instruments, especially violin and cello, suggest sounds reminiscent of the musette. This was the second piece by Rebel which I heard today, because the Babington sisters and Roger Williams played the first movement of Rebel's *Sonate troisième in A minor* at today's Lunchbreak Concert in the Citadel. I was impressed by both of Rebel's pieces; rich in instrumental colour, they showed considerable imagination. The third movement marked *Grave*, for instance, had

fine imitative counterpoint between cello and violin. The final movement was entitled Musette and as the composer demanded, it was indeed both gracious and jolly.

Sonate seconde pour violoncelle by Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (1689-1755) was performed splendidly by Claire Babington and David Smith. Throughout the four movements Claire gave the music a special rhythmic lift and lilt. The Allemanda fully embraced the spirit of the dance. The third movement marked Largo was where the idea of the musette came in, and Claire managed to suggest both the tune and the drone with her marvellous bowing techniques. In the finale marked Giga you could imagine the jumps and lifts that the dance itself requires.

The musette itself played by Amanda was back in the Sonate première pour musette by Jean Baptiste Senaillé (1687-1730). It too had an Allemande, in which the melody line was supported attractively by the drone. The third movement marked Gracieusement had a marvellous fluency and the concluding Gigue was stirring and wonderfully lively.

The final work was Pan and Syrinx by Michel Pignolet de Montéclair (1667-1737). It had a text sung by Frauke that describes how the God Pan creates music from reeds into which the nymph Syrinx has been transformed. The opening verses were for voice, cello and harpsichord and it was not until later that the violin joins in with a suggestion of panpipes. Once again Frauke's performance was powerfully dramatic. This was a marvellous conclusion to a concert which combined top class entertainment with exploration and discovery.