

Spiritato and The Marian Consort – Report on *Inspiring Bach*; Stour Music and Brighton Early Music Festival 2022

Thanks to the generous support of Angel Early Music, Spiritato gave two performances of our latest programme; *Inspiring Bach*, at leading Early Music festivals Stour Music (Kent) on 19th June 2022 and Brighton Early Music Festival (Sussex) on 22nd October 2022. These performances, part of a five-concert UK tour, follow on from an initial research and development period in October 2021.

The project focuses on composers admired, and music collected, by Johann Sebastian Bach, predominantly cantatas from the middle of the 17th Century. We contrasted these large baroque works with two intimate pieces – Johann Christoph Bach's *Ach daß ich Wassers genug hätte* for solo voice and



small ensemble, and Dietrich Buxtehude's sonata for violin and viola da gamba. The unusual repertoire in the programme was off-set by a 'gateway' work to appeal to wider audiences; *Christ Lag in Todesbanden* (BWV4) by JS Bach. A work itself, heavily influenced by Pachelbel's earlier setting of the text, which also featured in the programme.

A continuation of our first collaboration with vocal group The Marian Consort, we began rehearsals for the project on 17th and 18th June 2022. Our group specializes in bringing back forgotten music and this

project was no exception. For this large-scale programme, we featured an ensemble of 17 instrumentalists and 12 vocalists, all specialist Early Musicians, in rarely heard works by Pachelbel, Knüpfer and JC Bach.

A unique facet of *Inspiring Bach* is the pioneering integration of ventless natural trumpets, period instruments uncompromised by finger holes or valves and ignored by UK 'period' ensembles. Despite their veracity, using these instruments turns many assumed and established conventions of performance practice on their head. Ensembles in Europe are rapidly rediscovering how to perform with these trumpets, with astonishing results. UK ensembles are being left behind. We are proud to be contributing to the growing awareness of these instruments among UK audiences and colleagues.

At each concert we were met with tremendous enthusiasm for the methods we employed, both from audiences and the festival directors alike. The trumpets, presented to the audience as enabling a truer flavour of the music to be revealed, balanced and complemented the rest of the ensemble and we feel really engaged the audience. We were also able to better inform audiences of the symbolism of the trumpet, as both a divine and warlike instrument, so well-known when these works were first performed but now since lost.



Working on this grand scale and at a national level, has helped us develop a stronger management structure within our ensemble, and challenged us positively to overcome last minute changes and think far enough ahead to avoid problems. We feel better placed to promote our work more ambitiously and have already had several approaches to perform the programme abroad.

Both of the above performances were very well attended. Stour was a sold out performance, whilst the Brighton event proved to have the highest audience figures for any of their 2022 festival performances (282 people). This is a clear sign that there is demand for our work and that our commitment to presenting high-quality programmes and challenging audience listening habits is paying off.

Working in collaboration with The Marian Consort, a well-established vocal ensemble, this project has been a fantastic opportunity to raise awareness of our own group, share working practices and foster support from new promoters, audiences and patrons. Working on such a large scale has brought considerable financial challenges, compounded by our current lack of long-term strategic funding. Even well-regarded festivals required us to subsidise our performance heavily. To continue to work at this highest level, we will now be taking steps to increase our patron base, maintaining our momentum and building on the success of *Inspiring Bach*.

It has been extremely satisfying to note the enthusiasm with which audiences have greeted the little-known works in our programme. We feel strongly that without championing projects such as this, we risk the loss of wider programming of repertoire, knowledge of what is out there and audience demand for anything that isn't *Messiah*... We are therefore particularly grateful to Angel Early Music and all our supporters for enabling this landmark project to take place.

Spiritato, November 2022

Programme

J Pachelbel – *Gott sei uns gnädig*
JC Bach – *Ach daß ich Wassers genug hätte*
J Pachelbel – *Christ Lag in Todesbanden*
S Knüpfer – *Die Turteltaube lässt sich hören*
INTERVAL
JS Bach – *Christ Lag in Todesbanden* BWV4
D Buxtehude – *Sonata a2*
JC Bach – *Es erhub sich ein Streit*