

Scintillating baroque..



.. Serious **fun**



Director from the Continuo
Andrew Lawrence-King
Early Harps & Research

www.TheHarpConsort.com

Early Opera &
Historical Productions



Action! Action! Action!

“Beware the Power of the Dark Side!” Beyond Control in Baroque Opera

Modern actors look for their Motivation; today’s popular culture looks for the X-Factor, or for an Idol to worship; performers seek Inspiration or wait to be ‘discovered’ as Artists; we scan the brain or we interrogate the fossil record to find music’s neurological pathways and evolutionary function. Academics, practitioners and audiences all seem to believe that music has mysterious power, but the nature of the Force eludes us: we have to search for it.



But in the 17th century - a long time ago in a cosmology far, far away – the scientific consensus convincingly linked cosmic force to sword-fighting skills, and also to the occult power of music. Performers were confident in their ability to access the Force. Their concern rather was that its power could easily overwhelm them. Orpheus’s singing could make stones weep, but he was overpowered by his own unbridled passions.

Operatic scenes of Heaven & Hell, characters with mythical super-powers and the left-right symbolism of the baroque stage not only dramatise the eternal battle between Good & Evil, but also go to the heart of the personal dilemma. In the pursuit of happiness, do we find Apollonic contentment or Bacchic ecstasy? It might be easy to receive divine inspiration, but which god now possesses you?

Such metaphysical concerns are worked out in the practical details of period music-making. Improvised variations and continuo-realisation reduce composers’ Control, whilst the absence of a conductor increases performers’ responsibilities. Performances emerge from the spontaneous application of acquired individual skills within an inter-communicating team, rather than as a rehearsed interpretation. Control is shared exchanged, even fought for. It’s a game of football, not a choreographed ballet.

All this challenges us to re-design methodologies for education and rehearsal so as to facilitate elite-level technical control within a free-flowing and interactive performance environment. Swordsmanship training offers a model for learning skill elements with high precision, combining them in compound manoeuvres within controlled exercises, and then applying them in the melee of free-play.

Re-locating, even removing, some performance Controls also refocuses the search for the mystery of Art. The X-factor does not reside within a performer – it is the magical thread between us, that unites an ensemble and communicates to (and within) the audience.

The presentation will include video clips and illustrative examples from recent Historical Action productions of *Dido & Aeneas*, *La Morte d'Orfeo*, *Combattimento* and Orgambide's *Oratorio del Nacimiento* (the first Spanish Oratorio) etc, swordsmanship demonstrations and performed text extracts with baroque gesture.

In honour of your keynote speaker, Iaria O Lionaird, I will make brief mention of parallels to 'the Force' in the Otherworld of Celtic mythology.

The presentation will not include live music.

The method of investigation leading to the findings summarised above a three-stage process: close reading of (mostly well-known) historical sources on performance practice; devising new training regimes and rehearsal methodologies to inculcate the skills underlying that practice; observation of the results for in rehearsals and performances, for performers and audiences.

Title/Subtitle:

"Beware the Power of the Dark Side!" Beyond Control in Baroque Opera

Presenter:

Prof Dr Andrew Lawrence-King
Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions

Updated Curriculum vitae attached separately

Contact: Andrew@TheHarpConsort.com

Technical support: Standard projector for PowerPoint including video & sound files.

I hope to source a couple of swords (either modern Epee or 17th-century rapiers) in or around Ghent – it's rather tricky to transport weapons internationally.