

Scintillating baroque..



.. Serious **fun**



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Early Opera &
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Action! Action! Action!

ACADEMIC ABSTRACT

Baroque gesture: what's the point?

Barnett (1987) pointed to Baroque Gesture as a crucial component of Historical Action. Scholarship continues to advance, singers are keen to learn, but an effective pedagogy has yet to be established. Audiences appreciate the hand-ballet, but perceive an emotional disconnect: is baroque gesture a 'museum piece' that fails to convey genuine passion?

Our research project seeks to bridge the gap between historical sources and modern audiences not by 'dumbing down', but with sophisticated rehearsal methodologies, honed in the real world of limited budget, time-constrained productions, and tested on-stage with live audiences from widely differing backgrounds all around the world.

This workshop offers an opportunity for hands-on experience of historical instruction books and cutting-edge teaching strategies; exploring Gesture from the inside, and observing the emotional effect from the outside. We rehearse by speaking (not singing); singers and non-singers are equally welcome!

Everyone is invited to participate actively.

With an excerpt from Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, participants will be led through a series of (deceptively simple) exercises, building up a Historically Informed Performance layer by layer. Each time we declaim the short text, our focus shifts to one particular element of period theory, of historic practice and/or of the performer's Intention towards a modern Audience. The workshop is 'rehearsal in miniature': each three-minute exercise might in a full production take up a three-hour session, or be brought back frequently during a three-week rehearsal period or a three-term academic year.

Iterative exercises quickly establish the foundations: guiding principles of Rhetoric, the Four Humours, *Pneuma* (the Spirit of Passion), *Enargeia* (the emotional power of detailed visual description), *Sprezzatura* ('cool'). Each theoretical concept is worked out in practice. We channel modern Feldenkrais Method, Baroque dance, period Swordsmanship, historical gestural Notation, renaissance Paintings, today's Ericksonian Hypnosis.

The keystone is the renaissance Theory of Visions, linking the audience's emotional response to their visual imagination: we rehearse creating such Visions by Good Delivery. Participants learn to 'own' and improvise their historical gestures.

Today's "drama in historic venues" and Early Music present a period look and baroque sounds, but with less consideration of how emotions played out in the historical context. In mainstream performances, modern theories of acting and Romantic ideals of music tend to focus on performers. But genuinely historical practice privileges the audience.

The aim of this workshop is to offer participants a glimpse of new rehearsal strategies and future pedagogy for the kind of Historical Action that can create emotional visions for a modern audience.