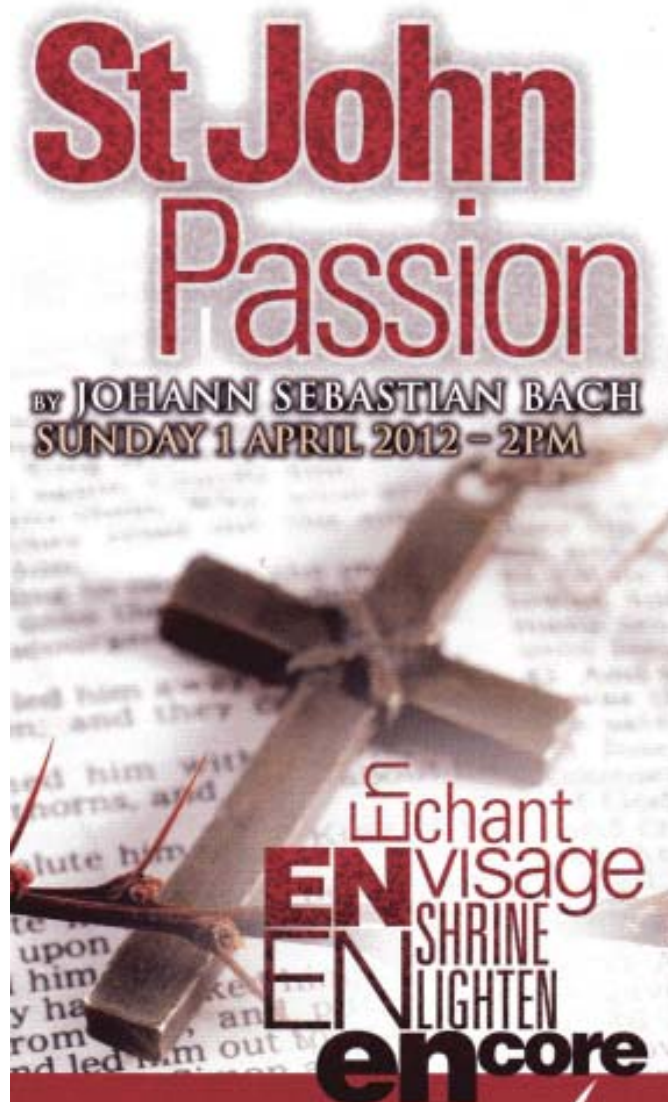


Richard Strauss's... alleged symphony, *Ein Heldenleben*... the climax of everything that is ugly, cacophonous, blatant and erratic. – Otto Floersheim, Musical Courier, New York, April 19, 1899.



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What would Johann Sebastian Bach make of our modern orchestra?

Certainly he would approve of the inclusion of a lute, and I imagine would greatly admire the skill of Tommie Andersson. We are privileged to have Tommie join us - he is generally regarded as the finest lute player in Australia, probably the world. If you want to know more about Tommie and his work, see below - and I've listed a few links at the end of this article.

The golden age of the lute was the first half of the 16th century, when more than 400 pieces were published in Europe. Lutes also flourished in the continuo sections of Baroque orchestras, but were replaced in the public's favour by the piano and the changes to orchestras. Bach wrote many compositions for the lute, quite a few of which now find favour with guitar players.

The orchestra of today has changed a lot since Bach composed his *Passions* in the early 18th century. It was only at this time that orchestras became more or less standardized - a string section of violins, violas, cellos and double basses, a couple of oboes and perhaps bassoons, perhaps two horns, a flute, two trumpets and tympani.

With the popularity of public concerts in large halls, instruments became louder and orchestras larger. Instruments evolved. Key systems on woodwinds were redesigned, brass instruments acquired valves, stringed instruments were made to project further. Larger and smaller variations of standard instruments were introduced - including the piccolo, cor anglais and bass clarinet, trombone and tuba.

Bach himself was responsible for many innovations in the evolution of musical instruments. He and Gottfried Silbermann were contemporaries who shared an interest in the voicing and location of organs. They also worked together on the escapement mechanism for the first Fortepianos.



This 1740 painting might depict one of Bach's concerts. The musicians in Jena rehearsed their performance before proceeding by torchlight to the town square for the concert.

Bartolomeo Cristofori invented the piano in 1709, but it wasn't until 1783 that John Broadwood patented pedals to replace hand stops.

In recent years musicians have attempted to revive traditional instruments to create historically informed performances. This has led to a re-discovery of the beauties of the lute repertoire with its intimacy, wide pitch range and subtlety of expression.

Hunter Valley residents now have the opportunity to attend a performance of one of the great works of Bach - 'a strikingly dramatic work... a gripping depiction of the emotionally charged events of Holy Week, it ultimately appeals with great directness to our human emotions and sympathies.' (BBC Guide to Great Choral Works.)

The combined Newcastle University Choir and Christ Church Camerata - more than 100 voices. A full symphony orchestra. Six talented soloists. The unique talent of Tommie Andersson. Conducted by Peter Brock. Free parking!

Johann Sebastian would enjoy it immensely! So will you.



Many of Bach's contemporaries thought his compositions were too long, too complicated and generally too hard to play.

A modern audience also has it a bit easier when it comes to attending a performance of his St John Passion. Bach composed this work to be performed in church, and the congregation was expected to give their attention to a sermon during the interval between the two parts.

As part of our audience, we'll invite you to enjoy a refreshment break, with an opportunity to enjoy the company of other concert-goers.

Tommie Andersson



Tommie Andersson has been based in Sydney since 1984, and is regarded as Australia's leading specialist in lutes and early guitars. He is highly sought after as a soloist and performs regularly with Opera Australia, Sydney Philharmonia, Pinchgut Opera, Sydney Chamber Choir, and the Australian Chamber Orchestra amongst others. He is a founding member and principal player of the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra and Australian Brandenburg Soloists.

He has performed in all the major Australian capital cities and festivals and gives regular concerts and live broadcasts for the ABC. In 2007 ABC Classic FM initiated the Lute Project, which involved website demonstrations of various types of lutes and commissions for four prolific Australian composers to write lute suites for Tommie Andersson. He gave these works their premiere performance as part of the Aurora Festival at the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre in Penrith in April 2008.

He has toured extensively in Sweden and has given performances and master classes in Scandinavia, Western Europe, Malaysia and Japan including tours of South America and Asia.

Here are a few links that will introduce you to the man and his instrument:

Tommie Andersson talks about the 7 Course Lute

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3IngOpNdSE>

Tommie Andersson Live in concert #1

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rX55yh6PyAM&feature=related>

I've included a few more interesting links in the covering email - including more about Bach and his compositions for the lute.



Peter Brock writes...

Someone asked me about the lute part in the *St John Passion*.

The first thing that has to be said was how surprising it would have been to the congregation to hear a lute being played in church - especially on Good Friday.

Imagine being at The Queen Mother's funeral in Westminster Abbey, and hearing a ukelele.

Or at Prince William's wedding to Kate Middleton, and hearing a banjo.

The surprise would have been something like that.

The lute was a domestic instrument, the forerunner to the guitar that was to be found in the homes of many a teenager in the 1960s and 70s. It didn't make as much noise as a guitar - especially because it had gut strings, not steel. It could be strummed, but more usually the player would pick out melody notes and accompanying harmonies underneath. By Bach's time it was not generally thought of as being an instrument suitable for "serious" music.

Rather, you would use it to accompany yourself or someone else at home, in a ballad perhaps, or a love song - an ideal, portable instrument with which to serenade a lover from under a balcony on a moonlit night. Just the thing for a troubadour.

But for Good Friday? And for immediately after the violence of Jesus being whipped?

Bach adds to it two "*violas d'amore*". This is an instrument now obsolete (except in "period instrument" performances), and we will use two muted violins. They provide a soft, sweet sound - soft enough that they do not obscure the tinkling semiquavers of the lute. A cello plucks bass quavers softly below, and an octave lower still, a

single double bass plays deep, soft sustained crotchets on the first and third beat of each bar.

And, with all of this, the Bass soloist sings a Christian's response to Jesus' scourging. The text is full of paradoxes: "with trembling hope and anxious rapture"; "thy chiefest good in Jesu's sorrow". He imagines that Christ's crown of thorns will become like the flowers of heaven, and that the bitter drink that Jesus was offered on the cross will be, to the Christian, "sweetest fruit". This bitter drink, the "sharp wormwood" of the text, is an intoxicant, whose active element, the "wormwood", is the basis of the Italian liqueur we know as vermouth.

And then, over and over, the singer repeats "then gaze on him, forever gaze on him".

The imagery is hard for us to digest, and perhaps harder for us to find helpful.

But for Bach this *arioso*, these eighteen short bars, these two minutes of music, express the height of religious ecstasy.

I believe this is the most sublime passage of the whole sublime work.



This is a reconstruction of Bach's face, made by a forensic anthropologist from the composer's skull, according to one of my favourite websites: www.npr.org/music/.

Bach composed a total of 972 works, including vocal, choral, keyboard and instrumental pieces.

He also sired twenty children to two wives – only nine of whom survived him.

He came from a dynasty of 7 generations of musicians extending from the 16th to the 18th century. He had 76 male relatives who were musicians, 53 of them named Johann!

For your diary

Our concert with Terrence Ko is on
Sunday October 14 - not 24,
as previously advertised in these pages.