

...the new manner of Mr Stravinsky... we hear intolerable cacophony, an accumulation of strange harmonies that succeed each other without rhythm or sense. – H. Moreno, *Le Menestrel*, Paris, June 6, 1914.

Passion and polish

I've heard that Japanese engineers working to replicate and possibly surpass the excellence of a Rolls Royce, discovered a component of the transmission which had been quite roughly finished. So they polished the part, and to their chagrin, it just didn't work. The rough finish was quite deliberate.

You may well ask what this has to do with a choir?

I'm writing this the day after NUC's performance of St John Passion. I'm listening to a recording of Bach's work by an internationally famous orchestra and choir under an equally illustrious conductor and featuring eminent soloists. Mine is probably not the most objective judgement, and it is difficult to evaluate a performance when you're in it, but I reckon we did a better job. This recording was just too pretty!

At times the choir represents a fairly nasty and bloodthirsty mob, baying for blood. When they sing *If this man were not an evildoer* and *The law won't let us kill him*, it's just not pretty. *Let us rather not divide it* is about soldiers gambling over Jesus' clothes, it's not about dancing gaily on the village green tra-la-la, which is how, I discovered, it can sound.

I'm not saying that our performance was rough – but it did have an edginess that made it more dramatic.

Our soloists added to the liveliness and drama that made this performance something truly special. Peter Brock's new translation sat more easily with the music Bach wrote, which was for German voices, not English. It was wonderful to hear Tommie Andersson on the lute and Paul Scott on Viola da Gamba.

Sometimes, in this age of wonderful recording technology, a performance can be too perfect, overdone. There's something about a live performance, where second takes aren't available. Passion over polish.

FROM Darkness INTO Light

A musical journey for the soul

Sunday 24 June 2012
2PM | CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL

Newcastle University Choir
Waratah Girls Choir
Christ Church Cathedral Choir

NEWCASTLE
UNIVERSITY
CHOIR
enlightenenrichenjoy

Conductors **Christopher Allan - Lindy Connett - Peter Guy**

Adults **\$30** Concession **\$25** Students **\$15**

Tickets available at Music Solutions Warners Bay, MacLeans Booksellers Hamilton, through Stickytickets or by phoning 4954 8781

Would you like to join the choir? Details on the website
www.newcastleuniversitychoir.com
www.waratahgirlschoir.com.au
www.newcastlecathedral.org.au

An economic study of 2009-10 has found that more Victorians attended live music performances than AFL matches.

It takes considerable resources to bring such a performance to the Great Hall. Ticket sales rarely cover the costs, and we are very dependent on the generosity of our sponsors. Works such as the *St John Passion* are too rarely heard, especially in smaller cities like Newcastle. If you missed it, you missed it, and you'll probably have a long wait until an opportunity like this comes our way again.

The University Choir offers Newcastle audiences a chance to hear fine music without the costs of going to Sydney, at more affordable prices, at a venue with free parking, highlighting quality local talent.

The choir deserves your support. We would like to bring at least one performance of this magnitude to Newcastle every year. You can make the difference.

Where would Wagner be without his Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria? Or Tchaikovsky without Nadezhda von Meck?



The five domes of St Mark's Basilica in Venice

Our next concert features three choirs – we'll be joined by the Waratah Girls Choir and the Christ Church Cathedral Choir – and a different venue.

It's exciting to be presenting works obviously intended to be performed in a cathedral, in a cathedral.

Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry is probably best known for *Jerusalem*, which is belted out with great gusto every year on the last night of the Proms, and is well suited to the Albert Hall or possibly the Great Hall. But *I was glad* will always be associated with Westminster Abbey, and its performance when Kate Middleton married Prince William. Parry composed it for the coronation of King Edward VII.

John Tavener's *Song for Athene* was also most notably performed in Westminster Abbey at the funeral of Princess Diana, under the title of *May flights of angels sing thee to thy rest*.

Which brings us to Antonio Lotti. Lotti was born in Venice in 1667, and his compositions bridge the late Baroque and early Classical styles. Bach and Handel were both influenced by his work – both possessed a copy of his *Missa Sapiante*.

Polyphony is the concept of presenting more than one single melodic line at a time, where several different melodies, all independent and equally important, intertwine. Thomas Tallis's *Spem in Alium* is a well known, if not all that often performed example of polyphony, written as it was for eight choirs of five voices each (soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, bass). Wikipedia notes that "The work is not often performed, as it requires at least forty singers capable of meeting its technical demands."

Lotti's *Crucifixus* was scored for two sopranos, two altos, two tenors and two basses, but is perfectly suited to a large choir, and we're looking forward to singing it in our next concert.

Lotti was first organist at St Mark's Basilica for forty years, and his works were usually performed in a cathedral.

Acousticians refer to 'cathedral acoustics', designed to enhance organ and choral performances. Speech intelligibility has completely different requirements. When the reverberation or echo of a building is too extensive, clear communication is difficult, if not impossible. It's a real challenge for a choir - sounding good is one thing, being understood is another.

St Mark's is 9th century Gothic architecture, well known for its unusual acoustics. Spoken prayers in spaces like St Mark's tend to run together and become somewhat lyrical. As a result, over time some of the spoken prayers became chants that are used in services today. Composers would compose music especially for a specific cathedral, taking advantage of the acoustical nuances of the building.

In the centre of St Mark's is a large Greek cross, and over the centre and each arm is a dome. These domes are lined with marble, decorated with tile mosaics which allow a considerable reverberation time. Each dome is fashioned a little differently and affects sound in different ways.

The acoustics of Christ Church Cathedral are probably not that complex, but do share that quality of enhancing the sound of a choir. The music we have chosen to perform will take full advantage, and lead to a memorable concert.

Seating, by the way, is quite limited, so book early!