La Belle Vielleuse: The Virtuoso Hurdy Gurdy in Baroque France

Tobie Miller, hurdy gurdy
Anna Steinhoff, viola da gamba
Jason J. Moy, harpsichord

Program Description:

In mid-18th century France, a strange fashion emerged among the nobility – that of idealizing and imitating the “simple” lifestyle of the peasantry. Stylized, refined pastoral music became all the rage among the highest circles of society, and rustic instruments such as the bagpipe and hurdy gurdy were at the forefront of this musical and socio-cultural movement. Far removed from their humble origins, both the instruments and their music were developed to their technological and aesthetic pinnacle in this period. In fact, between 1720 and 1760, there was more music composed for vielle (hurdy gurdy) and musette (bagpipe) than oboe and recorder, and famous aristocratic amateurs, including Queen Marie Leczinska, wife of Louis XV, existed side by side with a new generation of professional, virtuoso vielle players.

This concert features some of the virtuoso hurdy gurdy repertoire that might have been performed for, rather than by, the Queen – while our reine vielliste was instrumental in establishing the instrument’s popularity at court, she was, by all accounts, not a particularly accomplished player herself! Rounding out the program are pieces for harpsichord and viola da gamba, two other instruments that, like the hurdy gurdy, reached their zenith in France before gradually falling out of fashion in the latter half of the 18th century.

Program:

Jean-Baptiste Dupuits (fl. 1741)
Sonata in G Minor, Op. 1 Nr. 6

Marin Marais (1656-1728)
Chaconne in D Major, from Pièces de viole, Livre I

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Sonata in G Minor, BWV 1023

Francois Couperin (1668-1733)
Les Baricades Mistérieuses, from Pièces de Clavecin, Livre II

M. Ravet (fl. 1750)
Sonata III in C Major, “La Marine”, Ouevre II

Charles Bâton (fl. 1750)
Sonata IV in C Major, Oeuvre III

Performer Profiles:
Tobie Miller, hurdy gurdy
The Canadian hurdy gurdy player, recorderist and singer, Tobie Miller, grew up in a family of classical musicians. After studies in Early Music Performance (B.Mus) at McGill University (Montreal, Canada), she moved to Basel (Switzerland) to pursue postgraduate studies at the prestigious Schola Cantorum Basiliensis. Her work in Basel was supported by two grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, and by the J.B.C. Watkins Award. She was the recipient of a further grant from the Canada Council in 2011-2012 for her work on the baroque hurdy gurdy and transcriptions of J.S. Bach’s solo cello and violin repertoire for the same instrument. Currently dividing her time between Basel and Montreal, Tobie continues to perform and record with many ensembles on both continents including the Ensemble Baroque de Limoges (recording of Haydn and Mozart concerti forthcoming, on the Laborie label), Les Musiciens de Saint Julien (recording on Alpha label), Per Sonat (recording on the Christophorus label), and her own ensembles, La Rota and Ysis.

Anna Steinhoff, viola da gamba
Anna Steinhoff is a classical cellist who has been described by critics as "soulful," and "the rhythmic heart of the ensemble." Originally from Ann Arbor, Michigan, Anna completed degrees in cello performance from the Oberlin Conservatory and Northwestern University before making her home in Chicago. In addition to the playing the modern cello, Anna specializes in early instruments such as the baroque cello and viola da gamba. She is the principal cellist of Chicago’s period instrument orchestra, Baroque Band, and has performed with ensembles such as the Haymarket Opera Company, Newberry Consort, Callipygian Players, Music of the Baroque, Chicago Opera Theater, and Madison Bach Musicians. She is also a founding member of Wayward Sisters, who won the 2011 EMA/Naxos competition and recorded their debut album of music by Matthew Locke in 2012.

Jason J. Moy, harpsichord
Jason J. Moy holds degrees in harpsichord and Early Music performance from McGill University in Montreal, where his primary teachers and mentors included Hank Knox, Luc Beauséjour, and the late Bruce Haynes. Jason is a native of Chicago, and currently serves on the faculty of the DePaul University School of Music, where he teaches harpsichord and directs the Baroque Ensemble. His concert activities have taken him throughout the United States, Canada and Europe, and include an appearance at the 2009 York Early Music Festival in the United Kingdom. Jason has performed as harpsichordist and organist with some of the Chicago area’s most respected ensembles, including the Bach Week Festival Orchestra and Chorus, Music of the Baroque, Baroque Band, Chicago Chamber Musicians, Newberry Consort and the Illinois Symphony Orchestra. He has been featured in live performances on ABC7 and CBS2 television, and BBC Radio 3, and is frequently heard on Chicago’s classical radio station, WFMT98.7.