

Radio Notes

Catherine Bott and the Early Music Show on their forthcoming celebration of Georgian royal patronage of the arts.

BBC
RADIO 3
90-93PM



THIS SEPTEMBER WE'RE VENTURING INTO THE WORLD of art – and other fine things that owe their existence to royal patronage, in this case from the House of Hanover and a king who's better known these days in the characterisation that Alan Bennett gave him. Yes, poor mad George the Third.

George came to the throne in 1760 at the age of 22, well tutored in all the usual subjects from an early age: although no intellectual, he had a lifelong appetite for learning. The *Early Music Show* is going to do him proud in a pair of programmes on **17 and 18 September at 1pm**, when I'll be taking a walk round Georgian London.

Yes, the king spent the last years of his 60-year reign greatly diminished by mental health problems, but in periods of lucidity he could enjoy looking back at some of the good things he'd done for his country. He founded the Royal Academy of Arts in 1768, to raise the status of the arts and artists through the establishment of a national school of art, and on my travels I'll be talking to the Academy's MaryAnne Stevens about the debt that art-lovers owe to King George. His favourite painter was Zoffany, who loved to paint musicians with their instruments – the Academy has a sumptuous Zoffany exhibition coming in next spring.

The king's real passion, though, was collecting books, and it was he who assembled the King's Library, one of the most important collections of books and pamphlets of the Age of Enlightenment. Nowadays the collection's kept at the British Library, and when I went there recently to look at some of the musical items from the collection I made a discovery that gives a very homely touch to Handel's genius – the first page of his manuscript for the coronation anthem *Zadok the Priest* is marked by a large brown ring where Handel must have stood a tankard of beer. The *Early Music Show* refreshes the parts other programmes cannot reach.

What else is in the autumn schedule? Well, the next generation of early music performers is rising fast, and we're concentrating on youth in two programmes over the weekend of **24/25 September**. On the Saturday show, a round-table discussion with Laurence Cummings of the Royal Academy (of Music, this time) and Trinity Laban's Dr Claire Mera-Nelson about the future of early music education; and on Sunday, highlights of this year's York Early Music Festival Young Artists Competition, in which the standard was scarily high.

And I'm doing a couple of our regular live shows: from the Brighton Early Music Festival on **22 October** and celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Greenwich International Early Music Festival and Exhibition on **12 November**.

The *Early Music Show* now has a weekly podcast version, available via the Radio 3 website in just a few clicks of a mouse, in time for our own eighth birthday in September.

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UP & COMING

Ensemble Tramontana

THE TRAMONTANA IS A northern wind that sweeps across the mountains into the countries of southern Europe. It's also the inspiration for this new all-female quintet of recent and current Trinity Laban students that has won the college's Early Music Prize this year.



Ensemble Tramontana specialises in medieval and renaissance music around themes of travel, love and madness. The first of these is partly explained by the group members' cosmopolitan origins – including Hungary, Japan and Hawaii as well as the UK: 'It's definitely important,' says violist Esha Neogy. 'It affects what pieces we choose. Finding composers who have travelled, songs about travelling, metaphorical travelling on different levels.' Examples include 13th-century French crusade songs and an Italian madrigal by a Belgian composer with English text, both of which were part of their competition-winning programme.

But the tramontana has a hand in all three themes: 'As it funnels through the Pyrenees, local legend says that the wind has the power to make you feel giddy and eventually turn people to murder and suicide,' explains singer Louise Eekelaar. 'It's bringing that kind of element, the power of emotion, to the music.'

The ensemble is carving a niche for itself through its innovative arrangements. 'The wind travels through time and space, so we're experimenting with different textures and different instrumentations to bring that together,' explains recorder player and percussionist Julie Dean, who is amassing a collection that includes Middle Eastern instruments such as the darbuka, frame drum and temple bells. 'We'll each have a sudden brainwave at 3 in the morning and bring it to the next meeting, or we'll pick a piece and each come up with a format that we'll work on in the group. So we'll do the same piece with different instrumentation sometimes – each time we play it we can bring something new to it and see parts from different angles.'

Ensemble Tramontana is building a reputation around its south London home, including a recent performance in a tent at a community fair. 'A lot of the audience were young children or people from different cultures,' Dean recalls. 'To those people that weren't experts, it gave them something new and different, but not the wacky contemporary stuff.' This is an angle they hope to exploit in the future as they seek to 'bring their music to the masses' through planned autumn events in local pubs and cafes.

Not that they're averse to more traditional performance settings, and their competition prize is a spot at the Greenwich Early Music Festival in November. 'Through Trinity we've all performed in it in various different ensembles,' says Eekelaar. 'It's a great opportunity and we're really looking forward to it.' Just be warned: 'crimes of passion can be forgiven while the tramontana is blowing'.

JAMES CREL

For more information, search for 'Ensemble Tramontana' on Facebook