



Passing the shiny new bike parked ostentatiously in the hallway and quantities of brightly coloured wrapping paper strewn half way up the stairs, fellow Rhinegold publications can just make out the strains of Happy Birthday to You, sung in quarter comma meantone and emanating from the *Early Music Today* office. “Did I hear vibrato?” asks *The Singer*, prodding at the button to call the lift. “Don’t start!” replies the *Music Teacher*, “it’s strictly used as an ornament”.

To celebrate a decade of reflecting and reporting the British early music scene, we decided, before blowing out the candles, to take a quick look back at those last ten years and perhaps wonder about the next ten. And so I chose to ask a few of the party guests how they viewed developments and trends over recent years. I noticed a group of hungry looking musicians huddled in a corner, tucking into second helpings of jelly and ice-cream and went over to ask Jacob Heringman, the lutenist, whether he thought it was getting any easier for professional musicians to survive.

“Harder” was his immediate reply, “Concert fees have not kept pace with inflation. They’ve actually gone down, and there seem to be fewer promoters willing to risk performances that are not guaranteed to be extremely popular.”

“Harder” agreed Peter Fender, the fiddle player. “I think in general the problem is throughout classical music.”

“I agree about the fees,” nodded Fretwork’s Richard Campbell as he eyed-up a slightly lop-sided and luridly pink cup-cake.

“It’ll make you hyper-active,” said Chi chi. Richard gave a wry smile, “At my age it would take... no, you’re probably right”.

Chi chi Nwanoku, regular member of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, didn’t feel that life had got harder and added “I think the period scene has expanded enough to accommodate those committed. I think the mainstream interpretations of classical music are harder to sell.”

“But many fewer CD recordings are being made, because many fewer are being sold to the general public” countered Richard. They all seemed to agree that income from recordings was in serious decline. Jacob is one of a growing number of musicians who actually subsidises his own recordings of valuable but non-commercial repertoire which he feels committed to making available.

Long-time early music enthusiast Leo Stevenson offered the consumer’s angle.

“In a year I suppose I buy about 35-50 CDs, of which maybe two-thirds are of early music. I’d love to buy more CDs if I could afford it but this is rip-off Britain.” Did he think this led to people making illegal copies of classical CDs? - “I know someone who is *seriously* into classical music and does that an awful lot, it’s simply the price we’re charged in the UK that forces people to do it.”

I took the opportunity to ask Sue Revill, head of Chandos’s Early Music label *Chaconne* whether she thought her business suffered from piracy.

“Not much”, was her answer.

Was it thoughts of declining markets or simply the sight of Sue’s paper hat that gave me a sudden urge to start looking for a stronger drink? Helen Poole, a promoter from the Hazard Chase agency seemed fairly jolly. What was her secret? “The demand for early music compares favourably with mainstream classical” she told me. “Generally I have found that the boundaries of what constitutes early music have become stretched. I think artists who combine early with contemporary or present early music in a novel way, such as The Hilliard Ensemble and Trio Medieval, help early music appeal to a wider audience”.

I was reminded of something Leo had told me once: “Performers should spread the content of their concerts a little wider. I’d love to go to a concert that mixed keyboard music of Byrd or Couperin with Chopin or Scriabin - maybe even Philip Glass. Such concerts could be tied together with a theme perhaps, but they shouldn’t have to rely on gimmicks.”

“I love new or different programming ideas,” continued Helen, “promoters are under a lot of pressure financially and this is the biggest influence affecting programming.”

So who will be helping promoters attract audiences over the next ten years? I wondered.

“I think the really top artists will continue to flourish, as will those who approach or programme early music in different, exciting ways.”

I couldn't help thinking that one person's 'exciting approach to programming' might easily be another's 'reliance on gimmicks'. This thought seemed to be borne out by Marion Bolton, secretary of the Teesside Music Society, which was founded around the same time as *Early Music Today*. According to her statistics:

“Largest audience for each in their year were drawn by Piers Adams and I Fagiolini - because of the school children who took part.

What lesson should we draw from this, I asked. 'It seems to be “Dress in fancy costume and have a gimmick”.'

Was that it? Well, she was willing to add 'be lively': 'Concert Royal is a little staid and serious -- not popular. For Concert Promoters, the big headache is trying to attract young audiences. I gather the popular solutions are that artists should talk to their audiences about the music or that there should be more use of multimedia - video, surtitles, film and so on.'

Rhiannon Evans, keen early music follower and a performer in her own right, bounded over to see me. She had just won a 415 tuning fork in a tough bout of Pin the Wrong Note on the Sackbut Player. But I suspected she might have a thing or two to say about expanding repertoires.

“I think for EM groups to commission contemporary works is a worthy experiment, but am yet to be convinced it will be worthwhile ultimately - though it's perhaps preferable to playing existing 'mainstream' repertoire on early instruments.”

Chi chi could not agree: “The OAE have performed Mahler and more recently Dvorak which has been received quite well, and have now commissioned works by Turnage and Dove. I don't personally do crossover music...”

“Crossover and Fusion” retorted Rhiannon, as she carefully disentangled three different coloured party balloons she was holding, “are concepts imported from the world of popular music. I guess there must be people who like it or it wouldn't exist, but I, being of a purist, Teutonic and anal disposition like everything to be tidily in its place and not all jumbled up, so I don't approve”

They only seemed to have Sunny Delight and Alcohol-free Mead, but I kept up the search for the authentic type... speaking of which, I wondered how all this mixing up repertoires, crossing boundaries, not to mention gimmicks, squared up with current attitudes towards 'authentic' performance practice. Peter Fender seemed a little cynical on the subject: “Not sure that many people after the 70s were that bothered about authenticity. I bet very few of the people playing early instruments have ever read any source material about performance practice. Sad. Nevertheless loosing the authentic bonds is no bad thing. Leonhardt had it right when he wrote 'If one manages to be convincing, the interpretation sounds authentic. If one strives to be authentic, one will never be convincing.’”

I was starting to feel rather confused - and then I spotted him, the man I'd been looking for all evening, the magazine's editor. “Lucien! Congratulations! Great party,” I beamed “but

where's the booze?"

"Peter, really!" he replied, as he adjusted his novelty tie, "we're only ten!"

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