

# The English Concert

## The English Concert Master Class 2012

The second English Concert Master Class for young harpsichordist-directors will take place in June 2012 at the Foundling Museum in London.

Between Monday 25 and Friday 29 June **four aspiring harpsichordists** will work with **The English Concert**, their artistic director **Harry Bicket** and two solo singers in directing a range of Baroque repertoire, culminating in a public concert in which all student participants direct The English Concert.

The first English Concert Master Class was held in July 2010 at the Foundling Museum and was a great success. Four young harpsichordists, from UK, Hungary and the USA, worked intensively over four days on Baroque repertoire with the orchestra, Harry Bicket, Laurence Cummings and two young singers, culminating in a public concert. All classes and the concert were open to the public.

This year the basic pattern will be the same, but there will be a preliminary day of coaching in basic technique for directing an orchestra from the keyboard, without the orchestra present. These two sessions will not be public.

A significant **additional benefit to participants** will be the chance of assisting Harry Bicket in preparing works with The English Concert during the 2012-15 seasons, which will include major touring projects in Europe and the USA.

### Background

Conducting classes with symphony orchestras have become a familiar feature of the classical music calendar, but master classes for aspiring baroque directors are few and far between.

Performing Baroque music on period instruments is now ubiquitous and is taught in most leading conservatories, but directing period instrument orchestras from the harpsichord is a special skill that practitioners still have to acquire "on the job" as best they can. Part of the reason for this is that conservatories do not generally have "in-house" baroque orchestras.

Directing orchestral music while playing an instrument requires all the interpretative authority of a symphony conductor plus a different, and in some ways more demanding set of physical skills.

The English Concert Master Class is designed to provide a uniquely stimulating and intensive insight into the art of directing from the harpsichord.

## Comments from 2010

*"The English Concert's master class for young directors was very much uncharted territory, both for the four candidates and the orchestra. The art of directing an orchestra from the keyboard is in itself a skill that can only be learnt through hands-on experience: no amount of private preparation at home can teach you what an orchestra like TEC needs; it would be the equivalent of learning to drive a car by watching a DVD. For these young conductors, it was an extraordinary opportunity to try out what works and what doesn't, but in a relatively unpressured environment. But it was also a revelation for many of the TEC players to analyse what exactly it is that they need from a conductor, and why some approaches work and some don't. The week's work was invaluable for all of us, and the final concert a testament to how far the participants and orchestra had travelled together through the week."*

Harry Bicket (Artistic Director, The English Concert)

*"It's been absolutely worthwhile. It's been an extremely steep learning curve. I've always thought that directing might be for me, and this is my first experience, and I had no idea what's involved. I now realise that there's an awful lot involved, and I've learnt a lot and that I've still got a lot to learn. The length of it is about right. The repertoire is a good mix and I'd go on another one if there was one. It's been incredible."*

Student Participant

*"I think it's brilliant, I think it's been done very well, I think Harry and Laurence have been fantastic, and it's been very interesting for us to how the students progress and for us to think for ourselves about what it is we want from directors, and when you don't get it, what to do about it. Also a bonding exercise, team building."*

Joseph Crouch (member of The English Concert)

*"I think it's been excellent – it's always lovely to have live music in the museum and having it in the 18th century picture gallery, surrounded by the music, played authentically is just such an experience. It's a lovely surprise for visitors who aren't expecting it. It's a great opportunity and it's brought in a lot of people who haven't been to the museum before."*

Katharine Hogg (The Foundling Museum)

*"I found it fascinating in that one tends to think that they could do it without a director, and the very simple questions the musicians were asking about individual notes make you realise the absolute amazing skill to be a real director and not a follower. I would come if you were doing a similar thing again. The positioning of the audience was in the end excellent, so that we could see the director and it was almost as though we were part of the band. It drew attention to the fact that the director has to direct and not follow. It probably wouldn't work in a much bigger venue – you wouldn't want to mic the director of students – perfect size."*

Member of the Audience



*The Foundling Museum Picture Gallery*

## Artists

**The English Concert** is one of the world's foremost Baroque orchestras, comprising many of Europe's finest specialist musicians who together and individually have worked with leading directors for forty years. [www.englishconcert.co.uk](http://www.englishconcert.co.uk)

**Harry Bicket** is Artistic Director of The English Concert and has an international career as a conductor, particularly of Baroque opera, which he directs in leading opera houses with leading singers. [www.askonasholt.co.uk/artists/conductors/harry-bicket](http://www.askonasholt.co.uk/artists/conductors/harry-bicket)

## Venue

The **Foundling Museum** in Brunswick Square, Bloomsbury, grew out of the Foundling Hospital, established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for the care of abandoned children. The Hospital developed a strong association with composer **George Frideric Handel**, who became a trustee and for a number of years gave annual fund-raising performances of his oratorio *Messiah* there. In addition to its outstanding collection of pictures, the museum houses one of the most important collections of Handel musical scores and literature in the world – the Gerald Coke Collection. [www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk](http://www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk)

## Schedule

The Master Class will take place over five days, **Monday to Friday, 25-29 June 2012.**

- Day 1 will be devoted to preliminary coaching for the students, without orchestra
- Days 2-4 will be devoted to master classes with orchestra
- Day 5 to the final concert in which all students will participate.

## Repertoire

Three key repertoire areas have been chosen to develop fundamental interpretative, technical and communicative skills –

- **The Italian Concerto Grosso** – the core orchestral style of so much Baroque music
- **Arias by Bach and Handel** – the reflective and the dramatic treatment of text
- **French baroque and/or Purcell orchestral music** – with their idiosyncratic styles

Advanced student singers will be invited to be soloists in the arias.

## Classes

There will be eight 3-hour sessions over four days, Monday-Thursday, with two sessions per day. On Monday the sessions will focus on basic technique, without the orchestra present. Tuesday-Thursday sessions will be with orchestra and will take place in the morning and afternoon in the Picture Gallery and will be open to the public free of charge.

- Each student will be coached for four half-sessions
- Each Master Class day, Tuesday – Thursday, will be devoted to one area of repertoire
- Each half-session will be devoted to one piece of repertoire
- Each student will be required to prepare all pieces

## Final Concert

Each student will perform 3 pieces, one from each area of repertoire, in the public concert on the evening of Friday 29 June.

## Eligibility

The Master Class is open to **harpsichordists between the ages of 20 and 35**. Candidates will be chosen on the basis of their CV, academic and performance references and a recording that demonstrates a high standard of solo harpsichord playing. Candidates must be able to travel freely to the United Kingdom if they live or study abroad.

## Candidate Recommendations

Recommendations should be made by email to [nick@englishconcert.co.uk](mailto:nick@englishconcert.co.uk) by **Wednesday 29 February 2012**.

## Applications

Applicants should provide the following by email to [nick@englishconcert.co.uk](mailto:nick@englishconcert.co.uk) –

- A Curriculum Vitae in English
- An MP3 music file of their playing two contrasting movements by J S Bach; two contrasting movements of 17<sup>th</sup> century French music; a 17<sup>th</sup> century Italian Toccata
- The names and email addresses of two referees - one academic, one performance

Closing date for applications: **Friday 30 March 2012**.

## Costs

The English Concert is raising over **£25,000** in support from Trusts and Foundations to cover the costs of:

- Student travel, accommodation and subsistence
- Tuition fees
- Orchestral fees

**Successful applicants will be required to pay a Master Class fee of £500** and to provide their own music. They will be sent an invoice for the fee a month before the Master Class.

We are deeply grateful to the **Foundling Museum** for again so generously providing its space and resources free of charge for the English Concert Master Class.