

musica Dei donum

Concert reviews

Festival Early Music Utrecht 2018

[Part One](#) [Part Two](#) [Part Three](#) [Part Four](#)

Part One

"A Burgundian Alphabet in three concerts" [1]

Huelgas Ensemble/Paul Van Nevel

24 August, Jacobikerk

"Joyous Entrance" [2]

Vox Luminis/Lionel Meunier

24 August, Cathedral

Bob van Asperen, harpsichord

24 August, Geertekerk

Graindelavoix/Björn Schmelzer

24 August, Nicolaïkerk

Cantica Symphonia/Giuseppe Maletto

24 August, Catharinakerk

"Cluniacs: Benedictines in Cluny" [3]

Ordo Virtutum/Stefan Johannes Morent

25 August, Willibrordkerk

"Josquin in Spain: Missa Hercules Dux Ferrariae" [4]

Música Temprana/Adrián Rodríguez van der Spoelr

25 August, Jacobikerk

"Requiem: Ockeghem, La Rue" [5]

Diabolus in Musica/Antoine Guerber

27 August, Pieterskerk

Josquin Desprez: Missa L'homme armé 6. toni [6]

Vox Luminis/Lionel Meunier

28 August, Jacobikerk

Josquin Desprez: Missa Ave maris stella [7]

Weser-Renaissance Bremen/Manfred Cordes

29 August, Jacobikerk

Josquin Desprez: Missa Malheur me bat [8]

Gli Angeli Genève/Stephan MacLeod

30 August, Cathedral

Josquin Desprez: Missa Gaudeamus [9]

stile antico

31 August, Jacobikerk

Richafort: Requiem [10]

Cappella Mariana/Vojtech Semerád

1 September, Pieterskerk

Among lovers of early music there is always a debate about what exactly 'early music' is. For some 'early music' means music of the Middle Ages and (early) renaissance, others include music of the baroque and even classical periods. Today the term is generally used for music of all ages, performed on period instruments. That is reflected in the programmes of the Festival Early Music Utrecht. This year Olga Pashchenko played pieces by Debussy and Ravel on the fortepiano, in combination with harpsichord works by François Couperin and Jean-Philippe Rameau. The latter two are two of the composers who were given special attention in this year's edition of the Utrecht festival.

The programme of the festival was entitled 'Burgundian life', which most lovers of early music associate with the golden age of Burgundy, from the second half of the 14th to the early 16th century. However, as Rameau was from the Burgundian town of Dijon, he is a late representative of that region, even though he spent the main part of his life - as a composer of operas - in Paris. It made sure that this year's programme was not confined to the music of the renaissance, with Josquin Desprez as *composer in residence*, undoubtedly to the relief of those who prefer later repertoire.

The opening of the festival was rather unusual. Every year the historical bells of the Cathedral tower announce the start of the festival, and then the first concert takes place in the large hall of TivoliVredenburg. This year there was a kind of prelude: in the afternoon the Huelgas Ensemble [1] performed three programmes with sacred and secular polyphony by composers who in one way or another can be connected to the Burgundian golden age. The ensemble's director, Paul Van Nevel, is intimately acquainted with the repertoire, but even he must have done a lot of research, putting together the programme, especially as it was his aim to present an alphabetical overview. The first concert started with a chanson by an Anonymous composer and ended with another piece by an unknown composer, indicated as 'without a name' (Zonder naam in Dutch). He could not find a composer whose name starts with an X; this letter was omitted. As there is also no composer with a K, he attributed another anonymous piece to a certain Jehan Kwintens. The music was written in a period of about 150 years, which means that we heard quite some stylistic differences, for instance between the 3-part ballade *Roses et lis ay veu* by a certain Egidius (fl c1380) on the one hand and the Sanctus from the *Missa Sub tuum presidium* by Pierre de La Rue on the other. The first concert opened with the anonymous chanson *Ou lit de pleurs*, in which an unhappy lover laments about his fate, brilliantly translated in music. Several compositional forms were represented, such as *alternatim* pieces and liturgical chants with additional texts (*tropes*). The Huelgas Ensemble proved once again to be a top-class ensemble. Paul Van Nevel is not a man of broad gestures; he rather treats the repertoire as vocal chamber music. A number of pieces were performed with one voice per part, in others a larger part of the ensemble or even the entire group came into action. Through a differentiation in the line-up Van Nevel achieved a perfect blending of and balance between the voices. His treatment of dynamics was very subtle, and the intonation was impeccable, as always. It was the best possible start of the festival.

Instead of the evening concert the festival had come up with the idea of a 'joyous entrance' [2], referring to a habit in the time of the Burgundian rulers. Four short concerts took place across the historical town centre, and the audience was asked to walk from one venue to the other, sometimes meeting each other halfway. The four concerts reflected the various themes of this year's festival. Vox Luminis performed Lalande and Rameau; the latter was represented by a motet which has been reconstructed by Graham Sadler. Bob van Asperen and Paolo Zanzu played harpsichord pieces by Couperin - who was born 1668, which is commemorated this year - whereas Graindelavoix, directed by Björn Schmelzer, and Cantica Symphonia, directed by Giuseppe Maletto, performed sacred music by Josquin and his contemporaries, among them Antoine Busnoys. The latter ensemble did well in two sections from Busnoys' *Missa L'homme armé*, but the