

'O the pleasures of the plains' – Music from the 18th Century Pleasure Gardens

Workshop for singers and instrumentalists

Sunday, 25th June 2017

Tutors: Kate Semmens and Steven Devine

Venue: Burton Court, Eardisland, Leominster HR6 9DN

Registration from 9.30am. Workshop 10.00am-4.30pm

Following their extremely successful workshop at Stockenny in 2014, we're delighted to be welcoming back Kate and Steven for another workshop for singers and instrumentalists, this time studying the music of the London Pleasure Gardens. The Pleasure Gardens combined genteel areas (where music played and visitors walked up and down in their best clothes) and 'dark walks' where the goings-on were less polite. Food, music, sex, alcohol – all were available, and the Gardens were particularly famous for their masked ladies touting for custom. A number of brothels became well-established in the surrounding streets, including one at the aptly-named "Sluts Hole". We guarantee, however, that this workshop will be extremely respectable, with no hanky-panky in the darker corners.

The Gardens provided a useful source of income for composers and performers alike. Composers such as Thomas Arne and William Boyce became prolific in their song-writing, composing new pieces that could be performed and then sold as sheet music to the public. Charming pastoral songs appeared on concert programmes alongside opera arias and virtuoso instrumental music: all opportunities for both performers and composers to show off and potentially sell their skills.

This workshop will focus on music typical of the London Pleasure Gardens. Works studied will include extracts from Thomas Linley's 'Shakespeare Ode', selections from Thomas Arne's 'Judgement of Paris' and 'Alfred' (the grand ode of which may prove quite familiar), as well as catches, glees and choruses by Philip Hayes, William Boyce, William Shield and George Frederick Handel.

Steven is the harpsichordist with London Baroque as well as Co-Principal keyboard player with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. He has recorded over thirty discs with other artists and ensembles and made six solo recordings. Kate is a soprano soloist with many leading groups and opera companies. She has also developed an enviable reputation as a teacher, and is much in demand for masterclasses. Together they regularly run workshops for Early Music Fora throughout the country.

Our venue, Burton Court, is a glorious country house with influences ranging from Norman, Medieval, Regency, Victorian and Edwardian periods. The centrepiece of the house is the spectacular 14th Century Great Hall, a remarkable survivor of medieval architecture that dates back to 1330. The room has been described as the finest of its type in the West Midlands. There is plenty of parking on-site, and the delightful grounds will provide a lovely setting for picnic lunches if the weather is fine. We will hold our brief AGM just before lunch.

Sue Russell