

The Consort of Viols of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis

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THE CONSORT OF VIOLS OF THE SCHOLA CANTORUM BASILIENSIS.

Thus went the announcement of the Concert on Tuesday evening, 4th April, at Cowdray Hall, W.I. Perhaps many in the Swiss Colony did not quite know what to expect from a concert of this kind. If they stayed away because they weren't sure they missed one of the finest musical experiences which it has been our privilege to enjoy in recent years. I heard some of the players in Basle 15 and more years ago, especially the leader of the group, Mr. August Wenzinger, and I knew what to expect. But even so I came away deeply moved and humbly wondering whether so much of modern music really deserved the name. Viol and harpsichord, of course, are instruments of a different age — very far removed from jet planes and "Cokey-Cokey", and their peculiar charm can make one forget the rush and madness of the present time.

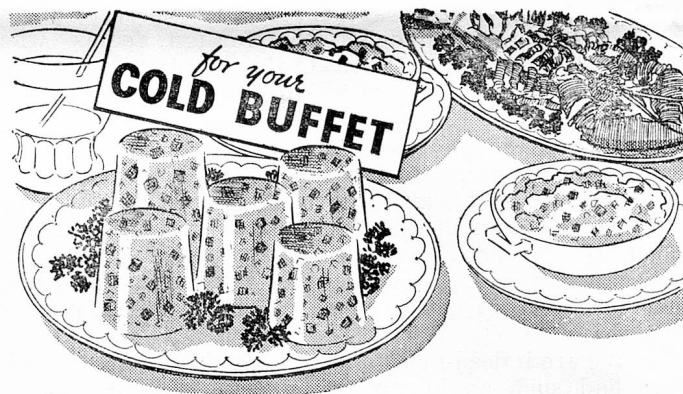
The viol was evolved in the late fifteenth century, a few decades before the violin was born, and it soon became popular all over Europe. It was constructed in various sizes to correspond with the different pitches of the human voice. The treble viol is larger than the violin, whilst the bass viol is practically the size of the cello. The Italian name is "viola da gamba" and indicates that the instrument is held between the legs. It has six strings tuned in fourths and a third. It also differs from the violin in having a flat back which slants towards the neck. A curious characteristic is the way in which the bow is held, viz. in the old oriental manner with the palm upwards. In the sixteenth century the viol was used in combination with wind instruments in church and court music. In chamber music the consort of viols prevailed until the middle of the seventeenth century. The bass viol, however, maintained its position as a solo instrument for another 100 years. In the twentieth century the solo viol was re-discovered, and some 20 years later the charm of the consort of viols came back to its own, through the musical "Jugendbewegung" in Germany and the research work of Arnold Dolmetsch in England.

In 1933 the well-known Basle musician and conductor Paul Sacher founded the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis. Since its foundation it has engaged in research work and teaching of old music. It has especially cultivated consort and solo viol playing, and professional and amateur artists, including children, are instructed. The concert group under Mr. Wenzinger's leadership have been on tour abroad on several occasions and their outstanding achievement is, as the Cambridge Review (April 48) put it "... to combine complete fidelity to the tradition of their instruments with the highest standard of modern ensemble playing." They have been to this country for record-making and broadcasting before, but the concert early this month was their first public appearance in London. It cannot be called anything but a great success and we

owe a debt of gratitude to the organisers amongst whom Dr. Liebrecht and Dr. Lindt must be mentioned. The concert was held under the auspices of the Anglo-Swiss Society and in association with the Arts Council of Great Britain. The concert was very well attended, and the audience included the Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrenté. It seems a pity that there was only a sprinkling of Swiss considering that the British public showed such good response. The concert has had a very good press.

For me, however, it is not to give either criticism or praise, but simply to record the lasting impression of a unique experience. Not only the leader but each of the other players is an accomplished artist. Mr. Wenzinger played the treble as well as the bass viol (as a solo instrument) and Miss Marianne Majer performed on the tenor viol. Miss Gertrud Flügel, a prominent Basle violinist, and Miss Hannelore Müller played the bass viol. Mr. Eduard Müller, a well-known organist in Basle, accompanied the consort on the harpsichord (clavicembalo or Kieflügel) on which he also gave two solos. The programme consisted of sixteenth and seventeenth century music (Samuel Scheidt, Orlando Gibbons, Purcell and Bach. The suite for two viols by a little-known French composer Marin Marais (1656-1728) was my own favourite, full of exquisite harmony. The performance lasted for well over two hours and it created a perfect world all of its own. I could not have wished for a better preparation for the great Easter Message than that evening of peace and quiet beauty.

MARIANN.



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