

Monteverdi Vespers

Q&A with Christopher Monks, Artistic Director, Armonico Consort

2017 is the 450th anniversary of the birth of Italian composer, Claudio Monteverdi, and Armonico Consort mark the occasion with a UK tour. Armonico Consort's Artistic Director, Christopher Monks, talks about his first acquaintance with Monteverdi's Vespers and what the work means to him.

How did you first discover Monteverdi's Vespers and what impression did it have on you?

The Vespers of 1610 was the work that turned my musical life upside-down when I first heard and studied it at the age of 16. It was the performance with Sir John Eliot Gardiner and the Monteverdi Choir from the Basilica of San Marco in Venice, which completely blew me away.

All that I thought of as important before then was thrown out of the window, as I was immersed into this world of extraordinary colour from instruments I had never heard of, and the most daring vocal acrobatics ever written for tenors, even to this day, to the concept of having performers literally anywhere in the building!

You mention some unusual instruments, what were they?

The Cornets and Sackbutts, also seeing the theorbo (a member of the lute family with an extended neck) played live for the first time; instruments of extraordinary shape and size making sounds and colours which were completely new to me.

Will placing the performers in different parts of the building be a feature of the tour performances?

Yes, the great challenge for us will be to discover secret parts of each venue where we can recreate the incredible effect of the echo sections originally performed in Venice.

Baroque and Renaissance music forms the backbone of Armonico Consort's repertoire, how did the Consort start life?

I was first introduced to the music of Byrd, Tallis, Bach, Monteverdi and Handel as a chorister. Later on, I was lucky enough to be at university with some incredibly special and imaginative people. We had a binding passion for music from the renaissance and baroque and were always trying to find new and unusual ways to stage concerts and engage audiences.

President Sir John Egan

Artistic Patrons Dame Emma Kirkby | Dame Evelyn Glennie | James Bowman CBE | Sir Willard White

Founder & Artistic Director Christopher Monks MA FRCO

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Was there anyone particularly influential to you at that time?

Dame Emma Kirkby agreed to help us put on our first concert back in 2001. She is an extraordinary musician who tore up the rule book and made us all feel like we were making chamber music, however big the group. She also taught me the importance of listening to the incredible experts I was so blessed to have in front of me.

Can you tell us about some of the musicians and singers involved in the Vespers tour?

I feel so privileged that 27 years after that performance by John Eliot Gardiner in 1990, I should be embarking on a tour with some of the world class musicians who sing with his Monteverdi Choir, including the incredible tenor soloists we all heard at a performance of the Vespers at the BBC Proms a few years back.

What should audiences listen out for?

The brilliant instrumental writing, the sheer number of electrifying climaxes and the vocal complexity of the tenors.

What do you hope audiences will take away from Armonico Consort's performance of the Vespers?

Monteverdi, the father of the Baroque period, was born 450 years ago this year and I would like our 2017 tour to ignite the fires in hearts and imaginations through this incredible work as it did with me.

Christopher Monks
Artistic Director, Armonico Consort

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