

REPORT

FROM BERLIN

GOLDBERG  
issue 50/jan  
08

## Music (not only) for Kings and Noblemen

**Making the shift from student to professional life is always a great challenge, even for talented young students of baroque playing. The crux of the matter is experience: to be able to play in one of the top-ranking orchestras you need professional experience; but you cannot gather this experience until you play in one of the major orchestras. One possible way across this bridge is to be offered a place by the European Union Baroque Orchestra.**

Every year, the EUBO invites 100 talented young baroque musicians from all over Europe to take part in a course of auditions. The successful candidates go on to spend the following six months together, rehearsing and working with leading baroque specialists including Lars Ulrik Mortensen, Ton Koopman, Andrew Manze, Rachel Podger and many more, a period followed by a tour of Europe. At the end of each year the students move into the professional domain and the whole process, from audition to completion, starts all over again – for the next generation. The EUBO has scored such notable success with this undertaking that former EUBO members are to be found in every baroque ensemble of distinction, such as the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra, Les Musiciens du Louvre, English Concert, Europa Galante, Academy of Ancient Music, La Petite Bande, The King's Consort, Concerto Copenhagen and Les Arts Florissants.

Music Director of the EUBO since 2004 has been Lars Ulrik Mortensen. The Danish harpsichordist and conductor of many renowned orchestras across the world is also Artistic Director of Concerto Copenhagen and

makes frequent guest appearances at the Theatre Royal of Copenhagen. In 2000 he was named Musician of the Year in Denmark and recent years have seen him awarded several prizes including the Diapason d'Or, the 2001 "Cannes Classique" prize and the Danish Music Prize of 2002 for his recordings. A Goldberg interview with Mortensen is forthcoming.

In 2007 the European tour of the 19-strong ensemble covered a total of 13 countries, in the course of which they took in five venues in Germany including the cathedral at Bad Gandersheim, the concert discussed here. In addition to the ensemble's tally of 11 home countries among the players, the conductor and harpsichordist Lars Ulrik Mortensen – a conductor whose whole person is simply afire with music – imported another, his own nation Denmark. In their programme "Music for Kings and Noblemen" the young musicians took the audience's breath away with their musical passion, conviction and infectious delight in playing.

Mortensen's carefully considered programme juxtaposed works by lesser known baroque composers – J. E. Galliard and J. H. Roman – with works by baroque masters Rameau and Bach. The opening suite from *Pan & Syrinx* by the German composer Galliard offers a fascinating array of baroque styles in the scope of its dances: "Purcell crossed with early Telemann and spiced with Campra", as Mortensen himself writes in his programme introduction. In this work, which occasionally displays hints of sound painting, the young musicians generated an extraordinary diversity of tonal nuances and baroque timbres through their vi-



Lars Ulrik Mortensen, music Director of the European Union Baroque Orchestra (EUBO)

brant playing and finest attention to detail. The woodwind trio (Rodrigo Gutiérrez Gutiérrez and Rachel Baldock, oboes, and Tomasz Wesolowski, bassoon) was especially impressive, playing their extensive solo passages with sheer technical perfection and enthralling musical creativity.

In the form of the *Sinfonia* for strings in E minor by Roman, Mortensen gave the programme a work with Scandinavian origins. This Swedish composer and music pedagogue, frequently termed the "father of Swedish music", made a unique contribution to the internationalisation of the Swedish music domain through his culture, his travels and his repertoire-enriching initiatives.

The famous orchestral suite *Zoroastre* by Rameau, which dates from 1749, is far more a work of sound painting than can be said of the Galliard suite, surprising us as it does with its harmonic turns, appealing melodic ideas and almost impressionistic tonal language. The work seemed to have been tailor-made for these musicians. With his varied and inspiring body language, Mortensen, in action here purely as conductor and not additionally as harpsichordist, set up a tonal dialogue embracing all manner of nuance, bizarre contours and shades of colour, which had the audience spellbound from beginning to end. And the musicians clearly relished entering into this lively dialogue with their conductor. Alongside these vivid tone-pictures, the two familiar works by Bach – the Violin Concerto in A minor, BWV 1041 and the Orchestral Suite No. 1 in C, BWV 1066 – came across as two firm pillars of

conservative baroque tradition. Yet this did nothing to prevent the flow of energy from the conductor and musicians, or to stifle the maestro's "personal notes". The violin concerto was presented by Mortensen in the original sense of the word "concerto" in that the violinist, Lidewij van der Voort from the Netherlands, performed not as a soloist soaring dazzlingly above the orchestra, but in her position as orchestral leader bound up in the overall sound of the orchestra; hence the concertising element of this composition, the "competing" of the instrumental groups, took the foreground to an unusual degree. This vitality of music-making was also responsible for making Bach's first Orchestral Suite an experience of very remarkable quality. One was struck by the broad palette of tonal colour in the tutti passages and delighted by the sound contrasts of the individual dances, in which the woodwind trio demonstrated once again its virtuosic brilliance.

Although producing CDs is not the principal mission of the EUBO, a number of discs containing recordings made in the course of the training programme are available commercially. They include "Bizzarie Universali" by William Corbett, *Concerti grossi* by Pieter Hellendaal, a CD entitled "Birds, Beast and Battles" under the direction of Monica Huggett, a reconstruction of Bach's lost St. Mark Passion and Handel's Cantata *Apollo & Dafne* with Roy Goodman conducting. A CD recording of the concert with Lars Ulrik Mortensen is currently in preparation.

CLAUDIA OELZE