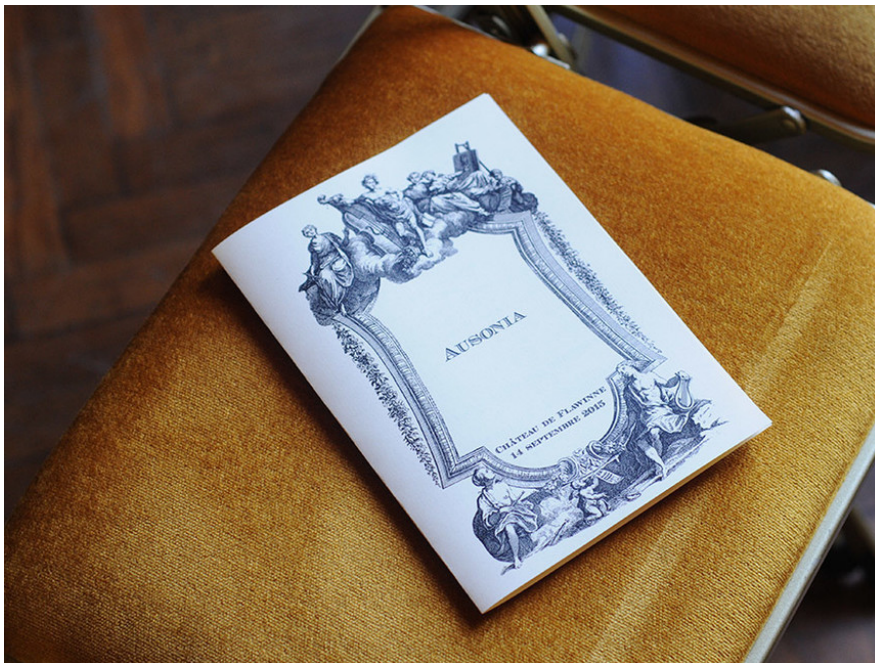




## Oh Camelot, My Camelot

Part the Third. The Concert



Ausonia at Chateau Flawinne © Rozenn Quéré Brussels 2015

25 JAN 2016 by DOMINIC ECKERSLEY

And in they come! Our soloist, Mira Glodeanu in an off-the-shoulder iridescent lichen green and pink crepe top with port wine red skirt below. First violin, Tami Troman, in a delightful flesh coloured skirt with box-cut strap top. The rest of the ensemble in Broadway black with the exception of our cellist, Geneviève Koerver, in her luscious blue top in perfect harmony with the deep Oxford blue of the harpsichord in front of which she sits herself down. Applause erupts from the packed full-house salon as the ensemble checks tuning, increasing even the already electric tension in the room, a tension of excitement and appetite.

And so to the first movement, the *Allegro*, of the Bach violin concerto in A minor. Mira takes the tempo with a gentle relaxed feel, almost as if to ease the audience into the programme of frenzied music laying ahead later in the evening. Fully at ease now, we are surprised by sudden and richly expressive, substantial rubatic—almost cadenza rhythmic licence—Mira is able to bring to her solo line with the Ensemble Ausonia pre-reading and supporting—enabling—her every musical whim. The Bach I had learned anew in the previous rehearsals, was still showing me even more unexpected facets of character! Why don't we hear this kind of music making more often? Pedal sections building, building and growing, more and more tension, more and more architecture.

The *Andante* starting out with very dignified chords of such convincing intonation you could almost forget there was not one but six people creating them together, six different minds which conjure magically a dark azure of clouds from which the soloist appeared like a blazing sunbeam. The chords gradually with sharper, more angular edges increasing the feeling of foreboding. This whole movement becoming almost a duet between the freely soaring solo



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violin and the luxurious support of the viola in quavers, producing a framework for the soloist to dance about in, to weave in and out of, and all interspersed periodically by the ever more ominous chords of the orchestra.

In the first moments already of the *Allegro Assai* the drama and expectation previously built in the *Andante* are relieved as if a sudden thunder storm after a spell of almost oppressively hot late summer afternoons. Underpinning the virtuoso violin, the harpsichord rumbles unimaginably enormous chords as the first cadential apex arrives—the thunder of that distant storm. This storm whisks itself into a fury of fire and fervour as the movement closes.

I feel for Frédéric as he composes himself to play the E minor harpsichord concerto. Our role as harpsichordists in concerts is almost always as continuo players who accompany while we direct from the keyboard. It's a role we become very familiar with, very comfortable in and it becomes something we almost find easy to do—if any music making ever could be easy. But we rarely end up with an orchestra playing actual concerti. In fact, until Bach started writing these bad boys, no one had ever played harpsichord concerti. The genre simply didn't exist. So for us to be up there in this role as a soloist with an orchestra not only watching and listening but also playing along, is a daunting prospect for the best of us, and Frédéric certainly is one of them!

He starts the *Allegro* with only two eight foot registers. This had seemed fine in rehearsals but suddenly feels too moderate. The audience, we, are eagerly eating up his sound—literally! Too much cloth and hair is now inundating the previously barren salon. But unfazed, the four foot register is snuck on in a moment and without any sudden or abrupt notice, the harpsichord is again carrying right over our heads to the back of the salon and through the gilded double doors to those seated further away even in the lounge behind. Each phrase from the harpsichord starts with an unusual poise and placement which gives it an almost elliptical feeling, gently undulating in the ocean like a young porpoise, while the second violin and viola support with warm but clear inner voices as the movement builds to a calm pedal tone until reaching a flamboyant *adagio* before the tempo *primo* recapitulation. How wonderful and rare it is to hear a harpsichord played with such a dynamic and expressive touch. Too few players today seem to even understand that they should expect, should seek and should deliver highly dynamic playing through their touch. So few harpsichords are even able to provide this kind of touch that it is little wonder so few players really know what to look for, what to offer, what to insist upon.

In the *Siciliano* I smell again in my ear's nose the bergamot fragrance rising from Farina's morning meadows, echoed in his bergamot water from Cologne which I have been grabbing secret whiffs of over these past days as one or another musician had splashed themselves with it. The strings building pillars almost like Japanese *torri* gates standing in a lake over which Frédéric flies like a peregrine falcon, his cantabile wings almost in suspended animation around the motionless and bewitching chords from the strings.

The final *Allegro* with its initial triplet harpsichord arpeggios right down and then right back up the keyboard give the impression of a little water fall at the edge of the lake, the silvery, accurate and articulate runs always under control but always surprisingly free—*fluid*. A scene of the gentle English countryside is being painted before our eyes, the wooded road to Tintagel perhaps? Are we still in Belgium or have we tele-transported to Avalon? My eyes are drawn to James' eyes as he glances over, again and again, as throughout the concert, to catch the eye of the first violinist, to see her bow, to read her interpretation with her, through her face. These are the things which make bands sound so tight, so together, so cohesive. The discordant right hand chords from the harpsichord bring me back into the audience and off the stage again as they build and prepare the way for a short solo and the final ritornello.

After a short pause at this half way point, the orchestra having left the salon return once more to play the E major violin concerto. Mira, the soloist, again not on the stage bleachers but down with us on street level. The candles behind the orchestra, set into gilded baroque wall sconces with vertical golden mirror dishes reflecting the gently flickering flames back

into the stage create a sense of intimacy and welcoming. As the *Allegro* commences my eyes are drawn again to the chin-off playing of the violist, Benjamin, and how his position at centre stage, coupled with this freedom of neck and head creates a physical symmetry and almost raises the music an inch or two off the bleachers. The violone jiving with fury filling the whole room with a crazed agitation and direction gives way suddenly to the almost pianissimo solo violin and gently bouncing viola quavers bringing us back to the next crazed tutti. There is something about this movement which always makes me visualise a portly cook of a manor house chasing her employer's nuisance kids from under her feet and out of the kitchen with a long bristled broom as they try to trick her and snatch a biscuit or two from the table, still hot from her wood-burning oven; the power continuo section of Ensemble Ausonia, driving this metaphor deep into my consciousness. The remarkable hierarchy built into each measure by the band gives an uncanny jazz feeling as the movement comes to an end.

The *Adagio*, on the other hand, posits the image of a Pieter Bruegel painting, of a frozen river covered in daring village skaters. Somehow the shapely string unisons seem to produce the swing of bodies swaying on their skates as they plough forwards. The last movement, the *Allegro Assai*, they play with the simplicity and honesty of a young innocent red haired freckled country girl amusing herself in the garden.

The D minor harpsichord concerto starts with such a break-neck speed my whole body—even my face—is ridden with goose-pimples. Every hair on my body, even those on the soles of my feet, are standing, alert, as Frédérick powers through to the first set of repeated harpsichord notes which he plays with an *inégalité* which even François Couperin would barely have been able to manage at this pace putting a real swing feel into the texture. I'm hearing Frédérick's Palmas loud and clear now! Even the pedal-note sections have a pull and shape, a direction, goals. Sitting on the right hand chords for fractions of extra moments he creates interesting and constantly changing bi-rhythms.

The *Adagio* with its unison strings easing the movement off like a boat from a quiet waters edge, with the delectable cello singing, as of the sad mute swan, the left hand of the harpsichord jumps up to the upper manual like the morning sun reflecting off the rippled water, providing a lucid if translucent accompaniment for the singing phrases of the right hand still down on the warmer and richer lower manual. The strings playing almost as if to soothe the harpsichord as it weaves rhythmically freely between their stable chords.

The last *Allegro*, the final movement of the concert, is full of torsion and pull, with the harpsichord pedal chords alternately strong and soft with Frédérick's remarkable touch, rhythmically unequal and yet only so slightly giving a natural feeling of flamenco, of gypsy funk. The concert ends to the roars of "bravo" and enthusiastic applause. But despite the brave effort on the part of the audience, no encore is played. But with what could you possibly follow the D minor concerto?

Follows on the 25th of February 2016 with the Fourth Part: *The After Concert and the Abby Yonder*



## Dominic Eckersley

Music is the language of joy and pain which I try to use to express joy and distress with the human condition hoping it brings happiness and comfort to others.

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**Captions**

1. Benjamin caught laughing © Rozenn Quéré Brussels 2015
2. The side isle of the 12th century chancel of Saint Michel de Thiérach © Rozenn Quéré Brussels 2015
3. Viola tuning with the Louis XIV organ in the distance © Rozenn Quéré Brussels 2015
4. The orchestra tuning to Mira's violin © Rozenn Quéré Brussels 2015
5. Power house continuo division © Rozenn Quéré Brussels 2015
6. Geneviève Koerver © Rozenn Quéré Brussels 2015

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