

The Marais Project newsletter



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This year in review

Jenny is often asked if our North Sydney concert series is the only place to hear The Marais Project perform. In fact, the ensemble and its various members have been very busy in 2008.

- The year commenced in early March with an appearance for Hunters Hill Music to a packed crowd of more than 300!
- After our "Sacred Song" concert Jennifer performed at the National Easter Viol School in Sydney which she also directed
- In May, The Marais Project joined forces once more with The Early Dance Consort for a special invitation only concert at Sydney's "Queens Club".
- Jennifer and Catherine then teamed up for two concerts, the first as part of the "From France to Freycinet Festival" in Tasmania, which is directed by soprano Jennifer Bates who moved to Tasmania from Sydney some years ago. Cathy and Jenny also featured as solo gambists in Bach's "Actus Tragicus" cantata for Sydney

Grammar School's Bach Cantata series.

- Late June saw the première of Kevin Hunt's semi-improvised piece at our "Viols 'n Violin" concert.
- The viola da gamba was represented at World Youth Day. Jennifer performed a Buxtehude cantata for viola da gamba and voice with counter tenor Timothy Chung. The recital was part of a liturgical concert in the Eastern Suburbs.
- Bastille Day saw a solo performance at that centre of French Culture, Hawks Nest, north of Newcastle.
- Finally, in August Marais Project members Chris Berensen, Cathy and Jenny, were guest performers at a St Anne's Anglican Church Ryde fundraiser for the overseas aid charity, TEAR. More than \$1,200 went to TEAR and some 150 people attended.

What a work load!

Ars Musica Australis... has generously offered to fund a new work for The Marais Project

New Commission

We are very happy to announce that Ars Musica Australis, an arts foundation that commissions new Australian music, has generously offered to fund a work for The Marais Project.

South Coast-based composer Rosalind Page will write a piece for two viola da gambas, theorbo and violin in 2009. Rosalind was recently commissioned to write a piece for Marais Project theorbist Tommie Andersson. Hers was one of five new works ABC FM commissioned for Tommie as part of the "Lute Project".

The Other Marathon

Alongside the 10 year marathon of performing the 600 works of Marin Marais, Jennifer is preparing to run the Sydney Marathon in September. Feel free to join her in training any day in Bicentennial Park...

The viola da gamba was represented at
World Youth Day

A Life Post Music?

We always thought that Marais Project gambist Catherine Tabrett was married to her music but on July 12th she succumbed to the charms of her now husband, Braddon. At Cathy's request, Jenny played excerpts of Marais' "La Folia" during the service.

ABC FM Re-broadcast

On the same day as Cathy and Braddon's wedding the ABC re-broadcast the studio recording of "Celestial Duos" made in 2007. The broadcast was followed by a flurry of on-line CD sales from The Marais Project www site which was pleasing.

Mara! meets Marais (in October)

On the 26th October The Independent Theatre, North Sydney will again host The Marais Project, as they combine for the first time with 3 members of the Award-winning World Music/Folk ensemble Mara!. For more than 20 years Mara! founders Mara and Llew Kiek have defied categorisation as they engage in multiple projects across a virtual kaleidoscope of musical styles from mediaeval ensembles to Bulgarian folk music, jazz, film music, choirs and orchestral works. Llew and Mara Kiek share something of their musical heritage and interests below.

Philip Pogson (PP): Llew and Mara, how did you find your way into the early music scene?

Mara Kiek (MK): My first real introduction to early music was through "Aquila Alterra" in the early 80's. The group was a kind of offshoot of the Renaissance Players. I had a background in dance and was asked to research early dance forms which could be incorporated into their performances. Around 1983, about two years after the formation of "Tansey's Fancy", (precursor of the Mara! Band), Winsome Evans asked me if I would like to audition for the Renaissance Players. She wanted me to audition as a percussionist as she had a full complement of singers at the time. I passed, and performed with the group regularly prior and subsequent to my 1988 study trip to Bulgaria.

Llew Kiek (LK): My early music interest was spawned through the Renaissance Players with whom I began performing in the early 1990's. Sometime after, Winsome asked me to produce the first 6 CDs that she recorded for Walshingam Classics, which went on to be re-released on Celestial Harmonies. The sixth of these was an ARIA nomination for best classical CD in 1996 - the first of several nominations I have since received for my CD productions.



Llew and Mara Kiek

PP: In the October concert, Mara! will consist of a trio, yourselves with the renowned Steve Elphick on double bass. What can the audience expect?

MK: We know lutenist Tommie Andersson and Jenny Eriksson, of course, as well as soprano Belinda Montgomery. This performance will give us the opportunity to explore some traditional and mediaeval repertoire that we wouldn't normally perform with the Mara! quintet. The fact

that The Marais Project also features instruments of the same families will enhance that texture.

PP: Looking at the WWW site (<http://www.maramusic.com.au/>) I am amazed by breadth of your musical interests. Mara, how did you get involved in Eastern European folk music?

MK: My introduction to music from the Balkans came via Linsey Pollak who was playing with Renaissance Players when I joined them in 1983. Linsey had recently returned from a study trip to Macedonia where he studied (gaida) bagpipes. He joined Tansey's Fancy and taught us a body of Macedonian traditional folk music and dances. Thus began a lifelong passion for the music of this region.

While I concentrated on Bulgarian music and particularly the traditional female singing voice, Llew focused more on Turkish music, particularly long and short necked lutes. He studied for a number of years with Sabahattin Akdagcık in Sydney and made numerous trips to Turkey to research and collect instruments.

For more than 20 years Mara! founders Mara and Llew Kiek have defied musical categorisation

PP: Mara, what is different in your sound production from an opera singer or even a rock artist?

MK: My singing technique has always been folk based. Although I studied classical singing privately in the late 70's and early 80's, the classical timbre was not instinctive to me. I always tended towards a "folk" sound and was irrevocably drawn to the arresting power of the Balkan voice when I first heard it. I badly wanted to achieve the Bulgarian-style timbre but could not easily or consistently access it during those early days. The quest for mastery has lasted 25 years and continues still.

Comparisons between Bulgarian traditional and "classical voice" are perhaps the easiest because the two techniques use different mechanisms of vibration of the vocal folds. The classical voice is

produced with a short "closed phase" of vocal fold vibration (the vocal folds are usually closed for no more than 30% of each vibratory cycle), while Bulgarian appears to feature a long closed phase (thought to be over 60%). A long closed phase results in greater sound pressure levels and perceived "loudness" and a greater intensity of high frequency harmonics within the sound spectrum. In some ways the Bulgarian vocal mechanism is actually closer to that employed by rock singers or the "belt" quality used in music theatre.

PP: What does the future hold for you as individual artists and for the various Mara Music projects?

MK: The promise of many diverse projects, the main one being the Martenitsa choir with whom we have already performed, recorded extensively and toured internationally. Add to this some theatre, film music and youth projects. I also intend to continue my studies and voice research including undertaking a doctorate. This will involve more time overseas, and provide further opportunities for the Mara! band to tour in Europe, traditionally our most receptive audience base.



Steve Elphick

LK: I am currently writing the score for an operatic work "El Amal" with librettist John Shand, in collaboration with Pacific Opera and Parramatta Riverside Theatres. The Mara! band has several Musica Viva commitments and will record "Tra Parole E Silenzio", a new suite of original music written by the band members, with Martenitsa in 2009.

Tickets for Mara! meets Marais are available from The Independent Theatre ph 9955 6580 or online at: www.theindependent.org (\$35/28) + booking fee.