

# GAMBA WATCH

The Newsletter of The Marais Project & Sounds Baroque



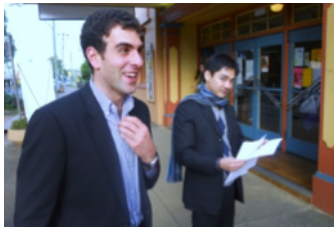
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Edited by Philip Pogson

## Bellingen Music Festival



Harpsichordist Anthony Hamad and gambist Shaun Ng arrive at the Bellingen concert hall

Bellingen must be one of the prettiest towns on the Australian East Coast. Nestled in the rainforest-licked foothills 35kms south west of Coffs Harbour and alongside the Bellinger River, it is also a town that loves art and culture. In addition to a writers festival the village of 3,000 hosts no less than three regular music festivals covering classical music, jazz and blues/roots.

On the last weekend in May The Marais Project travelled north to perform at the Festival joining distinguished colleagues including shakuhachi virtuoso, Riley Lee, The Lipman Harp Duo, singer Peter Cousens and alternate chamber music practitioners, "Ilythian". Local musicians Suzanne Sherrington and the Bellingen Youth Orchestra rounded out the program.

The Marais Project musicians loved the warm, relaxed atmosphere, close contact with the well-informed Bellingen audiences and musical discussions with the young people from the Youth Orchestra. The organisational aspects of the Festival were also superb making the Festival overall a "5 out of 5" experience.



The beautiful Bellingen River

If you enjoy fine music, beautiful scenery and warm hospitality plan to be at Bellingen in 2012.



## "Hercules" launch

Hercules the superhero needs no introduction. Not so "Hercules" the new Sounds Baroque opera that was officially launched in New South Wales schools on June 7th at The McDonald College, a well-known performing arts school at North Strathfield. Hercules is adapted from Jean-Baptiste Lully's 1674 opera "Alceste".

Sounds Baroque, directed by Jennifer Eriksson, has toured schools for more than 20 years as part of the Musica Viva in Schools initiative. Several Musica Viva in Schools supporters and donors were able to attend the launch including Margaret Wright, OAM, one of the founders of this world-leading program.

"Hercules" is highly interactive and the McDonald College students were superbly prepared to play their part. The children had even developed and presented their own dance item to the "Hercules Rap". The "Rap" was especially written for Sounds Baroque by Sydney composer Dan Walker. (Yes, baroque operas in 2011 include rap music!) Michael McGregor Head of Music at the College, commented "It was a great pleasure to have 'Sounds Baroque' launch their 2011 Musica Viva opera at The McDonald College. The children enjoyed themselves immensely."



Hercules (Michael Warby) and Hermine (Narelle Evans)

Sounds Baroque is unique in Australia in that it is the only baroque opera company touring Infants and primary schools.

## Bass viol sits the HSC



Alice (left) and Jenny

Year 12 student Alice Chance first heard Jenny Eriksson play the viola da gamba at her Primary school. She was five years old. She went home and told her mother, Sarah, that she wanted to learn the "valopittygumba". Sarah subsequently

contacted Jenny who suggested that Alice start lessons on the violin – which she did – but her love of the bass viol remained.

**It fascinates me how the mellow, beautifully tragic tones of the Gamba can still speak to people, centuries after its birth. (Alice Chance)**

Three years ago Alice commenced tuition with Jenny and is currently preparing for the Higher School Certificate music exams at MLC, Burwood. As far as we know, Alice is the first New South Wales HSC student to sit the HSC on the viola da gamba in more than twenty years. The last known HSC viol student was Victoria Watts, a fine gambist who is currently President of the Australian Viola da Gamba Society. Ms Chance is also studying composition at MLC with tutor Dr Paul Stanhope. For her elective composition Alice has composed a piece for two bass viols that will be performed for recording/submission purposes by Alice and Jenny.

In her practical exam Alice, accompanied by Jenny, will present a duo for two viola da gambas by Australian composer Stephen Yates whose ballet music "Love Reconciled" featured on The Marais Project's CD of the same name.

When asked what she loved about the viola da gamba Alice answered: "It fascinates me how the mellow, beautifully tragic tones of the Gamba can still speak to people centuries after its birth."



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## Marais Project & Sounds Baroque harpsichordist abroad

Chris Berensen was harpsichordist in residence for The Marais Project and Sounds Baroque for a number of years. He and his wife Hannah are currently undertaking postgraduate study in Leipzig, Germany. In this especially commissioned "Gamba Watch" article Chris describes something of their life in Germany. The full text is available at the Marais Project Blog. [www.maraisproject.com.au](http://www.maraisproject.com.au)

### Music school in Leipzig



Chris - exhibiting a lengthy specimen of German bureaucracy

Leipzig is simply a great place to study and practise seventeenth and eighteenth century music. The 'Hochschule für Musik und Theater' is the oldest conservatory in all of Germany and was founded by Mendelssohn himself. A surprising number of nineteenth and twentieth century music stars have studied or taught there, including Robert and Clara Schumann, Sir Arthur

Sullivan, Edvard Grieg, Leoš Janáček and Max Reger. However, the Hochschule today is just as alive, sporting a highly revered theatre department, jazz, and dramaturgy department. The Alte Musik (old music) department at the Hochschule is made up of a progressive and eclectic group of practitioners whose ideas we have already found to be challenging and convincing in their fresh approaches to the old flogged horses of early music issues. One of my lecturers is Nicholas Parle, a very fine, long time expat Australian harpsichordist that many people may remember. Guest specialists have spoken on such subjects as Ganassi's diminutions, and on basso continuo as used in the nineteenth century. On Wednesdays, we dance galliards. (No, I will not provide photos of me "galliarding"!

### Of concerts, instruments and venues

Beyond the walls of the Hochschule there are some great places to see good early music concerts. Apart from the almost daily Bach at the Thomaskirche and Nikolaikirche, there are numerous Manor houses with their ubiquitous drawing rooms, always perfect for a viola da gamba player or a lutenist. One particularly special building is the Bosehaus, headquarters of the Bach-Archiv and Neue Bachgesellschaft. Beyond the baroque courtyard and up the winding stairs, one finds what is close to the perfect chamber music venue – oh and did I mention it is home to one of the loveliest harpsichords I've ever performed on, a chamber organ,

and no modern piano? This is a venue definitely worth a test drive.

Another favourite place of ours is the Grassimuseum, which boasts a world renowned instrument collection. Especially wonderful about this place is that the enthusiastic experts there are happy to have people play their original instruments.



The entrance to the Hochschule für Musik und Theater "Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy", Leipzig

### Looking back, looking forward

In all it has been fourteen months since we arrived in Europe. We still feel unsure whether our toehold on the continent is firm enough to allow us to relax, and so we view our impending visit to Australia with curiosity. Will visiting Sydney trigger an inundation

of homesickness for Australia that we've been otherwise too busy to feel? Will it feel normal to speak to strangers in English, or have we already developed new foreign instincts in this relatively short time? Even more interestingly, how will we feel about returning to Germany? I'm hoping that as long as we keep paying the gas bill, things will be ok.



### Old and New

Although The Marais Project and Sounds Baroque specialise in baroque-era music, 2011 has brought about a number of compositional "firsts". On Palm

Sunday Jenny Eriksson premiered Paul Stanhope's remarkable "Lamentations" with the Sydney Chamber Choir. Following on from Lamentations, our August 14th Marais Project subscription concert will feature new settings by Dan Walker of poems by Les Murray, commissioned with the assistance of Ars Musica Australis. In addition to the original 17th century music by Lully, Sounds Baroque's opera "Hercules" also contains freshly composed materials by Dan Walker, Jenny Eriksson and Chris Berensen. Finally, Jenny has commissioned a special popular song arrangement for our 23rd October concert, "The Ossenbrunner Twins". Engaging with contemporary composers is a key aspect of The Marais Project and Sounds Baroque's commitment to active engagement with the age we live in.

### New Marais WWW site

The new Marais www site is up and running and is already proving popular. Alongside ticket and CD sales the site offers numerous articles, CD tracks, links and the Marais Blog. [www.maraisproject.com.au](http://www.maraisproject.com.au)

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