

Anneke Scott

Gavin Dixon



‘Greetings from Australia!’ When I contacted Anneke Scott to arrange this interview I had a feeling she might be difficult to track down. It turned out she was touring with the Australian Chamber Orchestra in a programme of Beethoven symphonies. But neither the exotic location nor the high-profile ensemble is particularly unusual on Anneke’s schedule.

In the 12 years since she graduated from the Royal Academy of Music, Anneke has established an enviable reputation as one of the leading natural horn players of her generation. If you’ve heard a British period instrument orchestra playing Baroque or Classical music in recent years, there’s a good chance that Anneke was leading the horn section. She is the principal horn of the English Baroque Soloists, the Orchestra of the Sixteen and the Dunedin Consort, as well as a regular guest with many other ensembles. In between all this, she is also active as a chamber musician and soloist.

When Anneke returns to London a few weeks later, she gives a recital to launch her new solo album of music by the 19th century French virtuoso Jacques-François Gallay. On top of her busy performing schedule, Anneke also devotes much of her time to historical research, and the recording is the culmination of a project to track down, catalogue and perform Gallay’s works.

Gallay is a fascinating figure in the history of the horn, a gifted player who was in the right place at the right time. “Paris was the last bastion of hand horn playing and the Conservatoire continued to teach the instrument well into the 20th century Anneke tells me to my great surprise. During the 19th century there was a real extension of hand technique. While other countries started to accept the valve, the French instead wanted to see how far they could go with hand technique. This leads to some really exciting repertoire, the flowering of which can be seen in Gallay’s work.

When we get down to the details of this music, we soon come up against issues that are familiar to all brass players. Gallay was first and foremost a player, and the music he wrote fits the instrument beautifully. But that doesn’t mean he gives the performer an easy time.

“A lot of what Gallay writes doesn’t look like “typical” hand horn writing. Many of the notes he uses are traditionally

regarded as problematic. But when you start to tackle it you quickly realise that it was written by someone who had a consummate understanding of the instrument. He knows just how far he can push the boundaries.”



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I ask if Gallay’s work in Parisian opera houses had a bearing on his music. “His style reflects French opera tastes very well in that it’s much more closely related to Italian opera! Gallay was principal horn of the Italian opera house in Paris and would have been immersed in this repertoire. I felt that a lot of Gallay’s solo works brought to mind opera scenes and characters.”



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Gallay wrote a treatise on hand horn playing, an invaluable resource when interpreting this music. But one

major issue remains. “The main thing left to the performer is the choice of crook, as Gallay doesn’t suggest which to use. I had to think initially about which crooks worked best with which pieces and then think about the juxtaposition of tonalities. It was great fun experimenting with the variables.”

It all sounds a very long way from the experiences of modern horn players. I ask Anneke how she thinks a horn player from a symphony orchestra would fare in a period performance ensemble.

“I’d be very interested to see what they made of it all. Of course the skills needed in modern and period bands are similar - a good set of ears, technique and flexibility. I think the most surprising thing would be the instrument and how it responds in certain conditions. A lot of my colleagues remember the alienating feeling we got when we first started playing these instruments in an

orchestral setting. For starters no longer being in F, your sense of pitch and harmony gets a real workout. Also, you begin to realise the crucial role of the horns as watchmen of the overall tuning of the orchestra.”

“I often find with period instruments that you really have to listen to what the instrument is trying to tell you. What might appear to some as a defect in the old instrument, a fragility or vulnerability perhaps, can actually be a thing of beauty if you work with it rather than trying to make it sound like its modern brother.”

Historical research has its place, but it is clear that actually playing these instruments is essential to understanding their capabilities. So where does the conductor fit in? I ask, as diplomatically as possible, who decides on the instruments for a specific piece, player or conductor?

“This varies from group to group” Anneke says. “One of the things that first attracted me to period performance was the research aspect of it. If you work in this field you are expected to have a good knowledge about the appropriate instruments and techniques for the repertoire. For much of what we do the choice of instruments

is very clear. Sometimes you make the decision as a section, sometimes conductors have their own ideas and input. A recent schedule I got stipulated the relevant decades, country and makers of instruments - this was after the conductor had been in touch with the principal players and asked their advice.'

"Another recent project was recording the Brandenburg Concertos at A=392. Baroque horns are built at A=415, though adjusting the crooks gives you some manoeuvrability. My colleague and I turned up with all sorts of plumbing to try and fashion horns that would work at this pitch. I tend to find that the directors who get involved in the nitty gritty decisions about the instruments we use tend to be more aware of the challenges involved. They also tend to be really enthusiastic about the differences between the various options and finding the right instrument."

The period orchestra world seems to have come of age in recent years. Listeners no longer make concessions to players for the greater difficulties their instruments pose. Is more expected of horn players in period bands today than, say, ten years ago?

"Today we're standing on the shoulders of giants. I've heard older colleagues, who were involved in the explosion in recordings during the 1980s and 90s, talk about learning on the job. Suddenly there was this huge growth industry within classical music and there was demand for anyone brave or foolhardy enough to give it a go."

"Now period performance is often a compulsory part of conservatoire training and a respected career choice. When I was applying for music college as an undergraduate I actually auditioned on both period and modern horn as I was already interested in playing the old instruments. For me the opportunity to seriously study period performance was key to my choice of college. I was seen as something of a rarity then, but the colleges were all very encouraging."

"For emerging generations of period horn players the challenge will continue to be gaining experience prior to working professionally. In comparison to students on modern instruments, who will have many years of youth orchestra or band playing behind them, those learning period instruments may not have had much experience. There are some marvellous schemes that have done much to address this, including the European Union Baroque Orchestra, and the Abbaye aux Dames in Saintes (which was absolutely fundamental to my training).



Anneke Scott

More and more youth orchestras are doing period instrument courses (particularly in Holland and Spain) and period orchestras such as Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the English Baroque Soloists/Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique have set up training or apprenticeship schemes. The main challenge for wind players continues to be the fact that you are so exposed, so seeking out opportunities to further your experience is an absolute must."

Anneke had to jet off again before we could finish the interview, this time to Utrecht. I assumed that must be for Oude Muziek, the pre-eminent Baroque music festival held in that city each year. But no, she was actually at the Gaudeamus Muziekweek, an equally revered festival of contemporary music. "I was there in a completely different role" she explained afterwards "with my husband, John Croft, who won this year's Ton Bruynèl prize for composition."

So how does the new music scene compare to the Baroque performance world? "They have a lot in common, and many musicians are equally at home in both. I think there are a lot of people in both who are really inquisitive and are excited about trying out new techniques and

experimenting with what the instruments can do.'

My mind turns to the idea of new music for hand horn. The most famous recent work to include the instrument is probably Ligeti's Hamburg Concerto. The work is a concerto for (modern) horn, but the orchestra includes a section of four horns who are required to play both valved and natural instruments.

"I've played in the horn section for the Ligeti concerto several times. It's the most amazing piece, very rewarding to play. The challenge is that you spend years trying to get the harmonics nicely in tune and then Ligeti comes along and asks you to leave them where they naturally lie. In Ligeti you get to indulge and really enjoy the natural tuning."

I ask about other recent works for natural horn and Anneke tells me that there is now a significant Modern repertoire. "Much of it" she says "was written as a result of the Bad Harzburg competitions, organised by Hermam Baumann in Germany in the 1980s and 90s. A number of leading horn players

including Claude Maury, Teunis van der Zwart, Thomas Muller and Uli Hübner were prize winners. There was always a solo contemporary composition as a compulsory element of the competition. One of the most commonly played modern works for natural horn, Hermann Baumann's *Elegie*, was written for the first competition in 1984, but as there were



Anneke Scott during a recording session.

two new works written for each competition there's a lot more out there. I'm currently working on many of these pieces as I think it'd be great to mark the upcoming 30th anniversary of the competition by performing them."

'Funnily enough, the challenges posed by contemporary compositions for natural horn mirror those of the 19th century. The people who knew most about the potential of the instrument were often the players who were usually better performers than composers. There are notable exceptions of course. One of my favourites at the moment, not written by a horn player, is a composition by Heinz Holliger called *Induuchlen* which is for countertenor and natural horn."

Another piece for natural horn has emerged as a result of Anneke's recent activities. "John, my husband, wrote a solo natural horn piece for me called *une autre voix qui chante*. Gally should take some responsibility for this, as John was working on the piece in secret while I was recording the disc."

Anneke plans to record the new work soon. She also has some other interesting recording projects lined up for the coming year. "The Bate Collection in Oxford has asked me to do a recital disc featuring the instruments in the collection. This will be a wonderful opportunity to do a large range of repertoire. The disc will cover Handel through to Richard Strauss, via Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Saint-Saëns and many others. There is also a second disc of works by Gally, this time the ensemble repertoire."

And her concert diary for 2013 is as busy and varied as ever: "One highlight is the Brahms Horn Trio, which I'm performing with violinist Matthew Truscott and pianist Steven Devine as part of the Suffolk Villages Festival. As it's the Britten anniversary, I'm giving performances of the *Serenade* and *Still Falls the Rain* with James Gilchrist for the Budleigh Music Festival. Oh, and I'm going to Buenos Aires for the first time to perform *The Damnation of Faust* with Sir John Eliot Gardiner and ORR. I'm really looking forward to that!"

Carol Brass