

## ENGLISH BAROQUE MUSIC: Handel in England, 26 July - 2 August 2009

Review by Megan Russ (violin), from Minnesota, U.S.A.

As a first-timer attending the Baroque week of the Cambridge Early Music Summer School 2009, I was not quite sure what to expect. From the descriptions it sounded great, of course, but one never knows about these sorts of things. Here are the things I did know: it would be challenging musically, and that I would be meeting and playing with many new people. My week in Cambridge turned out to be all those things- and so much more!

I will begin by raving about the people. Mingling with others who also share an avid interest in early music was tremendously satisfying. I can remember so many wonderful conversations at the dinner table and at tea time! Everyone is friendly and interesting, and there out of a love of early music and ensemble playing. It is not cut-throat or competitive. As a young, serious violinist I appreciated the musical challenges and high expectations. As a young, serious violinist who is NOT barreling towards a solo career cutting down everyone in her way, I appreciated the welcoming, friendly environment even more. I am not only talking about the students, either! The tutors are among the leading players and scholars in the field. They possess an unparalleled depth of knowledge and musical expression- and they are great to work with! They meet you where you are, demanding a high level of musicianship without being tyrannical.

As a modern violinist and relative newcomer onto the early music scene, I enjoyed the intense focus on baroque technique and interpretation. I came away with more knowledge and, even better, more experience playing in the baroque style. My early music "horizons" were broadened through exposure to new composers and new pieces. Although there are no private lessons on the course, there was a great mix of large ensembles and chamber groups to be involved in. I enjoyed being able to apply things we worked on in the morning sectionals to the music we played in the tutti sessions at night. Our hard work over the week culminated in an informal student concert, which was wonderfully varied and fun, and the official concert open to the public.

On to practical matters... I was very happy with the lodging and facilities at Sidney Sussex College. The opportunity to live and play in such a venerable institution in the heart of Cambridge was unparalleled! All rooms are single occupancy, and though not luxurious are perfectly adequate. You are hardly in your room anyway! We ate in the Great Hall, Harry Potter style. The food was excellent, and the staff friendly and accommodating.

I would highly recommend this course to anyone interested in exploring early music in an intelligent, warm atmosphere. I had a wonderful, memorable experience, and met many delightful people who I hope to see again next year!