

## RENAISSANCE MUSIC: The Triumphs of Maximilian, 3-10 August 2008

### Review by Lizzie Gutteridge

This must have been my lucky year. I signed up for the Cambridge Early Music Summer School after seeing a poster for their end of week concert and really knowing nothing about it. I put myself down as playing shawms first and viella second and was a little worried when I got the response “do you also play recorders?”. Well yes I do, when I've nothing better to do, so I went with it and was overjoyed to find on arriving that I was not alone.

This year was the first time Keith McGowan has tutored the winds on the course and his name attracted three other intrepid double reed players to sign up, including Simon Pickard of the Gloucester Waits. Unfortunately Keith had other commitments that only allowed him to be in Cambridge for three days so we packed in as much playing and technique as we could.

First we had to settle on a line-up and try to get a balanced and tuned sound out of a quartet who had never played together before. We had a peculiar selection of instruments in F, C, G and D between us and, having had the ancient and modern history of which of these were authentically reproduced, which were not, and why, we then ended up using the least authentic instruments for most of the rest of the week!

To summarise for those who haven't heard all this before (if you have, jump a paragraph): Shawm bands in the late 15th and early 16th Centuries were in a world of their own when it came to reading and writing down music, a bit like modern brass bands. Like brass bands their system was designed to allow players to change between instruments and use the same fingerings for the same notes on the staff for any of them. The tenor shawm in C was used to play the bass line and was played as if it were in F so the F in the space below the bass clef staff was played by closing all the holes to get a bottom C. The alto shawm was built in G but the player read the music as if it was a tenor instrument in C. If this part is written in C4 clef (what we now call tenor clef), then the bottom note on the instrument is also written just below the staff. The D soprano player read from C2 clef (with middle C being on the second line up) and thought they were playing a G instrument, so that yet again the bottom note on the instrument is written just under the staff. The net result of all this is that the music came out a whole 5th higher than it was written, and that no bass in F instrument was needed.

It seems to me that this is very useful information that I'd never come across before. How many of our waits bands already knew all this? Is it just that everyone assumed I already knew?... Apart from the fact that it relieves the pressure for me to find a proper bass instrument for the Colchester Waits, it will give a brighter sound to some apparently very low pitched pieces. Take our old friends *Tant Qui Vivrai* and *Bruder Conrad* for example.

Slightly less easy to come to terms with was the constant talk of such foreign concepts as shaping, phrasing off, dynamics and reed control. This all came as a bit of a shock to us as most of us had been doing our best to produce a loud and dramatic wall of sound effect but once we'd got over the initial shock it led to some interesting possibilities.

Even greater was the challenge, as the week progressed, of fitting our shawm sound to the needs of the choir. There seemed to be a new piece (and often a new instrument) in every session for a while as the tutors tried out various ways of making this work. At first the choir themselves were a bit shocked, having only sung with viols and recorders before as far as I

could make out. Even the course's administrator Selene Mills admitted to never having heard four shawms playing together before. However, day by day, people began to sidle up to us and say that actually, they quite liked our sound, and by the end of the week we were a definite hit. If anyone is thinking of combining a shawm band with a choir in future and would like the benefit of our experience I would suggest the following: Always use a big room with a big acoustic, even in rehearsal; have at least 4 strong singers to each instrument; and make sure you have an instrument on every line of the music.

The focus of the week's activities was the composer Senfl. Not widely known for much other than some of his sillier songs, Senfl was court composer to Maximilian and wrote a vast range of music from massive choral works to intimate chamber music and intricate tenor lieder, all of which were well represented in the final concert. If you're interested in finding out more about Senfl I strongly suggest you mention his name to Kathleen Berg [of the Lincoln Waits] next time you see her, or get her book about him when it's published later this year. [For information on this exciting project, visit <http://senfl.co.uk/>]

The end of week concert was a great success, beginning and ending with the full choir and instruments including 6-part loud winds and including, as well as examples of the styles mentioned above, a medley of folk tunes set in the tenor lieder played on bagpipes, viella, shawms and drum and a few smaller shawm ensemble pieces, including one of Senfl's sillier songs *Das Glaut zu Speyer* a sound picture of church bells that sounds strangely reminiscent of Steve Reich and the performance of which definitely included dynamics!

Chatting with the organisers over breakfast the next morning I asked if the loud winds were something they would like to make a regular part of the course from now on. They were very enthusiastic, especially if more players of these instruments and their brassy friends were to come along. Next year's course is provisionally booked to take place from the 2nd to the 9th August — see you there?

[Lizzie Gutteridge](#) », of [Wyldes Noyse](#) », and Colchester & King's Lynn Waits: reproduced with kind permission from the [Wait's website](#) »

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## **RENAISSANCE MUSIC: The Triumphs of Maximilian, 3-10 August 2008**

### **Review by Doris Willis**

These two summer schools, each lasting a week, take place in Sidney Sussex College. The Parley of Instruments tutors the Baroque week and Philip Thorby and Friends the Renaissance week. Philip is the main player in each.

I have taken part in one Baroque week but normally attend the Renaissance week since as a viol player and singer it suits my taste better. This year the title was 'The Triumphs of Maximilian' and featured music mainly of Senfl. The supporting tutors were David Hatcher for viols, Jacob Heringman for lutes and Keith McGowan for winds of many and various kinds.

In the past I have taken viol as my main instrument and benefited from the enthusiastic and inspiring teaching of David. This year I decided singing would be the number one.

The courses begin with a public concert by a tutor, in this case Jacob, who introduced his audience to the most engaging performance of Senfl lute music.

The course attracts singers and players from across the world, some who come annually from U.S.A. and Holland especially to take part. The age range this year was spread wide and it was a joy for us more mature folk to work with young people starting out on a musical journey. The music was mostly unknown to the larger part of the course but Kathleen Berg, who had been introduced to the wonders of Senfl a year ago, brought with her the proofs of her book which she had been immediately inspired to write on his life and works.

The first session is always with each student's first choice and personal tutor. Singing daily in the beautiful chapel of Sidney Sussex under the direction of Philip was exciting and demanding and he took the choir to heights which at first seemed hardly possible but which Philip always manages to achieve. The rest of the day was spent in viol playing or singing in varying groups, directed by the ever energetic and happy David or the quieter and calm Jacob and a final after dinner evening session together with Philip.

The afternoons are free and as the college is right in the town the shops and sales require attention. During the week there was a concert by Philip and Friends again around the same brilliant composer whose music, by this time, we had all come to admire and enjoy. The course ended with a concert by students and tutors, which proved an exciting and satisfying finish.

The week was not all work. On one evening we were taught a few simple Renaissance dances by David, who seems to have an endless supply of talents, accompanied by a wonderful collection of bagpipes and other winds. The final concert was followed by a riotous party with dancing to the tunes of David and his loud wind friends.

This course is not cheap, but you get what you pay for in expert, enthusiastic and first grade tutors, wonderful music, good food, satisfactory accommodation and a lot of friendship and fun. Some students take half board and make their own lunch or dinner which lessens the cost. Some bursaries are available. For my husband and me it is a good reason to return from Cyprus a little earlier than we might otherwise do. Selene and her husband, Nick as well as

their assistant, Linda, work endlessly behind the scenes to achieve the smooth running of these courses. I shall be looking forward to seeing the plans for next year. You can look up their website ([www.CambridgeEarlyMusic.org](http://www.CambridgeEarlyMusic.org)) or contact Cambridge Early Music, Trinity College, Cambridge CB2 1TQ

Doris Willis