



**HASTINGS  
PHILHARMONIC  
ORCHESTRA**

**EO** Ensemble  
OrQuesta

Angel Early Music Project Report- January and February 2023 project:  
Concert performance February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023.  
Cavalli's *Musiche Sacre* – 'Music from a time of plague'.

This project was run as a partnership between HPO [[link here](#)] and Ensemble OrQuesta [[link here](#)].

**Aims:**

- ♪ to champion this rarely performed early music and make it more accessible;
- ♪ to work within the local community to give exciting, challenging, and high-quality music opportunities to both early career professionals and enthusiastic amateurs.
- ♪ to enable local children and adults to reap the emotional and social benefits of participating in workshops, rehearsals, and a concert performance, empowering them to develop self-confidence, make new connections, and take pride in collaborating.
- ♪ to encourage an awareness of the role and power of music as a conduit for emotional expression across the centuries.
- ♪ to prepare a multi-purpose and functional new edition of the *Musiche Sacre* to increase the accessibility of this little-known music to the public.
- ♪ to make the new edition available for free download.



During free of charge sessions some of the children of HPO Songbirds were introduced to **Francesco Cavalli** as a composer of music in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Italy during a time of plague outbreaks. After discussion, considering the impact of the disease and how people might have felt, the children responded to the following stimulus – a pen and ink drawing of Naples suffering from a plague outbreak in 1756, the same year Cavalli wrote the *Musiche Sacre* – and were encouraged, with group leader support, in small groups, to use physical theatre to express the response of a community to the impact of a pandemic.





### Stimulus response:

The children shared some of their ideas about the feelings they thought people might have had during a plague outbreak:

‘worried’ ‘really frightened’ ‘scared’ ‘very sad if people died’ ‘in a panic’ ‘sick’ ‘like hell has come’ ‘unhappy’ ‘wanting to hide’ ‘bored at home’ ‘lonely’ ‘terrified’ ‘miserable.’

Marcio and Helen helped the children to understand the role of the church and music in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Italy – people turned to the church for support. The children were interested to learn that, because people could not understand Latin, it was important that the music they heard both comforted them and gave them hope for the future. The children were told that Cavalli was a brilliant composer of opera- he knew a great deal about how to express emotion in his music- he knew how to express, sorrow, joy, fear, and hope.

Illness amongst the children (including, ironically, the beginnings of an outbreak of chickenpox) reduced our Songbird numbers on the day photos were taken, but the children gathered round the piano to listen to the music of Cavalli, sing, and learn more about early music melodies and harmonies. They explored single melodic lines, lines entering one at a time, lines echoing each other, and antiphonal singing. They explored line that reflect calm emotion, and lines that reflect deep sadness. They explored rhythm and rhythm patterns and how these create a sense of energy and hope.

Then, they were encouraged to use movement help reinforce some of these concepts. Starting from an empty ‘frame’, they entered individually and joined in a solemn canto line and entered from different sides to reflect antiphonal singing. Then, still using Cavalli’s music, they were encouraged to include their ideas from the physical theatre sessions, breaking off into their tableaus to show the impact of a pandemic on a community.



The children were also sent a **booklet** with extra information about the plague and about Cavalli. This booklet included historical information, musical knowledge, listening challenges, questions to encourage thinking, and extension tasks to encourage 'digging deeper'. There was a listening challenge about Cavalli’s *Musiche Sacre* to complete during the concert as they listened to additional movements prepared by HPO Singers if they wanted to, and a fun activity to find out more about Plague Doctors. The children were encouraged to think about the power and influence of music across the centuries. This booklet is available for download [here](#).

**Feedback:** during the feedback session the children were asked for their response to Cavalli’s music. Here is some of their feedback:

‘I liked the nice tunes’ ‘I liked the bouncy bits’ ‘I liked the harpsichord’ ‘I liked it when it sounded like a dance’ ‘I liked everyone singing together’ ‘I liked the quiet bits’ ‘I felt nervous doing the concert’ ‘I felt happy when we did our singing and movement and it went well’ ‘I liked the tunes’ ‘I liked the harpsichord’.

# HPO SINGERS

The amateur singers in the chamber choir HPO Singers were introduced to the music of Cavalli during their rehearsal and workshop programme and were coached in the baroque style by Marcio da Silva. The music presents considerable challenges since it includes antiphonal singing and complex rhythms.

During final rehearsals HPO Singers appreciated the assistance of the young professional singers and the dynamic boost provided by the early music specialist musicians of **Ensemble OrQuesta Baroque**.



Our concert was held on the evening of **Saturday February 25<sup>th</sup>** in the atmospheric setting of Christ Church, St Leonards-on Sea.

**Audience:** we were delighted to welcome an audience of 120- we recognised that this early music might not have a wide general appeal despite our vigorous publicity and the inclusion of some of our children.



Marcio took the opportunity to explain the project to the audience, the grant support we had been grateful to receive, the nature of the work undertaken with the children, and the beneficial partnership with Ensemble OrQuesta and with the young artists working alongside HPO Singers.



The **programme** from the evening can be found [here](#). More **photos** from the concert can be found [here](#).

**Audience feedback:** response from the audience was hearteningly positive. The atmospheric lighting was appreciated and declared to have contributed to ‘a thoroughly enjoyable and thought-provoking evening’. Many were surprised how much they enjoyed the music, being ‘impressed by the variety – both calmness and energy’, and the quality of the singing – ‘Iste confessor’ was just beautiful’. The duets, trios, and quartets delivered by the young soloists were declared to be ‘outstanding’, with comments made about how ‘privileged Hastings is to hear such amazing singers who are clearly at the start of very promising careers.’

Audience members were delighted to see the children involved and found the children’s singing and physical theatre ‘moving’ and ‘very touching’ – ‘it brought tears to my eyes’.

Parents were very proud. One parent commented that ‘there had been a lot of talk at home about the plague and why people find music helpful’, another was astonished that her child now knew what ‘baroque’ meant and one remarked that her son had been heard singing Cavalli in the shower!

**Summary:** this project was designed to generate interest in early music by offering free of charge workshop sessions to children, to undertake development of the sacred music of Cavalli by preparing a practical new edition which our chamber choir, soloists, and specialist musicians could use, and to provide an opportunity for our community to engage with and consider the role of music across the centuries. We were able to pay our young artists and early specialist musicians fairly- they greatly enhanced our rehearsals and performance.

**Limitations:** we wish we had had more time to explore a wider range of elements – time constraints restricted the number of movements we could include in the concert programme and illness amongst the children (including a chickenpox outbreak) reduced our Songbird numbers for this project.

**Overall:** the work undertaken to produce the edition was important, the introduction to early music for both children and amateur adults was worthwhile, and the response from our audience was positive. Feedback suggests thoughtful engagement with our aims, both musical and social/emotional. We hope to revisit the world of early music with our different teams in the future.

