

The Overstrand Festival of Early Music

The Overstrand Festival of Early Music ran for the first time between April 3rd and 7th in 2024. It was initiated by Keith Hobday and Lucy Murphy who have also been developing the Belfry Arts Centre in Overstrand in North Norfolk as a hub of early music development and education.

The Festival consisted of 7 concerts, an all day International Lute Competition and a talk about the history of the Lute by David Van Edwards. The festival was a big success with all events well attended reflecting a healthy appetite in the North Norfolk public for early music as well as encouraging visits from further afield.

A strong theme of the festival was the encouragement and support of young musicians. The Bellot Ensemble, a collective of London based young musicians played in the opening concert and accompanied 3 performances of Purcell's opera Dido and Aeneas. The opening concert also featured Norfolk based musicians in the shape of Norwich Baroque and included unusual repertoire such as pieces by William Boyce and Charles Avison. The concert was rapturously received by a packed audience in St Martin's Church.



The Lute competition consisted of 7 emerging Lute players from 5 different countries. The judges, Mathew Wadsworth and Jacob Heringman could not separate two players for the first prize, Jonaton Bougt from Sweden and Christian Velasco Vasquez from Switzerland and generously both were awarded the first prize of £1000. Tobias Tietze from Germany was awarded a runners up prize of £500.



The staging of Dido and Aeneas in the unusual setting of Templewood country house, designed by Norfolk artist Bernie Anderson, was a big success with all 3 performances sold out. This ambitious and unusual performance helped create a great buzz for the festival. The festival concluded with a well-

received concert by emerging duo Beth Stone and Daniel Murphy, confirming the festival themes of unusual repertoire and support for young musicians.

The festival received good support from local sponsors and other funders including Making Music and Norfolk County Council. However, the grant from Angel Music was tremendous encouragement for what was an ambitious new endeavour. It helped provide a strong basis for what will hopefully become an annual event.