

Ton Koopman Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra

Dorothee Miels, soprano

LONDON SPITALFIELDS MUSIC

Spitalfields Church
8 JUNE 2012

The Telegraph, 11 JUNE 2012

J.S. BACH

Suite No. 1 in C major, BWV 1066

Cantata "Jauchzet Gott in Allen Landen" BWV 51

Cantata "Mein Herze schwimmt im Blut" BWV 199

Cantata "Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten" BWV 202

Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra at Spitalfields Festival gave a thrilling performance under Ton Koopman

Some performers possess the music they perform, others are possessed by it. Ton Koopman, harpsichordist and leader of the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra, is definitely one of the latter sort.

In their all-Bach concert which opened the Spitalfields Festival Koopman revealed that naive delight in Bach's pattern-making which makes him such an endearing performer to behold. In the opening piece, the C major Suite, Koopman seized hold of the upbeat figures in the bass and urged them on to the downbeat with ecstatic impatience. The age-old pattern of the dance, where leaping energy constantly gives way to gravity, was made vividly real.

You'd expect such a man would find the plodding, literal ways of a government bureaucracy too much to endure. Koopman unfortunately had to endure them, as the UK Border Agency prevented three of his Korean-born string soloists from entering the country. 'Rules, rules, rules!' he said as he told us this story, shaking his head in bafflement. But he and the players rose to the crisis with aplomb, substituting Bach's cantata *Mein Herz Schwimmt in Blut* for the expected Brandenburg Concerto No 3.

The change was a challenge to soprano Dorothee Miels, who now had to perform three solo cantatas in a row, rather than the two that were originally scheduled. But Miels never seemed under strain.

The first of the three, *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen*, is a festive piece which turns the soprano into a vocal trumpet, leaping vertiginously in duet with a real trumpet. It was a thrill to see trumpeter David Hendry brace himself like a weightlifter and send his high notes aloft. Miels — a shrewd singer as well as a beautifully natural one — didn't try to compete. Instead she just allowed her high notes to soar of their own accord. Grace met with strength, and matched it.

All this dancing energy was thrilling. But there's another side to Koopman, a feeling for the way grace and pathos entwine themselves in Bach's slow movements. It was beautifully revealed in the opening movement of Cantata 202, where the melting of winter was captured in a duet between Miels and oboist Antoine Toruncyk of heart-rending beauty. Even more affecting was Miels' consoling aria in the substitute cantata, where the violins' drowsy trills came like a soothing balm. Thank you, UK Border Agency; your stout defence of the realm brought us something unexpected, and wonderful.