

# Sounds Organised



June, 2006

1/06

Nothing on earth is so well suited to make the sad merry, the merry sad, to give courage to the despairing, to make the proud humble, to lessen envy and hate, as music  
*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

## Here's a bit about Shining Charpentier

Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1634-1704) was born in Paris, went to Rome to study painting, and then turned to music, training with Carissimi, a noted figure in the early history of the oratorio. After returning to France, Charpentier wrote several theatre scores for works by the playwright Molière. However, the development of Charpentier's career in opera and stage music was effectively blocked by the success of his contemporary, Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-87), court composer to Louis XIV, and director of the newly-formed Paris Opera. For most of his career, Charpentier specialized in religious music, working in particular for the Jesuits. In 1698, he was made musical director at the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, the royal chapel near Notre-Dame. He wrote numerous motets, oratorios and sacred dramas, masses (including a delightful *Midnight Mass for Christmas Eve*, which incorporates traditional French carols), and various settings of the Psalms, *Te Deum* and *Magnificat*, as well as several operas and other secular works. After years of neglect (many compositions still exist only in manuscript form), Charpentier's music was revived in the second half of the 20th century.

The *Te Deum* we are performing, the best known and most spectacular of four Charpentier composed, was written during his later years, probably in the early 1690s. The scoring for trumpets and timpani, and key of D major



(described as typically "joyous and martial" by the composer himself) suggest to scholars that the occasion was some sort of court ceremony. The exact circumstances and date are unknown, but Louis XIV's aggressive military and diplomatic policies during the later years of his reign

(1654-1715) generated many such events. Charpentier's work echoes earlier royal *Te Deum* compositions by Lully and Lalande, and may be compared with a similarly festive version written by Henry Purcell for King James II of England in 1694.

## ... and Dazzling Dvorak

Antonin Dvorák (1841-1904), born in a small Czech village, was the son of a butcher, but showed precocious musical talent, enrolling in the Prague organ school in 1857. Later, he became principal viola player in the new Czech theatre orchestra in Prague, and also worked as a church organist, while beginning to develop his career as a composer, during the later 1860s. Like Smetana (1824-84), Dvorák was committed to the Czech nationalist movement, which flourished in his day after centuries of Austrian rule over Bohemia. Patriotic sentiment underlies many of his works, most obviously the famous *Slavonic Dances* (1878). However, his reputation eventually became international, especially after Brahms offered his influential support in 1877. He wrote in a wide range of forms, including songs, chamber music, concerti and symphonies, and choral and operatic works. He is probably best known for his *New World Symphony*, written while he was working in New York in the early 1890s. This passionate and brilliantly orchestrated late romantic work combines Slavonic rhythms and themes with melodies reminiscent of negro spirituals.



His *Mass in D* (op.86), scored

originally for soloists, chorus and organ, was composed in 1887, for the consecration of the private chapel of Josef Hlávka, a wealthy patron of the arts in Prague. At the suggestion of the music publisher Novello, Dvorák arranged *The Mass* for orchestra in 1892; it is judged to be one of his greatest works, comparable with other major later 19th-century choral compositions by Verdi, Bruckner and others. "Responsorial techniques, a pastoral character, a wealth of harmonic colour and unique tonal charm are characteristic of this mass 'in praise of the Most High'" (according to Klaus Döge in Grove Music online). The writing for male voices reflects the important role played by patriotic singing in the Czech nationalist environment of the time. Elsewhere, dramatic and lyrical elements reflect the composer's prowess in symphonic and operatic writing.

JG

### Inside . . .

<b>Social Scene</b>	2
<b>Committee Stuff</b>	2
<b>Garage Sale</b>	3
<b>St John's Passion – review</b>	4
<b>Our Stars</b>	5
<b>Entertainment</b>	6-7
<b>Music and Travel</b>	8

## THE SOCIAL SWIRL

After another successful sausage sizzle at the start of the year, more social events are in the pipeline.

- An Olde Time Movie Night is planned, with the feature attraction, *Genevieve* (1953), a classic British comedy about the annual London to Brighton antique car rally, starring Kay Kendall, Kenneth More, and Joyce Grenfell.
- A Winery Tour is planned for spring.
- Other possible social events include a trivia night and a games night (each occasion to be held on a Friday night, probably in the hall at the back of our practice venue, with refreshments).
- Margaret Hill is plotting the Christmas dinner at our usual venue - details to follow in the next newsletter.

Interest in all these options will be canvassed at practices in coming weeks.

HW

## COMMITTEE STUFF • COMMITTEE STUFF

### New Committee

Following the AGM on 7<sup>th</sup> March and subsequent Committee Meeting,

#### President

Lionel Marks (Ph – 9803 3931)

#### Vice-President

Margaret Hill (Ph – 9500 0542)

#### Musical Director

Doug Heywood (Ph – 9391 2086)

#### Secretary

Levi Orenstein (Ph – 9523 6970)

#### Treasurer

Adam Brown (Ph – 9809 4806)

#### Publicity and Marketing

Mary Rose Morgan (Ph – 9885 6923)

#### Librarian

Peter Hallett (Ph – 9889 4204)

#### Social Co-ordinator

Heather Workman (Ph – 9799 2138)

#### Uniforms and Mailing List

Helen Brown (Ph – 9836 9704)

#### Fundraising and Tickets

Margaret Keighley (Ph – 9561 2531)

#### Membership

Marieke van de Graaff (Ph – 9807 8273)

#### Newsletter Editor

John Gregory (Ph – 9537 0153)

#### Website Liaison

Janet Ooi (Ph – 9890 5545)

#### General Members

Sean Dillon (Ph – 9890 5545)  
Pauline Lynch (Ph – 9572 2252)

## Highlights from recent Committee Decisions and Activ-

### Successful Grant Submissions

Levi and Margaret Hill attended a Boroondara Council course on 2nd May on "How to Prepare a Successful Grant Submission", and will be putting their new knowledge into practice soon, on behalf of the Chorale.

### Library Matters

Since vacating St Mary's, the five cupboards of existing music are being stored in Sean Dillon's garage. He and Doug Heywood will sort through it to select what can fit in one cupboard, which is all we are allowed to store at our new venue.

### Volunteer Rosters

Mary Rose Morgan has produced a form to distribute to members, on which they can nominate times and date when they are available to help with various events and activities during the year.

### Social Matters

Heather Workman has received offers of help from volunteers for the Social Committee, and has distributed a questionnaire to members asking for ideas and feedback. A new Social Committee bank account has been opened for raffle and other income and to fund social events; audited reports for this account will be presented to the main Committee.

### Proposed Digital Music Collection

John Gregory has suggested starting a digital music collection for the Chorale, and has initiated the collection by donating a double CD of Verdi's Requiem, conducted by Herbert von Karajan. Other donations of relevant recordings (original CDs only) will be gratefully received. Social Committee funds will be spent from time to time on suitable recordings, after consultation with Doug.

LO

# Garage Sale

# Garage Sale

Over the last few years, Camberwell Chorale has held a Garage Sale at a community Scout Hall in High Street Ashburton. While generating a useful amount of cash for the Chorale, this event has been worthwhile for a number of other reasons also.

Firstly, the customers attending the sale were usually impressed and pleased by the variety and cheapness of the products for sale. A number of customers commented on this and, in fact, asked whether it was to become an annual event! Other feedback related to the unusually high level of quality of the items for sale. The generosity of choir members and their families is directly responsible for these pleasing comments – an amount of new loot has already been picked up at various locations around Melbourne, and is awaiting this year's Garage Sale in October. Your help and generosity is again requested this year in helping to fill the stalls with goods. You can bring these goods in your car to the preparations for the sale, on Friday if that is convenient, or they can be taken to rehearsals and transferred into one of the Committee Members' cars. If the goods are too large or cumbersome, we will pick them up by truck from your place!

Secondly, this event brought many people, both from within the Chorale and outside together to have some fun and to do quite a bit of work! While it took some time, most of this work was relatively easy. It was interesting to see the different specialties people brought to the task, with some people pricing and assessing the worth of items, some organising and laying out, some carrying the goods and gear and still others selling the goods, or selling the hot sausages out the back of the hall. One advantage in being involved in this activity was the chance to buy some of the goodies on sale. The variety of these goods was extraordinary, with items ranging from tools and sports equipment to jewellery and furniture! It has been a bit of a difficult task to

know where to draw the line in regards to the type of stuff to sell. There has been such a variety of material offered to the chorale that decisions have to be made as to what to do with some of it at times. Additionally, some people have been concerned about the low price asked for the goods on offer, a concern which is quite understandable given the quality and the high price originally paid for some of these goods which they have donated. The view that the organising committee takes is that the goods are of no use to us unless they sell, and the only way we can ensure this in an open non-specialised market such as a garage sale is to price them very competitively. This policy appears to have worked, given that most of the items sold last sale. Interestingly, contrary to our original plan to sell any clothing we received for rags to the trade, clothing sold so well that it has become a line in its own right.

The Garage Sale and Sausage Sizzle is planned again for this year, again at the Scout Hall in Ashburton Park (High Street Ashburton, on the corner of Vears Road). The date set is Saturday, 7th October, with preparation and clean up on 6th and 8th October.

Come along and have a sausage and a look at some of the amazing stuff which is on sale. You will certainly find a bargain and maybe something you have been looking for for years! Even better, volunteer to help and be a part of the fun – we'll see you there!



June, 2006

**Well, how did you rate us? Leta Dickson (alto), in the audience, saw it this way . . .**

## St John's Passion under the Microscope

A (mostly) magical performance! The brilliance of Bach's St John Passion was evident in this performance. The dramatic and, in this case, somewhat dissonant, opening in G minor began a heavy and depressing prologue. The pace was slow and well maintained, and the plodding sense of doom increased the drama and established within the listener a suitable mood for the development of the Easter story. The first choir entry was a little ragged but the choir soon overcame its initial nerves and sang well. The staggered entries on "Lord" were beautiful and typical

of what the choir can do. This is a busy and full textured prologue and the sounds had filled the Church for some time. After this, the entry of the Evangelist was a complete contrast. Matthew Davine's true, clear voice and beautiful diction began the story. The continuo backing was sensitively played and complemented his narrative. The choir crowd scenes were wonderful with the thick textured orchestration and the contrapuntal choir parts creating a sense of hysteria and increased feelings of anxiety. The contrast of the chorales was a reminder of the soothing solidarity of the Established Church. The airs provided an opportunity for the instrumentalist to play with the soloists in a way that both entertained and allowed the listener to reflect upon the injustices and horrors of the story.

The highlights of the performance were many. The absolute highlight of the performance for me was the interaction between the flutes and Lisa Robinson in the first soprano air. In this piece the balance was perfect and the performance was a delight. The bass and tenor entries into the chorus, "We have a Law", were sung with clarity and were beautiful with just the right amount of accompaniment. All

the chorales were good and they became better as the work progressed. "Lie Still" was lovely. After the hysteria and cruelty of the previous choruses, it created an atmosphere of sad and gentle peace. Matthew Davine was a wonderful evangelist.



With the support of an excellent continuo it was a pleasure to listen to the unfolding of the well-known story. His performance gave support to all other performers and provided powerful continuity for the production.

Sometimes in the choir the lack of male-voice strength detracted from otherwise good singing and sometimes the pitching of the entry notes was a little shaky. In this performance, however, the biggest problem was in the orchestra, where a lack of dynamic range sometimes made the playing appear insensitive. In the first alto air, and to a degree in the second soprano air, the oboes were overpowering and seriously detracted from the soloists. Also, in the first tenor air, the orchestra was too strong for the light voice of Khong. In most of the chorales the orchestral playing was bland and loud, and did nothing to enhance the work of the choir. Generally speaking, diction was also a problem. Whether it was because of loud accompaniment, poor acoustics – or actually poor diction I am not

sure – but I found it hard to understand the words . . . and I know most of them. The exceptions to this were the two basses and the soprano.

It was interesting to reflect upon the differences between singing in the choir and listening in the audience. Very different skills are required. Good singing requires concentration and effort and it occupies the mind in a certain performer's way. Audience skills require an emotional response and, especially if you are writing a review, an analytical and critical assessment. In the early stages of this work the critical aspect of my mind was most active, but as the work progressed I became increasingly influenced by the power of Bach's music until it seemed that Davine's voice was the only one and all the other vocalists, the choir and the orchestra were there just to add colour, mood, light and power to his narrative. In that sense none of the criticisms matter because the magic of the performance worked. The power of the story, the beauty of the music, the skill of the construction and everyone's performances, melded to create the phenomena that are the object of performing art. Congratulations everybody.

LD



*Leta Dickson, who was also a guest reviewer in 2005, has had a long career in music in Melbourne. She worked for many years at Fintona Girls School, where she conducted three string orchestras and directed an active string program from year one to year twelve. Since retiring, her musical activities include a small amount of teaching at home and singing (alto) with the Camberwell Chorale.*

## OUR STARS

### Jeanette Martin – all you'd expect

Born in Oakleigh, Victoria, Jeanette was raised in a family of keen amateur musicians. Both of her parents sang in choirs and instilled in her a love of music from a young age.

She began piano lessons at the age of nine, and steadily progressed through the AMEB grades in Piano and Theory of Music. From the age of fourteen, she played the organ in services at the Cheltenham Church of Christ. The church subsidised her lessons on the pipe organ at St Andrew's Church, Brighton, with Ian Thomas and Lindsey O' Neill.

In 1976 Jeanette became a wife and mother and, as her friends were toiling through Year 12, she was immersed in a world of domesticity. Music became the focus of her "me" time. In April 1976 she passed Grade 8 Piano with Honours; in June, her son Jeremy was born, and in October, she gained her Associate Diploma in Piano

Over the next few years, working around the birth of her three daughters, Leisa, Penni and Melanie, Jeanette established a private teaching practice. Her children were among her earliest and most dedicated students. She continued her own regular piano lessons with Joan Voumard, and gained her T Mus A Diploma in 1983 and L Mus A Diploma in 1984 – the year Melanie was born. Throughout this period, she accompanied several amateur choirs.

In 1988 she was appointed to teach piano at Haileybury one day a week. From there, she moved to Mentone Girls Grammar where she continued to teach piano for the next fourteen years. The focus of her accompaniment work shifted to instrumentalists and vocalists for examinations, recitals, auditions and concerts. She was, for several years, official accompanist for the Flute Guild of Victoria at their

camp in Dookie and for the Musical Society of Victoria.

In 1996, Jeanette decided to continue her general education and embarked on five years of part-time study to gain an Arts Degree, majoring in something completely different . . . Sociology! This was a period of personal growth and satisfaction as she studied alongside her children, who were into the serious stages of their education. It was also the time when she and her husband parted, necessitating a more serious approach to earning a living and maintaining her own mortgage repayments.

Jeanette worked as an administrator and Principal Repetiteur with the National Children's Choir of Australia, whilst continuing some piano teaching. In 2003, she left the choir, and began teaching piano five days a week at Haileybury and Beaconhills Colleges.

Meanwhile, her son Jeremy had continued his training at VCA as a pianist, conductor and teacher. There he met his wife – Lisa Anne Robinson. They are now the proud parents of Jeanette's first grandchild – Xavier. It was through Jeremy that Jeanette attended her first Harrierville Music Camp in 2003 when they shared the role of accompanist. Having sung in Doug's choir there, Jeanette decided she just had to come to Camberwell to sing – and as it turns out, to play on occasion.

JM

### Leanne Pan – Star of another Type

Leanne Pan and Han Lee have hit a high note with investors as soaring returns from two of its funds - the Prime Value Growth fund and the Prime Value Imputation fund - propel the team's funds into the first and second spots.

Pan is a member of the Camberwell Chorale in Melbourne and sang at a performance of St John's Passion by Bach at Easter. As portfolio manager of both funds – the Growth fund averaging 34.19 per cent and the Imputation fund, 32.77 per cent over the past three years – Pan surely has a lot to sing about.

Pan and Lee, the Managing Director and Chief Investment Officer, have been working together for years, and both manage the funds. Key contributors to the performance of the Growth fund over the past three years have been shareholdings in Monadelphous, PCH Group, Orica, BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto and Zinifex.

The performance of the Imputation fund, in contrast, has been propelled by holdings in Record Investments, Alinta, Jubilee Mines, Noni B, Bradken, Consolidated Rutile and Monadelphous. There is often a 20 to 30 per cent overlap of stocks between funds.

Pan admits that the resources boom, and what she labels "the China story", have been major themes for both funds. However, rather than being overly exposed to mining stocks directly, the team prefers companies that service the mining sector, such as Monadelphous and PCH Group.

Surprisingly, it wasn't until last year that the Imputation fund started building a larger position in the banking sector, and it recently began buying shares in ABB Grain. Pan mentions that Adtrans and ARB Corporation are being monitored by the Imputation fund for possible purchase later in the year.

As a boutique manager, Prime Value doesn't give a hoot what the benchmark does, and the managers back their investment philosophy by personally investing in their own funds.

"It is hard to put us in a box", admits Pan. "We continually look for attractive situations in unloved sectors. "Biotechnology is one sector of particular interest at the moment.

Smart Investor



## Important Insights from Elementary Music Students as collected by a US teacher over a long teaching career.

- If you keep moving two fingers real fast on the piano, you get a thrill.
- The best way to tune up is to use a pitchfork.
- A good thing to remember about trying to pick up a tuba is don't.
- A diminuendo is something only encyclopaedias know for sure.
- Tutti means everybody toot at the same time.
- I know what a sextet is but I would rather not say.
- Refrain means don't do it! A refrain in music is the part you better not play.
- Haydn got married when he was 28 years old and became the father of classical music.
- Just about any animal skin can be stretched over a frame to make a pleasant sound once the animal is removed.
- By shortening and lengthening tubing filled with air, high and low sounds can be made. Only wind instruments can understand this well enough to make it work for them. When electric currents go through them, guitars start making sounds. So would anybody.
- Many things about electronic instruments that were once thought to be science fiction now actually are.
- Bach died from 1750 to the present.
- Beethoven expired in 1827 and later died from this.
- Although Rossini was once considered a great composer of operas, we now know of operas he failed to compose.
- Richard Wagner was born in 1813, supposedly (sic) on his birthday.
- Handel was half German, half Italian and half English; he was rather large.
- Felix Mendelssohn seems to have been happy, honest and well-liked, although a musician.
- Berlioz proved he was a wonderful composer by going insane.
- Music is one of our most anaesthetic arts.

## WELL, know y' musical onions, do ya?

1. The first steps toward the development of polyphony were taken sometime between 700 and 900, when
  - A) musicians composed new music to accompany dancing
  - B) the French nobles began to sing hunting songs together
  - C) monks in monastery choirs began to add a second melodic line to Gregorian chant
  - D) all of the above
2. The Notre Dame Mass by Guillaume de Machaut was
  - A) written for three voices without instrumental accompaniment
  - B) written for the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris'
  - C) the first polyphonic treatment of the mass ordinary by a known composer
  - D) all of the above
3. Leonin and Perotin are notable because they
  - A) are the first important composers known by name
  - B) indicated definite time values and a clearly defined meter in their music
  - C) were the leaders of the school of Notre Dame
  - D) all of the above
4. Secular music in the fourteenth century
  - A) became more important than sacred music
  - B) was not based on Gregorian chant
  - C) included drinking songs and pieces in which bird calls, barks of dogs
  - D) all of the above
5. The center of polyphonic music in Europe after 1150 was
  - A) Paris
  - B) Rome
  - C) Reims
  - D) London
6. The French secular songs of the Middle Ages usually dealt with
  - A) the Crusades
  - B) spinning
  - C) love
  - D) all of the above
7. In the recording of the medieval estampie, the melody line is played on a rebec, a
  - A) medieval drum
  - B) bowed string instrument
  - C) tubular wind instrument
  - D) plucked string instrument
8. Gregorian chant is named after Pope Gregory I, who
  - A) composed all the chants presently in use
  - B) was credited by medieval legend with having created it
  - C) had his name put on the first printed edition
  - D) wrote the texts for the chants
9. Gregorian chant
  - A) was the official music of the Roman Catholic church for more than 1,000 years
  - B) retained some elements of the Jewish synagogue of the first centuries after Christ
  - C) is set to sacred Latin texts
  - D) all of the above
10. Medieval music that consists of Gregorian chant and one or more additional melodic lines is called
  - A) ars nova
  - B) organum
  - C) alleluia
  - D) cantus firmus

Acknowledgements to McGraw-Hill Online Learning Centre.

1C, 2C, 3C, 4B, 5B, 6C, 7D, 8D, 9B, 10B. Talk to Leta Dickson if you disagree!

## Church Bulletins

and they keep getting better as you go . . .

Thank God for church newsletter editors. These sentences actually appeared in church bulletins or were announced in church services.

- The Fasting & Prayer Conference will include meals.
- Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.
- For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

- Don't let worry kill you off – let the Church help.
- Irving Brown and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.
- Miss Charlene Mason sang, "I will not pass this way again," giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.
- At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be "What Is Hell?" Come early and listen to our choir practice.

- Next Thursday there will be tryouts for the choir. They need all the help they can get.
- The Rector will preach his farewell message after which the choir will sing: "Break Forth Into Joy."
- A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.
- Eight new choir robes are currently needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

### Pleasures of Music . . . continued from back page

February, and I honestly don't know how the choir managed to stay so focused – maybe the average age of twenty-seven helped!

In autumn, in the ballroom of an 18th-century aristocratic palace in Catania, we enjoyed a performance of music from the period of Dante, featuring reconstructions of period instruments such as shawms and bagpipes, and definitely testing our Italian (not to mention the medieval Latin!). Later, we saw Verdi's *Masked Ball* in the grand Teatro Bellini, named after the early 19th-century opera composer Vincenzo Bellini – one of Catania's most famous cultural icons. The Verdi production was rich and passionate, matching the music to a T. We were proud of ourselves surviving without sub/surtitles, suggesting our language skills may finally be getting somewhere.

The most unusual musical experience from this trip – and also in some ways the most satisfying of all – was a concert featuring the *marranzano* (the Catanese term for the so-called 'Jew's harp'), performed by a local expert, accompanying a fabulous Sicilian folk singer. I had actually had a chance to try to play the instrument at a workshop a day or so earlier, with mixed success (I found the breath-



Baroque streetscape in Catania, Sicily

ing the hardest part). For good measure, the concert also included Thai and Hungarian exponents of their equivalents of this instrument, which has ancient origins. The Hungarian, a young man by name Aaron Szilagyi, was a real maestro, conjuring a spectrum of fascinating sounds. He varied folk traditions with his own contemporary harmonies and rhythms, and proved a hit at the after-concert disco (!), bridging historical eras, generations and cultures with ease. Music really is a universal language.

*\* Editor's Note: following articles in recent newsletters by Bernadette Taylor ("Diary from Africa" 2/04) and Di Camelleri ("Four Nights in Shanghai!" 1/05), it seemed a good idea to turn this into an occasional travel series. Submissions from all choir and orchestra members are welcome. We will try to get Doug and/or Thomas to contribute something in the next issue about Thomas's grand organ tour currently underway.*

# The Pleasures of Music while Travelling

Despite the torture of economy-class seats, marauding gangs of package tourists, and the odd truly inedible meal, travel really can broaden the mind, and produce unforgettable experiences. And music can provide just as much pleasure as the more obvious tourist pursuits, as Shirley and I discovered again last year, while on a rest and relaxation holiday in Europe. Our musical delights ranged from late-night jazz in Prague and Budapest, and a doleful Sicilian accordionist wandering through the streets during the midday siesta, to an Italian children's choir performing in a Renaissance church on the Venetian island of Murano – they sang various works by Galuppi, Mozart and even the Hallelujah Chorus (in "English", but with some very intriguing pronunciation!).

Some events were every bit as enjoyable as expected, such as a beautiful performance of Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* at the Vienna State Opera, viewed, as we were advised, from one of the boxes, or Logen. Others, though, just cropped up, and proved equally or even more inspiring (and considerably less ruinous to our budget than the Vienna opera!). For instance, we also happened to get seats for a superb Sunday morning concert in the Musikverein, with Riccardo Muti conducting the Vienna Philharmonic in a program including Schubert (4th Symphony, etc.), Mozart's clarinet concerto, and Richard Strauss's large-scale tone-poem, *Death and Transfiguration*. The performance of Strauss in particular was unforgettable – exhilarating, intense and profound, moving the visiting Englishman behind us to uncontrolled tears. Best of all, our seats were right on the stage, to the side, so we could appreciate the skills of the orchestra, and Muti's relaxed but very persuasive conducting, at close quarters.

For most of our time away, we were based on the East coast of Sicily, in Catania – a city that many itineraries skip, possibly because of its

slightly ruined look and mad traffic (or its reputation as a Mafia stronghold). Like much of south-east Sicily, Catania had to be rebuilt almost completely after a devastating earthquake in 1693. The result is a largely 18th-century historic city, unusual for its use of large quantities of dark grey stone, cut from the lava generated over the centuries by nearby Mount Etna. There are some superb late Baroque palaces and churches, and an elegant pedestrian street oriented almost (but not quite!) towards the volcano. The University is spread through the city in various historic buildings, notably a huge former Benedictine monastery. There's also a fabulous street market (outdoing the more famous Vucciria in Palermo), and the coffee and cakes are to die for.

And, as we discovered, Catania also has an excellent musical menu. Our first serving came on 28th August (St Augustine's Day), with an all-Monteverdi concert,

mostly unaccompanied, by a group called the World Chamber Choir (based in Belgium, but made up of young people from all over the world). They handled the music – a Mass and a reconstructed Vespers for St Augustine – really beautifully, making light work of the complicated rhythms and harmonies in up to eight parts (two

separated choirs, as originally used by Monteverdi at San Marco in Venice). The venue, one of Catania's historic churches, was perfect acoustically, but incredibly hot at the end of a long late summer's day, a bit like Melbourne in late

*continued on page 7 . . .* 

