

## Paul Luchkow Profile

Giving credence to the adage that everything old is new again, some Vancouver performers have been cultivating an interest in the music of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, what is commonly referred to as “early music.” Since the formation of Early Music Vancouver in 1970, the city has also seen the rise of the Pacific Baroque Orchestra, and more recently the appearance of the chamber ensembles La Cetra and The Burney Ensemble. As someone who has had a hand in all of these projects, Baroque violinist Paul Luchkow sees exciting growth in Vancouver’s early music community.

Luchkow was introduced to early music while studying at UBC, where he had the opportunity to play in the Collegium Musicum, the student ensemble for period instruments. While at the time it just seemed like a good course to round out his education, it gave him the musical foundation to accept an invitation to join the newly formed Pacific Baroque Orchestra. “I found that this style of music and performance speaks to me, and I’ve cultivated it,” he recalls over a cup of coffee. “It’s a very vibrant style of performance that audiences react to well. It grows out of an experience of sharing things with the other performers and with the audience.”

Integral to the shared experience of the musicians and their audience is a spirit of exploration. Although early music performance has been developing through thirty to forty years of scholarly research, musical notation and technical treatises from four hundred years ago can only hint at how the music originally sounded. “Period instrument performance comes out of a desire to experiment with sounds and styles from many years ago,” Luchkow admits. “There is no conceit that it is a direct representation. We’re taking our best guess.”

The experimental nature of early music was inherent from its beginnings, as improvisation was an important element of its presentation. “Performers were expected to flesh out compositions with their own ideas. It could be different every time,” recounts Luchkow. He hopes that contemporary audiences will be attracted to this variable aspect of the music, which has a lot in common with jazz performance. The spirit of experimentation and discovery in the music can also appeal to audiences who are looking for something unexpected, much like when the music was originally performed. “For audiences at the time, all of this was contemporary music. Audiences expected to be challenged with new music,” Luchkow adds.

While Luchkow and his colleagues believe early music can sound as fresh as new music, they do attempt to place it in an historical context. That was part of the impetus behind the formation of The Burney Ensemble, which Luchkow co-founded in 1998, along with Sonja Boon, a Baroque flutist, Búi Petersen, a Baroque trumpeter, gambist Nan Mackie, and harpsichordist Valerie Weeks. The group takes its name from Charles Burney, one of the first music historians who wrote extensively during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The ensemble gives readings from Dr. Burney and other writers of the time during their concerts, not so much to illustrate details of performance practice, but to situate the music in its own cultural era. “Burney’s writing helps us to understand the general aesthetic around the

music of the time. It gives you an impression of what the listener was experiencing,” says Luchkow. Sharing this extra level of music appreciation has already made the young ensemble’s annual series, “Dr. Burney’s Musical Journeys,” a favourite with Vancouver audiences. Luchkow is also excited about reaching younger listeners in a special children’s concert entitled “Dr. Burney Goes to the Zoo,” a program on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2002, which will feature music that mimics the sounds of animals.

As a Baroque violinist, Luchkow has been much in demand in Vancouver, and is a founding member of the 17<sup>th</sup> century string ensemble La Cetra, which debuted at this summer’s Vancouver Early Music Festival. He will be on tour with the Pacific Baroque Orchestra this fall, and will be going into the studio with them in November to record their first CD. Although early music makes up a large part of his performing duties, Luchkow does not regard it as an exclusive pursuit. “I play modern violin every chance I get,” the versatile musician admits. He was a featured soloist with the Vancouver Philharmonic Orchestra in 1998, when he performed Jean Coulthard’s *Violin Concerto*, under the direction of Wallace Leung. He will be appearing with the same orchestra again this season to perform Samuel Barber’s *Violin Concerto*.

Whether it is playing early music or contemporary music, Paul Luchkow has an enthusiasm for performing that affects all of his activities, an energy that audiences can easily respond to, and an excitement that is contributing to Vancouver’s cultural growth.