

Profile: Simon Carrington and the Yale Schola Cantorum

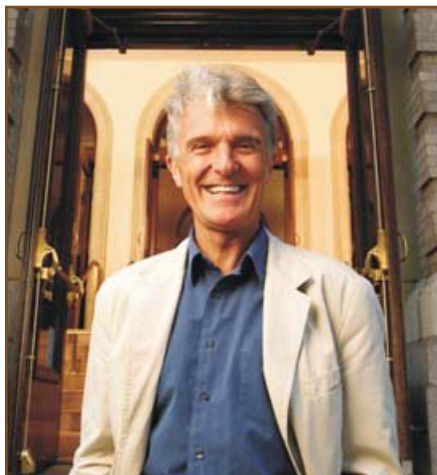
From the King's Singers to the Ivy League

I'VE BEEN TEACHING for 12 years, and there is no doubt in my mind, whether I'm working with a big all-state choir in Texas or my chamber choir here at Yale, that when they get the feeling for Renaissance or Baroque music done in the right way – with life, energy, and clarity – they find it to be the most thrilling music to sing," says Simon Carrington, the founder and director of the Yale Schola Cantorum.

Carrington, a former member and co-founder of the Kings Singers, is one of the choral world's great champions. He is a revered teacher and was director of choral activities at the University of Kansas for seven years; he held a similar position at the New England Conservatory, where he received the coveted Krasner Teaching Excellence Award. A much sought-after conductor, there was little in the choral repertoire that Carrington hadn't led before he came to Yale. But early music had not been a specialty area. A new teaching position would change that.

"The Yale Institute of Sacred Music wanted to develop a chamber choir that would specialize in music before 1750 and that of the last 100 years," says Carrington. "I was brought here in 2003 to develop it." Although Yale has a school of music (it's the only Ivy League university that has a graduate school of music for applied instrumentalists and singers), when Carrington arrived he found that the school offered only a program for singers on an operatic career track – not the kind of singers needed for an early music choir. He was able to convince his colleagues of the need for a graduate program for singers who didn't necessarily want to follow the opera route and who had an interest in early music.

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Study in Voice, Oratorio, Early Music, Song and Chamber Ensemble," he explains. "Eight spots were created – two SATB quartets – and that gave me eight singers. Then I had to find 16 more, and picking from around Yale worked out pretty well. There are no voice people apart from the eight; the others are people from any discipline."

In the Schola Cantorum's first year, the ensemble was singing Charpentier and James MacMillan. Carrington remembers, "The first year was a bit of a struggle because we didn't have the graduate students, but now it's good to have a bit more color in the choir." A bit more color indeed! The Schola Cantorum delighted lots of ears with performances in New Haven and New York City and with a recording

(reviewed in *EMAg*, Spring 2006) of a 2004 performance of Heinrich Biber's *Vesperae longiores ac breviores*.

The Biber edition was prepared and edited by Brian Clark, a musicologist who also prepared the centerpiece work of the Schola Cantorum's 2005 concert, the *Missa Resurrectionis* by Antonio Bertali, a 17th-century Italian composer. Carrington says of Clark, "There are many fine musicologists and editors out there, but only a few of them have a gift for finding the pieces that really live in a concert; Brian has got that."

Besides the gems that Clark mines for Carrington and the Schola, the repertoire of the ensemble makes for some interesting programming. "In the middle of the semester we developed a little series called Chiaroscuro, which throws together music from both ends of our area – we've done Monteverdi and Dallapiccola, and Purcell and Morton Feldman – that works really well in our recital hall," Carrington says.

More traditional fare is being performed in a Spring 2006 concert. "We are doing the *Saint John Passion* in the 1725 version. It's all students, with the solos all sung by the students, including the Evangelist," says Carrington. "The strings are students too, but because we are doing it in A-415 tuning, we have to bring in professional wind players. As of yet, the school of music hasn't developed a dual program of period and modern instruments."

Carrington has tremendous enthusiasm for young voices in early music. "To me it suits college-age singers beautifully because so often they are being pushed into other boxes where they are trying to make sounds that they don't have in their voices." He's a teacher and advocate who fires the imagination of his students. "I was in Texas leading the all-state choir, a monster-sized choir of excellent singers, in Monteverdi's *Beatus Vir*, but they were not used to singing it in the light, clear style," says Carrington. "We worked at it, and it became one of the pieces they enjoyed the most. It's just a question of getting there, of insisting just a bit and of making them think about all the things that makes early music so wonderful."

—*Craig Zeichner*