

# Harpsichord & fortepiano

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An interview with

# Sharona Joshua

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*I met Sharona at Snape Maltings, where she was making her British debut in the fourth Aldeburgh Early Music Festival. On the evening of Easter Sunday she gave a lively and quick-witted performance of Schubert songs with baritone Mark Rowlinson, using a copy of a Schantz fortepiano on which she also delighted the audience with a Schubert Allegretto. The following day, before Trio Eroica requisitioned her piano for a performance of Beethoven's Trio in B<sup>flat</sup> op.11, we had a chance to talk and take a closer look at the instrument.*

**T**HE SUCCESS OF any music festival, it might be said, depends not only on the return of established performers but also on the opportunity for audiences to hear young, up-and-coming artists who are only just beginning to make an impact on the wider listening public. One of these is certainly Sharona Joshua. Born in Israel in 1972, Sharona studied the modern piano from the age of six at the Haifa Conservatory. In the midst of her first degree at the Tel-Aviv Rubin Academy of Music, where she studied under Alexander Volkov, she won a scholarship which enabled her to come to London for a year to study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Although she had already been briefly introduced to the fortepiano, at a workshop in Jerusalem led by Zvi Meniker, a pupil of Malcolm Bilson, it was at the Guildhall that she began to study it seriously under Christopher Kite, only a few months before his tragic death. She describes him as a "lovely teacher".

Seeing Sharona at the fortepiano now, she seems made for it. I asked her what, as at that time a student of the modern piano, she had first liked about the fortepiano — what was it that attracted her, that made her want to study it further? She told me it was the sound, the attack, the ability to accent: it was altogether "lighter" than the modern piano. With it she discovered "a totally different world", the Classical repertoire. While as a modern-pianist she had felt a preference for the Romantic composers, on the fortepiano she discovered the ability to respond to Haydn and Mozart in a different way; and from there it was only natural to ask, if this is the case with Haydn and Mozart, what about Bach ... and so on.

On returning to Israel Sharona decided to specialise in early keyboards and began studying

harpsichord with David Shemer, also a former pupil at the Guildhall. Performing Bach's Concerto in F for harpsichord and two recorders (his own arrangement of Brandenburg IV) at a concert in Tel-Aviv, she "stole the show with astounding technique and passionate intensity", as one critic remarked. After a year and a half, and a number of solo recitals and broadcasts later, she returned to England to study with David Roblou and Richard Egarr and is now based here.

### Back from Bach

We then started talking about the instruments and what can be learned from them: that, although they are all basically the same, slight differences lead to specific touches for each instrument. From Bach she moved backwards to virginal music, which she loves. She has studied a variety of instruments, including a copy of a Neapolitan virginal of c.1660 by Malcolm Rose (original in Berlin), which plucks near the bridge; this year she plays a new copy of the Queen Elizabeth's Virginals (original in the Victoria & Albert Museum) with which she will soon be recording alongside the Musicians of the Globe.

So why constantly backwards? Sharona's approach to the repertoire is not dissimilar to that of a detective piecing together the scene of a crime: what went on immediately before a work was composed helps you to understand it. In the same way, understanding how early performers approached their work gives a particular insight. In this respect she has been much influenced by David Roblou and Richard Egarr, whose continuo styles — Roblou's "chordal" and Egarr's "more melodic" — are both more "interventionist" than some modern players would like, and in that respect perhaps closer in spirit to those of early



performers. Certainly, an insight into continuo playing can lead, in turn, to a greater understanding of solo harpsichord music and the freedom to improvise in it.

#### Haydn's favourite maker

For the Schubert recital at Aldeburgh Sharona brought her own fortepiano, a copy by Christopher Barlow of an instrument made in Vienna in about 1795 by Schantz. The original, now in the Holburne Museum, Bath, was found in 1971 in the basement of an Italian music shop. The Schantz workshop, much praised by Haydn, produced instruments with a richer sound — particularly at the top — than, say, a Walter or a Stein, something which Sharona appreciates. She has played both the original and the copy and finds them "remarkably similar".

#### A career with a view

When we met, Sharona was looking forward to her engagements later this year: a recital in the Spitalfields Festival in June with German soprano Elisabeth Scholl, performing songs by Mozart and Schubert, together with Haydn's late E<sup>b</sup> sonata; and appearances in the Southwark Festival and Blackheath Concert Halls series. 1998 brings recording work with the Musicians of the Globe for Philips, and a recital at the Purcell Room on 6th March. She plans to continue performing on both the fortepiano and the harpsichord. It is not difficult to deduce, from the evidence so far, that we will be hearing a lot more of her; and, as Mr. Beebe said of Miss Honeychurch when he heard her at the piano — "it will be very exciting — both for us and for her."