

# Harpsichord & *fortepiano*

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# INTERVIEW WITH DR. STEVEN COLES

by Kathryn Cok

Dr. Stephen Coles is well known in the U.K. as the artistic director of the Tudeley Festival. Formed in 1985 to raise funds for the Pembury Hospital Scanner, the festival has since then promoted over 150 events based at the world famous Chagall church of All Saints', Tudeley.

During a telephone interview from his home in Kent, I asked Dr. Coles about where his love of early music is derived, how the festival came about, including its growing keyboard collection, and his plans for 2006, the Mozart year.

KC: Steve, we have worked together quite often over the past few years either involving the Tudeley Festival or when I had the use of one of your keyboard instruments for a concert. I have always wondered how you came to be involved in the early music business?

SC: It was a gut reaction really. While still at school I bought a recording of King Arthur, and the Chemistry Master allowed me to play it on his Decca black box, since the music school didn't have a record player at that time. My father frequently played [Benjamin] Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, and I also became familiar with the works of [Henry] Purcell through records that he played.

KC: Did you study music or do you play an instrument yourself?

SC: I played the organ, having given up the piano very unwisely at the age of 11.

While exploring at school, I realized that listening to [J.S.] Bach made me feel very happy. We gave concerts at school; I had the chance to direct a performance of Monteverdi.

KC: How did the Tudeley Festival come about? Did you work yourself in the music business?

SC: No. I was a doctor (General Practitioner) for 22 years, and I currently do disability

analysis. However I did do music at Guys [Hospital] for four years, directed the orchestra and choir. Basically I waved my arms around. I think I waved my arms around quite well, actually. We had the advantage of having Southwark Cathedral as our concert hall.

I came to work at Pembury [Hospital], and stayed on in the area and worked as a GP. I had a little group with a friend who was a recorder player. We did one or two little concerts. It sort of vegetated on from there. I thought, wouldn't it be nice to do a concert at Tudeley Church? After having sort of discovered it, probably after someone suggested to go there. A doctor's wife who was another recorder player was celebrating her birthday, and someone said, why don't we do a concert for her birthday, which we did. I thought then, why, this is a rather good place. The Scanner appeal came along (for Pembury Hospital), so I thought wouldn't it be wonderful to do a concert on Bach's birthday, and I asked a lot of local musicians, they came and said yes, and after some disagreement about who would conduct I rang up Stephen Preston and booked him, and then we booked Philip Pickett. We then had three concerts on the birthdays of Handel, Bach and Scarlatti and that is how it all started.

KC: Having made several visits to your home, I know that one of your front rooms is bursting with keyboard instruments, everything from organs and harpsichords to fortepianos. How did you manage to acquire so many instruments?

SC: When the Festival started we were not an early music front hold, however the idea was to raise funds for the church and other charitable organizations if we could. In the heydays of the '80's you could raise lots of money, and we raised £50,000 pounds for the new organ which was played by Ton Koopman in one of the opening recitals. The new organ went in, and we helped with the

car park. After attending a concert during the Purcell year, up in Beverley (of the Palladian Ensemble), I had gone up to a chap from the Arts Council and mentioned the fact that I thought it would nice if the festival had some more keyboard instruments. He replied: Well why don't you fill out a form? So I filled out a form and six months later we were awarded £70,000 from the arts council. We then had the wonderful experience of being able to go shopping, and we bought the [Andrew] Garlick harpsichord, [and] the [Kenneth] Tickell organ.

KC: Were these builders people you knew about, or did you undertake research before deciding what to spend the money on?:

SC: A little research, yes, [Andrew] Garlick was even at that time thought to be the best [harpsichord] maker in England. Regarding organs, we looked around a little and Ken Tickell was one of the up and coming then, and for the fortepiano, that really came by chance. Some one told me about David [Winston], and the story there was that it [the Broadman copy the festival currently owns] had been ordered by someone else who cancelled the order shortly before it was completed.

KC: I understand that you also provide instruments for other concerts. Do you tune yourself?

SC: I use a tuning box to set the temperaments and also use my ears. I have never had a complaint.

KC: The festival also has a few recordings to its name. Are you involved in that as well?:

SC: My father was interested in recording, so that's how I also came into that. I started doing recordings once digital machines became affordable. Most of my work is doing CD's for the church to help raise funds and recordings for young musicians wanting demos and that sort of thing.

KC: I understand that for this Mozart year you have commissioned a copy of a Rosenberger piano. [Michael Rosenberger, Vienna, circa 1800]

SC: I think my life has been full of gut feelings. There are some very acceptable

makers around. We have got the Broadman [by David Winston] and that is great. I have played an original Broadman in Sweden, granted, lying on its side in a museum with 4,000 instruments, but it was an extraordinary moment, and we could have been playing the one here. And I just felt, since we will be doing a lot of Mozart, and one has to have a little commercial eye too, if there was a really good Rosenberger or Walter or whatever, it might get used a lot and might be a good investment. So, there is that side of it. Having looked around, I decided we would ask David to do it if he was interested, and apparently he has always wanted to build a Rosenberger; it's his favourite instrument.

Everyone I talk to in the early music world, including yourself, eyes light up when I mention it. Not only keyboard players, you know, [but] instrumentalists and singers as well. The pupils dilate, and there is a big smile, so I think it will be interesting.

KC: Who will be playing on it, and what kinds of concerts will you be having this season?

SC: Some of the highlights to be heard this season include Mozart Sonatas played by Rachel Podger [violin] and Gary Cooper [fortepiano] on the actual birthday of Mozart. Everything will be taking place at Tonbridge School, due to the church being closed because the under floor heating is being put in. On the Saturday in the Tonbridge School chapel we will be doing our annual fund raiser, Gary [Cooper] will play Piano Concerto no. 24, with the London Pro Arte Baroque Orchestra, and Kate Manley will be singing a few concert arias. For the rest of the year we will be back in the church [Tudeley] with different groups playing Mozart including: The Etesian Ensemble with Ensemble Galant, the Denner Ensemble, Trio Goya, the Galeazzi Ensemble, and others. Gary [Cooper] will also be performing the complete piano sonatas, fantasias and rondos in aid of Sri Lanka.

*Further information regarding this season's schedule, artists, date, time and location of concerts can be found on the Tudeley Festival web site: [www.tudeleyfestival.org.uk](http://www.tudeleyfestival.org.uk).*