

# Bach Festival: Bach and the French

From Renaissance chansons to the cabaret-style chansons of Jacques Brel, French music spanning four centuries found its place in this year's Festival, as Chris Shepard (Director of Music) relates.

The Music Department presented its third biennial Bach Festival in May and June this year. In addition to the performance opportunities provided for over 250 boys, the Festival also presented performances by guest artists and concerts in which the boys performed alongside Old Sydneians and professional musicians.

A list of highlights can hardly do justice to a Festival that encompassed fourteen concerts and three masterclasses, but covering the whole month-long celebration of Bach and his influence would require pages! This seemed to have been the year of the keyboard, exemplified by outstanding recitals by Paul Jacobs (organ), Ransford Elsley (piano) and Neal Peres Da Costa (harpsichord). Paul Jacobs, the *Wunderkind* of the organ world and Professor of Organ at New York's Juilliard School, performed music by Bach and 20th century French composers. The large audience was enthralled by the clarity and musicianship of Mr Jacobs' playing. Ransford Elsley, a member of the Grammar Music Department for twenty-five years, performed Messiaen's epic *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* in the Alastair Mackerras Theatre. Although this massive work was presented without an interval, the audience was entirely captivated by the Mr Elsley's astonishing musical and technical range. In a particularly intimate Big School concert, Neal Peres Da Costa played a series of



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Baroque harpsichord pieces, finishing with a Bach *French Suite*.

The sentimental favourite of the Festival's concertgoers was a programme of cabaret songs by French *chansonnier* Jacques Brel. Senior boys sang Brel's songs (many in French, and one even in Flemish!) accompanied by a small band to arrangements by Paul Weir, who designed the show. Boys were featured in the choral and instrumental concerts as well, and the Old Sydneians String Orchestra made its first appearance in a Bach concerto.

As is traditional for the Bach Festival, the celebration finished with a performance of one of Bach's major choral-orchestral works, using the Sydneian Bach Choir and Orchestra and advanced boys singing and playing with their older counterparts. This year's work was the *Christmas Oratorio*. With the *St John Passion* and *B Minor Mass* performed in 2001 and 2003, only one of the four major pillars of Bach's repertoire remains: the mighty *St Matthew Passion*. We have our work cut out for us!

20 May	Opening Lecture (T.H. Piekos) & Organ Recital (R.J. Wagner)
26 May	Chansons and Jacques Brel
27 May	Organ Recital: Paul Jacobs
29 May	French Harpsichord Recital: Neal Peres Da Costa
31 May	Organ Masterclass: Paul Jacobs
1 Jun	Choral Concert
2 Jun	Choral Concert
3 Jun	Organ Recital: David Drury
8 Jun	Yale Glee Club and Yale Whiffenpoofs
9 Jun	Orchestra Concert
10 Jun	Messiaen Piano Concert: Ransford Elsley
15 Jun	Russians and French: Violin and Flute Recital
17 Jun	Baroque Cello Masterclass
17 Jun	Piano Masterclass
17 Jun	Cello Concert—B.M. Manwaring & P.M. McMeekin
22 Jun	J.S. Bach, Christmas Oratorio
23 Jun	J.S. Bach, Christmas Oratorio

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