**CONCERTS IN THE WEST**

4, 5 and 6 September in Lyme Regis and Bridport, Dorset; Ilminster, Somerset and Exeter, Devon

JANE GORDON  *baroque violin*

JULIAN PERKINS *harpsichord*

Only Handel can open a violin sonata with three rising notes of an arpeggio and then, in adding a fourth, take one's breath away! This is how September's group of Concerts in the West began in what was the most uplifting chamber music concert I can recall. Jane and Julian are exemplary musicians in this genre.

They first met in their Royal College of Music days. Since then, Jane has led ensembles for Trevor Pinnock as well as scoring solo competition successes in the UK and Europe. Among many other achievements, Julian has shone as a concerto soloist with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the Orchestra of the Sixteen; he has also made a feature of recordings on a range of historical harpsichords.

Against the admirable 1985 copy of an Italian harpsichord, Jane's 1635 Italian Baroque violin shone to perfection. The sound, especially in Exeter's refurbished St Stephen's Church, left delighted audiences spellbound in a programme chosen for contrast, beauty, and the use of advanced techniques for the time. Following Handel's joyful D major Violin Sonata, a work written towards the end of his life, came the great beauty and sensuality of Leclair's 1723 G minor Sonata from his Opus 5 set. The first half closed with Corelli's 'madness' variations, *La Folia*, a celebrated show-piece built on a short motif that was to haunt Baroque composers and beyond (including Liszt and Rachmaninov). In their fluent introductions Jane and Julian constantly referred to the virtuosity of the works, but such was their dazzling execution that we only marvelled how brilliance served the music.

Before three contrasting solo keyboard sonatas by Domenico Scarlattiand JS Bach's duo Sonata in E minor, its introspection worn light as it gave way to the glorious *Gigue,* came the revelation of the evening – music by Heinrich Biber, a 1681 *Passacaglia* for solo violin, a work based on a repeated pattern of notes, here a mere four descending notes, with the violin heard at its purest yet dazzling best. Biber was to the seventeenth century what Paganini was to the nineteenth!

By contrast, the final set from Concerts in the West this year is at the end of October, and features the sensuous sound of Elaine Ruby's clarinet, with Daniel King Smith, piano, including music by Brahms and Verdi.

ANTHONY PITHER