

Master Class “THE FRENCH TASTE”

Agnès Mellon

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During the Baroque period, French taste is represented by a constant search for grace and elegance.

Its ideal is to look for measure, balance and clarity.

The art of singing lies in its capacity to adapt music to what is suggested in the text or the statement; it also lies in its care for an accurate declamation of the words, its unique sense of the importance of expression and allusion. The aesthetic motto is first of all “*to know how to tell things beautifully before they are sung... and to know how to tell them while singing at the same time*”.

The melodic line is packed with interpretation codes, very often not written on the score and only mentioned in scholarly treatises. In his preface to his collection of works published in 1660, Michel Lambert (1610-1696) writes “*the graces and the small details that I try to convey in the performing of my works... are things for which notation has not been invented and that need to be heard to make them appear*”.

The only rule that achieves unanimity is the one that requires “*to interpret with good taste*”. Also, freedom in interpreting the ornaments should never allow the singers to forget the rigorousness of the words.

The ideal of French Baroque is to generate strong feelings in the listener... Movement, contrast, ornamentation, vocal line and text are united to achieve the same aim and the same purpose: to touch the senses through meaning.

Agnès Mellon

From 1981 onwards Agnès Mellon joined successively the Chapelle Royale with Philippe Herreweghe and the Arts Florissants with William Christie. She sang with many conductors in France, Europe, the USA, Québec, China, Japan...

She founded her own ensemble “Barcarole” in 1997 to preserve the Baroque chamber music repertoire. With her ensemble she recorded “*Les déesses outragées*” (ALPHA) and “*Parole e querele d’amore*” (Zig Zag Territoires).

Concurrently with the Baroque repertoire, Agnès Mellon gave many recitals with Christian Ivaldi. She also created several show-recitals with the pianist François Kerdoncuff:

«*Esquisses de la vie d’une femme* » (“*A woman’s life - Sketches*”) and, for a more family-oriented audience, «*chante moi une histoire* » (“*Sing me a story*”).

In 2005 she created Accanto (which means *to sing close to*), an association which brings together her artistic and pedagogic achievements.

Her discography - more than 60 records - includes a large repertoire, from famous tragic Baroque operas to French songs.

Having received a CA (Teaching Diploma) Agnès Mellon now devotes her time completely to this passion. In 2008 she created a centre for the professional development of young singers who are keen to adopt the Baroque style, the “*Nursery of Voices*”. At present she teaches at the ESM Bourgogne (Centre for Higher Education in Music) in Dijon, as well as at the Vincennes music conservatory. She takes part in many master classes: USA, Québec, Japan - Kyoto Academy for French music - and CNSM (national conservatory for higher studies in music) in Paris, also in Sablé and at the Handel Festival in Karlsruhe.