

# Galanterie gives lute its due

## REVIEW

What: Early Music Society of the Islands

Who: Galanterie

John Schneiderman, lute, guitar, director

Elizabeth Blumenstock, Lisa Weiss, violins

William Skeen, cello

Where: Alix Goolden Performance Hall

When: Nov. 26

BY DERYK BARKER  
*Times Colonist staff*

From one point of view, the history of Western music can be seen as a progression from soft to gradually louder instruments and music. The harpsichord and friends were replaced by the more flexible — and louder — piano; the viola da gamba by the cello; and so forth. Even those instruments which were in regular use 250 years ago are considerably louder in their modern forms.

All of which may go some way to explaining the rather rapid decline in popularity of the lute in the 18th century; after 500 years as one of Europe's most popular and respected instruments, it simply could not compete on equal terms with the increased volume.

On Saturday evening Galanterie gave a program which underlined what was lost when the lute fell out of favour — and the reasons why, even though — almost uniquely in my experience — the traffic outside the hall behaved exceptionally and nary a single siren was heard all night.

Karl Kohaut was not only the last of the Viennese lutenist-composers, he was also a late example of that other endangered species — the successful amateur musician. The evening was built around three works by Kohaut, who evidently understood the problems of balancing his instrument with others; for the most part he is careful that

the lute's solo passages have far quieter accompaniment than tutti passages.

However, in a room the size of the Alix Goolden Hall — probably considerably larger than most Kohaut might have found himself performing in during his lifetime — the lute's voice was not always clearly audible even in those solo passages; and in tutti was often reduced to little more than a plucked texture in the background.

None of this should be taken as a reflection on the performances themselves, which were imbued with as much freshness, vivacity, insight and accuracy as one could wish for.

The music by Kohaut and that other household name, Johann Kropfgans II, was undoubtedly charming and elegant. The music of Haydn, Weiss and Vivaldi was, however, quite another matter.

Schneiderman's performance of Weiss's superb lute *Sonata in D minor* was dazzling. His fluent, unassuming virtuosity was entirely at the service of the music; and the dizzying gigue which closed the work left this listener breathless.

Even in casual mood, Joseph Haydn was clearly a great composer, as was evidenced by the *Cittazione in C*, an arrangement of his quartet Op.1 No.1. Originally entitled a divertimento, the music is clearly not meant to be profound, yet Haydn can hardly help himself; the adagio, with the lute's simply embroidered melody floating over gentle violins and pizzicato cello, lingers in the memory.

As does Vivaldi's *Concerto in D*. The solo part — for 'leuto' — may be hopelessly unidiomatic for a plucked instrument (Schneiderman played it on a baroque guitar) but it hardly matters when the music is so fine. In the slow movement, the guitar's delicate melody, the steady bass line and long-breathed, almost static violin chords ineluctably put me in mind of a wet winter's afternoon in Venice.

Altogether an exceptionally well played and engaging evening's music.

1 of 1 DOCUMENT

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