

BBC SPRINGER CASUALTY ON RECORD

[PRESS RELEASE 9/5/5]

The beginning of 2005 at the BBC saw an unprecedented storm of public protest over the screening of a blasphemous musical on BBC Two and the consequent resignation of internationally award-winning **BBC Radio 3** (90-93FM) producer, Antony Pitts.

Antony had worked at the **BBC** since just after university, starting as a secretary and ending up as a Senior Producer, and was well known for pushing back the boundaries of radio listening, creating some of the most challenging radio programmes ever broadcast. In 1995 he devised and produced an interactive radio & internet experiment for which he won the UK's most valuable industry accolade, the **BT Radio Academy Award**, and last year he was awarded the sought-after **Prix Italia** for a multi-layered collage of music and voices, *A Pebble in the Pond*. Throughout his time at the BBC Pitts was also conducting the early and new music ensemble TONUS PEREGRINUS, receiving a **Cannes Classical Award** for their chart-topping release of Arvo Pärt's *Passio* in 2003, and composing music for the Clerks' Group, Rundfunkchor Berlin, the Swingle Singers, Westminster Cathedral, and Klaus Heymann of **Naxos**. In June 2005, for the first time, a complete CD of his sacred choral music is to be released on one of Britain's leading independent record labels, **Hyperion**.

"At the centre of this new recording is *Seven Letters* - thought to be the only choral setting of St John's damning indictment of the first-century Church in Asia Minor from the Book of Revelation. Antony Pitts is a distinctive new voice whose music has been premiered at Wigmore Hall in London, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, and the Philharmonie Kammermusiksaal in Berlin. Pitts's choral music combines a jazz-infused idiom within a tight structure of traditional musical form and a response to the sacred texts which is both fervent and captivatingly heart-on-sleeve..."

The words of the *Seven Letters* are over 1900 years old, yet speak with a remarkably contemporary voice. The Laodiceans, the last of the seven churches addressed, think they are rich in worldly terms, but do not realize that spiritually they are "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked". Each letter ends with the urgent refrain: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches".

"...each 'letter' is declaimed by one of seven virtuosic members of TONUS PEREGRINUS over a cyclical choral backdrop which insistently increases in intensity as the work moves through the seven 'letters' of the musical scale, A to G. Such multifaceted intricacy is typical of Pitts's approach in the other pieces presented here. In each case a 'pop'-style hook provides the listener with an immediate entry point, while repeated listening allows the full scope of the musical vision gradually to unfold."

Today the sites of the seven churches are as fascinating as they are diverse: a variety of ruins from the height of the ancient Mediterranean Empires co-exist alongside modern society at a number of levels. Ephesus is one of the most stunningly preserved towns from antiquity and is no longer inhabited except by tourists and those who earn their living from them; some of the other sites are obscure provincial towns with more recent Turkish names and a modern existence that seems so different, yet is connected to the glimpsed fragments of the past; the final site of Laodicea is now a complete ruin bleakly devoid even of tourists, where the nearby natural water supply is still sickeningly lukewarm - the adjective applied to the Laodicean Christians themselves.

Seven Letters goes on sale at the beginning of June in all territories worldwide (**Hyperion CDA67507**). The artwork is by David Jenks. Retail price is £13.99, available in all good music shops and online. For more information, or to request an interview with Antony Pitts, please email sven@tonusperegrinus.co.uk, or ring +44 (0)7771 692024.

TONUS PEREGRINUS **Cannes Classical Award Winner 2004** www.tonusperegrinus.co.uk

Seven Letters

- 1 *Adoro te* 1999 [3'55]
- 2 *The Lord's Prayer* 1997 [3'58]
- 3 *The First and Last* 1988 [2'16]
- 4-10 *Seven Letters* 1998 [24'10]
 - A To the angel of the church in Ephesus [3'37]
 - B To the angel of the church in Smyrna [3'12]
 - C To the angel of the church in Pergamum [3'32]
 - D To the angel of the church in Thyatira [3'40]
 - E To the angel of the church in Sardis [2'48]
 - F To the angel of the church in Philadelphia [3'23]
 - G To the angel of the church in Laodicea [3'48]
- 11 *O Love* 1999 [3'46]
- 12 *O Wisdom of God* Antiphon for Advent 1991 [9'38]
- 13 *O Holy of Holies* Antiphon for Advent 1995 [4'16]
- 14 *Amen* 2000 [8'24]



Kathryn Oswald - alto
Joanna Forbes - soprano
Rebecca Hickey - soprano
Alexander L'Estrange - countertenor
Alexander Hickey - tenor
Francis Brett - bass
Benjamin Rayfield - tenor
Nick Flower - bass
Antony Pitts - director

The next UK concert appearances by **TONUS PEREGRINUS** are on:

Wednesday 6 July 2005 in Penshurst Place, Kent

(email: guillaume@cd.tp)

Wednesday 13 July 2005 at the York Early Music Festival

(tel: 01904 658338)

more info on '*The True Story...*' (a mediaeval love story with songs by Guillaume de Machaut):

<http://www.tonusperegrinus.co.uk/TPmpc.html>

TONUS PEREGRINUS is a group of individual musicians each forging their own diverse careers, yet unified when they meet to make music from many times and places. The ensemble was founded by the composer and producer Antony Pitts in 1990, while studying at New College, Oxford under Dr Edward Higginbottom. The Latin term *tonus peregrinus* was the name given to one of the Church's ancient psalm tones; in turn, this chant was based on a Jewish melody which may have been sung by Jesus and the disciples at the Last Supper. This particular psalm tone was unusual in that it had a different recitation tone in each half, hence its name, 'wandering tone'; it was also known, despite its history, as the *tonus novissimus*, or the 'newest tone'. **TONUS PEREGRINUS** combines these two characteristics in a repertoire that ranges far and wide from the end of the Dark Ages to scores fresh from the printer, and with an interpretative approach that is both authentic and original.

It was *Seven Letters* - the recording of Pitts's sacred choral music now released on Hyperion CDA67507 - that led Klaus Heymann to commission the ensemble's first two recordings for Naxos: Arvo Pärt's *Passio* (Naxos 8.555860), which hit the top of the BBC Music Magazine chart and won a Cannes Classical Award in 2004, and a pairing of the earliest complete polyphonic Mass and Passion settings, *The Mass of Tournai* (Naxos 8.555861). The ensemble's director Antony Pitts was also commissioned by Klaus Heymann to make new arrangements of 24 carols for Advent and Christmas: *The Naxos Book of Carols* is available as a CD (Naxos 8.557330) and as a carol-book published jointly by Faber Music and Select Music (ISBN 0-571-52325-0).

Forthcoming releases by **TONUS PEREGRINUS** include a new recording of organum by Léonin and Pérotin, 'Notre-Dame Cathedral & the Birth of Polyphony' (Naxos 8.557340), 'Sweet Harmony' - masses & motets by John Dunstable (Naxos 8.557341), the first-ever opera *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion* by Adam de la Halle (Naxos 8.557337), and *Hymnes and Songs of the Church* (Naxos 8.557681).