

Cleveland Museum of Art: Fretwork and Michelangelo

by Jarrett Hoffman



Fretwork, the famous England-based viol consort, will return to Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art next week for a program inspired by the Museum's current exhibit "Michelangelo: Mind of the Master."

On Wednesday, October 23 at 7:30 pm, Fretwork will play "Music from the Age of

Michelangelo," a program based on musical developments that occurred during that artist's life. One was the emergence of the violas da gamba, and the trend of homogeneous ensembles.

Another was a book of music published in 1501 by Ottaviano Petrucci that represented a major technological breakthrough in the field of printing. The *Harmonice Musices Odhecaton* ("One Hundred Harmonic Pieces of Music") was the first music book to be printed using movable type, and contained works for three to six parts — mostly vocal pieces, but without text — by major composers of the time.

I spoke to Richard Boothby of Fretwork to learn more.

Jarrett Hoffman: Tell me about the genesis of this program — did the Museum come to you with the Michelangelo pairing?

Richard Boothby: Indeed, yes. We played at the Museum last time we went to the States. [Read our 2016 conversation with Boothby [here](#).] I'd been in touch with Tom [Welsh, director of performing arts], and he said he'd love to have us back, but he

would like a program that linked with the Michelangelo exhibition. I thought that was something we could do quite easily because we have a program that mostly draws on a 1501 publication in Venice. So this presents a kind of aural evocation of the time when Michelangelo was living and working.

JH: That was the book by Petrucci, correct?

RB: That's exactly it. It's called the *Odhecaton*, which means 100 pieces, but in fact it's 97. It probably just means something around 100 pieces, or perhaps they lost count when they were putting it together.



JH: Does the whole program come from that book?

RB: We expanded it a little bit with favorite pieces by Josquin and Isaac, the two most significant composers of the time.

JH: Fretwork often pairs new and old music. But this concert will be devoted to the latter?

RB: Yes, this will be purely music from the late 15th and early 16th century. It's nice to stay in one style for a program.

JH: Is it difficult to put yourself in the right frame of mind to play music from many different time periods?

RB: It is a challenge to bring the right sensibility to different pieces all within the same program. When you do that, there are inevitable compromises. For example, when we play the Michelangelo program, because we're staying in one genre, as it were, we'll be able to adjust the temperament that we're using to make it more appropriate for that time.

When we're doing a more general program, we have to more or less stick to equal temperament in order to fit with the contemporary music ideal. It's the same with choosing instruments as well, but I think these are prices worth paying in order to have the variety that contemporary music brings to programs.

JH: You're the sole remaining founding member of Fretwork. Do you feel a responsibility to hold on to any original principles and ways of playing, or have you been comfortable letting things change both as you've gotten older and as new members have come in?

RB: I think things have to change when new people come in, and that's absolutely to be welcomed. If you rigidly adhere to original ideas, then you're stuck a bit. And I think it's very important that the last time we changed membership, we brought in two younger players — who were actually both born in the year the group was founded (laughs). They bring fresh ideas, and that's very important because the group is a living, breathing thing. It has to expand and contract, and move with the times.

JH: Lay out your tour schedule for me.

RB: We start at the Library of Congress in Washington. Then it's Carnegie Hall, the Gardner Museum, and Cleveland. After that, we go to Chicago, Vancouver, Victoria, Tucson, and Berkeley, California.

Tickets for the Cleveland Museum of Art performance are available [here](#).

Published on ClevelandClassical.com October 15, 2019.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)