

Glories of the Tudor Court

Hampton Court Palace: favourite of the king

By SUSAN JAMES

This year marks the 500th anniversary of Henry VIII's accession to the throne of England. Together with six notorious marriages, one of the many things that Henry achieved was the creation of his "favourite child," the red-brick wonder that is Hampton Court Palace.

Located on the banks of the River Thames, only a few miles southwest of London, present-day Hampton Court is a striking example of Tudor architectural ambition lavishly funded by England's capacious monarch. Peel back the layers of the complex and you will find a Crusader monastery, a medieval manor, an ambitious cardinal's playhouse, and an extravagant king's palace.

Laid out in two contiguous courtyards—a third is Stuart Baroque designed by Christopher Wren—Hampton Court as an architectural construct is the crown jewel of the early Tudor golden age.

Foundations of the original 12th-century medieval buildings, possibly a large farmhouse and outbuildings, are located beneath today's Base Court. Two hundred years later they functioned as a quasi-monastery for the Order of the Knights Hospitallers, a powerful group of crusading militants who fought in the Holy Land.

The site has ancient royal connections. Excavations in 2008 uncovered walls marked by a fire that happened in 1353 when Edward III came to visit. Chagrined by the damage, the king offered his own workmen from Windsor to oversee rebuilding, and not long after, the complex was modernized to create a gentleman's manor house, which was offered by England's kings to their loyal servants.

As Henry VIII's most influential advisor, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey took over Hampton Court in 1514. As the second-most-powerful man in the kingdom, Wolsey envisioned a residence on a lavish scale and razed the old medieval buildings to erect a modern palace that outshone those of his master.

It was Wolsey who devised the double courtyard design, with public rooms and guest lodgings set around the outer Base Court, and privy chambers and royal

guestrooms around the inner or Clock Court. As a Catholic cardinal and the king's chief advisor, Wolsey saw Hampton Court as the visual embodiment of his religious and temporal power.

The cardinal's architectural vision was influenced by Humanist philosophy and its emphasis on Classical imperatives. The architecture of Hampton Court shows a fine balance between earlier domestic Tudor building patterns and Italian Renaissance architectural innovations.

The palace is a symmetrical, rectilinear complex whose towering gatehouses lift the eye up in the medieval Gothic manner, while its flanking wings spread space outward in a Classical horizontal manner.

Wolsey was a sophisticated connoisseur at a time when his king was hiring gangs of artists and artisans from Italy, Flanders, and France. Many had worked on Francois I's elaborate Renaissance palaces and brought their skills and their Continental aesthetics with them to England.

Wolsey showed no hesitation in poaching the king's artists. Men such as Giovanni da Maiano, who created eight terracotta relief busts of Roman emperors to decorate the courtyard walls, were responsible for the Classical flourishes that distinguish the palace.

Clever as he was, Wolsey made a tactical error when he displayed his architectural treasure to his greedy master. In 1528, after Wolsey's fall from favour, Henry VIII took possession and turned the cardinal's palace into a pleasure seat fit for a king. Artists like Lucas Horenbout of Flanders and Niccolò da Modena of Italy were enlisted to draw up elaborate interior designs.

Royal suites for the king and his current queen were laid out on a piano nobile plan following contemporary Italian cues, but incorporating standard English architectural references such as a great hall with hammer-beam ceiling and a Great Watching Chamber.

Particularly in the commissariat portions of the palace, the kitchens, wash court, and storerooms, an English medieval aesthetic has been preserved. Henry's love of sports was incorporated, too, with the addition of a tiltyard, tennis



Above: HENRY VIII'S HOME: Hampton Court's main entrance. LINDA C. FRANCO

Right: ACTING OUT THE PAST: Actors playing Henry VIII and Kateryn Parr inspect their royal residence. LINDA C. FRANCO



court, and extensive gardens decorated with wooden poles topped by brightly painted figures of the king's beasts.

Henry's love of Hampton Court lasted his lifetime, but later monarchs did not share his passion. Where in the early 16th century, the palace had been on the cutting edge of Tudor architectural design, by the end of the 17th century, it was old-fashioned and neglected. The Stuart monarchs Mary II and William III devised grandiose plans to tear down Henry's work and put up a huge Baroque palace in the style of Versailles.

Although a large section of the Tudor building was destroyed, luckily for history, time and money ran out in 1694 when Mary died and William lost interest. The Fountain Court with its signature Christopher Wren facades adds a Stuart pedigree to the site, but Hampton Court's glories are reserved for its Tudor architecture whose size and magnificence are unmatched and offer a tangible tribute to the king and cardinal who created them.

Susan James is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles. She has lived in India, the U.K., and Hawaii and writes about art and culture. Her new book "The Feminine Dynamic in English Art, 1485-1603: Women as Consumers, Patrons and Painters," was published in March 2009 by Ashgate Press.

Music opens door to the West

Violinist Alexander Scherbakov and pianist Madalina Slav in focus

By CHIN YANG
Epoch Times Staff

On a quiet summer evening young violinist Alexander Scherbakov and his wife, pianist Madalina Slav, met us for a talk in their garden in Zurich.

Son of the famous pianist Konstantin Scherbakov, Alexander performs as a soloist and conductor. In addition to his classical repertoire he also performs unknown and modern works of music. He studied in Moscow, London, New York, and Los Angeles and has been a prize winner in many international competitions.

Like her husband, Madalina Slav's musical career began at an early age. She was 7 when she had her first public appearance as soloist with orchestral accompaniment. Slav, a Romanian, and Scherbakov, a Russian, are not only married, but also perform as a couple on international stages.

The Epoch Times: You were born in Moscow in 1982. How was it growing up there?

Scherbakov: I was born into a musician's family. My mother was a violinist. She is leading a concert agency now. My father is a concert pianist. So I grew up in a very musical environment. In the beginning I had to play piano as well, which I did not like at all. I could not do it. My hands were uncontrolled, and I always improvised instead of playing exactly what stood in the notes. My father, therefore, did not pressure me further. I am often asked why I chose to play the violin. I did not choose. It was laid into my hands. I have been playing the violin since age four.

At those times people in ex-communist countries either studied sports or music. These were the only chances for them to flee through the iron curtain to the West. This also holds true for my wife, Madalina Slav. She started playing the piano at a very early age as well. It was also her parents who decided for her.

As a child I never wanted to practice my violin, since a child of 4, 5 or 6 years does not usually like to stand in a room and practice the violin for the whole day. I was literally forced to practice. My little violin is full of white dots that came from dried tears.

Slav: It was similar in my case. I was not a child prodigy. I knew children who were considered child prodigies then. At that time, the status of child prodigy was something desirable for me, until I realized that



SOUL AND MUSICAL MATES: Violinist Alexander Scherbakov and his wife, pianist Madalina Slav. THE EPOCH TIMES

being a child prodigy may not be as good as it seems to be. The so-called child prodigies are trapped in their own world. They are very lonely and often have very ambitious parents.

ET: Communism has the principle of blind obedience. However, as a musician you have to always make your own decisions. How did you solve this conflict?

Scherbakov: This is an interesting question. In my early years I grew up under a communist regime. My family was always against this kind of state doctrine, and so I was educated that way. I still remember one incident at school. We were taught at that time that Lenin was our grandfather. I stood up during class and shouted out loud: "No, Lenin is not my grandfather, and I don't want him to be near me, either!" As a consequence, I was dismissed from class. I had already made my own decisions at that age. Of course, I was also obedient from time to time but only with reference to the personal levels within the family which had nothing to do with the surroundings and the regime.

Slav: The regime did not work. The origi-

nal idea was perhaps not bad, but it just did not work. Human beings are simply not the same. Communism reigned in Romania until 1989.

ET: Do you see yourself as a Swiss?

Slav: I have been living in Switzerland for seven years. I don't have a Swiss passport, but I don't think that I would feel differently if I had one. The soul remains the same, no matter what nationality one obtains.

The soul is Swiss if one is born in Switzerland. If one is born in another country, one's soul is connected with that country and its culture and traditions. For us, Switzerland is a beautiful country where we can live in peace. Here we can make our lives better and come closer to what we want.

ET: Mrs. Slav, if you could only bring one item from your home country, what would it be?

Slav: That is hard to say. Personally I believe that items belong to where they come from. This is why I would, for example, not bring from their culture things that cannot be understood here. If I had to bring something, it would be the Romanian music because that is my wish. I, however, do not expect that people here would understand it. Even people in Romania hardly understand it themselves.

ET: You are currently teaching at the Zurich University of the Arts—can you describe the difference between the Russian conservatory and the Swiss institution?

Scherbakov: There definitely exist huge differences. They lie mainly in the mental attitude of students who study at the Russian conservatory. Here in Switzerland students believe that a study program in music is easier to cope with than studies in law, physics, or languages. When it comes to music, people think that it is more pleasant. Studies are completed quickly and one does not need to work much on them. What will happen in the future does not really worry people too much.

In Russia, students are only admitted

when they are really interested in pursuing a career as a musician. The training is much harder. You follow a clear program, and clear limits are set. Here in Switzerland almost everything is on a voluntary basis.

The soul is Swiss if one is born in Switzerland. If one is born in another country, one's soul is connected with that country and its culture and traditions.

ET: You have already traveled half of the world with your concerts. Where do you most like to perform?

Slav: By far, in New York. If you ask where we like to perform the most, it is in New York ... the answer would of course be at Carnegie Hall (laughs).

ET: Where do you see yourself in 10 years time?

Scherbakov: Professionally speaking, that is constantly evolving. If one stagnates at a level, one's career will only go downhill. We can never stand still and we have to work hard at this on a permanent basis. There will be no future if we don't do anything. I personally would like to conduct more. Now I work as an assistant to Justus Franz at the Philharmonic of the Nations. Later I will probably conduct other orchestras as well. I am currently acquiring a conductor's craft. Nevertheless, I will continue to play my violin. I will not give it up.

Slav: We will let the future decide for us. We would also be ready to leave everything behind and travel with our dog wherever our destiny may lead us, even if this means that we would find ourselves at the Mediterranean Sea again.

ET: Thank you for the interview.

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