

Review: York Early Music Festival, Hathor Consort, Dhrupad Fantasia: Gloriana and Akbar the Great, National Centre for Early Music

13th July 2018

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Hathor Consort

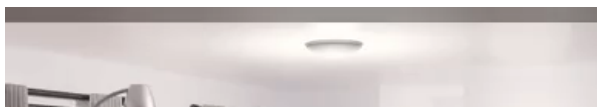
By Charles Hutchinson

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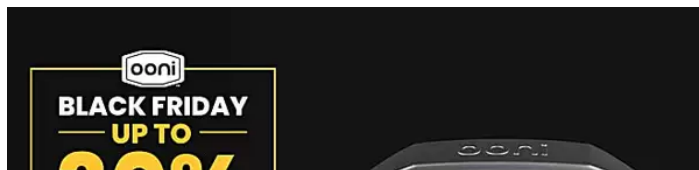
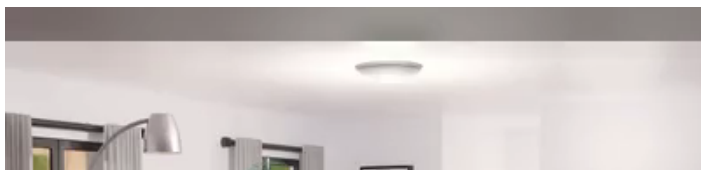
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ON Thursday night, the Hathor Consort joined forces with vocalist Uday Bhawalkar and pakhawaj player Jasdeep Singh for an inspired bringing together of 16th-century polyphony and Dhrupad, an ancient classical vocal tradition centred on Hindustani raga-based improvisations.

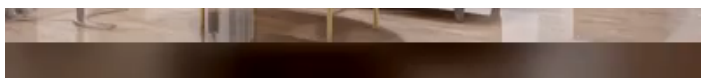


As explained by Nima Poovaya-Smith in a fascinating lecture earlier in the day, the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I and Emperor Akbar ran almost exactly alongside each other (1558 to 1603 and 1556 to 1605, respectively) and they both created climates in which the arts could thrive. The end of their rules marked the beginning of a longstanding relationship between England and the Indian subcontinent.

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The programme was divided into Morning, Afternoon – Bandish, Evening and Night, with no break between pieces, a decision that helped to blend the two distinct styles into a coherent concert that encompassed pieces from Renaissance figures, such as John Dowland and William Whytbroke, and Bhawalkar’s own compositions.

There were several impressive and virtuosic solos throughout – Anne Freitag’s Renaissance flutes and recorders were particularly charismatic – but the ensemble was at its best when all played together, the precise communication and easy rapport between the players clear to see.

The similarities between Dhrupad and 16th-century polyphony are striking, and the Consort and Bhawalkar and Singh weaved them together with sensitivity, allowing the intricacies of each to shine through. Well-crafted, innovative compositions and polished performances created an affecting programme of musical beauty that was in turn both joyous and haunting.

Review by Alice Masterson

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