

Paolo Pandolfo

The Art of Improvisation

In addition to being one of the world's leading gamba players, the charismatic Paolo Pandolfo is known also for his masterful improvisatory skills, as clearly demonstrated by his critically acclaimed solo and improvised concert at the Lufthansa Festival of Baroque Music in 2010. At the renowned early music school, the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, where Paolo teaches viola da gamba, Claire Bracher spoke to Paolo about how he himself came to work with improvisation, his early inspirations in this way of

working, and why it is a skill that many musicians today do not possess.

My own introduction to improvisation goes back to the days when I was a young boy of 16 or 17, and the time I was deciding whether to make music my life and my profession. In those years, early music (historical performance) was still not yet a part of my life, I didn't know anything about it, but I had certainly already taken a keen interest in music, and was already playing several

instruments; primarily, the violin, piano and guitar. By this stage in my musical life, I had been drawn to and found myself working with jazz players, and specifically to double bass jazz. Thereby, I was introduced to, and experienced a couple of years of playing this type of (improvised) music, and to the notion and attitude towards improvisation – of having this mixture of control and freedom which involves improvising on standard structures. It was a feeling and experience that I never forgot, and it remained very much in

