

Arts and Letters

Event Profile

Streetman takes on English History with Hysterics and Poignancy in Directorial Debut

PEPYS MUSICAL LIFE A piano keyboard barely stretches past "low C", two octaves below the C in the middle of the keyboard. But Curtis Streetman got there, more than once, as he recently led The New York Collegium in "The Musical Life of Samuel Pepys," a survey of the life and times of the famous diarist who was also an amateur composer. Mr. Streetman managed to get to a "low C" several times and it still came out more as a musical note more than a long growl. It was a tough reach, Mr. Streetman later acknowledged to the Sun. "I programmed them at the beginning because one's voice gets higher as a concert goes on."

Mr. Streetman's feat and the plangent music played to a packed hall at the New York Society for Ethical Culture. The West Side audience was transported to the 17th century by the music of Henry Lawes, John Blow and Matthew Locke, interspersed with Pepys' vivid accounts of the Great Fire of London, a storm at sea and a salacious dalliance with a woman in a London park, read smoothly by Thomas Meglioranza. Mr. Meglioranza also sang one number composed by Pepys himself, but despite all he gave to it, some audience members thought it proved that Pepys was a more talented diarist than songwriter. Also impressive was the size of the huge theorbo, an instrument resembling a six-foot long guitar with one and a half necks,



which joined the violin and viola and harpsichord in accompanying the singers.

Spotted during intermission was patron Bradford Endicott and his wife, Dorothea, who is executive director of the Collegium, chatting with art



historian Ruth Bowman, who said she had found the film shown before the concert "heartwarming." In the video, Andrew Parrott, musical director of the Collegium, interviewed Richard Lockett, the Pepys librarian at Magdalene College, Cambridge, where the diarist's 3000 volume library is housed. Mr. Lockett showed a very odd elaborate contraption, a large wooden box with push pull sliders, which Pepys had used to come up with the harmony for

his own simple songs. It would have been just as good to write a few rules on the back of a playing card, the two agreed.

Anthony Liversidge for The New York Sun