

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 10 February 2022 7.30pm

Jakub Józef Orliński countertenor

il Pomo d'Oro

Francesco Corti conductor, harpsichord

Ludovico Minasi cello

Zefira Valova violin, concertmaster

Jan Prievoznik double bass

Lucia Giraud violin II

Miguel Rincón Rodríguez theorbo

Giulio d'Alessio viola

Janez Krstnik Tolar (c.1620-1673)

Intrada: Adagio. Allegro from *Balletto a4 No. 1*

Georg Reutter (1708-1772)

D'ogni colpa la colpa maggiore from *La Betulia liberata* (1734)

Antonio Lotti (1666-1740)

Proh quantae sunt in orbe strages

Nicola Conti (fl.1733-54)

Salve sis, o Mater pia

Francisco António de Almeida (fl.1722-52)

Giusto Dio from *La Giuditta* (1726)

Baldassare Galuppi (1706-1785)

From Concerto a4 No. 4 in C minor

I. Grave • II. Allegro

Gaetano Maria Schiassi (1698-1754)

A che si serbano from *Maria Vergine al Calvario* (1735)

Interval

Bartolomeo Nucci (1695-1779)

Dal beato eccelso volo from *Il David trionfante*

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Peccator videbit from *Beatus vir* RV795 (1739)

Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello (c.1690-1758)

Chaconne in A

Johann Joseph Fux (1660-1741)

Non t'amo per il ciel from *Il fonte della salute aperto dalla grazia nel Calvario* (1716)

David Perez (1711-1778)

Gratias agimus tibi from *Mass a5*

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Amen, Alleluia in D minor HWV269 (c.1734-41)



Financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland as part of the multi-annual programme NIEPODŁĘGLA 2017-2022

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Great singers emerged in Europe after the birth of opera around 1600. Especially prized was the high-voice male, the *primo uomo*, nurtured in the cathedral choirs of Italy and sought after for the most heroic stage roles. Audiences, it seems, associated pitch with virtue, not gender. Most of these glittering, androgynous voices were created by a surgical operation (castration) carried out on choristers. The development of the countertenor voice in recent years has produced singers capable of once again doing justice to the extraordinary music written for these artists - mercifully without the need for surgery, as this evening's concert demonstrates.

Most of the arias here were composed in the 17th and 18th centuries for opera or oratorio and are of the *da capo* ('from the top') type, or in ABA form. The middle section is generally in a new key or tempo and the repeat of the first section elaborately embellished. This became the singer's opportunity to demonstrate the vocal gymnastics he had learnt and which would earn him the infatuation of listeners who would roar their approval and throw flowers at his feet.

The programme begins before the arrival of the star with an instrumental piece, a short tragic *Intrada* from *Balletto No. 1* by the Jesuit priest and composer **Janez Krstnik Tolar**, whose manuscripts long lay undiscovered in the prince's residence in Kroměříž, Czech Republic.

The singer enters with the opening aria 'D'ogni colpa' from *La Betulia liberata*, an opera on the gruesome Judith and Holofernes story from the Bible. Judith seduces then beheads the evil Holofernes (usually a contemptible tenor or bass) who has enslaved the Jews. The music, composed in 1734 by **Georg Reutter**, choirmaster of St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, was the first of many settings of the same text by the author Metastasio, each city, essentially, commissioning its own. In the next aria, 'Proh quantae sunt' by **Antonio Lotti** (himself choirmaster of St Mark's Basilica in Venice), the singer rues the massacres of history. It is scored for two violins, viola and 'basso continuo', in which improvised chords are indicated by numbers written above the bassline, a shorthand development of opera. 'Salve sis' is a prayer to the Virgin Mother by **Nicola Conti**, organist at the royal chapel in Naples from 1733 to 1754, who composed many operas for the city, all of which are lost. The gentle aria 'Giusto Dio' is from the Judith (*Giuditta*) story once again, in an oratorio by Portuguese composer **Francisco António de Almeida** staged in Rome during Lent 1726.

The instrumental Concerto a4 by **Baldassare Galuppi** for two violins, viola and cello is an early string quartet in all but name. Of its three movements, the first is reverently slow as if for church. Galuppi was a pupil of Lotti at St Mark's and the leading Venetian composer of his generation.

The divo concludes the first half with the elaborate scenario 'A che si serbano' from the oratorio *Maria Vergine al Calvario* by the Bolognese violinist and composer **Gaetano Maria Schiassi**, a leading instrumentalist in the Accademia Filarmonica in that city. The work was staged in Bologna on Good Friday 1735, a year after Schiassi had left for Lisbon to serve in the royal chapel as teacher, composer and singer. He was an experienced opera composer who had worked at Darmstadt and staged several successful operas there and in Italy, one of them a comedy in Bolognese dialect which pointed the way towards comic opera (*buffa*) as a separate genre. He was the ideal person to found the opera house in the Portuguese capital.

The aria 'Dal beato eccelso volo' is from the oratorio *Il David trionfante* by **Bartolomeo Nucci** who seems to have been a castrato himself, and teacher of the younger generation. A recent discovery, the entire archive of Nucci's music is now at the University of California, Berkeley. 'Peccator videbit' is a setting of the last verse of Psalm 112, *Beatus Vir*, by **Antonio Vivaldi**. It was commissioned in 1739 for performance at Easter by the composer's former employer, the Ospedale della Pietà, a girls' orphanage where Vivaldi had taught and trained a remarkable female orchestra, one of the wonders of Baroque Europe.

The instrumental Chaconne in A is a set of variations in mesmerising three-time by the Venetian composer **Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello**. He was brought to Munich by the Elector of Bavaria and from 1716 was employed at the ducal court in Stuttgart. He lost his job in 1737 which spurred him to greater activity as a composer, fortunately for later generations.

The last three items are celebratory, though they begin gently with the serene 'Non t'amo per il ciel' from the large-scale 1716 oratorio *Il fonte della salute* by Austrian composer and music theorist **Johann Joseph Fux**, from 1712 another choirmaster of St Stephen's Cathedral, Vienna. His successors knew him as 'the Austrian Palestrina' for his outdated but brilliant counterpoint. 'Gratias agimus' is a movement from the five-part Mass by **David Perez**, a Neapolitan composer of Spanish descent. The evening ends with a Handel firework, a setting of just two words - 'Alleluia, Amen' - composed in London in the 1730s when the composer was training the members of his opera company, which included castrati, to outsize their rivals. The trills sparkled, the breathless runs thrilled and the swelling long notes drove audiences wild.

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Janez Krstnik Tolar (c.1620-1673)

Intrada: Adagio. Allegro from *Balletto a4 No. 1*

Georg Reutter (1708-1772)

D'ogni colpa la colpa maggiore
from *La Betulia liberata* (1734)

D'ogni colpa la colpa maggiore È l'eccesso d'un empio timore Oltraggioso all'eterna pietà.	The greatest sin of all is an excess of unhallowed fear that affronts God's eternal mercy.
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Chi dispera non ama, non crede; Che la fede, l'amore, la speme Son tre faci che splendono insieme Né una ha luce, se l'altra non l'ha .	Those who despair have no love or faith, for faith, love and hope are three flames that burn together: none can shine without the others' light.
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Antonio Lotti (1666-1740)

Proh quantae sunt in orbe strages

Proh quantae sunt In orbe strages Movent caedes Augent clades Soli inter se mortales.	Ah, what slaughter there is in the world; among mortal men there is but death and destruction.
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Muta Deus, muta mentes Ut in bono tuo dono Sui tandem sint amantes.	God, alter men's minds that through your good gift they at last may love one another.
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Nicola Conti (fl.1733-54)

Salve sis, o Mater pia

Salve sis o Mater pia Expers paris O Maria nos, o Mater aspirare	All hail to thee holy Mother, you who are without equal, Mother Mary, help us.
--	--

Tu es illa cuiartis electa Qua benigna et dilecta Ah nos semper protege Ah nos semper aspire.	You are she who was chosen, she who is cherished and mild; ah, protect us always, ah, help us always.
--	--

Francisco António de Almeida (fl. 1722-52)

Giusto Dio from *La Giuditta* (1726)

Anonymous

Giusto Dio, Il popol mio Dal furor d'iniqua sorte Deh ti piaccia di salvar.	God of righteousness, may it please you to deliver my people from the ravages of pernicious fate.
--	--

Sull'indegno Il tuo gran sgedno Scenda omai possente e forte Che lo giunga ad atterrar.	May now your mighty wrath, powerful and strong, smite that unworthy man and cast him to the ground.
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Baldassare Galuppi (1706-1785)

Concerto a4 No. 4 in C minor

I. Grave

II. Allegro

Gaetano Maria Schiassi (1698-1754)

A che si serbano

from *Maria Vergine al Calvario* (1735)

A che si serbano In cielo i fulmini Se non si vibrano a l'empietà.	What good are heaven's thunderbolts if they do not strike down impiety?
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Nel caso asprissimo Di madre misera Gran Dio, le lagrime voglion pietà.	In the most pitiful case of a grieving mother, great God, tears call for mercy.
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Interval

Bartolomeo Nucci (1695-1779)

Dal beato eccelso volo from *Il David trionfante*

Dal beato eccelso volo Scendi omai per mia difesa Dalle sfere, o Rè possente.	Cease your noble, blessed flight and descend now from the heavens to protect me, o powerful King.
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Mia speranza tu sei solo, Tu m'aiuta all'alta impresa Col tuo braccio onnipotente.	You are my only hope. Your almighty arm will aid me in my bold endeavour.
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Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Peccator videbit from *Beatus vir RV795* (1739)

Peccator videbit et irascetur, dentibus suis fremet et tabescet: desiderium peccatorum peribit.	The sinner will see this and be enraged, he will gnash his teeth and waste away: the sinner's desire will perish.
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Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello (c.1690-1758)

Chaconne in A

Johann Joseph Fux (1660-1741)

Non t'amo per il ciel from *Il fonte della salute aperto dalla grazia nel Calvario* (1716)

Pietro Pariati

Non t'amo per il ciel Che puoi donarmi Ma sol perché d'amor, Tu, il fonte sei, E sol perché l'amarti È un dover mio.	I love you not for the heaven you can grant me but for the reason alone tha you are the source of love, and for the reason alone that loving you is my duty.
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Né temo del tuo sdegno Il braccio e l'armi Per un servil timor De' danni miei Ma sol perché temer Deggio il mio Dio.	Nor do I fear the weaponry of your wrath through craven dread of my own injury, but for the reason alone that I am impelled to fear my God.
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David Perez (1711-1778)

Gratias agimus tibi from *Mass a5*

Gratias agimus tibi Propter magnam gloriam tuam	We thank you for your great glory
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George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Amen, Alleluia in D minor HWV269 (c.1734-41)

Liturgical text

Amen, Alleluia ...