

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 16 October 2023
1.00pm

Théotime Langlois de Swarte violin
Justin Taylor harpsichord

François Francoeur (1698-1787)

From Violin Sonata No. 6 in G minor (Book II) (pub. after 1720)
Adagio • Courante • Rondeau

François Couperin (1668-1733)

Les Baricades mystérieuses (pub. 1716-7)

François Francoeur

From *Les Augustales* (1744)

*Le théâtre s'obscurcit, on entend le tonnerre •
Le théâtre s'éclaire*

Louis Francoeur (c.1692-1745)

Largo from Violin Sonata in B minor Op. 1 No. 6 (pub. 1715)

François Francoeur

Premiers et Seconds Airs from *Scanderberg* (1735)

Gavotte pour les muses et les plaisirs from *Le trophée* (1745)

Deuxième air from *Tarsis et Zélie* (1728)

From Violin Sonata No. 10 in G (Book I) (pub. 1720)

Adagio • Presto

Henry Eccles (1670-1742)

From Violin Sonata in G minor (pub. 1720)

Adagio • Courante

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Music for a while from *Incidental music for Oedipus, King of
Thebes* Z583 (1692)

Henry Eccles

Vivace from Violin Sonata in G minor

Alessandro Marcello (1673-1747)

Largo from Oboe Concerto in D minor SZ799 (by 1715)

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713)

Violin Sonata in D minor Op. 5 No. 12 'La Follia' (pub. 1700)



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



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At the turn of the 18th Century, the tides of European art music were governed by two very distinct stylistic polarities. This was in no small part due to cultural trends dating back at least another 150 years and still at work today. On one side was Italy, the land of song and the birthplace of its most exalted form, opera. Italian singers and voice teachers were in demand from London to St Petersburg, and it is no surprise that Italian remains the lingua franca of music across the world... think *concerto, sonata, forte, piano, allegro*. France, on the other hand, was the land of ballet. No court or noble household was complete without a French dancing master, and everyone from Louis XIV to Nureyev danced the *pas de deux*.

With his first publication in 1681, the violin virtuoso **Corelli** quietly disrupted music history with a series of six volumes of trio sonatas, concerti grossi, and solo violin sonatas. While his works were not a radical departure in form or style from his Roman contemporaries, he managed to blend the best of vocal *bel canto* with just the right amount of virtuosity and an uncanny ear for harmonic tension and release to create music that captured the imagination and the spirit and continues to do so today, just as Shakespeare still commands the stage. Corelli's works were copied and reprinted across Europe, and studied and imitated by none less than Bach, Vivaldi, Handel, **Marcello**, Pergolesi, and countless others, to the point where the Corellian style was synonymous with Italian Baroque violin music.

It is rather ironic that the most quintessentially French of all French composers was born in Florence and brought to Paris by a traveling nobleman. Rebranding himself to suit his new life, Lully rose through the ranks of the Parisian musical scene, and in 1661 was appointed Louis XIV's *surintendant* of music, where he wielded power with an iron fist. Both Lully and the Sun King were fine dancers, and it was no surprise that French opera almost always included a significant amount of ballet, the king often dancing in the spectacles himself.

And what of the French and Italian styles themselves? This being the Baroque period in the world of art, both shared a love for extravagant musical decoration. Italians, too far removed from vocal models, embellished their music between the notes with virtuosic passagework, clever melodic variation, and displays of florid improvisation borrowed from the opera stage. In contrast, the French tended to decorate the individual notes themselves with an encyclopaedic variety of trills and figurations notated in the musical score with extreme precision, with publications often including a glossary explaining each symbol and its precise execution.

It may come as no surprise that the French took great pride in their unique style and went to great pains to preserve its purity from the barbarian musical hordes from south of the Alps. Yet it would be mostly

in vain. Not long after Corelli's compositions went viral, early adapters like the Parisian harpsichord prodigy and influential *salonnière* Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre began to incorporate more Italian elements into her chamber music. Others quickly followed. By the 1720s, the great harpsichordist and composer **François Couperin** championed an idea he called *les Goûts réunis* ('the united styles') which fully embraced blending the often opposing French and Italian musical elements to achieve an ultimate perfection and balance. In 1724, he published a trio sonata which he called *l'Apothéose de Corelli*, an allegorical homage to Corelli's style interpreted through the mind of the French master. A year later, he followed that up with another allegorical sonata he called *l'Apothéose de Lully*, in which Corelli greets the French composer at Mount Parnassus, the two composers' joint deification symbolising the perfection of the *Goûts réunis* - along with quite a bit of ballet.

Another significant and successful exponent of the *Goûts réunis* was **François Francoeur**, son of a member of Louis XIV's string band *les vingt-quatre violins du roy*, and whose brother **Louis** and nephew Louis-Joseph were also important Parisian composers and performers. After extensive travels throughout the major European musical capitals, François returned to Paris, where in 1744 he was appointed co-music director of the Paris Opéra, completely taking over its management in 1757. Francoeur composed at least ten operas, several ballets, and two collections of violin sonatas, the work of a learned and cosmopolitan composer with a strong flair for the dramatic.

Across the English Channel, the blending of French and Italian styles played out in a very different manner. During the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, all things Italian were in vogue - hence the number of Shakespeare's Italian plays - and a great number of Italian musicians sought employment in England as teachers and performers. After the Restoration, Charles II brought French musicians and musical tastes to court, and renewed interest in creating a truly English form of semi-opera. **Purcell**, considered to be England's greatest 17th-century composer, blended the elegance of the French dance and the fiery sweetness of Italian *bel canto* into his native idiom, which was never completely free from the sharp corners and angularity of the English language. Fellow Englishman **Henry Eccles** combined nations in a more direct way, as musician to the French Ambassador to Britain in the first decades of the 18th Century. In 1720, he published a collection of 12 violin sonatas in Paris, many movements of which were borrowed from Valentini's Op. 8 (1712). The Sonata in G minor is, as far as one knows, mostly original, except for the final movement, which was taken from a work by Bonporti.

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