

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 18 November 2024  
7.30pm

## Giro d'Italia

### La Serenissima

Adrian Chandler director, violin

Oliver Cave violin I

Abel Balazs violin I

Maxim Del Mar violin I

Simone Pirri violin II

Jim O'Toole violin II

Ellen Bundy violin II

Charlotte Amherst violin II

Elitsa Bogdanova viola

Thomas Kirby viola

Sam Kennedy viola

Vladimir Waltham cello

Samuel Ng cello

Jan Zahourek double bass

Robin Bigwood harpsichord, organ

### BOLOGNA

Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello (c.1690-1758) Sinfonia-Suite in C minor for strings and continuo (pub. 1738)

*I. Allegro • II. Largo • III. Allegro*

### LUCCA

Giovanni Lorenzo Gregori (1663-1745) Concerto No. 6 in A minor for strings and continuo Op. 2

### BRESCIA

Pietro Gnocchi (1689-1775) Concerto No. 6 in B flat for strings and continuo

*I. Largo • II. Allegro spiccato e a tempo giusto • III. Larghetto • IV. Allegro*

### VENICE

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) Violin Concerto in D minor RV235

*I. Allegro non molto • II. Adagio • III. Allegro*

### Interval

### ROME

Giuseppe Valentini (1681-1753) Concerto No. 9 in E flat for strings and continuo Op. 7 (pub. 1710)

*I. Allegro - Adagio e staccato • II. Allegro • III. Adagio • IV. Vivace*

### PALERMO

Giacomo Facco (1676-1753) Concerto No. 7 in C for violin, strings and continuo Op. 'Pensieri Adriarmonici' (pub. 1719)

*I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro*

### NAPLES

Francesco Durante (1684-1755) Concerto No. 4 in E minor for strings and continuo

*I. Adagio • II. Ricercar del quarto tono • III. Largo • IV. Presto*

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Throughout the course of his career, **Antonio Vivaldi** composed a staggering 250 concertos for violin. Spanning a period of nearly four decades, these works bear testament to Vivaldi's development both as a violinist and as a teacher and culminate in the concertos of the late 1730s. It is to this period that the Concerto in D minor (RV235) belongs, probably composed for one of the women of the Ospedale della Pietà, the Venetian founding institution where Vivaldi was employed for much of his career.

This concerto has it all: high passagework; extended passages of grace notes; trills and extended passages of thirds. Most importantly, however, it is an exercise in bow control: the use of the slow bow, flying staccato, slurred staccato and the cantabile stroke are all present. There are even bowings so strange that Vivaldi felt inclined to write the direction *guardate la legatura* ('watch the slurs!') as a warning to his copyist or, equally likely, the soloist herself. These techniques show exactly why Vivaldi's reputation as a great violinist was undisputed (even by his critics) and why his pupils from the Pietà, such as Anna Maria, were said to be among the finest violinists in Europe. Although Vivaldi was unusual in the volume of music that flowed from his pen, he was by no means the only Italian of the *Settecento* composing instrumental music, even if many composers' names, such as **Pietro Gnocchi**, have since been relegated to the footnotes of history books. Gnocchi's music is now largely forgotten, but during his lifetime, he was well-respected and received accolades from the likes of Padre Martini. His output consists almost exclusively of sacred vocal music, though a small number of concertos and sonatas (again probably conceived for the church) also survive.

Born in Brescia, he studied in Venice before travelling widely in order to meet great musicians in centres such as Vienna, Dresden, Munich, Hungary and Bohemia. In addition to his work as a priest, composer and organist, he also wrote books on epigraphy, geography, archaeology and ancient history as well as being a scholar and master of languages. His interest in geography is reflected in the titles of many of his works, such as his settings of the *Magnificat Il capo di buona speranza* ('The Cape of Good Hope') and the *Il rio de la plata* ('The River Plate').

Similarly well-travelled was **Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello**. Born in Bologna, he served in Venice as a valet to Theresa Kunegunda Sobieska, the music-loving exiled Electress of Bavaria. Following the Treaty of Baden at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, the Electress returned to Munich with Brescianello who joined the Bavarian Hofkapelle as a violinist.

His stay in Munich was brief, and in 1716 he successfully applied for the post of *Director musices* at the Württemberg court (Stuttgart) before eventually assuming the role of Oberkapellmeister in 1721. He was not excessively prolific, but his surviving output is stellar. In addition to his Opus 1 collection of violin concertos and 'symphonias', he composed concertos, sonatas, an opera,

and a small number of orchestral suites, of which a fine collection survives in Rostock.

A further suite survives in the Universitetsbiblioteket, Lund, perhaps unique on account of the fact that it is not an Overture-Suite (i.e. written in the French style) but an Italianate Sinfonia-Suite. The greatest difference is found in the opening movement which resembles that of an Italian operatic sinfonia, although the multi-section format is highly original. The following suite of dances is more akin to the Rostock suites, though – in the manner of contemporary operatic Italian composers – both violin parts are often unified.

While Brescianello composed only one opera, **Francesco Durante** composed none at all, a rare feat for a Neapolitan. He was probably a pupil of Alessandro Scarlatti and composed mostly sacred music with the exception of a small quantity of keyboard and instrumental works, such as the eight concertos for strings. Although never published in his lifetime, these concertos appear to have been popular, as proven by the number of manuscript copies currently housed in various European and American libraries.

The works are typically flamboyant in style and incorporate elements of the church concerto, the concerto grosso and the Vivaldian concerto; all are characterised by Durante's quirky counterpoint. His supporters (the Durantists) were often at loggerheads with the supporters of Leo (the Leonists) who reproached Durante for his fantastical writing. Due to the exceptional quality of this collection, it is difficult to understand how exception could be taken to these pieces.

Another composer renowned for his unconventional style was **Giuseppe Valentini**, known to his friends as 'Il Straccioncino' ('The Little Ragamuffin'). An accomplished painter and poet, it was perhaps as one of Rome's finest violinists that Valentini enjoyed his greatest success, his technical abilities enabling him to write in keys considered unsuitable for the violin – as demonstrated by a 50-bar passage of horrendous broken chords found in the ninth concerto of his Opus 2.

**Giovanni Lorenzo Gregori** spent his entire life in the Tuscan city of Lucca where he served as a violinist in the Capella di Palazzo for 54 years until his retirement in 1742. Apart from five oratorios, the vast majority of his small output belongs to the period 1697-1705 including the Opus 2 concertos, the first such collection to be described as *Concerti Grossi*.

**Giacomo Facco** also published a single set of concertos (*Pensieri Adriarmonici*), which were dedicated to the Marquis de los Balbases, Carlo Filippo Spinola. Although published in 1720-1, the concertos are clearly influenced by the early works of Albinoni which Facco had presumably heard before leaving northern Italy. The fugal finales to a handful of the concertos (including the seventh) are unusual, yet highly effective.

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