

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 25 January 2022 7.30pm

Monteverdi's Italy

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin

Georg Kallweit violin, concertmaster

Kerstin Erben violin

Clemens-Maria Nuszbaumer viola

Stephan Sieben viola

Jan Freiheit cello

Annette Rheinfurth violone

Siobhán Armstrong harp

Raphael Alpermann harpsichord, organ

Antonio Bertali (1605-1669)

Sonata a6 in D minor (pub. 1662)

Marco Uccellini (1603-1680)

Sonata decima ottava a doi violini Op. 4 (pub. 1645)

Giulio Caccini (1551-1618)

Amarilli, mia bella (pub. 1601)

Andrea Falconieri (c.1585-1656)

Passacalle (pub. 1650)

Giovanni Valentini (c.1582-1649)

Sonata a5 in G minor (pub. 1662)

Giovanni Pandolfi Mealli (1630-1670)

Sonata 'La Biancuccia' Op. 4 No. 4 (pub. 1660)

Biagio Marini (1594-1663)

Sinfonia Sesto Tuono Op. 22 (pub. 1655)

Balletto Terzo Op. 22 (pub. 1655)

Corrente Seconda Op. 22 (pub. 1655)

Zarabanda Terza Op. 22 (pub. 1655)

Balletto Quarto Allemano Op. 22 (pub. 1655)

Interval

Giovanni Legrenzi (1626-1690)

Sonata a5 Op. 8 No. 11 'La Fugazza' (pub. 1663)

Benedetto Ferrari (1603-1681)

Amanti io vi so dire (pub. 1641)

Andrea Falconieri

Ciaccona (pub. 1641)

Antonio Bertali

Sonata a6 in D minor for 2 violins, 2 violas da braccio and viola da gamba and violone

Giovanni Legrenzi

Improvisation on 'Lumi, potete piangere' from *La divisione del mondo* (1675)

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

Improvisation on 'Pur ti miro, pur ti godo' from *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (1642-3 rev. 1651)

Heinrich Biber (1644-1704)

Serenada a5 'Der Nachtwächter' (1673)

I. Serenada • II. Allamanda • III. Aria •

IV. Ciaccona ('Der Nachtwächter') • V. Gavotte • VI. Retirada

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Monteverdi's Italy: The Rise of Instrumental Music

What does instrumental music mean? The question was posed frequently in the 17th and 18th centuries given the startling growth of the repertoire. The 'meaning' of vocal music was clear by its text, whether sacred or secular, and **Claudio Monteverdi**, the greatest composer in early Baroque Italy, provided countless examples of how words might inspire flights of musical fantasy. But while he used instrumental ensembles in his operas, madrigals and sacred music, he wrote almost no independent instrumental works. He may have sensed that wordless music — sound for sound's sake — created a problem. The question for his contemporaries was how to turn that into an opportunity.

The different question of what purposes were served by instrumental music was easier to answer. It filled both space and time during the church service; it was needed for dancing; it could sonically enhance any ceremonial occasion; it might provide a background accompaniment to a banquet or similar social event. But what attention should be paid to it was a different matter.

When, in the middle of the 16th Century, instrument makers in Cremona — with the Amati family at their head — started to make bowed string instruments held by the arm (*viole da braccio*), in contrast to between the legs (*viole da gamba*), they followed the Renaissance practice of creating a 'consort' covering the vocal ranges of a standard choir, with soprano, alto, tenor and bass violins; the bass violin was indeed held between the legs, although it was different in design from the bass *viola da gamba*. This consort gradually became standardised into what we now call the violin, viola and cello. The modern double bass, however, descended from the largest member of the *viola da gamba* family, the *violone*. What distinguished *viole da braccio* from those *da gamba* was the tuning of the strings (in fifths rather than fourths), the absence of frets on the fingerboard, and the bow held with the hand above rather than below the stick. The technique for playing them was quite different: freeing up the bowing arm and removing the frets allowed for much greater agility and expressive effect. The musical consequences were clear.

We can argue over who was driving the engine here: instrument makers, performers, or composers. But by the early 17th Century, *viola da braccio* ensembles were commonly employed in churches and princely courts, and such violin virtuosos as **Biagio Marini** and **Marco Uccellini** were in high demand. Given that the music they performed had no text, it could move easily across geographical and linguistic borders. Some Italian composer-performers stayed in Italy, as with **Giovanni Legrenzi** in Bergamo, Ferrara and Venice. Others took this music across the Alps — Biagio Marini far into Germany, and **Antonio Bertali** to Vienna — where they created fertile ground for the development of local talent extending into Bohemia (**Heinrich Biber** at Kroměříž before moving to Salzburg) and Poland (where **Valentini** worked for a time before going to Graz

and then Vienna). Such mobility might be a matter of choice or forced by circumstance: **Giovanni Antonio Pandolfi Mealli** was born in Montepulciano but held positions in Innsbruck and then Messina (in Sicily) — which he had to flee after murdering a fellow musician — before ending up in Madrid.

This music could also cross confessional boundaries between staunchly Catholic and Protestant domains. Jacob Ludwig (1623-98) had no difficulty in collecting instrumental music from both sides of the divide in the massive *Partiturbuch* (book of scores) for his employer, Duke August II of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel in 1662, himself an ardent Lutheran. Yet if vocal music were transferred to an instrumental context, it might carry coded messages: **Giulio Caccini's** well-known love song, 'Amarilli, mia bella', was often adapted in recusant communities across Europe (that is, Catholics under fear of Protestant persecution) because the amaryllis flower was commonly treated as a symbol for Rome.

Not all instrumental music was necessarily 'composed' in the way we might understand that term today. Most performers were well equipped to improvise at length over stock harmonic or melodic patterns — typical were the ostinato bass formulas associated with the passacaglia and chaconne — or on preexisting vocal works. But whether this music was improvised or composed (or somewhere between the two), the challenge was to find ways of structuring long stretches of musical time in a reasonably coherent way, with a striking beginning to capture the listener's attention, enough interesting material in the middle to maintain it, and a clear conclusion to signify that matters were coming to an end.

Dazzling virtuosity might suffice for a while, and clever tricks such as incorporating a popular 'Nightwatchman's song' (in Biber's *Serenada*) would tickle the fancy. But the better way to construct a musical argument was to follow the principles of rhetoric. Bertali's sonatas, for example, have clear sections alternating slower and faster tempos, virtuoso passage work, artful counterpoint and so on that might, in turn, be compared to the typical parts of rhetorical speech as defined by Aristotle and Cicero, from the exordium through to the peroration.

The notion that instrumental music could somehow elaborate a rhetorical argument was the key to giving it some sense of meaning. The point was not so much to tell a story — although plenty of so-called programme music started to appear in this period — as to invoke the typical structures of story-telling. This, in turn, left a great deal of freedom for listeners to discover whatever meaning they might wish. In the context of what is often assumed to be the highly regulated world of the musical Baroque, instrumental music starts to appear very anarchic indeed. And that, of course, is what makes it fun.

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