

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 28 January 2024
3.00pm

Drammi in Musica: Virtuoso Songs from 17th Century Italy

Nardus Williams soprano
Elizabeth Kenny theorbo

| | |
|--|---|
| Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677) | Tradimento from <i>Diporti di Euterpe</i> Op. 7 (pub. 1659) |
| Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) | Quel sguardo sdegnosetto SV247 (pub. 1632) |
| Sigismondo D'India (1582-1629) | Lamento d'Olimpia (pub. 1623) |
| Francesco Rasi (1574-1621) | Ahi fuggitivo ben, come si tosto (pub. 1608) |
| Benedetto Ferrari (1603-1681) | Voglio di vita uscir (pub. 1637) |
| Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643) | Così mi disprezzate (pub. 1630) |
| Alessandro Piccinini (1566-1638) | Toccata cromatica (pub. 1623) |
| Barbara Strozzi | Ardo in tacito foco Op. 3 (pub. 1654) |
| Girolamo Frescobaldi | Maddalena alla croce (pub. 1630) |
| Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger (c.1580-1651) | Canario from <i>Libro primo d'intavolatura di lauto</i> (pub. 1611) |
| Barbara Strozzi | Gite, o giorni dolenti Op. 2 (pub. 1651) |



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One of the paradoxes of performing music from the 17th Century is that, while characters leap off the page and their voices demand to be heard with dramatic urgency, we frequently stumble and bump into things - emotions, chord progressions, stories - that seem wildly 'strange'. We are reminded of the distance that the words and the music travel to our ears and to our experiences. This sort of contradiction was one with which many of this afternoon's composers were familiar, and found to be just as exciting as challenging. Religious believers in the Renaissance felt the physical suffering of Jesus as keenly as does the 'Maddalena' of **Frescobaldi's** searing lament ('Maddalena alla Croce'), across 1600 years. But the fate of Olimpia ('Lamento d'Olimpia'), drawn by **Sigismondo d'India** (c.1582- before April 1629) from Ariosto's epic romance *Orlando Furioso*, is harder for us to comprehend: Olimpia falls in love with the eventually faithless Bireno instead of the suitor arranged for her. The spurned Prince of Friesia causes his father to kill her entire family (the male part of it, at least) and then her whole country is sacked by Friesian troops. 'Boy-loves-girl-loves-other boy-other boy abandons girl' doesn't quite deal with all the terrible implications here. As Bireno, like Jason, and like Aeneas before him, sails off to fulfil his destiny, Olimpia endures the physical agony of personal grief, and of the consequences of her own terrible choice of personal happiness over filial duty.

This afternoon we find our solo singer emerging from the world of the madrigal – equally intense but companionable compositions – to perform alone in a fluid, dramatic form which its pioneers championed as more 'true' to the expressive power of the poets and dramatists who were drawing on ancient myths and romances for their inspiration. Writers such as Giulio Caccini and Vincenzo Galilei (the father of the astronomer) made explicit links – perhaps with a little bit of invention – with the actors of Ancient Greek theatre, singing heroic stories to the accompaniment of a lyre. The 'Chitarrone', at the time the more 'intellectual' name for the theorbo, was developed from a bass lute design around 1600 for the purpose of accompanying singers in this way. The 'stilo recitativo' allowed a singer to declaim his or her story flexibly over a partly-improvised accompaniment of what Caccini's English translator later in the century would describe as 'passionate chords'. Counterpoint, beloved by the previous generation, took a back seat to harmonic invention but, as we will hear in the toccata by **Alessandro Piccinini** (1566-1638), it did not disappear entirely. The giants of this 'seconda prattica' were **Claudio Monteverdi** (1567-1643) and **D'India**, a nobleman from Palermo who travelled across Italy throughout his career before ending up as music director for the Duke of Savoy. The ultimate renaissance man, he also wrote his own texts. **Francesco Rasi** (1574-1621), like his teacher Giulio Caccini, and Barbara Strozzi, too, excelled both as singers and chitarrone players. We're happy, and fairly confident you will be, to divide those skills between us!

The chitarrone had its real or fake classical pedigree, but it also had another side: its other name, the 'tiorba', seems to have been a bit of a joke, again challenging our modern sensibilities, about a blind man playing a hurdy-gurdy; exactly why is unclear, but the comedy neck and 'chordy' nature of players' improvisations brought less courtly associations to mind. 'Quel squardo sdegnosetto' combines sophisticated textual lightness with the popular 'ciaconna' bass and a strophic form to tease away at the extremes of passion conjured by vocal virtuosity. The ciaconna makes another appearance, its energy quietly undermining and ironically commenting on the melancholy of **Benedetto Ferrari's** (c.1603-81) 'Voglio di vita uscir': again a particularly 17th-century aesthetic of jamming comedy and tragedy together.

Barbara Strozzi (1619-77) was a master in combining intense feeling with knowing irony. In a very modern-seeming presentation, she made her self – or at least her fictional persona – the subject of most of her songs. Narrow as this seam of inspiration may appear, her output is characterised by its breadth not only of emotion and invention, but also by its sheer vocal range: plumbing the depths of rage, betrayal and grief in what we might call a 'mezzo' range one moment, and floating or soaring in the heights of soprano-ecstasy the next. Like d'India before her, she benefited from the culture of the Italian 'Accademia' for regular performance opportunities. These were gatherings of intellectuals that featured debate, joke-telling and scientific discussion as well as performance, making the compressed drama of her solo cantatas ideal vehicles for her career in mid-century Venice. Female virtuosos were not rarities in Italian courts (the *concerto delle donne* had blazed a trail in 16th-century Ferrara) but she was unusually strategic in her publishing ambitions. Her eight books of cantatas and madrigals make her the most published composer, male or female, in 17th-century Italy. 'Ardo in tacito foco' explores the paradox of a singer singing about her own silence, unable to express her passion: only the most daring of chromatic writing will do justice to this impossible situation. 'Gite o giorni dolente', from her Opus 2 of 1651, is uncharacteristic both in having a public context – dedicated to Ferdinand III of Austria and Eleonora Gonzaga of Mantua – and being a joyfully optimistic celebration of a dynastic marriage. Musicians spoke fervently to the world as well as from the heart, and political duty has, after all, its attractions. Despite the dedication, Strozzi (unlike many of her male counterparts) never achieved a position of institutional musical leadership. Despite her many beautiful madrigals and ensemble works, it is her solo lamenting voice that resonates most directly across the intervening centuries.

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Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677)

Tradimento from Betrayal
Diparti di Euterpe Op. 7

(pub. 1659)

Giorgio Tani

| | |
|---|--|
| Tradimento, tradimento! Amore e la speranza Voglion farmi prigioniero, E a tal segno il mal s'avanza, Ch'ho scoperto ch'il pensiero Dice d'esserne contento. Tradimento, tradimento! La speranza per legarmi, A gran cose mi lusinga, S'io le credo avvien che stringa Lacci sol da incatenarmi. Mio core all'armi, S'incontri l'infida, Si prenda, s'uccida, Su presto, su presto! E periglioso ogni momento. Tradimento, tradimento! | Betrayal! Treason! Love and Hope want to make me a prisoner and my sickness is so advanced that I have discovered that I am happy just thinking of it. Betrayal! Hope, in order to bind me, entices me with great things. The more I believe what she says the tighter she ties the laces that enchain me. My heart, take arms against the treacherous one! Take her and kill her, hurry, hurry! Every moment is dangerous. Betrayal! |
|---|--|

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

Quel sguardo sdegnosetto
SV247

(pub. 1632)

Anonymous

| | |
|---|--|
| Quel sguardo sdegnosetto Lucente e minaccioso Quel dardo velenoso Vola a ferirmi il petto. Bellezze ond'io tutt'ardo E son da me diviso Piagatemi col sguardo, Sanatemi col riso. Armatevi pupille D'asprissimo rigore Versatemi sul core Un nembo di faville Ma il labbro non sia tardo A ravvivarmi ucciso. Feriscimi quel sguardo Ma sanami quell riso. Begl'occhi a l'armi, Io vi preparo il seno. Gioite di piagarmi Infin ch'io venga meno. E se da' vostri dardi Io resterò conquiso, Ferischino quei sguardi Ma sanami quell riso. | That disdainful little glance That disdainful little glance, full of fire and menace, that poisoned arrow shoots forth to wound my breast. O beauties that set me on fire, and part me from my senses, injure me with your glance, heal me with your smile. Arm yourselves, O eyes, with harshest cruelty, fill my heart with a cloud of sparks, but after my death, O lips, be quick to come and revive me. Let that glance wound me, but let that smile then heal me. Beautiful eyes, take up your weapons, I am preparing my breast for you. Take pleasure in wounding me until I swoon and fall. But if I am brought low by your arrows, let those glances wound me, but let that smile then heal me. |
|---|--|

Sigismondo D'India (1582-1629)

Lamento d'Olimpia

(pub. 1623)

Sigismondo D'India

Misera me! Sia vero,
Bireno? ah! troppo è ver,
ohimè tu parti!
L'ancore hai sciolte, ah!
dispiegati lini!
E ciò poss'io veder, ciò posso
dire,
Idolo mio crudele, e non
morire?

Ove t'en fuggi?
Ohimè dove t'en vai?
Arresta il corso, empio,
empio Bireno!
Riedi, deh riedi ancora!
Ecco il porto d'Amor fra
queste braccia.
Perchè t'esponi al mar crudo
et infido
Lasciando ogni tuo ben su
questo lido?

Bireno, O mio Bireno,
Ma s'a me ti sei tolto -
Che dico mio?
Già mio, ah! non più mio!
O tradita mia fede, O van
desio!
Cinta dall'acque e dal mio
pianto amaro
Nonavrò nave che mi porti
a riva;
Ah!, come parlo, ahimè come
son viva?
Ov'andrò? Che farò sola e
smarrita?
Chi lassa mi soccorre aita,
aita?

O Bireno, Bireno, ah, foss'io
stata quando pria ti viddi,
O cieco 'afatt', o sonnacchiosa
almeno
Come in questa crudel notte
si ria
In cui teco perdei l'anima
mia.

Olympia's Lament

I am in despair! Can it be true,
Bireno? Alas, it is all too true;
alas, you have left me!
You have weighed anchor
and unfurled your sails!
How can I witness such a
thing, speak of it,
my heartless beloved,
and not die?

Where are you running to?
Alas, where are you going?
Stop, o pitiless Bireno!
Come back, come back to me!
Love's haven lies within my arms.
Why risk the cruel and faithless sea
and abandon the one you love upon this shore?

Bireno, my Bireno – but, if you have chosen to leave me,
why do I say 'my'? Once mine, you are no longer so!
O faith betrayed, o vain desire!
Surrounded by the waves and my bitter tears,
I shall have no ship to bear me to shore;
how am I able to speak, how am I still alive?
Where shall I go? What shall I do, alone and in turmoil?
Alas, who will save me? Help, help!

O Bireno, alas, if only when I first saw you I had been blind or at least sleeping,
as I was on this cruel, dark night on which I lost my soul when I lost you.

Ohimè ch'io moro! Ohimè chi mi da vita?
Chi lassa mi soccorre? Aita! aita!

Son quella pur che fatta prigionera
De l'amor tuo già di prigion ti trassi;
Quella che già ti die la Patria e'l Regno,
Quella che per te vidd' il caro Padre
E gl'amati Fratelli estinti e morti,
E tu mi lasci ingrato et io non moro.
Ah!, quanto più mi strazi, io più t'adoro.

Qui nel deserto horror di questo lido,
Lacera preda, ohimè, di crude belve
Rimano pur, crudele.
Ov'andrò? Che farò sola e smarrita?
Chi lassa mi socorre? Aita! aita!

Se non mi porge aita il mio Bireno
A chi lassa la chiedo? Ah!
Torna, deh torna e mira
La tua Olimpia tradita che già spira.
Torna sol a vederla!
Ecco la esangue
Che, traffitta dal duol, morendo langue.

Ah, che tu sei fuggito
Tu sei, lassa, sparito!
Ma fuggi pur, ti seguirò,
crudele;
Ti seguirò precipitando a volo
Tra le volubil'onde e i duri scogli,
Ultrice furia forsennata errante.

Alas, I am dying! Alas, who will rescue me?
Who will save me in my despair? Help, help!

And yet I am she who, taken captive
by your love, rescued you from captivity;
she who gave you her land and throne,
who for your sake saw her dear father
and beloved brothers slain;
you abandon me and yet I do not die.
Alas, the more I suffer, the more I love you.

I am doomed to remain here, cruel man,
amid the horror of this forsaken shore,
and fall prey to the claws of wild beasts.
Where shall I go? What shall I do, alone and in turmoil?
Alas, who will save me? Help, help!

If my Bireno will not come to my aid,
who else will heed my despairing call? Alas!
Turn back, turn back and see
how your Olympia, betrayed, is dying.
Turn back and look at her! Behold, she is close to death,
fatally wounded by grief, she lies dying.

And yet you have fled, alas, you have vanished!
You may run, but I shall pursue you, heartless one;
I shall fly in pursuit of you, over the capricious seas and obdurate rocks,
a crazed and vengeful Fury who never rests.

Ma ohimè, che sento? Qual
horror gelato
Per le vene del cor serpe e
s'avanza?
O dolor vivo, O morta mia
speranza!
Ahì ch'in mortal pallor mi
discoloro!
S'aggiaccia il sangue! Io
tremo, io manco, io moro!
Ahì che stracciar mi sento a
poco a poco!
Il piè vacilla, ahì lassa! E' cor
vien meno.
Ahì, ch'io manco,
Ahì che more il cor nel
seno.

But alas, what feeling is
this? What dread chill
creeps onwards through
my veins to my heart?
O living pain, o my dead
hope!
Alas, I am struck by a
mortal pallor!
My blood is turning to ice!
I tremble, I faint, I die!
Alas, I feel my body being
slowly torn to shreds!
My legs will not bear me,
alas! My heart is failing.
Alas, my strength is
fading; alas, my heart is
dying within my breast.

Francesco Rasi (1574-1621)

Ahi fuggitivo ben, come si tosto (pub. 1608)

Francesco Rasi

Ahi, fuggitivo ben, come si
tosto
Sconsolati lasciasti i miei
desiri.
Deh, come sia ch'a miei
dolori accosto
Di viver lieta più lassa
desiri?
O valli, o fiumi, o poggi, o tu
riposto
Dolce loco pietoso a miei
sospiri,
Se rimbombasti a miei
gioiosi accenti
Udit'or prego i duri miei
lamenti.

Alas, elusive love

Alas, elusive love, how
quickly you
have disillusioned my
desires.
How can you bear
witness to my grief
and yet, you wretch, wish
to live on in happiness?
O valleys, o rivers, o hills,
o sweet and
secluded place that hears
my sighs with pity,
where once you echoed
my joyful words,
listen now, I beg you, to
my sorrowing laments.

Benedetto Ferrari (1603-1681)

Voglio di vita uscir

(pub. 1637)

Anonymous

Voglio di vita uscir,
voglio che
cadano
Quest'ossa in polve e
queste membra in
cenere,
E che i singulti miei tra
l'ombre vadano,
Già che quel piè ch'ingemma
l'herbe tenere
Sempre fugge da me, ne lo
trattengono
I lacci, ohimè, del bel fanciul
di Venere.
Miei sensi del sepolcro all'
orlo vengono,
E dalla vita quasi
s'accogedano
Poi ch'un sol pegno di mercè
non tengono.

I want to leave this life behind

I want to leave this life
behind, I want these
bones
to crumble to dust and
these limbs to turn to
ashes,
I want my sobs to fade
into the shadows.
For the feet that grace
the tender grass
always run from me, and
alas, are not bound
by the shackles of
Venus's fair son.
My senses approach the
mouth of the tomb
and bid farewell to
life
since they possess not
even a token of mercy.

Vo che gl'abissi il mio
cordoglio vedano,
E l'aspro mio martir le furie
piangano,
E che i dannati al mio
tormento cedano.
A Dio crudel, gli orgogli tuoi
rimangano
A crudelir con altri. A te
rinuncio,
Né vo' più che mie speme in
te si frangano.
S'apre la tomba, il mio morir
t'annuncio.
Una lagrima spargi, et alfin
donami
Di tua tarda pietade un solo
nuncio,
E s'amando t'offesi, homai
perdonami.

I want hell's abyss to see
my grief,
the Furies to weep over
my agonies,
and the damned to yield
before my torment.
Fairwell, cruel one, let
your pride remain
to persecute others. I
renounce you,
I no longer want my hopes
to be shattered by you.
The tomb is open, I give you
warning of my death.
Shed a tear for me, and
give me at last
the merest hint that you, too
late, take pity on me;
and if by loving you I have
given offence, forgive me.

Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643)

Così mi disprezzate Thus you scorn me?

(pub. 1630)

Anonymous

Così mi disprezzate,
Così voi mi burlate?
Tempo verrà,
 ch'amore
Farà di vostro core
Quel che fate del mio;
Non più parole, addio.

Thus you scorn me?
Thus you mock me?
The time will come when
 love
will make of your heart
what you make of mine.
No more words - farewell.

Datemi pur martiri,
Burlate i miei sospiri,
Negatemi mercede,
Oltraggiate mia fede,
Ch'in voi vedrete poi
Quel che mi fate voi.

You give me torments,
mock my tears,
deny me mercy,
insult my faith -
you will see in yourself
what you are doing to me.

Beltà sempre non regna,
E s'ella pur v'insegna
A dispregiar mia fé,
Credete pur a me,
Che s'oggi m'acidete,
Doman vi pentirete.

Beauty will not reign forever,
and if she teaches you
to disdain my faith,
believe me,
if you kill me today,
tomorrow you will repent.

Non nego già, ch'in voi
Amor ha i pregi
 suoi,
Ma so, ch'il tempo cassa
Beltà, che fugge e
 passa.
Se non volete amare,
Io non voglio penare.

I don't deny that in you
Love has something
 precious,
but I know that time ruins
beauty, which flies and
 passes.
If you don't wish to love,
I don't want to suffer.

Il vostro biondo crine,
Le guance purpurine
Veloci più che Maggio
Tosto saran passaggio.
Prezzategli pur voi,
Ch'io riderò ben poi.

Your blonde locks,
your flushed cheeks,
quicker than May
will soon pass away.
Prize them well, then,
I'll have the last laugh.

Alessandro Piccinini (1566-1638)

Toccata cromatica (pub. 1623)

Barbara Strozzi

Ardo in tacito foco Op. 3 (pub. 1654)

Anonymous

Ardo in tacito foco,
Ne pure m'è concesso
Dal geloso cor mio
Far palese a me stesso
Il nome di colei ch'è 'l mio
 desio,
Ma nel carcer del
 seno
Racchiuso tien l'ardore,
Carcerier di se stesso il
 proprio core.
E appena sia contento
Con aliti e
 sospiri
Far palese alla lingua i suoi
 martiri.

I burn in a silent flame,
not even allowed
by my jealous heart
to reveal to myself
the name of her that I
 desire,
and in the prison of my
 breast
I keep the passion confined,
my heart its own
 jailer.
And I'm barely permitted
with panting breaths and
 sighs
to reveal its suffering in
 words.

Se pur per mio ristoro,
Con tributi di pianto,
Mostrar voglio con fede
A quella ch'amo tanto
Che son d'amor le lagrime
 mercede,
Ecco'l cor ch'essalando
Di più sospiri il vento,
Assorbe il pianto e
 quell'umor n'ha spento,
E con mio duol
 m'addita
Che gl'occhi lagrimanti
Sono mutole lingue negli
 amanti.

If to comfort myself
I want to show
with an offering of tears
to her that I love so much
that my tears are
 expressions of love,
then my heart
breathes out many sighs,
consuming my tears and
 exhausting my feeling,
and through my suffering
tells me
that tearful eyes
are the silent speech of
 lovers.

Qual sia l'aspro mio stato:
Ridir nol ponno i
 venti,
Nè pur le selve o l'onde
Udiro i miei
 lamenti,
Ma solo il duol entro al mio
 cor s'asconde,
E quale in chiuso
 specchio
Disfassi pietra al foco,
Tal' io m'incenerisco a poco a
 poco.
E s'ad' altri la
 lingua
È scorta alla lor
 sorte,
A me la lingua è sol cagion di
 morte.

This is my harsh condition:
the winds are unable to
 express,
nor can the forests or seas
hear my lamenting, but
 the pain
can only remain hidden in
 my heart,
and just as in a parabolic
 mirror
stone melts in flame,
I'm burning up little by
 little.
And while for others
speaking
leads to helping their
 condition,
for me speech only
causes my death.

Girolamo Frescobaldi

Maddalena alla croce

(pub. 1630)

Anonymous

A piè della gran croce, in cui
languiva
Vicino a morte il buon Giesù
spirante,
Scapigliata così pianger
s'udiva
La sua fedele addolorata
amante.

E dell'umor, que
da'begli occhi
usciva

E dell'or della chioma
ondosa, errante

Non mandò mai, da che la
vita è viva

Perle, od oro più bel
l'India, ò
l'Atlante.

Come far (dicea) lassa, ò
Signor mio,

Puoi senza me quest' ultima
partita?

Come, morendo tù, viver
poss'io?

Che se morir pur vuoi,
l'anima unita

Ho teco (il sai, mio Redentor,
mio Dio)

Però teco haver deggio e
morte, e vita.

Mary Magdalene at the Cross

At the foot of the towering
cross on which
hung Jesus, close to death,
breathing his last,
the woman who loved
him faithfully
could be heard weeping,
maddened by grief.

Since life began, neither
India nor the Atlas
mountains

has ever produced pearls
to match

the tears that flowed from
her fair eyes

or gold more precious
than her gilded, rippling
tresses.

Alas, my Lord (she was
saying), how can you

make this final journey
without me?

And how, if you are dying,
can I live?

For if you have to die, my
soul will be one

with yours (you know this,
my Saviour, my God),

since I must share both
life and death with you.

Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger

(c.1580-1651)

Canario from *Libro primo d'intavolatura di*

lauto (pub. 1611)

Barbara Strozzi

Gite, o giorni dolenti

Op. 2 (pub. 1651)

Anonymous

Gite, o giorni dolenti,
Che succedano al pianto
Gioie, allegrezze e
canto,
Scherzi, vezzi e contenti.

Away, Sorrowful

Days

Away, sorrowful days,
let joy, delight, and song,
jest, merriment, and
contentment
displace lamenting.

Fra le trombe di Marte
E tra i rumor di strepitosa
guerra

Dal ciel festoso
parte

E scende il nume delle nozze
in terra.

Volano gl'imenei, corron gli
amori

Di voi Giovi terreni

A rallegrare i cori,

A congiunger i seni.

Vada con pie' fugace

A rinserrarsi entr'un orrore
eterno

La discordia d'inferno

E rieda omai la sospirata
pace.

Coronata di ulivo Astrea
ritorni,

Che posi il mondo posi e fiera
porti

Le rovine e le morti

Megera ove di fede il mondo
è privo.

Felicissimi giorni

Di secoli migliori

Saran principi grati

Questi nodi beati.

L'Austria all'Austria con questa
Amorosa vicenda

Saldamente s'innesta,

Onde la virtù renda

Colmi alfin di vittorie e di trofei

Gli austriaci

Semidei.

E quali aver mai lice

Di bella età felice

Argomenti più giusti

Che le Muse a gradir tornin

gli Augusti?

Amid the trumpets of Mars,
and the noises of raging
war,

from the joyful heavens
the goddess of nuptials

descends to
earth.

Hymen flies; cupids come
running,

earthly gods,

to gladden your hearts,

to join your souls.

Make haste

to intervene in an eternal
horror,

the discord of hell,

and at last restore long-
sought peace.

Let Astrea return crowned
with olive wreath,

let the world put aside
cruelty,

ruin, and death, with which

Megera deprives the
world of faith.

Joyful days

of a better age

shall this blessed union be

the welcome beginning.

With this loving concord,
Austria firmly engrafs

itself to Austria,

wherfrom virtue lavishes

victories and trophies

upon the Austrian

demigods.

And what expression

of a glorious happy state

can be more seemly

than for the muses to

honor the magnificent?

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