

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 31 December 2023
7.00pm

Les Arts Florissants

William Christie musical director, harpsichord
Emmanuel Resche-Caserta musical assistant, violin
Augusta McKay Lodge violin
Cyril Poulet cello

Hugh Cutting countertenor

Carlo Vistoli countertenor

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)	Damigella tutta bella SV235 (pub. 1607)
Agostino Steffani (1654-1728)	Aita fortuna from <i>La lotta d'Hercole con Acheloo</i> (1689)
Giovanni Battista Fontana (1589-1630)	Sonata settima a doi violini (1641)
Agostino Steffani	Pria ch'io faccia
Antonio Caldara (1671-1736)	Medea in Corinto
Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)	Trio Sonata in G minor RV73 (pub. 1705) <i>I. Preludio. Grave • II. Allemanda. Allegro • III. Adagio • IV. Capriccio. Allegro • V. Gavotta. Allegro</i>
Giovanni Bononcini (1670-1747)	Sempre piango (pub. 1691)
Antonio Vivaldi	Cessate, omai cessate RV684
Antonio Caldara	Ciaccona in B flat Op. 2 No. 12 (pub. 1699)
George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)	Caro autor di mia doglia HWV182b (c.1740-3)
Antonio Vivaldi	In braccio dei contenti from <i>Gloria e Imeneo</i> RV687 (1725)



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Since its founding in 1979, Les Arts Florissants has established itself as one of the world's leading Baroque specialist ensembles. Tonight's concert showcases secular vocal and instrumental music from Italy, combining some of the most celebrated composers of the age alongside their lesser-known contemporaries.

Claudio Monteverdi was born in Cremona in 1567, and is rightly celebrated for his pioneering operatic and vocal works. Tonight we'll hear his lighter side, from his 1607 collection *Scherzi Musicali*: these 'musical jokes' were songs appropriate for courtly entertainments. 'Damigella tutta bella' is a bright and breezy number with lyrics that implore a beautiful damsel to pour out wine. Monteverdi's insistent switching of rhythmic emphasis (much like 'America' in *West Side Story*) makes this song particularly catchy, and it ends with cheeky abruptness.

Perhaps the most varied career in the programme belongs to that of **Agostino Steffani**. Born near Venice in 1654, he was a boy soprano who became a bishop and diplomat, with periods spent in Munich, Hannover and Düsseldorf. As a composer, he achieved fame for his many duets. 'Aita fortuna' from his opera *La lotta d'Hercole con Acheloo* is sung by two parts of a love triangle: the princess Deianira and river-God Achelous. Both call on Fortune to assist their conflicting romantic plights, so it's somewhat ironic that they sing together in harmony, in a charming call-and-response with the ensemble. The chamber duet 'Pria ch'io faccia' is a more expansive and mellifluous affair, setting a poem on unspoken love. With no characterisation of individual parts to consider, Steffani allows himself to luxuriate in the musical possibilities of two interweaving voices.

Giovanni Battista Fontana may be the most mysterious of tonight's composers. Born in Brescia in 1589, he worked in Rome, Venice and Padua, but relatively little is known about his career. A posthumous 1641 publication of his sonatas suggests that he played an important role in the early development of that form, though the date of their composition is uncertain. The Sonata settima of the collection, for two violins and continuo, is a freewheeling piece with a highly sectional structure, pitting extended passages of slow music against swifter movement.

Antonio Caldara, born in 1671, was a prolific composer who eventually become vice-Kapellmeister to the Emperor Charles VI in Vienna. His alto cantata *Medea in Corinto* dramatises a Greek myth: in what is in effect a monologue, Medea addresses her husband Jason in an escalating series of recitatives and arias. She helped him win the Golden Fleece, but has discovered that he plans to marry King Creon's daughter. We understand that he is unmoved by her complaints and ultimately turns away, whereupon the enraged Medea invokes the Furies to enact revenge. Contrastingly, Caldara's *Ciaccona in B flat* is a fine example of a staple form of the period. Thought

to originate from a Latin American dance, the chaconne involved variations over a repeating harmonic formula and/or ostinato baseline. Its strong dance character was generally retained in Italy, and Caldara tweaks his scheme to include interesting forays into the minor mode.

George Frederic Handel was born in Germany, but spent a few early years in Italy honing his craft. It was there that he first wrote the duet 'Caro autor di mia doglia', for the unusual combination of soprano and tenor. It boasts the same propulsive invention and florid melismas of his well-known *Dixit Dominus*, composed around the same time in 1707. Perhaps the words of ardent devotion resonated with the young man, but decades later (and long since settled in London) Handel re-arranged the piece for two altos and tightened up its final section. It's this revised version that we'll hear tonight.

For some time, Handel was rivalled in London by the composer **Giovanni Bononcini** - in fact, the first printed use of the term 'Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee' was a satirical description of their respective admirers. Bononcini was born in Modena in 1670, and 'Sempre piango' is an early chamber duet. It dramatises a quarrel between a woman (Chloris) and her lover whom she suspects of infidelity. The lachrymose continuo part in the opening duet ('always weeping') is particularly effective, and while both singers have their say in solo arias, matters remain unresolved in the final duet, which reprises the sorrowful mood.

An unhappy lover also stalks the pages of **Antonio Vivaldi's** solo cantata *Cessate, omai cessate*. The lyrics - a catalogue of lovelorn misery - are elevated by the music, in particular the exquisite aria 'Ah, ch'infelice', with its delicate blend of pizzicato and bowed strings, punctured by outbursts of vehement emotion. Much like Caldara's *Medea*, it culminates in a bristling 'rage aria', the narrator in this case intent on suicide and ghostly revenge. Vivaldi's penchant for bold contrasts is equally evident in his Trio Sonata in G minor. Its five short movements alternate suspenseful slow passages with explosive, fast-bowed fireworks - a trademark for the composer of the 'Four Seasons'.

Happily, Vivaldi leaves romantic strife behind for the final duet of the evening, as we end with a celebration of royal marriage. 'In braccio dei contenti' is the final part of the serenade *Gloria e Imeneo*, which was composed in 1725 for a French ambassador to honour the union of King Louis XV and the Polish princess Maria Leszczyńska. With liltingly insistent dance rhythms, it neatly forgoes regal pomposity - and there is no irony when these voices harmonise.

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Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

Damigella tutta bella O fairest damsel

SV235 (pub. 1607)

Gabriello Chiabrera

Damigella Tutta bella Versa versa quel bel vino, Fa che cada La rugiada Distillata di rubino.	Maiden so fair, pour, pour that fine wine; let fall the dew distilled from rubies.
--	---

Ho nel seno Rio veneno Che vi sparse Amor profondo Ma gittarlo E lasciarlo Vo' sommerso in questo fondo.	Deep inside my breast I feel a dark poison, planted there by Love; but I shall dislodge it and drown it in the depths of this glass.
---	---

Damigella Tutta bella Di quel vin tu non mi satii Fa che cada La rugiada Distillata da topatii.	Maiden so fair, your wine leaves me thirsty; let fall the dew distilled from topazes.
--	--

Ah che spento Io non sento Il furor de gl'ardor miei, Men concenti Meno ardenti Sono oimè gli incendi Etnei.	Ah, I feel the fury of my passions burning on unabated, the fires of Etna, alas, are less fierce, less ardent.
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Nova fiamma Più m'infiamma Arde il cor foco novello Se mia vita Non s'aita Ah ch'io vengo un Mongibello!	A new flame has lit a wilder blaze, a new fire sears my heart; if my life receives no aid, I myself shall turn into a volcano!
--	--

Ma più fresca Ogn'hor cresca Dentro me si fatta arsura Consumarmi E disfarmi Per tal modo ho per ventura.	Yet may this burning heat grow ever stronger within me: to be consumed and destroyed by it, such is my destiny.
--	--

Agostino Steffani (1654-1728)

Aita fortuna from La lotta d'Hercole con

Acheloo (1689)

Ortensio Mauro, after Ovid

Aita, Fortuna, Consolami tu. Se l'idol, ch'adoro, Gradisce i sospiri, Son cari i martiri, Non bramo di più.	Help me, Fortune, and comfort me. If my sighs please the one I worship, then I cherish my pain, naught else do I desire.
--	---

Giovanni Battista Fontana (1589-1630)

Sonata settima a doi violini (1641)

Agostino Steffani

Pria ch'io faccia

Anonymous

Pria ch'io faccia altrui palese
Chi mi tien fra lacci
stretto,
Di mia man con giuste
offese
Mi trarrò l'alma dal
petto.

Vuò morire pria che
dire
La cagion del mio desio;
Basta ben che lo sappia
Amore ed
io.

Ch'io riveli quello strale
Che lasciò l'alma ferita,
Nel mio duol benché mortale
Voglio perdere la
vita.

Cheto cheto, ma
secreto
Spererò quel che
desio;
Basta ben che lo sappia
Amore ed
io.

Before I disclose

Before I disclose to anyone
who it is that holds me
bound,
by my own hand shall I
tear my heart
from my chest and suffer
rightful injury.

I would rather die than
reveal
the object of my desire;
that mystery need only
be known by Cupid and
by me.

Before I name the arrow
that has wounded my heart,
I shall sacrifice my life to
my pain, mortal though it
be.

Silently and secretly shall
I live
in hope for the one whom
I desire;
that mystery need only
be known by Cupid and
by me.

Antonio Caldara (1671-1736)

Medea in Corinto

Paolo Rolli

Dunque, Giasone ingrato,
Farti senza periglio
L'alta preda acquistar del
vello d'oro,
Abbandonare il regno
E il german
lacerato
Franto gettar per via del
padre irato
A trattener lo
sdegno,
Di Pelia colla
morte
L'ucciso vendicar tuo genitore
E riporti nel tuo regno
usurato,
T'han reso traditore?
È ver, Giasone ingrato?

Non son io quell'istessa
Che di Colco sul lido
Accogliesti amoroso?
Non son io quell'istessa
A cui nella Feacia
Desti la fè di
sposo?
Quai segni non mi
desti,
Quai giuramenti di per mè
non festi
Di fido eterno amore?
Ed or', come spergiuro,
Il primo dolce affetto
abbandonato,
Volgi ad un altro oggetto
amante il core?
È ver, Giasone ingrato?

Non rispondi e non mi
guardi;
Si ch'è vero m'abbandoni;
Dimmi, ingrato, almen
perchè.
Non chinare al suolo i guardi,
Dimmi pur ch'io ti
perdoni
O di almen che ver non è.

Ma tu parti sdegnoso,
Ne vuoi che i miei lamenti
Turbino il nuovo tuo stato
amoroso.
Giasone incauto, arresta il
passo e senti:
Io già so che Creonte, rè di
Corinto,

Medea in Corinth

Thankless Jason,
I helped you safely win
the ultimate prize of the
golden fleece,
I forsook my homeland,
scattered the limbs of my
slain brother
across the path of my
wrathful father
to keep his rage away
from you,
I avenged your murdered
father
by killing Pelias,
and returned you to your
usurped kingdom
– and you now betray me?
Is it true, thankless Jason?

Am I not the woman
you took in your arms
on the shore of Colchis?
Am I not the woman
to whom in Phaeacia
you swore a husband's
oath?
Did you not give me every
sign,
did you not swear to me
every pledge
of faithful, eternal love?
And now, treacherous man,
you abandon your first
sweet love
and give your heart to
another?
Is it true, thankless Jason?

Silently you refuse to
meet my gaze;
if you are truly forsaking me,
at least tell me why, cruel
man.
Do not stare at the ground,
tell me, so that I can
forgive you,
or tell me it is not true.

But no, you leave, angered,
not wishing my laments
to disturb your new-
found love.
Foolhardy Jason, stop
and listen:
I already know that
dishonourable Creon,

Vuole misero ad onta
mia
Stringer teco in consorte
Glauca sua regia
prole.
Ma tu non gli dicesti ch'io
son Medea,
Ch'io posso fermar de fiumi il
corso,
Privar di luce il sole,
E da i regni di morte chiamar
l'ombre
E le Furie in mio
soccorso?

Averti che il moi
sdegno,
Quando sarò tradita,
Amore, vita e regno,
Empi vi toglierà.
Ma se vuoi meco,
infido,
Partir da questo
lido,
L'ira si placherà.

Pur non rispondi, e parti,
Traditore, spargiuro, iniquo,
ingrato;
Va, infelice, va in
seno
Dell'inesperta e sventurata
amante,
Ch'io tutte in quest'istante
Richiamo all'opra le mie
magiche arti.
Non ti rivolgi, e
parti?
Già l'atre faci
accendo
E spargo all'aria i suffumigi
neri.

Voi del baratro orrendo
Orridi abitatori,
Venite vendicate
I miei traditi amori;
Del trifauce portate
Le sanguinose
spume.
E voi, Furie spietate,
Tutte spegnete qui de Febo
il lume,
E svelti dalla
fronte
Datemi i serpi
fieri,
Ch'io vo di Flegetonte
Entro il liquido foco
Formare un rio velen, che poi
consumi

King of Corinth, wants to
shame me
by binding you in marriage
to his royal daughter
Glauce.
Have you not told him
that I am Medea,
that I can stop rivers in
their tracks,
snuff out the light of the sun,
and summon the shades
and Furies
from the realm of death
to help me?

Beware, for when I am
betrayed
my anger will deprive
you wretches of
love, life and land.
But if, faithless man, you
choose
to leave these shores with
me,
my rage will be placated.

Silently you turn to leave,
traitor, liar, miscreant,
ingrate;
go, cursed one, go to the
arms
of your unskilled and ill-
fated lover,
for I shall now set all my
magical arts to the
task.
Are you leaving without a
backward glance?
Then I shall light
sulphurous torches
and send black vapours
into the air.

Come, terrifying denizens
of the dread abyss
and wreak vengeance
for the betrayal of my love;
bring me the bloodied foam
from the three-throated
dog.
And you, pitiless Furies,
extinguish the light of
Phoebus here
and unfurl for me the
fierce serpents
coiled about your fearful
brows
that I may go into
the Phlegethon's liquid fire
and brew a fatal poison to
bring

Crudelmente quest'empi a poco, a poco.	those evildoers a slow and cruel death.
A far le mie vendette Venite orrende Furie, Mostri del nero Tartaro Quest'aria ad infestar.	Come, hideous Furies, and avenge me, fill this place with monsters from the dark depths of Tartarus.
Venite si costrette Dalle mie voci orribili; Tradita da quell perfido, Mi voglio vendicar.	Come if you are so constrained by my mournful laments; betrayed by that faithless man, I shall have my revenge.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Trio Sonata in G minor RV73 (pub. 1705)

I. Preludio. Grave

II. Allemanda. Allegro

III. Adagio

IV. Capriccio. Allegro

V. Gavotta. Allegro

Giovanni Bononcini (1670-1747)

Sempre piango

(pub. 1691)

Pazzini

Always weeping

Sempre piango e dir non so Quando mai io riderò.	Always weeping, I cannot say when I shall ever laugh again.
Sempre rido e dir non so Quando mai io piangerò.	Always laughing, I cannot say when I shall ever weep again.
Parti, vola, fuggi da me.	Go, fly, run from me...
Vengo, corro e torno a te.	I come, I run and return to you...
Ch'il tuo amore più non vo.	... for I no longer want your love.
Ch'il tuo amore solo io vuò.	... for all I want is your love.
No no restane in pace Ed a quel volto porgi Incensi e sospiri Ch'è la sola caggion de tuoi martiri.	No, no, be at peace and worship and sigh before the face which alone causes you to suffer.

Non sei più l'idolo mio Perché ad altra desti il cor Reso fiero il mio pensiero Vuol placarti col furor.	You are no longer my beloved for you have given your heart to another. My thoughts are adamant, they want to placate you with fury.
Cintia ingrata e crudele Ne gl'aspri affanni miei sola costante Ti mostri troppo fiera io troppo amante D'avanti al tuo sembiante Mirami supplicante Ma se il tuo cor altra bellezza adora Se ti piace così fa pur ch'io mora.	Cruel and thankless Cintia, only constant of my bitter suffering, you are too proud, I too loving. See how I beg you to your face, but if your heart loves another beauty, then kill me if so you wish.

Al bel dardo d'un tuo sguardo Più resistere non so Morirò sì morirò Che volete di più luci crudeli Ma prima di morire. Vi prego a rendermi Disciolto in lagrime L'avanzo misero Di questo cor Che già mai non v'oltraggiò.	I can no longer resist the fair darts of your eyes, I shall die, yes, shall die. What more do you want, cruel eyes? Yet before I die, I beg you to return to me, reduced in tears, the wretched remains of this heart that never did you wrong.
--	---

Sono questi del cor gl'ultimi fiati	My heart is breathing its last...
Che languendo si more Già che a morir l'ultimo è sempre il core	... it is languishing and dying, since the heart is always the last to die.

Che ingannando non more Perché a tradir hai pronto sempre il core.	... it is deceptive and not dying, since your heart is always ready to betray.
--	--

Antonio Vivaldi

Cessate, omai cessate RV684

Anonymous

*Recitativo
accompagnato*

Cessate, omai cessate,
Rimembranze crudeli d'un
affetto tiranno;
Già barbare e spietate
Mi cangiaste i contenti in un
immenso affanno.

Cessate, omai cessate,
Di lacerarmi il petto,
Di trafiggermi l'alma,
Di toglier al mio cor riposo, e
calma.
Povero core afflitto e
abbandonato,
Se ti toglie la pace un affetto
tiranno,
Perché un volto spietato, un
alma infida
La sola crudeltà pasce ed
annida.

Aria
Ah, ah ch'infelice sempre
Me vuol Dorilla ingrata,
Ah sempre piu spietata;
M'astringe à lagrimar.
Per me non v'è no,
Non v'è ristoro
Per me non v'è no,
Non v'è più speme.
E il fier martoro e le mie pene,
Solo la morte può consolar.

*Recitativo
accompagnato*

A voi dunque, ricorro orridi
specchi,
Taciturni orrori, solitary
ritiri,
Ed ombre amichi trà voi
porto il mio duolo,
Perche spero da voi quella
pietade,
Che Dorilla inhumana non
annida.
Vengo, spelonche amate,
vengo specchi graditi,
Affine meco involto il mio
tormento in voi
Resti sepolto.

Aria
Nell'orrido albergo ricetta di
pene

Cease, now cease
Recitativo accompagnato

Cease, now cease,
cruel memories of a
ruthless love;
brutal and callous,
you have turned my joy
into immense sorrow.

Cease, now cease
wounding my breast,
piercing my soul,
divesting my heart of rest
and calm.
Poor heart, afflicted and
forsaken,
a ruthless love divests
you of calm,
because an unkind face, a
treacherous soul
nurtures and harbours
cruelty alone.

Aria
Ah, cruel Dorilla wants me
to be unhappy for ever;
ah, ever more heartless
she drives me to tears.
For me there is,
no, there is no escape,
for me there is,
no, there is no more hope.
And only death can ease
my suffering and woes.

Recitativo accompagnato

To you, then, I turn,
fearful waters,
silent horrors, solitary
places;
friendly shadows, I bring
my grief to you,
for I hope you will offer
me the pity
that is beyond cruel
Dorilla.
I come, beloved caves, I
come, inviting waters,
so that the torment I
bear
may lie buried deep within you.

Aria
In this dark place, a
refuge from pain,

Potrò il mio tormento
sfogare contento,
Potrò ad alta voce chiamare
spietata
Dorilla l'ingrata, morire
potrò.
Andrò d'Acheronte sù le nera
sponda,
Tinguendo quest'onda di
sangue innocente,
Gridando vendetta,
Ed ombra baccante vendetta
farò.

I can freely express my
torment,
I can say out loud that
Dorinda
is cruel and thankless, I
can die.
I shall go to the dark
banks of the Acheron,
staining its waters with
innocent blood,
calling out for vengeance,
and as a wrathful spirit I shall
have that vengeance.

Antonio Caldara

Ciaccona in B flat Op. 2 No. 12 (pub. 1699)

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

**Caro autor di mia
doglia HWV182b**
(c.1740-3)
Anonymous

Caro autor di mia doglia
Dolce pena del core
Mio respiro, mia pace,
No, no, che d'altrui che di te
mai non sarò.

O lumi! O volto!
O luci! O labbra!

Dagli amori flagellata
La discordia fuggirà;
Bella gioia innamorata
Lampi eterni spargerà.

**Beloved author of
my grief**

Beloved author of my grief,
sweet sorrow of my heart,
my breath, my peace,
no, I shall never belong to
any other but you.

O eyes! O face!
O lights! O lips!

Whipped by cupids
discord will flee;
fair and loving joy
will spread eternal light.

Antonio Vivaldi

**In braccio dei contenti
from Gloria e Imeneo
RV687**

Anonymous (1725)

In braccio dei contenti
Godrà felice ogn'alma
Più caro il suo piacer.
In sen d'amica
calma
Già lieta più sfavilla
La face al bel
goder.

**In contentment's
embrace**

In contentment's embrace,
every heart will gladly
enjoy its hard-won pleasure.
Surrounded by amicable
peace,
the happy nuptial torch
shines more radiantly
with delight.