

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 31 October 2022
1.00pm

Tim Mead countertenor

Laurence Cummings harpsichord

Jonathan Manson cello

Antonio Caldara (1671-1736)

D'improvviso (1712)

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Siete rose rugiadosa HWV162 (c.1711-2)

Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725)

Leandro, anima mia

Giovanni Bononcini (1670-1747)

Lasciami un sol momento (1721)

George Frideric Handel

Dolc' è pur d'amor l'affano HWV109 (c.1715-8)

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The Italian Baroque cantata is a sketch in several movements on the theme of love. The movements alternate Recitative, the freely rhythmic singing speech of opera, and Aria, in strict time with repeated sections and melismas, lengthened syllables for stress. In Rome, an 18th-century lunchtime concert might consist of five cantatas just as here.

Antonio Caldara, born in Venice, sang from boyhood to age 30 in St Mark's Basilica. In 1699 he was the musical director for the Duke of Mantua who bankrupted his city state by overspending on the arts. In 1708 he moved to Rome to write an oratorio for Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni's Accademia dell'Arcadia where he'd have met George Frideric Handel, who was learning how to write Italian opera.

Ottoboni was the lyricist of Caldara's cantata *D'improvviso*, which explores the spontaneity of love. Caldara, at the age of 40, was a newly-wed when he composed the score in Austria in 1712. Love is impetuous. He married Caterina Petrolli, contralto, who perhaps interpreted the spiky dotted rhythms and contorted melodies. The singer imitates the cello at the start. No other part is scored. The keyboard improvises chords to suit the harmony in what is called *basso continuo*, invented by Baroque musicians as a kind of shorthand. Imitation ceases at *piaga* ('wound') which stretches melismatically.

The work begins and ends with a so-called *da capo* aria, part one repeated (from the top) and ornamented after a contrasting middle section. In this first aria, the centre brightens in a major key. The singer demonstrates his skill and taste embellishing, Baroque style, the reprise.

The recitative introduces Filli (Phyllis), whose *crudeltà* ('cruelty') surmounts ascending semitones. Her coolness attracts more than her beauty: a paradox of love. The central aria is an allegro with the cello echoed by the voice again, exploring now the theme - the more you charm, the more I suffer - with melismas elongating *pietosa* ('merciful'), the second one with sighs. The following recitative promotes Phyllis to goddess status and leads into an andante aria to close. The voice now echoes only half the opening cello line before obsessing on the *tante piaghe* ('many pains') of love. The middle part predicts that Phyllis will be grateful for her lover's suffering fidelity.

Handel meanwhile came to London and composed *Siete rose rugiadose*, a cantata for continuo and alto voice. Three movements cover the seductive text. A largo, slow and languorous, begins, the cello's opening notes repeated by the voice, which then embellishes the melody with written ornaments including shakes and turns and a melisma stretching *labbra* ('lips') into a kiss with gasping breath halfway. The lover is inflamed and in the middle part extends *accende* ('sparks') with a searing long note and a flickering run.

Handel lists the *bocca* ('mouth'), *sospiri* ('sighs'), *bel riso lusinghiero* ('fair, beguiling smile') and each of *taci*

('silent') and *parole* ('words') in a recitative before a new *da capo* aria concludes in panting three-time that these oral attributes alleviate the lover's torment. In the middle part *ridenti* ('laugh') adds to the collection with a snickering melisma.

Alessandro Scarlatti now sets Hero and Leander, lovers separated by the sea, in six movements. An anxious Ero worries in free rhythm about her lover's nightly swim across the Hellespont. The cello introduces the *da capo* aria in which Ero beseeches the turbulent *mar* (the sea - a wave-like melisma) to spare her Leandro and begs, in the middle, the winds to be propitious. In recitative she calls Leandro: come! Agitation quickens the next aria, announced by cello, with *mar* now a long note. In the central section, Ero hopes her ardent love will dry him. In the last two movements, the narrator switches to third person and observes from afar. The plaintive aria extends the form, the voice an *a capella* echo of the cello which no longer is mere bassline but a counterpart. The melody's internal echoes are obsessions, presages - *presagi* - of death. No cadence comes before the middle part which runs on like the sea.

In the early 18th Century, **Giovanni Bononcini** was the star of European opera composers. The Earl of Burlington persuaded him to come to London in 1719. He announced himself by publishing an album of cantatas with a dedication to King George in 1721. It includes *Lasciami un sol momento*, written in three movements: first a largo aria, the cello pre-empting what the alto sings of treacherous love. A spiked melisma fits *amara* ('bitter') while the middle section colours *cor* ('heart') with a palpitating pulse. The recit introduces Eurillo and the unhappy Dorinda. The finale skips resentfully, the lover singing of quiet suffering on an ascending run. The same melisma in the middle section ornaments *crudele* but ends with a descent here - like a pricked balloon.

Handel wrote *Dolc'è pur d'amor l'affanno* in around 1718 as he prepared to visit Europe for a singer-hunting trip for London's opera. He broke the mould. The voice no longer apes the cello's start, but has an independent tune - *cantabile* (with singing tone) against the choppy dotted rhythms of the bass. The lyric likewise contrasts love's pure sweetness with its torment, musing that it still results in joy - *contento*, sung to an elaborate melisma. In a minor key, the middle part concludes the same: when *pene* ('pain') and *speme* ('hope') unite, delight is more. The recitative dwells on love's strange opposites - *dolci ripulse* ('sweet repulses'), *graziosi sdegni* ('gracious anger'). Finally, the last *da capo* aria admits confusion with the voice insistent on its ignorance - *io non so* ('I know not') in emphatic repetition on repeated notes. Melismas disappear. The middle section takes these repetitions and re-casts them in the cello and the voice, a unity which marked young Handel out.

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Antonio Caldara (1671-1736)

D'improvviso (1712)

D'improvviso amor ferisce Al girar d'un vago ciglio E la piaga sente il cor. Par diletto e pur svanisce Il piacer quando il periglio Si discuopre nel dolor.	Love strikes suddenly, at a glance from two fair eyes, and its wound afflicts the heart. The pain seems delightful and yet its pleasure vanishes when its danger is revealed.
Così, Filli crudel, Questo mio seno scopo formasti A strali tuoi di foco, ma poi come baleno Spari la tua pietade E di me gioco prendesti, Ond'io che mi distruggio in pianto; Son di tua crudeltà più che di tua beltà Misero vanto.	Thus, cruel Phyllis, you chose my heart as the target for your arrows of fire, but then, like lightning, your mercy disappeared and you made me your plaything, which is why all I can do is weep; I am the wretched victim of your cruelty more than your beauty.
Se quanto bella sei, tu fosti A dolor mei, Filli, Filli pietosa, Saresti un vago fiore, Un fior ma senza spine, Fra l'umidette trine, Più grato della rosa.	If you were as merciful to my grief as you are fair, Phyllis, you would be a lovely flower, a flower without thorns, more lovely than a rose among the lacework of dewy grass.
Resta pure nel tuo natio costume, Che superbetta ancora, Tu del mio cor sarai l'amato Nume; E quell'hora fatal, Quell'istess'hora che d'improvviso A te mi rese amante Quanto tu sei crudel Me vuol costante.	Yet do not change your inborn ways, for despite your pride you will be the god my heart adores; and that fateful hour, that same hour which suddenly made me fall in love with you, wishes me to be as constant as you are cruel.
Al tuo ciglio che mi ferì Tante piaghe mostrerò Sin che havra pietà di me. E verra presto quel dì Che sprezzato non sarò E gradita la mia fe.	I shall reveal my many wounds to the eyes that caused them and they will not take pity on me. But the day will soon come when I am not scorned and my faith is rewarded.

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Siete rose rugiadose HWV162 (c.1711-2)

Siete rose rugiadose, Belle labbra del mio ben. Sempre care se ridete, Se parlate, Se tacete, Accendete questo sen.	You are dew-pearled roses, fair lips of my beloved. Ever dear to me, whether laughing, speaking, or silent, you set my heart ablaze.
Dolce bocca soave, In te nasce il bel riso lusinghiero, Che accende amore, In ogni cuor più fiero. I dolci tuoi sospiri Fanno obliare all'alma, I suoi martiri; Ed io, che per te peno, cara, Se ti riveggio allor, che taci, Se le tue parolette, S'un tuo sospiro sento, Mi scordo ogni tormento.	Sweet, gentle mouth, on your lips is born that fair, beguiling smile that sparks love in even the hardest heart. Your sweet sighs make the soul forget its suffering; and if I, who long for you, see you again, and you are silent, I only have to hear one word, one sigh from you, to forget every torment.
Per involarmi al duolo, Mi basta solo, solo un dolce tuo sospir, Bocca vezzosa. Ne' tuoi soavi accenti, Nei vezzi tuoi ridenti, Perde ogni suo martir, L'alma amorosa.	To escape my pain all I need is one of your sweet sighs, o beautiful mouth. A soul in love forgets its suffering amid your softly spoken words and your enchanting laugh.

Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725)

Leandro, anima mia

Leandro, anima mia, Ero t'attende.	Leander, my love, Hero awaits you.
Da una doppia passione	Her heart is troubled by a two-edged
Agitata è quest'alma e impaziente	passion – it impatiently
Il tuo venir desia.	awaits your arrival,
Ma di quell'onda via	yet it fears the danger that threatens you
Teme il periglio ancor che ti sovrasta	as you swim the waters
Nel trapassare l'Ellesponto a nuoto.	of the Hellespont.
Questo timor troppo il mio cor contrasta,	This fear so afflicts my heart
Non so più che bramare,	that I know not what to long for;
Se tu non vieni io moro.	if you do not come I shall die,
Periglioso è il venire	but your journey is fraught with danger.
Resta, vieni, no, mio dubbioso pensier	Stay, come, no, no. Who can understand
Ma chi t'intende Leandro,	you, my wavering mind? Leander,
Leandro, anima mia, Ero t'attende.	Leander, my love, Hero awaits you.
Non mi togliete il bene O voi onde del mar,	O you waves of the sea, take not my love away from me.
Siate propizi, o venti, A chi porta i contenti,	Be merciful, o winds, to the one in whom my happiness lies,
A me che su l'Arene L'Alma sto per spirar.	and to me, I who on dry land am ready to breathe my last.
Vieni Leandro, vieni A consolar chi d'ogni spasso è priva,	Come, Leander, come, to comfort one deprived of all diversion,
Che una nobil Donzella Diporto altro non ha Che solo amare.	for a noble maiden has only love to occupy her mind.
Tu puoi l'ore passare Tra musici concenti e fra Sirene,	You can pass the hours amid music and alluring song;
Or nelle valli amene	one moment you can be hunting
Di fugace animal seguir la traccia	a beast in flight through pleasant valleys,
Or veloce destrier spronare il corso.	the next spurring on a proud steed.
Ciò fa men grave il tuo passar dell'ore	It is easier for you to make the time pass –
Altro a me non rimane Che a te pensare e il ragionar d'amore.	I have nothing to do but think of you and the ways of love.

La speranza dice al core ch'il bel pié	Hope tells my heart you have set
Posto hai nel mar per accoglierti mio ben.	your fair foot into the welcoming sea, my love.
Ecco il braccio, eccoti il sen,	Behold your arms, your breast,
Vuò col foco del mio amore Le tue membra rasciugar.	I want to dry your body with the fire of my love.

Così tra se parlava	Such were the words the maiden of Sestos
Dell'Ellesponto al lido	was uttering to herself on the shore of the
La donzella di Sesto	Hellespont
Quando nel mare infido,	when, in the treacherous sea,
(Mentr'ella con timor mesta ragiona)	(while she sadly reasoned with fear)
Ei con morte contrastata	Leander was battling with death
E in un fatale istante	before, in one fatal moment,
Egli perde la vita, Ero l'amante.	he lost his life, Hero her beloved.

Di donna amante il core che teme	The fearful heart of a woman in love
Spesso è presago delle sventure.	is often a presage of tribulation.
Quando un'alma non sa perché geme	When a soul knows not why it laments,
Lungi all'ora non son le sciagure.	then tragedy is not far away.

Giovanni Bononcini (1670-1747)

Lasciami un sol momento (1721)

Lasciami un sol momento O rimembranza amara Del mio tradito amor	Leave me for but a moment, o bitter memory of a love betrayed.
Sì fiero è il duol ch'io sento Che la mia pace cara Tutta m'involi al cor.	So dreadful is my pain that it has robbed my heart of its cherished peace.
E' possibile oh Dio Che dopo tante offese	Is it possible, o God, that after being so cruelly abused
Si ricordi d'Eurillo il pensier mio?	my thoughts still turn to Eurillo?
Come mai dal mio core	How can it be that righteous anger
Giusto rigor non scancellò l'imgo	does not strike from my heart the image
Dell'empio che tradì tanto il mio amore?	of the cruel man who so betrayed my love?
Sventurata Dorinda	Unhappy Dorinda,
A qual pace speri alle tue pene amare	what respite from your bitter anguish do you hope to find
Se tra l'offese ancora	if, despite the wrongs he has done you,

Tanto Eurillo ti piace e t'innamora.	you still love Eurillo so dearly?
Soffro in pace la catena	I shall calmly endure my shackles,
Né più spero libertà	no longer hoping for freedom.
Forse un giorno la mia pena	Perhaps one day the pain I feel
Del crudel pena sarà.	will torment my cruel betrayers.

George Frideric Handel

Dolc' è pur d'amor l'affano HWV109 (c.1715-8)

Dolce pur d'amor l'affanno,	Even the anguish of love is sweet,
Se compagno del tormento, Il contento viene ancor.	if along with the pain pleasure comes too.
Se le pene unite vanno, Con la speme e con l'affetto,	If the sufferings go together with the hope and tenderness
Il diletto e' poi maggior.	then the pleasure is even greater.

Il viver sempre in pene, Stanca i desir d'amore, E il viver lieto sempre, Piace ma sazia il core.	Living always in pain wearies the desires of love, and living always happy pleases but satiates the heart.
Dolci ripulse e graziosi sdegni, Certe sventure inaspettate e lievi, Danno tormento, e'ver, Ma fan talora piu' soavi i piacer, Quanto piu' brevi.	Sweet denials and gracious disdain, certain unexpected and slight misfortunes, give torment, it is true, but sometimes make the pleasures sweeter although briefer.

Se piu' non t'amo, Non ti doler, Ch'amarti, o bella, lo piu' non so. Ma da te bramo Caro piacer, Se tu sei quella Che mi piago'.	If I no longer love you, do not grieve, for to love you, oh beauteous one, I no longer know how. But from you I crave sweet pleasure, if you are that one who wounded me.
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All translations except 'Dolc' è pur d'amor l'affano' by Susannah Howe.