

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 5 December 2022
7.30pm

A Roman Baroque Christmas

Katharina Konradi soprano

Arcangelo

Jonathan Cohen chamber organ, harpsichord, director

Zefira Valova violin I

Michael Gurevich violin II

John Crockatt viola

Felix Knecht cello

Ismael Campanero double bass

Sergio Bucheli lute

Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725)	Salve regina (v)
Giuseppe Valentini (1681-1753)	Sinfonia 'per il Santissimo Natale' Op. 1 No. 12 (pub. 1701) <i>I. Largo - Andante e forte • II. Allegro • III. Largo • IV. Presto</i>
George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)	Gloria HWV deest (?1706) <i>Interval</i>
Alessandro Stradella (1639-1682)	Sinfonia No. 22 in D minor
Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713)	Trio Sonata in E Op. 4 No. 6 (pub. 1694) <i>I. Preludio • II. Allemanda • III. Giga</i>
Alessandro Scarlatti	Oh di Betlemme altera povertà (Cantata pastorale per la nascita di Nostro Signore)

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Rome at the height of the Baroque could truly have been described as the centre of the universe. Over the course of the 17th Century, the city's culture had conflated into a perfect statement of ecclesiastical power and classical grandeur, made through every possible form of art – from sculpture to architecture to urban planning. Every year it was flooded with Pilgrims travelling to visit the seat of the Holy See, and never was this more the case than at Christmas, when Rome was at its most culturally vibrant and coherent.

Behind its grand public facades, however, glittered Rome's most exclusive private salons. Among these was that of Queen Christina of Sweden, known only to Romans as 'The Queen'. For reasons that have always been unclear, in 1654 Christina had abruptly abdicated her throne, converted to Catholicism and moved to Rome. Inscrutable and intellectually indefatigable, when she arrived she continued with patronage of the type she had nurtured in Sweden, and built around herself a literary salon enriched with musical and operatic commissions from some of the most innovative composers in Rome. Her private gatherings, known as *conversazioni*, were notoriously exclusive, and the musicians and artists with whom she worked were no less revered than the noblemen, cardinals and gentlewomen she invited as guests. Over the course of her life in Rome she commissioned music from composers whose work is still credited as some of the most inventive of the Italian Baroque, including Alessandro Scarlatti, Giuseppe Valentini, Alessandro Stradella and Arcangelo Corelli.

When Christina died in 1689, a group of her closest literary associates founded the *Accademia dell'Arcadia*, with the purpose of upholding her values so they might 'exterminate bad taste and see to it that it shall not rise again', and make sure her *conversazioni* did not die with her. The composers that had benefitted from her patronage during her lifetime continued their association through membership of the *Arcadia*, which took its name from the Greek and Roman pastoral literature tradition that shared the same values of moderation and simplicity. Arcadians were given pseudonyms to use in the academy's bucolic virtual reality and, although its mission statement could not have been more removed from the defining features of the Baroque period of which it was part, its pastoral nature became synonymous with the identity of Christmas: the similarities between the soft folk tunes of the shepherds described in Virgil's poetry and the shepherds of the Christmas story creating a bond through their sounds as much as through their imagery.

Christina's Master of Music had been **Alessandro Scarlatti** (later 'Terpandro Azeriano' to his fellow Arcadians) who, although born in Sicily, spent much of his career shuttling back and forth between Rome and Naples. He had been influential in the development of the new and colourful Neapolitan style of opera that was evolving at the time, and the 600 sacred vocal cantatas he wrote bear miniature witness to his

pioneering skill in writing for the voice. The fifth of his five settings of the *Salve regina*, in F minor, not only illustrates his gift for writing melodies that inspire excitement and joy, but is a keen example of the ornate overlap between sacred and classical traditions that is so redolent of Baroque Rome.

Scarlatti was not the only cultural innovator welcomed into Christina's salon. It was also home to instrumentalists known for embracing new ideas, and in different ways. The set of 12 sinfonias for strings Op. 1 of **Giuseppe Valentini** (or 'Euginaspe Leupinto'), for instance, is one of the earliest examples of the use of the word 'symphony', of which the last, the Sinfonia 'per il Santissimo Natale', is built around two pastoral movements that immediately identify it for performance at Christmas. While **Alessandro Stradella's** Sinfonia No. 22 in D minor might not be so readily associated in the same way, and the Trio Sonata in E Op. 4 No. 6 of **Arcangelo Corelli** (aka 'Arcomelo Erimanteo') is more austere in its reverence than openly celebratory, the respective compositional fireworks and simple elegance of these Arcadian pieces create with Valentini a fulcrum of styles that are all emblematic of the Christmas spirit.

'Oh di Betlemme altera povertà', Alessandro Scarlatti's *Cantata pastorale per la nascita di Nostro Signore*, was written to be performed on Christmas Eve. The gently-drawn bagpipes played by the Arcadian shepherds can be heard deep within the texture, just as they can be in Christmas music of Christina's salon such as Corelli's Concerto grosso 'Fatto per la notte di Natale'.

Although **Handel** arrived in London after the death of Queen Christina, the influence of the music of the Arcadian composers could already be heard in his music. The *Gloria* is a sacred cantata that Handel probably wrote before setting off for Italy in 1706, but which shows the influence of Scarlatti's vocal writing and use of recitative. His pastoral cantata *Aminta e Fillide* had its first performance in Rome in 1708 as part of Christmas celebrations organised by the *Arcadia*, and its aria 'Se vago rio' reflects the return to simplicity that the commission demanded. Similarly, the orchestra for the first performance of Handel's *Il Trionfo del Disinganno* in 1707 (led by Corelli), and the beautiful 'Lascia la spina' that appeared later in *Rinaldo* as 'Lascia ch'io pianga', also reflect Queen Christina's vision through the beauty of simplicity and moderation.

The *Arcadia* was not just a powerful intellectual hub. It also brought together all the elements of the true nature of the Baroque – a period in which the arts began talking to each other in order to celebrate drama and spirituality. Nowhere was this communication more in evidence than at Christmas when, above all, it was music that brought these elements together to be so emblematic of its true spirit.

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Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725)

Salve regina (v)

Anonymous

Salve Regina, mater
misericordiae:
Vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra,
salve.

Ad te clamamus, exsules filii
Evae.

Ad te suspiramus,
Gementes et flentes in hac
lacrimarum valle.

Eia ergo advocata nostra,
Illos tuos misericordes
oculos ad nos converte.

Et Jesum benedictum
fructum ventris tui,
Nobis post hoc exsilium
ostende.

O clemens, o pia, o dulcis
Virgo Maria.

Hail, O Queen

Hail, O Queen, Mother of
mercies;
our life, our sweetness,
and our hope, hail!

To you do we cry, the
exiled children of Eve.

To you do we sigh,
weeping and mourning in
this vale of tears.

Therefore, our Advocate,
turn your merciful eyes
towards us.

And, Jesus, the blessed
fruit of your womb,
reveal to us after our
exile.

O kind, O loving, O sweet
Virgin Mary.

Giuseppe Valentini (1681-1753)

Sinfonia 'per il Santissimo Natale' Op. 1 No. 12

(pub. 1701)

I. Largo - Andante e forte

II. Allegro

III. Largo

IV. Presto

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Gloria HWV deest (?1706)

Liturgical text

Gloria in excelsis Deo.	Glory to God in the highest.
Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.	And on earth peace to people of good will.
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.	We praise you. We bless you.
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.	We adore you. We glorify you.
Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.	We give you thanks for your great glory.

Domine Deus, Rex caelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens.	Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father.
Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe.	Lord Jesus Christ, only begotten Son,

Domine Deus, Agnus Dei,
Filius Patris.

Lord God, Lamb of God,
Son of the Father.

Qui tollis peccata
mundi,

Who takes away the sins
of the world,

Miserere nobis.

have mercy on us.

Qui tollis peccata
mundi,

Who takes away the sins
of the world,

Suscipe deprecationem
nostram.

receive our
prayer.

Qui sedes ad dexteram
Patris,

Who is seated at the right
hand of the Father,

Miserere nobis.

have mercy on us.

Quoniam tu solus
Sanctus.

For you alone are the
Holy One.

Tu solus Dominus.

You alone are the Lord.

Tu solus
Altissimus,

You alone are the Most
High,

Jesu Christe.

Jesus Christ.

Cum Sancto Spiritu,
In gloria Dei Patris.

With the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the

Amen.

Father. Amen.

Interval

Alessandro Stradella (1639-1682)

Sinfonia No. 22 in D minor

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713)

Trio Sonata in E Op. 4 No. 6 (pub. 1694)

I. Preludio

II. Allemanda

III. Giga

Texts continue overleaf

Alessandro Scarlatti

Oh di Betlemme altera povertà (Cantata pastorale per la nascita di Nostro Signore)

Anonymous

Introduzione

Introduction

Recitativo

O di Betlemme altera
povertà venturosa!
Se chi fece ogni cosa, se chi
muove ogni sfera
In te discende, e l'autor della
luce,
Ne suoi primi vagiti a te
risplende.

Recitative

O noble and fortunate
poverty of Bethlehem,
if the maker of all, the
mover of every sphere,
descends upon you, and
the source of light,
giving his first cries,
shines on you.

Aria

Dal bel seno d'una
stella
Spunta a noi l'eternito sole.
Da una pura verginella
Nacque già l'eterna
prole.

Aria

From the shapely breast
of a star
the eternal sun rises for us.
From a young pure virgin
eternal offspring is now
born.

Recitativo

Presa d'uomo la forma,
Alle gelide tempore
D'inclemente stagione
Soggiace il gran Bambino.
E d'acerbo destino
Per sottrarre al rigore
L'umanità cadente,
Del suo corpo innocente
Fa scudo a noi
l'appassionato amore.

Recitative

Assuming human form
the great infant is exposed
to the icy trial
of inclement weather.
To save fallen humanity
from the rigours
of harsh fate,
His innocent body's
passionate love is our
shield.

Aria

L'autor d'ogni mio bene
Scioglie le mie
catene
E stretto, e in fasce.
Il tutto ei fè dal
nulla,
Eppur lo veggio in
culla
E in terra nasce.

Aria

The source of all my riches
wrapped in swaddling
bands
loosens my chains.
He made everything from
nothing,
and yet I see him in the
cradle,
born upon earth.

Recitativo

Fortunati pastori,
Giacchè v'è dato in sorte
Che il signor della vita,
Immortale, inreato,
Respiri fra di voi l'aure
primiere!
Al dolce suon giulivo
di zampogne
innocent

Recitative

Lucky shepherds,
since it has fallen to your lot
that the Lord of life,
immortal, never created,
should draw his first
breaths in your midst!
To the gentle, festive
sounds of innocent
bagpipes

D'un Dio fatto
mortale
Correte a celebrar l'alto natale.

rush to celebrate the lofty
birth
of a God made mortal.

Aria

Tocco la prima sorte a voi,
pastori,
Perchè si fa Gesù di Dio
l'Agnello.
Offrite alla sua cuna i vostri
cuori
Mirate quanto è vago e
quanto è bello.

Aria

The greatest fortune was
yours, shepherds,
for Jesus has become the
Lamb of God.
Offer your hearts at his
cradle,
see how pretty he is, and
how beautiful.

Lasciate i vostri armenti e la
capanna
Abbandonate sì le pecorelle.
Ve' una speranza in lui che
non v'inganna
E chi vi può dar loco in fra le
stelle.

Leave your flocks and
huts,
yes, forsake your sheep.
He embodies a hope that
does not deceive you
and can give you a place
amongst the stars.

*Texts and translations kindly provided by the artists. 'Salve regina'
translated by Richard Bastable.*