

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 5 September 2021 7.30pm

Ed Lyon tenor

Theatre of the Ayre

Elizabeth Kenny lute, theorbo

Siobhán Armstrong harp

Reiko Ichise viola da gamba

Rodolfo Richter violin

Jane Gordon violin

Pierre Guédron (c.1570-1620)

Aux plaisirs, aux délices (1614)

John Dowland (1563-1626)

My thoughts are winged with hopes
(1597)

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

Sì dolce è'l tormento (pub. 1624)

Giovanni Battista Fontana (1589-1630)

Sonata No. 7 (1641)

Sébastien Le Camus (1610-1677)

Je veux me plaindre de vos rigueurs

Robert de Visée (c.1655-1732)

Allemande : 'La Plainte' from
Suite in C minor

Francesco Cavalli (1602-1676)

Lamento d'Idraspe 'Uscitemi dal cor'
from *Erismena*

Anonymous

Irish harp tune

John Dowland

Time stands still (1603)

Claudio Monteverdi

Vi ricorda, o boschi ombrosi (1607)

Tarquinio Merula (c.1594-1665)

Ciaccona (pub. 1637)

Stefano Landi (1587-1639)

Damigella, tutta bella

Interval

Giovanni Battista Fontana

Sonata No. 17 (1641)

Francesco Cavalli

Lamento d'Alessandro Misero, così va'
from *Eliogabalo*

Etienne Moulinié (c.1600-1669)

O stelle homicide (1629)

Antoine Boësset (c.1586-1643)

Je voudrais bien, ô Cloris (1629)

Michel Lambert (c.1610-1696)

Vos mespris chaque jour me causent
mille alarmes (1689)

Stefano Landi

Augellin che'l tuo amor

Nicola Matteis (fl. c.1670-1713)

Preludio

Nicholas Lanier (1588-1666)

No more shall meads

Stefano Landi

Canta la cicaletta

Anonymous

Passacaglia della Vita *attributed to*
Stefano Landi

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17th-Century Playlist

... flaming as I have seen him, in a good humour he hath held the company by the ears ...for more than an hour together.

So Roger North wrote about violinist **Nicola Matteis**, who thrilled audiences in Restoration England, and whose 'Aria Amorosa' is a true song without words. Being 'held by the ears' was an idea associated with the emergence of charismatic performers who would insert short bursts of rhythm and melody into the listener's brain.

Like an old-school mixtape, Ed Lyon conceived this programme from songs which have long held him by the ears. Theatre of the Ayre fleshes out the sonic and harmonic possibilities behind the texts, many of which have a basis in improvisation over familiar chord patterns.

This idea of 'blueprint' music was a feature both of 'serious' and popular song, often called *airs sérieux* and *airs à boire* (drinking songs). With notation from lute tablature to figured bass, from elaborate counterpoint written in partbooks, to simple guitar chords ('alfabeto'), singers and players delighted in teasing their audiences by hurling them from one to the other in a moment.

Pierre Guéron started musical life as a boy soprano, eventually becoming the most prolific and popular writer of airs outside France. 'Aux plaisirs, aux delices' was published by Pierre Ballard in 1614, and then in a part-song version in 1618. The opening riff drives the song's movement – a three chord trick with rhythmic arpeggios that appear only in the tablature version. **John Dowland's** 'My thoughts are winged with hopes' also has flexible performance options: it exists in instrumental form as *Sir John Souch's Galliard* and shows Dowland's ability to tie up a knotty poem full of philosophy, wit and feeling into a deceptively simple package, full of rhythmic vitality. Rhythm speaks to meaning also in **Monteverdi's** 'Si dolce è il tormento' and in his 'Vi ricorda, o boschi ombrosi': Orfeo confides the pain of love to the woods, but his assumed melancholy is confusingly driven by a perky *ciaccona* bass.

The *Sonate* of **Giovanni Battista Fontana** were published posthumously – he, with many thousands of others, succumbed to the 'voracity of the pestilence' in northern Italy in 1630-1. They show a typically laissez-faire approach to instrumentation: *a 1. 2. 3. per il violino, o cornetto, fagotto, chitarone, violoncino o simile altro istromento*. It's a reminder that instrumental colour and tone was up to the performer as much as the composer. That said, Brescia was known for violin playing and making, and the sonatas exploit the instrument's soul as well as agility. The goal was to move the listener by catching them – by the ears – with 'affetti', mercurial figuration alternating with short bursts of expressive harmony. **Merula's** 'Ciaccona' likewise

displays the instrument's dazzling capabilities in a more dance-like context.

French language and sound immediately suggest more languorous passion. Viol player **Sebastian Le Camus's** 'Je veux me plaindre de vos rigeurs' is paired with 'La Plainte', theorbo player **Robert de Visée's** elegy for his daughters: beauty and pain entwine. 'Je voudrais bien, ô Cloris' paints a bedroom parting scene. The playlist hook is the beautiful chorus, where sophisticated ornamentation blends with clear harmony and a lovely tune. **Michel Lambert's** major-key twist on the four-note bassline, 'Vos mespris chaque jour', adds charm and nostalgia to a familiar harmonic theme.

A shoemaker's son, **Stefano Landi** went from Rome and opera to the heady world of Venetian chamber music, where his prolific output of *canzonette* found a wider audience. 'Augellin che'l tuo amor' is from his first book of *Arie per una Voce*, 1620 and 'Damigella, tutta bella' from his second, 1627. Landi's cousin Fabio was a harpist at the Medici court in Florence; guitar and harp were often used together in this region. 'Canto la cicaletta' is set over a gentle *ciaccona*. Loveliness and humour combine: the cicada may be no nightingale but he can give Orfeo a run for his money by singing/buzzing to his death: 'more cantando'.

Cavalli wrote *Eliogabalo* for the Venetian Carnival season of 1668 but it was never performed, perhaps because the libretto promised scenes of debauchery, sex and violence in the reign of the teenage Roman Emperor Heliogabalus. Noble Alessandro rises above it all by singing of true love over the *passacaglia* bassline: in its minor form this was the signature of many laments.

'Time stands still' ponders the paradox of time itself, with Beauty and Truth overcoming Envy in a pageant-like contest between virtue and inconstancy and change. Queen Elizabeth I's motto, was – not uncoincidentally – 'semper eadem'. This song and **Nicholas Lanier's** 'No more shall meads' feature the relatively unusual sound of the brass-strung early Irish harp: a colonial trophy in Tudor England, it was then much taken up in aristocratic and royal circles. Lanier had a connection with harper Cormac Mac Dermott, who was employed by Sir Robert Cecil in the late 1590s.

Stefano Landi wrote 'My madrigals are born of man and represent human ideas and natural passions, but they are also a path and means to angelic concerts, which I strive to imitate as best I can'. In the 'Passacaglia della Vita', the pulse of life and the imminence of death are gloriously intertwined.

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