

PROGRAM NOTES
NAPERVILLE CHAMBER PLAYERS
MAY 23, 2010

Translations

Alessandro Scarlatti:

Se Florindo e fedele

*If Florindo will be faithful,
I will fall in love with him;
If he is loyal,
I will fall in love with him.
Let him tighten his bow,
That quivering archer,
That I will be able to defend myself
From such a tempting glance.
I will not listen to petitions, tears and quarrels,
But if he will be faithful,
I will fall in love with him.*

Sento nel core

*I feel in my heart a certain sorrow
Which goes on disturbing my peace;
There shines a torch which inflames my soul.
If it is not love, it will be love soon.*

Gia il sole dal Gang

*Already, the sun from over the Ganges,
Sparkles more brightly
And dries every drop
Of the dawn, which weeps.*

*With gilded ray
It adorns each blade of grass;
And the stars of the sky
It paints in the field.*

George Friedrich Händel:

Flammende Rose

*Flaming rose, earth's adornment
Enchanting glory of all radiant gardens.*

*All eyes that see your magnificence
Dazzled by your charm must confess
That you were made by the finger of God.*

Singe Seele

*Sing, my soul, sing in praise of God,
Who in such wise ways
And so masterfully adorns the world.*

*He stimulates us through our hearing,
Delights us through our sight,
Making trees and fields blooming with flowers.
Let him be renowned and praised.*

Antonio Vivaldi:

Mentiti contenti

*False happiness
Is the true torment
Of the faithful lover.*

*Those piercing glances
Are like arrows
That quiver with pain.
Cruel beauty!*

Program Notes

Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725) was both the founder of the Neapolitan school of opera and an important bridge to the Classical period. His music is identified by beautifully refined melodies and rich, full accompaniments. Scarlatti helped establish the nearly universal use of the da capo aria form (ABA). "Se Florindo è fedele" is a playful aria from the opera *La donna ancora è fedele* (*The Lady Still Is Faithful*), in which the singer has just overheard Florindo profess his love. From a chamber cantata meant to be performed in the home, "Sento nel core" is an aria that expresses the fear and uncertainty of falling in love. "Già il sole dal Gange" is an aria from the opera *L'Honesta negl'Amori* (*Honesty in Love Affairs*), the composer's second opera written at the age of nineteen.

Henry Purcell (1659-1695), one of the finest English composers of the Baroque era, wrote only one full opera: the tragedy, *Dido and Aeneas*. "When I am Laid in Earth," often referred to as Dido's Lament, opens with a descending chromatic line, a ground bass which is repeated eleven times throughout the aria. Purcell utilizes text painting throughout the aria, but particularly in the ground bass which relentlessly trudges downward, as Dido meets her fate: death. Dido's Lament is included in many music textbooks for its exemplary use of ground bass.

George Friedrich Handel (1685-1759) is best known for his oratorio, *Messiah*. In Part Three of the oratorio, the spiritual messages represented by Christ's teachings are set forth for the instruction and benefit of all, opening with the moving aria *I Know That My Redeemer Liveth*. Handel's "Nine German Arias" (he wrote other arias in German, but this is a discrete group) were written in the mid-1720s, long after the composer left his native Germany for Italy and then England. These arias present spirituality in an intimate way, with a good deal of imagery from nature subtly reflected in the music.

The prolific Venetian composer **Antonio Vivaldi** (1678-1741) wrote many chamber works for various instruments, including about 90 sonatas. The Sonata in a minor was originally written for flute and bassoon, performed today on cello. *All'ombra di sospetto* is among 36 of Vivaldi's chamber cantatas. The cantata texts generally revolve around love and its joys and sorrows, and the settings can be quite emotionally expressive. The scoring is typically for voice and continuo, although "All'ombra" involves obbligato flute. Though often accused of repeating his own material, Vivaldi was highly imaginative, and his works exercised a strong influence on Johann Sebastian Bach.

Bernardo Storace (fl. 1664) is survived by his only remaining work, *Selva di Varie Compositioni D'Intavolatura per Cimbalo ed Organo*, published in 1664. The title page from this collection provides us with Storace's only known biographical fact: his employment as Vice-Maestro di Cappella to the senate of Messina. The Ciaccona heard tonight is an excellent example of his intense creativity manifest through the ground bass forms.

J.S. Bach (1685-1750) is widely considered the greatest and most prolific composer in world history. He was a masterful organist and harpsichord player who mainly worked as a church music director writing thousands of brilliant sacred works. It was when he was full of fresh youthful energy in his late twenties that he composed the Six Suites for Violoncello, published in 1720.

Violoncello is the old name for the cello. The cello had not yet fully been developed at this time. Not even an endpin was used at this time and there were no female cellists that we know of until the 19th century. That is because it was considered terribly impolite for a woman to be seated with her legs open like that! The cello's ancestor, the viola da gamba, was primarily used as an accompaniment instrument in the background.

This period of time was unusual for Bach since he was employed by a wealthy prince in Cöthen, Germany and was not required to compose or perform exclusively sacred music in a church. Bach took some time as director of a chamber orchestra to learn how to play the viola da gamba and the violin. He wrote almost all of his orchestral suites and instrumental chamber works during this time. These unaccompanied cello suites are the first masterpieces we know of ever written for the cello and they represent one of the most beloved jewels in the cello repertoire to this day. The technical demands involve complex bowing combinations, double stops (playing two or three notes at time) and long arpeggios.

As a "modern cellist," I have struggled to adapt my playing to a more "authentic" and Baroquely beautiful interpretation of what Bach intended. I don't have the proper gut strings (made of sheep's gut) that would produce the kind of sound of 300 years ago but I have eliminated as much vibrato, gratuitous shifting and long, sustained dramatic musical lines of Romantic aesthetic as I can. We "modern cellists" have a great deal of conflict giving up these habits for the good of the music but now I have been humbly converted by the beauty that is not so much my strong personal interpretation but the magic of what lies beyond my modern musical imagination.

I like to fancifully think that Bach was listening to one of his two brilliant cellists in the court one day playing this very D minor Suite and instantly fell in love with his wife, Anna Magdalena as she stood up to sing one day. And the rest is history with her bearing him 21 children and lovingly hand copying out this set of Six Suites!

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