

ITALIANISSIMO!

Programme Notes

We open our programme of works from 18th-century Italy with a work by a visiting composer. **Mozart's Symphony no. 13 in F Major** was composed during the second of three journeys to Italy undertaken by Wolfgang and his father Leopold during Wolfgang's teen years. The impetus for the second visit was a commission from Empress Maria Theresa to compose an opera for the Theatre Regio Ducal in Milan in honour of the marriage of her son, Archduke Ferdinand, to Princess Maria Beatrice Ricciarda of Modena. The opera, a serenata called *Ascanio in Alba*, was a resounding success – Ferdinand asked his mother whether he could offer Mozart a position at his Milanese court, to which Maria Theresa replied, “I don't know nor do I believe that you would need a composer or useless people. If that would give you pleasure, I don't want to keep you from it.” It was discouraging enough advice to forestall any offer of employment, but Wolfgang's success in the opera theatre brought new confidence to the young composer's writing. The F-Major Symphony was composed a few weeks after the opera and was premiered at an orchestral concert at the residence of Albert Michael von Mayr, keeper of the privy purse to Archduke Ferdinand. It is an accomplished work, brimming with energy – despite letters written by Wolfgang to his sister at home mentioning that he is “always sleepy,” testament that despite his prodigious talent, Wolfgang was nonetheless a normal fifteen-year-old boy!

The Neapolitan composer **Nicolò Jommelli** was a prolific, influential and very successful composer of opera. He worked in Vienna and Stuttgart as well as Italy, and is credited with making many of the modifications that were to distinguish the classical opera from the baroque. His style is a synthesis of German, French and Italian elements, and his works were admired throughout Europe. In addition to composing just under 100 operas, Jommelli also composed a wealth of sacred vocal and choral music, and a small handful of instrumental works. Among the most popular of the latter is the **Ciaccona in E-flat Major** for orchestra, also published in London in an arrangement for pianoforte.

We opened the first half of the concert with music from a visitor to Italy, and end with a work written in Paris by an Italian expatriate: **Giuseppe Maria Cambini** was born in Livorno and seems to have spent his early career in Naples, but at age 24 left for Paris and remained there for

the remainder of his life. A violinist, most of his output is instrumental, including some 150 string quartets, 120 string quintets, and at least 80 symphonies concertantes. The *simphonie concertante*, a form that melds the concerto and symphony, was very popular in late 18th-century Paris. Mozart heard *simphonies concertantes* by Cambini, among others, during his visits to Paris and was inspired to try his own hand at the hybrid form (Mozart's *Simphonie concertante for oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon* will be performed by Tafelmusik in November 2011). Cambini's works are charming and witty, French in style but with a distinct Italian accent.

Giovanni Battista Sammartini was born in Milan to a French oboist who had settled in Milan at the end of the 17th century. Giovanni's older brother Giuseppe took up his father's instrument and settled in London c1728, playing in Handel's orchestra. Giovanni remained in Milan and was renowned as an organist, holding positions in numerous churches in the city. Although a large quantity of his music has been lost, his extant works remain numerous, and include 67 symphonies, 20 concerts, a wide range of chamber music, three operas, and a number of liturgical works.

Unusually for a Neapolitan musician, **Francesco Durante** did not compose operas. Instead, he was widely known as a master of church music and respected teacher. He also wrote a number of solo harpsichord works and a set of eight concerti grossi. The latter were probably composed in the late 1730s or early 1740s, and were carefully compiled to display a great variety of style and structure, marked by unexpected harmonies and expressive counterpoint. The last concerto of the set is titled "**La Pazzia**" (madness or folly), and is arguably the most original, dispelling any notion that the music of this composer of sacred works was in any way staid or conservative. The folly is to be found in the viola parts: a pair of violists step out of their usual place in the middle of the orchestra to be featured soloists, the "*primi uomini*" of this decidedly theatrical piece.

Born in Lucca in 1743, **Luigi Boccherini** was the son of a cello and double bass player. After a period of cello study in Rome, he and his father went to Vienna to take up positions in the court theatre orchestra. Luigi returned to Lucca in 1764, but left soon after on a concert tour which took him eventually to Paris, and finally to Madrid, where he was to take up residence. The Infante Don Luis employed him as both composer and cellist, and he also enjoyed the patronage of several "Signore Dilettanti di Madrid," among them Lucien Bonaparte, French ambassador, and the Marquis Benavente. Furthermore, King Frederick William II of Prussia, a keen amateur cellist, provided Boccherini with a regular salary for many years in return for a supply of new music. Although best known as a prolific composer of chamber music, Boccherini also wrote several cello concertos and approximately 30 symphonies. His music is full of grace and charm, combined with a great deal of energy and wit – music which is entertaining to both the player and the listener.