

# *Tafelmusik*

## LYRICAL BAROQUE Programme Notes

### FASCH SUITE & CONCERTO

Johann Friedrich Fasch was descended from a long line of Lutheran cantors and theologians. He studied at the Thomasschule and the University in Leipzig, followed by composition studies with Graupner in Darmstadt. In 1722 he accepted the position of court Kapellmeister at the Anhalt court in Zerbst and remained there until his death in 1758. His reputation as a composer was widespread, and his works were performed by Telemann in Hamburg, Bach in Leipzig, Pisendel in Dresden, and C.P.E. Bach in Berlin. He continued to send copies of his compositions to his former teacher Graupner in Darmstadt, and the library there includes a wealth of his instrumental works, including the orchestral suite from which we have excerpted three movements to open this week's programme.

Although himself an organist and violinist, Fasch had a particular penchant for wind instruments. The abilities of the wind players of the Dresden orchestra were a particular source of inspiration to the innovative Fasch, and although he was never employed at the Saxon court, he wrote several works for its orchestra, among them the Concerto for chalumeau in B-flat Major. Although most solo baroque concertos are accompanied by string orchestra, Fasch has added two oboes and a bassoon to the score.

### TELEMANN & VIVALDI CONCERTOS

It is not surprising that the other concertos on the programme are written by Telemann and Vivaldi: arguably the two most prolific composers of concertos of any period, both included an array of works for unusual instruments in their catalogues. Telemann, who played chalumeau himself, penned two double concertos pairing an alto and tenor chalumeau. This allowed him to cleverly appear to extend the instruments' range, with one instrument taking over where the other leaves off. Vivaldi wrote works for both chalumeau and clarinet, and imaginatively exploited the different potentials of the two instruments. He wrote three concertos featuring solo parts for pairs of clarinets, including two C-Major Concertos that pair them with two oboes. The slow movement of RV.559 is left only to the four winds, who seamlessly alternate roles of accompanist and soloist.

### CONTI CANTATA

Francesco Bartolomeo Conti was born in Florence in 1681. An accomplished player of theorbo and mandolin, he moved to Vienna in 1701 to take up the position of theorbist at the Habsburg

court in Vienna. In 1713 he was designated court composer, quickly becoming Vienna's leading opera composer. He also composed some 80 cantatas, most for soprano voice and perhaps written for his second and third wives: Maria Landini and Maria Anna Lorenzani were the court prima donnas. Of those with orchestral accompaniment, no fewer than six feature the chalumeau. "*Fra queste ombrose piante*" ("Under those shady trees") survives only in a copy in an unknown hand that is preserved in the library in Darmstadt. The copyist, apparently German, had difficulty transcribing the Italian text, in which different goddesses bestow gifts on the occasion of the birthday of the dedicatee of the cantata, presumably a member of the Imperial family. We are grateful to York University Professor Guillaume Bernardi for "repairing" the Italian and providing a translation.

### **HANDEL EXCERPTS FROM *Il pastor fido***

Handel took London by storm in 1711 when, on leave from the Hanoverian court, he produced *Rinaldo* at the Haymarket Theatre. For the first time, the London audience saw a full Italian *opera seria*, complete with Italian castrati and spectacular stage effects, and were enthralled. When Handel returned a year later, he chose to present a simpler pastoral opera, *Il pastor fido*, a tale of love set in Arcadia and based on Guarini's famed play of 1585. With none of the flamboyance of *Rinaldo*, the new venture received but a lukewarm response: "The Scene represented only ye Country of Arcadia, ye Habits were old, ye Opera Short." Handel quickly ensured popular support by reverting to *opera seria*, but was inspired to revisit *Il pastor fido* 20 years later. He had contracted a French dance company led by Marie Sallé for the 1734/35 season, and by reworking entire sections of the opera and adding extended dance sequences, he created a delightful and successful entertainment.

In the small set of excerpts we present this week, we offer a sampling of three arias from the first version, interspersed with dances written for Sallé from the later production. All three arias are drawn from Act II, and are sung by three of the protagonists: the young maiden **Amarilli**, her confidante **Eurilla**, and the shepherd **Mirtillo** (originally sung by a castrato). Mirtillo is hopelessly in love with Amarilli. She secretly returns his love, but is betrothed to Silvo, and although Silvo is not at all interested in love, only their union will lift a curse of the gods on the people of Arcadia, and Amarilli is determined to do her duty. Eurilla hopes to have Mirtillo for herself, and through deception plots to have Amarilli caught and sentenced to death for infidelity. Mirtillo's lullaby "*Caro Amor*" opens the act, as he sings himself to sleep. Amarilli sings of her struggle in "*Finte labbra*," and Eurilla ends the act with "*Ritorna adesso Amor*" – her plot has succeeded, but still she doubts whether Mirtillo will be hers. By the end of the opera, all is resolved: Mirtillo and Amarilli are happily married, the curse lifted by the gods, Silvo has found love with the shepherdess Dorinda, and Eurilla asks for forgiveness.