Tafelmusik

MUSIC FIT FOR A KING
Programme Notes

"Know, Sire, that a king without any taste for music is a crowned ass."
A courtier to Louis IV

For most baroque musicians, their livelihood depended on obtaining a position at court. Even the smallest of courts retained the services of at least a few musicians, and larger courts vied to employ the leading composers, singers and instrumentalists of the day. Patronage of the arts was deemed essential to maintaining wealth and power. If architecture was the most manifest testament to a ruler, and painting and sculpture the most flattering, music was arguably the most stirring. We open our season with a selection of music written in service of their royal patrons by musicians employed at courts from Vienna to London, and from Barcelona to Moscow.

We begin each half of the concert with music written for the Versailles court of Louis XIV, a monarch who was the paragon of Johann Kuhnau's statement: "Persons of high degree who patronize music do so for reasons of state, in order to distract the people and prevent them from looking into their cards." We are indebted to Louis' music librarian, **André Danican Philidor** (*c*1647-1730), for assembling several collections of music written specifically to serve the king and his family: music for royal weddings, births, state occasions, spectacles and entertainments. A 1705 collection of music written for the brass, wind and timpani players of the *Grande Écurie* (Great Stable) comprises works by fourteen court musicians, and advertises on the title page the inclusion of a set of airs composed by **Jean-Baptiste Lully** (1632-1687) for the *Grand Carrousel* organized in 1686 to celebrate the heir to the throne, the Grand Dauphin (known as Monseigneur). The elaborate spectacle was held in the courtyard of the *Grande Écurie*, and Lully's airs would have been played by a host of brass and wind players – we offer a taste with our reduced "indoor" version. Between the three airs, timpanist David Campion will play marches written "for the King's guard" and included in the same collection, including one composed by Philidor's younger brother **Jacques** (1657-1708), and one written by **Claude Babelon** (*d*1715), timpanist at the court from 1702-1715.

The suite by **Michel Richard de Lalande** (1657-1726) that opens the second half of the concert was included in two manuscript collections by Philidor: in a 1695 manuscript it is titled "*La grande pièce royale*," and its intent is clarified in a 1703 collection of "*Symphonies de M. de La Lande qui se joüent ordinairement au Souper du Roy*." A third manuscript further describes this particular "*Fantaisie ou Caprice*" as the one "*que le Roi demandait souvent*" (that the king often requested). Scored for oboes, bassoon and strings, it would have been performed by the king's exclusive orchestra, *Les Petits Violons du Roi*, which provided entertainment for the court's daily functions as

well as forming the orchestra for the court operas and ballets. Lalande succeeded Lully as the most influential composer at Louis' court, and as *Surintendant et Maître de Musique de la Chambre* would have been responsible for the king's daily entertainments.

Surely one of the greatest luxuries enjoyed by members of a royal family would have been the celebration of your birthday with the performance of a work newly composed in your honour by one of the court composers – a far cry from the usual chorus of "Happy Birthday" to which most of us are accustomed, especially if your court composer was none other than **Henry Purcell** (1659-1695). Purcell composed odes for the birthday of Queen Mary II during each year of her reign, from 1689-1694. The 1692 ode is an intimate setting of Sir Charles Sedley's "Love's goddess sure was blind." The odes are all scored for ensembles of singers, but also include some exquisite instrumental movements. To the opening symphony, with its remarkable Purcellian twists of harmony, and the whimsical final dance, we have taken the liberty of adding an instrumental version of one of the airs, a duet for two tenors accompanied by two violins and continuo, "Sweetness of nature," with our oboists taking the vocal lines.

Poland was a powerful state at the beginning of the 17th century, and its court and royal chapel under Sigismund III retained some 60 musicians. Half of these musicians were imported from Italy, and the Polish court was the first outside of Italy to present a full season of Italian opera, at the behest of the king's son, Wladislaw, in 1628. The Italian style was all the rage, but visiting musicians were equally enamoured of the traditional Polish folktunes and dances. **Marcin Mielczewski** (d.1651) was a musician at the royal chapel in Warsaw and *Kapellmeister* at the court of the Bishop of Płock, Karol Ferdynand Waza, brother of King Wladyslaw IV. In his *Canzona prima* for two violins and continuo, he appealed to both Italian and Polish taste by alternating sections written in the style of his Italian colleagues with sections incorporating Polish folk tunes, undoubtedly greatly delighting the courtiers. The canzona famously includes a mazurka, for the first time in the history of "art" music.

The education of most of Europe's nobility, both male and female, included music lessons, and we travel now to the courts of Portugal and Spain for a famous example of this. The Neapolitan harpsichordist and composer **Domenico Scarlatti** (1685-1757) left Italy to take up a position at the court of John V in Lisbon, where his principal duty was the musical education of the king's daughter, the Infanta Maria Barbara, and of the king's younger brother, Don Antonio. When Maria Barbara married the future Ferdinand VI of Spain, Scarlatti remained in her retinue at the palaces in Madrid and Aranjuez, supplying the queen with a seemingly endless supply of harpsichord sonatas, over 550 of which survive. Most court composers had to tread carefully when writing pieces for their royal patrons to perform, ensuring that they could be played without embarrassment. At the same time, they had to remain modest while displaying their own virtuosity – Count Esterházy famously said to his employee Joseph Haydn: "It is no credit to you that you play better than I do, it is your duty." In Maria Barbara, Scarlatti met an exceptional student, one that inspired him to write music that made great demands on the player, pushing keyboard technique well beyond its previous boundaries. Clearly excited by the sights and sounds

of Iberia, he also developed a style and language in the sonatas that are a unique blend of Neapolitan and Spanish melodies, rhythms and harmonies.

We end the first half of the concert with music written for a hunting party at the court of Darmstadt, seat of the Landgraves of Hesse. **Christoph Graupner** (1683-1760) was employed at the court as *Kapellmeister* for an astonishing 50 years, leaving behind some 1,400 cantatas, 115 sinfonias, 50 concertos and 80 orchestral suites, as well as a library of meticulously copied scores of works of many of his contemporaries, a library that remains an invaluable resource today. Although the Darmstadt court was a small one, it was very active musically – at its peak at the end of the 18th century, the court employed 89 instrumentalists and 54 singers. Amongst Graupner's many sinfonias are several scored unusually for strings with horns and timpani, rather than the more common pairing of trumpets and timpani. They were written for hunting parties: the horns are an obvious association with the hunt, and Graupner perhaps thought the timpani added to the sense of occasion.

Much of the music written for ceremonial occasions at court is formal in style, full of pomp and majesty. With music written for funerals a certain solemnity is also expected. Intimacy is rare, but can be found in the *Lamento sopra la morte Ferdinandi III* of **Johann Schmelzer** (*c*1620/23-1680), violinist and composer at the Habsburg court in Vienna from 1649 until his death. Laments were more commonly vocal works, often associated with opera (*e.g.* Dido's lament from Purcell's *Dido & Aeneas*), but French lute and keyboard players began writing solo instrumental works titled "*tombeaux*" in memory of friends or patrons early in the 17th century. The Austrian harpsichordist Johann Froberger's studies in France inspired him to write several *tombeaux*, including a *Lamento sopra la dolorosa perdita della Real Maestà di Ferdinando IV*. Ferdinand IV died in 1654, and it is quite likely that Froberger's lament in turn inspired Schmelzer to write a lament on the death of Ferdinand's father, his employer, when he died three years later, but Schmelzer turned to a small ensemble of solo strings rather than harpsichord to express his sorrow. It is a poignant and tender work, written for the funeral service or perhaps simply in memory of the occasion. In the middle of the lament is a section labelled "*Todtenglockh,*" in which the strings imitate the tolling of the funeral bells.

We move north to Russia and the court of the Romanoff tsars, where the styles and instruments of western Europe started to be heard during the 17th century. We offer instrumental transcriptions of *Vivats* and sacred motets, arranged by Mark Bailey, a scholar of Slavic music. Mark believes that such transcriptions were a common practice at the Russian court. *Vivats* were short, fanfare-like choruses sung at court to honour military victories and other achievements. Their content so clearly reflects military-style trumpet calls that it is likely that most of these works were transcriptions of music played by the trumpet and drum corps that accompanied the tsars on their travels. The *Vivats* on this week's programme commemorate Peter the Great's signing of a peace treaty with Sweden. These introduce two motets arranged for strings: the anonymous *Tsaritse moya preblagaya* (My queen most blessed), and *Dostoyno yest* (It is truly right to bless you), composed by the Moscow singer **Vasily Titov** (*c*1650-c1715), who was a particular

favourite of Peter the Great.

We end the concert with a selection of movements from the extensive suite of instrumental music written by the Swedish composer **Johan Helmich Roman** (1694-1758) for the wedding of the Swedish Crown Prince Adolf Frederick to Louisa Ulrika of Prussia, which took place at the palace in Drottningholm in 1744. Often called "the Swedish Handel," Roman studied with Handel in London during the years in which Handel wrote his renowned *Water Music*. Although composed 30 years later, Roman's wedding music – or *Biljägersmusiken* – is clearly inspired by Handel's suite, with the same scoring and style, but with a Swedish, and slightly more galant, flavour. Its celebratory nature is a fitting end to our tour of music written for courtly occasions.

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Graupner: Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Dresden
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