

Tafelmusik

Intimate German Baroque

PROGRAM NOTES

By Charlotte Nediger

In programming our seasons, we often find ourselves turning to more intimate repertoire for our January concerts, an instinctive desire, perhaps, to warm up cold January evenings and Sunday afternoons with a cozy gathering of musicians and listeners. This season is no exception, as we invite British baritone Peter Harvey to join us in an exploration of rarely heard works written in the seventeenth century in German-speaking lands: both the Protestant north, and the Catholic south. As the concert includes works by two of J.S. Bach's principal mentors, Buxtehude and Johann Christoph Bach, we could not resist looking forward, so end the program with J.S. Bach's beautiful Cantata 82.

BIBER SONATAS



Engraving of Biber by Paulus Seel, from the 1681 publication of Biber's *Violin Sonatas*.

In a concert that combines the secular and sacred, it is appropriate that we open with a sonata for strings from Biber's collection *Fidicinium Sacro-Profanum*, meaning "Sacred and profane fiddle music." Two violins are in dialogue with two violas and continuo in a sonata that melds elements of the Italianate church sonata with courtly dance music. Heinrich Biber held positions at the archiepiscopal courts of Olmütz and Kremsier before assuming the post of Kapellmeister and eventually Lord High Steward to the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg. His accomplishments were acknowledged by Leopold I with his ennoblement in 1690.

Biber is credited with advancing the art of playing and composing for the violin to a height previously

unknown north of Italy. The eighteenth-century music historian Charles Burney wrote "of all the violin players of the last century Biber seems to have been the best, and his solos are the most difficult and most fanciful of any music I have seen of the same period." His violin sonatas are marked by virtuoso passagework, both in unmeasured passages and over ostinato basses, and by extensive use of double-stops (playing on two strings at once) and chords. The Third Sonata from his 1681 collection is typical. The opening prelude alternates free passages over long held notes in the bass with quick, almost bell-like, passages of double-stops. This is followed by a simple aria with two variations. A long unmeasured passage of remarkable virtuosity leads to a chaconne built over just four repeating bass notes, the last variations of which inspire an arresting ending.

BUXTEHUDE CANTATA

Born in Denmark, Dietrich Buxtehude spent most of his working life in Lübeck as organist and Kapellmeister of the Marienkirche in Lübeck. He was also appointed Werkmeister, a post encompassing the duties of secretary, treasurer, and business manager of the church, and directed an annual series of concerts at the church called "Abendmusik." His extant music includes a large quantity of keyboard music, chamber sonatas, and some 125 cantatas. The cantata "*Mein Herz ist bereit*" is a setting of Psalm 57 for solo bass voice, accompanied by three violins, violone, and continuo. At the midpoint there is a particularly delightful imitation of the psalter and harp called upon to awake the soul. Buxtehude's influence on North German composers was widespread: famously, the 20-year-old J.S. Bach took a month's leave from his job as organist in Arnstadt and walked 400 kilometres to Lübeck to meet the Danish master.

BÖDDECKER SONATA

The bassoonist, organist, and composer Philipp Friedrich Böddecker was born in Alsace to a family of musicians. He held posts in various cities in Germany and France, eventually settling in Stuttgart as organist at the collegiate church and teacher at the college. A handful of sacred works survive, as well as two virtuoso sonatas, one for violin and one for dulcian (the precursor of the bassoon). The latter is a stunning set of variations on a tune popular throughout Europe from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. The title is drawn from the text associated with the tune in Italy: "Madre non me far monaca" (Mother, don't make me become a nun). In Germany the tune came to be used as a chorale, and as such is the basis of a famous organ chorale by J.S. Bach, "Von Gott will ich nicht lassen," BWV 658. In the Böddecker variations you will hear a violinist play the tune, first on its own, and then above increasingly florid variations played on the dulcian.

J. CH. BACH LAMENTO

A first cousin and close friend of Johann Sebastian Bach's father, Johann Christoph Bach is thought to have had a great influence on the young Johann Sebastian, probably taking on much of his musical instruction upon the death of Sebastian's father when Sebastian was just ten years old. Some years later Sebastian assembled the *Altbachisches Archiv*, a collection of works by his ancestors, and included several works by his mentor. Sebastian described him as a "profound composer [...] as good at inventing beautiful thoughts as he was at expressing words." Among the works in the *Archiv* are two remarkable laments, one for solo alto and the other for solo bass, both accompanied by solo violin and a consort of violas and continuo. They are passionate settings of potent texts, demanding much artistry of the singer and of the solo violinist, and leave a deep impression on performers and listeners alike.

J. S. BACH CANTATA 82

The Cantata "*Ich habe genug*" was written by J.S. Bach for the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, the last of the feasts of the Christmas season, also known as Candlemas, the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin, and in the Catholic Church as the fourth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary. It is celebrated on or around the 2nd of February; "*Ich habe genug*" was first performed on that date in 1727. The author of the text is not known, but it is based on the Gospel story of Simeon at the presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple 40 days after his birth (St. Luke, chapter 2): "And it was revealed unto him [Simeon] by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people.'" The story inspired Bach to set the middle movement as a lullaby, and his wife Anna Magdalena included this movement in the notebook she prepared for her own use, and for use with her children. The cantata is one of the most famous of Bach's cantatas for solo voice, and one that was performed several times during Bach's tenure at Leipzig. Originally written as we are performing it this week, for solo bass voice with obbligato oboe, Bach also left versions for soprano and flute, and for alto and oboe.