

Tafelmusik

A JOYOUS WELCOME

Program Notes

by Charlotte Nediger

HANDEL CONCERTO A DUE CORI

The instrumental portions of our performances this weekend feature Handel's last compositions for orchestra, written when the composer was in his early sixties. Handel's three Concerti a due cori were written as "interval music" for three new oratorios: *Judas Maccabaeus* (1747), *Joshua* (1748), and *Alexander Balus* (1748). An oratorio that advertised the inclusion of "a new concerto" always drew a crowd. In the case of the Concerti a due cori ("Concertos for two choirs"), the works were not only newly composed, but were also a new genre. Scored for two antiphonal "choirs" of wind instruments plus a full string orchestra with continuo, they are grandiose, extroverted works, undoubtedly inspired by the trio of so-called "Victory Oratorios" for which they were composed. All three include reworkings of earlier material: Handel's audiences would have recognized most of them, drawn primarily from oratorio choruses, so the concertos must have had a certain "medley of great hits" quality. You may recognize the chorus "Lift up your heads" from Handel's *Messiah* as the second movement of the concerto we are performing this week.

CORELLI CONCERTO GROSSO OP. 6, NO. 10



ARCANGELVS CORELLIUS.

Corelli was among the first composers to write music for the orchestra independent of the opera, the dance, and the church. During a visit to Rome in 1681, the German musician Georg Muffat heard performances of Corelli concertos: "These concertos, suited neither to the church (because of the ballet airs and airs of other sorts which they include) nor for dancing (because of other interwoven conceits now slow and serious, now gay and nimble, and composed only for the express refreshment of the ear), may be performed most appropriately in connection with entertainments given by great princes and lords, for receptions of distinguished guests, and at state banquets, serenades, and assemblies of musical amateurs and virtuosi." Ideal music, then, for welcoming a new Music Director! It was Corelli who popularized the concerto grosso, based on the popular form of the trio sonata for two violins and continuo, to which is added a four-part

orchestra: when the two groups play in alternation a wonderful chiaroscuro is created. The solo or "concertino" trio supplies tenderness and virtuosity; the orchestra provides a rich sonority and solid foundation. Corelli started composing and performing concerti grossi as early as 1670, but only twelve were ever published, and those posthumously, as Opus 6, in 1714. Their publication had long been awaited throughout Europe, providing a model for many composers of the late baroque, but their simplicity, classical proportions, and utterly idiomatic string writing were never entirely surpassed. In a fitting tribute,

the anniversary of Corelli's death was marked for many years by the performance of the Opus 6 concertos in the Pantheon, where the composer was buried.

VIVALDI *THE FOUR SEASONS*

The Four Seasons appeared in Vivaldi's 1725 publication of twelve violin concertos entitled *Il Cimento dell'armonia e dell'inventione*, which translates roughly as "bold experiments with harmony and invention." The *Seasons*, full of audacious experiments of every kind, were undoubtedly the inspiration for the title. The four concertos are accompanied by four sonnets, giving detailed descriptions of the programmatic elements of the music, which paint a vivid picture of life in the Italian countryside in the eighteenth century. The author of the sonnets is unknown, and it is possible that Vivaldi penned them himself. To ensure that the musicians were aware of the effects they were to create, Vivaldi labelled the various lines of the sonnets to correspond with letters in each of the instrumental parts. He also included very detailed instructions for performance, including dynamics, bowing, and articulations. The concertos are dazzling proof of Vivaldi's skill as a violinist and his ingenuity and inventiveness as a composer.

Sonetto Dimostrativo
Sopra il Concerto Intitolato
L'E S T A D E

DEL SIG.^{ro} D. ANTONIO VIVALDI

A *Setto d'aria Stagion dal Solo accena
Lingue d' luom, lingue d' greggio, ed arde il Fano;*

B *S'ingole il Cucco la Strce, e torto intesa
Canta la Tortorella e l'gardelino.*

D *Zeffiro dolce spira, m'è contera
Aluore Borea improvviso al suo vicino;*

E *E piange il Pastorel, perchè sospesa
Teme fiore borasca, e l' suo destino;*

F *Toglie alle membra laore il suo riposo
Il timore de' Lampi, e tuoni fieri
E de' mosche, e mosconi il tucl furioso;*

G *Ah che pur troppo i suoi timor son veri
Tuona, e fulmina il Ciel e grandineo
Trenca il capo alle Spiche e i grani alboro*

The sonnet and a page of the solo violin part of **Summer** from the original 1725 publication.
You can see the letters in the part that correspond to lines in the sonnet.

We are delighted to be presenting all four concertos over the course of our concert season, with Elisa Citterio as soloist. We begin with **Summer**, which opens with languid, oppressive heat from the blazing sun, accompanied by bird calls, and finally interrupted by a summer storm. A shepherd, terrified by the storm, attempts to calm himself in the second movement, but is pestered by insects and troubled by approaching thunder. The storm lets loose its fury in the final movement. The full sonnet is printed below.

(Join us as Vivaldi's *Seasons* unfold: **Autumn** at our October concerts, **Winter** in January, and **Spring** rather optimistically at concerts in February!).

L'Estate

I. *Sotto dura staggion dal sole accesa
Lingue l'huom, langue 'l gregge,
ed arde il pino;
Scioglie il cucco la voce, e tosto intesa
Canta la tortorella e'l gardelino.*

*Zeffiro dolce spira, mà contesa
Muove Borea improvviso al suo vicino;
E piange il pastorel, perche sospesa
Teme fiera borasca, e'l suo destino;*

II. *Toglie alle membra lasse il suo riposo
Il timore de 'lampi, e tuoni fieri
E de mosche, e mossoni il stuol furioso!*

III. *Ah che pur troppo i suoi timor son veri
Tuona e fulmina il ciel e grandinoso
Tronca il capo alle spiche e a 'grani alteri.*

Summer

I. In the torrid heat of the blazing sun,
man and beast alike languish,
and even the pine trees scorch;
The cuckoo raises his voice, and soon after
the turtledove and goldfinch join in song.

Zephyr blows gently, but suddenly
Boreas contests its neighbour:
the shepherd weeps, fearful
of the wild squall and anxious for his fate.

II. He rouses his weary limbs from rest
in fear of the lightning, the fierce thunder,
and the angry swarms of gnats and flies.

III. Alas! his fears are justified,
for furious thunder splits the heavens,
flattening the cornstalks and the grainfields.

VIVALDI CONCERTO CON MOLTI STRUMENTI, RV 569

Vivaldi wrote a number of concertos with an expanded orchestra, i.e. "*con molti strumenti*." The Concerto in F Major is essentially a concerto for violin, but rather than accompanying the soloist with the usual string orchestra, Vivaldi adds oboes, bassoons, and horns to create a work that is colourful and festive. The winds play solo passages in dialogue with the violinist, often stealing the limelight. This concerto survives in two versions: Vivaldi's manuscript score in Italy, and a manuscript score and set of parts copied by the violinist Pisendel at the court in Dresden. Pisendel was one of a small entourage of Dresden musicians who accompanied the Crown Prince of Saxony on a visit to Venice in 1716. Vivaldi was impressed with the abilities of these musicians, and by their accounts of the impressive skills of the Dresden court orchestra, with its legendary wind players. He befriended Pisendel, and sent music to him in Dresden on a regular basis. It is quite possible that many of Vivaldi's Concertos *con molti strumenti* were written expressly for the Dresden court, including the concerto we are performing this week.

RAMEAU SUITE FROM *LES BORÉADES*

Les Boréades was Rameau's last opera, composed in his eightieth year. Although rehearsals had begun as early as April 1763, no performance took place prior to Rameau's death in September of 1764, for no obvious reason. The work was not premiered on stage until over 200 years later, in 1982 (by John Eliot Gardiner at the Aix-en-Provence Festival). It is a remarkable opera — Rameau seems to have summoned all of his creative energy to create one final masterpiece, a work that is surprisingly modern, sensual, and spirited. Like other Rameau operas, it includes a wealth of instrumental music, written to accompany the dance, to cover scene changes, and to provide aural "images" of events and scenes on stage. The splendid overture to the opera introduces the selection of instrumental movements we have chosen to close our concerts this week.