

Tafelmusik

ELISA'S ITALIAN ADVENTURE

A Note from Elisa



My Italian Adventure was born out of a desire to take you by means of music on a journey to the land where I was born and have lived. My hometown is Brescia, and although much less famous than nearby Venice, it played an important role in the history of music. One cannot pinpoint the date and place that the violin reached its present shape, but the studio of the violin maker Giovanni Paolo Maggini and his contemporaries in Brescia certainly contributed to the development of string instruments and to achieving the highest level of craftsmanship. String instruments from the seventeenth century had a very warm voice, and the Brescian consort of strings apparently brought to mind the sound of madrigals by

Luca Marenzio, also from Brescia.

Fontana, Marini, and Vivaldi's father are also from this city. Brescianello, Steffani, and Locatelli were born in towns not far away (especially compared to Canadian distances!), and for Castello the only references we have are Venetian. Our short trip takes us therefore to towns within a 200-kilometre radius and spanning just over 100 years. Other than the celebrated Vivaldi, the composers we will encounter on this journey are less known to the general public, but they give us an idea of what people listened to in baroque Brescia and Venice. I hope you enjoy this Italian musical adventure!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elisa Citterio". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Elisa Citterio

Program Notes
by Christopher Verrette



Baroque music was born in Italy around the turn of the seventeenth century. The innovative new forms of opera, sonata, and concerto developed there were spread to the rest of Europe through both printed music and the travels of Italian musicians. Our program begins with music by three of the pioneering composers of the era.

FONTANA SONATA XIV

Little is known about the life and career of Giovanni Battista Fontana beyond what is written in the memorial preface to his sole opus of sonatas, published posthumously in his native Brescia, an important centre of violin making. He went on to work in Rome, Venice, and finally Padua, and was praised as “one of the most singular virtuosi the age has known.” Fontana's writing is very much akin to the vocal music of his generation and calls for the noble form of rhythmic flexibility singers called *sprezzatura*. In Sonata XIV, the two violinists rarely play at the same time, instead exchanging solos in dialogue almost like characters in an opera, then a burgeoning new art form. The dulcian (an early bassoon) joins later in a canzona-like section, playing a decorated version of the continuo line.

MARINI SINFONIA – ALLEMANNO

Biagio Marini is recognized today mostly for his innovations in solo violin playing, not only technical displays, but highly imaginative writing that explored the instrument more fully beyond the norms of dance and consort music. Also Brescian, Marini worked at the cathedral of San Marco in Venice under Claudio Monteverdi, then travelled

widely through Italy and Germany and as far north as Brussels. His Opus 22, published after returning to Italy, includes a number of short pieces for four-part strings. The *Sinfonia terzo tuono* is deliciously vocal, sounding much like a popular song, while the *Balletto quarto Allemanno* ventures into the realm of the silly: the first violin gets stuck repeating a three-note motive for most of the second half until a cadence is finally reached.

CASTELLO SONATA X

As with Fontana, the life of Dario Castello is not well documented. He is identified as the chief wind player at San Marco on the title page of his first book of sonatas. He calls his works *Sonate concertante in stil moderno*, making it quite clear that he is writing in a new style. He makes use of a wide variety of figures, with frequent, bold, and sometimes jarring changes of tempo and affect. Sonata X gives a distinct voice to the dulcian, an instrument Castello possibly played himself.

STEFANNI SUITE FROM NIOBE

Italian musicians were in high demand outside of their homeland, particularly at the Catholic courts of the Holy Roman Empire. Thus the talented choirboy Agostino Steffani was recruited by the Bavarian court, arriving in Munich on his thirteenth birthday. No expense was spared on his education. He was sent to Rome and Paris for further study, and employed back in Munich as organist and director of chamber music. Mostly appreciated for his vocal duets, he also wrote for the stage, although he did so clandestinely later in life because of the distinguished status he had attained as a cleric and diplomat at the Hanoverian court and elsewhere. *Niobe* was composed for carnival in Munich and is based on the story found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of a queen that angers the gods by boasting about her children, who are slaughtered as punishment and Niobe turned to stone.

LOCATELLI CONCERTO OP. 4, NO. 12



Pietro Locatelli was a native of Bergamo, but by age sixteen he had joined the vibrant musical community that served the many churches and influential families of Rome, under the guidance of Arcangelo Corelli. His earliest published music shows him to be an accomplished disciple of Corelli, but already exhibiting some interesting ideas of his own. Notably he added a second viola part to the orchestral texture. He travelled extensively as a soloist and became known for his acrobatics on the violin, the high fees and lavish gifts he received from patrons, and his extravagant clothing (with the implication that it was above his station).

It was customary for composers to do something special with the final piece in a published collection. For the last of his Opus 4 concerti grossi, Locatelli writes for four solo violins instead of the usual two. The soloists are at first heard one at a time, then mostly in pairs, but there are moments where all the violins make a glorious noise together. In the last movement there is a lot of playful banter in which the violins echo each other.

BRESCIANELLO SUITE IN G MINOR

Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello was another talent imported from Italy to Germany, where he was ultimately triumphant in what was evidently a fierce competition with the native German Reinhardt Keiser over the position of *Kapellmeister* at Stuttgart. The Suite in G Minor demonstrates that he became proficient in the so-called “mixed style” popular in Germany in the eighteenth century, that melded elements of both French and Italian. The *Overture* and most of the dances exhibit French traits, while the composer's Italian origin shines through most clearly in the *Siciliano*.

VIVALDI AUTUMN, FROM *THE FOUR SEASONS*

In *The Four Seasons*, Antonio Vivaldi uses his signature form, the solo violin concerto, to paint musical pictures of the seasons, supported by sonnets which are actually imbedded in the musical score. For **Autumn**, he chooses the key of F Major, strongly associated with hunting horns, which suits the last movement in particular, but is evident already in the opening solo of the first movement. The ensuing rambunctious solo passages are specifically designated *l'ubracio* (the drunk) in the score, as the harvest is celebrated perhaps a little too enthusiastically. Baroque composers often used long sustained notes and stable harmony to represent sleep or repose, but Vivaldi portrays the alcohol-induced slumber of revellers with unsettling harmonies that refuse to resolve comfortably, and a further restlessness is added by incessant arpeggiation from the continuo instruments under the muted strings. The finale vividly captures images of the hunt, complete with horns, barking dogs, gunshots, and even the final death wail of the cornered animal.

L'autunno

I. *Celebra il vilanel con balli e canti
Del felice raccolto il bel piacere
E del liquor di Bacco accesi tanti
Finiscono col sonno il lor godere.*

*Fà ch'ogn 'uno tralasci e balli e canti
L'aria che temperata dà piacere,
E la staggion ch'invita tanti e tanti
D'un dolcissimo sonno al bel godere.*

II. *I cacciator alla nov 'alba à caccia
Con corni, schioppi, e canni escono fuore
Fugge la belua, e seguono la traccia;*

III. *Già sbigottita, e lassa al gran rumore
De' schioppi e canni, ferita minaccia
Languida di fuggir, mà oppressa muore.*

Autumn

I. The peasants celebrate with song and dance
their joy in a fine harvest
and with generous draughts of Bacchus' cup
their celebrations end in sleep.

Song and dance are done;
the gentle, pleasant air
and the season invite one and all
to the delights of sweetest sleep.

II. At first light the huntsman sets out
with horns, guns, and dogs;
the wild beast flees, and they follow its trail.

III. Terrified and exhausted by the great clamour
of guns and dogs, wounded and afraid,
the beast tries to flee but is overcome and dies.

VIVALDI CONCERTO FOR 2 OBOES

The oboe was a relatively new instrument on the Venetian scene at Vivaldi's time. In 1704, it began to be taught at the Ospedale della Pieta, where Vivaldi taught violin, and he came to use it in many of his concertos. The double concerto in C Major makes some interesting departures from typical concerto form. Instead of the usual orchestral introduction, the oboes begin the piece without the strings, who come in only later with contrasting material. Also, the second and third movements begin with essentially the same music, only in the minor mode in the *Largo* and the major mode in the *Allegro*.