

THE TEMPESTUOUS VIOLIN

Program Notes

By Christopher Verrette

Italy in the first quarter of the seventeenth century was the crucible for a new approach toward writing music. The highly debated “new music” took its inspiration in part from impressions of what Ancient Greek theatre may have been like, and sought a more direct appeal to the listener’s emotions and a more fluid attitude toward form than the very rational and structured practices of the renaissance. The old ways were not entirely discarded, however, and remain the cornerstone of a proper education in counterpoint to this day. The first four composers we encounter in the program seem to have one foot in each century.

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The violin was a product of the renaissance and, having already incited many to dancing, was beginning to find its singing voice at the turn of the century. The instrument’s versatility made it a natural vehicle for composers in the new form called “sonata” and later the concerto. Interestingly enough, these same four composers, while making important contributions to the repertoire of the violin, distinguished themselves mostly on other instruments.

Kapsberger is best known for his virtuoso theorbo music, a clear embodiment of the new style, bold and experimental in form and technique. He calls himself a “noble German” on his title pages, and made his way to Rome, where he was a favourite among the musical establishment of the influential Barberini family and hosted “academies” of his own. The sinfonias for ensemble are more restrained in style, and explore different numbers and configurations of instruments without overt virtuosity, as if looking back at where he came from.



The interior of San Marco in Venice, with some of numerous galleries from which musicians performed, often in dialogue.

Giovanni Gabrieli followed in the footsteps of his uncle and mentor **Andrea Gabrieli** both by seeking tutelage with **Lassus** in Munich and then by becoming a career organist at San Marco in Venice. The music of the **Gabrielis** is virtually synonymous with that legendary acoustical space and is often scored for multiple choirs of instruments that played antiphonally across the room. Giovanni was first to indicate specific instruments for this music, including cornetto, trombone, and violin. The **Sonata for 3 violins** is his most intimate scoring. The violins exchange supple, vocal lines above a slow-moving bass, but the final cadence has all the fanfare of his larger works.

The Canzon Duodecimi Toni is more typical of the **Gabrieli** style: it is scored for two choirs of instruments that play mostly in alternation, occasionally overlapping or joining forces for a *tutti* effect. The second

choir cheekily makes its entrance in a different metre, bringing on a bit of rhythmic havoc, but order is soon restored. Here the two bass lines are full participants in the rhythms and figures around them, being at times the fastest moving parts.

Samuel Scheidt is regarded as the founder of the North German organ school that included such luminaries as **Dietrich Buxtehude** and **J. S. Bach**. **Symphonie 7 in D** appears in a collection of 70 “Symphonies and Concertos” published in 1644. These concise works, organized by key, appear to be intended to serve as introductions or interludes to other longer pieces, such as dance suites or songs in verses. The long, descending chromatic lines of this *symphonie* suggest it would have to be a sad song indeed.

Depictions of battle in music have a long history and inevitably involve many repeated notes at different speeds in imitation of trumpets and drums and general mayhem.

In the **Galliard Battaglia**, **Scheidt** cleverly combines the battle idiom with a dance, and thus with love and courtship. The usually playful repeated notes and cross rhythms of the galliard become potentially truly combative in a musical manifestation of the saying “All’s fair in love and war.”

Little is known of the life of **Dario Castello** other than he was a wind player who worked at San Marco sometime after Gabrieli. His sonatas were clearly popular, as they were reprinted years after his presumed death. He states unequivocally on the title pages that he is writing “*in stil moderno.*” This means, among other things, frequent changes of tempo and character which he often indicates with words like “*alegra*” and “*adagio*,” a new development in notation at that time. Nevertheless, vestiges of the older Venetian school are still to be found. **Sonata 15** begins rather like a madrigal, with the parts moving together in a speech-like rhythm. The piece mostly consists of four canzona-like sections, each starting in a different voice, with a contrasting middle section in a lilting triple metre.

SONATE CONCERTATE

In stil Moderno Per Sonar nel Organo
Onero Clauicembalo con di-
uerfi Instrumeti.

A 1. 2. 3. & 4. Voci.

DI D. DARIO CASTELLO

Musico Della Serenissima Signoria di Venetia
In S. Marco, & Capo di Compa-
gnia de Instrumeti.

LIBRO SECONDO

Nonamente Rillampato



IN VENETIA MDC XXXXIIII
Appresso Bartolomeo Magni.

Title page of Castello's 1629 publication of sonatas “*in stil moderno.*”

Sonata 16 begins oddly with an entire phrase played by the violin alone. The mostly cheerful piece is interrupted by an extended “*battaglia*” section, with many changes of dynamic, but returns to the opening material near the end.

Published in 1673, *La Cetra* by **Giovanni Legrenzi** falls right at the midpoint of the baroque era. He was a highly regarded composer in Venice at the time. In the one sonata for the unusual number of four violins, he demonstrates his mastery of writing with many motives. At the outset the violins each enter systematically in turn with the first one, then toss around three others more freely, then the pattern repeats in a different order. The contrasting middle movements venture to other keys, then the home key is found again in the dance-like finale.

Arcangelo Corelli was the dominant violinist and instrumental composer in Rome for decades, serving its many churches and wealthy families. He was revered for the refinement both of his playing and compositions, and also for his skill as an orchestral leader. While considered the leading exponent of the concerto grosso, his works in that form only appeared in print posthumously. The concertos are designed so that, while they can be played by a trio group alone (*concertino*), they realize their full potential with the addition of larger group of strings (*ripieno*) playing in dialogue to create large dynamic contrasts. Accounts of Corelli’s own performances show that the *ripieno* could even include wind instruments, as we are doing in the final concerto of the concert.

Matthew Locke was England’s first great composer for the theatres once they reopened after the Restoration. His music for a revival and reworking of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* is particularly significant for the Curtain Tune that begins the action of play. It vividly evokes the storm itself, with instructions to begin softly and very gradually swell the sound as the pace of the music accelerates until an outburst of fast notes marked,

unambiguously, “Violent.”

The remaining music is mostly from the “First and Second Music” that precede the actual play and are not related to the plot as such. The title “Lilk” does not appear elsewhere in music to my knowledge, but resembles the maritime hornpipe.

L’Estro Armonico, **Antonio Vivaldi’s** Opus 3, was his first great success and one of the most reprinted publications of the eighteenth century. The eighth concerto is among the most popular, partly due to a transcription for organ by Bach. The interplay of the parts is more important here than the large contrasts of Corelli. Particularly striking is the juxtaposition of a cantabile (singing) melody and virtuoso passagework in the last movement. ■



In the first half of the concert, Dominic Teresi plays **dulcian**, the ancestor of the **bassoon**. The dulcian had its origins in renaissance Italy, and by the seventeenth century was among the most widely heard instruments, often added to ensembles of string instruments. It adds both strength and clarity to the bass of the ensemble, especially useful in the resonant acoustics of baroque churches and cathedrals. In the second half of the concert, Dominic plays the more familiar bassoon, which gradually replaced the dulcian, and became part of both the bass and the wind section of the baroque orchestra.