



## Late Baroque German Masters

### • Program Notes

Following on the heels of their 17th-century predecessors, Bach, Handel, and Telemann developed a plentiful legacy of brilliantly composed works that have inspired centuries of listeners. Two concertos for three violins, an elegant sonata for viola da gamba and continuo, one of Handel's most beautiful Concerti Grossi, and an exquisite aria from Bach's "Easter Oratorio" transcribed for viola and strings will celebrate the great culmination of the Baroque era.

#### **Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)**

##### **Concerto for 3 Violins in F Major, TWV 53:F1**

The solo concerto was one of the most significant musical developments of the Baroque era. Certainly, Vivaldi is remembered for his gargantuan contribution to the genre, having composed about 350 solo concertos (230 for violin) and some 45 double concertos, half of which are for two violins. Although Telemann probably wrote more compositions—most recently numbered at over 3,000—he wrote fewer solo concertos than Vivaldi. Fifty or so are known, along with 15 double concertos, 7 triple concertos, and 4 using four or more solo instruments. Bach, too, was captivated by the idea of double and triple concertos, and extended his interest to a concerto for four harpsichords which is a more-or-less direct transcription of a concerto by Vivaldi for four violins. The question of equal versus unequal distribution of technical demands comes to mind quickly, as it would have been considered carefully by the composer. In Telemann's Concerto for 3 Violins in F Major, the calls for virtuosity are quite evenly shared among all three soloists. In fact, an impression of musical egalitarianism is one of the first things that one notices about this particular composition. Collaboration seems to be the theme, and it is always noticeable. Solo passages are never more than a few measures long, and the central movement brings the three soloists together in a most collaborative way. Moving further toward shared responsibilities (and shared riches), the final movement seems to be hardly a concerto at all, rather more like a grand sinfonia for all the participants. That final *Allegro* has a particularly palpable *joie de vivre* and melds the full ensemble together into an especially enthusiastic sense of unity.

#### **Dieterich Buxtehude (circa 1637-1707)**

##### **Sonata and Suite in B-flat Major, BuxWV 273**

Buxtehude was certainly Bach's greatest inspiration. It was in 1705 that Bach, then only 20 years old, traveled over 250 *on foot* to hear the famous North German composer perform. Buxtehude was nearly 50 years older at the time, and his music so greatly influenced Bach that we hear evidence of that impact even at the end of Bach's career. While Buxtehude is certainly not a late Baroque composer, we include his music on this program because of the profound effect that it had on Bach. The Sonata in B-flat Major begins with a 14-note theme played 32 times by the bass instruments (violone and harpsichord), while a solo violin and solo viola da gamba perform variations above the repeated bass line, all of this amounting to a kind of *chaconne*. A sequence of shorter sections brings the sonata portion to its close, but a suite of dances follows, perhaps following in suit to the opening *chaconne*, that includes an *Allemand*, a *Courant*, a *Saraband*, and a sprightly *Gigue*. Listen carefully to the second half of the *Gigue*: It begins with a 2-bar motif that Bach would later utilize in the final movement of his Fifth Brandenburg Concerto, certainly as an homage to the composer that he so greatly revered.

### **George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)**

#### **Concerto Grosso No. 6 in G Minor Op. 6 HWV 324**

The Concerto Grosso was one of the primary and most often employed musical formats during the Baroque era, much the same as the symphony format identified the Classical era. While there was a great variety among the concertos in terms of the number of sections, the tempos of those various movements, and the inclusion (or not) of dances or even a suite of dances, almost all concerti grossi featured a small contingent of soloists usually comprised of two violins, and one violoncello—called the “*concertino*” group—accompanied by harpsichord. Those players were given the spotlight due to the usually more demanding parts that were written for them, and those calls upon their virtuosity were usually very evenly distributed. In the case of the standard group of soloists, the two violinists would often play together in duet. By contrast, a larger group of instrumentalists would be heard at the beginnings, ends, and either intermittently or almost continuously throughout each movement and would fill out the sound when they joined in. The Italian word for that larger contingent is *ripieno*, which in modern usage means “stuffing” or “filling” and is often used in descriptions of foods, such as the *ripieno alla crema* that one finds inside a delicious pastry. Only occasionally would the ripienists remain silent for an entire movement. The contrast of soloists vs. ripienists provided both contrasts of sonority and emphasis on the solo group. In terms of function, *concerti grossi* could be played before or after larger works, such as an opera or oratorio, or even as an *entr’acte* or *intermezzo* between the acts. Handel is among the group of composers who most famously utilized the concerto grosso format. Some of the others were Corelli, Scarlatti, and Geminiani, and if you notice a predominance of Italian names, that is because the format is clearly of Italian origin. Handel became familiar with it during his first sojourn in Italy when he was 21–24 years old, and despite his non-Italian (German) nationality, or perhaps because of his German-style approach to harmony and melody, Handel brought a richness of color to his *concerti grossi* that embellished the more uniform sound of the Italian models. The work performed on this program is one of Handel’s most imaginative examples of the genre. The contrasts between movements are quite pronounced, and the variety of sonorities is especially satisfying. A brooding opening movement followed by a fugue-like section (with an interestingly chromatic descending “subject”) is followed by an exquisite central movement in the warm key of E-flat major. Given the title of “*Musette*”—which refers to a bagpipe-like instrument that had a much more elegant tone than its rustic predecessors and was quite fashionable in the French courts—the middle movement is characterized at the start by a sustained “pedal tone” in the bass over which the melody begins its lovely wanderings. But its middle section, animated and having a tone of contrast and briskness, and in conjunction with the outer and more serene sections, reminds some of the great aria from *Messiah*, “He was despised,” which shares the same key of E-flat, the same structure, the same contrast of tempi, and the same breadth of scale. To close, Handel composed a pair of *Allegro* movements, the second of which is an elegant minuet.

### **Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**

#### **“Aria” from the “Easter Oratorio” BWV 249**

Throughout the last five centuries, the musical styles applied by composers to sacred works has sometimes looked backward and sometimes looked forward. For example, in the 17th century, composers would frequently adopt older styles for their sacred works as a way to impose a kind of conservatism to their settings of masses. But in the 18th century, composers—including Bach—would frequently apply newer and more “operatic” styles to sacred settings. This opened up a cornucopia of options that could be utilized, and in the case of Bach’s cantatas, the operatic format of the da capo aria offered a richness of possibilities. Accompanimental textures became virtually unlimited, from the

economy of trio sonata style (for example, one voice with an added obligato instrument along with basso continuo) to lushly dense orchestral scorings for any number of instruments. In Bach's "Easter Oratorio" (*Kommt, eilet und laufet*, or "Come, hasten and run"), about halfway through, Peter finds the now cast-aside shroud at the tomb and sings an aria about his previous fear of death being assuaged by the idea that the shroud will comfort him at the moment of his own passion, going on to reflect on how the cloth will tenderly wipe away the tears from his cheeks when he falls into eternal slumber. The original orchestration for tenor accompanied by two recorders, two muted violins playing in octaves, and bass creates a mood of tranquility and somnolence. Our performance of this aria passes the recorder parts to two additional muted violins and transcribes the sung text to solo viola.

### **Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**

#### **Concerto for 3 Violins in D Major, BWV 1064r**

Many of Bach's concertos for solo violin, though now lost in their original forms, were transcribed or "recycled" as harpsichord concertos when Bach would assume the directorship of Leipzig's Collegium Musicum in 1729. The Collegium Musicum, a semi-professional musical performance society that Telemann had founded in 1702, was one of two such societies in Leipzig: the other had been founded in 1708 and was directed during Bach's time in Leipzig by J.G. Görner, the University Church music director and Thomaskirche organist with whom Bach was not on the best of terms. Bach's Collegium Musicum was supported by university students and some professional musicians, almost certainly including his older sons. This ensemble could be adapted to the performance of anything secular from chamber music to small orchestral/choral works, and was a fixture of the lively middle-class musical life in Leipzig. Meetings of the ensemble were held on Friday evenings at Gottfried Zimmermann's coffee house (or sometimes *al fresco* in summer). In addition to these regular concerts, which were open to the public, the Collegium also performed from time to time for royal or academic occasions. We know that Bach composed several pieces for such events, but unfortunately there is no known record of the music played at the Collegium's ordinary concerts. Nevertheless, we believe that Bach arranged his many harpsichord concertos for these evenings from pre-existing concertos for other solo instruments, most often violins. We believe further that, sometime around 1735, Bach and his sons performed a concerto for three harpsichords in C major (BWV 1064) at Zimmermann's Coffee House. This concerto, like so many others that were performed in Leipzig around that time, was probably the result of another successful transcription by Bach of a pre-existing work for violins. Accordingly, the lost and likely original concerto has been reconstructed, or reverse-engineered, into the form we present tonight. Transposed to D major, a more likely and more idiomatic key for a triple violin concerto, the work opens with a clearly intelligible ritornello. The accompanying orchestral musicians play nearly all the time (in all three movements), and "teamwork" seems to be the subtext. The soloists enter always in order, either first-second-third, or third-second-first. The central movement presents a fuller spectrum of sound than the first, especially when the ripienists occasionally play in the lower parts of their instruments' ranges. The third movement gives the chance for all the soloists, in succession from third to second to first, to demonstrate their prowess, in a commendably polite contest. Only the first violinist is given the opportunity to play in a more or less improvisational style in a pseudo-cadenza that brings us to the final ritornello and the concerto's close.