



## The Premier Century of the Baroque

### Program Notes

Even though music from the Baroque era is often characterized by the compositions of Bach, Corelli, Handel, Telemann, Rameau, Scarlatti, and Vivaldi, those diademed celebrities crafted their styles upon an extremely rich and varied history of earlier Baroque composers who defined regional styles, sometimes through their own originality and sometimes through their finesse in coalescing diverse characteristics into new hybrid approaches that would define the final decades of Baroque music. It was during the first century of the Baroque — between 1600 and 1700 — that the ingredients were produced that would fill the pantry from which the most famous and emblematic late Baroque composers would draw their flavors. This concert program samples those styles and flavors as we take a journey from Italy to Austria, Germany, France, and England, curating souvenirs from each to experience the music that inspired the Baroque masters of the next century.

#### • MUSIC FROM ITALY •

**Giovanni Battista Buonamente (circa 1595–1642)**

*Sonata seconda a tre violini* from *Sonate, et canzoni a due, tre, quattro, cinque, et a sei voci, libro sesto* (1636)

**Marco Uccellini (circa 1603–1680)**

*Sinfonia Nona à tre violini* from *Sinfonici concerti brevi e facili, Opus 9* (1667)

**Biagio Marini (1594–1663)**

*Sonata in Ecco con tre violini* from *Opus 8*

A captivating, imaginative, and evocative style of compositions for violin (or multiple violins) and continuo, developed at the beginning of the seventeenth century in Italy, brings to the foreground the topic of florid passagework in vocal and instrumental compositions. For centuries, voices and instruments passed between themselves various compositional and expressive traits, almost always reflecting the evolution of increasing virtuosity. By 1600, the capabilities of instruments and their performers' abilities to incorporate elaborate ornamentation had equaled if not superseded the technical prowess of vocalists. In fact, the first decades of the Baroque era are essentially defined by the *fioritura*, or florid embellishment that was either notated by composers or improvised in performance. But the truly essential characteristic of that floridity is that it was highly expressive of a particular mood or affect, and not intended to be heard as showy or gymnastic.

Giovanni Battista Buonamente began his professional career in service to the House of Gonzaga in Mantua, followed by serving the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II in Vienna. He performed at the coronation of Ferdinand III in Prague in 1627, before relocating to Parma where he was the violinist at the Madonna della Steccata church. Then moving on to Assisi in 1633, he served as *maestro di cappella*. The *Sonata seconda a tre violini* is hauntingly beautiful and alternates between a sweet conversation of sorts among the violins that gives way to energetic passages. Dance-like interpolations, almost joyful in nature, eventually return to the opening ascending and descending melodic exchange before another lively section concludes with just one note in the last bar, played only by continuo.

Marco Uccellini, like Buonamente, was also a violinist as well as a composer. It is likely that he studied under Buonamente in Assisi at the Basilica of Saint Francis. Following in his teacher's footsteps, he enjoyed a series of appointments, first in Modena where he was well rewarded for his talents, receiving almost eight times the salary of other violinists at the Este court. And it was through the support of the Este family that he found his subsequent position in Parma, where he composed opera and ballet, none of which has survived. Uccellini's *Sinfonia Nona a tre violini*, like his other sonatas for violin(s) and continuo, represents the style that would become an idiomatic standard of the early Italian Baroque. This particular sonata is unusually highly structured. In fact, it is in the "binary" form of A-A-B-B wherein the first half is repeated in its entirety, before the second half follows suit, and each of those halves are themselves composed in two contrasting sections.

Biagio Marini was known as a virtuoso violinist. Born in Brescia, his travels took him to Brussels, Düsseldorf, Venice, Padua, Parma, Ferrara, Milan, Bergamo, then back to his home town of Brescia. Not only a busy traveler, his personal life was busy, too: He married three times and fathered at least five children. His compositions, especially for violin, are innovative, incorporating several “special effects” including double and triple stops, and the technique of retuning the violin’s strings (known as *scordatura*) to create greater sonority from the instrument. In the *Sonata in Ecco con tre violini*, the primary violinist appears to be performing a complex solo sonata until, quite surprisingly, two violins begin to echo the ends of some phrases. Marini’s dramatic intention is described quite literally in the surviving score which indicates for the second violinist (the first echo), “*Chi sona questa parte non deve esser visto*” (“Whoever plays this part must not be seen”), and even more emphatically for the third violinist (the second echo), “*Quello che suona non deve esser visto*” (“What is heard is not to be seen”).

## • MUSIC FROM AUSTRIA AND GERMANY •

**Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (circa 1623–1680)**

**Sonata IX S 43 from *Duodena selectarum sonatarum* (1659)**

During Johann Schmelzer’s tenure at the Habsburgs’ court, music (*Hofmusik*) was extremely important as it served as both a symbol and instrument of the dynasty’s magnificence and power, just as Jean-Baptiste Lully’s music was for the rival court of Louis XIV. Schmelzer’s first published works, titled *Duodena selectarum sonatarum*, include the Sonata on this program. Like seventeenth-century violin works by Italian composers — which had tremendous influence on his composing style — this sonata is divided into several sections that are inter-connected. There are no explicit tempo indications, but, very much in the *Stylus Phantasticus* style of the time, performers had freedom to express the music as if it were being improvised. Unlike compositions by his Italian contemporaries, rather than having multiple treble instruments against a bass, this sonata gives the second part to the viola da gamba, making a somewhat denser texture, and one that was favored by his Northern German colleagues.

**Johann Pachelbel (1653–1706)**

**Canon & Gigue in D Major P. 27 (circa 1680)**

Johann Pachelbel, (1653-1706), one of the most eminent German organist-composers of the generation before J. S. Bach, held important positions in Vienna, in several German cities, and in his native Nüremberg. He helped establish in Roman Catholic south Germany both the virtuosic keyboard style of Austria and the Protestant chorale and chorale-based forms of north Germany. His works include suites, chorale variations, and chorale cantatas. Pachelbel is also one of the most noted German composers for the organ. His works exhibit the dramatic, aggressive style of the Baroque era, albeit in a formal, almost disciplined manner. However, as exemplified in his six organ arias titled *Hexachordum Apollinis*, the approach is improvisatory in nature, with sharp contrasts between irregular and free rhythm. Yet these works are well ordered and designed to focus on the virtuosity of the player. In his preface to the works, Pachelbel wrote, “And many believe that music originates from the angels who sing to the honor of the Highest with their threefold ‘Holy!’. Also that the heavenly bodies attend with their wondrous movements, to exhort a beautiful Harmony or Euphony of sounds, of the kind that the worldly-wise Pythagoras and Plato attest to have heard.” Well-known as a teacher, his pupils included Johann Christoph Bach, who passed the teachings along to his younger brother Johann Sebastian. Pachelbel’s influence reached even further: He had a son, Carl Theodor, who became an important musical personality in the early history of the American colonies.

The well-known Canon (and Gigue) in D Major has become one of the most popular of all Baroque works. It has received quite possibly as much radio air-time as any other composition from the Baroque period. And its rise in popularity was due to the arrangement recorded by Jean-François Paillard in 1968. As Bach did in his transcription of Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater*, Maestro Paillard added a viola part not found in the original. Also, on occasion, the violins (many more than Pachelbel had intended) engaged for each part double the original notes at an octave above. Certainly it was the romantic treatment of Paillard’s arrangement that initially captured the ears and hearts of millions of listeners, but the release of the recording would soon be followed by the Early Music revival that led to thousands of newly produced and newly conceived performances of Baroque music, rendered — according to the best intentions of their performers — as it was conceived: in the case at hand, a brilliant and sublime tour-de-force for three solo violins, played above a constant but very harmonically satisfying bass line. The Canon was later paired with a sprightly Gigue.

**Philipp Heinrich Erlebach (1657–1714)**

**Sonata Terza from VI Sonate à Violino e Viola da Gamba col suo Basso continuo (1694)**

*Adagio—Allegro—Lento—Allemande—Courante—Sarabande—Ciaconne—Final*

Moving north from Nüremberg to the outskirts of Thuringia — the area of Bach's lineage — we enter a musical culture in which the Italian developments in instrumental writing found an enthusiastic audience. In some German courts, the new Italianate virtuosity mingled with other national influences to produce interesting hybrid results. One of the composers who were inspired by the possibilities of these various cultures was Philipp Heinrich Erlebach. He spent most of his career as Kapellmeister to the small court of Rudolstadt, which under his direction became a center of musical culture. Alas, a fire in the court library destroyed most of his work after his death. Of his many instrumental works — at least 120 are recorded — only six trio sonatas, six orchestral suites, and a march survive. The works we have are wonderfully vivid. His trio sonatas use the characteristically Northern German instrumentation of violin, viola da gamba, and continuo, and create a wonderful interplay of Italianate operatic styles, French dance movements, and German *Stylus Phantasticus* extravagance.

• MUSIC FROM FRANCE •

**Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–1687)**

***Trios pour le coucher du Roi***

*Symphonie—Sarabande—Menuet—La jeune Iris—Chaconne*

As Italians proliferated their instrumental sonata genre, French composers held the Dance Suite as their preferred multi-movement form. Marin Marais was the first to publish dance suites in trio form. These movements from the *Trios pour le coucher du Roi* ("Trios for the King's Bedtime") by Jean-Baptiste Lully, known primarily as a composer of Opera-Ballets, are found only in manuscript form. The collection, containing nearly 50 *symphonie* and dance movements, once thought to be solely by Lully, has now been re-examined and is found to contain trios by Marais as well. Chamber music suites became a very popular foil to the Italianate sonata, and both were produced throughout all of Europe throughout the entire Baroque.

• MUSIC FROM ENGLAND •

**Henry Purcell (1659–1695)**

**Sonata No. 9 in F Major, Z. 810 "The Golden Sonata" from Ten Sonatas in 10 Sonatas in Four Parts (1697 post.)**

*Allegro—Adagio—Allegro—Grave—Allegro*

There are two collections of instrumental sonatas by Henry Purcell. Like all of his purely instrumental works, it is very difficult to determine when they were actually composed. In all likelihood, they were produced during a short period of time prior to 1680. The *Sonatas in Four Parts* seem to have been written over a long period of time and were assembled for publication by his wife, after his death in 1695. These sonatas consist of four or more short, linked sections. Some of them simply alternate between slow and fast, while others include dances and contrapuntal canzonas. This particular sonata became well known in the nineteenth century as a violin solo with piano accompaniment. It is in this form that it acquired the sobriquet, "The Golden Sonata."

**John Blow (1649–1708)**

**Chaconne a 4, in G Major (circa 1680s)**

John Blow's memorial in Westminster Abbey states that he was "Master to the famous Mr. H. Purcell." We know little more information about their student-teacher relationship, but what is clear is that they were close colleagues and friends until Purcell's untimely death. Blow's compositional output is huge, consisting primarily of music for voices: anthems, service music, odes, songs, and the earliest fully sung English opera (*Venus and Adonis*—the model for Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*). He seems to have written very few purely instrumental works. His Chaconne in G major is composed over a repeating chord sequence (rather than an *ostinato*, or repeating bass line). Blow's formidable understanding of counterpoint is very evident even as this work proceeds with ever-increasing activity and figuration. Just as the variations reach their zenith, the activity recedes, giving way to an expansive homophonic conclusion.