



Program II

Sol Joseph Recital Hall • San Francisco Conservatory of Music
7:30 p.m.

A few of the most engaging formats in music, especially prominent during the Baroque era, are the related but slightly different chaconne, passacaglia, and ground bass. They all involve a repeated bass line or a repeated harmonic progression (chord sequence), serving as a foundation for variations and melodic development. In a way, these types of compositions remind us of theme and variations. For example, Mozart's Twelve Variations on "*Ah vous dirai-je, Maman*," a French folk song associated with the nursery rhyme "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," engage the listener to see what Mozart's genius would come up with next! Similarly, Baroque composers employed the formats of chaconne, passacaglia, and ground bass to demonstrate their proficiency, imagination, and ingenuity.

The differences between the three are somewhat subtle. In a ground, the bass line typically remains constant, while melodies and harmonies above it change, allowing for creative variations. A famous example is Pachelbel's Canon in D, where the bass line repeats some 28 times while the melodies above it evolve. Contrastingly, a chaconne is characterized by a series of variations over a repeated *harmonic* progression, often in triple meter. One of the most famous chaconnes, from Bach's Partita in D minor for solo violin, is on tonight's program. A passacaglia can be thought of as a hybrid, usually presenting stately music over a repeated bass line along with a strong sense of structure and form. Tomorrow night's program features a stunning example of this in Muffat's Passacaglia at the end of the fifth sonata from his collection called *Armonico Tributo* ("Tribute to Harmony").

Opening this program is the **Ground in D Minor** by Nicola Matteis, born in Italy (probably Naples), and later moved to England, where he gained recognition as a violinist and composer, performing at the court of King Charles II. The bass line, over which variations for three violins are heard, is 10 bars long (although we are treated to the first four bars alone as a kind of introduction and again at the end to wrap up the piece). Occasionally, it is the bass line itself that is varied, or rather ornamented; however, when this happens, Matteis tends to reduce the prominence of the upper strings, perhaps to shift the spotlight to the bass (continuo) players.

Telemann's "Paris Quartets," treasured among Baroque instrumentalists, are two sets of six chamber compositions for flute, violin, viola da gamba (or cello), and continuo. The composer had been invited to Paris by a quartet of prominent musicians. For that occasion, he wrote the first set of six quartets, planning to present them to his French colleagues. But his travel plans were thwarted, and it wasn't until eight years later, by which time he had composed a second set, that he arrived in France. Both collections had been published by the Parisian firm, Le Clerq, and were very popular and successful. Within a decade, two additional sets were published by Le Clerq; however, the fourth set was likely not authorized by Telemann but instead created by the publisher to generate additional sales. In this case, those six quartets are probably arrangements of earlier works. The **Sonata II in F Major** has abundant charm and grace. All four movements

have a very "whistleable" quality and are a delight. No wonder these pieces met with such great commercial success!

Geminiani's **Sonata in F Major** is a late work from the composer who spent many years in England and Paris and enjoyed a reputation as being on an equal plane with Handel and Corelli. Reportedly, he was called "*Il furibondo*," the "madman," by the composer Tartini because of Geminiani's expressive rhythms and commanding musical stature. This sonata was composed in 1746, by which time the cello had been fully elevated to its status as a noble participant in chamber music and capable of very rich sonorities, which Geminiani certainly employed in this showcase for the cellist.

Vivaldi's **Trio Sonata in G Major** has found its place on musicians' music stands through a very circuitous pathway, and it did so only recently, becoming the latest sonata to be added to the list of works by the composer. It seems that the composer Giuseppe Torelli brought a copy of the sonata with him when he visited the Bavarian city of Ansbach. From there, it somehow found its way into the hands of an extremely talented young violinist named Johann Georg Pisendel, and it is in Pisendel's hand that the manuscript was discovered in Dresden. It is an unusual gem, seeming quite improvisatory at the outset of both the first and third movements. Short segments follow, always giving ample opportunity for bravura displays from both the violinist and cellist.

The second work on a ground bass appears after the intermission. Henry Purcell borrowed the bass line from an aria composed by Jean-Baptiste Lully, "*Socca pur tutti tuoi strali*" ("Shoot all your arrows"). The aria had become well known in England, and Purcell had a strong interest in the format of a ground bass, employing the form at the key moment of "Dido's Lament" in *Dido & Aeneas*. The somber quality of Purcell's **Sonata in G Minor** is consistent with ground basses that begin with descending pitches accompanied by dark, chromatic harmonies.

The Purcell sonata serves as an "*overture entrée*" for Bach's **Partita in D Minor**, a monumental work in the violin repertoire, celebrated for its intricate structure, emotional depth, and technical challenges. Bach wrote six works for unaccompanied violin, some titled sonatas and others partitas, the distinction being whether the individual movements are named with tempo indications (e.g., *Grave*, *Fuga*, *Andante*, *Allegro*) or after dances (e.g., *Allemanda*, *Courante*, *Sarabanda*). The final movement in the D Minor Partita, a chaconne (spelled by Bach in the Italian form, "*ciaccona*"), stands out as a masterpiece that inspires and challenges violinists worldwide, regarded as one of the greatest works for solo violin ever composed. It is as long as the preceding five movements and takes both the violinist and the listener on an immense journey. Astonishing, both here and in Bach's cello suites, is the way that multiple parts, top to bottom, are touched upon or merely implied, creating a full spread of sonority. Even when the musical line shifts from a lower to an upper part, the listener's imagination "completes" the missing notes due to our innate sense of hearing the full harmony in our minds.

THURSDAY • AUGUST 7 2025