

Program Notes

Over the course of the 18th century, conversational skill—the nature, purpose, function and management of everyday discourse—became a subject of extraordinary interest and attention. The Art of Conversation, described by the novelist Henry Fielding as “the grand business of our lives,” became the subject of etiquette manuals, rhetorics and logic books, sermons and religious tracts, and was cultivated among the elite salons. Musicians, too, in their compositions and writings about music, became eager to produce works that would incorporate into their art the fashionable taste for skillful repartee.

Our conversational forms for today are many, from solo suite to concerto, but our primary medium is that of the trio sonata. One of the most important and popular forms of instrumental music throughout the baroque period, the trio sonata became a key repository for musical ideas and innovations, playing no small role in defining the instrumental language of the 17th and 18th centuries. The reasons behind the trio sonata's popularity are many, not least of which include the enticing, virtuosic violin playing coming out of Italy. The trio sonatas op. 1- 4 by the violinist and violin teacher **Arcangelo Corelli** are considered to be the single, most influential body of works upon the development of the form. First published between 1681 and 1694, by 1700 these works were available in some thirty-five separate editions. Corelli's home of Rome had become a kind of mecca for instrumentalists (due perhaps in part to a papal ban on public performances of opera from 1674-1710), and Corelli became the first composer to achieve fame and influence solely through the composition of purely instrumental works. Patrons of the arts from great Roman aristocratic families would hold *conversazioni*, where guests would gather for informal conversation, games, and to hear new music.

It is not that Corelli invented the trio sonata, but rather that he provided the perfect synthesis of Italian styles in a perfectly balanced form. His idiomatic writing for the violin in fast movements fits perfectly into the hand and positively springs out of the bow—a sheer pleasure to play. At the same time, his luxurious slow movements are superbly crafted in their unadorned simplicity, but also invite the violinists to improvise in their dialogues back and forth, as was the practice of the day.

The virtuosity of the harpsichordist, organist, composer **Louis Marchand** drew admiring crowds eager to catch his many performances from church to church in Paris. His reputedly colorful and unpredictable behavior, combined with his extraordinary skill, must have made for wonderfully inventive and exciting occasions. (The reality of his actions—his political intrigues, abuse of his wife, and dissipation—are rather less admirable.) Very little of his music was published or even written down perhaps due to his generally impatient nature. As a result, much of his compositional output and virtuosity has been lost to us. The few surviving keyboard works are all early, notably among them the two books of *Pièces de Clavecin*. The *Prelude* of the Suite in D minor is written in the unmeasured French tradition, without rhythmic or metrical indications and with much left to the expressive inclination of the performer. The succeeding set of dances, following the formal order first established and standardized in France, conclude with an especially rich and virtuosic chaconne.

Many European composers would fall under the intoxicating spell of the Italians, looking at once for ways to incorporate the Italianate musical style, while at the same time wishing to differentiate it clearly from their own. **François Couperin**, not least among them, set about in the final work of his *Les Goûts réunis* to unite (as the title indicates) the French and Italian tastes in a kind of musical perfection or Apotheosis. The programmatic work in 7 movements tells the story of Corelli's journey, beginning at the gates of Parnassus (home to the Muses) and then, once admitted, Corelli's joy at the wonders he finds within. Couperin creates a wonderful variety of textures and expressions as Corelli

drinks at the fountain of Hippocrene, becomes exhilarated from imbibing its poetic inspiration, and then ultimately is overwhelmed by sleep. Throughout, Couperin pays masterful tribute to both Corelli's broad and serious slow movements and joyful idiomatic writing, yet without ever surrendering his own uniquely French voice.

Antonio Caldara's cello concerto in D minor is not only a charming work that revels in the capabilities of the newly emergent solo instrument, but is also conveniently scored essentially for a trio sonata-sized ensemble. Caldara, a contemporary of Vivaldi's and also Venetian-born, was one of the most prolific composers of his generation, excelling in the production of vocal forms—operas, oratorios, and cantatas. His instrumental works, by comparison, are few and curiously among his earliest and his last. His only trio sonatas, op. 1 and 2, are exceptional works clearly inspired by Corelli, which date from the 1690s during his years as a freelance cellist and composer in Venice. Only in the penultimate year of his life (in Vienna where he had held the position of vice Kapellmeister of the imperial court) did he turn to his own instrument, producing 16 cello sonatas and very likely the D minor concerto. The concerto is a grand conversation between solo and accompanying voices, at times oppositional and independent, at times in support and agreement. Sonorous arpeggiated passages and rapid string crossings dominate the concerto's outer allegro movements while the siciliano-styled *Adagio* conveys the lyricism and vocality of both the cello and Caldara's compositional style. Caldara's *44 Lezioni*, which count among the very first methods for the cello, probably also date from this same period. Here the dialogue is the important one that takes place between teacher and student. The first of these lessons, set in the key of D minor, makes a delightful prelude (and warm-up in the key) for the *Concerto per Camera a Violoncello solo*.

C.P.E. Bach's *Sanguineus und Melancholicus* attempts to portray a conversation between two persons, one cheerful and the other (rather stubbornly) melancholic. Bach's purpose in writing the trio sonata, as he claims in his preface to the work, is “to express by means of instruments what is otherwise much more easily done with voice and words.” The detail with which each gesture and group of notes is described in the first two movements is astonishing. These are indicated by a letter in the music a, b, c, etc. with the text provided in the preface. Depicting the confrontational (and at times humorous) nature of their characters and dialogue, meter, key, and tempo changes abound. Melancholicus begins in C minor in a cut time Allegretto, with a muted voice (literally with a mute on the bridge of the violin) ending on the dominant with a question to Sanguineus. Sanguineus, unmuted, begins his reply on the cheerful relative major in a Presto 3/8. The two continue back and forth between these meters at varying intervals, ultimately segueing into an Adagio in which both participate, and over the course of which Melancholicus allows himself to be slowly persuaded by Sanguineus. The slow movement ends with the violins moving in descending triplets in thirds, expressing their “total unanimity.” Bach inserts no text into the final *Allegro*, only remarks in the preface as to Sanguineus' respectful acceptance of Melancholicus' subdued submission and the ultimate cementing of their friendship.

The renowned music historian Charles Burney complains (1789) that despite Bach's powers of invention, melody, and modulation, his attempt to depict two disputants of different principals remains “as obscure and unintelligible as the warbling of larks and linnets.” Bach does provide a detailed text, which he claims is only for those (perhaps like Burney?) “who have inadequate insight into the musical expression.” We urge you the audience to decide for yourselves if Bach's efforts (and ours) effectively convey such a dialogue.

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