

THE ITALIANS IN VIENNA

Antonio Cesti (1623 - 1669):

Ballet Suite from the Opera, *Il pomo d'oro*, Act V, Finale (1668)

- I. Gran ballo
- II. Aria
- III. Branle di Morsetti
- IV. Sarabande per le terra
- V. Balletto per il mare
- VI. Trezzo
- VII. Aria viennese
- VIII. Gigue

Pietro Marc'Antonio Cesti was born in Arezzo, in the region of Tuscany, where he began musical studies with local composers as a child. At the age of fourteen, he joined the Order of Friars Minor (or Franciscans), a Roman Catholic group founded by Francis of Assisi. His music studies continued in Rome, then on to Venice, where his first known opera, *Oronthea*, was produced in 1649.

Three years later, in 1652, he became a member of the court at Innsbruck of Ferdinand Charles, Archduke of Austria. That was followed by a stint as *maestro di cappella* in Florence, a position in the papal chapel in 1660, and *Vice-Kapellmeister* in Vienna.

Cesti is most widely known as an opera composer, though he was also an admired tenor and organist in his lifetime. His opera, *Il pomo d'oro* (*The Golden Apple*), from which our program's opening ballet dances are drawn, was written for the wedding in Vienna of Emperor Leopold I in 1666 but given full theatrical production two years later, including a large orchestra, multiple choruses, and mechanical devices which enhanced stage settings of everything from violent storms and naval battles, to gods descending from the heavens (*deus ex machina*)!

Giovanni Valentini (ca. 1582 - 1649):

Sonata à4 in G Minor

Here is an example of a “mysterious” composer due to little known of his life. He is neither the only Baroque composer with the last name of Valentini nor the only composer with the full name of Giovanni Valentini known since. He composed far more works than were published in his day, but many have been identified around Europe in later generations.

Our featured Valentini is thought to have been born in Venice. He was a poet and violinist as well as a composer of sacred choral works and a prominent court organist, serving in the Polish court chapel

of Sigismund III Vasa, and later in Vienna as *Kapellmeister* for the Hapsburg court under Holy Roman Emperors Ferdinand II and III.

Experiencing and performing early music is traveling through time. But with his chromaticism, harmonic progressions and quirky metric patterns, Valentini was a *future* time traveler. As Dr. Silke Leopold put it so well in her article, *Giovanni Valentini: Kapellmeister am Wiener Kaiserhof*, “What an unexpected modernity of the musical conceptions in the large form as well as in the compositional detail. In the great musical laboratory that represents the 17th century for the transition from modality to harmonic tonality, from linear to cyclical forms, from text-generated to purely musical invented motifs, Valentini is one of the masterminds.”

Francesco Rognoni [of] **Taeggio** (ca. 1570 - ca. 1626):

Variations on *Vestiva i colli*... from *Il Desiderio*, by Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

Francesco Rognoni grew up in a family of string players, making music in Milan with his brother, Giovanni Domenico Rognoni, and their father, Riccardo Rognoni. The noble title of *Taeggio* was conferred on their family name by King Sigismund III of Poland (in whose court another composer of this evening’s program, Tarquinio Merula, served in Warsaw).

Francesco followed his father’s footsteps in bowed-string pedagogy. While both published early violin methods, Francesco centered on technique and ornamentation shared by violin and voice. Both could be pleasantly sneaky in giving new Latin titles to gracefully ornamented versions of some secular material.

Speaking of titles, Francesco Rognoni was designated Papal Knight and hereditary Count Palatine late in his career. The Rognoni Variations in this evening’s program are of the opening tune of Palestrina’s madrigal, *Vestiva i colli e le campagne intorno* (*He dressed the hills and the surrounding countryside*). You will first hear the harpsichord in the hills, joined in the dressing by the cello, then the recorder flowing through the countryside.

Giovanni Bononcini (1670 - 1747):

Sonata Prima in A Minor for Cello & Continuo

I. Andante

II. Allegro

III. Menuet I & II *Grazioso*

Here is another string-playing family with Dad, Giovanni Maria Bononcini, leading the way with trio sonatas considered important precursors of Arcangelo Corelli’s. Unfortunately, Giovanni and his two younger brothers were orphaned when he was eight years old. Nevertheless, he and his brother Antonio would later play in the same court orchestra in Vienna, serving Emperor Leopold I. After

that, Giovanni Bononcini became *Kapellmeister* to the future Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI, and from there, became the favored stage composer of Leopold I's heir and successor, Joseph I, for whom he produced five operas.

After the death of Joseph I, Bononcini left Vienna for Rome. Eight years after that, he was invited to London by the Earl of Burlington to become a composer for the Royal Academy of Music under the direction of George Frideric Handel. Whose operas had more audience popularity: Handel's, or Bononcini's? The latter ... for a while anyway. Their rivalry was referred to in an epigram from poet John Byrom, ending with two names apparently 150 years older than characters conceived by Lewis Carroll:

*Some say, compar'd to Bononcini
That Mynbeer Handel's but a Ninny
Others aver, that he to Handel
Is scarcely fit to hold a Candle
Strange all this Difference should be
'Twixt Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee!*

Francesco Antonio Bonporti (1672 - 1749):

Aria Cromatica, e Varieta, No. 1 in A Minor (1720)

Bonporti was an Italian priest, composer and violinist. He had training in Innsbruck, Austria, then studied theology in Rome, where he also happened to study composition with Arcangelo Corelli! Upon being ordained, he returned in 1694 to his hometown of Trento, Italy, where he held a minor position at the cathedral there for 46 years.

Throughout his life, Bonporti sought to obtain a higher rank within the church as well as additional employment through dedications of composed pieces to eminent individuals, but he saw no leaps or bounds in ecclesiastical designations or musical patronage. Northern Italy was dominated by Austrian and German-speaking priests, preventing Italians – no matter how talented or high-born – from advancement. In 1740, he retired to Padua, sharing an apartment with a fellow priest, and passed in 1749, never benefitting from the popularity of his chamber music compositions, which became widely known.

Four of his *Invenzioni*, Op. 10, were mistakenly included in the *Bachgesellschaft* edition of the works of J.S. Bach, and one was apparently published by the English composer Henry Eccles as his own!

Tarquinio Merula (1595 - 1665):

Ciaccona in C Major, Op. 12, No. 20 (0000)

While Tarquinio Merula was probably not a fellow whom you would have enjoyed working with (or being a student of), Baroque music *does* appreciate him! One of the most versatile and progressive Italian composers of his generation, Merula enriched sacred music with newly developed techniques in both vocal and instrumental performance. He was a key figure in the early development of forms which flourished in the Baroque era: cantata, aria, sonata da chiesa (church sonata), sonata da camera (for one or more melody instruments with basso continuo), and the sinfonia. His secular music includes solo madrigals with instrumental accompaniment and the pioneering of the later Baroque cantata form, divided between recitatives and arias. He wrote a single opera, *La finta savia* (The fake sage) in 1643.

The Merula ciaccona (Italian word for chaconne) in our program demonstrates both the standard brevity of the ostinato bass pattern over which the two treble voices sing and dance, with a vitality that responds to and influences them.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678 – 1741):

***La cetra* Concerto Op. 9, No. 9** (1727)

I. Allegro

II. Largo e spiccato

III. Allegro

Here's a person who, like Rognoni and Bononcini, enjoyed growing up in a musical family. The oldest of five boys, Vivaldi was taught violin by the same guy who did his hair: his father, Giovanni Battista, a barber, composer and violinist. They actually toured Venice performing together.

From an early age, Antonio Vivaldi was diagnosed with *strettezza di petto* (tightness of the chest), probably bronchial asthma, which plagued him for the rest of his life. At the age of 15, Antonio began studying for the priesthood, as this was often the only possible way for a poor family to obtain free schooling. Ordained in 1703 at 25, he was nicknamed *il Prete Rosso*, "The Red Priest," due to his red hair.

His chronic chest tightness eventually excluded him from continuing to celebrate mass. But at this time he was appointed as a violin instructor for the Ospedale della Pietà, a charitable institution for orphans and abandoned girls established by a group of Venetian nuns, the *Consorelle di Santa Maria dell'Umiltà*, in the 14th century. Over the next thirty years, Vivaldi composed most of his major works while serving the Ospedale, and a great many of them were inspired by and devoted to the student musicians.

While boys learned a trade and had to leave when they turned 15, girls received music education and performed at the Ospedale in phenomenal choirs and orchestras. Many remained there to make music for the rest of their lives.

La cetra, named after a lyre-like instrument often called a zither, is a set of twelve violin concertos published in 1727. All but one are written for a single solo violin accompanied by strings and basso continuo. The concerto we're performing for you this evening is the one that features two solo violins ... and, sneakily on our part, recorder, with accompanying voices.

The piece reveals Vivaldi's more rustic side with a violin duet locked in the simple harmonies of improvised folk music, thirds and sixths in parallel motion. Animated *Alphonse & Gaston* interchanges (alternating instead of interrupting) in the first movement, and charming clockwork spiccato plus lyricism in the second movement, are followed by a rousing finale in 3/8 time.