

Reno Chamber Orchestra
Inside-Out
April 6 & 7, 2024

Program Notes
By Chris Morrison

Alessandro Scarlatti

Born: May 2, 1660, Palermo, Sicily
Died: October 22, 1725, Naples, Italy

Among the most popular and influential composers of his time, Scarlatti studied in Rome as a youth. A production of the first of his 115 operas brought him to the attention of Queen Christina of Sweden, for whom Scarlatti became *maestro di cappella*. Later, from 1684 to 1702, he served in the same position at the royal court in Naples, and similarly from 1707 for Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni in Rome. Two years later he returned to Naples, where he continued to compose prolifically. Scarlatti was an important transitional figure between the Baroque and Classical eras, the inventor of several musical forms that became important throughout Europe: the “Italian” overture in three movements (an important progenitor of the symphony), the sonata in four parts (a predecessor of the string quartet), and the *da capo* aria. Along with his operas, Scarlatti's output included most of the major forms of his day, including the cantata (of which he wrote some 500), oratorio, mass, concerto, and sonata. He was the father of two other composers, Domenico Scarlatti and Pietro Filippo Scarlatti.

Concerto Grosso No. 3 in F major

Composed: c. 1725
Duration: 8 minutes
Instrumentation: strings, continuo

Known more for his operas and religious music, Scarlatti didn't really turn to composing instrumental music until later in his career. The present concerto is one of a set of six that was published in London fifteen years after Scarlatti's death. Some of these works also exist in the form of instrumental sonatas in four parts (two violins, viola, and continuo), and so it could be that the orchestral arrangements didn't originate with Scarlatti.

The Concerto Grosso No. 3 sounds very much in line with the kinds of concertos that composers like Arcangelo Corelli before him, and George Frideric Handel after him, were writing in the early eighteenth century. Its opening, both lively and ceremonious, leads directly into a heartfelt slower section. Then comes a contrapuntal Allegro, with interplay between solo strings. The achingly poignant Largo that follows, with its descending figures, leads directly into the sprightly, dance-like concluding Allegro.

Henry Purcell

Born: c. September 10, 1659, London, England

Died: November 21, 1695, London, England

Henry Purcell was probably the greatest British composer of his time. He was born near Westminster Abbey in London into a musical family – his father was a gentleman of the Chapel Royal, where musicians for the royal service were trained, and where young Henry received his first formal instruction. His talent as a singer was noted early, and Purcell was a chorister in the Chapel Royal, and started composing both songs and religious works, as a youth. He also wrote works for the stage, both operas and incidental music for plays. When John Blow retired as organist of Westminster Abbey in 1679, Purcell took his place, and for years thereafter devoted himself almost entirely to sacred music. Three years later he also became organist at the Chapel Royal. In his last years he returned to writing music for the theater, ultimately producing dozens of such works. Purcell died at age 36, possibly of pneumonia or tuberculosis, and was buried next to the organ at Westminster Abbey. Long after his death, Purcell's music was a major influence on English musicians like Benjamin Britten.

Music for the Theater

Composed: 1679 (The Virtuous Wife), 1691 (The Gordian Knot Unty'd), 1692 (The Fairy Queen), 1695 (The Indian Queen)

Duration: 12 minutes

Instrumentation: strings, continuo

Initially, Purcell wrote mostly for the church and royal court. But as court music played less of a role during the reign of William and Mary, Purcell increasingly turned to writing theater music for additional income. His first major stage work, the opera *Dido and Aeneas* of 1689, is regarded as one of the first-ever British operas. Purcell ultimately produced six major stage works as well as incidental music for some 43 plays. Typically, the latter would take the form of short pieces of music, including instrumental pieces, songs, and choruses, that might support the action or be used as interludes between acts or during scenery changes.

One of Purcell's first sets of theater music accompanied a play by Thomas D'Urfey called *The Virtuous Wife, or, Good Luck at Last*. Its Overture has a grave, stately tread before the tempo increases for a contrapuntal section. The lively *La Furstemberg* was a popular tune throughout the eighteenth century, thought to be of anonymous origin until it was suggested that Purcell wrote it for a revival of *The Virtuous Wife* in the 1690s. After that comes a graceful, and rather melancholy Slow Aire

The comedy *The Gordian Knot Unty'd*, possibly written by William Walsh, was based on the ancient Greek legend involving Alexander the Great's attempt to untie a knot that, if he were successful, would give him control over all Asia. (In the end, he cut the knot with his sword.) For this play, Purcell wrote an overture and a series of instrumental airs and dances, including the lyrical Minuet.

The Indian Queen was left unfinished by Purcell, and was first performed in the year of his death, 1695. Often referred to as a semi-opera – due to its mix of operatic music, spoken passages, and instrumental interludes – *The Indian Queen* was based on a revision of the 1664 play of the same name by John Dryden and his brother-in-law Sir Robert Howard. The Rondeau from Act III is sweet and graceful.

The Fairy Queen, another semi-opera from 1692, is based on an anonymous adaptation of William Shakespeare's famous *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Purcell didn't actually set any of Shakespeare's text to music, but rather wrote music for masques – short entertainments involving music and dance – that appear in several acts, as well as music heard before each act begins. After Purcell's death, this score was lost, and was only rediscovered in 1901. Many have since argued that the work contains some of Purcell's finest theater music. The work's Hornpipe is sprightly and light in texture.

Georg Philipp Telemann

Born: March 14, 1681, Magdeburg, Germany

Died: June 25, 1767, Hamburg, Germany

Telemann was one of the most prolific composers of all time, with over 3,000 works to his credit (many now lost), including over 1,000 church cantatas, 46 Passion settings, and 600 suites for orchestra. He was largely self-taught as a composer and instrumentalist: among the instruments he played were the violin, organ, flute, recorder, oboe, double bass, trombone, and zither. While he got an early start in music, composing an opera at age 12, Telemann's family wanted him to pursue some other career, and for a time he studied law at the University of Leipzig. But music won out, and the Mayor of Leipzig asked Telemann to take over composing music for the city's churches. After working in Leipzig as well as Sorau (Poland), Eisenach, and Frankfurt, Telemann moved to Hamburg in 1721 to become music director of that city's five churches. Telemann was friends with many famous fellow musicians, even serving as godfather to Johann Sebastian Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel, who on Telemann's death took over his Hamburg post.

Sonata à 4 in A minor, TWV 43:a5

Composed: 1738?

Duration: 10 minutes

Instrumentation: 2 violins, viola, continuo

While the trio sonata was the main form of chamber music in the Baroque, early in the eighteenth century a new genre emerged that enriched the harmonic possibilities of a small ensemble: the sonata à 4, a quartet with continuo. Such a work is Telemann's Sonata, which comes down to us in copies found in the archives of Darmstadt (transcribed by Court Kapellmeister Johann Endler) and Dresden (copied by Johann Georg Pisendel, perhaps the most famous violinist of his time and leader of the court orchestra in Dresden). Telemann's work was likely part of the repertoire of the court ensembles in both of those two cities.

The Sonata in A minor opens plaintively with a short Grave. The tempo then increases for a propulsive Allegro, its galloping rhythms evocative of the hunt, with the violins by turns trading phrases and playing in harmony with one another. Another short slow movement, a lamenting Adagio, features sustained notes from the violins that lend a hint of suspense. An energetic Allegro follows, with more contrapuntal interplay between the violins. The brief fifth movement, aptly designated Largo e staccato, moves in fits and starts, serving as an introduction to the fiery Allegro final movement.

Damien Geter

Born: 1981, Chesterfield County, Virginia

Celebrated composer and bass-baritone Damien Geter infuses classical music with styles from the Black diaspora to create music that furthers the cause for social justice. His varied credits include performances from the operatic stage to the television screen. He is Composer-in-Residence at the Richmond Symphony through the 2024-25 season, and serves as Interim Music Director and Artistic Advisor at Portland Opera, as well as Artistic Advisor for Resonance Ensemble. His growing body of music includes chamber, vocal, orchestral, and operatic works. Recent highlights include commissions from Imani Winds, Chicago Symphony, and Glimmerglass Opera, including six premieres in 2022 alone. Geter is an alumnus of the Austrian American Mozart Festival and the Aspen Opera Center. He also toured with the prestigious American Spiritual Ensemble. He is the owner of DG Music, Sans Fear Publishing, as well as co-author of the book *Music in Context: An Examination of Western European Music Through a Sociopolitical Lens*.

Buh-roke

Composed: 2019

Duration: 7 minutes

Instrumentation: strings, harpsichord

Buh-roke was originally composed for the Portland Baroque Orchestra, with a subsequent performance by the Seattle Symphony. Geter has described his work this way: "As you may have guessed, *Buh-roke* is a modern nod to the Baroque era. Featuring the harpsichord (one of my favorite instruments), the piece borrows techniques from that time, but with a funky twist. *Buh-roke* loosely explores the technique of *fortspinnung*, a characteristic of Baroque music that gives the piece a sense of direction. A minuet meets the listener in the contrasting section as throwback to the stylized dance which appeared in many suites and early Classical symphonies. The piece ends as it begins (ABA') which resembles the form of the *da capo* aria."

George Frideric Handel

Born: February 23, 1685, Halle, Germany

Died: April 14, 1759, London, England

George Frideric Handel is one of the most beloved composers of music's Baroque era. Born Georg Friedrich Händel, Handel held early posts as church organist and violinist before moving to Italy to learn about Italian opera at first hand. He had his first successes as a composer there and attracted the attention of the Elector of Hanover, who brought him back to Germany as his court composer. When the Elector became King George I of England in 1714, Handel followed him to England. The Italian operas Handel subsequently wrote for the London stage made him famous, and when the audiences for those operas diminished by the early 1740s, Handel won even greater fame composing religious oratorios like *Messiah* (the source of the ever-popular "Hallelujah" Chorus), *Israel in Egypt*, and *Judas Maccabeus*. Decades after Handel's death, Ludwig van Beethoven, who thought Handel the greatest of all composers, said of him "I would bare my head and kneel at his grave."

Concerto Grosso in G major, Op. 6/1

Composed: 1739

Duration: 12 minutes

Instrumentation: strings, continuo

The concerto grosso form, so popular in the early eighteenth century, was marked by the contrast between a small group of soloists (the *concertino*) and the entire orchestra (the *tutti*). For many years the most popular such works were the twelve Concertos, Op. 6 of 1714 by Arcangelo Corelli. During his early years in Italy, Handel got to know and work with Corelli, and the influence of the older composer's work was evident when Handel finally wrote his own concertos. The twelve Op. 6 Concerti – officially titled “Twelve Grand Concertos in Seven Parts” – were composed in one month late in 1739, and quickly became some of the most popular orchestral works of their time. Their reputation hasn't flagged: in recent years *The New Grove Dictionary of Music* has ranked Handel's Op. 6 with Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* as “the twin peaks of the Baroque concerto.”

The first concerto of Op. 6 is in five movements. It opens with a stately, slightly swaggering *A tempo giusto*, featuring brief conversations between two solo violins. The lively second movement is propelled by quick repeating notes in the continuo accompaniment. The meditative *Adagio* moves between elegance and sorrow, and the Concerto concludes with a pair of *Allegros*: the first contrapuntal in texture, the second in an energetic and insouciant 6/8 rhythm.

Francesco Durante

Born: March 31, 1684, Frattamaggiore, Italy

Died: August 13, 1755, Naples, Italy

Francesco Durante was a composer of both instrumental and religious music, as well as a noted teacher. He was born in a small town north of Naples, and studied in both Naples and Rome. Among his teachers was Alessandro Scarlatti, whose teaching position at the Sant'Onofrio Conservatory Durante inherited in 1725. After seventeen years there, Durante became head of the Santa Maria di Loreto Conservatory in Naples, in which position he remained until his death. Among his students over the years were notables of the Italian Baroque like Giovanni Paisiello, Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, and Niccolò Piccinni. Durante's sacred works, for which he is most remembered and which constitute the bulk of his output, include two requiems and several masses and motets. But he also wrote music for strings and for solo harpsichord.

Concerto No. 8 in A major “La pazzia”

Composed: c. 1740

Duration: 12 minutes

Instrumentation: strings, continuo

It is unknown exactly when Durante composed his set of eight *Concerti per quartetto*, although the best guess is the late 1730s or early 1740s. Durante subtitled the Concerto No. 8 in A major from that set “La pazzia,” which can be translated as “Folly” or, perhaps more accurately here, “Madness.” As

with most such concertos, there are regular alternations between the solo instruments and the tutti, or full ensemble. Often in this work, though, these transitions are abrupt and even surprising, seeming almost improvisatory at times, with the rest of the orchestra overlaid with what one commentator called “the solo violin’s frequent interjections of lunatic ranting.”

True to the concerto's title, the first movement proceeds unusually. Several repetitions of a descending two-note phrase are followed by a solo for the violin. Restrained sections, including duets for the violas, are quickly interrupted by more active passages, very much in the style of Carl Philip Emanuel Bach and the *Empfindsamer Stil*, or sensitive style, with its sudden, eccentric changes of mood and occasional dissonances. Marked *Affettuoso*, the short second movement is slow, with lyrical, sonorous phrases exchanged by the violins and violas. Rather than C.P.E. Bach, it is Vivaldi that is called to mind in the third movement, with its easy swing and its exchanges between soloists and full orchestra.

Antonio Vivaldi

Born: March 4, 1678, Venice, Italy

Died: July 28, 1741, Vienna, Austria

Antonio Vivaldi is remembered as one of the fathers of instrumental music and the master of the concerto for soloist(s) and orchestra – of which he wrote over 550, including some 240 for the violin. Colorful and tuneful works like *The Four Seasons* are among the most popular in all of classical music. His operas and religious works also brought him fame during his lifetime. Ordained as a priest in 1703, the redheaded Vivaldi came to be known as “il prete rosso” (“the red priest”). He decided to pursue musical rather than ecclesiastical duties, and became a teacher at the Ospedale della Pietà, an orphanage and school for girls famous for its excellent choir and orchestra, where he worked in several capacities over the ensuing three-plus decades. Meanwhile his concertos and other instrumental works were being published to great acclaim, attracting the admiring attention of famous musicians such as Johann Sebastian Bach. In his later years Vivaldi fell on hard times, and on his death he was buried (as was Mozart five decades later) in a pauper’s grave in Vienna.

Violin Concerto in G major, RV 307

Composed: c. 1720

Duration: 11 minutes

Instrumentation: solo violin, strings, continuo

With over 500 concertos to Vivaldi's credit, nearly half of those for solo violin, there will inevitably be a few works that are well-known, and many that have fallen into relative obscurity, including a few gems. This G major concerto is one of those works that should really be more familiar. Probably composed early in the 1720s, the work is bright and tuneful, and full of fascinating surprises.

Marked *Allegro molto* (very fast), the first movement leaps out of the gate, with an almost stormy atmosphere. The virtuosic solo violin soon enters in similar fashion. Surprising harmonic movements and occasional pauses in the momentum are sprinkled throughout the music. The opening movement's hard-charging nature is in great contrast to the lamenting second movement *Adagio*.

Over a pulsating motion from the string orchestra, the violin tentatively spins out its line. As with the first movement, the third is full of contrasts, harmonic turns and rhythmic intrigue. At times, the solo violin spins its way into the stratosphere, and at other times it is earthy and dance-like, with rapid-fire figuration.