



Chamber Music Series

Harmonies with Harpsichord | November 7th, 2020

Program Notes by Anna Norris

HANDEL Suite in D major HWV 341

George Frideric Handel has always been a composer's composer. For all that he was popular with the public during his lifetime and is still popular (for at least a few of his works!) to the present day, it is the esteem that other great composers of the past hold him in that truly gives a glimpse of his character. "Handel was the greatest composer that ever lived," wrote Beethoven; "I would uncover my head and kneel before his tomb." Once, when Haydn received a compliment on the quality of his recitatives, he brushed it off with, "Ah, [the recitative] *Deeper and Deeper in* [Handel's] *Jephtha* is far beyond that!" Mozart said that "Handel understands affect better than any of us. When he chooses, he strikes like a thunder bolt."

One of Handel's other notable qualities, which was perhaps better-understood by his fellow composers who experienced the pressures of producing works explicitly intended to please patrons, was his looseness and expansiveness with regards to which works could truly be said to have been written "by" him. Even in comparison to the norms of the era, Handel's propensity for borrowing and remixing both his own and others' works was prodigious; modern musicologist Richard Taruskin has summarized him as "the champion of all parodists." Copyright law, of course, was in its very infancy when Handel was an established middle-aged composer, so the idea of "intellectual property" tying one specific work to one specific person had no presence in his mind the way it does in our modern consciousness, with all of our pesky ideas of authorship and ownership.

As well as transforming the work of others, Handel was also perfectly content to allow publishers to rearrange his music, without consultation, into whatever forms they saw fit. Such is the case with the *Suite in D major*, which for reasons that may well have been dramatic but have been lost to the sands of time, was originally published by the rival publishing house to the one with whom Handel had an exclusive agreement. The musical contents of which are a mix-and-match of tunes from sources such as the second *Water Music* suite and the opera *Partenope*. They are arranged for trumpet, strings and continuo in the virtuosic style that despite not being Handel's own work, is certainly at least an homage from a contemporary who, like Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, held Handel in the very highest esteem.



CORELLI Concerto grosso in F major Op.6 No.6

To any regular concert-goer in the twenty-first century, it is an obvious fact that the violin is the sovereign of the instruments of the orchestra. Violin players easily outnumber any other instrumentalist present, they sit in easily visible positions at the front of the stage, and of course the concertmaster-- a title unambiguous in its majesty if ever there was one-- must always be drawn from among them. It is difficult to imagine the supremacy of the violin having been *established* by someone; but if the credit (or the blame, depending on one's perspective) can be assigned to one man in particular, that man would be Arcangelo Corelli.

Corelli, a violinist and composer born in Italy in 1653, looms so large in the history of violin playing that the fictions about him are more numerous than the facts. They're also likely more entertaining; the teenage Corelli was probably not, despite Jean-Jacques Rousseau's tall tale, run out of Paris by envious French composer Jean-Baptiste Lully. Nor is he likely, as one overly excitable abbot's history goes, to have bravely defied his father's wishes to left home in the service of being discovered and summoned by a high-ranking cardinal and subsequently by the Pope. (The composer's father died before he was born, for one thing.) However, the fictions hold at least the seed of truth; that by the time he wrote his *Twelve Concerti Grossi*, Corelli was already a legend of the violin requiring a sufficiently grandiose backstory, and his legend has not diminished in the intervening three hundred years.

The form of the concerto grosso itself was, although not invented by Corelli, popularized and indelibly associated with him. The form-- meaning literally "big concerto"-- features two groups, the accompaniment ("ripieno") and an entire cadre of soloists ("concertino.") Corelli almost certainly composed and performed an enormous number of *concerti grossi* during his lifetime, the majority of which were performed but never published. He was prolific but meticulous, and when it came time to choose representative samples of his concerto grosso works to be published, he found the task difficult. "I am fully aware of my own weaknesses," he wrote in 1708, five years before his death, "so that only recently, in spite of numerous, long drawn-out corrections, I scarcely had the confidence to put before the public eye those few works I entrusted to the printer."

In fact, Corelli died without completing the task; however, he passed it on to a trusted student, and twelve concerti made it through the stringent editing process. The surviving twelve are likely not the original works as they were first performed; instead, the movements are assembled carefully from various concerti. The result is a guided tour, led by the composer himself, of Corelli's career highlights.

The sixth concerto of the set is a *concerto da chiesa*, a church concerto. The name does not necessarily imply that the music was intended to be performed during a service, only that it is closer in style to liturgical music than to the *concerto da camera*, or chamber music, style that was intended to be suitable for dancing.



CATLIN SMITH* Garland

Tafelmusik commissioned me to create a new piece based on Bach's Musical Offering. The challenge for me was to compose music that embraces the technique of composing with canons – using the well-known theme – while at the same time creating music with my own voice. I did use the famous theme by Frederick the Great (it appears in various forms, including backwards) but interlaced it with themes of my own. This garland of themes, canons and melodies is my offering to Tafelmusik.

Program note by Linda Catlin Smith

FINGER Sonata for oboe, trumpet and continuo

Gottfried Finger was born in the Czech Republic, and arrived in London in his mid-twenties ready to make a name for himself as a composer. Once there, however he was quite content to remain exactly what he had been when he arrived: a central European oddity, committed to expanding the instrumentation of his works and to drawing on inspiration from his homeland. He quickly obtained a post in the Catholic chapel of King James II in 1687-- unfortunately for him, only a year before James was deposed and exiled in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. No matter; Finger noticed that there was an expanding market for music aimed at amateur recorder players, and shifted his focus from Catholic liturgy to home recorder music and compositions for the theatre.

He was also well-known as a performer: his most significant proficiency was on the bass viol, and he was also an early pioneer of the baryton, an instrument similar to the viol but with an extra set of strings on the neck intended to be plucked with the thumb. He also played, well enough to describe their qualities in an unpublished treatise on music and to compose boundary-pushing music, the trumpet, bassoon, baryton, bass recorder, and the lute.

Finger was particularly noted for his new techniques on the trumpet: he had the ability, hitherto unheard-of in London, to use his lips alone to force non-harmonic notes on the trumpet into tune, and an article in the London publication *The Gentlemen's Journal* described his minor-key music for the trumpet as "a thing previously thought impossible for an instrument designed for a sharp key."

His *Sonata for oboe, trumpet and continuo* was published in 1700, immediately before his temper and high opinion of his own worth brought his time in London to a screeching halt and drove him to Germany to seek better fortunes. In 1701, Finger entered a competition to set William Congreve's masque *The Judgment of Paris* to music. He came only fourth, and according to amateur musician Roger North describing the incident, "declared he was mistaken in his music, for he thought he was to be judged by men, and not by boys, and thereupon left England and has not been seen since."



JANITSCH Sonata da camera in C minor Op. 1 No. 1

Johann Gottlieb Janitsch was one of the lucky class of musicians who secured fairly early in his career a job that provided him with a stable income, a supportive employer, inspiring colleagues, and enough leisure time to pursue his own projects. The job was as a musician in the court orchestra of Frederick the Great, a position he acquired even before Frederick ascended to the throne: Janitsch joined the ensemble in 1736, a period of time during which the Crown Prince living in Rheinsberg Palace and was devoted almost entirely to the arts. He was also absorbed in writing a refutation to Machiavelli's *The Prince* that argued against Machiavelli's cavalier attitude towards immorality and in favour of the ideal of the royal statesman as protector of his subjects, which his friend and sometime lover Voltaire aided him in publishing anonymously to great acclaim.

Unsurprisingly, such Enlightened attitudes made for a pleasant work environment for musicians, and upon Frederick taking the throne, Janitsch and his colleagues in the orchestra followed him to Berlin. With the King's permission, Janitsch began a tradition of "Friday Assemblies," gatherings that mixed professional and amateur musicians and were open to the public, a tradition that inspired many later gatherings of that type in Berlin.

Janitsch's Sonata da camera in C minor would have been composed for just such a gathering; an evening of chamber music mixing professionals and amateurs, the latter category in which Frederick the Great himself was first among equals. Frederick's main instrument was the flute, and he found a lifelong friend, teacher and musical colleague in Johann Joachim Quantz; who like Janitsch, stayed with Frederick from before he ascended the throne until Quantz's death.

Adolphe Menzel's painting *Flute concert in Sanssouci* provides a description of the atmosphere for such a *sonata da camera*; the royal flutist stands, surrounded by musicians and noble ladies and cast in the soft glow of chandeliers and candles. The painting is warm and inviting, a scene that any musician would be happy to step into and take part in, and one that provided Janitsch with a lifetime of livelihood, inspiration and friendship.

VIVALDI Concerto in A minor (1678–1741) for two violins & strings Op. 3 No. 8 RV 522

1711 was a good year for priest, composer, teacher and virtuoso violinist Antonio Vivaldi. To begin with, he had an extremely satisfying victory in the form of a reinstatement to the job that he had lost a year previously: the board of the Ospedale della Pietà, the school for orphans where he had been working since 1703, had tired of his contumacy and voted him out by a narrow margin, then repented and recalled him back unanimously the next year.

He also published his first set of concertos, a collection of twelve titled *L'estro armonico* ("The Harmonic Inspiration.") It was the start of a lifetime's collection of concertos that would, by the time he died, number around five hundred works, and the sheer number of them was primarily thanks to the nature of his job at the Pietà. Although the school was an orphanage, and trained its male students in a trade to be sent out into the world, its lasting fame and primary place in Venetian society was due to its education for its female students. The girls of the Pietà received a first-rate musical education, and while many left to make advantageous marriages, the most skilled of the student musicians were invited to remain in residence with the school's top ensembles for the rest of their lives. The concerts at the Pietà were considered some of the top entertainment in the city-- so much so that over time, it became clear that not all of the children furtively abandoned at its gates were, strictly speaking, actually orphans. Eventually, they simply started accepting adolescent music students, who paid fees for their education.

Thus the twelve concerti of *L'estro armonico*, including No. 8 for two violins and strings, would have been first performed by the women of the Pietà. And although there were many differences between the concert-going experience of Venice in the 1700s and Canada in the time of COVID-19, there is one significant similarity: the audience hearing Vivaldi's string concerti for the first time were also not permitted to gaze upon the faces of the musicians playing them.

In lieu of masks, the audience was separated from the performers by an opaque metal grate; and instead of being a ward against physical disease, the barrier was intended to protect the audience both against unpius thoughts of female beauty and, possibly, the realization that many of the musicians were in fact disfigured by smallpox. Of course, the heightened sense of mystery created by the grate probably encouraged more impious thoughts than it prevented; Jean-Jacques Rousseau was so driven to distraction by the thought of the angels hiding behind it that he finagled a lunchtime meeting with the Pietà students through a friend who worked at their dormitory. He soon realized that what was being hidden from him wasn't exactly what he had been expecting: "Scarcely one of them was without some striking defect," he later wrote. But he soon learned, as we masked concert-goers and -givers of 2020 must also learn, that appearances aren't everything. "During the meal," Rousseau admitted, "they soon became enlivened; ugliness does not exclude the graces, and I found they possessed them. I said to myself, they cannot sing in this manner without intelligence and sensibility, they must have both. My manner of seeing them changed to such a degree that I left the house almost in love with each of these ugly faces."



Masterworks

HAYDN Symphony No. 96 in D major “Miracle” Hob. I:96

Franz Joseph Haydn had bad luck with leaving jobs. His very first period of musical employment, as a chorister at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, ended abruptly with a caning and a shove out the door after the composer cut off a colleague's pigtail as a joke. His next job, as the music director of an orchestra in the household of a wealthy Count, disappeared into thin air when the Count was forced to face up to being not, in fact, quite wealthy enough for *that* kind of expenditure. His subsequent position, in the same role for the much richer Esterházy family, lasted for much longer-- but they, too, eventually moved to cut costs, drastically reducing the number of musicians employed and the amount the remaining few were paid.

Thus, in 1790, Haydn found himself with a much reduced income but in possession a towering reputation, many friends and admirers, and plenty of free time on his hands. It was the ideal moment for Johann Peter Salomon, a German violinist and conductor living and working in London, to convince Haydn to make a trip to his city. All of London was head over heels for Haydn, so it was a feather in Salomon's cap to be the one to bring him there, which he did by collecting Haydn from Vienna in person for them to travel together; the trip was the first time Haydn had seen the ocean.

Today, the set of symphonies that Haydn wrote during his time in London are most often referred to as the *London symphonies*, but also occasionally as the *Salomon symphonies*. There are twelve London symphonies in all, numbers 93 through 104 of Haydn's symphonic opus; and, although the 96th symphony is not numbered as such, it was actually the first symphony composed and performed during Haydn's first London trip.

The story behind the work's subtitle, *The Miracle*, provides a glimpse of the kind of enthusiastic reception that the 59-year-old composer received in London. The first symphonic premiere of the trip took place in the Hanover Square Rooms, a musical venue in Hanover Garden established twenty years earlier by Johann Christian Bach and by the late 1700s considered the trendiest venue in London. The room also contained a



chandelier of the type commonly found in theatres of the day; theatre chandeliers needed to be hauled up and down from the ceiling using a hand-cranked pulley, and as a result had a reputation for being somewhat fickle. The public's enthusiasm for the concert was enormous; attendee and music critic Charles Burney wrote in his diary, "Haydn himself presided at the pianoforte: and the sight of that renowned composer so electrified the audience, as to excite an attention and pleasure superior to any that had ever, to my knowledge, been caused by instrumental music in England." The public's desire to get close to the famous composer was so great, in fact, that they crowded up against the front of the stage-- meaning that when the chandelier in the centre of the room crashed to the ground, the audience escaped miraculously unscathed.

The *Miracle* symphony is in four movements: the slow opening typical of the London symphonies, attached to a first movement in sonata form, and ensuing slow second movement, third movement minuet, and quick finale. The second movement contains a special gift: it ends with an extended orchestral cadenza, beginning with an interplay between the two solo violins. The principal of those parts was played by Salomon; a thank-you from the composer to the friend who brought him on the adventure of a lifetime.

SHOSTAKOVICH/arr. Barshai Chamber Symphony in F major Op. 73a

"Cynical, pernicious grotesquerie," wrote Soviet music critic Israel Nestyev in 1946 of Dmitri Shostakovich's latest symphony, "[a] tone of relentless mockery and ridicule, emphasis on the ugliness and cruelty of life, the cold irony of stylization."

Most musicians and artists understand the sting of a negative review; few, however, have felt the horror that Shostakovich and his contemporaries in the Soviet artistic scene felt at a poor review from exactly the wrong reviewer-- Nestyev, for example, or even Stalin himself. In 1946, the year during which Shostakovich composed the 3rd string quartet which his student Rudolf Barshai later arranged into a chamber symphony, the tides of official opinion were turning perceptibly against him. His ninth symphony, premiered in late 1945, was officially censured for "ideological weakness," the first event in a downwards slide of governmental favour that would eventually culminate with his second official denunciation in 1948 and dismissal from the teaching post that had provided a large portion of his income.

The atmosphere into which the 3rd quartet was written and performed, then, was one of abject terror, which is reflected in the mystery surrounding its meaning and intention. The five-movement quartet originally came with programmatic subtitles, suggesting that Shostakovich intended the work to be a rumination on war: not the triumphant celebration of victory over the Nazi Germany that he originally promised (and failed to deliver) in the Ninth symphony, but a more contemplative and sombre view of violence. The first movement depicted "Calm unawareness of the future cataclysm," the second "Rumblings of unrest and anticipation," the third "The forces of war are unleashed," the fourth "Homage to the dead," and the fifth "The eternal question: why and to what purpose?" Perhaps it is the title of the fifth movement, a questioning of the machinery and object of war itself, that gives a clue as to why Shostakovich removed the subtitles almost immediately: he no longer had the latitude to make statements that could be read as putting "emphasis on the ugliness and cruelty of life."

"I have a burdensome and horrifying memories of the events I witnessed," said Rudolf Barshai of the period of Shostakovich's censure, during which Barshai was a student at the Moscow Conservatory. For all that



government officials and the ignorant public abandoned and ostracized Shostakovich, however, he never lost the respect of his students: "All the pupils always regarded Shostakovich as a God. His advice in composition class was so wonderful, so precise, and so precious." Barshai emigrated to Tel Aviv in 1977 to escape the constraints of anti-Semitism on his career in Russia, and his adoration for his friend and mentor "DD" (the students' nickname for "Dmitri Dmitrievich") is evident in his transcriptions of Shostakovich's string quartets. Barshai uses his experience both as orchestral musician and a conductor (including as music director of the Vancouver symphony from 1985-1988!) to expand Shostakovich's moody, intensely personal quartets into the declamatory and outwards-facing genre of the symphony; drawing his burdensome memories of totalitarianism out of the darkness and into the light.