

**Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644-1704): Mensa Sonora, Partita No. 3 for Strings and Continuo (1680)**

Just as Ernest Hemingway would accompany his Marennese oysters with a chilled bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé, sumptuous feasts have often been paired with great music. Georg Philipp Telemann was certainly no stranger to the Tafelmusik tradition of music functioning in a banquet setting. So was Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber, whose “Mensa Sonora” (meaning “Harmonious Table”) was a set of six suites composed for aristocratic dining.

Born in Wartenburg, north Bohemia in 1644, Biber was the son of a gamekeeper or forester and managed to ascend through the ranks of the aristocracy of Salzburg to become Kapellmeister in 1684. Little is known about Biber’s early musical training except that by the mid 1660’s he was already a master on both violin and viola da gamba. His “Mensa Sonora” doesn’t get as much play as some of his more virtuosic violin works, but it contains splendid music nonetheless.

The work, subtitled “instrumental table-music with fresh-sounding violin sonorities” consists of six suites of mainly very short dance movements. This was music for dining – that is, background music. But it is much more than that. Its consistently high level of craftsmanship and imagination transforms what might have been purely functional music. Biber’s contrapuntal dexterity is evident throughout the piece. There are also moments startling originality, especially in the pointillist treatment of the arpeggio motif in the first movement Gagliarde, and the spirited ending to the finale Sonatina, where the musical discourse is broken into smaller and smaller fragments. Whether these musical subtleties were heard over the clatter of the knives and forks of the diners, we’ll never know.

**J.S. Bach (1685-1750): Concerto for Oboe and Strings in F Major (BWV 1053R) (c. 1720)**

When shopping for a used car, it is best to avoid one with an “R” designation in its title, which means the vehicle was once declared as salvage, and has been reconstructed. But reconstructed cars can also be a great deal under the right circumstances, and for oboists seeking a solo oboe concerto by J.S. Bach, the reconstructed BWV 1053R is as good a deal as they come.

You see, as much as Bach loved the oboe (his works contain over two hundred oboe solos in concertos and opening choruses and arias in cantatas), there are no existing compositions written just for oboe analogous to the suites and partitas for violin, cello and flute. There are clues and other indications that Bach did indeed compose oboe concertos, but those manuscripts and parts have been lost. So, for a complete oboe concerto, we have to rely on reconstructions such as the F Major Concerto for Oboe and Strings, BWV1053R. This reconstruction is based on the harpsichord concerto No. 2 in E major, BWV1053, composed around 1738, which itself might have been Bach’s reworking of a concerto, probably for oboe, composed around 1720.

Much like that used car, Bach “recycled” numerous parts of this three-movement piece for use in other works. The first movement Allegro appears as the opening Sinfonia in Cantata BWV169 with an orchestra that features two oboe d’amores. The second movement Siciliano appears as the aria “Stirb in mir” in the same cantata, and the concluding Allegro is reused in cantata BWV49 as the opening Sinfonia. So at least in the case of J.S. Bach, that “R” designation is indeed a good thing.

**George Frideric Handel (1685-1759): Prelude in B Flat Major for Solo Harpsichord (1733)**

Ask anyone today to name a composition by George Frideric Handel, and it’s a safe bet that the “Messiah” will be the response. Even in his own time, Handel was known primarily as a composer of operas and oratorios. But Handel was, like his contemporaries J.S. Bach and Scarlatti, a formidable keyboard player. Although his focus was on opera and oratorio (a lot more profitable!) his output for the harpsichord is of high quality, great variety, and instrumental originality.

Early in his career, in 1720, he published a book of pieces for keyboard, followed by a later set in 1733, titled “Suites de Pièces,” which included the Suite in B-flat major, HWV 434. The suite consisted of three sections: a Prelude, a Sonata, and an Aria with variations. The opening Prelude is notated in block chords (where all of the notes of a chord are played simultaneously in one solid “block”) that sketch out the harmony of the prelude’s beginning, middle and ending. It’s a good example of what the original purpose of a prelude was, that is, to warm up the fingers and test the tuning of the instrument. Even today, blocked chords are a favorite voicing for jazz pianists. And just as jazz music is subject to the interpretation of the performer, there’s a good deal of leeway for the harpsichordist in how these block chords may be played. The chords are then alternated with a set of arpeggios, and the Prelude ends on a B-flat major triad. Handel’s harpsichord suites exploit the expressive and technical resources of his instrument with no less mastery than that of his Leipzig counterpart.

**Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767): Tafelmusik III for two Oboes, Strings and Continuo (1733)**

Georg Philipp Telemann’s “Tafelmusik” or “Musique de table” as it was originally titled when published in 1733, is a virtual feast for the ears. Arguably the composer’s best-known collection of music, it is firmly entrenched in the rich Tafelmusik tradition in which music accompanied meals of all types, from devotional hymns sung during lunches in private homes to lavish banquets entertaining distinguished guests. Tafelmusik was composed and performed across Europe from the late medieval period through the Enlightenment.

“Musique de table” is divided into three parts, or “productions,” each with identical structure: An overture, a quartet for three instruments and continuo, a concerto for several solo instruments and strings, a trio sonata, and a solo sonata with continuo. The final movement, titled “Conclusion,” includes the entire ensemble. Each part offers an example of the most important instrumental genres of the time, with the exception of the quartet, which was quite rare in the Baroque era.

“Consisting of over four hours of instrumental ensemble music, the collection’s cornucopia of styles and scorings is easily—even irresistibly—likened to a table bursting with all manner of culinary delights,” writes Steven D. Zohn, Professor of Music at Temple University. Zohn goes on to surmise that Telemann designed his collection to mirror a three-course meal with French table service, the productions being analogous to courses, and the individual pieces to dishes.

This performance of Tafelmusik III includes an overture in B Flat Major for two oboes, strings, and basso continuo; a quartet in E Minor for two violins (originally for violin and transverse flute), cello, and harpsichord; a solo sonata in G Minor for oboe, cello, and harpsichord; and a conclusion in B Flat for two oboes, strings, and basso continuo.

Musicians:

**Alexandra Knoll, oboe** – Alexandra was born in Zimbabwe and immigrated to South Africa at age ten. She worked professionally in the Natal Philharmonic before moving to the U.S. She is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music and The Juilliard School. She is a member of the American Symphony Orchestra, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic and plays frequently with the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Ballet, New Jersey Symphony and Orpheus.

**Kathy Halvorson, oboe** – Kathy studied at the University of Wisconsin, the New England Conservatory and the Royal Conservatory in The Hague. She performed with the Netherlands Wind Ensemble, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Amsterdam Bach Soloists and the Opera, Ballet, Symphony and Radio Orchestras. In New York, she has performed with the Argento New Music Project, American Symphony, Berkshire Opera Company, Northeastern PA Philharmonic, International Contemporary Ensemble and as a member of Sylvan Winds. She has recorded as Principal Oboe with the Toronto Chamber Orchestra.

**Cyrus Beroukhim, violin** - Cyrus is Concertmaster of the American Symphony and plays as associate principal viola with the New York City Ballet Orchestra. He has performed at the Ravinia, Verbier, Norfolk, Sarasota and Keshet Eilon Festivals and with the Rose String Quartet and America's Dream Chamber Artists. And, he has toured to Taiwan, Germany, Luxembourg and Japan and has appeared at the Museum of Modern Art's Summergarden concert series.. He holds the doctorate from the Juilliard School and is Associate Professor of Violin at New York University.

**Katie Hyun, violin** – Katie has performed as soloist with the Houston Symphony, Dallas Chamber Orchestra, the Columbia Festival Orchestra as well as the Busan Sinfonietta and Incheon Philharmonic Orchestra in South Korea. She is founder and director of the Quodlibet Ensemble and founding member of the award-winning Amphion String Quartet which was a member of Lincoln Center's CMS Two. On Baroque violin, she frequently appears with Trinity Baroque Orchestra, the Sebastians and New York Baroque. She holds degrees from the Curtis Institute of Music, SUNY Stonybrook and the Yale School of Music.

**William Hakim, viola** – William Hakim has performed throughout the U.S. and abroad. He is principal of the New York Symphonic Ensemble, Glens Falls Symphony, member of Le Poisson Rouge Ensemble and plays with the New Jersey Symphony, Manhattan Chamber Orchestra, Sonos Chamber Orchestra, Orion Music Festival and Metropolis Ensemble. He performed as violist of the Hyperion String Quartet.

**Alberto Parrini, cello** - Born in Italy, Alberto Parrini has been principal cellist of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic since 2007 and is a member of the American Symphony. He performs regularly with the New York Philharmonic and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. He toured Japan as principal cellist of the New York Symphonic Ensemble and performed throughout the U.S. with the American Chamber Players and the St. Lawrence String Quartet. He toured with the White Oak Dance Project and performed with Continuum, Proteus Ensemble, New Jersey Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra and Metamorphosen Chamber Orchestra. He teaches at Princeton University and during the summer at Kinhaven Music School.

**Motomi Igarashi, violone** – Motomi has appeared as a double bass, lirone, violone and viola da gamba player, not only in the United States, but also in Japan and Europe. She has played with the American Classical Orchestra, the BEMF Orchestra, Concert Royal, Foundling Baroque Orchestra, Philomel, the New York Collegium and Bach Collegium Japan. As a Juilliard School graduate, she studied Baroque style and viola da gamba in France. She attended Academia d'amore in Bremen. She plays viola da gamba and Lirone as a member of Anima.

**Lionel Party, harpsichord** – Living now in his Native Santiago de Chile after forty-one years in New York City where he performed as soloist and resident harpsichordist with the New York Philharmonic and served on the faculties of the Juilliard School and Curtis Institute. He has created Il Telescopio di Galileo, a period instrument ensemble. Recipient of the first prize and a gold medal in harpsichord in the Fourth International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition in Leipzig, he has now served as juror for two events in 2010 and 2014. "He seems not restricted by the harpsichord but liberated by it. Party has unusual and fascinating talent; Everything he does is stimulating to hear." The New Yorker.

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