

## PROGRAM NOTES

### **Jean-Baptiste Quentin (1690-1742): Concerto in A minor for Strings & Continuo, Op. 12 No. 1 (After 1729)**

France and the violin in the baroque era – that is a complicated story. During the 17th century the Italian style and its main exponent, the violin, conquered most of the continent, except France. Until the early 18th century the French tended to resist the Italian style, which they considered extravagant in expression and virtuosity. The violin, used mainly for dance music and opera, was given no solo roles. Around 1700, however, resistance towards the Italian style started to wane. Even that most Gallic of French baroque composers, François Couperin, sympathized with it and attempted to include elements of it in his compositions. Eventually Italy became the go-to place for French violinists to further their skills. Notably, French composer Jean-Marie Leclair, who became one of the most prominent composers of solo concertos for the violin, got his training in Italy.

Among the lesser-known composers who studied in Italy is Jean-Baptiste Quentin. Little is known about him, other than he was a violinist at the Paris Opéra in 1718. His oeuvre is considerable, with seventeen sets of sonatas published in Paris between 1724 and around 1740. The Concerto in A Minor is Jean-Baptiste Quentin's lone violin concerto, published - or rather, hidden - in the anthology *Sonates en trio et à quatre parties*, op. 12, which was presumably printed after 1729. It is likely the only French concerto in four movements.

### **Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre (1665-1729): Sonata in D minor for Violin, Viola da gamba and Harpsichord (1707)**

It comes as no surprise that French composer Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, despite her remarkable skills in composition, harpsichord virtuosity, and improvisations, was excluded from professional employment because she was female. Yet because of her gender her artistic genius was seen as a novelty and encouraged. She worked under the patronage of the most powerful figures during the reign of Louis XIV and her skill was celebrated all over Versailles. La Guerre was indeed a musical pioneer, one of the first to bring sonatas and cantatas into the French repertoire, and the first woman in France to compose a performed opera.

At a time when the French tended to resist Italian musical practice, La Guerre openly embraced an aesthetic synthesis of the French and Italian musical styles - something professional composers of her time were careful to avoid. Even François Couperin (who was a cousin of her husband) was careful to circulate his own sonatas under an alias to avoid tarnishing his reputation in France. Yet La Guerre boldly published her six sonatas of 1707, of which the D minor Sonata is the first, under the name "Sonates," and called each individual work by its Italian name, "Sonata." She also designated each sonata's various movements under Italian names such as "presto," or "adagio."

The D minor sonata has eight movements that interchange between melancholy and exultation, with D major passages woven within. The entire set of six sonatas is a tour de force of artistic inspiration and virtuosic skill. Fittingly, they were dedicated to King Louis XIV, whose court cultivated La Guerre's extraordinary creative gifts throughout her life.

### **Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757): Harpsichord Sonatas in D minor, K.52, and D Major, K.53 (1742, 1752)**

Born in Naples, the same year as J.S. Bach and G.F. Handel, Domenico Scarlatti never achieved in his lifetime the recognition of his famed colleagues, however prestigious his position as Music Master to the Spanish Queen may have been. This is probably due to the fact that he composed most of his music for a single instrument: the harpsichord. Fortunately, today Scarlatti has come into his own as one of the foremost keyboard composers of all time, along with Liszt and Chopin. He is also recognized as the true pioneer of modern keyboard technique.

Although over 550 of Scarlatti's harpsichord sonatas have survived, curiously only a small number of his compositions were published during his lifetime. And as for the term "sonata," it does not refer here to the classical meaning, but rather to the generic meaning derived from the word "sonare" (to sound), just as "toccare" (to touch) relates to toccata. The form of Scarlatti's sonatas is very simple, almost always binary with optional repeats. Each begins with a compelling introduction followed by a short development and ends with an engaging ritornello. The music is lively and joyful, with engaging rhythms, surprising harmonies, and expressive jumps and brilliant runs that bring out the harpsichord's melodic, dynamic and percussive attributes.

### **Johann Rosenmüller (1619-1684): Sonata Prima à 2 for Two Violins and Continuo (1682)**

Sometimes a composer's greatest works were created in exile. So it was with Johann Rosenmüller, born in Oelsnitz, near modern-day Dresden, in 1619. One of the most talented composers in Germany, he was organist at Leipzig's Nikolaikirche and all-but-assured the upcoming Thomaskantor position (later held by J. S. Bach), when in 1655 he was arrested due to alleged sexual misconduct. He fled to Venice to escape arrest, where he ended up teaching at the same orphanage for girls which later employed Antonio Vivaldi. Vivaldi, in fact, was one of his major Italian influences in the numerous works he composed while at the orphanage.

Fortunately, he was able to return to Germany in 1682, serving as Kapellmeister at Wolfenbüttel. His later music is an attractive mixture of German fugues and shorter Italianate sonata movements. Even progressive a composer as Telemann cited him as an influence. This string sonata, published in 1682, lies right at the point where the multi-sectional mid-Baroque sonata coalesced into the High Baroque sonata form. Even a multi-movement piece such as this one remains compact and focused on a single effect, with dissonant homophonic passages making a nice contrast with the fugal or otherwise polyphonic fast passages.

### **George Philipp Telemann (1681-1767): Quartet in E minor for Two Violins, Viola da gamba, and Continuo (1738)**

George Philipp Telemann is said to be the most prolific composer of all time – yes, he even has Vivaldi beat – and was considerably more famous in the early 1700's than J.S. Bach himself. By 1730 Telemann's fame had spread all across Europe. In 1737 he finally left Hamburg for a long-delayed journey to Paris. Seven years earlier he had composed a set of six quartets in preparation for his visit, subsequently adding a second set of six during his stay there in 1738. Collectively, the twelve works have come to be known as the Paris Quartets.

The combination of instruments in this set allows a great deal of flexibility in grouping in these pieces, which were originally composed for flute, violin, viola da gamba, and continuo. Telemann was certainly a master of the principal styles of his time - German, Italian, and French, and could write with ease and fluency in any of them. Yet despite their French title and forms, these quartets are more a continuation of a melding of tastes than a bow to the French style. Although Telemann published these pieces as “Quadri,” they are not really in the accepted form of quartets; their blend of Italian concerto, German sonata, and French suite makes them especially interesting listening. Although there is an emphasis on technical virtuosity, Telemann's approach moves away from Baroque's former rhetorical style to something more relaxed, contributing to the quartets' popularity.

### **Antonio Vivaldi (1687-1741): Concerto “Madrigalesco” for Strings and Continuo, RV 129 (c.1729) Concerto in G minor for Strings and Continuo, RV 156 (c.1730)**

The Concerto for Strings, RV 129, is one of more than 140 concertos Vivaldi composed between 1723 and 1729. While the sheer volume of this output has historically opened Vivaldi to criticism of being compositionally uninventive, the “Madrigalesco” distinguishes itself from the majority in a number of ways. For one thing, it contains not three movements, but four. Additionally, it is one of a handful of concertos with which the composer supplied the nickname. In this case, the contour and flow of its melodies creates a distinctly vocal quality. Not only are the melodies song-like, but some of them are actually recycled extensively from earlier vocal works. So here we have Vivaldi with a different flair - rather than relying on the structural and harmonic expectations established in his other works, the “Madrigalesco” takes a decidedly more emotionally direct, melodically expressive tack.

Vivaldi's Concerto in G minor for Strings, RV 156, is a full-bodied concerto ripieno (full concerto) with no featured soloists. The lack of a solo instrument is what sets apart Vivaldi's sinfonias and concertos, such as this one, from the multitude of other such works. Yet with his usual, inexhaustible fertility of invention, Vivaldi turns this into an opportunity to explore the possibilities of development and counterpoint more extensively than was possible in the language of the solo concertos. The outer Allegro movements are tumultuous and fiery, with a strutting syncopation and rushing melodies. In between is an Adagio that features a walking line in the double bass under sustained tones in the upper strings. The concluding Allegro moves through a bustling fugato - a technically superlative Fugue that displays Vivaldi's mastery of counterpoint.