

Companions of the Baroque – Notes by Christina Hutten

Music fosters companionship. Psychobiologist Colwyn Trevarthen has shown this to be true even for infants, who naturally communicate with their mothers with noticeable patterns of rhythm, timbre, and gesture. He defines communicative musicality as “the dynamic sympathetic state of a human person that allows coordinated companionship to arise.” The composers of the concertos on this recording served as companions of princes and as international ambassadors, built musical ensembles and associations both professional and amateur, and enriched social life by providing music for the church, court, opera, public concert hall, civic ceremony, and the private living room. The dynamism and expressivity of their music continue to bring together musicians and music lovers hundreds of years later.

The concerto genre is particularly suited to cultivating companionship as its name indicates. The word “concerto” derives from *concertare*, which in Latin means “to debate” and in Italian means “to arrange, agree, or get together.” Both definitions emphasize a prized element of friendship – stimulating discussion. A concerto brings the orchestra into dialogue with a small ensemble or soloist. Its style and form enable players of differing statuses and abilities to make music together and allow ensemble musicians to shine as individuals. Early concertos grew out of ensemble sonatas. The contrast between the full orchestra and the small ensemble of principal players created light and shade in the music without focusing on the soloists as star virtuosi. Evaristo Dall'Abaco's Concerto Grosso in D major Op. 5 No. 6 is of this type. Dall'Abaco was born in northern Italy but spent most of his life in the service of the Bavarian court. He remained at the side of his employer, Elector Maximilian II Emanuel, when he had to flee Munich during the War of the Spanish Succession. When Maximilian was restored to his realm, he rewarded Dall'Abaco for his constancy and companionship by appointing him not only Konzertmeister but also Electoral Councillor.

Almost 500 concertos by Antonio Vivaldi still survive today. The genre suited both the nature of his employment and his fiery temperament. Vivaldi taught music to the orphaned and abandoned girls cared for at the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice, assisted by *maestre di coro*, the most advanced performers among the girls and women. By writing concertos, Vivaldi could meet his pupils at their various skill levels, challenging older students with virtuosic solos and accommodating younger ones with simpler orchestral playing. Even after his expert teaching apparently made his position redundant, the convent continued to pay him to compose new concertos for its musical ensemble.

Vivaldi's Concerto in D minor Op. 3 No. 11 comes from his collection *L'estro armonico* (Harmonic Frenzy), published in Amsterdam in 1711. In it, he established a new musical form adapted from the opera aria. “Ritornello form” involves alternating an orchestral refrain (or *ritornello*) with episodes for soloist(s), which may explore the musical ideas of the ritornello or spin off into fanciful figurations. A movement in ritornello form begins and ends at “home” with the orchestral ritornello played in the main key. In between, the soloist leads a journey through various keys while her travelling companion, the orchestra, marks each new tonal region visited with a bit of the refrain. Ritornello form proved a brilliantly successful formula, especially combined with Vivaldi's flair for drama and breathtaking virtuosity, and *L'estro armonico* became popular throughout Europe. In 1715, the Frankfurt patrician and amateur musician Johann Friedrich Armand von Uffenbach travelled to Venice especially to meet the famous composer of *L'estro armonico* and described his experience of hearing Vivaldi improvise a cadenza, which, he reported, “really terrified me for such has not been nor can ever be played; he came

with his fingers within a mere grass-stalk's breadth of the bridge, so that the bow had no room, and this on all four strings with imitations and at incredible speed." In the concerto on this recording, Vivaldi demands just such boldness from the group of soloists, especially at the opening as the two violins compete with rapidly exchanged imitations followed by a furious cello solo.

It is unclear whether the Concerto for flute, violin, and strings in E minor was composed by Georg Philipp Telemann or by Johann David Heinichen, since surviving manuscripts attribute it to each. The confusion is not surprising, given that the two composers shared similar early careers and moved in the same musical circles. Both studied law at the University of Leipzig but could not hide their obvious musical gifts and were drawn into musical professions by composition commissions. Both led the Leipzig Collegium musicum, a student ensemble established by Telemann that gave weekly concerts at a coffee house in Leipzig. Heinichen eventually travelled to Venice, Europe's most illustrious centre of opera, to study composition and spent time with Vivaldi. He then accepted a position at the court of the Prince Elector of Saxony, where he remained for the rest of his life leading the court's outstanding musical ensemble, experimenting with unusual instrumental colours, and distinguishing himself as a music theorist. The Concerto in E minor certainly explores instrumental colour, beginning with an Allegro movement contrasting the character of the flute and violin, followed by an ethereal Adagio in which the soloists are accompanied by pizzicato strings, a Presto exploiting the most rapid passagework of which the violin is capable, a short linking Adagio and a final Allegro in which the soloists are more seamlessly integrated into the orchestral fabric in a fleet-footed gigue.

Telemann has often been disparaged as a composer more concerned with churning out quantities of fashionable music than with attention to musical quality. While his compositional output is indeed staggering (he wrote more than 1000 cantatas, for instance), what really stands out is the great care he took to write idiomatically for musicians and their instruments, whether for the finest professional players or for amateurs enjoying music as a leisure pursuit. Consequently, Telemann disliked the concerto genre, finding the virtuosic showmanship associated with it awkward and distasteful. He wrote, "Even though it is likely that nature wished to deny me something, because we aren't all able to do everything, it is probably one reason why I've found, in most concertos that I've seen, many difficulties and awkward leaps by little harmony and even poorer melody. The first qualities I hated because they were uncomfortable for my hand and bow, and owing to the lack of the last qualities... I could neither love nor imitate [concertos]." Telemann's own concertos foreground ensemble playing, lyrical melodies, rich harmony, and counterpoint. Both his Concerto for flute and strings in D major TWV 51:D1 and his Concerto for two violins, bassoon, and strings in D major TWV 53:D4 seem strongly influenced by his sacred cantatas with aria-like slow movements and fast movements like choral fugues free from Vivaldian fireworks. Telemann's graciousness won him friends everywhere. He was godfather to one of Bach's sons and shared an interest in gardening with Handel, with whom he exchanged plants by mail. By middle age, he was not only Kantor in Hamburg, one of the most prestigious musical posts in Germany, but also corresponding agent for the Eisenach court, supplying news from his ambassadorial associates in Hamburg and his correspondents across Europe. Perhaps Telemann's life and music are one of the finest examples of how music-making and companionship can nurture one another.

– Christina Hutten

Victoria Baroque

Soile Stratkauskas – Artistic Director

Victoria Baroque has brought exciting performances of early music to Vancouver Island audiences since 2011. Victoria Baroque's musicians are all residents of West Coast Canada, and the group has been the catalyst for many of its players for specializing in period instruments. Besides self-presented concerts, Victoria Baroque has performed as guest artist for Early Music Vancouver, Early Music Society of the Islands, Artspring, and the Cowichan Symphony Society. Notable and regular guest directors and soloists include UK-based violinist Kati Debretzeni and harpsichordist Steven Devine, Canadian soprano Nancy Argenta, and Tafelmusik's Director Emerita and violinist, the late Jeanne Lamon. Victoria Baroque's début CD, *Virtuosi of the Baroque*, featuring Kati Debretzeni was released under Marquis Classics in 2014. Outreach and education are integral to Victoria Baroque's mission, and its educational initiatives have included community workshops and collaborations with the Victoria Conservatory of Music, University of Victoria School of Music, and the Greater Victoria Youth Orchestra. As with other musical groups, Victoria Baroque's regular concert activities came to a halt in spring 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, leading them to explore new ways of reaching audiences, including through online concerts and livestreaming. The CD "Companions of the Baroque" marks the ensemble's 10th anniversary.

Soile Stratkauskas

Victoria Baroque's founder and artistic director, Soile Stratkauskas, moved to Victoria, BC, in 2010, and quickly established herself in the West Coast early music scene. Originally from Finland, Soile completed her undergraduate studies at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, UK, and gained her master's degree at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where she studied early flutes with Lisa Beznosiuk. In the UK, Soile performed with many prominent period instrument orchestras, including the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the Gabrieli Consort and Players, and she has toured in Europe with these groups. She is a member of the Pacific Baroque Orchestra, and teaches baroque flute at the University of British Columbia as part of Early Music Vancouver's Baroque Orchestra Mentorship Program. Soile is passionate about creating opportunities for making and sharing music in the community.

Chloe Meyers

Violinist Chloe Meyers performs with early music ensembles across North America as a leader, orchestra member, and chamber musician. She is the concertmaster of the Pacific Baroque Orchestra in Vancouver and co-concertmaster of Arion Baroque Orchestra in Montreal. She has led or appeared as soloist with groups including Victoria Baroque, Pacific MusicWorks, Ensemble Les Boréades, the Theatre of Early Music, Ensemble Masques, and Les Voix Baroques, of which she was a founding member. She has had the pleasure of sharing the stage with international violin stars, performing double concerti with Stefano Montanari, Enrico Onofri, Amandine Beyer, and Cecilia Bernardini. Chloe's playing may be heard on many award-winning disks, including three Juno-nominated recordings she led as concertmaster. A committed and enthusiastic teacher, she trains young artists in the Baroque Orchestra Mentorship Program, an exciting initiative of the University of British Columbia, Early Music Vancouver, and Pacific Baroque Orchestra.

CREDITS

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This recording took place on the traditional territories of the Lekwungen-speaking peoples and we are grateful to be making music on these beautiful lands.

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