

## Baroque Masters

The end of the 16th century witnessed one of the greatest ideological and aesthetic transformations in the history of Western civilization, the shift from the Renaissance to the Baroque. Baroque art, whose birthplace was Italy, is first and foremost an art of movement, of illusion and enchantment. It seeks to arouse the emotions, to entice, and uses to these ends all that brings pleasures to the senses. This new ideal was linked to a concept of man that derived from Antiquity, the idea that the arts and eloquence could *move, improve, alter and appease the sentiments*.

Theorists describe Baroque art as being characterized by exuberance, irregularity, artifice and contrast, based on an open form of great freedom, and on a moving, plural structure where, in contrast to the static forms cultivated in the Renaissance, each plastic element directs the spectator's gaze to neighbouring elements. Aiming first at the expression of the various passions, the works of Baroque art and architecture afford the eye no rest: everywhere, our gaze rebounds enthralled before the ecstatic saints or the movement captured in the stonework of *façades*.

Music plunged into this heady tide. The foundations of opera, the Baroque form *par excellence*, had been laid. Characters were individualized and the melodic line liberated from the profusion of voices. During the Renaissance, instruments performed transcriptions of multi-part vocal works and played the dance airs required at balls and festivities of all kinds, but towards the end of the 16th century works appeared that were the forerunners of both chamber music and the symphony. Vocal virtuosity was quickly adapted to the violin, recorder, organ and harpsichord, the same concern with expressiveness and sensuality helping to develop the peculiar characteristics of each.

Although each European country retained national characteristics, the winds of change

quickly swept them all, and the music was transformed under the influence of Italy.

In our performance we adopt the style of playing appropriate for this music, incorporating a theatrical approach and a rhythmical freedom to obtain eloquence. We have chosen some pieces for you from the musically prominent countries of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries: France, England, Germany and Italy. These works express the spirit of the baroque period most eloquently while illustrating the national differences. We chose the composers we enjoy to play most especially. Unquestionably Couperin, Purcell, Rebel, Corelli and Vivaldi were among the greatest musicians of their time.

We do hope that through our performance tonight, you will share our joy in playing this music. (*Francis Colpron*)

### ARTISTS' PROGRAMMING VISION AND MUSIC NOTES: A Musical Journey to the Countries of the Baroque

N.B. The historical narrative of this 'journey' through different countries differs from the musical ordering of tonight's program.

In *Le bon usage du monde*, Claude Roy warns us that "it's a traveller's illusion that distance counts, that the beautiful is necessarily far away." Thanks to technology we can, instead, travel through time without leaving the comfort of our homes and, reconciling action and contemplation, appreciate with mind, eye, or ear the artistic productions of all times and all lands.

Les Boréades proposes a musical journey to the heart of the Baroque. We start in Italy, where we will delight in the exuberant and passionate expression that marks the work of the first great virtuosi in the history of music. As soon as we have crossed north over the Alps, we will see that the French cared a great deal about dance, both on stage and in instrumental music. The various stylized ways of playing dance rhythms, known as "à la française," were

all the rage in every part of Europe. Finally, visits to England and the German countries will convince us that their composers managed, while adopting the Italian and French practices, to retain the character of their homelands, and to give us music as rich and original as the models on which it was based.

**Salomone Rossi (1570-1630)**, a Jew, is one of the musicians who, around 1600, first wrote music for instruments without singers, music that was independent of vocal models. He was based in Mantua, where one of his colleagues was the violinist **Giovanni Battista Buonamente**. Their respective collections of sonatas, canzonas, and various dances show the first stages in the evolution of the trio sonata, a form that would inspire the genius of composers for almost two centuries. Buonamente's trips to Austria spread the modern instrumental style beyond the borders of Italy.

Around the 1670s, major changes began to occur in the sonata and the concerto. The new elements included a clear separation of movements, usually into two parts, each with a stable rhythm and continuous motion, as well as the affirmation of tonality. **Arcangelo Corelli, (1653-1713)** also a violinist, was the main innovator in this development. His work, with its perfection, measure, and balance, became the ideal compositional model throughout Europe for several decades. His most enduring impact was in England where chamber versions of his 12 concertos, opus 6 were published in several editions for amateurs.



For the generation after Corelli, the trio sonata became the form *par excellence* in which all young composers had to prove themselves, to show off their melodic gifts and their contrapuntal skills. Thus, before being employed as *maestro di violino* at the Pietà in Venice and just after being ordained a priest, **Antonio Vivaldi** published his first collection, which consisted of 12 sonatas for two violins and basso continuo. Deliberately taking Corelli as a model, he composed the last sonata in this collection in the form of virtuoso variations on *La Follia*, which at that time was a very popular tune with an accompaniment of a recurring sequence of four chords.

**Jean-Féry Rebel's** short ballet, *Les Caractères de la danse*, an icon of French music, links together the main dance rhythms of the era. It was first performed in 1715 by Mademoiselle Prévost, who added mimed gestures and postures suggesting an action to the steps of each dance. It was widely performed, including in London in 1725 with Handel conducting

**François Couperin (1668-1733)** is best known for the considerable body of work he wrote for harpsichord. A composer of intimate music, he has also left us chamber music consisting of suites and trio sonatas, in which he combines the Italian style, all the rage in the Paris of his day, with the French style. *L'Astrée*, composed in the 1690s, is one of the first sonatas written in France.



London-based **Matthew Locke (1621-1677)**, official composer of 'private musick' for Charles II and organist with the Queen's Catholic Chapel, left a good deal of music for the theatre and the church, and also music for consorts of viols, a form that began in the Renaissance and that he merged with that of the dance suite.



In 1677 **Henry Purcell** became composer of violin music for the Chapel Royal and later became, among other things, a member of William of Orange's 'private Musick.' His instrumental works consist, essentially, of viol fantasies, harpsichord pieces, and three- and four-voice sonatas. The latter do not take a fixed form; they vary in number of movements and, by applying harmonic and contrapuntal devices, turn the Italian model on which they are based into an intimate and utterly English form of expression.

**Jacob van Eyck (1590-1657)**, blind since birth, was carillonneur at the cathedral of Utrecht, in Holland, and inspector of bells in his native city. He was also an amateur recorder player. For many years he entertained strollers in the cathedral gardens with his playing. Around 1650 he published his various pieces and variations in two collections entitled *Der Fluyten Lust-Hof*. The tune of "Doen Daphne d'overshoone Maeght" (When Daphne, the Most Beautiful Maiden) comes from England.



At this same time, **Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (1623-1680)**, a virtuoso violinist, had been a member of the imperial chapel in Vienna, for more than thirty years. His *balletto* entitled *Fechtschule*, (the fencing school), was the fruit of a commission he received in 1668 from Prince-Archbishop Carl von Liechtenstein-Kastelkorn. The prelate, an arts patron and a great lover of music, wanted for his court "all sorts of beautiful dance tunes, of the kind that are especially used at carnival time." In fulfilling this commission, Schmelzer also added musical portraits of two tradesmen: the fencing master, and the barber-surgeon, whose job it was to bandage wounds and treat injuries.



When you travel from one country to another through the music of this period, national differences are clear. Also evident are theatricality, a sense of grandeur, and wit tinged with humour. There is, undoubtedly, music that is more exotic, but it is hard to find music that is as beautiful and as immediately seductive as that of the countries of the Baroque. Bon voyage! (©François Filiatrault, 2008. Translated by Sean McCutcheon)