

Anne Laver
Program for Sonoma Bach Concert Series
Saturday, February 17, 2018

“All Roads Lead to Rome”

Overture from the opera *Flavio* George Frederic Handel (1685-1759)
arr. Walsh

Toccatà quarta per l’Elevazione Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643)

Fantasia la mi fa fa Bernardo Pasquini (1637-1710)

Concerto grosso in C Major, op. 6, no. 10 Archangelo Corelli (1653-1713)
arr. Thomas Billington
Prelude
Allemanda
Adagio
Corrente
Allegro
Minuet

Capriccio sopra il cucu Johann Kaspar Kerll (1627-1693)

Praeludium in E, BuxWV 141 Dieterich Buxtehude (1637-1707)

*****intermission*****

Prelude in E-flat Major, BWV522/I Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele, BWV 654 J. S. Bach

Fugue in E-flat Major, BWV522/II J. S. Bach

Notes on the program

At the time of the Roman Empire, the city of Rome was the point from which all distances were measured and all roads began, hence the source of the modern idiom, “all roads lead to Rome.” This program features music of a later time period, when Rome had once again risen as Europe’s important cultural center. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this city was home to the who’s who among the musicians of day—Frescobaldi, Carissimi, Marcello, Pasquini, Froberger, Muffat, Handel, Kerll, Corelli, and Scarlatti—and was the backdrop for great musical innovation. Wealthy nobility nurtured and encouraged composers to write and perform keyboard toccatas, operas, and concerti. This program will explore a variety of works with a connection to Rome, including works by Italians and those that were influenced by them.

Handel: Overture

George Frederic Handel was one of the most famous baroque composers to get his start in Rome. Between the years 1706—1709, Handel spent most of his time in Rome, writing solo cantatas, sacred music, and oratorios. He eventually settled in England and worked tirelessly to satisfy the English demand for modern Italian opera. He wrote dozens of operas in this style for various theatres. *Flavio* premiered in 1723 at the King's Theatre in London using Haym's libretto, which had been adapted from an Italian text prepared for Rome. As is the case with many of his Italianate operas, Handel opens with a two-part overture in the French style, complete with dramatic flourishes and dotted rhythms. This arrangement was printed by Walsh, the prolific London publisher, in a 1755 collection titled, "Handel's sixty overtures from all his operas and oratorios, set for the harpsichord or organ."

Frescobaldi: Toccata

Girolamo Frescobaldi is credited with establishing a distinctly new keyboard style. He successfully blended the madrigalism from his hometown of Ferrara with a new toccata form that alternated between short motivic episodes and sections driven by harmony and dissonance. Frescobaldi lived and worked most of his life in Rome, where he was organist at St. Peter's Basilica. His Toccata Quarta, from his second book of toccatas (Rome, 1627), uses his new language to depict passion and emotion surrounding Christ's death on the cross.

Pasquini: Fantasia

Bernardo Pasquini was one of the great Italian keyboard virtuosos of his day, earning the admiration and support from a host of influential patrons in Rome: Queen Christina of Sweden, Prince Colonna, Cardinal Ottoboni, Cardinal Pamphili and Prince Giambattista Borghese. Pasquini was an established member of the musical elite in Rome during his life, he interacted with Handel, played duets with Corelli, and taught dozens of pupils, notably Muffat, Zipoli, and Domenico Scarlatti. His Fantasia la mi fa fa shows appreciation and familiarization with older forms (he copied Frescobaldi's book of fantasias as a student), but also incorporates modern time signatures and virtuosic motives. The piece explores the motive "la mi fa fa"—a collection of pitches from two hexachords—in five distinct sections that successively increase in pace and excitement.

Corelli: Concerto

Archangelo Corelli first sparked the interest of the wealthy Cardinal Pamphili by playing violin for the Lenten oratorios in Rome in 1676. With the backing of Pamphili and other important patrons, he quickly became the most important violinist in Rome, performing regularly and publishing sets of solo sonatas, trio sonatas, and concerti grossi. The thinner textures, transparent structures, and light virtuosity in Corelli's work garnered him fame throughout Europe. This popularity is manifest in a transcription of Corelli's collection of concerti grossi made by Englishman Thomas Billington in 1784.

Kerll: Capriccio

Johann Caspar Kerll was a composer of German birth who spent his formative years in Rome studying with Giacomo Carissimi. He probably interacted with Froberger during his time in Rome, and may have even studied with him. After his student years in Rome, Kerll moved to Munich and spent the rest of his life as Kapellmeister to the Elector Ferdinand Maria. Kerll's Capriccio sopra il cucu exists in manuscript copies with other Italianate works and is a whimsical study on the cucu bird's call. Kerll no doubt knew earlier cucu capricci by Italian masters Frescobaldi and Pasquini.

Buxtehude: Praeludium

As music manuscripts and ideas flowed northward from Italy, composers in Germany city states rushed to adapt the Italian style to their own contexts. One of these composers was Dieterich Buxtehude, organist at the Marienkirche in the northern German city of Lübeck. Buxtehude was known to improvise masterful multi-movement works that incorporated elements of the Italian style: dramatic harmonic shifts, virtuosic figuration, and imitative sections. For these reasons, one of his contemporaries, Martin Heinrich Fuhrmann, believed Buxtehude advanced the Italian toccata style established by Frescobaldi. He famously stated his admiration for Buxtehude in his *Musicalische-Trichter* of 1706: "Thus this German Italianizes; indeed he runs many miles ahead." In the Praeludium in E, Buxtehude begins with an opening flourish to establish the key, which is then followed by four imitative sections, each with harmonically-driven transitional material in between. The theme for the first fugue, played on the reed sound, has a subject that may sound familiar to us as the same incipit for the chorale "O God our help in ages past" (tune: St. Anne). It is a coincidence that this fugue shares the same material, seeing how the choral was published in the end of the 18th century in England. You will hear the fugue subject again on the final piece on the program.

Johann Sebastian Bach: Prelude and Fugue and Chorale Prelude

Although Johann Sebastian Bach achieved considerable fame as an organist in his lifetime, he rarely traveled, and when he did it was within Germany. Despite this, Bach was able to glean the important elements of other national styles from studying manuscripts. While working in the court of Duke of Weimar, he perused the duke's younger brother's collection of Italian concertos and made a handful of keyboard arrangements during the years 1713-14. Bach continued to draw on the stylistic elements he mastered in this period throughout his life. One of these was the concept of the ritornello form. In an Italian concerto, the ritornello is the recognizable theme played by the whole ensemble that could be broken into smaller pieces, transposed, repeated and played in alternation with the virtuosic solo sections. Bach expertly adapted this ritornello concept in his keyboard preludes and chorale preludes to make new and expanded forms. The Praeludium in E-flat Major and the chorale prelude *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele* are excellent examples of the way Bach used this technique. In *Schmücke dich*, the ornamented chorale tune takes the role of the soloist and the opening theme is the ritornello that comments on each phrase. In the Praeludium in E-flat, Bach's ritornello that opens the piece begins in an exuberant French overture style with full organ in dotted rhythms. Bach demonstrates his mastery of genre and style by blending the Italian ritornello form with the French overture style in this piece. This sophisticated work is the first piece in Bach's 1739 Clavierübung III, one of the few collections Bach published in his lifetime. The last piece in the collection is the Fugue in E-flat, a monumental triple fugue in which each of the three sections present different characters and progressively faster rhythms.

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