



P R E S E N T

Quicksilver Baroque

Sunday, September 9, 2018
3:00 p.m.

St. John's Episcopal Church

Program

FANTASTICUS: Strange and Wonderful Music from the Seventeenth Century

Sonata no. 9 à 4	Matthias Weckmann (1616–1674)
Sonata ottava à due	Giovanni Fontana (1589–1630)
Sonata quinta à 4 from <i>Sonate, opera seconda</i> , Venice 1651	Massimiliano Neri (ca. 1621–ca. 1670)
Sonata à 3 in A minor from the <i>Duben Collection</i> , Uppsala, ca. 1660	Antonio Bertali (1605–1669)
Sonata à tre	Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644–1704)
Toccata	Michelagnolo Galilei (1575–1631)
Polnische Sackpfeiffen	Johann Schmeltzer (ca. 1623–1680)

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Sonata no. 2 à 4	Weckmann
Sonata terza à 2 from <i>La Cetra</i> , Venice 1673	Giovanni Legrenzi (1626–1690)
Sonata à 4 in G major, La Carolietta from <i>Kroměříž</i> , 1669	Schmeltzer
Prelude, Fugue, and Postlude in G minor	Georg Böhm (1661–1733)
Sonata decimaquarta from <i>Sonate Concertate in Stil Moderno, Libro II</i> , Venice 1629	Dario Castello (fl. early 17th century)

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About the Program

by Robert Mealy, © 2018

The seventeenth century is often called the “early modern period” by historians, a useful term that reminds us what a transformative moment this was in Western cultural history. This was the moment when Europe became modern. New technologies were emerging, our modern economic system was developing, the earth was no longer at the center of the universe. Among these cultural revolutions was one in music, as composers began to invent a *nuove musiche* or *stile moderno*. This self-consciously “modern” music delighted in dramatic oppositions and vivid emotional statements, in striking contrast to the smooth tapestry of Renaissance polyphony.

Tonight’s concert is an examination of this modern music, as it was invented by virtuoso instrumental composers first in Italy and then in Germany. It is also an exploration of their new invention, the *sonata*: a pure instrumental work, a piece simply meant to be “sounded,” with no agenda but the imagination of the composer – and no standard formal shape except the passionate give-and-take of friends in conversation. Some German theorists described this new instrumental style as the *stylus fantasticus*; according to one writer, this was “the most unrestrained style,” in which composers are free to use whatever their imagination suggests.

These passionate musical conversations come down to us in various ways. The sonatas of the Italians are generally published in Venice (but who bought them? who played them?) while German music tended to circulate in handwritten copies, collected by connoisseurs or passed around between colleagues.

We open each half of our program with sonatas by a wonderfully *fantasticus* composer from the northern reaches of Germany. **Matthias Weckmann** studied with Schütz in Dresden, from whom he received training in the latest Italian styles. He later became the director of music at the Jacobikirche in Hamburg, where he organized a series of weekly concerts with distinguished musicians who performed “the best things from Venice, Rome, Vienna, Munich, Dresden etc.” Doubtless his own fiercely dramatic ensemble sonatas were heard among these foreign pieces.

The flood of sonatas printed in Venice in the early part of the seventeenth century began to decline in the 1630’s, when plague swept Northern Italy and the economy began to crash. One of the victims of “the voracity of this pestilence” (according to the preface of his sonatas) was the great virtuoso violinist **G.B. Fontana**, whose works were gathered together after his death. His *Sonata ottava* is characteristic in its almost visionary sweetness, as well as in its seemingly effortless spontaneity of gesture, with some unexpectedly wayward rhythms.

Massimiliano Neri (not to be confused with the male model of the same name) is possibly the most widely-traveled of our composers. Born of Italians working at the

Munich court, he spent many years in Venice as organist at San Marco. He later moved to Vienna, where he was ennobled by the Emperor, before ending his career as Kapellmeister for the Elector of Cologne. His *Sonata quinta* from his 1651 set of sonatas is typical of his work, combining the brisk motivic interplay of Gabrieli’s polychoral canzonas with the impassioned rhetoric of the *stile moderno*.

Another Italian immigrant was the “valoroso nel’violino” **Antonio Bertali**, who arrived in Vienna around 1624 and became Kapellmeister to the Emperor in 1649. His *Sonata a 3* uses the same striking contrasts as Weckmann and Fontana, only in a larger musical architecture. This sonata, with its passionate solos and strikingly sonorous conclusion, turns up in an enormous music collection put together by Gustav Düben for Queen Christina of Sweden, in Uppsala.

The virtuoso Italian violinists who sought employment at the Viennese court brought with them the new idea of the *sonata concertata*, where each instrument steps forward to take a solo. Leopold I was a great connoisseur of chamber music and made a point of rewarding the talents of native-born composers. After playing for the Emperor several times, the violin virtuoso **Heinrich Biber** was ennobled as “von Biber” in recognition of his exemplary talents. The sonorous *sonata a tre* attributed to him not only allows each player to take their turn as soloist, but brings everyone together in a particularly lyrical and expressive triple-time at the close.

Many of our sonatas were written by musicians who themselves were expert performers. **Michelagnolo Galilei** was a virtuoso Florentine lutenist whose fame spread far enough that he was invited to become a court musician for the nobles of Poland when he was only 18. He later became a member of the Hofkapelle of Maximilian I in Munich, where he spent the rest of his life. Although his brother, the scientist Galileo Galilei, is better-known today, Michelagnolo was a composer whose works circulated widely throughout Germany and Italy. He published one volume of engraved music for ten-course lute, a collection of toccatas and dances which (as one scholar has remarked) “express their author’s elegance of invention, cosmopolitanism of style and eminently poetic nature.”

Along with the high arts of the sonata, the musicians of the courts also could offer less refined pleasures. **Johann Schmelzer**, the first German Kapellmeister to the Imperial court in Vienna, spent much of his career providing entertainments for the music-loving Leopold I, who was particularly fond of musical *bizarrie*. Schmelzer’s wonderfully vivid portrait of Polish bagpipers knits together a number of folk tunes, interspersed with more courtly material. Its ending is particularly eccentric: a tune fragment played in unison that just peters out to nothing.

In our second half, things turn more serious. After another of Weckmann's deeply unexpected sonatas, which ends with a quite wonderful sequence of visionary sonorities, we hear **Giovanni Legrenzi's** third sonata from his collection *La Cetra*. This sonata, from a collection dedicated to the Hapsburg emperor, is an excellent example of how the sonata was changing by mid-century, influenced by the lyricism of Venetian opera composers like Cavalli and Cesti. Now, instead of a kaleidoscope of changing moods, the sonata has become a series of separate movements. The overlapping dissonances heard in the opening of this sonata were later to become a staple in the works of Arcangelo Corelli.

With *La Carolietta*, we hear a more artful piece from **Schmeltzer**, who was celebrated by a contemporary as "the famous and perhaps the most distinguished violinist in all of Europe." Schmeltzer not only created entertainments like the *Sachspfeifen* which closed our first half, but also wrote elaborate sonatas like the one for violin, trombone, bassoon, and continuo we hear next. Schmeltzer became the first non-Italian to attain the rank of *Kapellmeister* at the Imperial court in 1679. He didn't live to enjoy the honor, however: a few months later, he was dead from an outbreak of plague.

We hear from a slightly later generation with the *Prelude, Fugue, and Postlude* of **Georg Böhm**. This important composer, who was to influence J.S. Bach so deeply, spent his formative musical years in Hamburg, where he would have heard French-style opera at the public opera house as well as the grand German organ tradition repre-

sented by older masters like Reincken. Böhm himself became the organist for nearby Lüneburg in 1697 and held the position until his death. Böhm's three-movement keyboard work we hear today brings together the French elegance and sense of dance that Böhm would have learned in Hamburg with the deep harmonic intensity characteristic of the north German keyboard tradition.

We end with one of the great masters of the instrumental *stile moderno*. Apart from his music, we know absolutely nothing about **Dario Castello**. There are no records that someone with that name even existed in Venice during the early decades of the century, or that (as he claims on the title pages of his two books of sonatas) he ever worked at San Marco. Judging by some musical details they share, it's clear that Monteverdi was a close colleague. But all that we know of Castello today is through his sonatas, which (unusually for the time) went through several reprints – proof that his contemporaries thought they were something special.

Castello's striking *Sonata decimaquarta* begins with a little epigram, a statement and its answer, which is then discussed by the ensemble at length. The strongly rhetorical adagio which follows builds to a grand climax. We then hear an elaborate duet for the two violins, with a strikingly angular motif. After some festive triple sections, the sonata finishes with an eleven-bar pedal point, over which the soloists sketch some wonderfully warped melodic phrases. (In his preface, Castello recommends trying these pieces out once or twice before performing them, "for nothing is hard to those who love it.")

Quicksilver

Robert Mealy & Julie Andrijeski, *violins & directors*

Greg Ingles, *trombone*

Avi Stein, *harpsichord & organ*

Dominic Teresi, *dulcian*

Charles Weaver, *theorbo & guitar*

"Revered like rock stars within the early music scene" (*New York Times*), **Quicksilver** brings together leading historically-informed performers in North America today. Described as "drop dead gorgeous with a wonderful interplay of timbres" (*Early Music America*), and praised as "irresistible" (*Fanfare*), Quicksilver vibrantly explores the rich chamber music repertoire from the early modern period to the High Baroque. The ensemble has been featured at numerous music series and prestigious festivals, receiving critical acclaim, standing ovations and repeat invitations. Recent appearances include Carnegie Hall, Virginia Arts Festival, Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center, Chamber Music in Historic Sites (Los Angeles), Boston Early Music Festival, Vancouver Early Music Festival, Early Music Now (Milwaukee), Dumbarton Oaks (Washington, DC), Houston Early Music, Early Music

Hawaii, Music Before 1800, and San Diego Early Music Society. Quicksilver's debut recording, "Stile Moderno: New Music from the Seventeenth Century," was described as "Breakthrough of the Year ... breathtaking" (*Huffington Post*) and "convincing ... terrific" (*Early Music – Oxford Journal*). Quicksilver's latest recording, "Fantasticus: Extravagant and Virtuoso Music from Seventeenth Century Germany," has been named one of *The New Yorker's* "Ten Notable Recordings of 2014", praised as "Fantasticus, indeed" (*Gramophone*) and a "recommended purchase!" (*Austrian Music Journal*). Quicksilver's next recording, "The (Very) First Viennese School," is forthcoming next season.

For more information on the group's activities, please visit their website, www.quicksilverbaroque.com.

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