

## Program Notes

It is our pleasure to invite you to join the FIU Collegium Musicum on its musical tour through the early music of Italy and that of selected foreign composers who were inspired by her example. We begin with a consort of viols, instruments that share similarities to the members of the violin family, but are more closely related to lutes in terms of tuning, approach, and repertoire. An ordained priest, Vincenzo Ruffo was a prolific composer who served in several different Italian cities. The three pieces we present tonight are from the only volume of instrumental works he is known to have published. All are highly contrapuntal, and the last one features the popular contemporary tune “La Gamba,” first in the bass and then in the soprano voice.

“La Romanesca” is a classic ground bass variation, a Baroque theme and variations following one of several well-known bass note/chord patterns that musicians used as framework for improvisation much in the same way that the blues musicians of today riff on the familiar 12-bar blues pattern that we all know from early rock and roll artists such as Chuck Berry. In the Baroque era, each succeeding variation demonstrated a contrasting idiomatic technique from that particular instrument’s “bag of tricks.” We can think of these pieces as written-out improvisations. One of the favorite ground bass variations was “Follia,” familiar to modern audiences from period films such as *Jefferson in Paris* and *Tous les matins du monde*. Of the many “Follia” variations, Corelli’s is the best known. It is a virtuoso showpiece for violin and cello that demands complete technical command. Originally from Bologna, Corelli settled in Rome where he ultimately established himself both as the most important violinist of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and one of the first truly great orchestral conductors.

Perhaps the most popular instrument in the 16<sup>th</sup> and much of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the lute is similar to the guitar, however, like the viol, the lute was the preferred instrument for court, while the guitar, like the instruments of the violin family, was preferred for popular entertainment. Oscar Chilesotti (1848-1916) was an Italian musician and historiographer, who transcribed a larger number of pieces from lute tablature into modern notation. As it goes, the original manuscripts from which Chilesotti made his transcriptions have since been lost; had he not made his transcriptions, that large repository of compositions would have disappeared forever. With its entrancing ostinato, “Italiana,” is one of the top ten Italian lute “hits” of the Renaissance. Cosimo Bottegari was a Florentine court singer and lutenist who compiled a manuscript songbook that is one of the few surviving pre-Baroque sources of Italian lute songs. Prior to becoming the Counter-Reformation composer of Catholic Church music *par excellence*, Palestrina composed secular music. Scandal! “Vestiva i colli” is one of the most popular classic Italian madrigals even serving as a model for many instrumental compositions by other composers. “Bianco fiore” from Cesare Negri’s dance manual *Le Grazie d’Amore* is often arranged for other instruments, but tonight it is performed in its original form on the lute.

The Modenese singer, theorbo virtuoso, poet, and adventurer Bellerofonte Castaldi proudly heralded his friend Claudio Monteverdi as the “New Orfeo.” Indeed, Monteverdi is one of music history’s most important trailblazers, composing the first real opera (*Orfeo* 1607) and advancing the philosophy that the expression of the text should supersede the rules of counterpoint. In his instructions “Lamento della Ninfa,” he specifies that the three gentlemen are to be positioned close to but apart from the Ninfa, for their text is both commentary and commiseration on her plight.

English madrigals flourished during a brief, but fruitful period from 1588 to 1627. Initially inspired by a popular collection of Italian madrigals translated into English known as *Musica*

*Transalpina*, the earliest English madrigals were based upon Italian models, but composers such as Gibbons soon found their own voices. The final line of Gibbons' "Silver Swan" laments "More Geese than Swans now live, more Fools than Wise." It is thought that this phrase was meant as a metaphor, decrying the general quality of madrigals composed in the waning years of the once glorious tradition. Bolognese composer Adriano Banchieri's "Contrapunto bestiale alla mente" is a hilarious menagerie of animal characters that needs no further introduction. Meow!

Organist at St. Peter's in Rome, Girolamo Frescobaldi was the most important early 17<sup>th</sup>-century Italian keyboard composer. Daring and bold, his virtuosic toccatas demonstrate the gamut of keyboard pyrotechnics in contrasting sections designed to display the keyboard's textural versatility. At the other end of the century is Domenico Scarlatti. Son of the renowned Neapolitan opera composer, Alessandro Scarlatti, Domenico's 500+ single-movement harpsichord sonatas blend the very best of the Italian Baroque style with that of his adopted Iberian homeland resulting in dynamic compositions of unparalleled individuality. The Sonata in Bb displays both Scarlatti's melodic gift that he certainly developed under his father's wing as well as his unmistakable rhythmic vitality, an attribute he no doubt acquired in Portugal and Spain. Notice how he also uses the entire range of the instrument, bringing out the myriad variety of colors a fine instrument like ours can produce.

A composer with a name such as Schütz might seem out of place in a concert devoted to Italian music. Schütz spent a great deal of time in Venice, first learning polychoral techniques from Giovanni Gabrieli, and then returning to spend time with Monteverdi, whom he admired greatly. Tonight you will have the opportunity to experience what it is like to be in the middle of the polychoral experience: half the choir will be placed on your left and the other half to your right. This marvelous composition is a monument to text expression. To wit, notice how the first utterances of "Saul" spring from the depths of...the earth?, his soul?, his conscience?... as if he's not even sure he's hearing the call until it becomes so strong that he can ignore it no longer. The startling chromaticism represents the conflict within Saul's inner being while the key modulations represent his spiritual transformation. Receiving his training as a singer in Monteverdi's choir at San Marco and then as his assistant, Rovetta succeeded Monteverdi as choirmaster upon his mentor's death in 1643. Appropriately for a Holy Week concert, "Laetatus sum" exalts the Holy City, Jerusalem, and offers a universal prayer for peace and prosperity.

Although he is reported to have said that he wanted to be remembered as an opera composer, the Venetian composer Antonio Vivaldi is revered chiefly for his c. 550 concerti, many for non-traditional concerto solo instruments such as the lute, viola d'amore, chalumeaux, and mandolin. Tuned like a violin, the modern four-course (four sets of double strings tuned in unisons) mandolin conjures up images of Italy like no other instrument. Vivaldi's concerti are in three movements. The first and third movements are in ritornello form, which means that the opening orchestral theme returns in full or in part at regular intervals throughout the movement. Between the ritornelli, the soloist performs impressive feats of soloistic wizardry. Vivaldi's slow movements are usually in binary form and in a contrasting key, in this case, the relative minor. Our soloist tonight will embellish the repetition of each half of the slow movement in traditional Baroque fashion.

We hope you enjoy tonight's concert and thank you for sharing your evening with us.

- David Dolata, Eva Reyes-Cisneros, and Stephan Maras