

The Harvard Baroque Chamber Orchestra
presents

HANDEL'S ITALY

featuring

Benjamin P. Wenzelberg, countertenor

Sunday, November 7, 2021, 4 PM
The Memorial Church

PROGRAM

Overture to *Rodrigo* George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)
Overture
Gigue
Sarabande
Matelot
Menuet
Bourrée

Come nave in ria tempeste Nicola Porpora (1686-1768)

from Cello concerto no. 1 in G Major Porpora
Amoroso
Allegro

Phoebe Carrai, cello

Si pietoso il tuo labbro Porpora

Concerto grosso in D Major, op. 5 no 6
Evaristo Felice Dall'Abaco (1675-1742)
Allegro
Aria Cantabile
Ciaccona - Rondeau – Allegro

Eroica Fortezza Handel

Il dolce foco mio Handel

Passacaglia from *Rodrigo* Handel

Come nube che fugge dal vento Handel

THE PLAYERS

Violin:

Sarah Darling*

Farkhad Abdikadirov

Rishabh Ghosh

Eliza Hirsch

Jennifer Hsiao

Nathan Kim

Constance Kraay

Carrol Lee*

William Lundell

Cynthia Mathiesen

Kevin Miura*

Ambrose Philipek

Silvia Casacuberta Puig

Morris Reeves

Madeleine Riskin-Kutz

Nikhil Seshadri

Zev Shapiro

Alison Souza

Johanna Staples-Ager

Meghan Titzer

Sophie Westbrooke

Viola:

Hayley Murks-Abdikadirova*

Diamante Balcazar

Teresa Bloemer

Zoe Chau

Jessica Cooper

Jonathan Karp

Veronica Koven-Matasy*

Cello:

Phoebe Carrai*

Neo Guerrero

Christopher Hodges*

Judah Lampkin

Jose Quezada Márquez

Nathaniel Steele

Bass:

Guinevere Connor*

Nosa Lawani

Arjun Nageswaran

Harpsichord:

Albano Berberi

Oboe:

Mary Cicconetti

*Denotes a principal player



Harvard Baroque Chamber Orchestra
Officers 2021-2022

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TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

Porpora: "Come nave in ria tempesta"
from *Semiramide regina dell'Assiria*

Come nave in ria tempesta
combattuto è il mio
pensiero,
che risolvere non so.
In qual parte io volgo il
ciglio
veggo orror, veggo periglio,
nel crudel cimento e fiero
(giusto Ciel) che far dovrò!

As a ship in a storm
battled is my thought,
what to resolve I do not
know.
In which part I turn the
brink
I see horror, I see danger,
in the cruel trial and proud
(just Heaven) what shall I
do!

Porpora: "Si pietoso il tuo labbro"
from *Semiramide riconosciuta*

Si pietoso il tuo labbro
ragiona che quest'alma non
teme che finga
s'abbandona alla dolce
lusinga
e contenti sognando mi va.
Care pene, felici martiri,
se mostrasse l'ingrata
Tamiri,
Qualche parte di questa
pietà.

Your lips are pitying,
because this soul does not
fear
that it will pretend it
abandons itself
to sweet flattery and happy
dreaming it goes.
Dear pains, happy martyrs,
if it showed the ungrateful
Tamiri
some part of this pity.

Handel: "Eroica fortezza"
from *Rodrigo*

Eroica fortezza,
Non teme sciagure, resiste
alla sorte.
Le pene di sprezza non cura
sventure,
in contra la morte.

Heroic strength
does not fear misfortunes, it
resists fate.
The pains of contempt do
not cure misfortunes,
in contrast to death

Handel: "Il dolce foco mio"
from *Rodrigo*

Il dolce foco mio,
ch'accende un bel desio,
amor lusinga.
Ma nasce un rio Timor,
onde languisce il cor,
che gli non finga.

My sweet flame,
fanned by a great desire,
is flattered by love.
But a fear is born in me,
so my heart languishes,
in case love is pretending.

Handel: "Come nube"
from *Agrippina*

Come nube che fugge dal
vento,
abbandono sdegnato quel
volto.

Like a cloud that escapes
from the wind,
I indignantly abandon that
face.

Il mio foco nel seno già
spento,
di quest'alma già il laccio è
disciolto.

My fire in the womb already
extinguished,
the snare of this soul is
already dissolved.

PROGRAM NOTES

The young George Frederick Handel (1685-1759) spent the years 1706-1710 pursuing his career in Italy, absorbing the vibrant Italian style of music-making first-hand and working as a freelance composer for elite patrons including the Cardinals Pamphili and Colonna. Handel composed *Rodrigo*, his first Italian opera, during this period. It was performed at the Teatro Cocomero in Florence. His suite of orchestral pieces from *Rodrigo* combines French and Italian musical styles. The elegant French Overture breaks into fast music akin to a *passepied* (a dance). In the slow sections, we hear a lovely motivic *contrapposto* (counterpoise, or opposition of weight), with *arpeggios* answered by scales; the music is majestic and subtle. The *Gigue* is a comic dance of the type that could have accompanied the *lazzi* (physical gags) of a *commedia dell'arte* production. The quirky, unpredictable repeated notes and syncopations are like leaps, somersaults, and feints performed by a mischievous *arlecchino*. It goes by quickly but sticks with us: it is funny, earthy, and poignant. The rising and falling of the *Sarabande's* melody conjures the hidden breath of the dance. The music's *scansion* is irregular and its melody floats across and through phrases with exquisite charm. The *Matelot* (sailor's dance) is like a sea chanty without words. A raucous, muscular song, it brings to life the open sea and the crash of waves. A *menuet* and *bourree* follow. The graceful *menuet's* tenebrous turns of phrase in its second half are rendered all the more charming by their quick turnaround back to the sunny home key. The *bourree* is filled with effusive joy. Like the *menuet*, it has moments of a minor tonality, with sidelong sighs and winks in *g minor*.

Neapolitan composer Nicola Porpora (1686-1768) was celebrated as an opera composer and pursued an international career in cities including Naples, Rome, London, and Vienna. He was trained at the Conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesù Cristo. The Neapolitan conservatory curriculum, based on internalization of musical language through singing (*solfeggio*, or, elaborate vocal etudes), thoroughbass-based improvisation (*partimento*) and counterpoint formed the foundation of Porpora's own practice

as a teacher. His pupils included Franz Josef Haydn (1732-1809) and the superstar castrati Farinelli (1705-1762) and Caffarelli (1710-1783). NB: Castrati, like today's modern pop stars (think Madonna and Beyoncé), went by only one name.

Porpora worked in London from 1733-1736. Enabled by his patron Frederick, Prince of Wales (1707-1751), he competed aggressively with Handel for dominance in the opera scene. Ultimately, Handel prevailed. The arias we present from *Semiramide regina dell'Assiria* demonstrate the Porpora's masterly command of operatic technique and expression. In "Come nave in ria tempesta," the lyrics compare an addled mind to a ship at sea amidst a storm. The melody, like the ship, is thrown about. Flowing suspensions in the strings summon images of endless waves. In the romantic "Si pietoso il tuo labbro" a paramour's lips are musically depicted by elongated appoggiaturas (a type of piquant, dissonant ornament). Porpora infused his instrumental works with the same dramatic verve that he displayed in his theatrical compositions. In his Cello Concerto in G, the opening Adagio imparts an amorous mood. Upon hearing this music, we are meant to lose ourselves in beauty and ecstasy. In the orchestral writing, no one contrapuntal part is paramount; all parts, however, stem from the fundamental bass, like a great variety of wildly growing foliage sprouting from the earth. The cello is a protagonist "walking" through this musical landscape, thinking, feeling, and reflecting. In the second movement, a playful Allegro, fragments of the wittily ornamented, trilling theme get tossed about the strings. The orchestra, rather than simply accompanying the solo part in this movement, dialogues with the cello, commenting, interjecting, and encouraging.

Evaristo Felice Dall'Abaco (1675-1742) was born in Verona, Italy. His travels in France and the Netherlands with his patron Maximilian II Emanuel, Elector of Bavaria influenced his musical style. The Concerto a più istrumenti, Op. 5: No. 6 in D major reflects these international influences and reveals Dall'Abaco as a true cosmopolitan artist. In this Concerto (like

the Handel suite we open with) the music freely mixes elements of the Italian style with French dance forms.

The opening Allegro, written squarely within the tradition of Corellian Concerto Grosso opens with a joyful martial clarion call. This motif resounds throughout the movement. The harmony develops into more complex directions as the movement warms into its conclusion (the musical story thickens!). The Aria cantabile that follows may be a nod to the celebrated Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713). Corelli's Op. 6, No 1 sports a similar melody. In François Couperin L'Apothéose de Corelli, the composer offers a musical depiction of Corelli drinking from the spring of Hippocrene on Mt. Helicon, his source of artistic inspiration. The flowing quality of Abaco's Aria cantabile could bring to mind such images. The Chaconne, which opens like movement from a French theatrical dance, does not take very long to break out into Italianate giga-like triplets. Mid-way through the piece, Abaco breaks the ground (that is, the repeated bass) and introduces spark-like textures over a drone. The Chaconne ends with two stylishly off-kilter seven-bar phrases. The Rondeau combines elements of two French dances, bourree and rigaudon. To close, an Allegro combines now-familiar giga-style tumbling triplets with sparkling violinistic bariolage, a display of musical fireworks.

The Handel arias we present, from Rodrigo and Agrippina display the composer's charismatic and natural way with operatic expression. In "Eroica fortezza" from Rodrigo, stubborn repeated notes charge the piece with an air of defiance. For the image "le pene di sprezza" (the pains of contempt), Handel mobilizes a sequence of laboriously rising intervals to illustrate emotional struggle. The instrumental introduction on "Il dolce foco mio" from Rodrigo, paints the perfect musical portrait of a flame that flickers and dances unpredictably and delightfully. "Come nube" from Agrippina is a moving exercise in extreme dramatic contrasts. The excitement of the A section, the pathos of the aria's midsection, and the lift in spirits that accompanies the da capo (return) of the A create a vivid picture of very human emotional contradictions.

We offer the Passacaglia from Handel's Rodrigo suite toward the end of our program. The passacaille (and its cousin, the chaconne) was a favorite in French ballet and operatic contexts, the perfect dance for a special dramatic moment or grand finale. Handel's Passacaglia combines soloistic concerto- and sonata-like string writing that could be straight out of Corelli or Vivaldi's playbook if it were not interlaced throughout a French dance movement. The movement ends in a graceful tutti gesture, with the melody dipping up to a twinkling high note, before settling down to a peaceful rest.

—Benjamin Katz

SOLOIST'S NOTE

It is indescribably meaningful to present this program to you, 20 months after its originally intended date in March 2020! When Phoebe and Sarah first reached out to me about performing arias by Handel and Porpora, I jumped at the chance—as a countertenor generally oriented around repertoire that sits higher in range, the opportunity to perform such virtuosic and simply beautiful arias for countertenors and castrati (aka, functionally, men with huge ranges that blended modal and falsetto registers) with the ensemble is a great gift. All performing forces get to exercise a lot of different musical muscles across the set: you'll hear florid fireworks passed between the vocal and instrumental lines and softly spinning interconnected lyrical threads; there will be feisty vengeance, there will be delicate affection; the extended affects of the Porpora arias perfectly complement the capricious, bite-sized sections of the pieces in the Handel set. You'll embark on a journey of different characters, woven together from their contexts of hurt, fear, love, loss, and hope, in this dynamic and multi-genre/multi-locational/multi-era concert.

Through it all, what I hope you'll see and hear the most is how intricate and close-knit this music demands our collaboration to be. Opera has always been my passion precisely because it requires every moving part to be present and in active dialogue with all others—it's been an utter joy feeling embedded within the orchestra (I say that as much interpersonally as I do musically!) in our process with and performance of this set. Whether practicing the simultaneous vocal and (glorious!) oboe coloratura riffs in "Come nube" to perfectly synchronize our phrasing and timing, or feeling the dissonance resolve between me and the cellos/basses in a gorgeously crunchy passage of pain during "Il dolce foco mio," we are at once each distinct characters in communication across these operatic excerpts, and at the same time, a whole greater than the sum of all our individual parts.

Bringing this music to life in this concert, finding new discoveries every week in the magically masterful writing of these two composers, and knowing that it's all for the purpose of

performing them for you—a (live!) audience filled with energy and care for all of our work—is an immense honor. We can't wait for you to come with us to Handel's Italy!

—Benjamin P. Wenzelberg

BENJAMIN P. WENZELBERG

Benjamin P. Wenzelberg '21/'22 was recently named a 2021 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions District Winner of the Boston District and Encouragement Award Winner of the New England Region, and participated in the 2021 Houston Grand Opera Young Artists Vocal Academy. As a conductor, he conducted the Boston Pops at Symphony Hall after winning their Bernstein Centenary Conducting Competition, and has attended the Tanglewood Music Center Conducting Seminar, Gstaad Conducting Academy, and the Britten-Pears Young Artist Program studying with Marin Alsop. He received an ASCAP Award for his original libretto and music of *The Sleeping Beauty* – an opera for family audiences, and his orchestral composition, *Heroic Dreamscape Fantasy* – inspired by a theme of L. van Beethoven, was performed at the Vienna Musikverein and premiered in Japan in February 2020 during Beethoven 250th Birthday Celebration concerts. Wenzelberg has served as the Music Director of Harvard College Opera (2018-2021) and the Mozart Society Orchestra (2017-2021), sings with the Harvard University Choir, has performed as a soloist and conductor with the Harvard Baroque Chamber Orchestra, and serves as the Assistant Music Director of Lowell House Opera, for whom he is currently writing the libretto and music of a commissioned opera, also his senior thesis: *NIGHTTOWN*: an operatic reimagining of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Piano credits include performing as a collaborative pianist for German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the 2019 Harvard Honorary Degrees Dinner. He is a US Presidential Scholar in the Arts, an alumnus of Juilliard Pre-College, a former child soloist and chorister with the Metropolitan Opera, and he has performed as a vocal soloist with New York City Opera, the New York Philharmonic, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, at Carnegie Hall, and at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. www.benjaminwenzelberg.com

HBCO

Winner of the prestigious Erwin Bodky Award for excellence in early music, the Harvard Baroque Chamber Orchestra is dedicated to bringing back to life the vivid rhetoric and dancing rhythms of baroque music. It was founded by Robert Mealy '85, now the director of the Juilliard School's Historical Performance Program, and Dr. Murray Somerville. The orchestra rehearses each week in the sanctuary of Harvard's Memorial Church, using the church's set of baroque bows and instruments from the Early Instrument Collection of the Music Department. HBCO's Harvard members are joined by students and recent graduates of the New England Conservatory, the Boston Conservatory, Boston University and the Longy Schools of Music. Guest directors have included Christopher Hogwood, William Christie, Joel Cohen, Andrew Parrot, Ton Koopman, Anne Azema, and Bobby McFerrin. The group has also sponsored masterclasses by Elizabeth Blumenstock, Nicholas McGeegan, and Judy Tarling. HBCO has twice been featured by the Cambridge Early Music Society on its Chamber Music by Candlelight series, bringing Vivaldi concerti and a program of new music for old instruments to five Greater Boston venues.

PHOEBE CARRAI

Director Phoebe Carrai followed her path to Austria to do postgraduate studies in early music after finishing her studies at NEC. She became a full member of Musica Antiqua Köln, making 40 discs for Deutsche Grammophon and teaching at the Hilversum Conservatory in Holland. Ms. Carrai taught at the Conservatory of the Arts in Berlin, Germany, for sixteen years and is now on the faculties of the Juilliard School, and the Longy School of Music of Bard College. She also teaches at the Curitiba Festival in Brazil and the Handel Festival in Karlsruhe and was a jurist in 2016 at the International Bach Competition in Leipzig. In addition to chamber music and solo appearances, Ms. Carrai performs regularly with Juilliard Baroque, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, The Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra and Chamber ensemble, the Göttingen Händel Festival Orchestra

and Ensemble and The Arcadian Academy. Ms. Carrai's recording of the six Bach suites for solo Violoncello and Duets of August Kummer can be found on the Avie label. She has also recorded for Harmonia Mundi, Deutsche Grammophon, Aetma, Telarc, Decca and BMG. Ms. Carrai plays on a restored Italian cello made in ca. 1690.

SARAH DARLING

Described as “a tireless force of musical curiosity, skill, and enthusiasm” and “the one to up the ante” (Boston Musical Intelligencer), Sarah Darling enjoys a varied musical career as a performer, educator, and musical co-conspirator on viola and baroque violin. She is a member of the Grammy-nominated self-conducted orchestra A Far Cry, as well as Boston Baroque, Musicians of the Old Post Road, Emmanuel Music, the Boston Ballet Orchestra, Les Bostonades, Newton Baroque, the Boston Camerata, the Boston Early Music Festival, and the Carmel Bach Festival. Sarah studied at Harvard, Juilliard, Amsterdam, Freiburg, and New England Conservatory, working with James Dunham, Karen Tuttle, Wolfram Christ, Nobuko Imai, and Kim Kashkashian. She has recorded old and new music for Linn, Paladino, Azica, MSR, Centaur and Crier Records, plus a solo album on Naxos. Sarah is active as a teacher and coach, relishing the opportunity to “translate” between musical worlds while serving on the faculty of the Longy School of Music. She plays on a restored English violin made in 1695.



We extend our heartfelt thanks
to the wonderful staff at Memorial Church,
the Harvard University Music Department,
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and the generous Friends of Harvard Baroque.

