

PROGRAM NOTES

“Imperfect Circle” looks to seventeenth century Italian Baroque music to explore ideas relating to the circle, a symbol of idealized perfection, while simultaneously confronting the imperfections of our natural world. The concept of the circle implies a sense of motion, here in connection to musical harmony. In music’s mathematical relationships, we find both perfect and imperfect intervals. Both have potent results in chromatic music where the musical line ascends or descends by half-tones. Sometimes the “imperfections” of the harmonies of such chromatic motions lead to raw and intense moments in the music. We also invoke circles in the repetitive harmonies found in commonly-used Baroque forms such as the chaconne and the passacaglia.

The program is itself circular as trio sonatas by **Dietrich Buxtehude** begin and end tonight’s program, the fourth and sixth sonatas from his remarkable Opus 1. Repetitive and obsessive figurations abound in this collection, often through the use of an ostinato movement such as the *Ciaccona* of the fourth sonata. The free and flowing instrumental world of the *stylus fantasticus*, full of contrasting textures and tempos, is especially apparent in the sixth sonata. It asks the ensemble to change tempo fourteen times. Some markings, such as *con discrezione*, invite the musicians to make an imaginative and free interpretation, while others demand stricter, perhaps dance-like regularity. Buxtehude’s viola da gamba part, here played on the five-string Baroque cello, at times enjoys an independent contrapuntal line and at other times joins the continuo team. The continuo, covered by both the theorbo and the harpsichord, is already full of potential texture and color.

Also represented twice on the program are **Angelo Berardi**’s violin works. Berardi greatly inspired our circular thinking through his creative and elaborate canzona titles. Full of startling contrasts and long suspensions, his first canzona is titled “Chi la fa, l’aspetti” (What goes around, comes around). Again, the five-string cello enjoys a chameleonic role, here playing the violin part while the violin enjoys the “solo” role in Berardi’s sixth canzona, *Capriccio per camera*. Like Buxtehude, a profusion of tempo changes entertain and engage the listener. Berardi explores various regional styles with movements modified by *francese* (French), *inglese* (English), and *todesca* (German), while circular themes abound in the two *arcate* (arches), a *cromatico*, and even *perfidia replicata* (repeated betrayal).

To revel in chromaticism is one of the primary aims of tonight’s program. Indeed, keyboard instruments can adeptly demonstrate the acute color changes that result from chromatic motion. One can imagine **Jan Pieterzoon Sweelinck**’s *Fantasia chromatica* coming out of his dazzling improvisations for which he was known in Amsterdam.

The works by Sweelinck and Andrea Cima help connect our circular explorations to the musical traditions of the Renaissance. **Andrea Cima** came from a family of string players in Milan. His brother, Giovanni Paolo, wrote the first sonata that specifically asks for the violin, published in 1610. The *Capriccio a 2* provides a beautiful example of early music featuring one high voice and one low voice anchored by the continuo, the perfect formation for Pallade Musica.

Chromatic and repetitive music abound in the two movements from the *Sonate accademiche* by **Francesco Maria Veracini**. The collection’s title indicates works intended for a private or salon setting, not theaters or churches. Veracini’s version of the ground-bass passacaglia is particularly lamenting and stark. This character is brought forth by weaving the individual lines of the two violin-family instruments throughout long passages with marked with an “S.” This symbol indicates the exclusion of figures in the continuo. Following the Passagallo, the second movement contrasts with a vigorous Caprice. Here chromatic descents are accented and staccato, ornamented by snap figures and driving repeated notes. The blustery music perhaps coincides with Veracini’s character and own violin playing, known for immodesty and vivacity. His action-packed life led him to work throughout Europe to much acclaim and attention in Venice, Dresden, London, and Florence, and his performances inspired many creative violinists, including Tartini and Locatelli.

Veracini was said to have performed the music of **Francesco Antonio Bonporti** while touring throughout Europe. Bonporti’s *Aria cromatica e variata* exploits the tension of chromatic descents (and some ascents)

through a collection of difficult and intricate variations. An under-appreciated composer, Bonporti became better known in modern times after it was revealed that some of his music had been erroneously attributed to J.S. Bach. A violinist and priest from the northern region of Trent, Bonporti took inspiration from (and perhaps studied with) Corelli, but struggled to find adequate employment.

The fifth sonata from the Opus 1 violin sonatas of the Veronese composer **Evaristo Felice Dall'Abaco** caught our attention because the second movement is a chaconne with wonderful broken chord figures in both the violin and bass parts. However, a lack of figures in the bass line implies that the part was likely intended to be played on the cello. Indeed, music for violin and cello was a valuable emerging genre at the time. Dall'Abaco may have studied with Torelli, who also contributed to the genre—as did many other composers, who, like Dall'Abaco, worked in Bologna and Modena.

—Elinor Frey