

PROGRAM NOTES

Although the harpsichord is most closely associated with music of the Baroque era, the two most notable Italian composers for the harpsichord worked on the outer edges of that period. Girolamo Frescobaldi was an innovative composer, steeped in the traditions of the late Renaissance, who helped forge a new approach to music in the early 17th century. Domenico Scarlatti, son of Alessandro Scarlatti, the pre-eminent opera composer of the Italian Baroque, went off on his own to create a unique musical language which borrowed from remnants of baroque style while foreshadowing that of the Classical era. This program juxtaposes music by those two famous masters with works by some of their Italian predecessors and contemporaries.

Domenico Scarlatti began his career in Rome under the patronage of the exiled Polish queen Marie Casimire. There he composed large-scale vocal works modeled after those of his father. However, the works for which he is best known are the more than 550 short harpsichord sonatas he composed later in life during his thirty years on the Iberian Peninsula. There he served as private harpsichord tutor to Maria Barbara, Princess of Portugal and later Queen of Spain. In 1736 Scarlatti published thirty of these sonatas under the title *Essercizi* (Exercises). In the preface he asked that we not look for anything profound in them but rather for “an ingenious jesting with art.” At the Spanish court Scarlatti had relatively little contact with the outside world; however his music spread throughout Europe and became especially popular in England later in the 18th century.

The early 17th century was one of those rare historical periods in which composers intentionally developed what they themselves identified as a modern style. Giulio Caccini published a collection of vocal music he called *Le Nuove Musiche* (The New Music), Dario Castello published two sets of instrumental music in *Stil Moderno* (in Modern Style), and Salomone Rossi wrote a sonata simply titled *La Moderna* (The Modern). What made this music new or modern? Claudio Monteverdi defended an attack on his own extraordinary madrigals by explaining that whereas in the older style the music had been master of the text, in the new style the text was now master of the music. In other words, the established 16th-century rules for counterpoint, voice leading, and treatment of dissonance could be broken in order to better convey the meaning of the text and the affect imbedded in it. Instrumental composers such as Girolamo Frescobaldi applied the same principles to textless music. Frescobaldi specifically instructed us to play his keyboard toccatas as if they were “modern madrigals” in which one would vary the tempo and even pause altogether “according to the mood or meaning of the words.”

Maddalena Casulana was the first of many Italian women who published music in the 16th and 17th centuries. Four of her madrigals were included in an anthology published in 1566, and she later published three volumes devoted entirely to her own work. Music by Casulana was performed by Orlando di Lasso at the Bavarian Court in Munich, a sign that her work was widely respected in her own time.

A contemporary of Domenico Scarlatti and another keyboard player, Domenico Zipoli, studied with Scarlatti's father Alessandro and with Bernardo Pasquini in Rome. Zipoli later became a missionary who spent the last years of his life as music director of the Jesuit church in what is now Córdoba, Argentina. Zipoli's music shows the influence of the great Roman violinist Arcangelo Corelli whose music was the model for what we now call common-practice harmony. This is music built around the circle of fifths, with walking bass lines, sequences, and strings of suspensions.

The most famous Italian composer of the late Baroque is undoubtedly Antonio Vivaldi, virtuoso violinist and “Red Priest” who taught music at the *Ospedale della Pieta* in Venice. The *Ospedale* was a combination orphanage and conservatory for girls and young women, internationally famous for its extraordinary musical performances. Anna Bon began her training there at the age of four and was later hired to sing at the court of Friedrich and Wilhelmina of Bayreuth. The beloved sister of Frederick the Great, Wilhelmina was also an accomplished musician and composer who promoted a high level of music-making at court. While at Bayreuth, Bon published collections of flute sonatas, harpsichord sonatas, and instrumental trios (all when still in her teens). Bon's *Sonata in C Major* follows the three-movement form of a typical Italian concerto at the end of the Baroque era.

—Byron Schenkman