

The GEORGIAN CONCERT Society



Season 2021-22

Tartini's 251st - Virtuoso Violin Music

La Serenissima

Adrian Chandler – violin

Vladimir Waltham – cello

Lynda Sayce – theorbo

Robin Bigwood - harpsichord

Saturday 27th November 2021

St Andrew's & St George's West Church, Edinburgh

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Supporters, from Chamber Music Scotland
(through funding provided by Creative Scotland).*

**Chamber
Music
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ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

PROGRAMME

Sonata VII (Opus 1) for violin & continuo in D, B.D6 / GT 2.D06

Adagio

Allegro

Larghetto

Allegro

Sonata IX (XXVI Sonatas) for violin & cello in A, B.A1 / GT 2.A01

Largo andante

Allegro

Allegro assai

Menuet

Sonata VI (XXVI Sonatas) for violin in e, B.e1 / GT. 2e01

Andante cantabile

Allegro cantabile

Giga

Sonata I (Opus 1) for violin & continuo in A, B.A14 / GT 2.A14

Grave

Allegro – Adagio

Presto

Sonata VI (Opus 1) in D for violin & continuo, B.D12/ GT 2.D12

Grave

Allegro

Allegro

Sonata Il trillo del Diavolo for violin & continuo in g, B.g5 / GT 2.g05

Larghetto affettuoso

Allegro

Andante – Allegro – Andante – Allegro – Andante – Allegro - Adagio

PROGRAMME NOTES

Tartini was born in the Istrian town of Pirano, then part of the Venetian Republic. Like Vivaldi, he was initially destined for the priesthood and in 1708, he left the family home in order to study law – like many aspiring clerics – at the University of Padua. Despite this, he seems to have spent most of his time improving his fencing skills (whilst dressed as a priest), a talent in which few could match him. In 1710, Tartini married Elisabetta Premazore, the mistress of Cardinal Giorgio Cornaro provoking untold fury both from the cardinal and from Tartini's family as Elisabetta was deemed not to have been of sufficient social standing. Tartini fled to the Franciscan monastery at Assisi where he spent the next few years honing his violin technique and studying composition with the organist Bohuslav Černošský. By all accounts those years were well spent, as on his return to Padua in 1721, he was appointed *primo violino e capo di concerto* at the Basilica of S. Antonio of Padua (*Il Santo*); he became one of the most celebrated violinists, teachers and theorists of all time.

The rest of his career was mostly spent in Padua apart from a three-year period (1723 – 1726) when he visited Prague with his friend and cellist Antonio Vandini. One must bear in mind however, that Tartini's speedy exit from Padua was partly necessitated by a desire to escape the wrath of a Venetian innkeeper who was accusing him of fathering his daughter's new-born child. This aside, his Bohemian sojourn enabled Tartini to associate with some of the finest musicians of the Viennese court, notably Fux, Caldara and Weiss. Because of health problems caused by the climate, Tartini returned to Padua in 1726 and seldom left the city again other than to give concerts in Bologna, Camerino, Ferrara, Parma and Venice.

Despite being asked to compose for Venetian opera houses on numerous occasions, Tartini turned down all such approaches as he did not want to appear guilty of mistaking a singer's vocal cords for a violin fingerboard, a crime that he lay firmly at Vivaldi's door (although he was very complimentary about Vivaldi's concertos). Tartini instead focussed his energies on teaching commitments at his Scuola delle Nazioni (formed shortly after his return from Prague), theorising about music and violin technique, performing and composing. Apart from a handful of trio sonatas, *sonate a quattro* and some devotional vocal works that were written towards the end of his life, the vast majority of Tartini's compositions are made up of violin sonatas or concertos, most of which require a prodigious display of technique from the soloist.

As with so many composers of the period, Tartini held the printed collections of Corelli's works in extremely high regard. It is unsurprising that his Opus 1

sonatas (Amsterdam, 1734) paid significant homage to the man from Fusignano. Like Corelli's Opus 5 sonatas, Tartini's Opus 1 is organised into two books each of six sonatas, the first consisting of church sonatas, the second of chamber sonatas; there is also an additional *Pastorale* for scordatura violin and continuo at the end of the second volume.

Three things become apparent when studying these works: the first is Tartini's fixation with double and multiple stopping (which perhaps explains his 'discovery' and fascination with the *terzo suono* or combination tone); the second is his obsession with the trill; the third is his use of melody, particularly in the slow movements.

The importance of melody only increased during the course of Tartini's career. One possible reason for this is the presumed stroke that Tartini suffered in c1740 which meant that he was less able to execute virtuosic passages. Although he was well acquainted with both sacred and secular vocal music, it seems that it was the songs of the Venetian boatmen and of his native Istria to which Tartini turned in this instance. Both these influences can be felt strongly in his 30 *piccole sonate* which were written towards the end of his life. He sent a copy of these sonatas to Frederick the Great's Chamberlain, the Graf von Algarotti with an accompanying letter that explained that whilst a cello part had been added for some of the sonatas, he (Tartini), preferred to play the works *senza basso*.

Without a doubt, it is *Il Trillo del Diavolo* that has become his most famous work. Tartini claims to have composed this sonata in 1713, after a dream in which the devil played the violin at the foot of his bed. Tartini tried to commit the music of his dream to paper the following morning but said that although it was the finest thing he had ever written, the music of the devil was infinitely better. This work has been handed down to us in a collection of non-autograph copies that are all slightly different. It is fascinating that such a work could have been composed in 1713, though I do wonder whether Tartini revisited the sonata on numerous occasions, tinkering with the technical aspects of the sonata until it became the heady mix of virtuosity that remains so stupefying to this day.

© Adrian Chandler, November 2021

BIOGRAPHY

La Serenissima is the UK's leading exponent of the music of eighteenth-century Venice. Praised for its 'all-too-rare ability to make one's pulse race afresh with every new project' (Gramophone), La Serenissima has uncovered a plethora of neglected music, making it available to all through live performance, recording and outreach. Uniquely, the group's entire repertoire is edited from source material.

Founded in 1994 by violinist Adrian Chandler, La Serenissima is recognised for its outstanding recording catalogue which is regularly featured on BBC Radio 3, Classic FM and international radio; advertising (*Versace*, 2018) and film (*Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, 2020). The group has won two Gramophone Awards: for *The French Connection* (2010) and *The Italian Job* (2017); in 2018 album *Vivaldi X2* topped the UK Classical Chart. New release *Behind Closed Doors* was hailed with a BBC Music Magazine double 5 star review.

La Serenissima performs across the UK and internationally. It has given the first UK performance of Brescianello's opera *Tisbe* (2018) and the modern premiere of Caldara's opera *Lucio Papirio Dittatore* (2019). In 2021, the group performed in Wigmore Hall's live-stream series and looks forward to a postponed residency at the iconic venue.

La Serenissima is proud to have as its Honorary Patron, His Excellency The Italian Ambassador to the UK.

www.laserenissima.co.uk

[Updated 9 Nov 2021]

THE HARPSICHORD

A harpsichord in the Italian style
Designed and built by Grant O'Brien, 2003.

The harpsichord being used in tonight's concert was designed by Grant O'Brien. It is important to note that it is not a copy of any specific instrument. Usually harpsichord players look for copies of a particular instrument when

they choose an instrument for their use. But Grant O'Brien, with a background of many, many years of experience in the field, chose to select the best features of Neapolitan harpsichords as well as a number of features of the harpsichords of

Bartolomeo Cristofori, the inventor of the piano action, to incorporate in this instrument.



This harpsichord was built in the workshops and with the help of Graziano Bandini in Castel San Pietro, near Bologna in Italy. The decoration is inspired by the decoration of the mid-sixteenth century, and was carried out by Stefano Pessione of Rome. The unusual sharply-pointed tail is characteristic of the Neapolitan builder Onofrio Guarracino and of a number of other Neapolitan makers, and the stand is also in the style of instruments made in Naples. The stringing design, carried out by Grant O'Brien has many features of Bartolomeo Cristofori, and uses brass strings, except for the bottom notes which use red brass strings placed,

unusually, on a separate bridge. The lengths of these lower strings have been adapted to the lower strength of red brass. It has 2 sets of strings to give the usual 2 x 8' disposition, and it has a compass of C to d³, just over 4 octaves. Tonight's performance is played at a¹ = 440 Hz, the same as modern concert pitch and using a transposing mechanism built into the instrument.

The decoration of the music desk is inspired by the decoration of what is perhaps the only surviving Neapolitan music desk. The painting on the inside of lid is an allegory of Naples. On the left is Sebete, the god of the river that flows down through Naples. Bacchus and Ceres, the God and Goddess of wine and the harvest, are placed in the centre of the scene floating along on a scallop shell pulled by two dolphins. The sculpture, book, music, painter's palette, mask and globe in the foreground represent culture, learning, the sciences and the arts for which Naples is famous. A sea god announces the arrival of the ethereal party which is led by Parthenope, Naples most iconic figure, at the front. A putto with a huge net flies above, catching and controlling the gusts of wind that might otherwise upset the progress of the figures below.

In ancient times the place where Parthenope is supposed to have died became an early Greek settlement which was called Parthenope after this potent icon. Later it was called Palaeopolis (The Old City) after subsequent settlers established Neapolis (The New City) nearby. It is from the Greek name Neapolis that the modern city of Naples (*Napoli* in Italian) derives its name.

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