

The GEORGIAN CONCERT Society



Season 2023-24

Ensemble Stravaganza

Follia & Chaconne—the art of improvisation

Domitille Gillon, violin

Robin Pharo, viola da gamba

Léo Brunet, guitar

Thomas Soltanin, harpsichord

Saturday 28th October 2023

St Cecilia's Hall, Edinburgh

**Chamber
Music
Scotland**



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

*The Georgian Concert Society gratefully acknowledges support from its
Supporters, and from Chamber Music Scotland
(through funding provided by Creative Scotland).*

PROGRAMME

Antonio Pandolfi Mealli (1624 – 1687)

La Castella, violin sonata, opus 3 n°4

Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (1623 – 1680)

Ciaconna in a minor

Dietrich Buxtehude (1637 – 1707)

Sonata in G minor, BuxWV 261

Antoine Forqueray (1672 – 1744)

Suite n° 2 in G major for viola da gamba

La Leclair | Chaconne "La Buisson"

Johann Heinrich Schmelzer

Sonata quarta, Unarum fidium (1664)

Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (1644 – 1704)

Sonate n°VI a violino solo (1672)

Marin Marais (1656 – 1728)

Folies d'Espagne (Second book, 1701)

Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (1644 – 1704)

Sonate n°III a violino solo (1672)

Ensemble Stravaganza is one of today's most dynamic early music ensembles. Brought together by the violinist Domitille Gilon and the harpsichordist Thomas Soltani, musicians take part with enthusiasm and dedication to this musical and human adventure, which makes each concert a unique and rewarding experience for the audience.

Ensemble Stravaganza includes various formations, with soloist musicians playing regularly in the main baroque orchestras: La Simphonie du Marais (Hugo Reyne), Ensemble Sagittarius (Michel Laplénie), Opéra Fuoco (Jay Bernfeld), Gli Incogniti (Amandine Beyer), Les Ambassadeurs (Alexis Kossenko), Pulcinella (Ophélie Gaillard), Pygmalion (Raphael Pichon), les Musiciens de Saint-Julien (François Lazarevich)...

Ensemble Stravaganza is regularly invited to numerous international festivals, in France (Printemps des Arts de Monte-Carlo, Festival baroque du Pays du Mont Blanc, Musicale Internationale de Guil Durance, Festival Jeunes-Talents-Paris, Sinfonia en Périgord, septembre musical de l'Orne...), in Scotland (Sypert concert series), in the Netherlands (Oude Muziek Utrecht), in the United Kingdom, Belgium (Concertgebouw Bruges), Germany (Tage Alter Musik Regensburg), Austria (Wiener Konzerthaus), Poland...

In 2011 the ensemble was awarded the bronze medal of the Academy of Literature and Arts. They also won the top prizes in several early music competitions (Premio Bonporti competition (Italy), van Wassenaer international early music competition, H.I.F Biber competition). The five recordings of Stravaganza has been very well received by the critics (Aparte label record, Muso label and Nomadmusic).

Their next recording will be released this month and will feature the violin sonatas of the composers in today's programme

Ensemble Stravaganza has the support of the Adami, the conseil général and régional P.A.C.A. It is a member of the F.E.V.I.S.

www.ensemble-stravaganza.com

Programme Notes

Many of the composers of this programme were violinists, highlighting the intertwining of the development of violin technique with the appearance of new modes of playing. The common thread running through the programme is the constant presence of an ostinato (such as in the ciaccona), which is overlaid by a highly expressive and often exuberant virtuoso solo part. This basso continuo, which repeats itself as the variations unfold, offers a wide range of possibilities for creativity. One can be infinitely innovative, both in the choice of instruments used from one movement to the next and in the register in which one wishes them to sound. The repetition of this bass is heady and inspiring, not unlike a jazz bassline. Sometimes the solo instrument navigates harmonic currents and tempi that change abruptly, giving the impression of listening to a character talking, going from laughter to tears, from an advanced lethargic state to a sudden and indomitable frenzy. This gives the illusion that the violinist is improvising, free to express himself over a constant and rigorous foundation.

Composer and violinist **Giovanni Antonio Pandolfi Mealli (1624-1687)** was a musician at the court of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in Innsbruck when he published his opuses 3 and 4 in 1660. La Castella is a perfect example of these sonatas, published under the name 'Sonate per chiesa e camera'. These works are whimsical and improvisatory in style and are of great virtuosity, while being supported with simple continuo writing. All of the pieces are dedicated to named fellow musicians who Mealli met in the various musical chapels he frequented.

Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (1623-1680), a virtuoso violinist and major composer especially in the field of instrumental music, exerted a great influence on Biber, who is assumed to have been his pupil. He was Kapellmeister in Vienna under the protection of Emperor Leopold I, who ennobled him in 1673, and with whom he maintained a true friendship, as evidenced by numerous gifts of gold and jewellery. Schmelzer was also regularly called upon to prepare court concerts. His work is characterised by two main techniques: the variation, which is omnipresent in the Sonata quarta, built over a chaconne bass line that allowed him to write a technically highly developed violin part (rapid passages, arpeggios, double stopping); and the ballet, consisting of suites of dances, a style that was particularly appreciated at court.

The Danish/German composer **Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707)** is best known today for his organ and vocal music and was revered as an organist by his contemporaries including JS Bach and GF Handel. The second volume of seven trio sonatas was published in Hamburg in 1696, with movements sharing features with other works in this programme such as ostinato bass lines and virtuosic interplay between the violin and viola da gamba.

Antoine Forqueray (1672-1745). “Crabbed, capricious and strange” are three adjectives employed by Hubert Le Blanc (1740) to describe Antoine Forqueray. Forqueray’s skill was such that, of his contemporaries, only **Marin Marais (1656-1728)** was considered to reach the same level, as attested to by Pierre Louis Daquin, who wrote in 1754 in the *Siècle Littéraire de Louis XIV*: “One may say that nobody has surpassed Marais; only one man has equalled him: the famous Forqueray.” Notwithstanding, considerable differences stood between the two musicians, in their playing and in their compositions. Le Blanc declared that if the basse de viole had a fine support in the person of Marin Marais, it had a solid one in Antoine Forqueray. He defined perfectly the musical personality of each man when he declared that one (Marais) played like an angel, and the other like a devil. He also added that “from the compositions and manner of playing of the elder Marais there results a naturally harmonious sound, the resonating pendulum timbre which arises from the bass viol”, while “the elder Forqueray, after having heard the elder Marais, having created a beautiful style in which he could express himself without the humiliating preparation of a pupil, founded a second school of the most correct interpretation of sonatas whence one achieves a bubbling sound with a spicy flavour reconciling French harmony, deriving from resonance, and Italian vocal melody”. If one is to believe 18th-century observers, it would indeed seem that Marais’ playing was characterised by a natural grace, while that of Forqueray was more piquant.

Heinrich Ignaz von Biber (1644-1704) is one of Ensemble Stravaganza’s favourite composers. Along with Johann Paul von Westhoff and Johann Jakob Walther, Biber was one of the most significant 17th-century German composers. Described as a formidable violin virtuoso by the violin-maker Jacob Stainer, Biber was also distinguished by the vivacity and originality of his work, of which the 18th-Century British musicologist Dr Charles Burney wrote: ‘Of all the violinists of the last century, Biber seems to have been the best, and his solos are the most difficult and whimsical of any I have seen at that time’. Seventeen years after Schmelzer, Biber was also knighted by Leopold I. He enjoyed a

flourishing reputation that spread throughout Germany and his exceptional skills as a violinist were matched by a rare compositional talent. Thus, Biber contributed greatly to the development of violin technique: his explorations of descriptive sound effects and elaborate expressive figures pushed aside the existing limits of virtuosity. In particular, he explored the principles of scordatura (tuning the strings to different pitches), notably in the famous collection of Rosary Sonatas, and used a plethora of bariolages (alternating notes on adjacent strings) and arpeggiated chords in the Salzburg Sonatas published in 1681.

Harpsichord by Pascal Taskin, Paris, 1769, MIMEd 4315

The celebrated Pascal Taskin harpsichord survived the turmoil of late 18th-century France and was restored by Tomasini in 1882, at a time when few people were interested in these instruments. In the 1890s it was played publicly in Paris by the pianist Louis Diémer (1843-1919), who later bought the instrument. During World War II it was removed to the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, but later returned to Paris and was sold to Raymond Russell in 1952. Since 1964, it has been part of the University's Musical Instrument Collection housed at St Cecilia's Hall. It has played an invaluable role in the revival of interest in making and playing harpsichords, having been used as a model by countless modern harpsichord makers.

Its appearance and decoration are simple and elegant, and the sound is sumptuous and highly refined. It has the usual two-manual disposition, with two sets of strings at normal (8-foot) pitch and a third set sounding the octave above (4-foot), together with a buff stop. The registers are operated by hand-stops and the three sets of strings can all be played together by means of a 'shove coupler'. The action is extraordinarily sensitive and, like most French harpsichords of the period, its lower register is particularly rich and opulent.

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The Georgian Concert Society – Season 2023-24

Next concerts

Saturday 11th November 2023 at St Andrew's & St George's West

Monteverdi String Band

The Madrigal Transformed – *An instrumental journey through the Italian musical landscape at the turn of the 17th century, exploring the madrigal as it adopted the innovations of the evolving Seconda Prattica.*

Oliver Webber Violin, Theresa Caudle Violin, Wendi Kelly Contralto viola, David Brooker Tenor viola, Mark Caudle Bass violin

Saturday 2nd December 2023 at St Andrew's & St George's West Church

Illyria Consort (Bojan Cicic Violin)

How brightly shines the Morning Star - *This programme focuses on virtuosic Baroque composers who were inspired to write some of the most striking music that exists for organ and violin on the theme of the Nativity.*

Saturday 20th January 2024 at St Andrew's & St George's West Church

London Handel Players

Pearls of the Baroque: chamber music by Handel and his illustrious contemporaries

Saturday 10th February 2024 at St Cecilia's Hall

Mhairi Lawson and Jan Waterfield

Domenico Corri (1746-1825): from the river Tweed to the Opera House

A programme of songs and arias from the publications of an Eighteenth-Century Italian Maestro, publisher, singer and impresario and opera composer of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, who worked for the Edinburgh Musical Society from 1771 to 1789.

Supported by the Scottish Early Music Trust.

Saturday 9th March 2024 at St Andrew's & St George's West Church

London Haydn Quartet

A programme reflecting a musical "conversation" between Mozart and Haydn, including works by each one which clearly inspired the other composer.

Catherine Manson, Michael Gurevich violins, John Crockatt viola, Jonathan Manson, cello

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The Georgian Concert Society reserves the right to change programmes if required.