



## London Handel Players

December 16 & 17, 2022

### PROGRAM NOTES

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*Support for the program notes is generously provided by Roberta Viviano.*

#### **MICHAEL PRAETORIUS**

(CREUZBURG, 1571–WOLFENBÜTTEL, 1621)

##### **In Dulci Jubilo (1607)**

Praetorius served as organist and *Kapellmeister* at the court of Wolfenbüttel from 1592 until his death. His music, which shows the influence of Italian masters such as Giovanni Gabrieli as well as his contemporary, Heinrich Schütz, was highly regarded in his lifetime. His numerous settings of the 12th-century carol ‘In dulci jubilo’ were published as part of the nine-volume *Musae Sioniae* (1605–10).

#### **GIROLAMO FRESCOBALDI**

(FERRARA, 1583–ROME 1643)

##### **Capriccio Pastorale (1637)**

A virtuoso keyboard player and child prodigy, Frescobaldi was appointed organist at St Peter’s Basilica in Rome at the age of 24. His innovative keyboard music was hugely influential long after his death: Bach signed and dated a copy of his *Fiori musicali* in 1714. The ‘Capriccio pastorale per organo’ was published in his 1637 book of *Toccate e partite*. It is one of the earliest examples of a musical genre that imitates the music-making of Italian shepherds, who came into the cities at Christmas time to play their music on shawms (*piffero*) and bagpipes (*zampogna*).

#### **MICHAEL PRAETORIUS**

##### **Dances from Terpsichore (1612)**

*Ballet - Bourrée - Ballet du Roy - Ballet des Amazones - Ballet des Anglois*

Named after the Muse of Dance, *Terspichore* is a compendium of over 300 popular dance tunes that Praetorius harmonized in four parts. The tunes, which are mainly French in origin, were probably intended for performance on violin-family instruments; at the time of publication, the 'violin band' cultivated at the French court had become the epitome of sophistication and a symbol of status and power. Elegant dances are juxtaposed with wilder ones representing Amazons and – the English.

## **MARC-ANTOINE CHARPENTIER**

(PARIS, 1643–PARIS, 1704)

### **Noels sur les Instruments (c. 1693), H. 534**

*Joseph est bien marié - Or nous dites Marie - A la venue de Noel*

As a young man, Charpentier spent three years in Rome studying with Carissimi. On his return to Paris, he suffered greatly from the stranglehold exerted on Parisian music by his illustrious but unscrupulous contemporary, Jean-Baptiste Lully. Charpentier was particularly drawn to writing Christmas music, producing instrumental carols, Latin oratorios on Christmas themes, French pastorales and a Christmas mass - the *Messe de Minuit pour Noël*, in which the text is sung to the melodies of traditional carols.

## **ANTONIO VIVALDI**

(VENICE, 1678–VIENNA, 1741)

### **Concerto for Violin 'Il Riposo, Per il Santissimo Natale,' RV 270**

The son of a red-haired violinist and composer, Vivaldi was employed for the majority of his life as the music master at the Ospedali della Pietà, an orphanage for girls that was run like a convent. The girls were trained to sing and play to make them more attractive candidates for marriage, performing in lofts behind a screen for modesty's sake. Under Vivaldi's tutelage, the orchestra at the Ospedale attained a very high standard of performance and became an international tourist attraction. In addition to teaching the violin and rehearsing the orchestra, Vivaldi was required to compose an oratorio or concerto for every feast day. The concerto 'Il Riposo', for performance at Christmas time, may well have been one of these.

## **Traditional Carols**

*Välkommen, O Jesu (Sweden); Or nous dite Marie (France); Riu, riu, chiu (Spain)*

The Swedish carol arrangement reflects the ‘twin fiddling’ tradition in which master and apprentice play together, often using ‘ringing strings’ which are also a feature of Shetland fiddling. The refrain of the *villancico* ‘Riu, riu, chiu’ either represents the song of a bird (nightingale or kingfisher) or the roaring of a river, which protects ‘the lamb from the wolf’ (Mary, spared of original sin): the theme is the Immaculate Conception.

## **GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL**

(HALLE, 1685–LONDON, 1759)

### **from *Messiah*, HWV 56 (1741)**

*Pifa, Aria ‘O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion’*

Handel probably intended *Messiah* to form part of a London concert series, but an invitation to Ireland resulted in the first performance taking place in Dublin, on 13 April 1742. The libretto was compiled from biblical texts by the literary scholar and editor of Shakespeare’s plays, Charles Jennens. The text to the aria ‘O thou that tellest’ is taken from the book of Isaiah and is used to express Mary’s joyful reaction to the Annunciation. The music of the ‘Pifa’ is in the *pastorale* tradition: Handel spent time in Rome around 1707 and may well have encountered the music-making of Italian shepherds firsthand – the same music that inspired Frescobaldi.

## **ARCANGELO CORELLI**

(FUSIGNANO, 1653–ROME, 1713)

### **Concerto Grosso Op. 6/8 (1714)**

*Vivace - Allegro - Adagio/Allegro/Adagio - Vivace - Allegro - Largo ‘Pastorale’*

Born near Ferrara, Corelli arrived in Rome around 1675 and quickly established himself as one of the leading violinists in the city, playing for wealthy patrons, including the exiled Queen Christina of Sweden. Concerto No.8, intended for performance on Christmas Eve (‘fatto per la notte di Natale’), was probably composed around 1690 for Corelli’s chief patron, Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni.

## **ANTONIO VIVALDI**

### **Concerto for flute, 'La Notte', Op. 10/2 (c.1728)**

Largo - 'Fantasmi' Presto - Largo - Presto - 'Il sonno' Largo - Allegro

Originally composed for solo flute (or violin) with obbligato bassoon, 'La notte' ('Night') is an unusual and highly descriptive concerto which appears to chart a night in which sleep is elusive and when it does come, it is either feverish ('Phantasms' Presto) or uneasy ('The Dream' Largo).

## **English Carols**

*Sweet was the song the Virgin sang; Past three o'clock*

The refrain of the anonymous 16th-century carol 'Sweet was the song' is a lullaby sung by Mary to her child as she rocks him 'feetly' (nimble) on her knee. 'Past three o'clock' is based on the call of the London waits, musicians and watchmen, who patrolled the streets at night.

## **JOHANN DAVID HEINICHEN**

(KRÖSSULN, 1683–DRESDEN, 1729)

### **Pastorale per la Notte di Natale**

Following his studies at the Thomasschule and later at the university in Leipzig, Heinichen spent seven years in Italy, mainly in Venice, where in 1716 he met Prince Augustus III of Poland, subsequently serving his father Augustus II as *Kapellmeister* in Dresden for the rest of his life.

## **JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH**

(EISENACH, 1685–LEIPZIG, 1750)

### **Arias from Christmas Oratorio (1734) BWV 248**

*'Schlafe, mein Liebster', 'Großer Herr'*

When putting together his 'Christmas Oratorio,' Bach had no qualms re-using music from the secular works he had composed the previous year for the Crown Prince and Electress of Saxony. 'Schlafe, mein Liebster' re-purposes an aria sung by the character 'Lust' in *Hercules at the Crossroads* (BWV 213), while 'Großer Herr' is taken from a Birthday cantata for Queen Maria Josepha (BWV 214).

*Program Notes by Silas Wollston.*