

PROGRAM NOTES

It is generally acknowledged that the composer Giaches de Wert was brought to Italy from Flanders as a child in order to sing in the household of the Marchesa of Padulla, who lived near Naples. His musical career took him to Novellara, and eventually Milan, which he left in 1565 to take the position of *maestro di cappella* at the ducal chapel in Mantua. Here he remained for most of his life. His time there was not without trials, including opportunities for better work. He remained in Mantua, however, while cultivating relationships elsewhere. Among the most significant of these was Duke Alfonso II d'Este of Ferrara, whom he met in the 1550's. By Milan's standards, Ferrara was a very worldly place, but most importantly, it was the home of the *concerto delle dame*, a trio of women singers who, together, made the most wonderful sounds. They were the center of a larger musical ensemble supported by Alfonso.

Wert's eighth book of madrigals, published in 1586, is dedicated to Alfonso, and the music therein was intended for this trio and company. *Questi odorati fiori* begins with just the three women, and everyone enters a few measures in. The other two poems are based on texts from an epic poem by Wert's contemporary Torquato Tasso: *La Gerusalemme liberata*, which contained tales from the crusades. The two madrigals, which also exploit the women's voices, are both examples of dramatic speech set to music, a form in which Wert excelled. The first briefly describes the sorceress Armida, running after her fleeing lover, the great knight Rinaldo, and crying out. She implores him to listen to her speech. Armida is sometimes associated with sirens, and that characterization is musically present in this brief work. The second Tasso setting, *Sovente*, describes Erminia, an Antioch Muslim princess, among the shepherds in the forest where she has sought to hide. She is carving the sad story of her unrequited love for the Christian knight Tancredi in the bark of the trees. She vows that one day a stranger, reading her words will sympathize with her love and harsh fate, as perhaps we do now.

The year after Wert's eighth book of madrigals appeared, Claudio Monteverdi published his first book in Venice, dedicating it to a prominent patron in Verona. Monteverdi's search for his first job, however, took him to Mantua in 1590 or 1591, where he performed in a distinguished ensemble run by Giaches de Wert.

The first three numbers come from Monteverdi's first two collections of secular madrigals. The composer's preference for word painting is already in evidence, and he has begun to work with rhythmic motives to help define passages. *Fumio la Pastorella* is a setting of a poem by the 16th-century Florentine poet Antonio Allegretti. Monteverdi divides the text into three parts. The imagery is pastoral and the prayer of Fumia takes on a particularly solemn, but happy, tone. Monteverdi appropriately sets Tasso's *S'andasse Amor a caccia* as a hunting song: notice the incessant imitative texture, as if the voices were chasing one another. Grechino, mentioned in the text, was Margherita d'Este Gonzaga's dog. In *Crudel perchè mi fuggi*, using a text by the Ferrara poet Battista

Marini, Monteverdi intensifies the rhetoric of the last two lines by repeating music for the repeated text, “non si può.”

The text of *Ardo sì ma non t'amo* is actually three poems pulled together, with the first poem by Guarini and the other two by Tasso. Guarini's poem was set by over 50 composers, frequently together with the two poems included here. The trio of settings creates a conversation between two lovers, and Monteverdi further unites the three texts through musical repetition. The author of *Poi che del mio dolore* is unknown, but the music magnifies the sense of “pain” mentioned in the first line. The final poem in this set is by Giovan Maria Bonardo, a Mantuan poet of a previous generation. Again, suffering love is the subject, and a longing for relief in death.

The next pair of madrigals, being from Book 4 and published in 1603, reveal a stylistic leap. The Ferrarese poet Ridolfo Arlotti penned *Luci serene*. The poem is full of juxtaposed opposites that stimulate Monteverdi's genius for expressive dualism. The narrator endures suffering in the presence of the beloved, but experiences it as a source of intense pleasure and happiness. Returning to Guarini, *Voi pur da me partite* again contrasts pain and love, this time in the context of utter, heartless rejection. Monteverdi's musical rendering of separation thoroughly captures the narrator's quiet torment.

Monteverdi's eighth book of madrigals, *Madrigali guerrieri, et amorosi con alcuni opuscoli in genere rappresentativo, che saranno per brevi episodii frà i canti senza gesto* (Madrigals of warriors, and amorous, with some pieces in dramatic forms, which will be brief episodes between the songs without gesture) appeared 20 years after Book 7. It is a kind of summation, including works composed over the previous 30 years and featuring a spectrum of what he called “humors.” The stanzaic form of the text (and its setting) is typical of canzonetta writing, though they tend to also be lighter in subject matter--not so in this selection. The lover is still subject to the vicissitudes of unrequited love.

Domenico Gabrielli is a name that is likely familiar to very few people, except scholars of Italian 17th-century music and cellists. Domenico, known as “Minghino dal violoncello” (Italian) or “Mingéin dal viulunzèl” (Bolognese: both names are based on diminutives of “Domenico”), bears no relation to the more famous Gabrielis of Venice (note the difference in spelling). He was among the first three known composers to write music for the cello and he was mostly active in Bologna, where he was also born. Unlike the other two composers, he had a reputation as a skilled cellist. From what is known of his career, he was the court cellist in Bologna, succeeding his alleged teacher as the city's premier cellist.

The last decade of his life was filled great activity stretching him so thin that at one point he was temporarily suspended from his position because of his failures to execute his duties in a timely fashion.

The G major sonata comes from an undated manuscript. The composer possesses a clear sense of the instrument's strengths, which are beautifully formulated here. The form (particularly the short movements) reflects Baroque sonata writing before 1700.

Et è pur dunque vero is an extended speech directed at Lydia, who is beautiful and unfaithful. We learn about her through this anonymous text, and we learn of the subjective state of the poet. The forces of nature are invoked ("stelle," "tempeste," "venti") as the narrator moves from being undone, to being condemned to solitude, to thoughts of death. The madrigal appears in the 1632 *Scherzi musicali* and is written for soprano, one (unnamed) instrument, and continuo.

The final group begins with a setting of Ottavio Rinuccini's text, *Sfogava con le stelle*. The poem uses a strategy Monteverdi exploits with great skill: a speech within a narrative. In this madrigal Monteverdi's setting is particularly successful at eliciting empathy from the audience by plumbing the speaker's emotional depths. *Voglio di vita uscir* is a solo madrigal or canzonetta, not found in any of the published collections. The author of the poem is unknown, but a slightly different version of the text was set by Benedetto Ferrari in 1637. And finally, a madrigal from Book 7, published in 1619, is a setting of the text *Al lume delle stelle* by Tasso. The set-up mirrors that of *Sfogava*: Tirsi looks at the stars and wonders... It is a four-voice madrigal with continuo. There are extended passages for only two voices.

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