

# Miller Theatre Program Notes

Early Music: *Esperar, Sentir, Morir*

Saturday, February 19 at 8:00PM

*Esperar, sentir, morir*: To hope, to feel, to die. Music may seem to mirror, perhaps even to recognize, our hopes and our feelings, and music, no sooner heard than gone, has things to say, too, about death.

Tonight, though, we celebrate also the livingness of music, even of music that was set down on paper three or four centuries ago, for, after all, that act of writing was not the end—music lives on in performance, perpetually renewed—nor was it necessarily the beginning. Musicians notating songs, or dances, or virtuoso instrumental pieces, may be inventing, but they may also be copying something else on paper or recording what they have heard. Moreover, these three activities—inventing, copying, recording—may not be so easily distinguished. Invention is never free, but will pick up, here and there, what is already stored in the mind. And copying and recording are never strictly limited to what is in the source, but will alter and perhaps embellish.

Musicians in the 17th century were thoroughly at home with this free flow of information, and would happily arrange, adapt, or incorporate anything that came along: a bass line or a dance rhythm, another composer's piece or a song heard in the street. So although all the pieces on this program have composers's names attached, these ascriptions do not tell the whole story. For every Tarquinio Merula, composing with individual skill and artistry, there is a Martín y Coll, working with found musical objects. And even Merula was not aloof from his rich musical environment, running from Monteverdi to popular melody.

If, nevertheless, this music speaks to us with a personal voice, the voice is perhaps its own, as music, or that of a whole era speaking through so many instances, or it is one of our own voices, echoing what we already knew but had never so keenly experienced. *Esperar, sentir, morir*.

## **Un ferito cavaliere** by Luigi Rossi (c.1597 - 1653)

Rossi, born in the Naples region, was among the most admired composers of his time. He traveled to Paris in 1646 to compose and produce one of the first operas staged in France, an *Orfeo*. Our piece may have gained him that commission, for it enjoyed great success, as a poignant example of the lament and as a commentary on recent events. The "wounded knight" of the title was the king of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus, whose death at the Battle of Lützen (November 6, 1632) ended several years of eager, astute, and successful military activity on behalf of the Protestant cause in Germany (on behalf, too, of increasing Sweden's domains and authority). His memorial cantata moves easily between recitative and more melodious turns, through passages where the intensity is geared up by chromaticism or an avoidance of strong beats.

## **Si dolce è'l tormento** by Claudio Monteverdi (1567 - 1643)

This captivating number is one of three by Monteverdi contained in a songbook that Carlo Milanuzzi, a Venetian friar who was also a connoisseur of love songs, published in 1624. Much is achieved by the simplest means: the slow, triple-time melody goes down stepwise through an octave, rises at the start of the second section, and then descends an octave again, but a third down, to land back on the keynote. The sweet torment of love was a poetic cliché of the time, but here it is expressed with exquisite freshness.

## **Canario** (Spanish anon.)

The canario, or canary, was a stamping triple-time dance for couples, popular in Renaissance Spain and said to have originated in the Canary Islands. Our example provides plenty of room for virtuosity and improvisation.

**Ay Ay Ay** by Etienne Moulinié (1599 – 1676)

This catchy Spanish song appeared in a book of lute transcriptions put together by the French court composer Gabriel Bataille in 1609 and published in Paris. Moulinié was in the city later as court composer to the king's brother, Gaston d'Orléans.

**Toccata secunda arpeggiata** by Johann Hieronymus Kapsberger (c.1580 – 1651)

Though so German in name (his father was a colonel in the imperial army), Kapsberger spent his whole life in Italy—principally in Rome, where he enjoyed the patronage of popes and cardinals. A performer himself, he published four books of music for lute or chitarrone (a lute with an elongated neck to support bass strings), comprising toccatas, and dances. This toccata is from his first book for chitarrone (1604) and presents a harmonic circuit—in arpeggiated chords, as the title indicates—whose steps are sometimes beguilingly bizarre.

**Hor ch'è tempo di dormire and Folle è ben che si crede** by Tarquinio Merula (1594/5 – 1655)

A major figure in the north Italian generation after Monteverdi, Merula spent most of his life as a church musician in Cremona and Bergamo, publishing eighteen volumes of music, secular as well as sacred. His magnificent *Hor ch'è tempo di dormire* is both of those at once: a lullaby, as if sung by Mary to the infant Jesus, that is also a prophecy and a lament. Most of it is sung over the continuous tread or slow heartbeat of a pair of chords, going into a short aftersong. *Folle è ben che si crede* gives more evidence of Merula's mastery of expressive melody, here in a strophic song.

**Clarín del mosqueteros del Rey de Francia- Rujero- Paradetas- Jácaras** by Gaspar Sanz (1640 – 1710)

Remembered chiefly for his three volumes of music for Spanish guitar, Sanz came from a wealthy family, which gave him the benefits of a university education (at Salamanca) and a prolonged period of travel in Italy as a young man. On his return to Spain he was appointed guitar teacher to Don John, the king's illegitimate son. Our selections from his guitar books begin with an impression of the bugle call of the French royal musketeers and include a piece based on a popular bass line named after a character from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, Ruggiero. The concluding *Jácaras* exemplifies a kind of lively song of Arab-Spanish origin.

**Diferencias sobre la Folia** by Antonio Martín y Coll (d. c.1735)

A Franciscan friar and an organist, Martín y Coll was also a collector of music, who put together four volumes of pieces by contemporaries from across western Europe. The present work is a set of *diferencias*, or variations, on the La Folia theme, a bass line whose gravity and openness to change recommended it to many composers of the period, Bach included. Here it is the basis for a sequence of eleven variations.

**Esperar, sentir, morir** by Juan Hidalgo de Polanco (1614 – 85)

Hidalgo joined the Spanish court as a harpist in his mid-teens and rose to become the leading musician there, composing songs and music for the theater. Much that tonight's program has contained may seem to spring into the vitality of this love complaint.