

# Miller Theatre Program Notes

Early Music: Circa 1600

Saturday, February 20, 2010 at 8:00PM

Circa 1600: One of the most intriguing periods in the history of music. Throughout Europe, polyphony holds sway. In Italy, with Florence and Venice as the nuclei, a new style emerges. The baroque era has commenced. Composers aim to arouse feelings in listeners primarily with virtuosic diminutions, harmonically supported melodies, and expressive intervals. This rediscovery of pure instrumental music and its emancipation from vocal music was expounded by Monteverdi, Gabrieli, and many others.

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The term 'baroque' is used for the many different musical manifestations from the end of the 16th century to the middle of the 18th century: from Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) to Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). The unifying principle of these 150 years is the presence of an expressive ideal, the awakening of affects—feelings, emotions and moods—a principle that was born circa 1600.

At the core of the baroque is the belief that music is capable of, and has the duty to encourage changes within the human body. Specific external stimulants, including sounds and music, can change the condition of our body fluids (humores), vapours of the body (vapores) and other components of our being, such as the life spirits (spiritus animales), the brain, and the soul. These sensations from outside interfere with the normal condition of the body by arousing and stirring the affects. The equilibrium gets altered and the body becomes actively 'affected' while the mind undergoes this disturbance in a passive manner. Famous treatises about this subject have come down to us: examples include René Descartes's *Traité des passions de l'âme* (1649); Athanasius Kircher's *Musurgia Universalis* (1650), which specifically describes music; and Johann Mattheson's *Der vollkommene Kapellmeister* (1739).

Strikingly, Sir Thomas More was already writing about the passions in music as early as 1516 in his *Utopia*: "...whether it bee a prayer, or els a dytty of gladnes, of patience, of trouble, of mournyng, or of anger: the fassion of the melodye doethe so represente the meaning of the thing, that it doth wonderfully move, stirre, pearce, and enflame the hearers myndes."

The most diverse musical tools and compositional textures can be employed to activate the mechanism that affects the body and mind: modi, tonality, tempo, rhythm, intervals, consonance, dissonance, rising and descending movement, dynamics, change of register or tessitura, and instrumentation. By using these weapons rhetorically to stir the mind and body, a style that Kircher calls 'musica pathetica' came into existence, music being of such a nature "ut ad datum quemcunque anime affectum auditorem concitet" (that it encourages the listener to any given affect of the soul). In this way, grief can be evoked by a descending melodic movement, preferably in small intervals, as well as by an accumulation of dissonances, syncopation, slow movement, and use of the lowest register. On the other hand, the affect joy can be caused by wide intervals, limited use of dissonance, swift movement, and triple meter.

This theory of affects and passions deals with the strict relationship between music and rhetoric. The orators from antiquity used rhetorical means to stir the emotions of their audience, to control them and guide them in a specific direction. A composer also has the capability "di muovere l'affetto dell'animo of the listener" (Guilio Caccini, *Le nuove musiche*, 1601-02).

At the start of the 17th century instrumental music became the equal of vocal music in quality and quantity. The forms used were not yet standardized and exhibited many facets but later developed into idiomatic works, often exhibiting virtuosic features and ornamentation.

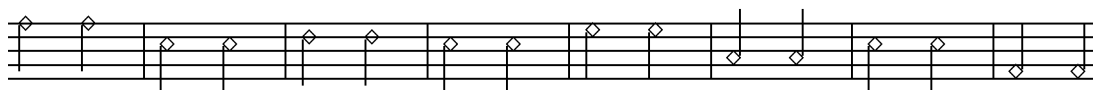
Initially the compositional features of the Renaissance remained and were faithful to vocal counterpoint and imitation. The canzona was the most prevalent instrumental genre. It has an interesting history, demonstrated in this concert program by combining the imitative and typically instrumental two-part **Canzon La Spiritata** by Giovanni Gabrieli, with the rather old-fashioned, but brilliantly vocally decorated, **Canzon deta Suzanne un iour** by Andrea Gabrieli, Giovanni's uncle. The two other examples of the canzona presented here are by the hand of Tarquinio Merula, a well-trained organist and violin virtuoso who worked as bandmaster and director of church music in Cremona, Bergamo, and Venice. In his late *Canzone* (1637), he adhered to the early advocates of the sonata di camera and di chiesa and was one of the most advanced composers of the time. Merula's works are to be found in numerous instrumental prints during the 17th century. **Canzon La Marcha and Canzon La Livia** are taken from the first book of canzonas and are

striking examples of the new instrumental style, which was released from any vocal associations. The preface of this 1615 edition adds the text "per sonare conogni sorti de strumenti musicale," meaning recorders allowed!

The new way of writing ("das Generallbasszeitalter," as Hugo Riemann put it) found its way into instrumental music. This resulted in the first independent idiomatic instrumental works for instrumentalists and basso continuo.

All instrumentalists were expected to master the *métier* of improvisation and diminution; consequently new extemporised genres emerged (*ricercata*, *toccata*, *fantasia*, *preludio*). The development of these forms was closely related to the emancipation of instrumental music. Composers focused on free individual creativity, independent of existing models or inspiration based on a text.

*And when the musician takes the liberty to emply all that comes to mind without expressing the passion of a single word, then this composition is called Fantaisie, or Recherche.* (Marin Mersenne, *Harmonie Universelle*, 1636)

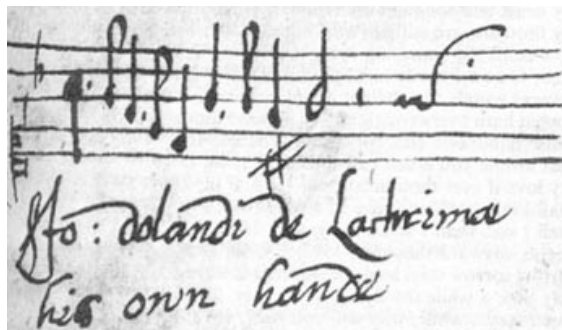


The fanciful forms of the *ricercata*, *toccata*, *fantasia*, and *preludio* were put into practice extensively by the keyboard virtuoso Giralomo Frescobaldi in an unpredictable and creative style "...now slowly, now quickly, and even held in the air, to match the expressive effect, or the sense of the words... for it is left to the fine judgement of the performer to regulate the tempo" (Frescobaldi, *toccate e partite*, 1615, preface).

A more conventional, but also highly virtuosic improvisation practise was notated by **Jacob van Eyck** in his *Der Fluyten Lust-Hof* (1644-64) for the handfluyt. The technique of diminution is also clearly present in the many variations on ostinato bass patterns. An early example of virtuosity upon a fixed bass is the **Maske** by Hugh Ashton (bass ostinato, see picture), originally for three voices with a highly complex and sometimes awkwardly shaped fourth voice added later by one Mr. Whytbroke. Circa 1600, the most influential keyboard composers in Europe were Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck and Frescobaldi, especially in organ playing. Sweelinck's compositional style is strongly based on the contrapuntal and melodic traits of the English virginalists. He writes in a strict and severe way, very different from Frescobaldi as can be heard in his variations upon the themes **Ballo del granduca** and **Pavana Lacrimae**. Although these pieces were originally conceived for organ, they fit a recorder consort like a glove (isn't an organ just a chest of flutes?).



The late 16th century *Ballo del granduca* originated in central Italy, where Grand Duke Ferdinando De Medici distinguished himself as a lover of the arts. Ferdinando was patron to Giulio Caccini, Jacopo Corsi, and other musicians of the Camerata-group, whose work marked the birth of opera in Florence. The title refers to an Italian dance first performed at the marriage of Ferdinando De Medici to Christina of Lorraine in 1589. It consists of a series of short musical phrases with chordal texture, imploring embellishment, and cadencing on various pitches. The Amsterdam-based organist Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck was inspired by



this simple tune. In his *Ballo*, the original dance is the model for five original and energetic variations. In the same period, Sweelinck composed organ variations upon Dowland's most famous melody, the *Lacrimae Pavana*. This pavana, in all probability originally composed as a lute solo, before 1595, became Dowland's signature song—literally as well as metaphorically: he would occasionally sign his name "Jo. Dolandi de Lachrimae". Many interpretations of *Lachrimae* (or *Lachrymae*, literally 'tears') were penned for solo and ensembles with the lyrics being added later, the text being possibly by Dowland himself.

*Flow, my tears, fall from your springs! Exiled for ever, let me mourn. Where night's black bird  
her sad infamy sings, There let me live forlorn...*

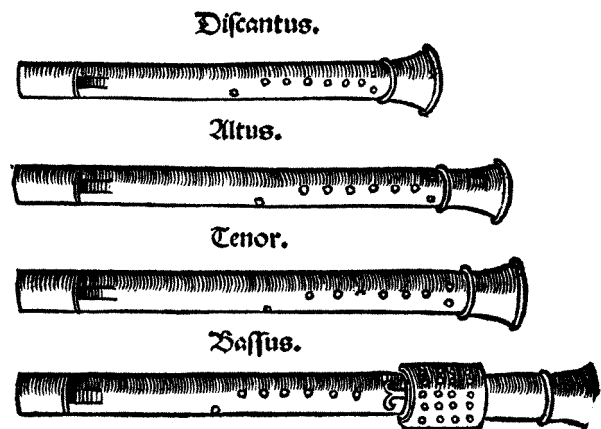
Another popular form was the variation upon a cantus firmus, where the composer weaves polyphonic textures around a given melody, as in the magnificent ***Fantasia super lo son ferito***. This chef-d'oeuvre comes from Scheidt's *Tabulatura Nova*, a varied collection of keyboard music published in Hamburg in 1624. Palestrina's madrigal, on which it is nominally based, was popular with Italian musicians around 1600 and was used as a starting point for improvisation. Only the first of the four themes, used in this fantasia, comes directly from Palestrina, although the second is achieved by reversing the first. The third and fourth themes are chromatic. The work terminates with a richly-worked section in which all four themes appear together. Similar ideas are found in several substantial works by Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, who was Scheidt's teacher.

Dance music for instrumental ensemble became a highly popular genre in the early baroque period. German composers were influenced by the English instrumentalists who worked in Germany (for example, William Brade in Hamburg 1560-1630). Excellent examples are to be found in Johann Herman Schein's *Banchetto Musicale* (1617) and Samuel Scheidt's *Ludi Musici* (1621-1627). The most popular were settings for five voices of the pavane, gaillarde, and allemande. Thomas Simpson's *Taffel Consort*, published in Hamburg in 1621 was an exception to this. This immensely popular ensemble tune book contains no less than 50 four part dances, mostly with English origin. For this concert program we have selected two Jacobean tunes, ***Satyr's Dance*** and ***Volta***, the latter in combination with a typically jig-like rhythmic ***Capriccio***. The mass production of dance music was abruptly terminated during the Thirty Years' War, a European civil war fought mostly in Germany between 1618 and 1648.

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## Instruments

*Virdung consort*: Unfortunately, no recorders have come down to us from before the 16th century. For works from 1520 and earlier, Flanders Recorder Quartet makes use of a very rare collection of instruments, made by the Amsterdam-based maker Adrian Brown. He has provided us with a small cylindrical consort based on the woodcut illustrations in the treatise of Sebastian Virdung (*Musica getuscht und angezogen*, 1511). Having this restricted basis of surviving instruments and using the woodcuts as a template, he constructed a speculative recorder consort at pitch  $a^{\prime}=520$  (which is the pitch of the oldest still-sounding organs in northern Italy) consisting of a bass in F, tenors in c and altos in g. These recorders in walnut have a quite peculiar sound and an interesting and colorful articulation, which best suits this early repertoire.



*"Bassano" consort*: There are around 200 surviving original recorders from the period 1500-1650, a time we could describe today as being the golden age of the instrument. It was the only period in the recorder's history when it was considered as a serious musical instrument and when families of recorders were played in consort, principally to perform vocal music. Henry VIII (1491-1547) presumably was so enchanted by the instrument that he arranged for his agents to persuade members of the celebrated Bassano family to emigrate from Venice to England to play and make wind instruments at his court. An inventory of Henry's collections made after his death in 1547 notes 76 recorders among his many musical instruments. Another example of the popularity of the recorder at this time is found in a 1531 inventory of the Antwerp town musicians, which lists no fewer than 28 recorders. Almost a fifth of these surviving recorders are found today in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, but originate from the d'Este collection in Padua. In the spring of 2000, Adrian Brown started a serious survey of these instruments, resulting in a new museum catalogue of all 43 recorders in the collection. This project gave him the freedom to minutely study the details of these

instruments that had an important influence on his work. The set of recorders used is based on instruments that were almost certainly made by members of the Bassano family of London and Venice. The original instruments were probably made in the second half of the 16th century. Up to about 1700 recorders, no matter how tall, were made in one piece. Because of this it is not an easy task to travel overseas with very large instruments. The lowest notes of this concert will thus be heard on yet another set of flutes:

*Baroque consort:* This set of large baroque recorders was built between 1990 and 1995 by the Boston-based recorder maker Friedrich von Huene. The smaller instruments are personal favorites of the players, collected from all over the world, and copied from original models in various wood types. The pitch of baroque recorders is  $a'=415$ , being a semi tone below the modern concert pitch. Our set consists of many types, from sopranino through soprano, alto, voice flute, tenor, bass, great bass up to the man-high contrabass in F, of which there are only three models in the world.

*—notes by Tom Beets*