



Ensemble Masques

From Biber to Bach

Saturday, November 5, 2011

8 PM

Convocation Hall

University of Alberta

Heinrich Ignaz von Biber (1644-1704) was born in Wartenberg (now Stráž pod Ralskem, Czech Republic). He was one of the most significant composers of the early seventeenth-century Viennese violin style. Like many of his Austro-German contemporaries, including one of his teachers Johann Heinrich Schmelzer, Biber was greatly influenced by an earlier group of Italian composers, including Marini and Uccellini. The *Sonatae tam aris quam aulis servientes* was Biber's earliest published collection. Written to be suitable for the sacred surroundings of the church or the secular setting of the court, it consists of twelve short sonatas for five to eight instruments. Each one-movement sonata is divided into contrasting yet continuous sections, similar to the earlier canzona model used by Italians. A number of interesting stylistic devices are at play in these sonatas, making them gems of musical diversity : changes in tempo and meter abound in each section create vigor and volatility. This captivating unpredictability makes Biber one of the most compelling composers of the Baroque period, who elevated the technical and expressive potential of the violin, setting the stage for later Baroque masterpieces such as J. S. Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, written in 1720.

Johann Rosenmüller (1619 –1684), was a German composer, who played a part in transmitting Italian musical styles to the north. He studied at the University of Leipzig, graduating in 1640. He served as organist of the Nikolaikirche Leipzig from 1651, and had been assured of advancement to cantor. However, in 1655 he was imprisoned in a scandal involving alleged homosexual activities with his students. Escaping from prison, he fled to Italy, and by 1658 was employed at Saint Mark's in Venice. He composed many vocal works while teaching at an orphanage for girls, the Ospedale della Pietà where Vivaldi would teach from 1703. The works of Giovanni Legrenzi and Arcangelo Corelli were among his Italian influences. In his last years, Rosenmüller returned to Germany with Duke Anton-Ulrich of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, at whose court he served as choir master. He died at Wolfenbüttel on 10 September 1684, and is buried there.

For his “Tam aris quam aulis” collection, Biber was probably inspired by a similar publication of **Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (ca 1620-1680)**, the Sacro-profanus concentus musicus, destined, as its name indicates, to a double usage. The first non Italian to occupy the position of composer in Vienna, and to publish violin sonatas, Schmelzer exercised great influence in Austria. He probably also counted Biber among

his students, as the latter evidently imitated the former's compositional techniques, especially his manner of rapidly threading together very short contrasting sections, albeit subtly linked. *Die Fechtschule* is a suite in six parts meant to musically illustrate a fencing school—and perhaps meant to accompany a presentation of one on stage. It ends with a “Bader Aria,” or instrumental song for the barber-surgeon who would have bandaged the participants. Somewhat less than hygienically, as this was years before septicemia became a recognized issue, but bleeding to death could be a great problem, as well.

Composer of the Baroque era which today symbolizes its highest point, **Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)** played a major role in the development of Western music. He was a complete musician who mastered the manufacture of instruments, instrumental technique, composition, improvisation, pedagogy, and management of a musical institution. Modeled after the Violin Concerto in E major BWV 1042, the harpsichord concerto BWV 1054 was transposed into D major, so that the e, highest note played in the violin version can be achieved in the version for harpsichord, while the d was the top note in many harpsichords of the time. All of Bach's harpsichord concertos (with the exception of the fifth Brandenburg Concerto) are considered arrangements from earlier concertos for melodic instruments (violin, oboe) probably written in Köthen. In many cases, only the harpsichord version has survived.

Inspired by the adventures of Don Quixote written by Cervantes (published in Madrid in two parts in 1605 and 1615), **Georg Philipp Telemann (1681 – 1767)** wrote at age 80 a suite called "Don Quichotte auf der Hochzeit des Comacho." He describes occupations of the hero and his stupid peasant fellow Sancho Panza through several fun movements: the awakening of Quixote, where he struggles to get out of his sleep when the alarm sounds, the attack on the windmills, sighs of love for the "princess" Dulcinea, Sancho Panza fooled; clumsy gallop of Rosina and Sancho Panza's ass, then the sleep of Don Quixote, where he dreams of new adventures.