



Saturday 18 June 2011

7.30pm

St. Cecilia's Hall

L' Ensemble Stravaganza

Domitille Gilon · violin

Ronald Martin Alonso · viola da gamba

Damien Pouvreau · theorbo

Thomas Soltani · harpsichord

Music at the Habsburg Court



The Syper Summer Concert Series

Sonata tertia (from *Uranium Fidium*)

Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (1623-1680)

Preludio

Musica (Grave-Presto)

Aria Burlesca (Presto)

Nicola Matteis (c.1650- c.1700)

Suite No.8 in E major (from *Hortulus Checulus*)

Johann Jakob Walther (1650-1717)

Preludio

Aria / Variation

Sarabanda / Variation

Giga

Sonata V (from *Salzburg sonata*, 1681)

Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (1644-1704)

INTERVAL

The crucifixion (from the *Mystery sonatas*)

Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber

Lamentation sur la mort très douloureuse de sa majesté Ferdinand III, se joue lentement et à discrétion

Johann Jakob Froberger (1616-1667)

Sonata III (from *Salzburg sonata*, 1681)

Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber

Music at the Habsburg Court

Music seems to have enlivened the Habsburg Court since the fifteenth century. The accession of Ferdinand III to the throne (1637) started a new line of cultivated music-loving emperors, promoting talented musicians and prolific composers. As generous sponsors of the arts, they became effective actors of the musical life that punctuated events at the Court.

Ferdinand III as well as Leopold I and Joseph I contributed especially to the boom of musical production, sacred and profane, in seventeenth-century Austria. Ferdinand III remarkably reorganised the Musikcollegien, a famous musical establishment funded by the imperial Court. Its musical activities were strictly regulated and demanded high dedication from the musicians. Thanks to the attention paid to that musical institution, the number of opera and oratorio performances had multiplied tenfold between 1630 and 1675.

The musical practice of the emperors themselves played a large part in the undeniable musical supremacy of the Habsburg Court over Europe. Leopold I especially used to spend most of his free time composing music and displayed rare passion and dedication on each occasion of the numerous official and private events organised at the Court, where music naturally played a privileged part.

The pieces chosen in this programme were all written by composers who worked more or less for some time under the sponsoring of the Habsburg emperors. This repertoire comes from thriving seventeenth-century Vienna and is a living testimony to the inventiveness that stemmed from the bonds between emperors such as Leopold I and Ferdinand III and musicians such as Froberger, Schmelzer, Biber, etc.

It goes without saying that every composer had his own aesthetics and style. They each contributed in their own way to the evolution of the musical practice of the time, notably using multiple influences as inspiration for their musical language. Composition techniques were enriched with French, Italian and German styles, as in the case of Froberger for instance.

Improvements were also made to the instruments, particularly in the case of the violin, drawn by the general talent of those artists, whose fame was mainly due in the first place to their virtuosity as violinists.

The Stravaganza Ensemble is a baroque formation mainly dedicated to chamber music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for one or two high-pitched instruments. Europe in that period was a breeding ground for talented and virtuoso composers, some of whom are still unknown today.

Brought together by the violinist Domitille Gilon and the harpsichordist Thomas Soltani, musicians take part with enthusiasm and dedication to this musical and human adventure, which makes each concert a unique and rewarding experience for the audience.

The Stravaganza Ensemble includes various formations, with musicians coming from the best European conservatories (Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique of Lyon, Conservatorium van Amsterdam, Conservatoire Supérieur of Paris). They each perform regularly in famous orchestras.

During the development of their careers, members of the Ensemble have benefited from the advice and support of major artists, during masterclasses and academies (Gustav Leonhardt, Christophe Rousset, Lucy van Dael, Jordi Savall - among others).

The Stravaganza Ensemble is regularly invited to numerous international festivals, in France (Festival baroque du Pays du Mont Blanc, Musicale Internationale de Guil Durance, Festival Jeunes-Talents, Paris...), in the Netherlands, in Japan, in Germany, in the United Kingdom...

In 2011 the ensemble was awarded the bronze medal of the Academy of Literature and Arts.

The CD 'Concert at the Court of the Hapsburgs' is the first recording published by the Ensemble.

Domitille Gilon won first prize at the Conservatoire National de Région of Boulogne-Billancourt in violin and chamber music. She completed her studies with Christophe Poiget and Nicolas Gourbeix in violin, and Zoltan Toth and Reiko Kitahama in string quartet at the Conservatoire National et Supérieur de Musique of Lyon.

Domitille has appeared in concerts with musicians like Jérôme Pernoo, Bruno Pasquier, Roland Pidoux and regularly participated in the Danel string quartet masterclass. In the meantime, she had masterclasses with other artists including the Debussy and Tokyo string quartets, Gérard Poulet, Jean-Jacques Kantorov and Jacques Ghestem.

A member of the Orchestre-à-Cordes-des-Jeunes-d'Ile-de-France (young orchestra), she did several tours, and recorded with the harpist Françoise Demaubus in 1995. Domitille has played as a soloist in Bach's *Concerto for two violins* and Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*.

She is a member of the Orchestre National D'Ile-de-France, and often plays with the main baroque orchestras such as Gli Incogniti (Amandine Beyer), les Ambassadeurs (Alexis Kossenko), Prometheus XXI (Jean-Marc Philips Varjabédian)...in the most famous festivals, all around the world.

She studies baroque violin with Lucy van Dael in the Conservatory of Amsterdam. The violinist also participated in several masterclasses with Hélène Schmitt, Patrick Bismuth, Amandine Beyer...

Domitille is artistic director of L'Ensemble Stravaganza, with the harpsichordist Thomas Soltani.

After studying double bass and guitar at the Institut Supérieur d'Art in Havana, Cuba, **Ronald Martin Alonso** studied the baroque guitar and the viola da gamba with the ensemble "Ars Longa", while still in Cuba.

With "Ars Longa", he made three recordings of baroque music and played in festivals such as: Festival d'Art Sacré de la Ville de Paris, Festival de Musique Ancienne de Brezice in Slovenia, Academia Santa Cecilia in Rome, Italy. The ensemble has had invitations by prestigious conductors such as Claudio Abbado and Gabriel Garrido.

Thanks to the scholarship from the Centre International des Chemins du Baroque of Sarrebourg, Ronald went to France to study with Rebeka Ruso (viola da gamba), Martin Gester and Francis Jacob (chamber music) at the Conservatoire National de Région of Strasbourg.

He is currently studying with Ariane Maurette at the Conservatoire of Paris, with Judith Pacquier, Jean Tubéry, Caroline Howald...

Ronald plays double bass or viola da gamba in famous ensembles such as Fuoco e Cenere – Jay Bernfield; Sagittarius – Michel Laplénie; Le Parlement de Musique – Martin Gester; Les Traversées Baroques – Etienne Meyer. He often plays in festivals like the festival of Ambronay, France, Ribeauvillé, Saintes, Sarrebourg, Fénétrange, Les Folles Journées of Nantes, Festival de Sablon in Brussels, Tropical Baroque Music Festival in Miami, USA.

He was involved in a concerts project with the French dance company "Les Fêtes Galantes" - Béatrice Massin and was selected to play the viola da gamba at the Génération Baroque in 2008 with Martin Gester as conductor and at the Académie baroque Européenne of Ambronay in 2009.

Ronald recorded a first CD in 2005 with his ensemble "Nouvelles Voix" called "A la Marésienne" with works by Marin Marais and Jean-Philippe Rameau.

Damien Pouvreau is a versatile musician (early music, contemporary music, music for theatre), who performs in a number of orchestras and baroque ensembles: Sagittarius (Michel Laplénie), La Symphonie du Marais (Hugo Reyne), Centre de Musique de Versailles (Olivier Schneebeli), Fuoco e Cenere (Jay Bernfield), Almazis (Iakovos Pappas), Philidor (François Bazola).

He also performs in many prestigious festivals in France: Folles Journées de Nantes, Printemps des Arts, La Chabotterie, Itinéraire Baroque en Périgord, Festival du Périgord Noir ...and also abroad: Chile, Italy, Romania, China, Greece, England ...

Damien Pouvreau has contributed to several recordings (the latest: Atys, Lully with The Symphonie du Marais). As he is aware of the correspondence between the arts, with his ensemble "Les Enfants de la Cour", he has created and produced several music shows mixing literature, theatre and dance, performed in prestigious places such as the Château de Versailles, the Château de Fontainebleau, the Cartoucherie of Paris, and the Nouveau Théâtre of Montreuil.

Damien Pouvreau is a classical guitarist who studied under two great Spanish masters: Javier Quevedo at the Ecole Nationale de Musique of Saint Germain en Laye (where he got unanimously the gold medal for classic guitar and the gold medal for chamber music) and his second master was Alberto Ponce at the Ecole Normale of Paris (where he received the Diplôme d'Excécution).

As he is passionately interested in baroque music he decided to dedicate himself to the repertoires of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He has followed the greatest specialists in this field: Claire Antonini, Benjamin Perrot, Eric Bellocq, Massimo Moscardo. He joined the department of early music of the Conservatoire National de Région of Paris where he obtained, with honours, the Diplôme d'Etudes Musicales Supérieures, option Early Music. He also received the first prize of Basso Continuo, with honours, under the teaching of Frédéric Michel at the Conservatoire National de Région of Boulogne Billancourt.

Damien teaches the lute, the theorbo and the baroque guitar at the Conservatoire of Choisy le Roi.

Thomas Soltani won first prize in harpsichord at the Conservatoire National de Region of Marseille in 2003 with Christine Lecoin, and also has a Bachelor of Music from the University of Aix, Marseille.

He was unanimously awarded first prize *Cum Laude* for the harpsichord diploma of bachelor at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam in the class of Bob van Asperen. He has also attended masterclasses with Christophe Rousset, Gustav Leonhardt, Françoise Lengellée, Jean Marc Aymes, Lucy Van Dael and Hugo Reyne, at important musical institutions such as the Académie Musicale de Villecroze, the Institut Neerlandais of Paris, the Piccola Accademia of Montisi, Italy.

He plays with ensembles such as the Amsterdam Symphony Orchestra, the Sweelinck Baroque Orchestra... He has also played in Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas*.

He has appeared concerts in famous festivals in France, Germany, Holland, Scotland, England...with musicians such as Jean-Marc Apap, Frédéric Chatoux, Igor Ruhadze... and was selected in 2007 to give a recital during the Fringe Concerts organized by the Early Music Festival of Utrecht.

He also studied with Olivier Baumont at the Conservatoire superieur de musique et de danse de Paris.

Thomas is studying with Bob van Asperen, for his Masters at the Conservatory of Amsterdam.

He has been awarded a bronze medal by the Académie Arts Sciences Lettres.

The instrument used in this evening's concert was originally built in Paris, 1764 by Jean Goermans and was then modified in 1783/4 by Pascal Taskin. The instrument is a superb example of a late eighteenth-century French harpsichord, with two manuals, three sets of strings (two unisons and an octave), and four registers, the extra register being for a peau de buffle set of jacks, giving a soft warm sound in contrast to the more brilliant pluck of the quilled jacks. Rather than handstops, the instrument has knee levers to change the registers, theoretically leaving the player's hands free to continue playing music.

The fourth register was unusual in French instruments, and was added (in this example) in the rebuilding by Taskin who also added the knee levers. The reason was simple - Flemish instruments by members of the Ruckers family were considered the "Stradivarius" of the harpsichord world and worth much more than new French harpsichords. By making the alterations (also including redecorating with chinoiserie images and darkening the soundboard) Taskin was attempting to pass the instrument off as an example made by Ioannes Couchet, a member of the Ruckers family. The ruse was complete when he cut the serif off the IG initials in the rose to give the letters IC.

Despite the presumed attempt at fraud, it is still considered to be a fabulous-sounding harpsichord and is much replicated by modern builders.

Dr Darryl Martin, curator, EUCHMI

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