

ACRONYM

Program Notes

ACRONYM's native habitat is the raucous, tuneful, virtuoso international repertoire for string ensemble that developed in central Europe during the second half of the 17th century. This musical ferment, a result of the transformation of courtly and religious institutions and the migration of musicians caused by the chaos of the Thirty Years War (which ended with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648), would eventually lead to the familiar forms and styles of the later Baroque music of Bach, Vivaldi, and Handel. But before that, European chamber music was a "wild west" of different styles, forms, and approaches. This experimental and chaotic moment in the history of European culture has left us some wonderful compositions that can sound bracingly avant garde to modern audiences more familiar with the elegant, balanced compositions of the High Baroque with its claims to order and reason. Our program today features some of our favorite works from composers with newfound access to courtly budgets (and the comparatively large ensembles they could support) and the eclectic musical styles and approaches of a displaced international community of musicians from across the continent.

Programmatic battle music has long been popular, from Renaissance polyphony by composers such as Clement Janequin—in which singers imitate gunfire and cries—to instrumental works like Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* and Beethoven's *Wellington's Victory*, each of which features an actual battery of cannons in the percussion section. We open and close this concert with two such compositions. Our first piece, *Sonata Jucunda* (Joyous Sonata), has no composer's name attached to it. Based on its quality and a borrowed melody, scholars generally agree that its likeliest composer was **Johann Heinrich Schmelzer** (c.1620-1680), who rose through the musical ranks of Vienna to become *Hofkapellmeister*. This work features prominent battle motifs and a distinctive modal melody—played in unison by the whole ensemble—that may have Ottoman origins. *Sonata Jucunda's* place and date of composition (Austria or Bohemia in the latter half of the seventeenth century) therefore imply it might have been a joyous commemoration of one of the Holy Roman Empire's military victories over the Ottoman Empire.

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Samuel Friedrich Capricornus (1628-1665) was born Samuel Friedrich Bockshorn in Žerčice, now part of the Czech Republic. He studied philosophy, theology, and languages before focusing on music. This brought him in 1649 to Vienna, where he might have studied with *Hofkapellmeister* Antonio Bertali. At a young age he was appointed *Kapellmeister* in Stuttgart, where he became embroiled in a lengthy public feud with the local organist, Philipp Bötdecker, who coveted Capricornus's new position. The two sniped in published letters about each other's counterpoint, and Bötdecker's brother—a local cornettist—was caught up in the kerfuffle when Capricornus publicly declared that he played his instrument like it was a “cow horn.”

Francesco Cavalli (1602-1676) is best remembered today for his dramatic works; he composed more than forty operas throughout a brilliant career in Venice. Cavalli's *Musiche Sacre*, a 1656 publication of masses and motets, includes a few scattered instrumental pieces including the *Canzona a8* of tonight's program. Cavalli composed this piece in the Venetian polychoral style popularized by Giovanni Gabrieli.

Almost no information survives about **Andreas Kirchhoff** (fl. 1670), an organist and composer based in Copenhagen who might be related to a number of town musicians from that era who share his family name. Kirchhoff's extant compositional output is scarce and comprises little more than three sonatas found in the Düben Collection, a manuscript archive accumulated by several generations of the Düben family, court composers to Queen Christina of Sweden.

Queen Christina helped shape the sounds of seventeenth-century music by supporting various composers during her travels and residencies in Stockholm, Innsbruck, Paris, Rome and elsewhere. Christina helped launch the career of **Alessandro Scarlatti** (1660-1725), one of the most successful and influential composers of the seventeenth century, after she heard the 1679 production of the young composer's opera *Gli equivoci nel sembiante*. She was impressed enough that she made Scarlatti the *maestro di cappella* of her household in Rome, a position he held for a few years before moving to Naples, where he would spend much of his career. The overture (“sinfonia”) to Scarlatti's oratorio *Agar et Ismaele esiliati* features lush, virtuoso writing for strings reminiscent of the style of Scarlatti's teacher in Rome, Giacomo Carissimi.

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Court and church composers wrote most of our program, but the next two composers held a job that was relatively new in the Baroque era: that of a municipal musician hired for the enjoyment of a city's citizenry. **Clemens Thieme** (1631-1668) was a protege of Heinrich Schütz, and he studied in Copenhagen and Dresden. He was hired as an instrumentalist in Zeitz and eventually appointed *Konzertmeister*. His polychoral Sonata *a8* offers an intriguing alternate orchestration of trumpets and trombones instead of strings. **Johann Pezel** (1639-1694) enjoyed a successful career as a municipal trumpeter in Leipzig. After failing to win Leipzig's *Thomaskantor* post (held by J. S. Bach a few generations later), Pezel took a position as director of instrumental music in Bautzen. His *Ciaccona* serves as the conclusion to a lengthy collection of alphabetically-titled sonatas named after characters and places from antiquity.

Giovanni Valentini (c.1582-1649) served as *Hofkapellmeister* at the Hapsburg Court in Vienna at the end of the Thirty Years War. Valentini's wild instrumental works were mostly unpublished and have therefore been largely forgotten today, but they demonstrate numerous innovations, including the surprising harmonic shifts found in his "Enharmonic" Sonata, in which two choirs of instruments alternate the same music in the distant keys of G Minor and B Major. Valentini's countryman, student, and eventual successor in Vienna was the violinist **Antonio Bertali** (1605-1669), who led and expanded musical activities in the Imperial City during the decades following the war. Bertali is represented here by a sonata which survives in the *Partiturbuch Ludwig*—named for its copyist, Jakob Ludwig—a manuscript of over a hundred sonatas from this era, most of them *unica*.

Johann Philipp Krieger (1649-1725) studied in Venice with Johann Rosenmüller, and he later traveled to Vienna, where Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I ennobled him on the basis of his fine organ playing. Krieger won posts in Bayreuth and Halle and was eventually appointed *Kapellmeister* of Wiessenfels, where he remained until his death 45 years later. Although Krieger is of a later generation than most of the other composers on this program, his Sonata *a4*—featuring a lengthy fugue, extensive solos for each instrument, and a particularly beautiful *ciaccona* section—is an early composition from prior to 1680.

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The most famous surviving work of baroque battle music is the concluding piece on our program, composed by Schmelzer's pupil, **Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber** (1644-1704). Biber worked in Graz and Kroměříž before settling in Salzburg. His *Battalia* is in eight continuous movements. A brief untitled introduction is followed by *Die liederliche gesellschaft von allerley Humor* (the lusty society of all types of humor), in which several contemporaneous folk songs are heard in eight keys simultaneously, and a note in the manuscript reads: "*hic dissonat ubique nam ebrii sic diversis Cantilenis clamare solent*" (here it is dissonant everywhere, for thus are the drunks accustomed to bellow with different songs). This cacophony is followed by two untitled *presto* movements, with *Der Mars* (the god of war) between them. A gentle *aria* is a respite but segues directly into *Die Schlacht* (the battle). *Battalia* ends with an *Adagio: Lamento der verwundten Musquetir* (lament of the wounded musketeer).

--Loren Ludwig



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