

## An Italian Afternoon at the Carriage Barn

Kevin Bushee, baroque violin  
André O'Neil, baroque cello  
Sandra Mangsen, harpsichord

**Overture to *Rinaldo*** **G. F. Handel, arr. Wm. Babbell**  
*Suits of the Most Celebrated Lessons (London, 1717)* **(1685–1759)**  
*Vivace-Allegro – Adagio – Giga, presto*

**Sonata 19, *allegro*** **Domenico Scarlatti**  
**Sonata 17, *presto*** **(1685–1757)**  
*Essercizi per gravicembalo (London, 1738–39)*

from *Ayres for the Violin, Part IV (London, 1685)* d. after 1713  
*Preludio, adagio -- Motivo, presto -- Fuga a due corde -- Aria, presto*  
*-- Passagio à solo -- Allegro, prestissimo – Ground -- Aria amorosa*

**Sonata for violoncello and continuo in C Major, Op. 5 No. 3** **Geminiani**  
*VI Sonate di Violoncello e Basso Continuo (Paris and London, 1746)*  
*Andante – Allegro – Affetuoso -- Allegro*

### Intermission

**Sonata seconda a violin solo detta *La Luciminia contenta*** **Marco Uccellini**  
*Sonate, Correnti et Arie, Op. 4 (Venice, 1645)* **(?1610–1680)**

**Sonata for violin and continuo in D Minor, Op. 4 No. 4** **Francesco Geminiani**  
*Sonate a Violino e Basso (London, 1739)* **(1687–1762)**  
*Largo – Allegro – Grave -- Allegro*

**Ciaccona** **Bernardo Storace**  
*Selva di varie compositioni (Venice, 1664)* **fl. mid 17<sup>th</sup> c.**

**Sonata for violin and continuo in F Major, Op. 5 No. 4** **Arcangelo Corelli**  
*Sonate a Violino e Violone o Cimbalo (Rome, 1700)* **(1653–1713)**  
*Adagio – Allegro – Vivace – Adagio -- Allegro*

## Musings...An Italian Afternoon at the Carriage Barn

This concert is dubbed “An Italian Afternoon,” but it has to do as often as not with Italianate music as it was found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century London. Of the violinist-composers who made their way to London in search of both fame and fortune, or at least a decent living, Nicola Matteis and Francesco Geminiani were prominent in their day but are not much remembered or performed now. Yet John Evelyn described Matteis in 1674 as “that stupendous Violin *Signor Nichalao* ... whom certainly never mortal man Exceeded on that instrument” (quoted by Peter Walls in “The Influence of the Italian Violin School in 17<sup>th</sup>-Century England,” *Early Music* 18,1990, 575-84). And many of his contemporaries held Geminiani to be the equal of Handel and Corelli.

Walls asserts with good reason that it was Matteis who introduced the virtuosic Italian violin style to the English. Apparently he had many students, and his pedagogical bent is evident in the two collections he published (*Arie diverse* and *Ayres for the Violin*) in 1676 and 1685. In the Preface to the *Ayres* he claims his aim is “to furnish matter for Practice and Diversion.” To help more and less advanced players choose pieces, he provides two partial lists of the contents, one of “the most easy ayres in the book that may be play’d upon the flute as well as the violin” and the second of “passages and ayres a little harder to practice upon the violin, with double stops & divisions.” The pieces are grouped into suites by key, although that term is not used and the content of each group much less predictable than that in, say, a Bach suite. At a time when solo violin music in Italy was being published in score, Matteis’ volumes are in “choirbook” format, that is in separate parts printed one above the other in a single book, perhaps in order to save space.

Another Italian violinist-composer who immigrated to London was Francesco Geminiani, who arrived in 1714, after studying under both Corelli and Alessandro Scarlatti in Rome and Naples. Like Matteis and Handel, Geminiani was seeking a better life in London. Apart from three extended visits to Paris, his career was centered in that city and in Dublin, where by he owned a concert room cum art gallery. He played his final concert in Dublin two years before his death. Like Matteis, he was a pedagogue, publishing treatises on violin playing, accompaniment, guitar, and taste. As a composer, he published two volumes of solo violin sonatas and three of concerti grossi, as well as the Op. 5 sonatas for violoncello, which were also published in arrangements for violin; his contemporary Veracini decried this practice as “reheating”. He also reheated many of his own violin sonatas and concertos and those of Corelli as concertos or trios. His two collections of keyboard pieces are drawn mainly from his own compositions for strings. His published collections were printed not only in London, but also in Paris and Amsterdam. His concertos—both original and arranged—were performed in the Concerts of Ancient Music in late eighteenth-century London, alongside many works by Handel.

Three composers whose works are included in the concert remained in Italy, at least as far as we know. Marco Uccellini was one of the foremost violinists of his day, a generation or two before that of Matteis. He worked in Modena at the Este court and at

the cathedral, and from 1665 in Parma at the Farnese court. He wrote operas and ballets (music lost) and some sacred vocal music, but we know him primarily as a composer of violin music. Of his seven published collections, Opp. 4 and 5 contain solo sonatas. Indeed, the latter (Venice, 1649) was the first printed collection devoted entirely to solo sonatas. They are the high point in the repertoire for the instrument prior to Biber and Schmelzer, and deserve to be much better known. His music was known outside Italy: the Op. 4 collection was reprinted in Antwerp by Phalèse in 1663. It's curious that the *correnti* and *arie* that conclude the volume can be played as violin solos or as duos, since the second violin part is *aggiunto ad libitum*. This is not unlike Matteis' inclusion of optional second violin parts in his collections of solos.

About Bernardo Storace we know next to nothing. His single volume of keyboard music was printed in Venice; its title page lists him as *vicemaestro di cappella* to the senate of Messina, Sicily. The volume contains several sets of variations on ground bass patterns as well as two toccata-canzona pairs and a few dances. The ciaccona on the program begins in C, and modulates to F and then B flat, before returning to the home key. Very exciting moments, those modulations. Enjoy them.

Although Corelli himself remained in Rome, his influence arrived in London in the persons of those who claimed him as teacher and via editions and manuscript copies of his music. By 1717, all six of the collections, which were exclusively devoted to the violin, had enjoyed English editions not only in the original scoring, but also in arrangements for flute (a.k.a. recorder) and for harpsichord. Alongside the prints, the numerous manuscript copies testify to their wide popularity. In London, John Walsh had published the solo sonatas (Op. 5) in 1700, the same year they had appeared in Rome, where the composer had become the city's foremost violinist. He worked with Alessandro Scarlatti in both Naples and in Rome, where both were admitted to the Arcadian Academy in 1706. And in 1708 he led the orchestra for Handel's Roman oratorio, *La resurrezione*.

I have made space for Handel by opening this concert with the overture to his *Rinaldo* (London, 1711). I do this in order to set the stage for the two keyboard sonatas by Scarlatti and to make the point that even for instrumental music, the subtext is operatic more often than not. *Rinaldo* was Handel's first opera for London, where Italian imports and locally crafted pasticcios had proven popular in the first few years of the century. The city was awash in Italian opera, not only on the stage but at home, via a plethora of songbooks and instrumental arrangements of overtures and arias. William Babell arranged the overture from *Rinaldo* as part of the first Set in his 1717 collection, *Suits of the most Celebrated Lessons*. Each of the four sets consists of a newly composed prelude, and selections from one or more operas. He had done something similar with excerpts from two operas from the previous season (*Hydaspes* and *Almahide*) in *The Ladys Entertainment*, Part 4 (1711). The idea of playing opera excerpts at the keyboard was thus well established. Interesting in the *Rinaldo* overture is Babell's extravagant ornamentation in the Adagio; it surely would have been ornamented (perhaps by the principal oboist) in Handel's orchestral version as

well, although Babel's arrangement may well be more extreme than any that was heard in the theatre.

I follow the overture not with one of the many operatic arias arranged for harpsichord, but with two sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti. Why? We usually think of Scarlatti as the provider of a repository of sonatas useful for the technical challenges they pose. But many are quite dramatic, and this should not surprise us if we remember that Domenico's dad was Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725), a major opera composer in Naples and Rome in the early years of the century. Indeed, I chose these because they are so very rich in dramatic possibilities. The minor mode of Sonata 19 might be heard as the song of a desperate hero or heroine from the early eighteenth-century operatic stage. Sonata 17 I imagine as a dialogue between the pursued and the pursuer. I take great liberties with the tempo in order to contrast the two characters, who seem to me to be in the midst of a Road Runner cartoon.

I like viewing Italian baroque instrumental music through an operatic lens. Even if the music does not survive, Domenico Scarlatti is known to have composed a dozen or more operas for Naples or Rome. He composed sacred vocal music, arias and cantatas as well, but it is for his keyboard sonatas that we remember Domenico. That focus on keyboard music seems to have resulted from his association with Maria Barbara at the courts of Portugal and Spain. In 1719 he went to Lisbon as keyboard teacher at the court. His association with the *Infanta*, Maria Barbara, finally took him to Madrid in 1728, when she married the Crown Prince of Spain, Fernando. His main preoccupation in those later years seems to have been composing keyboard sonatas for his patron. His sonatas were immensely popular in London, where thirty were published as *Esserizi* in 1738/39. And they remained popular, as basic repertoire for budding keyboard virtuosos. Muzio Clementi is known to have cut his teeth on the harpsichord playing Scarlatti sonatas in England in the late 1760s. In fact the question of which keyboard is appropriate for each sonata takes one on a fool's errand: there were fortepianos, harpsichords and clavichords at the Spanish court. Some of the sonatas work better on a particular instrument, but really the piece simply changes when you take it from one to the next instrument.