

PROGRAM NOTES

GIOVANNI GIROLAMO KAPSBERGER (C. 1580 – 1651)

Toccata arpeggiata

While little is known of Kapsberger's life, he is primarily remembered as a composer for theorbo, a large guitar-like instrument that was common in the period. This work, which features on our ARIA award-winning recording *Tapas*, comes from a beautiful 60-page manuscript published in Venice in 1604, titled *Libro primo d'intavolatura di chitarrone* (first book of theorbo tablature). Tablature is a form of music notation that indicates fingering rather than specific pitches. In this case, it shows which fingers are to be placed on which strings of the theorbo. The manuscript below constitutes the entirety of the music notated by Kapsberger for this piece: all other aspects of realising the music are left to the performers. However, the marking *arpeggiata* indicates that it is to be played with arpeggios: musical phrases that take individual notes of a chord, and sound them individually in succession. An earlier page of the manuscript also suggests that this piece is a *toccata*: a musical work that typically features fast-moving or complex passages, in these performances realised by the Brandenburg's principal theorbo player, Tommie Andersson. The result is an exciting and virtuosic journey through adventurous musical territory.



Theorbo tablature of
Toccata Arpeggiata from
*Libro primo d'intavolatura di
chitarrone* by Kapsberger

SCENE I

CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI (1567 – 1643)

Lamento della ninfa

As you walk through Venice for the first time, nobody can escape two things: the labyrinth of canals, and the striking *Piazza San Marco* (St Mark's Square), which has been walked by countless musical geniuses over the years. One of these was Claudio Monteverdi, who was the head of music at the stunning St Mark's Basilica which dominates the square. Famed for its extraordinary acoustics, St Mark's Basilica was practically Monteverdi's home, and it was during his over 30 years here that he cemented his position as one of the most influential and monumental figures in music history. He is usually credited as the father of the opera, and also as the most important transitional figure between the Renaissance and Baroque periods of music. He composed an enormous volume of both secular and sacred music, although sadly much of it has been lost. The many musical concepts pioneered by Monteverdi include the *basso continuo*, a small group of bass instruments which provide the harmonic foundation of a work. In these performances, the *continuo* group consists of the harpsichord, theorbo, cello, violone, lirone and viola da gamba. The bulk of Monteverdi's work is contained in nine books of madrigals: secular vocal compositions common in the Renaissance. The *Lamento della ninfa* (lament of the nymph) comes from the eighth book, which is evocatively titled *Madrigali guerrieri et amorosi* (Madrigals of war and love). It is structured in two roughly equal halves: the first for 'war' and the second for 'love'. Unsurprisingly, this short work comes from the part of the book devoted to love.

THE STORY

The *Lamento della ninfa* (Lament of the nymph) is a three-part work, opened and closed by a chorus of three shepherds, who introduce the nymph as full of *fuora* (anger) and *dolor* (pain). The central and most striking section is the nymph's lament itself – a grief-stricken song where she bemoans her fate. She has been betrayed by a lover and is consumed by anguish. Most likely, he has abandoned her for another woman. The shepherds interject throughout her song, calling her *miserella* (miserable girl) and lamenting her fate. Their final words make the poignant comment that *mesce amor fiamma, e gel* (love blends fire and ice).

SCENE II

ANDREA FALCONIERI (C. 1585 – 1656)

Ciaccona

Andrea Falconieri, or Falconiero, was born in Naples, but travelled across Italy, France and Spain during his long life. He worked at a convent in Genoa for some time, before being ejected by the Mother Superior, who complained that his music was unsettling to the nuns. He then returned to Naples, where after the death of Trebbacci, who appears later in this program, Falconieri was named his successor as the *maestro di cappella* (music master). He died of the plague, and although little survives of his music, it is likely that he composed a very large amount. As a lutenist, many of his published works are popular songs and *villanellas* (rustic songs common in Naples in the period). This particular work comes from the composer's *primo libro* (first book) of assorted works, which was published in 1650. It is a *ciaccona*: a piece with a repeated bass line that featured varied musical lines above it. In this case, these lines are wonderfully virtuosic on the part of the violins.

CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI (1567 – 1643)

Overture from *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*

Although Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (c. 1607) is often considered the first opera, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (c. 1639) is one of Monteverdi's later works, and comes considerably closer to the modern conception of opera. For example, it includes several ensembles – where several cast members sing together – a form which was new and fashionable at the time. As with many works of the period, it fell into obscurity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and interest in the work was revived in 1922, when the score was published. For many years, the authenticity of this work was repeatedly questioned, and as a result it was not regularly performed until the 1950s, when its authorship by Monteverdi became widely accepted. Its story comes from the later part of Homer's *Odyssey*, and tells of the return of the King of Ithaca, Ulysses, to his homeland. He discovers that his wife Penelope is beset by suitors, and resolves to vanquish each of them. The overture, or *sinfonia avanti il prologo* (sinfonia before the prologue), of this work is just eight bars long, however the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra will perform it with repetitions and variations, as was common in the period.

CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI (1567 – 1643)

Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda

This work was first performed during the Venice carnival season of 1624. Like the

centerpiece of the 'war' component of the manuscript. It is considered an operatic *scena* (scene): a short work which is difficult to label using modern musical terms, but approximates opera in a period when the concept was in its infancy. The work contains one of the first known uses of pizzicato – the technique where string players pluck their strings with the finger rather than playing them with the bow. This is believed to represent Tancredi and Clorinda striking one another with the bases of their swords. Monteverdi also uses music to paint various other aspects of the story, including lilting rhythms for the *motto de cavallo* (horse trot) and fiery string passages for the clash of Tancredi and Clorinda. This work also pioneers the *stile concitato* (agitated style), which consists of rapid repeated notes, usually to convey tension.

THE STORY

Set during the First Crusade (1095 – 1099), the *scena* tells the story of a wandering knight, Tancredi, who encounters a mysterious armoured figure, who he takes for an opposing soldier. They fight and, when Tancredi is victorious, he removes the mortally wounded soldier's helmet to tragically discover his lover, Clorinda. In her dying moments, Tancredi baptises Clorinda and she sees heaven opening to welcome her.

GIOVANNI MARIA TRABACI (C. 1575 – 1647)

Consonanze stravaganti

Giovanni Maria Trabaci is a little-known southern Italian composer, but he left a sizeable body of surviving works. His professional life seems to have taken place almost exclusively in Naples. This short work comes from a large volume of music called the *Libro primo* (first book) in dozens of different styles, dated 1603. It is over one hundred pages long, and contains one work titled *Consonanze stravaganti* (extravagant consonances). This is most likely a reference to the striking and unusual harmonies of the piece. Unexpected harmonic twists and turns make this work particularly memorable, much like the Kapsberger that opens this program. There is evidence that Trabaci would have intended this work to have been performed on a keyboard which had more keys than the modern keyboard, which has twelve keys per octave. This instrument, which would have been known as a type of *cimbalo cromatico*, would have had fourteen keys per octave, with the capacity to distinguish between notes that a modern keyboard cannot. This work is written with extreme chromatic changes that showcase these notes.

INTERVAL

SCENE III

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685 – 1750)

Brandenburg Concerto No. 4, BWV 1049 (First Movement)

Johann Sebastian Bach is one of the titans of music history, and his volume of works is enormous, varied and hugely influential. The six Brandenburg Concertos have a special place among this repertoire, and so important are they to the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra that they are the inspiration for our name. These works were a gift from Bach to the Margrave of Brandenburg-Schwedt, which is the source of their name, although this moniker was not given to the set until about 150 years later. Surprisingly, there is no evidence that the Margrave ever replied to Bach, and it is likely that the Margrave never even heard them performed. Each of the six concertos has a distinct character, and all are noted for various virtuosic deployments of certain instruments. This concerto, the fourth, is renowned for its technically brilliant violin lines. It is also the only one of the six to feature two parts for the *flauti d'echo*, although it is not entirely clear which instruments Bach had in mind for these parts. It is now believed that they were intended for the *flauto dolce*, or baroque recorder. While no single Brandenburg Concerto requires all 17 of the musicians that Bach had at his disposal while *Kapellmeister* (head of music-making) at Köthen, when viewed collectively their instrumentation suggests that they were intended for this specific group of musicians. As a result, it was most likely Bach's intention that these concertos be performed with an ensemble of one musician per part, and for this performance, the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra is presenting the first movement of this concerto with just such a group.



Costume design sketch of Lieschen by Genevieve Graham

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685 – 1750)

Coffee Cantata, BWV 211

For most of his working life, Bach resided in Leipzig, which was home to Café Zimmerman, the most prestigious and best-appointed *Kaffeehaus* (coffeehouse) in the town at the time. During Bach's lifetime, coffeehouses were hugely popular. Coffee was introduced to Europe from Africa via the Middle East in the late 1500s, and it swept through the continent like wildfire in the 1600s. The earliest coffeehouses in Germany were established in port cities in the 1670s, and reached Leipzig some time after that. Leipzig's Café Zimmerman was home to a *Collegium Musicum* (a musical society common in Germany at the time) that had been established by the composer Telemann in 1702. Bach ran the society between 1729 and 1739, and it was during this period that he composed the cantata *Schweig stille, plaudert nicht* (Be quiet, stop chattering), but today it is best known as the Coffee Cantata. Although classified as a cantata – a vocal composition with instrumental accompaniment intended for concert performance – this particular work is rather like a miniature opera, featuring two characters plus a narrator, similar to Monteverdi's *combattimento*.

THE STORY

The *Coffee Cantata* tells the story of Lieschen, a young girl who is addicted to coffee. Her disapproving father, Schlendrian (which literally means *stick in the mud*), threatens to withhold meals, clothes and anything else he can think of in order to force her to stop drinking the beverage. Ultimately, only the threat of forbidding her from marrying has the desired effect. However, Lieschen is a strong-willed girl, and when her father is offstage, she admits that she won't marry a man who doesn't indulge her coffee-drinking ways. In the end, Schlendrian seems to relent to his daughter's ways, and the cantata closes with Lieschen, her father and the narrator singing together that drinking coffee is natural – a sentiment still shared by many, hundreds of years later.