

YORK
EARLY MUSIC
FESTIVAL

**University
Baroque Ensemble**

**Online Premiere
18 July 2021 3.00 pm**

University Baroque Ensemble

Lucy Russell, Rachel Gray,
Jennifer Cohen, Peter Seymour *directors*

Marche pour la Cérémonie des Turcs
Chaconne des Scaramouches

Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–87)

Concert pour quatre parties de violes

Marc-Antoine Charpentier
(1643–1704)

Prelude 1

Prelude 2

Sarabande

Gigue angloise

Gigue françoise

Passacaille

‘Entrée de Polimnie’ *from* Les Boréades

Jean-Philippe Rameau
(1683–1764)

Concerto for four violins in D major
from L’Estro Armonico, RV 549

Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741)

Allegro

Largo e Spiccato

Allegro

Symphony no. I in B flat major

William Boyce (1711–79)

Allegro

Moderato e dolce

Allegro

The Lockdown Passacaglia

University Baroque Ensemble

This concert was recorded at the National Centre for Early Music on 25 June, as part of the University of York’s YorkConcerts season.

Marche pour la Cérémonie des Turcs Chaconne des Scaramouches

Jean-Baptiste Lully

Jean-Baptiste Lully, an Italian-born French composer of the seventeenth century, is considered a master of the French Baroque style. Both works in this programme were composed by Lully for the 1670 play *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, (The Bourgeois Gentleman), written by Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, originally presented in the court of Louis XIV at the Château of Chambord. The play contains interludes of spoken dialogue, vocal and instrumental music and depicts a middle-class gentleman's wasted efforts to achieve aristocratic status. Indulging in the fine art of music is one way in which he tries to enlighten himself as to the activities of the 'upper class'.

Marche pour la Cérémonie des Turcs (March for the Turkish Ceremony) features in Act IV of the play. Louis XIV's request to have the play exhibit a Turkish masquerade is partly envisaged in this work. While the music itself is incredibly celebratory and energetic, helped by the use of percussion in some productions, in the context of the play, the Turkish culture is mocked in exchange for Monsieur Jourdain's satirical and improper desire to rise to the social aristocracy.

Possibly the better known of the two works is *Chaconne des Scaramouches*. It appears in the middle of a vocal and instrumental musical interlude towards the end of the play. The dance accompanies a comedic scene featuring an arlequin and trivelin acting mischievously around the couple's brief exchange. The chaconne's typical features of being in a major key and in triple time are exemplified in this work, giving an amiable, cordial feel to this joyous and somewhat humorous scene.

Concert pour quatre parties de violes

Marc-Antoine Charpentier

Marc-Antoine Charpentier, a French Baroque composer during the reign of Louis XIV, dominated seventeenth-century French music by the extent and power of his output. He embraced all genres and his mastery in writing sacred vocal music was recognised and hailed by his contemporaries. His *Concert pour quatre parties de violes*, composed from 1680-1681, is in the form of a dance suite. With the exception of the first prelude, which is written in a highly imitative style in the old polyphonic manner so well suited to the texture and sound world of a viol consort, the remainder of the suite is made up of dance forms, (the second prelude being in effect an *Allemande*), giving an unfamiliarly exotic character to this viol repertoire.

'Entrée de Polimnie' from *Les Boréades*

Jean-Philippe Rameau

French composer Jean-Phillipe Rameau was best known for his operas and harpsichord music, along with his work as a musical theorist. In spite of his renown as possibly the greatest of the French late-Baroque composers, surprisingly little is known about his life. It appears that he withdrew from the spotlight in every area of his life except music, with one friend even stating that 'his heart and soul were in the harpsichord; once he had shut its lid, there was no one home'. He spent some of his life as a violinist, but his career as a composer took off later in his life. In fact, his first opera, *Hippolyte et Aricie*, was written at the age of 50, and actually caused arguments between people who enjoyed his music and Lully's most avid supporters, who apparently referred to it as 'grotesque, discordant music'. Over time, however, this debate died down and Rameau received a more positive overall reception.

Les Boréades is Rameau's last opera and appears not to have been performed during his lifetime. It owes much of its popularisation to John Eliot Gardiner, who first gave a public performance of the piece in 1975. 'Entrée de Polimnie' is perhaps the most famous excerpt from the opera and is centred around a beautiful falling scalic idea, which is punctuated by regular ornamentation. The bassoon part, which is today performed on a cello, is perhaps the highlight of the music and regularly interacts with the violins to great effect.

Concerto for four violins in D major

Antonio Vivaldi

from L'Estro Armonico, RV 549

Published in 1711 and appearing in Vivaldi's first printed collection of concertos, the Concerto in D, RV 549, is scored for four solo violins, strings and continuo. The set as a whole was titled *L'Estro Armonico* (The Harmonic Inspiration). Musicologist and Vivaldi expert Michael Talbot has argued that it was 'perhaps the most influential collection of instrumental music to appear during the whole of the eighteenth century'. Vivaldi demands agility and speed from his soloists and fills this particular concerto with contrast. Arguably the predominant feature of Vivaldi's music, however, and very prevalent in this concerto, is his use of small musical cells, sometimes lasting no more than a beat. Through repetition and sequencing (moving the cell steadily higher or lower), he develops entire sections or even movements, exploring different harmonies and the whole range of the violin while passing the

cells around the instruments in conversations. In this concerto, Vivaldi often groups the soloists in pairs, the first with the third and the second with the fourth.

These three movements follow the typical concerto structure of the time: a fast, slow and then another fast movement. Vivaldi slowly builds up the texture in the first movement, beginning just with the first solo violin, just as in his Concerto for four violins in B minor. Concertos in this set also often include a more active solo cello part; listen out for this in the first movement. For the second movement, we move to the relative minor, creating an altogether darker mood. This is emphasised by the surprising descending chromaticism which characterises the tutti sections, perhaps reflective of the 'harmonic inspiration' which he titled this set. Unusually for the music of this time, these sections are made up of parallel octaves – the whole orchestra and soloists play the same notes together, leaving the harmonies bare. This was an effect saved for moments of drama and suspense; for instance, Handel used this technique in his aria 'The People that Walked in Darkness' from *Messiah*. The final movement changes the mood completely, back in the original key of D major and employing many characteristics of a baroque gigue (a fast and lively dance involving lots of jumps often used to end instrumental sonatas and concertos at this time). Cadenzas were a chance for freedom and virtuosity, and while often left for the performer to improvise in the moment, Vivaldi includes a noteworthy written-out cadenza here. Listen out for the extreme chromaticism over a held dominant pedal, holding the suspense until the explosive re-entry of the final *tutti* which brings this concerto to an exciting close.

Symphony no. I in B flat major

William Boyce

William Boyce, known for his church music, symphonies and stage music, is viewed by some as one of the most important English composers of the Baroque period. In 1755 he was appointed Master of the King's Musick as well as organist at the Chapel Royal, St James's Palace. During his lifetime he wrote eight symphonies which are seen as his best-known works. Symphony no. I in B flat major has similarities to the overture to the *New Year's Ode*, 'Hail, hail, auspicious day', which was written to see in the new year of 1756. This symphony is written in the Italian style, which means that it starts with a fast movement characterised by a constant moving bass line. This is followed by a slower, more lyrical movement with longer, more sustained melodic lines. The final *Allegro* is full of dancing energy due to the 6/8 time signature which creates a significant contrast to the two previous movements.

The Lockdown Passacaglia

University Baroque Ensemble

During the Spring term, the University Baroque Ensemble was once again forced to return to Zoom for rehearsal sessions. Given the choice to continue or abandon our weekly working together, the vote fell in favour of keeping calm and carrying on! In fact, such was the enthusiasm for regular meetups that we determined to seek new ways of working together and find fresh challenges to keep ourselves engaged and motivated. These were dark months for us all. We needed to feel a part of something, needed to feel valued and encouraged, so this little community valiantly stuck it out through another online lockdown.

Aside from working on the notes for this concert (via sectionals etc.), we had the idea to compose our own passacaglia, having studied various dance forms during lockdown. Several students had worked on Biber's *Passacaglia* and so we analysed the work together, learning about how the piece was composed and how the variations worked. One or two students, as a result of these sessions, went off and wrote their own, including William Campbell, our organist/harpsichordist. The idea behind it all was to create a safe space for some experimentation and to befriend the 'fear' that is associated with composing or improvising our own music. Zoom provided that 'safe space' and nobody needed to feel any pressure.

Our starting point was to make this enterprise a team effort from the outset. We collated material by finding rhythms based on our own names and then decided whether the *Passacaglia* should be in the major or minor. Everyone voted in favour of major – we wanted to write something joyful and celebratory as an antidote to all the lockdown hardship. We found our time signature and the key of D major and then began to write short phrases which were then woven into the final piece by Lucy Russell. Our resident improvising violinist, Nina Kumin (who is doing a PhD on the subject), will be adding some improvisation to the performance.

Compositionally, this is to be taken for what it is – assembled by an ensemble. It's fun, sunny and lightweight – and yet, the inspiration for it grew from darker and more challenging times. It feels like a tonic, after all we have been through, and we hope you enjoy it!

The **University Baroque Ensemble** draws players from the University of York's undergraduate and postgraduate courses to explore historically informed performance style, generally performing on modern instruments but with string players using baroque bows. In December 2020, the ensemble presented a live, socially-distanced concert of JS Bach's Cantata no. 61, Leclair's Violin Concerto no. 3 in C and Telemann's Concerto for three oboes and three violins. Following a second lockdown, we are delighted to have met in person this term, with rehearsals linked via Zoom to those who remained as far afield as South Korea and China.

Violin

Lucy Russell

Jessica Bosworth

Junyang Ding*

Gabin Kim*

Nina Kumin*

Jin Ma

Weronika Mieczynska

Xuanling Wan*

Ruoyun Yang

Viola

Alan George**

Cello

Ali Baumann*

Holly Lawson

Shuang Pan

Naomi Prince

Rachel Gray

Bass

Richard Waldock**

Flute

Alison Nairn

Oboe

Rosemary Lynch

Alex Nightingale**

Harpsichord/Organ

William Campbell

Percussion

Kieran Crowley

* *soloist*

** *guest player*

Directors **Lucy Russell**, **Rachel Gray** and **Jennifer Cohen** have been involved with University Baroque Ensemble for only a few years, whereas its founder and director **Peter Seymour**, who retires this summer, has been its source of inspiration and energy for many years. We owe him an enormous debt of gratitude and would like to pay tribute to his tireless work in sharing his musical expertise and insights into early music performance practice with so many generations of students.