

The Ministers of Pastime

Phantastic Kapellmeisters

Filmed at the National Centre for Early Music
During their EEEmerging+ Residency - May 2023

The Ministers of Pastime

Phantastic Kapellmeisters

Sonata septima a 5 in A major

Johann Heinrich Schmelzer

c.1620/23-1680

Sonata a 4 in D minor
(pub. c.1680)

Giovanni Valentini

c.1582-1649

Sonata a 6 in E minor
(pub. 1662, Partiturbuch
Ludwig No.101)

Antonio Bertali 1605-69

Sonata a 2 in D minor for violin and viola
(pub. 1680-88, Rost Codex LXX)

Antonio Bertali

Sonata a 4 in D minor
(pub. 1662, Partiturbuch Ludwig No.76)

Antonion Bertali

Sonata a 5 in D minor

Schmelzer

Sonata Jucunda, A 546/IV:100

Anon. (attrib. Schmelzer)

This concert will be shared online in the NCEM's celebration of European Early Music Day on 21 March along with performances by two other young ensembles: I Zefirelli and The Ministers of Pastime. Full details: ncem.co.uk/earlymusicday/

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There are moments and places in history through which, despite political, military and religious conflicts, an artistic movement can evolve and even transcend the problems of its own times. The court of Vienna, with its progress marked by the Thirty Years War, witnessed the flourishing of one of these currents – one of the most important development in music in the seventeenth century: *stylus phantasticus*.

The Italian organist Giovanni Valentini, the Italian violinist Antonio Bertali and the Austrian violinist Johann Heinrich Schmelzer were three musicians who occupied the position of kapellmeister in the Viennese court successively, and were pillars in the development of *stylus phantasticus*. Influenced by the Venetian school and the opera of northern Italy – and thanks to a close relationship with their respective emperors and benefactors, Ferdinand II, Ferdinand III and Leopold I – these composers enjoyed a creative freedom that allowed them to perfect a compositional style that is both experimental and imaginative.

The earliest of them, **Giovanni Valentini**, born in Venice around 1582, was a pupil of the Gabrieli school of violin playing and then worked from 1604 as organist at the Polish court in Warsaw. Ten years later he joined the court of the Archduke Ferdinand at Graz. After the Archduke's election in 1619 as the Holy Roman Emperor, Ferdinand II, Valentini moved to Vienna, together with many of the musicians from Graz, to work as imperial organist. Following the death of Giovanni Priuli in 1626, he was promoted to Hofkapellmeister, becoming a key figure in the development of the musical life of the Viennese court. As well as compositions ranging from operas, oratorios and madrigals to instrumental works, he also wrote poetry and literary works. Wild yet carefully worked out uses of metric and rhythmic formulas, outlandish chromatic lines and sudden harmonic changes are key to his musical style. Much of his experimentation is linked to the use of enharmonic keyboard instruments in Graz.

Born in Verona in 1605, **Antonio Bertali** received his musical training from Stefano Bernardi, who engaged him as a musician at the Viennese court in 1624. Gaining a reputation as both a gifted composer and a virtuoso violinist, he became kapellmeister in 1649 after Valentini's death. Bertali's compositions include operas, oratorios and other dramatic works. His instrumental music includes a broad range of popular mid-seventeenth-century styles, from the contrapuntal sonatas prevalent at court to large-scale, multi-sectional works. Bertali retained his post until his death in 1669, when he was succeeded by Giovanni Felice Sances.

Johann Heinrich Schmelzer was born in Sheibbs, Lower Austria, between 1620 and 1623. Information about his early years is unknown, but it appears that he was

in Vienna as early as 1636 and, like Bertali, his success was as both a violinist and a composer. Appointed vice-kapellmeister in 1671, he assumed most of the court duties from an ailing Sances. Following the death of Sances, Schmelzer only held the title of kapellmeister for a few months before dying in 1680 in Prague, where the court had moved to avoid the plague, but which he did not escape. He was a key figure in the development of instrumental music in Austria before Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber, who was a possible student of Schmelzer.

In this programme, we trace the history of the *stylus phantasticus* through the instrumental works of these three composers and their passage through the Habsburg court. We find a path marked by the unique harmonic landscapes of Valentini, the contrasting sounds of Bertali and the inexhaustible palette of affects in the music of Schmelzer. It is the story of a musical development that assumes a life of its own, one that is inseparable from the environment and context of its time.

The Ministers of Pastime

Ignacio Ramal *violin*

Sara Balasch *violin*

Ángela Moro *violin, viola*

Alaia Ferran *viola*

Marc de la Linde *viola da gamba*

Clara Pouvreau *cello*

Jussif Jacobo *double bass*

Jeremy Nastasi *archlute, baroque guitar*

Joan Seguí *harpsichord, organ*

The Ministers of Pastime specialises in historically informed practice, focused on performing repertoire from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It owes its name to an expression with which the French ambassador at the court of Henry VIII of England described the search for musicians in Europe, and hence the ensemble seeks to reflect the richness of cultural influences across the whole continent.

Committed from the very outset to the idea of collectivity, the ensemble draws on the players' different individual backgrounds and origins, as well as on the bonds that bind them together, to develop projects that seek to combine the highest musical standards with musicological rigor. At the core is the music for violin consort and its evolution, as well as the importance of these instruments in later

musical genres. Parallel to their activities as an ensemble, the members regularly collaborate with other groups and musicians on the early music scene.

The Ministers of Pastime has recently been selected as a member of the prestigious EEEMERGING+ programme, which supports and promotes emerging young groups in European early music performance. The 2022-2023 season includes concerts at the Festival Emergent at L'Auditori in Barcelona and at Fundación Juan March and Festival Internacional de Arte Sacro in Madrid. During 2023, the ensemble performs at numerous festivals and venues around Europe, including Fontfroide and Ambronay (France), Cisternmusica (Portugal) and at the Jordi Savall Festival at Santes Creus.

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