

Bach and Beyond

Programme Notes

by Christina Hutten

The music on tonight's programme is music designed to build community. It was nurtured by tightknit musical families, fostered collaboration between local professional and amateur musicians, circulated internationally among avid collectors, and blended diverse national styles. Telemann's description still seems apt today. It is music to "revive spirits wearied by official business and encourage the further growth of music by constant practice of that art."

Johann Bernhard Bach's **Overture in G Minor**, an orchestral suite of French dances, survives in parts copied at the request of Johann Sebastian Bach. Bernhard was the town organist and court harpsichordist in Eisenach and Sebastian's cousin on both their fathers' and mothers' sides. They were part of a musical family serving the German provinces of Saxony and Thuringia from the sixteenth until the nineteenth century. For the Bachs, music was a craft to be passed on through the generations. The musical careers of the boys were decided during childhood; they usually studied with family members, and often married members of other musical families. Sebastian was, for instance, godfather and music teacher to Bernhard's eldest son. Their family gatherings must have resembled music festivals. When Johann Sebastian took over the leadership of the Leipzig *collegium musicum*, music of Johann Bernhard was some of the first he prepared for the ensemble, and even Sebastian's obituary gives him a nod, mentioning that Bernhard "composed many beautiful overtures in the manner of Telemann."

Georg Philipp Telemann's mother was determined to distract her son from music. There had been no musicians in the Telemann family for generations, and, at the time, musicians did not even have the rights of citizenship. She hoped that he would instead become a pastor, and sent him away to study with Caspar Calvör, apparently unaware of the theologian's love of music. Calvör encouraged Telemann's musical aspirations and by the age of twenty-seven, Telemann had already secured a coveted position as *kapellmeister* at the ducal court in Eisenach, where he met and befriended Johann Bernhard Bach and must have been welcomed as an honorary member of the Bach family, becoming godfather of Johann Sebastian's son Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach a few years later. Telemann dedicated himself to musical training throughout his career. As a twenty-one-year-old, he established a *collegium musicum* in Leipzig, a student ensemble designed to provide aspiring performers a springboard into professional careers. He published a periodical of repertoire for amateur musicians. Later, as city music director in Frankfurt, he taught music to schoolboys, including six to eight especially talented boys to whom he gave private lessons. He also revived the *collegium musicum* of the Frauenstein society, an association of upper and middleclass amateur musicians and music lovers, who hosted and performed weekly concerts alongside professional musicians.

Telemann likely wrote his **Concerto for Four Violins in G Major, TWV 40: 201** for his pedagogical endeavours in Frankfurt. The flexible concerto genre was well-suited for use by student groups and mixed ensembles of amateurs and professionals. Telemann's Concerto for Four Violins requires no orchestral support. It gives each of four equally-matched violinists moments to shine as soloist and others to offer accompaniment. It is really a concerto in the seventeenth-century sense of instruments

working together in a consort. Might it have been composed for four of Telemann's talented private students? By contrast, Bach's **Concerto for Two Violins in D Minor, BWV 1043** showcases two violinists supported by orchestral accompaniment. Bach likely wrote it for the students of the *collegium musicum* in Leipzig, since the surviving parts in Bach's hand date from 1730, soon after he had begun leading that group. The music sometimes hints that it began life as a trio sonata for two violins and continuo, but that Bach adapted it to involve more players. The violas, for instance, hardly participate in the fugal counterpoint of the first movement.

Antonio Vivaldi famously composed more than 500 concertos for the orchestra of the Piéta, one of four Venetian institutions that offered musical education to orphaned and abandoned girls. Bach's encounter with Vivaldi's concertos was so formative, that Bach's first biographer Johann Nikolaus Forkel claimed that Vivaldi taught Bach "how to think musically." However, the composition by Vivaldi on tonight's programme is not one of his many concertos, but the **Quartet in C Major, RV 801** for three treble instruments and continuo, the only surviving example of this genre composed by Vivaldi. The quartet, never widely cultivated, originated in France. Examples by composers like Joseph Bodin de Boismortier must have inspired Telemann to write his famous Paris Quartets, which in turn inspired examples by several other German composers. Johann Joachim Quantz explains that "a quartet or a sonata with three concertante instruments and a bass is the true touchstone of a genuine contrapuntist and is often the downfall of those who are not solidly grounded in their technique." How Vivaldi encountered this genre is unclear, but his quartet is proof of a lively exchange of musical ideas that did not only flow in one direction north from Italy. Curiously, Vivaldi's quartet survives only in Germany in the library of Schloss Herdringen. Even more mysteriously, the end of the continuo part is marked "Del. Sign. Handel". Might Vivaldi have received a commission from a music lover from across the Alps, and how might Handel have been involved?

The cosmopolitan Georg Muffat, of Scottish heritage, born in Savoy, educated in Paris and Rome, and employed in Strasbourg, Vienna, Salzburg, and Passau, considered himself a pioneer unifying French, Italian, and German musical styles. He provided multi-lingual prefaces to his prints to ensure they were widely accessible. His **Sonata in G Major** from *Armonico Tributo*, blends elements from the Italian chamber sonata and concerto and the French dance suite. Muffat further ensured the user-friendliness of these pieces by suggesting that they might be adapted for performance by few or many instruments and using "T" and "S" to designate possible tutti and solo passages. Later, he made his intentions clearer, republishing the collection as fully elaborated concertos in a collection called *Ausserlesene mit Ernst und Lust gemengte Instrumental Musik* (Choice Instrumental Musik Mixing Seriousness and Delight). In the preface to this collection, he explains the social significance of his music that was, because of the mixture of serious and dance movements was unsuitable for either church or dancing, but appropriate for performance at court and state occasions and at all kinds of musical gatherings.