***Blockley Chamber Concerts***

**Friday 26 April 2024**

**The Geminiani Ensemble**

**Alison Bury Violin**

**John Dornenburg Viola da Gamba**

**Malcolm Proud Harpsichord**

***Chamber music by Bach and Buxtehude***

**Notes by John Dornenburg**

**By the time of Bach’s birth in 1685, the early Italian Baroque instrumental style had fully permeated the music of northern Germany’s courts and cathedrals. This style is generally characterized by an emphasis on virtuoso instrumental figuration, chromatic harmonies, resplendent dissonances, and expressive sonorities, to which German composers such as Dietrich Buxtehude added a strong element of counterpoint and fugal writing. Music of this time and place is often categorized as the *stylus phantasticus* or fantastic style, in which forms like the sonata divide into seamless sections of contrasting tempo and emotional effects. Buxtehude’s fourteen published trio sonatas for violin, viola da gamba and harpsichord present us with a large collection of such fascinating works, and we have selected two, both for the quality of the music and for their differing structures.**

**Buxtehude’s Trio in A Minor is a fine example of the ‘fantastic’ style described above. Three vigorous fast sections are sandwiched between four expressive slow sections, the last of which concludes the sonata with a dramatic chromatic descent. In contrast to this freely composed style, the opening of his Trio in B flat Major is built upon a jaunty unifying ground bass pattern in the harpsichord that we hear thirty six times. Above this unrelenting bass line, further coherence is achieved through the repetition of a distinctive five-note motive that introduces the melodic episodes in both violin and viola da gamba throughout the piece.**

**Buxtehude’s other compositions include sacred choral works, praeludia for organ, harpsichord partitas, and about 50 works based on chorale melodies, all of which the twenty-year-old Bach assimilated when he left his organist job in Arnstadt to visit Buxtehude in Lübeck.**

**By the time Bach assumed his post in Cöthen in 1717 there was a newer style of music in vogue, much influenced by the widely disseminated compositions of Arcangelo Corelli and especially Antonio Vivaldi, whose music Bach both copied and arranged. Instrumental sonatas and concertos are now neatly divided into separate movements, with each movement largely shaped through the sequential development and variation of themes in a more diatonic and, to a degree, predictable manner.**

**The two violin sonatas on our programme, BWV 1021 and BWV 1023, are the only authentic Bach sonatas for violin with basso continuo accompaniment, in which the harpsichordist spontaneously creates an accompaniment from the figured bass. They were likely composed while Bach was at his ultimate post in Leipzig.**

**The Sonata in G Major, BWV 1021, is in the now-standard four-movement sequence of the sonata da chiesa (church sonata). This sonata’s slow movements highlight the solo violin with basso accompaniment, but in the two fast movements the melodic material is shared equally. The Sonata in E Minor, BWV 1023, begins with a toccata-like movement of constant semiquavers over an unbroken pedal point, leading into an improvisatory-like Adagio. It combines aspects of both the four-movement sonata da chiesa and sonata da camera (chamber sonata), since it concludes with two dance movements. Interestingly, the Sonata in G Major exists in a later version as a trio sonata for flute, violin, and basso continuo (BWV 1038), possibly not wholly by Bach.**

**Bach’s harpsichord solo Capriccio is thought to commemorate the departure of his elder brother, Johann Jacob, who was leaving home to take a position at the Swedish court. This is one of Bach’s earliest surviving works, and the programmatic format (not one he would repeat) provides a link to older German composers such as Johann Kuhnau. The beautiful third movement, a Lamento, features our programme’s second ground bass, this time in a chromatic style. The piece concludes with the clear depiction of the post horn, upon which Bach then invents a lively fugue.**

**Tonight’s final Trio Sonata in G major is one of only two authentic trios by Bach, the other being part of the *Musical Offering*. It was originally composed for two flutes with basso continuo and was later revised by Bach into the Sonata for Viola da gamba and Harpsichord (BWV 1027). We will perform it with violin and viola da gamba on the solo parts, and the harpsichord taking the original trio sonata's basso continuo line. The trio is a masterpiece of contrapuntal writing, with the upper two parts sharing melodic themes equally, and a bass line that contains both melodic imitation and some extended flourishes in the fast movements.**

**J S Bach**

**Sonata in G major, BWV 1012 – Violin and basso continuo**

***Adagio – Vivace – Adagio - Presto***

**Dietrich Buxtehude**

**Trio in A minor, BuxWV 254 – Violin, viola da gamba and basso continuo**

***Adagio – Allegro – Lento – Vivace – Largo – Presto - Lento***

**J S Bach**

**Sonata in E minor, BWV 1023 – Violin and basso continuo**

***(Prelude) – Adagio ma non tanto – Allemande – Gigue***

**Interval**

**Dietrich Buxtehude**

**Trio in B flat major, BuxWV 255 – Violin, viola da gamba and basso continuo**

***Vivace – Allegro – Lento – Allegro***

**J S Bach**

**Capriccio *On the departure of a dear brother.* BWV 992 – Harpsichord solo**

**Arioso Adagio: *Efforts of his friends to talk him out of making the journey.***

***Various misfortunes which might befall him in foreign lands.***

**Adagioissimo: *The friends’ general lament.***

***Since they can see it cannot be otherwise, the friends bid him adieu.***

**Allegro poco *Aria of postillion.***

**Fuga: *In imitation of the post horn.***

**J S Bach**

**Sonata in G major, BWV 1039 – Violin, viola da gamba and basso continuo**

***Adagio – Allegro ma non presto – Adagio e piano - Presto***

**The instruments**

**The baroque violin is strung with gut strings, and has several other notable differences from its modernized version: the neck is less angled with a shorter fingerboard, the inner bass bar (a wooden support glued to the bass side of the instrument’s belly) is lighter, and there is no chin or shoulder rest. Most of the famous violins by makers such as Stradivarius, Amati, and Guarneri have been altered to the modern style. The common feature of the various styles of baroque bow would be a somewhat shorter length, an outward curve when tightened, and a more pointed tip.**

**Alison tonight plays a violin by Fabrizio Senta, made in Turin, 1665.**

**The bass viola da gamba is one of a family of bowed instruments that paralleled the violin family - it is not the ancestor of the violoncello. Its six or seven strings are strung with gut, it has a fretted neck, and is tuned in intervals of fourths with a central third, rather similarly to the guitar. Contrary to the violin family, the viol bow is held with an underhand grip through which the player pulls directly on the bow hair with the fingers. The instrument was in common use during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries and has a vast solo and ensemble repertory.**

**John tonight plays a viola da gamba by David Rubio, 1985, after Richard Meares, 17th century.**

**The harpsichord and organ were the principal keyboard instruments for over 200 years before the pianoforte began to dominate in the late 18th century. Wooden jacks at the end of the keys are fitted with plectra which pluck the metal strings rather than hammer them. Harpsichords can have one or two keyboards, and often feature elaborate painted decoration on the case and sound board. In addition to its impressive solo literature, the harpsichord is used to realize the figured bass or basso continuo, which is an improvised accompaniment above the printed bass line.**

**Malcolm tonight plays a harpsichord in the Flemish 17th century style by Wolfgang Zuckermann, made by 1983 by John Dordenburg and Louise Carslake.**

**The Geminiani Ensemble**

**Taking its name from the Italian composer and virtuoso violinist Francesco Geminiani, who lived for periods of his life in Ireland and England, the members of the ensemble have known each other for many years, having met while studying baroque music in The Netherlands and Austria.**

**Alison Bury was a founder member and regular leader of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, recording as leader, soloist and director, and usually to be found at Glyndebourne Festival Opera for performances of the operas of Handel and other baroque composers. Alison has also been leader of the English Baroque Soloists; has taken part in numerous recordings; and has toured in Europe, Australia, the USA and the Far East. Her solo work includes performances and recordings with the Academy of Ancient Music, the Raglan Baroque Players and the Taverner Players.**

**After many years as a San Francisco-based performer, university lecturer, and recording artist, John Dornenburg now resides in Longborough. He has made over thirty CD recordings of both solo and chamber music on all sizes of viola da gamba and violone, four partnered with harpsichordist Malcolm Proud. John has performed across the USA and in Australia, New Zealand, Lebanon, Turkey, Holland, the United Kingdom and Ireland. His university posts included Lecturer in viola da gamba at Stanford University; teaching music history at the California State University, Sacramento; and Artist in Residence at the Universities of Washington and Melbourne.**

**Malcolm Proud won first prize at the Edinburgh International Harpsichord Competition in 1982 after a year of study with Gustav Leonhardt. Since then he has enjoyed an international career as harpsichordist and organist. He is a member of the Irish Baroque Orchestra and Camerata Kilkenny and has performed with the English Baroque Soloists, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and *Akademie für alte Musik* Berlin. In 2018 he curated concerts at the National Concert Hall in Dublin to mark the 350th anniversary of François Couperin’s birth. In 2022 he performed Book 1 of Bach’s Well-tempered Clavier, marking the 300th anniversary of the work. He and John Dornenburg have recorded CDs of Marais and Bach., with solo CDs including Purcell’s harpsichord music and Bach’s Six Partitas and the Goldberg Variations.**

|  |
| --- |
| **Next *Blockley Chamber Concert* events– In the church.**    **Friday 7 June. Drinks from 7:00pm, concert 7:30 to 9:15pm.**  **Kate Semmens, Soprano; Steven Devine, Fortepiano.**  **Music by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven**  **Saturday 8 June, 10:00 am to 12:30 pm.**  **Student fortepiano masterclass with Steven Devine.**  **Audience welcome.**  **Friday 19 July. Drinks from 7:00pm, concert 7:30 to 9:15pm.**  **The Tedesca Quartet**  **Music by Haydn, Mendelssohn and Mozart**  **Information and booking - lgpacker123@gmail.com – 01386 700579** |