

Bennington Baroque

July 12, 2015 – 4 PM
Carriage Barn
Park-McCullough House
North Bennington, Vermont

Kerry Ryer-Parke, *soprano*
Mathieu Langlois, *baroque flute*
André Laurent O'Neil, *baroque cello*
and viola da gamba
Sandra Mangsen, *harpsichord*

Süsser Blumen Ambräflocken

Ambrosial petals of sweetness
Your silvery sheen incites me
To glorify Him that made thee.

And as you fall, I will soar
Heavenward and sing praises
To Him who created the world.

Ambrosial petals...

In den angenehmen Büschen

In the pleasant bushes
Where light and shadow mix
Seek in silent pleasure
Your eye and heart to refresh.

Then lift contented feelings
Out of your breast
And sing praise
To the Creator's goodness.

Notes on the Music

"These people have no ear, neither for the beat nor indeed for music in any form, and their unnatural passion for piano-playing and singing is all the more disgusting. There is verily nothing on earth so terrible as English musical composition, except English painting" Heinrich Heine, *Pariser Berichte* (29 July 1840), (trans. Bryan Townsend, *The Music Salon, Blogspot*, 9 Sep 2012).

While we readily acknowledge William Byrd and Henry Purcell as extraordinarily gifted native English composers, Handel, Geminiani and Carl Friedrich Abel were all immigrants, who chose England as a promising place in which to pursue their careers. Whether England really was becoming *Das Land ohne Musik*, as the title of a 1904 book asserts, might be questioned, but in the 18th century it was certainly attractive for musical immigrants, who found a population eager to attend performances, purchase their publications, and cultivate domestic chamber music.

Telemann, of course, has no direct connection to London, since he spent the bulk of his career in Hamburg; however, his *XIIX Canons melodieux ou 6 sonates en duo* (Paris, 1738) was re-issued there in 1746, an indication that the publisher, John Simpson, thought they would appeal to English amateurs eager for the latest from the Continent.

William Byrd, organist, harpsichordist, composer of sacred and secular vocal music, composed a great deal of music for the *Virginals*, not only the abstract Fantasias, but also elaborate dances, and arrangements of popular songs. (*Virginals* in contemporary usage referred to any quilled keyboard instrument, so Byrd and his fellow keyboardists are referred to as *Virginalists*.) He was called the father of English music; with respect to his keyboard music, Joseph Kerman wrote, "He kindled English virginal music from the driest of dry wood to a splendid blaze that crackled on under Bull and Gibbons and even lit some sparks on the Continent." Expect to find much imitation among the several voices in each section of the Fantasia; in the dances, enjoy the elaborate repeats of each of the three sections.

Most people know **Henry Purcell** as the composer of *Dido and Aeneas*, often called the first English opera. But in fact, Purcell wrote much more instrumental and vocal music for the theatre, in works often referred to as "semi-operas." *Dido and Aeneas*, long thought to have been written for performance at a girls' school, is now the subject of much debate among specialists, some of whom believe it was first presented at court in the mid 1680s. *The Fairy Queen* and *King Arthur* were both performed publicly at Dorset Garden. Much of Purcell's vocal music was reprinted in the two posthumous volumes of *Orpheus Britannicus*, and so enjoyed wider circulation in domestic settings.

Francesco Geminiani, hailed in his lifetime as the equal of Corelli and Handel, had arrived in London from his native Italy by 1714, and spent the rest his career there. His activities encompassed teaching, composition, writing of instrumental tutors and guides to taste and ornamentation, as well as collecting and selling paintings. The cello sonatas were published in both Paris and The Hague and by 1747 an edition printed from the Dutch plates was available in London. Both the cello sonatas and their arrangements for violin are demanding pieces: an English amateur wrote that he had seen the sonatas at Walsh's shop, but noted that they "are above my skill." Six of the sonata movements are included in Geminiani's second collection of arrangements for keyboard. That he spent more time arranging his compositions than he did creating new ones caused Veracini to accuse him of "merely reheating" his works, and Charles Burney to fault him for his lack of imagination.

Handel needs little introduction. He arrived in London in 1710, on leave from his position as Kapellmeister in Hanover, but remained there until his death. Composer, keyboardist, and impresario—he never stopped trying to appeal to the English taste for opera, chamber music, and oratorio. The nine German Arias were composed to texts by B. H. Brockes, at a time when Italian opera production in London had achieved a more secure foundation under the aegis of the Royal Academy, with substantial patronage from the King and the nobility. By then Handel was well established. He had been appointed Composer to the Chapel Royal, and acted as music master to the royal princesses; as well, he leased the house in Brook Street where he would live until his death. The texts celebrate the beauty of God's creation, but the music is more or less indistinguishable from his Italian opera arias. The arias were probably composed around the same time as the solo and trio sonatas published c. 1730, and heard in private performances for the royal family. The Sonata in E minor for flute and basso continuo (Op. 1 No. 1, in Walsh's edition) is in the typical four movements, slow-fast-slow-fast.

A generation younger than Handel and Geminiani, **Carl Friedrich Abel** came to London in 1758/59, after service in the court orchestra at Dresden. He was a viol player as well as a competent harpsichordist and began concertizing in London in collaboration with Johann Christian Bach in 1764. Their Bach-Abel concerts ran from 1765 to 1781, and involved ten to fifteen concerts each season, as well as oratorio evenings. After Bach's death, Abel continued to perform and to organize concerts until a month before his death in 1787. He was well regarded in London among musicians and in fashionable circles, both for his abilities as a composer and performer and for his generosity toward fellow musicians.

The twenty-seven pieces for unaccompanied viol were never published (the manuscript is in the NY Public Library), and illustrate something of Abel's own virtuosity, while the published chamber repertoire was likely aimed more at the cultivated amateur. His instruments (viol and harpsichord) may have been on their way out, but his style is thoroughly modern. The *Four Trios* for violins/flutes and bass (Op. 16, Berlin, 1783) are quite modern: three movements (rather than the four common to baroque sonatas), slow harmonic rhythm, and elegant melodic lines presented in balanced phrases, and the final minuet with variations. SM