

La Voce del Violoncello - Elinor Frey, cello

The Raven's Cry Theatre, Sechelt, Sunday, November 6, 2022

Programme

Toccatà quinta - Francesco Paolo Supriani (1678-1753)

Capriccio primo - Giuseppe Maria Dall'Abaco (1710-1805)

Passa Galli - Giovanni Battista Vitali (1632-1729)

Bergamasca - Vitali

Sonata no. 5 - Domenico Galli (1649-1697)

Suite no. 4 in E-flat Major, BWV 1010 - J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

Prelude, Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Bourées I & II, Gigue

INTERMISSION

Ricercar no. 1 - Domenico Gabrielli (1659-1690)

Sonate no. 2 en re mineur - Domenico Galli

Capriccio decimo en la majeur - Dall'Abaco

Ciaccona à Basso Solo - Giuseppe Colombi (1635–1694)

Romanella et Tarantella - Giulio Ruvo (fl.1703-1707)

Capriccio quinto - Dall'Abaco

Sonate en la mineur - Anonyme

Toccatà decima en re mineur - Supriani

La Voce del Violoncello offers a journey through the curious inventions of the first great cellist-composers of Italy. In the Baroque era, Italian cellist-composers contributed some of the most original and celebrated Baroque works for the instrument. Dall'Abaco, Supriani, Vitali, Gabrielli, Ruvo, Colombi, and Galli have each written cello music that is charming, sumptuous, and captivating. *La Voce del Violoncello*, uniquely reveals the breadth of solo cello works from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and is an important contribution to understanding the origins of unaccompanied cello music from before and during the time of Bach when Italians also wrote remarkable solo cello works. This program is the result of research and performances that have grown out of the support of grants from the US-Italy Fulbright Fellowship Program, The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Canada Council for the Arts.

It is in the 1665 publication of instrumental music by Bolognese organist Giulio Cesare Arresti that we first find the term *violoncello*. The instrument being referenced, however, is a

complicated matter that has occupied scholars and performers for a long while. Local variations in Italian terminology and construction meant that bass violin family instruments varied in size, tuning, number of strings, playing techniques, underhand or overhand bow grips, pitch standards, string materials, and musical roles. The introduction of metal-wound lower strings on the larger bass violin, ca. 1660, meant that the instrument could be made smaller, easier to play, and more responsive: the bass violin family instruments were called by myriad names, among them *violoncino*, *violone*, *basso viola*, *bassetto*, etc. This program represents the excitement of musicians at this innovation and their music of exploration and discovery as performers began to write idiomatic solos for their instrument and the *violoncello* was finding its voice. The program follows the genre over approximately 75 years, from the mid-seventeenth century to the death of the Neapolitan virtuoso Francesco Supriani in 1757, by which time the *violoncello* had spread throughout Europe, producing star performers with international careers. Its name and construction had also become fairly standardized by then, owing, in part, to influential treatises (notably by Michel Corrette): it had four strings; it was tuned in fifths and was played with an overhand bow grip.

Arresti's colleague, **Giovanni Battista Vitali** (1632-1692) called himself a "suonatore di violone da braccio," and performed in the *cappella musicale* orchestra of Bologna's San Petronio Basilica. Vitali left his post in the *cappella* (later held by *violoncello* players Petronio Franceschini, Domenico Gabrielli, and Giuseppe Jacchini) and joined the Modenese court in 1674 under the patronage of the young Duke Francesco II d'Este, a passionate amateur string player. Like Vitali, Francesco's violin teacher, **Giuseppe Colombi** (1635-1694) also wrote solos for the bass violin (called *violone*). Naturally, its technique developed parallel with the violin's. Modenese string players were also influenced by Northern visitors and absorbed international styles. Both Vitali and Colombi wrote for Duke Francesco II, perhaps didactically, as their instructive and creative "solo" lines could easily be accompanied by an improvising bass player. Vitali's *Bergamasca*, *Passa Galli*, and Colombi's *Ciaccona* are presented here without bass accompaniment.

Duke Francesco's demand for fine string players also brought the master violoncellist **Domenico Gabrielli** (1659-1690) to Modena. Gabrielli's now seminal 1689 *Ricercari* contributed to the development of an idiom particular to the *violoncello* and remain esteemed among works that advanced the instrument's unaccompanied solo repertoire. As for the music of Vitali and Colombi, the twelve sonatas of Parma-born musician **Domenico Galli** (1649-1697), suit a B-flat/F/c/g tuning. A versatile instrument maker as well as composer, Galli presented Duke Francesco II with an ornately carved cello along with these sonatas, the *Trattenimenti* of 1691. These works have rarely been performed or recorded, but I was particularly attracted to the two *Sonate* presented here: I admire their speaking qualities, variety in articulation, and flowing passagework, and was moved by their dignity and gravitas.

From the hub of solo bass violin activity in Modena, one may observe the spread of the term *violoncello*, its performers, and its music. It is in the decades after Vitali, Colombi, Gabrielli, and Galli that Johann Sebastian Bach wrote his now iconic suites. While the presence of the violoncello in Italy was certainly growing, the “solo” works from the first decades of the eighteenth century are for the most part *Concerti* and *Sonate* (Vivaldi, Caldara, Jacchini, Porpora, Vandini, Platti, Giovanni and Antonio Maria Bononcini, etc.). It remains to be seen whether more unaccompanied works emerge from libraries and private collections. The anonymous work (c.1700) on the program is an example of a new discovery through a recently catalogued anonymous collection of violoncello music—the Raimondi-Mantica-Odescalchi collection—in the Archivio di Stato in Como.

Slightly later—in the first years of the eighteenth-century, a little-known southern Italian musician working in Naples, **Giulio de Ruvo** (fl.1703-1707), wrote a handful of appealing short solo pieces. Here I play a *Romanella-Tarantella* pairs, which reveal the lyrical quality of southern Italian song combined with the energy of folk dance. I also selected two works by another cellist who worked in Naples a few years later, **Francesco Paolo Supriani** (1678–1753). He wrote one of the first (short) instruction manuals for violoncello, the *Principij da imparare a suonare il Violoncello*, along with twelve unaccompanied *Toccate*. At least ten of these are found in a second manuscript in which an embellished version and a bass part are added to the original solo line. These *Toccate* can be considered as a model for improvisation and composition on the cello, perhaps reflecting Supriani’s Neapolitan musical education. I see the *Toccate* as a cellist’s equivalent of the compositional exercises called *partimenti*. As for the variation forms and dance movements of Vitali and Colombi, Supriani’s music demonstrates the union of pedagogy and creativity in cello composition.

Giuseppe Clemente Dall’Abaco’s (1710-1805) works often remind listeners of Bach. Dall’Abaco’s background helps explain a merging of Italian, French, and German elements. His father was the celebrated Italian composer Evaristo Felice Dall’Abaco (likely a violoncello student of Vitali’s) whose career brought his family to Germany, where Clemens August, Electoral Prince of Cologne, became Giuseppe Clemente’s godfather. The senior Dall’Abaco sent his son to Venice, after which Giuseppe Maria embarked on a successful career that brought him to perform throughout Europe, including London and Brussels, before retiring to his father’s hometown of Verona. No one can confirm it, but it seems likely that Dall’Abaco wrote his solo works for his own concertizing, to be performed before patrons and colleagues of advanced musical taste, clearly aiming to meet the high standards of composition for the *violoncello* that was emerging in his day. I am continually captivated by Dall’Abaco’s ability, like Bach’s, to generate rhythmic interest through changes of register, the intriguing perception of multiple voices, and a great and often noble, intimate, and tragic elegance.

At the heart of the repertoire of nearly all cellists, **Johann Sebastian Bach's** cello suites are among the most appreciated works of music lovers around the world. The suites highlight how Bach is particularly adept at mixing particular characteristics of the cello. For example,

because of its unique range, from the low bass to the soprano, the cello is able to create the illusion of multiple voices, a polyphony inspired by the use of Bach's harmony and melody, wonderful techniques that intrigue the ear at every moment. The suites were probably composed around 1720 when Bach lived in Cöthen in the service of Prince Leopold, when he composed much secular and instrumental music, including works for solo violin and the famous Brandenburg concertos. For this concert, the main source is the manuscript copy of Anna Magdalena Bach, as no Bach autographs survive.

- Notes by Elinor Frey

Biography

Elinor Frey is a leading Canadian-American cellist, gambist, and researcher. Her albums on the Belgian label Passacaille and Canadian label Analekta – many of which are world premiere recordings – are the fruit of long collaborations with artists such as Suzie LeBlanc, Marc Vanscheeuwijck, and Lorenzo Ghielmi, as well as with composers including Maxime McKinley, Linda Catlin Smith, Christian Mason, and Lisa Streich. Elinor's recording of cello sonatas by Giuseppe Clemente Dall'Abaco received a *Diapason d'Or* and her critical editions of Dall'Abaco's cello music is published in collaboration with Walhall Editions. In April 2022, she welcomed the CD release of *Early Italian Cello Concertos*, a collaboration with Rosa Barocca orchestra.

Elinor is the artistic director of Accademia de' Dissonanti, an organization for performance and research, and she has performed throughout the Americas and in Europe in recital and with numerous chamber ensembles and orchestras (Constantinople, Les idées heureuses, Il Gardellino, Tafelmusik, Arion, Pallade Musica, etc.). In March 2023 she will perform Boccherini and Sammartini concertos with the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra.

Recipient of dozens of grants and prizes supporting performance and research, including the US-Italy Fulbright Fellowship (studying with Paolo Beschi in Como, Italy) and a recent research residency at the Orpheus Institute in Ghent, Elinor holds degrees from McGill, Mannes, and Juilliard. She teaches early cello at McGill University and the Université de Montréal and is a Visiting Fellow in Music (2020–2023) at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford University. Frey was awarded Québec's Opus Prize for "Performer of the Year" in 2021. www.elinorfrey.com