

PROGRAM NOTES

The Fairy Queen, Suite #1, Z.629

Henry Purcell (1659 -1695)

**"Here lyes Henry Purcell Esq., who left this life and
is gone to that blessed place where only his harmony can be exceeded."
(Henry Purcell's Epitaph)**

Henry Purcell, a highly regarded British composer of all time, was born in Westminster, England 1658/59? and died there in 1695. He was one of the three children of Henry Senior and his younger brother Daniel was also a composer. Unfortunately, his father passed away when he was only seven years and was placed under the guardianship of his uncle Thomas. His first music teachers were Captain Henry Cooke, Pelham Humfrey and Dr. John Blow (soon after the death of Humfrey in 1674). In 1680, Dr. Blow decided to resign his position as the organist at Westminster Abbey due to the impressive talents demonstrated by the young Purcell. In 1682, Purcell was appointed organist of the Chapel-Royale, a position that he was able to hold simultaneously with his commitment with Westminster Abbey.

Purcell's first composition was believed to be an ode for the king's birthday in 1670. His greatest works include his *Te Deum* and *Jubilate*, written for St. Cecilia's Day in 1694. He also composed a number of Baroque operas including the famous *Dido and Aeneas* (1689) and *The Fairy Queen* (1692; an adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), incidental music, some 250 songs, 12 fantasias for viol consort, a limited number of suites for harpsichord and numerous anthems. He also set music to many plays such as Thomas d'Urfey's comedy "*The Virtuous Wife*" or "*Good Luck at Last*" (1679) and was premiered at the Dukes Theatre by King's servants. Unfortunately, he did not write much music for the organ probably because he was too involved as an organist at Westminster Abbey.

Henry Purcell died on November 21, 1695 in Dean's Yard, Westminster and was laid to rest near the organ of Westminster Abbey. Although his music was never published during his lifetime, his widow managed to accomplish that before she died in 1706.

The Fairy Queen is a masque or semi-opera and it was first performed on May 2, 1692 at Queen's Theatre, Dorset Garden in London. It was composed for the United Company of the Theatre Royal and it is believed that the libretto is an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. A masque is a courtly entertainment that flourished during the Baroque period and involved acting, dancing, music and singing on an elaborated stage.

This orchestral suite is arranged by one of Purcell's admirers Constant Lambert. It contains some of Purcell's finest writing for the theatre, as scholars have agreed for generations. In celebrating the 350th anniversary of Purcell's birth in 2009, ***The Fairy Queen*** was performed by the Glyndebourne Festival Opera using a newly edited score prepared for the occasion by Bruce Wood and Andfrew Pinnock of the Purcell Society. The suite is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two trumpets, timpani, strings and continuo.

Antonio Vivaldi and His Concertos

(1678 – 1741)

Antonio Vivaldi, nicknamed “il prete rosso” (the red priest), was born on March 4, 1678 in Venice to Giovanni Battista Vivaldi, a professional violinist at the church of St. Mark’s, and Camilla Calicchio. Although Antonio was a gifted violinist, he was actually ordained a priest in 1703. (However, he presided at very few masses due to his chronic asthma.) Immediately after his ordination, Vivaldi was appointed maestro di violino at the Ospedale della Pietà, a girls’ orphanage in Venice; then in 1711, he was promoted to maestro de’ concerti (music director); and in 1735, he became maestro di cappella. This was a position that he held between 1703 and 1738. Vivaldi passed away during the night of July 27/28, 1741 at the house of Viennese saddle-maker. His funeral was held at Stephen’s Cathedral and was buried in a common grave. During his lifetime, Vivaldi wrote more than 500 concerti for various instruments including the violin, cello, flute, oboe, recorder, bassoon and even the mandolin but not one for the keyboard; some 50 operas, numerous cantatas, trio sonatas, the Magnificat in G minor and his most famous choral work “Gloria”.

Concerto for Sopranino Recorder and Orchestra in C Major, RV 433

This particular concerto is probably composed for the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice, the girls’ orphanage where Vivaldi was employed for most of his professional career. In total, Vivaldi has composed three concertos for the ‘*flautino*’, an instrument which musicologists finally agreed that it was actually the sopranino recorder that Vivaldi’s music was written for. It has three movements: *Allegro - Largo - Presto*. The music of the outer movements is very energetic and challenging which requires virtuosic abilities to perform. On the other hand, the middle movement is very lyrical and charming; the orchestra takes on the role of accompanying the soloist here. Today, you will find this work performed more often on a piccolo than the sopranino recorder since the latter has gone out of fashion by the end of the Baroque period.

Concerto for Viola D’Amore and Orchestra in D Minor, RV 393

The viola d’amore shares many similarities with the viol family such as its shape and how it is played. It has either 6 or seven strings with a set sympathetic strings set below the fingerboard and it is held just like the violin (under the chin). The sympathetic strings are tuned to the same notes as the instruments and its purpose to give the instrument a much warmer and sweeter sound when it is played.

Like all Vivaldi’s concertos, this work also has three movements and followed the FAST-SLOW-FAST structure. Difficult passages with double-stops and chords can be found throughout the entire piece. This might suggest that Vivaldi wrote this piece for a virtuoso viola d’amore player.

Concerto for Lute and Orchestra in D Major, RV 93

The lute is considered the predecessor of the modern guitar. The number of strings on the instrument is varied depending on the period where the instrument was used. One can play the lute by either with a pick (plectrum) or finger picking. Unfortunately, the lute fell out of fashion by 1750 and it was until the middle of the 20th century that we saw a revival of the instrument. Many period instrument orchestras such as Tafelmusik of Toronto regularly include lute music in their programming. In addition, a lot of lute music has been transcribed for guitar and this has also generated new interest in the instrument today.

The concerto has three movements and it is scored for strings and continuo. There are two major characteristics of this work: First of all, the notes played by the lute are mostly 8th or 16th notes; it is because longer notes will not be able to sustain due to the nature of the instrument. Secondly, the lute is accompanied by the harpsichord most of the time; this is to ensure that the lute will not be overpowered by the strings.

Orchestral Suite "La Musette", TWV 55:g1

G. F. Telemann (1681 - 1767)

Georg Philipp Telemann was born in Magdeburg, Germany, and grew up in an upper-middle class family. Unfortunately, his mother was not very supportive of his desire to pursue a career as a musician /composer. He attended law school for a short period of time before he decided to fully dedicate his life to music. Telemann was considered to be the most prolific composer of all time with more than a thousand cantatas attributed to him. In fact, Telemann was even more popular and in demand as a composer than his contemporary Johann Sebastian Bach during his lifetime.

Telemann taught himself how to play many different instruments such as the organ, violin, recorder and even the bass trombone. His major compositions include the popular Tafelmusik, Viola Concerto in G Major, numerous orchestral suites and concertos for various instruments.

Orchestral Suite "**La Musette**" begins with a French overture dominated by dotted rhythms in the opening section follows by an energetic B section. The next two movements are based folk music of Italy and Poland: Napolitaine (folk music from Naples) and Polonaise. The fourth movement, Mourky, has a dark character where there is a strong cellos and double basses presence. The fifth is a minuet, a popular Baroque dance in $\frac{3}{4}$ meter. Telemann tried to imitate the sound of the 18th century bagpipe in the sixth movement, Musette. The violins have the melody while the cellos and double basses provide the sound of a drone throughout the entire movement. The final movement, Harlequinade, is a character piece. The Harlequin is a mute character in traditional pantomime and his behaviour is usually ridiculous but amusing. The music is very brief by playful and entertaining.

Program Notes Written By Eric D. Fahn ©