

# BMC 11 - A CONCERT OF ITALIAN BAROQUE MUSIC

by Albinoni, Porpora, Pasquini, Bonporti, Alessandro Scarlatti & Geminiani.

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We open our selection of Italian Baroque Music with an Oboe Concerto by **Tomaso Albinoni**, born in Venice in 1671, eldest son of a wealthy paper merchant. At an early age he became proficient as a singer and, more notably, as a violinist, soon turning his hand to composition. According to one report, he also ran a successful academy of singing. He resided in Venice all his life, and would have had ample opportunity to hear the music of Vivaldi who was also a Venetian working in Venice.

Albinoni first came to public notice as a composer when, in 1694, his first opera, *Zenobia, Regina de Palmireni*, was produced in Venice, and his first collection of instrumental music appeared. Thereafter he divided his attention almost equally between vocal composition (operas, serenatas and cantatas) and instrumental composition (sonatas and concertos).

Albinoni's Oboe Concertos, and in particular the collection known Op.7 issued by Estienne Roger of Amsterdam in 1715, are significant in terms of the wider development of music. It is likely that the first concertos featuring a solo oboe were composed by German composers such as Telemann or Handel. Nevertheless, the Concertos for One and Two Oboes in Albinoni's Op.7 were the first of their kind to be published, and proved so successful that the composer repeated the formula in Op.9 in 1722. On this disc we hear No. 5 from the Opus 9 set. It is interesting to note that whereas Vivaldi's Oboe Concertos are written in violinistic style, making only scant concession to the player's need to draw breath frequently, Albinoni models his style of writing for the oboe on the vocal idiom, of which he was an established master. [Further orchestral music by Albinoni is available on *Baroque Music Collection - BMC 45*]

**Nicola Porpora** was born in 1686 in Naples where he received his early musical training. In 1708 his first Opera, *Agrippina*, was composed for the Royal Palace. From 1715 to 1721 he was *maestro di cappella* at the Neapolitan Conservatorio S. Onofrio where as a singing teacher, he taught Farinelli, Caffarelli and Hasse. In 1733 he was invited to London by the newly formed *Opera of the Nobility*, the avowed aim of which was to bring down Handel's Royal Academy of Music; it failed in 1737 and Porpora returned to Venice, having composed five of his finest operas. Also composed and published (in 1736) during his London period was the Opus 2 set of Six *Sinfonie da Camera* of which we hear No. 2 on this disc. From 1747 to 1751 he was employed at the Dresden court, moving in 1752 to Vienna where Haydn became his accompanist and pupil. In 1753 he returned to his native Naples where he died.

**Bernardo Pasquini**, born in Tuscany in 1637, became a virtuoso keyboard player, and contributed significantly to the development of opera and oratorio in Rome. He collaborated frequently with Corelli in chamber music, oratorios and operas. His keyboard pupils included Gasparini, Zipoli and Georg Muffat. His harpsichord works, particularly the Toccatas, are inventive and forward-looking. He also employed dance tunes and rhythms, as indeed Domenico Scarlatti would do in Spain. We hear two such examples, the *Partite* (Variations) based on the popular dance *Bergamasca*, and a Toccata taking the cuckoo's call as its theme.

**Francesco Antonio Bonporti's** initial intent was to become a priest. However while completing his theological studies in Rome he took lessons in music from Pitoni, Fornari and Corelli. Ordained in 1695 he continued his musical activities when church duties permitted. Much of his music was printed, often at his expense, and was pirated throughout Europe making his name widely known. He wrote much good violin music, his Ten *Invenzioni da Camera* were long considered to be by Bach. The *Recitativo* from his *Concerto a Quattro* on this disc is a beautifully lyrical movement which deserves to match in popularity the great Baroque favorite pieces.

Sicilian-born in 1660, **Alessandro Scarlatti** was trained in Rome. He married in 1678 and later that year was appointed *Maestro di Cappella* of San Giacomo degli Incurabili. His first large-scale works (an oratorio for the Oratorio dei Ss Crocifisso and the popular *Gli equivoci nel sembiante*) were performed there the following year when he was only 19. His patrons from the outset were of the highest rank, among them the exiled Queen Christina of Sweden who made him her *Maestro di Cappella*, Cardinal Pamphili, the musically indefatigable Cardinal Ottoboni and, in Florence, Prince Ferdinando de Medici.

In 1684 at the age of 24 Scarlatti moved to Naples. For the next two decades over half the new operas given at Naples were by Scarlatti, who produced over 40 works. From 1695 his Operas and 'musical dramas' incorporated three-movement *sinfonias* which soon became standard for all Italian operas. Indeed, the Italian opera overture, or *sinfonia*, contained most of the elements of the pre-classical and classical symphonies, and the symphony (or *sinfonia*), designed for concert

performance, may be traced back to the Italian opera overture (or *sinfonia*) of Alessandro Scarlatti. It was in these overtures and last operas that he also began experimenting with orchestral (instrumental) color in the modern sense. *Baroque Music Club* recording BMC 7 offers a selection of Alessandro's orchestral works.

Alessandro's last years were spent in Naples, teaching (Hasse was his pupil from 1722), composing Cantatas (which ultimately numbered over 600, mostly for soprano and continuo), a *Serenata* and a set of Sonatas for Flute and Strings, probably composed for Quantz, who visited him in late 1724 or early 1725, and who would no doubt take the Sonatas back to Potsdam to be performed by King Frederick the Great at Sans Souci. It was most probably at this time that he composed the Sonata in F for flute, 2 violins & continuo in F heard on this disc.

Though Alessandro Scarlatti's son Domenico is much better known as the "family harpsichord composer" we have included some of father Alessandro's works for this instrument which are no less inventive, and no less exciting than his son's.

**Arcangelo Corelli** was one of the "Founding Fathers" of Baroque music, having been called the Founder of Modern Violin Technique, the World's First Great Violinist, and the Father of the Concerto Grosso. Born in Fusignano, Italy, in 1653, he studied in Bologna, moving to Rome in the 1670s where he was sponsored by a succession of influential patrons. A brilliant violinist, he organized the basic elements of violin technique, and made concert tours throughout Europe. Equally famous as a composer, his music was likewise known and performed in all the major European musical centers. His popularizing of the *concerto grosso* form provided the model for those of Vivaldi, Geminiani, Handel and others. The Opus 6 Concertos seem to have been among the composer's favorite compositions for they were frequently re-worked over a long period, and achieved a wide acclaim during his lifetime.

**Francesco Geminiani** was among the very first composers to have concertos printed in England. Born in Lucca in 1687, he studied the violin first under Lonati in Milan, then Corelli in Rome. It is also possible that he studied composition with Alessandro Scarlatti in Naples. In 1714 Geminiani came to England where his playing quickly gained him the support of leading figures at court and among the aristocracy. Indeed, one of his pupils, the Earl of Essex, rescued him from prison when he ran into debt through his consuming passion for art-dealing and collecting. Geminiani left London for Dublin in 1733 where he built up a fine reputation as a teacher, performer, concert promoter and theorist. In that year he opened a Concert Room in Dublin, apparently using the upstairs premises for music and the rooms below for trading in pictures. Geminiani was not a prolific composer by the standards of his day but his sonatas and concertos, modeled to a great extent on those of his teacher, Corelli, reveal meticulous craftsmanship. On this disc we hear a *concerto grosso* from the opus 7 set, published in London in 1746. During the late 1740s and 1750s Geminiani wrote a number of musical treatises, including the often-quoted *The Art of Playing on the Violin*, *A Treatise on Good Taste in the Art of Music*, and *The Art of Accompaniment*. Geminiani died in 1762.