



A hidden gem for classical music lovers in Delaware

**Tempesta di Mare | Philadelphia Baroque Orchestra
With Meg Bragle, mezzo-soprano**

Saturday, October 23, 2021

2:00 PM

Bethel United Methodist Church

Lewes, Delaware

PROGRAM

Women of Antiquity

heroines and villainesses from history and legend

“Women of Antiquity” suite, TWV 42:C1
from *Der Getreue Music-Meister*, 1729; orchestration R. Stone

Georg Philipp Telemann
(1681–1767)

Introduzione: Grave; Vivace; Andante; Vivace

Xanthippe (hornpipe) — **Lucretia** (polonaise)

Corinna (tambourin) — **Clœlia**: Spirituoso (gigue) — **Dido**: Triste; Disperato

Juno: “Awake, Saturnia, from thy lethargy!”
from *Semele*, 1743

George Frideric Handel
(1685–1759)

Archidamia: “Dura legge a chi t’adora”
from *Archidamia*, 1727

Georg Reutter the Younger
(1708–1772)

Sinfonia to **Dafne**, 1734

Reutter

Agrippina: “Mormorando anch’ il ruscello”
from *Agrippina*, 1708

Nicolo Porpora
(1686–1768)

Dido: “Thy hand, Belinda!”
from *Dido and Æneas*, 1689

Henry Purcell
(1659–1695)

PAUSE

Hagar: “Fra deserti e vaste arene”
from *La Divina Provvidenza in Ismaele*, 1732

Reutter

Judith: “Del pari infeconda”
from *La Betulia liberata*, 1734

Reutter

Chaconne & Passacaille from **Médée**, 1693

Marc-Antoine Charpentier

Circe: "Sombres marais du Styx"
Circé, 1694

(1643–1704)
Henri Desmarets
(1661–1741)

Program Subject to Change

PROGRAM NOTES

The women from antiquity in this program fall into numerous overlapping categories: heroines and villainesses, historical and fictional, sacred and secular, famous of their own accord and famous in relationship to someone or something else. In some cases even the boundary between fictional and historical gets blurry. For instance, Dido is best known as a fictional character in Virgil's epic poem, the *Aeneid* (ca 20 BCE), but the mainly Phoenician legends on which Virgil based her character may draw on an actual historical figure. Regardless of their stories' being factual or non-factual, these women have all taken on the legendary status that merit their roles as central characters in early modern opera.

Telemann pays tribute to five famous women from the ancient world in a suite that appears in his serial publication, *Der Getreue Music-Meister*, which was fully issued by 1729. The suite is in trio texture, ostensibly for two treble instruments and continuo. But here and there he has also noted solo and tutti indications. Whether this is to be taken literally or just to inform the performers' imagination remains to be seen. The present arrangement by Richard Stone entailed mainly the addition of a viola line to Telemann's trio, plus a bit of imagination to orchestrate in the fashion Telemann used for his own larger-scale works.

Xanthippe was the historical wife of the philosopher Socrates, who lived from the 5th to the 4th century, BCE. Ancient accounts of her character differ, but the one popular in Telemann's Germany was that she was argumentative (which would have passed without comment had she been a man). The German language still uses "Xanthippe" as a synonym for shrew. The jazzy, contradictory rhythms and jagged contours of this hornpipe movement come together to create a tidy outline for a German version of her character.

Lucretia is a martyr figure in ancient Roman legend, a matron whose rape by Sextus Tarquinius, son of King Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, so enraged the citizenry that they rose up to drive the Tarquin monarchs from Rome and instituted the Roman Republic. Lucretia died by suicide following the rape in 510 BCE. Telemann's cast her movement in the stately polonaise form befitting a noblewoman and a tragic-sounding melody.

Corinna of Tanagra was a poet in ancient Boetia who lived sometime between the 5th and 4th centuries BCE and favored choral lyric poetry in her local dialect. Though her work survives only in a fragmentary state, she—along with Sappho—is one of the few female poets of ancient Greece whose work is extant today. Ancient historians cite evidence of high civic regard for her literature. Telemann's joyous music for her has a strong sense of call and response, underscoring the notion of her poems receiving choral recitation.

Clœlia was a Roman given over as hostage as part of a peace treaty with Clusium in 508 BCE. She escaped her captors and took other young Roman women with her, braving the currents of the Tiber, which she and her captors swam across, while her captors shot arrows at them as they made their crossing. Telemann depicts their energetic escape with swirling triplets for the currents of the Tiber, and sharp punctuating notes depicting the arrows released at them by their Clusian captors.

Telemann concludes the suite with a movement named for **Dido**, in which he contrasts soft, slow, mournful episodes with loud, frantic ones, surely in musical depiction of her heartbreak after Æneas's stealth departure. More discussion of Dido continues below.

Juno was the powerful queen of the Roman gods and wife of Jupiter. Their relationship was forever on the rocks due to Jupiter's constant infidelities, for which affronts Juno punished his mistresses to get even. The story of Semele, a mortal that Jupiter had an affair with, is one such example upon which the poet William Congreve (1670–1729) wrote a libretto in 1706 that drew from Ovid's (Publius Ovidius Naso) *Metamorphoses* (8 CE). John Eccles (1668–1735) set it to music, a brilliant 3-act work in the vein of Purcell's *Dido and Æneas* but that never made it to stage until the 20th century. The sequence in this program from Handel's 1743 setting of Congreve's text captures the moment after which Juno has discovered Jupiter's latest liaison and plots her payback. Iris, messenger of the gods, acts as Juno's accomplice.

By contrast, the mortal **Archidamia** was an historical queen of Sparta who lived 340-241 BCE. She is famous for having enlisted and directed the women of Sparta during the seige of that city (272 BCE), from which her city emerged victorious against the Epirote aggressors. She is the central character in Reutter's 1727 *fiesta teatrale*—a Viennese genre of staged, one- or two-act operas—written and performed in honor of Empress Elizabeth Christina's nameday. Giovanni Pasquini (1695–1763), a poet at the Habsburg court, wrote the libretto. The aria's lyrics come in response to a discussion about the the laws of heaven, whether just or unjust, during a time of great peril for the Spartan state. This aria opens with singing accompanied only by harpsichord and cello, a naked texture often signaling a song about desperation. But when a gentle, duo obbligato of lute and dulcimer appear after the first vocal phrase, that message changes to one that possibly foreshadows a benign future for their city.

Reutter's 1734 *Dafne*, another *fiesta teatrale* for the Kaiserin's nameday with a Pasquini libretto, draws loosely from Ovid's mythology in *Metamorphoses*, the most commonly read version of the tale. The backstory, after which Pasquini picks up *in media res*, is a rivalry between Apollo, the sun god, and Cupid, the god of love. Cupid had shot Apollo with one of his darts, causing him to fall in love with and chase Daphne, who had vowed lifetime virginity and as such found Apollo revolting. Pasquini's libretto continues from here, though with a lighter touch than in Ovid's disturbing telling. When Daphne realizes she can't outrun Apollo, her pleas for rescue are answered through her magical metamorphosis into a laurel tree. The most famous interpretation of the tale has to be Bernini's 1625 lifesize marble sculpture that captures the moment of shared surprise and terror as Apollo catches up to Daphne in mid-transformation.

Agrippina the Elder was an historical figure (14 BCE–33 CE), the powerful wife of general Germanicus Julius, her cousin. The historian Tacitus noted that her influence exceeded that of her husband. Capable of quelling mutinies, she later channeled that power on behalf of her infamous son Gaius "Caligula" to ensure his succession to emperor. Her daughter Agrippina the Younger was no less notorious than Caligula, and her grandson through Agrippina the Younger, Nero, possibly more appalling than any of the above. Agrippina the Elder's political sorties against other powerful Romans whom she viewed as threats to her family's grip on the throne resulted in her eventual exile. While in exile, her captors withheld food so that her enemies could claim that her death by starvation was suicide. The Neapolitan poet Nicola Giuvo (1680–1748) wrote the libretto.

Dido appears twice in this program, once in Telemann's instrumental number at the top of the show and later in her famous lament by Purcell. As mentioned earlier, there is some basis to believe that the legends around her that precede Virgil's are based on an historical female character who founded Carthage. Her alternate Phoenician name, Elyssa, links her back to these earlier accounts. She sings the lament because her lover, the soldier Æneas, has sailed off under cover of night to resume his role in the Trojan wars, leaving her heartbroken and on the point of suicide.

Falling for a sailor remains a literary trope akin to splitting up to go in search of a missing companion in a horror movie: it never ends well. **Circe's** story comes from Homer's 8th century BCE classic, the *Odyssey*. Desmaret's music sets the words of poet Louise-Geneviève Gillot de Saintonge (1650–1718), the first woman to have one of her books staged at the French Royal Academy of Music. She describes her Circe in her *dramatis personae* as "a daughter of the sun [i.e., Apollo]...and a powerful magician in love with Ulysses." Saintonge's play has Circe's magic on frequent display, suggesting the likelihood that its first run was accompanied by amazing stage effects. In this incantation sequence from Act 1, Circe invokes the spirit of Ulysses' friend, who died of a drunken mishap, to reveal her rival for Ulysses' love.

Another powerful sorceress was the dangerously skilled **Medea**, granddaughter of Apollo, who on multiple occasions saved her husband Jason's life, and with whose magical help he sought the Golden Fleece. Her story is best known in the playwright Euripides' 5th century tragedy, *Medea*, which Pier Paolo Pasolini famously adapted into the 1969 movie with opera legend Maria Callas in the title role. Jason betrays Medea by agreeing to marry the noblewoman Creusa. Furious, Medea sends the new wife a garment which, when Creusa put it on, burnt her to death. She killed her two children by Jason and fled the country in a chariot with flying dragons. Charpentier's *Médée* is one of the finest examples of the Lullian *tragédie-lyrique*.

Reutter also wrote oratorios, and the two final songs represent depictions of characters from the Old Testament: **Hagar** from Genesis and **Judith** from the Book of Judith.

Hagar, who gave birth to Patriarch Abraham's son Ishmael, was the servant of Abraham's wife Sarah, who at the time was unable to conceive. Hagar and Sarah's relationship was not good, and after Sarah gave birth to Isaac, she compelled Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael. Hagar and Ishmael nearly died crossing the desert until an angel spoke to Hagar, pointed them to water, and promised her that Ishmael would father a great nation. In Muslim tradition, Muhammad was Ishmael's descendant who became that great nation. Hagar describes her trepidation in the vast desert through the lyrics of Antonio Maria Lucchini (1690–1730).

Judith is the heroine from the Old Testament story of Judith and Holofernes, which takes place during an occupation of Judah led by the general Holofernes. Judith, a beautiful Judean widow, ingratiates herself with Holofernes, eventually gaining access to the enemy encampment. She enters Holofernes' tent and, discovering him passed out drunk, decapitates him and brings the head back to show to the Israelites. Her aria, a metaphorical call for well-reasoned boldness, follows shaming her countrymen for considering surrender to the Assyrians. The story is most recognizable to secular audiences through numerous depictions in paintings of Judith's bearing the head of Holofernes.

Reutter wrote the first setting of Metastasio's 2-act *azione sacra* (sacred play), *La Betulia liberata*, which was reset numerous times since, including Mozart's of 1771.

The Hammered Dulcimer

Reutter calls the special instrument in the three arias on this program “salterio”, a hammered dulcimer whose name comes from the same root as “psaltry” in English. What precise form of dulcimer Reutter means by that word had not been entirely clear. That is because the Italian-baroque, art-music instrument called salterio has too small of a range to play many of the notes in two of the Reutter arias. But if “salterio” is used in its generic sense, the way “hammered dulcimer” can in English, then more possibilities enter the fray.

Another form of hammered dulcimer that had some currency in Reutter’s day is the pantalon, invented by Pantaleon Hebenstreit (1668–1750) of the Dresden Hofkapelle. It was a big instrument that had all the notes in those arias. We do know who played these parts in Vienna: the dulcimer virtuoso Max Hellmann (d. 1765), who studied the pantalon with its inventor.

A second likelihood is a speculative baroque forerunner of what is known today as the cimbalom, which in its current form has the necessary range. In the nineteenth century the cimbalom acquired a pedal-operated damping mechanism, though all accounts of dulcimer playing in the baroque era speak of a technique that allows notes to ring over one another in bell-tower fashion. The fact that no specimen of a baroque form of the cimbalom survives and is specifically labelled “cimbalom” invites a certain amount of speculation that “cimabalom” and “pantalon” could have been different names for the same thing.

A third possibility is the employ of a large-enough Alpine folk hammer dulcimer with the necessary range. But the fact that Hellmann studied with Hebenstreit makes an Alpine folk instrument unlikely.

The pantalon or a baroque form of the cimbalom—possibly one and the same thing by different names—seem the most likely form of dulcimer/salterio intended. Now the matter is just a bit less mysterious.

Richard Stone & Gwyn Roberts, Philadelphia