



Italian Sirens

ARS
LYRICA
HOUSTON 

Sunday, November 12 at 6pm

Zilkha Hall, Hobby Center for the Performing Arts

MATTHEW DIRST | *Artistic Director*

FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Good evening and welcome to *Italian Sirens*, the second installment of Ars Lyrica's 2017/18 season of *Artful Women*. This program spotlights several resident artists, including three marvelous singers and two exceptional violinists, along with our incomparable continuo group, which is augmented this evening with percussion. Music by some extraordinary women is on the menu, a veritable feast of 17th-century delicacies.

Our season continues December 31 with *New Year's in Berlin*, featuring music from the legendary salon of Sara Itzig Levy, one of the most influential patrons of her time. This festive program of instrumental concertos is preceded by an elegant dinner and followed by a gala champagne reception, making for a stylish way to celebrate New Year's Eve in downtown Houston. This is always our most popular night of the year, so get your tickets early!

Subscriptions for the remaining programs on our *Artful Women* season are still available and can be purchased either at intermission in the Zilkha Hall lobby or through the Hobby Center box office. Check the Ars Lyrica website for the most recent information: www.arslyricahouston.org.

Thank you for joining us and enjoy the program!



MATTHEW DIRST
Artistic Director

DESIGN: SPINDLETOP DESIGN

PROGRAM

<i>Le Tre Gratie à Venere: Bella madre d'Amore</i>	Barbara Strozzi (1619–1677)
Sonata sesta	Isabella Leonarda (1620–1704)
<i>Ad arma, o spiritus</i>	Isabella Leonarda
<i>Lasciatemi qui solo</i>	Francesca Caccini (1587–c1641)
<i>Non sò se quel sorriso</i>	Francesca Caccini
<i>Amor dormiglione</i>	Barbara Strozzi
Sonata Seconda	Giovanni Batista Fontana (1589–1630)
<i>Bone Jesu</i>	Chiara Margarita Cozzolani (1602–c1676)
Ciaccona	Antonio Bertali (1605–1669)
<i>Piango, prego</i>	Luigi Rossi (c1597–1653)
<i>Amor non si fugge</i>	Barbara Strozzi
<i>Pensaci ben mio core</i>	Barbara Strozzi
<i>Chi desia</i>	Francesca Caccini
Sonata decima	Isabella Leonarda
<i>Fan Battaglia</i>	Luigi Rossi
<i>Festa Riso</i>	Pietro Antonio Giramo (fl. 1619–1630)

All texted works will be sung in their original language, with English surtitles.

Special thanks to the Moores School of Music, University of Houston, for use of its John Phillips harpsichord (after Florentine models, c1700), and to St Philip Presbyterian Church for providing rehearsal space for this program.

PROGRAM NOTES

Western art music underwent profound changes during the decades surrounding 1600. A novel style of musical recitation (*stile recitativo* or *monody*), modeled after the poetic declamation of the ancient Greeks, transformed musical practice in multiple spheres—from solo song to the emerging instrumental sonata—while giving birth to opera. At the same time, women were becoming more active in Italian musical circles especially. The Three Ladies of Ferrara, the most famous virtuoso singers of the late Renaissance, established a new place for women in musical culture, one that had not yet existed outside the convent. By the early decades of the 17th century, female composer-musicians (who were typically gifted singers as well) could be found in several other northern Italian cities, including Florence, Venice, and Novara. Tonight's program features music from each of these locales, from the prolific compositional hands of Francesca Caccini, Barbara Strozzi, and Isabella Leonarda, respectively.

The family of Francesca Caccini (1587–c1641) included quite a few gifted musicians: her father Giulio Caccini, for example, was a seminal figure in the invention of both monody and opera. Francesca's talents as a singer, harpist, and keyboard player won her an important position in Florence, where she served for decades alongside various relatives and students in the Medici court chamber ensemble; by 1620, she was its highest paid member. Ambition and good connections paid off in the form of big commissions, including at least one extant stage work—*La liberazione di Ruggiero* (1625), the first opera composed by a woman—and over a dozen large-scale court entertainments. Her solo monodies and songs, from which we sample three distinct works, are characterized by felicitous text setting and pleasant tunefulness.

Isabella Leonarda (1620–1704) spent virtually her entire adult life at the Collegio di Sant'Orsola in Novara. As a child of a local aristocratic family, she enjoyed considerable influence and freedom within this Ursuline convent, which she eventually served in a variety of capacities,

including music master and mother superior. Her many sacred vocal compositions were doubtless first heard during elaborate feast-day liturgies at Sant'Orsola. Her sonatas must have served other purposes, since instrumental music was widely prohibited in Italian convents until the dawn of the 18th century.

Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about Leonarda's career is the fact that she published multiple volumes of her own music, at a time when women published very little. Her opus 16 sonatas (Bologna, 1693) are the earliest published instrumental works by a woman. This volume, from which our program draws two works, includes twelve sonatas, most of which require two violins, a bass string instrument, and continuo.

The change of attitudes toward instrumental music, even among cloistered women, becomes apparent when one compares Leonarda's published work to that of Chiara Margarita Cozzolani (1602–c1676). A Benedictine nun who ceased her musical activities after she became abbess of Santa Radegonda in Milan, Cozzolani nevertheless published four volumes of sacred concertos and liturgical works between 1640 and 1650. Her "Bone Jesu," which is sandwiched between two contemporaneous sonatas on this program, sets one of the Latin Responsories for Holy Week.

Daughter of the Venetian poet Giulio Strozzi and his longtime servant Isabella Garzoni, Barbara Strozzi (1619–1677) attained local fame as a teenager for her beautiful singing. Her father's *Accademia degli Unisoni* (a domestic "academy" for poetry and music) provided the perfect venue for young Barbara's talents, and she quickly acquired admirers: two volumes of solo songs from the mid-1630s name her on their title pages as dedicatee, most likely because she performed this music when it was new. Not content simply to sing for the Venetian *litterati*, Strozzi wrote and published her own music. The first woman to make her living as a composer, Strozzi favored the most popular genres of secular vocal music of her day, with solo madrigals, ariettas, arias, and cantatas to her credit. In addition to her father's verse, she set poetry by many of her city's leading poets. Though she composed no operas, Strozzi's affinity for the aesthetic of Venetian opera—its flowery love poetry, dramatic emotions, and earthy humor—is immediately palpable in her shorter works, three of which appear on this evening's program.

The remaining works by Luigi Rossi and Pietro Antonio Giramo are all scored for three female singers plus continuo, a texture popularized in early-modern Italy by the first professional women singers (the *concerte delle donne*) and which persisted throughout the 17th century. The Roman Rossi was one of opera's first impresarios: his *Orfeo* premiered in France, at royal request, in 1647. We know far less about the Neapolitan Giramo, but have at least two surviving collections of *arie* for several voices. Interestingly, the passions expressed in these pieces—from bitter complaints to exuberant rejoicing—are no less incisive in the work of these men, who seem to have learned a thing or two from their female contemporaries.

© MATTHEW DIRST

ARTISTIC PERSONNEL

ARS LYRICA HOUSTON

Matthew Dirst, *Artistic Director*

ITALIAN SIRENS ARTISTS

Sydney Anderson	<i>soprano</i>	Barrett Sills	<i>cello</i>
Alexandra Smither	<i>soprano</i>	Michael Leopold	<i>theorbo & Baroque guitar</i>
Cecilia Duarte	<i>mezzo-soprano</i>	Matthew Dirst	<i>harpsichord & organ</i>
Kurt Johnson	<i>Baroque violin</i>	Jesús Pacheco	<i>percussion</i>
Stephanie Raby			

INSTRUMENT SPOTLIGHT

The theorbo is essentially a long-necked lute, of which there were many varieties during its heyday from the late 16th through the early 18th centuries. The standard lute, though widely popular during the Renaissance, proved insufficient for early opera especially. To accompany long stretches of recitative and the new concerted music of the 17th century, low bass notes were essential. These notes were easily achieved by extending the neck of a standard lute. The lowest strings on a theorbo are tuned to individual notes, like those of a keyboard instrument. The theorbo's fretted finger board serves the upper strings, on which the player realizes strummed chords or broken (arpeggiated) figuration.





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ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Soprano **Sydney Anderson** is delighted to make her Ars Lyrica debut this season. An accomplished concert soloist, Ms. Anderson has been featured with such ensembles as the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra, Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, Manchester Symphony Orchestra, Amherst Symphony Orchestra, The Apollo Chamber Players, and Bach Society Houston. Recent soloist credits include Mozart's *Requiem*, Christopher Theofanidis's *The Here and Now*, and the title role in Handel's *Esther*.

This past summer brought multiple European concert debuts, as Ms. Anderson was featured with the Danube Symphony Orchestra in Budapest, Hungary, after winning first place in the company's Concerto Competition. She also performed with the Ensemble Academia in Nuoro, Sardinia, as part of their annual chamber concert series, titled *Tra Mare, Stelle e Magia*. In 2016, Ms. Anderson celebrated her main stage debut with Houston Grand Opera as Arminy in *Carousel*, and participated in the company's Opera to Go! program as the Princess in *The Princess and the Pea*. Recent opera roles include Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*), Manon (*Manon*), Lisette (*La Rondine*), Adina (*L'eslisir d'amore*), and Antonia in (*Les Contes d'Hoffman*). As a participant in Opera Saratoga's young artist program, she covered the roles of Belinda in *Dido and Aeneas* and Virgil in the World Premiere of *The Long Walk* by Jeremy Howard Beck and Stephanie Fleischmann, and won third place in the company's young artist competition. Other awards include the 2017 Fielder Grant for Vocal Career Advancement, and the Karl Amelang Memorial Award in the 2016 Houston Saengerbund German Singing Competition.

Ms. Anderson holds a MM from the University of Houston and a BM from the University of Hartford.



Soprano **Alexandra Smither** is quickly making a name for herself in the worlds of old and new classical music. She has held fellowships at Songfest, the Franz Schubert Institute, Music Academy of the West, and the Tanglewood Music Centre. This summer she made her Tanglewood debut alongside Emanuel Ax singing Schubert's *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*. This season includes a National tour as the Grand Prize Winner of the Eckhardt-Grammaté Competition, as well as her debut with HGOco and Ars Lyrica. www.alexandrasmith.com



Mezzo-Soprano **Cecilia Duarte** last appeared with Ars Lyrica Houston as the Angel in Handel's *Jephtha*. She created the role of Renata in the first opera with mariachi music *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* with Houston Grand Opera, touring with it to the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, France, and then in later performances at Chicago Lyric Opera, Houston Grand Opera (revival), San Diego Opera, Arizona Opera, and Fort Worth Opera. Cecilia is an active performer in the circle of contemporary music, and has premiered several works, such as Ethan Greene's *A Way Home* (HGO and Opera Southwest), David Hanlon's *Past the Checkpoints*, *The Ninth November I was Hiding*, and *After the Storm*, (HGO) and most recently, the opera *Some Light Emerges* also with HGO. An early music enthusiast, Cecilia has performed at the Oregon Bach Festival, the Festivalensemble in Stuttgart, Germany, and the Festival de Música Barroca of San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, as well as performing often with the Bach Society Houston, Mercury, the Orchestra Redefined, and Ars Lyrica Houston. Past performances include Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* (Opera in the Heights), Jessie Lydell in *A Coffin in Egypt* (HGO), and Sarelda in *The Inspector*, Tituba in *The Crucible*, and Loma Williams in *Cold Sassy Tree* with the University of Houston. Future performances include the Christmas Neighborhood Series with Mercury in November-December and a new production of *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* with New York City Opera in January of 2018.



Ars Lyrica Founder & Artistic Director **Matthew Dirst** is the first American musician to win major international prizes in both organ and harpsichord, including the American Guild of Organists National Young Artist Competition (1990) and the Warsaw International Harpsichord Competition (1993). Widely admired for his stylish playing and conducting, the *Dallas Morning News* recently praised his "clear and evocative conducting" of Handel's *Alexander's Feast*, which "yielded a performance as irresistibly lively as it was stylish." Dirst's recordings with Ars Lyrica have earned a Grammy nomination and widespread critical acclaim. His degrees include a PhD in musicology from Stanford University and the *prix de virtuosité* in both organ and harpsichord from the Conservatoire National de Reuil-Malmaison, France, where he spent two years as a Fulbright scholar. Equally active as a scholar and as an organist, Dirst is Professor of Music at the Moores School of Music, University of Houston, and Organist at St Philip Presbyterian Church in Houston. He is the author of *Engaging Bach: The Keyboard Legacy from Marpurg to Mendelssohn* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and the editor of *Bach and the Organ* (University of Illinois Press, 2016).

ABOUT THE ARTISTS cont.

Violinist **Kurt Johnson** is currently in his 16th season as a member of the Houston Symphony Orchestra. Before joining the HSO, he was a recipient of the Civic/Northwestern String Fellowship and held the concertmaster position of the Civic Orchestra of Chicago for two seasons. Kurt received his undergraduate degree in music from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and his master's degree from Northwestern University. His teachers have included Marilyn McDonald, Rachel Barton Pine, Gerardo Ribeiro and David Taylor. Kurt has performed with the Grant Park Symphony Orchestra and the Peninsula Music Festival in Door County, Wisconsin. He performs frequently with Ars Lyrica and the Houston Bach Society. Kurt resides in the Heights with his wife, flutist Colleen Matheu Johnson, their two kids Allegra and Luke and their newly adopted dog Lulu.

Michael Leopold holds degrees in historical plucked instruments from American universities as well a degree in lute and theorbo from *L'Istituto di Musica Antica* in Milan. He has performed both as a soloist and as an accompanist throughout Europe, Australia, Japan, South America, Mexico and the United States. He plays with many leading Italian early music groups, including Concerto Italiano, La Risonanza, La Venexiana and La Pietà de' Turchini and several American period-instrument ensembles, including Ars Lyrica. Michael has also collaborated with numerous orchestras and opera companies, including Orchestra Verdi di Milano, Opera Australia, San Francisco Opera, Barcelona Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Washington National Opera, and Glimmerglass Opera, among others. His performances in operas have been widely praised: "Michael Leopold was a standout on theorbo, providing some of the most sensitive and heartfelt musical moments of the evening," (*Chicago Classical Music*). He can be heard in recordings on the Centaur, Stradivarius, Glossa, Naïve, Avie and Naxos labels.

Jesús Pacheco obtained his Bachelors Degree in Percussion from the Superior Conservatory in Seville, Spain. He was part of the Andalusia's Youth Orchestra, as well as the Divan, under the baton of Michael Thomas and Baremboim, respectively, for several years. A versatile percussionist, Jesús performed at the Festival Ensemble in Stuttgart, Germany and the Bach Collegium (Stuttgart Bachakademie) under the direction of Helmut Rilling. He was a regular in the professional orchestras of the Andalusian region long before he moved to Houston. He arrived in Houston four years ago, where he is now a very prolific performer and music educator, having already performed with many ensembles and companies in town such as Bach Society, Mercury, Ars Lyrica, Octave Illusion, the Latin American Philharmonic Orchestra, Houston Brass Band, amongst others. Jesús is currently the Assistant Band Director at Strake Jesuit College Preparatory in Houston-TX, and keeps an active life as a performer in the area.

Violinist **Stephanie Raby** has played multiple instruments all over the world and is fluent in a variety of musical styles. She is an active soloist and chamber musician on violin, viola, and viola da gamba and is a specialist in early music performance. Stephanie earned a master's degree in Early Music at Indiana Jacobs School of Music and in 2015 she was a finalist in the Early Music International Young Artists Competition in York, England with her chamber ensemble Les Touches. She is currently the concertmaster for Austin Baroque Orchestra and a founding member of the chamber ensemble Les Touches and multimedia performing arts organization Lumedica Musicworks.

Barrett Sills is a prizewinning cellist in international competitions in Europe and South America. A native Texan, he was a scholarship student at Yale University, where he was a teaching assistant to Aldo Parisot and recipient of the prestigious Maxwell Belding Internship Award. Barry has performed with orchestras in France and Germany and as a recitalist in Paris, the south of France, and throughout South America as an Artistic Ambassador for the United States Information Agency. He currently serves as principal cellist with both the Houston Ballet Orchestra and the Houston Grand Opera Orchestra, and is frequently featured as a cello soloist for the Houston Ballet. In addition to his work on modern cello, Barry also plays Baroque cello and viola da gamba and is heard regularly in concert on both instruments with Ars Lyrica Houston and Bach Society Houston.

Artful Women HONOREE

Joan Weltzien



Joan Weltzien, Ed.D. has been a long-time supporter of Ars Lyrica. She fell in love with the organization the first time she heard Matthew Dirst play and knew she wanted to be involved. Joan served on the Ars Lyrica board and enjoyed helping develop the programming that today draws early music lovers from all over the city. Joan and her husband, Mike, are patrons of a number of Houston performing arts organizations. She has always felt the arts should be as well funded as other interest areas and that to ensure they continue to thrive in our city, it's everyone's responsibility to participate, even if that simply means attending a concert or performance. Joan and Mike enjoy travelling extensively to experience arts and different cultures and they've met many of their closest friends through locally sponsored performing arts trips. Joan's loves outside of the arts include her husband, family, her many cherished clients in her psychology practice and her two cats.

ARS LYRICA HOUSTON

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ABOUT ARS LYRICA

Founded in 1998 by harpsichordist and conductor Matthew Dirst, **Ars Lyrica Houston** presents a diverse array of music from the 17th and 18th centuries on period instruments. Its local subscription series, according to the Houston Chronicle, “sets the agenda” for early music in Houston and it also appears regularly at major festivals and conferences, including the 2014 Berkeley Early Music Festival & Exhibition. Ars Lyrica’s distinctive programming favors Baroque dramatic and chamber works, and its pioneering efforts have won international acclaim: the ensemble’s world première recording of Johann Adolf Hasse’s *Marc’Antonio e Cleopatra*, hailed by Early Music America as “a thrilling performance that glows in its quieter moments and sparkles with vitality,” was nominated for a Grammy Award® for Best Opera 2011.

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ARS LYRICA'S NEXT PERFORMANCE:



New Year's in Berlin

New Year's Eve 2017 transports us to the Berlin salon of Sara Itzig Levy, whose home was a meeting place for musical giants in the late 18th century. An elegant dinner and festive gala surround the program, as Ars Lyrica celebrates the new year in high style.

SOLOISTS



Mario Aschauer
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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31 AT 9 PM

Zilkha Hall, Hobby Center for the Performing Arts