

Comfort & Joy



Friday, December 18 at 7:30 pm

Digital Program Book

ARS LYRICA HOUSTON

presents

Comfort & Joy

Broadcast Program
Friday, December 18, 2020
7:30 pm

featuring

Camille Ortiz	<i>soprano</i>
Cecilia Duarte	<i>mezzo-soprano</i>
Colin St-Martin	<i>traverso</i>
Stephanie Noori	<i>violin</i>
Maria Lin	<i>violin</i>
Yvonne Smith	<i>viola</i>
Eric Smith	<i>cello</i>
Arash Noori	<i>theorbo & guitar</i>
Jesús Pacheco Manuel	<i>percussion</i>
Matthew Dirst	<i>harpsichord & artistic director</i>

*Special thanks to St Philip Presbyterian Church
for hosting our Fall 2020 broadcast programs.*

Video and audio by BEND Productions, LLC

PROGRAM

Christmas Cantata: *O di Betlemme altera*

Alessandro Scarlatti
(1660–1725)

Introduzione

Recitativo: O di Betlemme altera

Aria: Dal ben seno d'una stella

Recitativo: Presa d'uomo la forma

Aria: L'autor d'ogni mio bene

Recitativo: Fortunati pastori giacchè v'è dato in sorte

Aria: Tocco la prima sorte a voi, pastori

Concerto in D Major, TWV 51:D2

Georg Philipp Telemann
(1681–1767)

Moderato

Allegro

Largo

Vivace

Nisi Dominus, RV 608

Antonio Vivaldi
(1678–1741)

Nisi Dominus

Vanum est nobis

Surgite

Cum dederit

Sicut sagittae

Beatus vir

Gloria Patri

Sicut erat in principio

Amen

Selections from *Noëls sur les instruments*, H. 534

Marc-Antoine Charpentier
(1643–1704)

A la venue de Noël

Or nous dites Marie

Ou s'en vont ces guays bergers

“Gesegnete Christen”
from *Erwünschtes Freudenlicht*, BWV 184/2

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

Scarlatti, *Christmas Cantata*

Recitativo

*O di Betlemme altera povertà venturosa!
Se chi fece ogni cosa, se chi muove ogni sfera
In te discende, e l'autor della luce,
Ne suoi primi vagiti a te risplende.*

O noble and fortunate poverty of Bethlehem,
If the maker of all, the mover of every sphere,
Descends upon you, and the source of light,
Giving his first cries, shines on you!

Aria

*Dal bel seno d'una stella
Spunta a noi l'eterno sole.
Da una pura verginella
Nacque già l'eterna prole.*

From the shapely breast of a star
The eternal sun rises for us.
From a young pure virgin
Eternal offspring is now born.

Recitativo

*Presa d'uomo la forma, alle gelide tempre
D'inclemente stagione soggiace
Il gran Bambino.
E d'acerbo destino per sottrarre al rigore
L'humanità cadente
Del suo corpo innocente
Fa scudo a noi l'appassionato amore.*

Assuming human form,
The great infant is exposed
To the icy trial of inclement weather.
To save fallen humanity
From the rigors of harsh fate
His innocent body's
Passionate love is our shield.

Aria

*L'autor d'ogni mio bene
Scioglie le mie catene
E stretto, e in fasce.
Il tutto ei fe dal nulla,
Eppur lo veggio in culla
E in terra nasce.*

The source of all my riches
Wrapped in swaddling bands
Loosens my chains.
He made everything from nothing,
And yet I see him in the cradle,
Born upon earth.

Recitativo

*Fortunati pastori giacchè v'è dato in sorte
Che il signor della vita immortale,
Increato respiri fra divoi l'aure primiere!
Al dolce suon giulivo di zampogne innocenti
D'un Dio fatto mortale
Correte a celebrar l'alto Natale.*

Lucky shepherds, since it has fallen to your lot
That the Lord of life, immortal, never created,
Should draw his first breaths in your midst!
To the gentle, festive sounds of innocent bagpipes
Rush to celebrate the lofty birth
Of God made mortal.

Aria

*Tocco la prima sorte a voi, pastori,
Perche si fa Gesu di Dio l'Agnello.*

The greatest fortune was yours, shepherds,
For Jesus has become the Lamb of God.

*Offrite alla sua cuna I vostri cuori
Mirate quanto è vago e quanto è bello mirate.*

Offer your hearts at his cradle,
And marvel the miracle of his birth.

*Lasciate I vostri armenti e la capanna
Abbandonate si le pecorelle.
Ve' una speranza in lui che non v'inganna
E chi vi puo dar loco in fra le stelle speranza.*

Leave your flocks and huts,
Yes, forsake your sheep.
He embodies a hope that does not deceive you
And can give you a place amongst the stars.

Vivaldi, *Nisi Dominus*

*Nisi Dominus aedificaverit donum,
in vanum laboraverunt qui aedificant eam.
Nisi Dominus custodierit civitatem
frustra vigilavit qui custodit eam.*

Unless the Lord builds the house,
Those that build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord guards the city,
Those who watch stay awake in vain.

Vanum est vobis ante lucem surgere;

It is vain for you to rise before light;

*Surgite postquam sederitis,
qui manducatis panem doloris;*

Rise after you have rested,
To eat the bread of sorrows;

*Cum dederit dilectis suis somnum.
Ecce hereditas Domini filii:
merces, fructus ventris.*

For so He gives His beloved sleep.
Behold, children are the Lord's heritage;
The fruit of the womb is a reward.

*Sicut sagittae in manu potentis,
ita filii excussorum.*

Like arrows in a warrior's hand,
so are the children of one's youth.

*Beatus vir qui implebit desiderium suum ex ipsis;
non confundentur cum loquentur
inimicis suis in porta.*

Blessed are those who have a quiver of them;
they shall not be ashamed,
and can speak even with enemies at the gate.

Bach, *Gesegnete Christen*

*Gesegnete Christen, glückselige Herde
Kommt, stellt euch bei Jesu
Mit Dankbarkeit ein!
Verachtet des Lokken
der schmeichlenden Erde,
daß euer Vergnügen vollkommen kann sein!*

Blessed Christians, blissful flock,
Come and stay with Jesus
with thankful hearts!
Spurn the temptations
of the flattering earth,
so that your contentment can be complete!

PROGRAM NOTES

Sometime between 1703 and 1720, Alessandro Scarlatti composed a cantata for soprano and strings on commission from an Italian noble for a Christmas Eve dinner party. This was how noble and even ecclesiastical Roman households traditionally observed this most holy night, with an elaborate meal and musical entertainments occupying the hours between first Vespers of the Nativity and Midnight Mass. Cardinal Antonio Ottoboni fashioned the libretto of *O di Betlemme altera* as three recitatives/aria pairs, which invoke Jesus's birth, his eventual suffering, and the shepherds' rejoicing at the manger, respectively. The final recitative invites the shepherds to sound their drones, which Scarlatti conjures with rustic string writing in the closing aria, a *pastorale* movement comparable to the *Pifa* from Handel's *Messiah*, except with words. A limpid *Introduzione* summons the pipes with similar gestures, providing an element of symmetry to the whole.

Venetian sacred music of the same time, by contrast, was presented regularly for a paying public. The *Ospedale della Pietà*, where Antonio Vivaldi taught for most of his career, enjoyed under his watch an unrivalled reputation: this all-female orphanage functioned effectively as a music academy, to which generations of ladies and gentlemen on the "grand tour" would flock for some of the most remarkable musical performances of the age. Monthly Vespers concerts, offered with the composer's young charges concealed behind an intricately carved screen, included Vivaldi's own concerted settings of psalms appointed for the eponymous prayer service (one of the "holy offices"). Stylistically, these *tour-de-force* psalm settings resemble *opera seria* more than traditional Latin church music, with elaborate vocal and instrumental obbligato lines.

Vivaldi's setting of Psalm 127, scored for mezzo soprano and strings, comprises multiple short movements that adapt this psalm (*Nisi Dominus* in the Latin Vulgate) somewhat idiosyncratically, not always strictly verse-by-verse. By turns virtuosic and introspective, its most ravishing movement comes with the first words of the concluding *Gloria Patri*, with an otherworldly *viola d'amore* obbligato transfiguring this familiar bit of text.

Of the three sacred vocal works on this program, only the closing duet premiered in church: during a Leipzig liturgy on Whit (Pentecost) Tuesday of 1724, to be precise. For his sacred cantata *Erwünschtes Freudenlicht*, Sebastian Bach reused substantial portions of a secular work from his time at the Cöthen court, adapting its primary movements to a new text devoted largely to the praise of Jesus, the Great Shepherd.

The scoring and swinging tunefulness of its second movement signal a lively pastorale dance, with the “blissful flock” rejoicing in gratitude for the gift of God’s grace.

Around these vocal chamber works, our program also offers a few instrumental pieces from the same era, including one specifically for the holiday season. Georg Philipp Telemann wrote a spate of solo wind concertos during the years surrounding 1721, when he began his long tenure as music director for Hamburg’s five principal churches. Of these, seven are scored for flute and strings, with the D-major Concerto TWV 51:D2 perhaps the most admired of the lot. Its opening movement sports the rhythm of a *polonaise*, a Polish folk dance, but within the formal confines of a French *rondeau*. Telemann relied on an Italianate *ritornello* for the second movement Allegro, which features brilliant figuration for the solo flute and some sassy licks in the strings. The melancholy third movement, set in the relative minor, juxtaposes an expressive solo obbligato above a quiet but steadily throbbing figure in the strings. A pair of sprightly minuets, the second a quasi-trio, bring this beguiling work to a close.

Marc-Antoine Charpentier’s collection of *Noëls*, conceived in 1693 for a small instrumental ensemble, includes arrangements of some of the most beloved French Christmas melodies. These tunes, many borrowed from Renaissance folksongs, remain eternally popular: French organists still improvise on them. As *maître de musique* for the Jesuits in Paris, Charpentier supplied music of various kinds for liturgical and social occasions, from didactic oratorios to settings of popular songs. By turns rustic and tender, his noels evoke the same kind of naiveté and wonder as English carols, albeit in the more decorative style of the French Baroque. — *M. Dirst*

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Praised by the New York Times as “a creamy voiced mezzo-soprano,” **Cecilia Duarte** has created several roles in contemporary operas such as Renata in *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* and its prequel, *El Milagro del Recuerdo*, as well as others such as Gracie in *A Way Home*, Harriet/First Responder in *After the Storm*, Alicia in *Some Light Emerges*, and Alma in the first episode of Houston Grand Opera’s web series *Star-Cross’d*, which won a Telly Award in 2019. Cecilia also appears as a soloist in the Houston Chamber Choir’s Grammy-winning album *Duruflé: The Complete Choral Works*. As an early music artist, Cecilia has performed at the Oregon Bach Festival, the Festivalensemble in Stuttgart, Germany, and the Festival de Música Barroca in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. She performs often with Ars Lyrica Houston, Mercury Houston, and most recently with the newly formed Kaleidoscope Vocal Ensemble.



Internationally recognized for her compelling performances of opera and concert repertoire, Puerto Rican soprano **Camille Ortiz** is quickly establishing herself as a leading artist in standard operatic roles and on the concert stage. Recent appearances include Micaëla in Magic City Opera’s *Carmen*, a debut with the Naples Philharmonic, Norina in *Don Pasquale* with Gulfshore Opera, and a return to San Francisco for the *Mozart Magnified* series with Philharmonia Baroque as featured soprano soloist in *Exsultate, jubilate*, among other works. Camille is Assistant Professor of Voice at the University of Oregon, School of Music and Dance. She completed a D.M.A. at University of North Texas, a Master of Music degree at Manhattan School of Music, a Bachelor of Music degree at Oral Roberts University where she double-majored in voice and violin, and is a graduate of the pre-college division of the Puerto Rico Conservatory. She is the winner of the Gerda Lissner Foundation 2008 Encouragement Award and a finalist in both the Liederkrantz 2009 competition, Lieder division, and the Sergei and Olga Koussevitzky 2010 Young Artists Competition.



Colin St-Martin, who since childhood has been interested in 17th and 18th century European culture, began playing the traverso at the age of fourteen. He studied at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Brussels, Belgium where he obtained a First Prize (Bachelor of Music) under the tutelage of renowned m. took him to Brussels, Belgium, where he obtained a First Prize (Bachelor of Music) from the Royal Conservatory of Music under the tutelage of renowned Baroque specialist Bart Kuijken. He returned to the United States to complete graduate work at the Early Music Institute at Indiana University. Currently, Colin is busy as a performer and recording artist with many early music ensembles across the United States in addition to his work as a master teacher.

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Jay Carter
countertenor



Sherezade Panthaki
soprano