

Musical Duels



Saturday, September 26 at 7:30 pm

Digital Program Book

ARS LYRICA HOUSTON

presents

MUSICAL DUELS

Broadcast Program
Saturday, September 26, 2020
7:30 pm

Mario Aschauer & Matthew Dirst	<i>harpsichord</i>
Maria Lin & Oleg Sulyga	<i>violin</i>
James Dunham	<i>viola</i>
Barrett Sills	<i>cello</i>
Deborah Dunham	<i>violone</i>

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

*Harpsichords by John Phillips (Berkeley, CA):
single-manual Gräbner (2020) and single-manual Delin (2012).*

Video and audio by BEND Productions, LLC.

Concerto for Two Harpsichords in C Minor, BWV 1060 Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)

Allegro
Adagio
Allegro

Balletto a 4: *Die Fechtschule (The Fencing School)* Johann Heinrich Schmelzer
(c1620–1680)

Aria 1
Aria 2
Sarabande
Courante
Fechtschule
Bader Aria

Ricercar a 3 from *A Musical Offering*, BWV 1079/1 J. S. Bach

Mensa Sonora, Pars VI in G Minor Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber
(1644–1704)

Sonata
Aria
Canario
Amener
Trezza
Ciacona
Sonatina

Concerto for Two Harpsichords in C Major, BWV 1061 J. S. Bach

[Allegro]
Adagio ovvero Largo
Fuga

NOTES ON THE MUSIC

Sometime in the early seventeenth century, instrumentalists embraced a new way of doing things. The allure of opposing groups of instruments, embodied in the earliest concertos, quickly became a defining feature of Baroque music. This program of “musical duels” explores that kind of opposition with a pair of Bach’s concertos for two harpsichords, string band music from the Austrian Baroque, and a singular fugue that embraces two seemingly opposed musical styles.

J. S. Bach wrote his first keyboard concertos between 1717 and 1723 during his service to Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. Concerti for multiple harpsichords followed during Bach’s long tenure in Leipzig, perhaps as a means of sharing the spotlight occasionally with his gifted sons, all of whom eventually entered the family trade. Most of these concerti, including those for solo harpsichord, are transcriptions of earlier works for other instruments. That fact doesn’t render them somehow less idiomatic than other keyboard concerti; quite a few of these pieces were likely transcriptions of Bach’s own organ concertos, whose original versions are no longer extant. Bach had no trouble transferring musical ideas from one medium to another, and some of his transcriptions are arguably more successful pieces than their originals. Of the two double-harpsichord concertos on this program, the first (BWV 1060) will be familiar to some as a concerto for violin and oboe; the other (BWV 1061) exists only as a work for two keyboard instruments.

Bach’s concertos follow the Italian format, with two fast movements surrounding an artfully embellished slow movement. In the C-minor double concerto, the strings are integral to the articulation of the *ritornello* (refrain) passages in the outer movements and they accompany the extensive solo writing in a variety of ways. The C-major concerto, on the other hand, had no string parts in its earliest incarnation. Though a late addition, the strings are a welcome one, for they help to reinforce important structural points while adding their distinctive warm color to the harpsichords’ plucky texture.

These two concerti were likely first heard on programs of the Leipzig Collegium Musicum, an ensemble made up primarily of university students, whose direction Bach assumed in the mid 1720s. Performances by this ensemble took place at a coffee-house and occasionally at an outdoor garden owned and operated by Gottfried Zimmermann. The convivial and highly caffeinated atmosphere encouraged informal programs that offered works in various genres, including concertos, suites, and secular cantatas.

The Austrian composer and violinist Johann Heinrich Schmelzer served the Habsburg court for nearly fifty years, during which time he contributed significantly to the development of violin technique and the growing repertoire of music for string ensembles. His *Fechtschule* depicts musically a rather polite fencing match within the parameters of the suite, with various dances and even a “barber’s song” (“Bader Aria”) for the poor fellow whose job it was to bandage up the participants. One wonders whether such a work accompanied an

elaborate court ballet that featured fencing, on the model of Monteverdi's *Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*.

Schmelzer's younger contemporary Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber took violin playing to new heights, with complex solo works that continue to challenge even the finest violinists. As *Capellmeister* to the Holy Roman Emperor, Biber was also a busy composer. His chamber works, the violin sonatas especially, were known across Europe for their bold ideas and unconventional designs. His *Mensa Sonora* comprises six suites of French dances, each of which begins and ends with an Italianate sonata (or sonatina) movement, thus joining together the two dominant musical styles of his day.

Bach's *Ricercar a 3*, finally, is an artifact of a famous stylistic duel: between old-fashioned counterpoint and the melody-dominated music of the mid eighteenth century. In May of 1747, Frederick the Great of Prussia welcomed the famous Leipzig cantor to the Sanssouci Palace by having him improvise a fugue, on a theme that the king supplied. A skilled flautist and composer, Frederick had done his homework, and he tried to outwit the great master of counterpoint and fugue with a lengthy chromatic fugue subject. Bach's extemporized fugue in three voices became, within the space of a few months, the first movement of a beautifully engraved *Musical Offering* whose contents explore the possibilities of the royal theme in two fugues (or "ricercars"), ten canons, and a trio sonata in four movements. The *Ricercar a 3*, which stands at the head of this curious collection and likely reflects Bach's Potsdam improvisation, combines rigorous contrapuntal development of the royal theme with free passages whose *galant* gestures seem to float in directly from Frederick's more fashionable milieu. — *M. Dirst*

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Ars Lyrica Artistic Director **Matthew Dirst**, recently described in the *Washington Post* as an “efficient, extremely precise conductor who has an ear for detail,” 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 and the Warsaw International Harpsichord Competition. Widely admired for his stylish playing and conducting, Dirst leads a period-instrument ensemble with several acclaimed recordings, one of which—J. A. Hasse’s *Marc Antonio e Cleopatra*—was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2011 for Best Opera. 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. His publications include *Engaging Bach: The Keyboard Legacy from Marburg to Mendelssohn* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and *Bach and the Organ* (University of Illinois Press, 2016).



Praised as a performer with “unconventional ludic drive” by the press and listed among Austria’s thirty-five most outstanding researchers aged under thirty-five by the Austrian Science Fund in 2013, **Mario Aschauer** works as conductor, harpsichordist, and musicologist at the interface of music scholarship and performance. His book *German Keyboard Treatises in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2011) is considered a standard reference in the field. Further projects in early keyboard studies include the development of historical-style keyboard fingerings and notes on performance practice for new editions of prominent works by Beethoven and Schubert as well as a new edition of Mozart’s keyboard sonatas published by Bärenreiter. As a performer on historical keyboard instruments, Mario has built up a diverse repertoire specializing in Austrian Baroque music. In addition to his active performing career, Mario teaches music history, historically informed performance and early keyboard instruments at the Sam Houston State University School of Music as Associate Professor of Music. He holds an MA in harpsichord performance from the University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna, an MPhil and a PhD in musicology from the University of Vienna—all of which he earned “with distinction”—as well as a degree in conducting from the Linz Bruckner Conservatory.

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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 in its original context while creating connections to contemporary life. Ars Lyrica's acclaimed programming features neglected gems alongside familiar masterworks, and extracts the dramatic potential, emotional resonance, and expressive power of music. Its local subscription series, according to the Houston Chronicle, "sets the agenda" for early music in Houston. Ars Lyrica appears regularly at international festivals and concert series because of its distinctive focus, and its pioneering efforts in the field of authentic performance have won international acclaim, including a Grammy nomination for Best Opera.

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Ars Lyrica's Next Performance



Conflict & Concord

October 24, 2020 | 7:30 pm

This first of two all-Bach programs for Fall 2020 explores the rich repertoire of cantatas and chamber music from the great Baroque master.

Cantata 170 transcends human suffering with beautiful melodies and delicate textures, while Cantata 134 celebrates the joys of the next world with sumptuous orchestral and vocal forces. Between these masterworks, principal players offer a remarkable trio sonata Bach composed for Frederick the Great, from a collection infused with ideological and musical contrasts.

These exceptional works combine intellectual challenges with profoundly comforting messages, while showcasing some amazing talent.

- J.S. Bach, *Vergnügte Ruh', beliebte Seelenlust*, BWV 170
- J.S. Bach, Trio Sonata from *A Musical Offering*, BWV 1079
- J.S. Bach, *Ein Herz, das seinen Jesum lebend weiß*, BWV 134

This program will be broadcast online.



Steven Brennfleck ^o
tenor



Leia Lensing ^o
mezzo-soprano

^o *Ars Lyrica* debut