

# MSAB Individual Grant

## *Concert 1: Songs from Baroque Italy*

Alyssa Anderson, mezzo-soprano  
Michael Thomas Asmus, harpsichord

Monday 2 August 2021

### Program

Introduction to the program	by Michael
Introduction to Marcello	by Alyssa
Ecco il momento (ca. 1728–1739)	Rosanna Scalfi Marcello (1704/5–after 1742)
Introduction to Cozzolani: Part I	by Michael
Concinant linguae (1642)	Chiara Margarita Cozzolani (1602–1678)
Introduction to Caccini	by Alyssa
Cantan gl’augelli from <i>Raccolta di arie a voce sola</i> (c. 1620)	Settimia Caccini (1591–1660)
Introduction to Strozzi: Part I	by Michael
Per un bacio (1659)	Barbara Strozzi (1619–1677)
Introduction to Cozzolani: Part II	by Michael
O quam bonum (1642)	Cozzolani
Due luci ridenti from <i>Raccolta di arie a voce sola, e madrigali a più voci</i>	Caccini
Introduction to Strozzi: Part II	by Michael
L’eraclito amoroso (1651)	Strozzi
Introduction to Handel	by Michael
Lungi da me, pensier tiranno! (before 1709)	George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

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When Alyssa and I began planning for this performance, nothing spoke to us more than songs (really they're cantatas) written in Italy. Our first piece we ever performed together, *Concinant linguae*, was a great place for us to start developing the program as it appears now.

For me, nothing is more quintessentially "Baroque" than cantatas written in Italy in the early 1600s. Baroque style vocal music really began in Florence with the work Giulio Caccini—the father of Settimia Caccini—and others at the Florentine Camerata. The style that the Camerata developed, known now as recitativo (Italian for "recited"), had a strong influence in the opera world into the mid-1800s. This program is an exploration of a handful of pieces written from 1642 to the mid-1700s.

You'll notice that the general musical style of the pieces on the program are similar. That aspect illustrates how broadly the Florentine style was disseminated. However, it's important to note that each composer has his or her own way of representing the style in their own individual compositional voices.

Thanks to Alyssa for joining me for this program; thanks to my parents and brother for their assistance with logistics and recording; thanks to Sibley County for allowing me to use the courthouse rotunda; and thanks to the Minnesota State Arts Board for providing me an opportunity to do this project. We hope you enjoy the program.

## Program Notes

### *Rosanna Scalfi Marcello*

In 1728, the talents of Rosanna Scalfi Marcello, a Venitian singer, were discovered by her future husband Benedetto Giacomo Marcello.

The story goes that, one day, Benedetto overheard Rosanna's singing through an open window in his family's palazzo, which faced the grand canal. After much searching, Benedetto located the singer—Rosanna—and began giving her singing lessons. Apparently, Benedetto had offered lessons to several poor but talented singers from a young age. Rosanna, the daughter of a domestic servant, was likely incredibly poor.

Benedetto was trained as a lawyer and worked as a magistrate for the city of Venice from 1706. They married in a somewhat secret ceremony

around 1728. Rosanna was a specialist in the *arie di battello* sung by the Gondoliere and must have also had some training before meeting Benedetto.

After their marriage, which no doubt caused many in Benedetto's circle to gossip, Rosanna performed for guests in the Marcello palazzo and composed. It's likely that the compositions contained in Rosanna's only manuscript were intended for performances here or in other private settings.

### *Ecco il momento*

Secular cantatas, like Rosanna's *Ecco il momento*, were a specialized genre that appeared frequently in the later-Baroque era. Great numbers of cantatas were written and were

almost always intended for private performances in aristocratic palazzos. The cantatas sometimes lean closer towards the dramatic, stage-centric opera genre than music for a private party.

Our selection of Rosanna's 12 extant cantatas is cantata no. 11, *Ecco il momento*. The cantata is quite standard for the time with four movements alternating between recitatives and arias. The pastoral theme of the cantata appears to have been Benedetto's specialty, which he perhaps passed onto his wife. The poetry typical melodrama of the period. The protagonist of the cantata laments the possibility that her lover, Thrysis, has left her for another woman.

What is most striking about Rosanna's cantata is the wide vocal range and her adventurous use of harmony. The recitatives, in particular, utilize sudden changes in harmonies which are incredibly unprepared for.

### Chiara Margarita Cozzolani

A nun in Milan, Cozzolani's eventual admission to the monastery of Santa Radegonda was not uncommon. Many women born into middle-class families of the period were destined to become nuns—whether it was their decision or not. The monastery was located in the same neighborhood as where she grew up.

Cozzolani's arrival as a novice at the monastery is marked by a payment of a "dowry" to a holding bank in 1619. When she took formal vows on August 14, 1620, the dowry funds were withdrawn from the bank.

It might seem a bit peculiar to us that a woman would essentially pay a marriage dowry to a

monastery. One would like to hope that the funds were used for the maintenance of the newly committed sister. The funds might have also been used to pay a teacher for music lessons or for some other purposes to the benefit of the monastery.

Milan was somewhat of a nun-musician powerhouse. Of 41 monasteries that housed women, at least 27 of them were well-known the musical abilities of the sisters. Cozzolani's musical talents are evident in the two pieces we're performing on this concert.

### *Concinant linguae & O quam bonum*

As a nun, Cozzolani's extant musical output is exclusively sacred vocal music. Cozzolani's first publication made in 1640 is lost and the genre of music it once contained is unknown.

The two pieces of Cozzolani's that we're performing come from her 1642 collection *Concerti sacri*. The collection includes pieces for one to five voices and continuo. Motets, like those we're performing today, and a setting of the Mass rounds out the collection.

The text for both selections are unique in their approach to imagery. In *Concinant linguae*, the sweetness of God's love is like honey, and the birds of earth tweet their approval. In *O quam bonum*, the pierced side of Jesus creates a door to eternal salvation. The poetry is a portal into the ways in which these nuns thought about their daily lives and their worship of God.

### *Settimia Caccini*

Frustratingly little is know about Settimia's life, likely overshadowed by her father and older

sister. What we do know is that Settimia most likely made her debut with her sister in *Euridice*.

In 1604, she travelled to Paris with the rest of the family where her talents also impressed the French court. She was offered positions at various aristocratic households in France, but Giulio had different plans for her.

Settimia and Francesca were supposed to be employed in two Roman households after their 1604 trip. However, those appointments fell through after deaths in both Roman households.

By 1609, Settimia married fellow singer Alessandro Ghivizzani. In arrangement of the marriage, the Medici were supposed to pay her dowry on behalf of Giulio. However, after not paying, the Ghivizzani family kidnapped and ransomed Settimia for the dowry. The stunt likely resulted in Alessandro's banishment from Tuscany in 1611.

After her husband's banishment, Settimia and Alessandro moved to Lucca, the family's city. Settimia returned only occasionally for guest performances until her husband's death in 1636. In that year she became a member of the Medici's permanent musical establishment.

### *Raccolta di arie*

The two selections by Settimia come from a manuscript dated to the 1620s. Now held in the music library at Bologna's conservatory, the manuscript contains the four extant pieces by Settimia. The manuscript is dedicated to a Florentine aristocrat, Filippo del Nero, which provides evidence the manuscript possibly originated in Florence.

The character of the Settimia's pieces are in contrast to those of her famous sister and father.

For me, Settimia's pieces bring a sense of joy and levity that Francesca's—and most certainly Giulio's—do not. I'm incredibly fond of these two selections, and I'm thankful to Alyssa for bring them to my attention.

### *Barbara Strozzi*

Barbara Strozzi's songs are wonderful, evocative, and playful examples of the classic early Italian Baroque style. Strozzi was born in Venice, the illegitimate daughter of Giulio Strozzi and his long-time servant Isabella Garzoni. Barbara's father was a poet and was active in the musical and literary circles of Venice. He even supplied the texts for some of Barbara's songs.

Barbara often performed at her father's meetings of the *Accademia degli Unisoni*, founded in 1638, accompanying herself on the lute or viola da gamba. It also seems that she was a welcome part of the academy's discourse on musical activities.

Strozzi was taught composition by Francesco Cavalli (1602–1676), one of the leading opera composers in Venice at the time. In 1644 Strozzi published her first collection of pieces: a varied set of 25 madrigals for two to five voices, basso continuo, and occasionally two violins. The collection sets her father's poetry.

In 1651, seven years later, and in financial straits, Strozzi published her second collection of pieces. The second collection, dedicated to Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II (1578–1637), features pieces for solo soprano voice, basso continuo, with a few pieces also including two violins.

Between, 1651 and 1664, Strozzi published another six collections of music, almost

exclusively for one voice and basso continuo. Most of the collections are dedicated to prominent royalty spread throughout German lands and Italy.

Strozzi's seventh collection, from which *Per un bacio* is taken, was dedicated to Nicolò Sagredo, a Procurator of San Marco and was later elected the Doge of Venice. The songs in the collection are again for solo voice and basso continuo.

Scholar Richard Kolb notes that Strozzi's publications were most likely a response to her financial position. Most importantly, it was probably Strozzi's hope that her publications would allow her to attract new patrons for her compositions. Some of the collections, like Op. 2 and Op. 7, contain mixtures of extreme technical complexity for professional or excellent amateur singers and moderately complex for very good amateur singers. To have so many complete collections of her works is quite remarkable, considering how many compositions by her contemporaries have been lost over the centuries.

### *Per un bacio*

We've selected a song from Strozzi's seventh publication which is a strophic piece—using the same music for two verses. The poetry is a quite typical melodramatic setting of forlorn lovers so often found in songs of the mid-1600s across Europe.

Strozzi's music utilizes several tempo changes which reflect the varying degrees of strife which the poet suffers. The slower tempos are very much laments while the quicker tempo is more adamant and enraged. Strozzi, like her teacher

Cavalli, is very sensitive to the text and the story that it is conveying. As you listen, notice how Strozzi uses tempo *and* harmonies to help musically depict the text.

### *L'Eraclito amoroso*

Our selection from Strozzi's second publication is *L'Eraclito amoroso*, or the Amorous Heraclitus. Strozzi's song sets text depicting a playful take on Heraclitus's Flux Principle which basically states that things are constantly changing and never remain the same. The poem Strozzi sets is a highly ironic, tongue-in-cheek hypothetical imaging of Heraclitus's own suffering under his Flux Principle, as Alyssa notes in her introduction before our performance.

What is also notable in Strozzi's setting is her careful attention to the text and her use of harmonies and rhythmic durations to accentuate the text. Strozzi uses text painting on words like torture, sobbing, sighing, assail, and afflict to musically represent the emotions of the poet.

Strozzi's setting blends quasi-recitative, arioso, and arietta styles in this evocative piece. The opening ("Listen, lovers") and closing portions ("So much sorrow") of the piece are quasi-recitative. The second section ("My only pleasure") is in the arioso style. The middle portion of the song, with the repeating bass lines ("Every torture...May every sadness") are in the arietta style.

### George Frideric Handel

Handel's time in Italy, from 1706 – 1709 was perhaps the most defining of his musical life. In Italy he built a network which would help launch his career as a composer of Italian operas in

London. Handel also refined his craft by hearing operas in Venice and Florence, and by hearing and writing cantatas in Rome.

During his time in Italy, Handel was dependent upon receiving money and housing from multiple patrons. He no doubt had some financial abilities upon arriving, but it's unlikely that he would have survived for three years on those initial funds alone.

One of Handel's most important patrons was Marquis Francesco Maria Ruspoli, a member of the Roman aristocracy who owned a great deal of land and multiple villas across the region. Ruspoli gave Handel a small series of rooms, called an apartment, in Ruspoli's old palace—Ruspoli had recently upgraded to a newer palace which he was renting.

In exchange for the apartment, and one would assume a bit of money, Handel's obligations were to compose a new cantata for Ruspoli's weekly academy meetings. Ruspoli was a member of the Arcadian Academy, one of the most important literary academies of the era.

### *Lungi da me, pensier tiranno*

In some instances, Handel's cantatas had a clear purpose for composition, such as *Diana cacciatrice*, HWV 79 (Italian, "Diana the huntress"), which was written for a stag hunt of

Ruspoli's in May 1707. Other cantatas don't seem to be associated with such a specific occasion.

Handel's cantata *Lungi da me* is one of those types of cantatas unassociated with a specific event. We're not even exactly sure when the cantata was written. A copyist's bill dated 31 August 1709 is the only evidence that we have to date the cantata. And even that isn't information isn't definitive.

The cantata exists in two versions—one for soprano voice the other for alto—and we're unsure which one was first. Some scholars suggest that the version for alto, which we're performing on this concert, was the first version. Nevertheless, the cantata must have been finished, at the latest, by the time it was copied.

The cantata is a little unusual because Handel writes so many movements. Three recitatives and three arias alternate throughout the piece. By the time the cantata was written, Handel had already premiered several operas. In the cantata, you'll notice the signs of the dramatic genius that Handel was to become.

Program notes by MTA.

## About the Musicians

**Dr. Alyssa Anderson** (mezzo-soprano) is an active performer and arts administrator based in Minneapolis. She received her B.M. in performance from the State University of New York, College at Fredonia, and her M.M. and D.M.A. from the University of Minnesota.

As Artistic Director and vocalist of The Dream Songs Project, a classical voice and guitar duo based in Minneapolis, Alyssa has commissioned twelve major works for the ensemble and premiered numerous pieces by local and national composers in concerts across the US. She is a founding member and current Artistic Director of the experimental chamber group, RenegadeEnsemble, and also performs as The Poem Is Done with saxophonist Dr. Jeffery Kyle Hutchins.

A core member of The Rose Ensemble since 2015, Alyssa has also performed as a soloist with numerous other ensembles and presenting organizations in the Twin Cities, such as Zeitgeist, Miranda Ensemble, LOFTRecital, 113 Composer Collective, Metamorphosis Opera Theater, Consortium Carissimi, Minnesota Bach Ensemble, Oratorio Society of Minnesota, Kenwood Symphony Orchestra, Twin Cities Lyric Theater, and Bloomington Symphony Orchestra. More information can be found at [AlyssaAnderson.org](http://AlyssaAnderson.org).



Harpichordist & Conductor, **Michael Thomas Asmus**, is currently studying at Stony Brook University for a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Harpsichord Performance with Arthur Haas. As a conductor, he has been praised as a “conscientious [conductor]” with “a natural talent” and “a bright future” by audiences and ensembles alike. He has been lauded as a “versatile” continuo player (CNVC.org) with “judicious, rhythmically supple harpsichord playing” (Star Tribune). He is consistently lauded by his colleagues as a great musical collaborator.

Since June 2011, Michael has acted as the Music and Artistic Director of La Grande Bande, a non-profit, period instrument orchestra and chorus he founded in the same year. La Grande Bande will produce its first full concert series for the 2019–2020 season.