

2024
YORK
EARLY
MUSIC
FESTIVAL
6 – 13 JULY

Ensemble In Echo

*Metamorfosi –
Italian transformations*

St Lawrence Church
Wednesday 10 July 7.30pm

Ensemble In Echo

Metamorfosi – Italian transformations

- Amarilli mia bella (after Giulio Caccini) **Jacob van Eyck** c. 1590-1657
- Susanne un jour a4 **Didier Lupi** c. 1520-c. 1559
Susanne ung jour a5 **Orlando di Lasso** 1532-1594
(divisions by Giovanni Bassano)
- Sonata seconda a7 **Giovanni Battista Grillo** c. 1570-1622
- Canzona a5 'Susana un jur' **Antonio de Cabezón** c. 1510-1566
Fantasia 'Susanne un jour' **Claudio Merulo** 1533-1604
- O felice occhi miei **Jacques Arcadelt** 1507-68
Capriccio a3 'O felice occhi miei' **Vincenzo Ruffo** c. 1508-87
- Anchor che col partire a4 **Cipriano de Rore** 1515/16-1565
Contrapunto a2 sopra 'Ancor che col partir' **Adriano Banchieri** 1568-1634
Anchor ch'io possa dire a6 **Alessandro Striggio** c. 1536/7-1592
- Ancidetimi pur a4 **Jacques Arcadelt**
Ancidetimi pur per l'arpa **Giovanni Maria Trabaci** c. 1575-1647
- En dilectus meus a5 ('Vestiva i colli') **Gabriello Puliti** c. 1575-80-1642/43
Capriccio a2 'Vestiva i colli' **Pietro San Giorgio** fl. 1608
- Dormendo un giorno a5 **Philippe Verdelot** c. 1480-85- before 1552
Capriccio a3 'Dormendo un giorno' **Vincenzo Ruffo**
- Sonata prima a7 **Giovanni Battista Grillo**

It is often said that imitation is the highest form of flattery. Contained within this truism is an unspoken criticism of the imitator as lacking the inspiration required to create something novel or distinctive for themselves. This chimes with our wider twenty-first-century western culture which often prizes – sometimes to the extent of fetishising – newness and innovation, regarding them as *the* defining elements of true creativity. This was not an attitude shared in Renaissance Italy.

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy saw the flourishing of a vibrant court culture in which social status was of ultimate importance. To gain favour in society was essential in order to increase the chances of acquiring a better position, patronage, an advantageous marriage (for oneself or one's children), or support in the event of trouble, sickness or infirmity. Without a secure place in society, and the developed social networks that followed, life could quickly become precarious. The pursuit of social advancement was therefore necessary in a way we can scarcely imagine today. One reliable way of attaining that all-important good opinion of others in courtly society was to demonstrate an ease, familiarity and skill with things that were in vogue at any given time, be they the latest poetic forms, the newest dances, the most fashionable clothes or the most popular musical styles.

The key to gaining admiration in such things was not merely to observe and appreciate them, but to actively participate publicly in a way that exhibited good taste and a lively wit. This meant striving privately to become an excellent dancer, an admired writer of sonnets, or a practical musician good enough to be able to participate in after-dinner performances of sophisticated madrigals, chansons or instrumental music. All of this had to be done lightly, with an apparent ease, as if dancing or singing came as easily as breathing. The most admired courtiers were those able to embellish all these things in an easy and playful way (for instance by adding flicks to a basic dance step, wearing fashionable garments in a new way, or – as we will hear tonight – by adding spontaneous ornaments to a musical piece). To exhibit such nonchalant artistry was not showing off. It hinted at the supposed sophistication of one's very soul.

To compose a musical response to a popular madrigal or chanson was another way of participating in this culture, one that suggested even greater skill and sophistication on the part of the composer. As we will hear this evening, these responses took myriad forms.

A popular approach was that taken by the virtuoso cornettist Giovanni Bassano, who took the soprano lines of well-known vocal pieces such as Lassus's 5-voice chanson *Susanne ung jour* (itself a reworking of Didier Lupi's 4-part original),

transforming them by replacing the original long notes with flurries of running semiquavers, syncopations and leaps. The version performed here was published by Bassano in 1591 as an illustration of the kind of ornaments performers like him routinely improvised spontaneously.

Another approach was to use thematic material from a popular madrigal as the basis for keyboard fantasias (which often became so florid the original material became hard to discern). As with twentieth-century jazz standards, the interest with such works lay in hearing an admired musician's 'take' on a particular piece. The pieces by Claudio Merulo and Giovanni Maria Trabaci are examples of this, as is the Canzon *Susana un jur* by Cabezón which began life as a keyboard piece but is performed here by an ensemble of instruments.

Alessandro Striggio was a leading figure at the courts of Mantua and Ferrara, two of the most artistically progressive and innovative courts of the late Renaissance. A diplomat as well as a composer, Striggio was fluent in a literary culture in which courtiers would exchange and circulate poems written in response to one another's work. This culture extended to pieces of music. Cipriano de Rore's 4-part madrigal *Ancor che col partire* became one of the most popular hits of the sixteenth century, inspiring more reworkings and adaptations than virtually any other piece of the era. Striggio's *Ancor ch'io possa dire* is simultaneously a musical as well as a literary response to it. Not only does he rework de Rore's 4-part musical material into a new 6-voice work, he also sets it to a verse by de Rore's contemporary Girolamo Parabosco written as a response from the point of view of the lover to whom the original is addressed. To add another layer of transformation we are performing Striggio's madrigal with florid diminutions written by another Venetian cornetto virtuoso, Girolamo Dalla Casa.

Satisfying though Striggio's expansive approach is, it was in fact far more common for composers to take the contrary approach of transforming 4-part pieces into miniatures for two or three voices. As we can hear with Banchieri and San Giorgio's adaptations of *Ancor che col partire* and *Vestiva i colli* these are contrapuntal exercises (often written with pedagogical intent), which aim to explore all the imitative and expressive possibilities available within a deliberately limited palette.

Vincenzo Ruffo's *Capricci* are very different. Here Ruffo takes the melody from a popular piece (in this instance *O felice occhi miei* and *Dormendo un giorno*) placing it in long notes in the bass. Over that he invents two playfully interweaving lines which chase each other from start to finish.

The concert concludes with a grand 7-part instrumental sonata by Giovanni Grillo of the sort one might have heard performed from the balcony of a great Italian basilica such as San Marco in Venice or San Petronio in Bologna. Into this rich sound Grillo plainly inserts not one, but two of the most popular secular songs of the sixteenth century: *Susanne ung jour* and *Vestiva i colli*. Grillo quotes both pieces at length in a manner which must have brought a smile to all who heard it.

We hope that by this stage of the concert both pieces will be nearly as familiar to you as they would have been to listeners in early seventeenth-century Italy, thereby allowing you to participate afresh in the playfully inventive musical culture of late Renaissance Italy: a 400-year-old culture reimagined and recontextualised today in twenty-first-century York.

© Gawain Glenton

Ensemble in Echo

Gawain Glenton *cornetto, recorder*

Oliver Webber *violin*

Rachel Byrt *viola*

Emily White *trombone*

Adam Crighton *trombone*

Gavin Kibble *bass violin/viol*

William Hunt *violone*

Silas Wollston *organ, harpsichord*

Formed and directed by cornetto player Gawain Glenton, In Echo is a diverse ensemble that explores the rich repertoires of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Specialising in Renaissance and Baroque music, the ensemble also commissions and performs new music for old instruments.

'It is natural to believe that people have always experienced the world much as we do today, but the truth is different. Fundamental attitudes – such as man's place in the universe, the nature of society and everyday life – are not constant. They evolve and alter over time. The same is true with music. For instance, musical training in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was very different from the training classical musicians receive today, with the result that musicians then developed a different understanding of music from its most fundamental aspects.

We cannot click our fingers and ‘become’ musicians of the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, but we can explore the skills we know they developed. The aim is not academic, but to arrive at performances that connect more with modern audiences – just as fully historical productions of Shakespeare plays can be more accessible to people in the twenty-first century, not less.’

Gwain Glenton

YORK EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL

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