

2025  
**YORK**  
EARLY  
MUSIC  
FESTIVAL

**Ensemble Bastion**

*Phantasma*

**National Centre for Early Music**

**Thursday 10 July 1.00pm**

# Ensemble Bastion

## ***Phantasma***

Visions of Heaven and Hell

Sonata Quinta a2, Sopran e trombon overo violeta  
(from *Sonate concertate in stil moderno, libro secondo*, Venice, 1629)

**Dario Castello** 1602-31

Sonata Quarta, 'La Biancuccia'  
from *Sonate à Violino solo, per Chiesa e Camera*, Innsbruck, 1660

**Giovanni Antonio Pandolfi Mealli**  
1624-c.1687

Quarta Sonata a2, Sopran e trombon overo violeta  
(from *Sonate concertate in stil moderno, libro primo*, Venice, 1621)

**Dario Castello**

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Affligée et Tombeau sur la mort de  
Monsieur Blanchrocher, FbWV 632

**Johann Jacob Froberger** 1616-67

Passacaglia  
(from *Mystery (Rosary) Sonatas*, Salzburg, 1678)

**Heinrich Ignaz Franz Von Biber** 1644-1704  
Arr. Ensemble Bastion

Io son ferito  
(from *Il tezo libro delle Muse a cinque voci*, Venice, 1561)  
from *Regole, passaggi di musica*, Venice, 1594

**Giovanni Perluigi Da Palestrina**  
1525/26-94

Diminution by  
**Giovanni Battista Bovicelli** c.1550-c.1597

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Sonata per b quadro

**Orazio Bassani** c.1550-1615

Sonata Nona, 'La Malchiavella'  
(from *Sonate a due istromenti cioè violino e violone*, op. 55, Bologna, 1670)  
*Vivace – Vivace – Allegro*

**Maurizio Cazzati** 1616-78

La Moresca  
(from *L'Orfeo, Favola in Musica*, Mantova, 1607)

**Claudio Monteverdi** 1567-1643



*We are grateful to the Pavilion Hotel  
for supporting this concert*

The seventeenth century in Europe was marked by famine, plague and war, devastating large parts of Italy and the German-speaking regions. Yet this dark age became fertile ground for a musical style of bold creativity and innovation: the *Stylus Phantasticus*. Marked by the bizarre, improvisatory, and unexpected, this style reflects the tension between celestial serenity and infernal chaos – visions of heaven and hell.

The Venetian violinist and wind instrumentalist **Dario Castello** explored this new style in his two sonata collections *Sonate concertate in stile moderno*. Typical of early seventeenth-century sonatas, his music alternates abruptly between slow and fast, lyrical and virtuosic sections, creating a fantastical atmosphere. Ending on the fifth degree, the opening piece lures the listener into a dreamlike state.

Another representative of the *Stylus Phantasticus*, **Giovanni Antonio Pandolfi Mealli**, who was a violinist and composer at the court of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, is also infamous for murdering the castrato Marquett in a political quarrel. His fiery character resonates in *La Biancuccia*, which opens with the harsh rhetorical figure *passus duriusculus* – chromatically descending diminished fourths and ascending diminished thirds. The fast sections, filled with dissonant intervals that would have been forbidden in earlier styles, evoke a sense of agitation – and perhaps even devilish virtuosity.

We continue with a solo harpsichord piece that **Johann Jacob Froberger** wrote to commemorate the lutenist Monsieur Blancrocher, whose death he witnessed during their walk in Paris. *Tombeau* is a French improvisatory form of lament that usually ends with an ascending scale or arpeggio, symbolising the soul's ascent to heaven. On the contrary, Froberger's piece closes with a descending scale, suggesting a darker fate for Blancrocher, who died before a priest could administer the Last Rites.

A descending motive takes up a central role in **Heinrich Ignaz von Biber's** *Passacaglia*, where it forms a basso ostinato beneath a seemingly improvised line. This voice reflects, questions and searches – yet the bass remains unchanging. The piece, one of the earliest for solo violin, concludes Biber's *Rosary Sonatas*, each introduced by a copper engraving linked to the Christian Rosary and the Feast of the Guardian Angels. In Ensemble Bastion's arrangement, the solo part is reimagined for recorder and continuo, which alternate between soloistic and accompanimental roles, offering a new perspective on this inward musical meditation.

From divine contemplation to the inner turmoil of the human heart: what other earthly experience finds itself so strikingly caught between heaven and hell as love? **Palestrina** set to music a poem that captures this tension with beauty: 'I am wounded, alas! [...] What a cruel resolution it will be to return to her, for only she

may heal me – she who wounded me’. This piece also reveals another kind of contrast: that between old and new. In the seventeenth century, it became common practice for instrumentalists – newly stepping into the role of soloists – to improvise elaborate diminutions on well-known madrigals by Renaissance masters. Today’s version follows that tradition, in a setting by **Giovanni Battista Bovicelli**.

Another key figure in this practice was **Orazio Bassani**, known by the nickname ‘Oratio della viola’. Renowned in his time not primarily as a composer but as a virtuoso gambist, he was especially celebrated for his mastery of the *alla bastarda* style. Bassani worked mainly in Parma, where he ranked among the highest-paid musicians – alongside the famous organist Claudio Merulo.

From the torments of love and loss, we descend into the world of calculated cunning and theatrical flair. A lesser-known composer today, **Maurizio Cazzati** enjoyed considerable fame during his lifetime, serving as music director in Mantua, Bozzolo, Ferrara, Bergamo and Bologna. *La Macchiavella*’s title evokes Niccolò Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, in which he advises rulers to embrace evil when political necessity demands it. In Cazzati’s imagination, *La Macchiavella* resounds with bold gestures – wide leaps, repeated notes and striking syncopations.

The concert ends with *La Moresca*, a lively dance that also concludes the great *L’Orfeo, favola in musica* by **Claudio Monteverdi**. This early opera is based on the Greek legend of Orpheus and tells the story of his descent into the underworld in a fruitless attempt to rescue his beloved Eurydice. In the final scene, a chorus of shepherds offers consolation: ‘He who sows in suffering shall reap the fruit of every grace’. And so, the boundary between heaven and hell blurs one last time – through music that dances on the edge of joy and despair, of loss and transcendence.

© Maruša Brezavšček

## Ensemble Bastion

Maruša Brezavšček *recorder*

Martin Jantzen *viol*

Mélanie Flores *harpsichord*

Elias Conrad *theorbo*

Ensemble Bastion is dedicated to bringing fresh, historically informed interpretations of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century music to modern audiences. Known for ‘delivering authentic sound marked by original, vibrant, and compelling performance’ (Glasna, 2024), the ensemble seeks to capture the essence of these musical eras through thoughtful programming and expressive interpretation.

Their name symbolizes their mission to preserve and explore early music while paying homage to the celebrated composer and musical theorist Sebastian Virdung. His 1511 treatise, *Musica getutscht*, holds a symbolic significance for the ensemble, as it was published in Basel – the city that now serves as their artistic home. The treatise features the same types of instruments played in the ensemble: recorder, viola da gamba, lute and keyboard instruments.

Having met during their studies at the renowned institute for early music, Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, musicians Maruša Brezavšček, Martin Jantzen, Elias Conrad, and Mélanie Flores, are active performers on international stages and recipients of prestigious accolades. In July 2024, Ensemble Bastion was honoured with the EUBO (European Union Baroque Orchestra) Trust Prize at the York Early Music International Young Artists Competition. The ensemble is led artistically by Maruša Brezavšček, first-prize winner of international recorder competitions and professor at the Academy of Music in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Ensemble Bastion's performances have been enthusiastically received at festivals such as the Erasmus klingt! Festival Lab in Basel, Switzerland, the Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik in Austria; the Festival Seviqč in Celje, the Chamber Music Cycle in Maribor, Baroque Rendezvous in Ljubljana, and the Šenčurski glasbeni dnevi in Šenčur, Slovenia.

*We are grateful to the John Feldberg Foundation for supporting events in the Festival that showcase the achievements of young musicians*



John Feldberg was a talented violinist and harpsichord builder who died aged 30 in 1960. He and his future wife Ann met at Cambridge, where she was a music student and keyboard player with passion for early music. In 1957 they set up a harpsichord building workshop. John died just as the workshop was beginning to take off; Ann continued the business with great success for another 22 years.

The John Feldberg Foundation aims to support some of the many charitable causes Ann and John Feldberg espoused, in particular:

- encouraging people to access music and the arts
- finding ways to live sustainably and protect and conserve the environment
- enabling people to bring about change through their activities in these spheres – even where the challenge seems impossible

The John Feldberg Foundation is a Charity registered in Hamburg: Charity No. 922.20-64 (2367) and recognised by the UK Charity Commission.

# YORK EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL

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York Early Music Festival is administered by the National Centre for Early Music through the York Early Music Foundation (charity number 1068331)

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