

Bach to Bethke 8 November 2020

Programme

J.S. Bach Violin Concerto in A Minor BWV 1041, 1st movement (Allegro) Matthew Holman (solo violin)

Johan Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750) was born in Eisenach into an extended family of composers and musicians. He composed this violin concerto in around 1729 – 30. This was a period after he had composed his 200 church cantatas in only 6 years as the Cantor of Leipzig's Lutheran churches. As the newly appointed director of the Collegium Musicum, he had more opportunity to compose secular works. These were often presented at Zimmerman's Kaffeehaus at weekly Friday night gatherings. Included in these evening presentations were works such as the well-known secular Coffee Cantata and the A minor violin concerto we are presenting tonight, where he was most likely the soloist.

The first movement of the concerto, *Allegro*, is presented in ritornello form, which means the main theme comes back in various fragments in both the solo violin and orchestral parts, weaving the melody between the parts.

G.F. Handel *Ombra mai fu*, from *Xerxes* Devon Florence (tenor)

Georg Frederick Handel (1685 – 1759) was a German born composer, who settled in England and spent most of his life in London. He was a great composer of the Baroque period, whose influence stretched into the Classical era. *Ombra mai fu*, often called *Largo from Xerxes*, is the opening aria from Handel's 1738 opera *Xerxes*. The opera was first performed in London and was at first a complete failure, due to its innovative nature of combining elements of *opera buffa* (comic opera) in an *opera seria* (serious style of opera). *Xerxes* is now one of Handel's most popular operas, and *Ombra mai fu* a well-known and popular aria.

The aria takes place in Act 1, where the King of Persia, Serse, is giving thanks to a plane tree for the shade it is providing him.

Frondi tenere e belle
del mio platano amato
per voi risplenda il fato.
Tuoni, lampi, e procelle
non v'oltraggino mai la cara pace,
né giunga a profanarvi austro rapace.

Ombra mai fu
di vegetabile,
cara ed amabile,
soave più.

Translation

Tender and beautiful fronds
of my beloved plane tree,
let Fate smile upon you.
May thunder, lightning, and storms
never disturb your dear peace,
nor may you by blowing winds be profaned.

Never was a shade
of any plant
dearer and more lovely,
or more sweet.

G.B. Pergolesi *Stizzoso, mio stizzoso*, from *La Serva Padrona* Tseghofatso Makube (soprano)

Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710 – 1736) was an Italian Baroque composer, violinist and organist. He composed both operas and sacred music. This aria comes from his opera *La serva padrona*, or The Maid turned Mistress. It is a short opera in two parts, featuring a shrewd maid, Serpina, and her aging master, Uberto. It was a great hit because of the relatable characters and indeed it became a model for the *opera buffa* genre and an important piece bridging the Baroque and Classical opera styles.

In the first act Serpina is acting like the mistress of the household and bossing Uberto, an elderly bachelor, around. He is upset with her because she did not bring him his chocolate and she forbids him from leaving the house, saying he will have to follow her orders from now on.

Stizzoso, mio stizzoso,
voi fate il borioso,
ma no, ma non vi può giovare,
ma no, ma non vi può giovare.
Bisogna al mio divieto:
Star cheto, cheto,
e non parlare.
Zitt! Zitt! Serpina vuol così,
Zitt! Zitt! Serpina vuol così

Translation

My vexatious master, vexatious,
you're a bully,
but no, you're not getting anywhere with it,
but no, you're not getting anywhere with it.
My interdiction is necessary:
Stay quiet, quiet,
and don't talk.
Hush! Hush! That's the way Serpina wants it,
Hush! Hush! That's the way Serpina wants it.

G.F. Handel *Comfort Ye - Every Valley* (recitative and aria), from *Messiah*, Yamkela Ntshakaza (tenor)

Messiah (HWV 56) is an oratorio in English composed by Handel in 1741. The work traces the story of Jesus, with the libretto written by Charles Jennens drawn from the bible. Part 1 of the oratorio corresponds with Christmas and the life of Christ; part 2 deals with Lent, Easter and the ascension; and part 3 deals with end of time.

The recitative *Comfort ye* and aria *Every valley* appear in part 1, and are a musical rendition of Isaiah 40. The mood of the recitative is preparing for the coming of the Messiah, to provide comfort for the suffering of people on earth.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

The music for the aria strides forward, with coloratura, virtuosic runs. The words speak of change and hope, a social revolution.

Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; the crooked straight, and the rough places plain.

T. Albinoni Sonata a Cinque Opus 2, no.2.

Tomaso Albinoni (1671 – 1751) was an Italian Baroque composer. Out of his substantial compositional output, he was best known as an opera composer in his day, whereas now he is remembered for his instrumental music and concertos. This is largely due to the fact that his operas were not published in his lifetime and have been lost, whereas nine collections of his instrumental music were published. The opus 2 collection of instrumental music was written around 1700.

The Sonata a Cinque we are presenting today is for 2 violins, violas, and cellos in four movements.

Largo – Allegro – Grave – Allegro

It is a beautiful, characteristically Baroque style work, with contrapuntal and interwoven call and response style melodies between the various instruments.

Interval

A *Chamber Eucharist* is a composition of a six-movement setting of the ordinary text for the Eucharist (commonly called the Mass) in seven languages: Afrikaans, English, Latin, San, SeSotho, SeTswana and IsiXhosa. The work was composed by Dr Andrew-John Bethke for the Makhanda (then Grahamstown) community in 2015 as a spiritual and musical response to the xenophobic violence which flared up the preceding months throughout South Africa.

Musically it juxtaposes different musical styles in such a way as to successfully show that different cultures can work together to create a fabric of unity and familyhood. It accomplishes this by allowing widely divergent languages and musical styles to coexist within the greater fabric of a unified whole. Spiritually it serves as a demonstration that, as our South African motto suggests, “diverse people [must] unite”- there is unity in diversity. This text, “!Ke e: /xarra //ke” in /Xam (San) Language, is the philosophical underpinning that inspired the nature of the work in response to xenophobia. It forms the backdrop upon which the climax movement – the Credo – was composed. The motto of a secular state thus unfolds within the Christian doctrine creating space for xenophobia to be mediated – a space for reflection and contemplation.

Dr Andrew John Bethke wrote this work for the Anglican Cathedral of St Michael and St George in Makhanda erstwhile Director of Music there. It forms part of Cathedral’s on-going transformation programme, where the Cathedral leadership team is attempting to create space within its worship patterns for a local multicultural voice to emerge. It stands as a beacon of hope and thanksgiving for the gift of diversity rather than a call to missionary endeavor of multicultural cohesion.

Dr Bethke is currently a lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in music theory and Choral Studies. Whilst in Grahamstown he served as the Conductor of the University Chamber choir as well as a lecturer in the Department of Music. He was also a lecturer at the College of Transfiguration. Dr Bethke is also a Rhodes Alumnus, having obtained his MMus - Composition in 2016.