

fantasticus

baroque chamber works

jenkins • pandolfi mealli • kertzinger • muffat •
buxtehude • stradella • schmelzer



Fantasticus

Rie Kimura *baroque violin*

Robert Smith *viola da gamba & baroque cello*

Guillermo Brachetta *harpsichord*

Alessandro Stradella (1639-1682)

1. **Sinfonia No. 22 in D minor** [7:51]

Dieterich Buxtehude (c. 1637-1707)

2. **Sonata a 2 in A minor**, BuxWV 272 [7:42]

Giovanni Antonio Pandolfi Mealli (c. 1629-c. 1679)

3. **Sonata 'La Castella'** [6:47]

Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (c. 1620/23-1680)

4. **Sonata a 2 in A minor** [6:00]

attr. Augustinus Kertzing (d. 1678)

5. **Sonatina in D minor** [4:50]

Antonio Bertali (1605-1669)

6. **Sonata in a 2 in D minor** [6:45]

Georg Muffat (1653-1704)

7. **Passacaglia in G minor**
(from *Apparatus musico-organisticus* (1690)) [7:45]

Dietrich Buxtehude

Sonata and Suite in B flat, BuxWV 273

8. Sonata [8:07]

9. Allemanda [2:18]

10. Courant [1:23]

11. Saraband [0:49]

12. Gigue [1:23]

John Jenkins (1592-1678)

13. **Fantasia in D minor** [4:50]

Total playing time [66:38]



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Stylus fantasticus

The seventeenth century saw a dramatic rise in the status of instrumental music. In earlier centuries, instruments were mainly used to double voices or play improvised dances. But from 1600 onwards, an instrumental repertory emerged independent of vocal and dance music. This new repertory increasingly featured idiomatic instrumental techniques, such as multiple-stopping for stringed instruments or rolled chords for keyboardists. For the first time in history, composers could gain a European reputation principally by writing instrumental music, as with Heinrich Biber (1644-1704), Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713), Johann Jakob Froberger (1616-1667) and many others.

The emerging repertory of idiomatic instrumental music posed a compositional challenge. How should such instrumental works be structured when they had no words? Should a composer follow dance rhythms or the logic of counterpoint? Or should the piece be a showcase for the virtuosity of an individual performer?

In 1650 an answer to this dilemma was provided by the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680). In his *Musurgia universale* he formulated the notion of the *stylus fantasticus* (also known as

stylus phantasticus): 'The fantastic style is suitable for instruments. It is the most free and unrestrained method of composing; it is bound to nothing, neither to words nor to a melodic subject; it was instituted to display genius and to teach the hidden design of harmony...' Kircher conceived the *stylus fantasticus* as primarily contrapuntal, but using freely invented themes rather than the *cantus firmus* (pre-existing melodies) often used in vocal counterpoint. As examples of the fantastic style, Kircher quoted excerpts from several pieces, including Froberger's Fantasia on the theme *Ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la* and a sinfonia for four lutes attributed to Lelio Colista (1629-1680).

By the eighteenth century, concepts of the *stylus fantasticus* had broadened. Writing in 1739, the Hamburg theorist Johann Mattheson (1681-1764) defined it as an improvised or improvisatory style: 'a singing or playing that comes of free genius or, as is said, *ex tempore*. [...] This style is the most free and unrestrained manner of composing, singing and playing that one can imagine, for one hits first upon this idea and then upon that one, since one is bound neither to words nor to melody, only to harmony, so that the singer or player can display his skill.' As examples, Mattheson quoted the rhapsodic openings of keyboard toccatas by Froberger and

Dieterich Buxtehude (c. 1637-1707); these unrestrained outpourings contrasted with the contrapuntal pieces cited by Kircher.

Mattheson also extended the notion of the *stylus fantasticus* to include improvisatory music for instrumental ensemble. He described how in 1666 in Hamburg, a sonata 'for two violins and viola da gamba by the young [Kaspar] Förster [c. 1616-1673] was played. Each player was given eight bars to let his free ideas be heard, in accordance with the *stylus fantasticus*.' Mattheson's description implies that each performer improvised over a repeated bass theme. An ostinato bass, reiterated hypnotically by the continuo, was the ideal foundation for virtuosic outpourings by players of melody instruments. Taking Kircher's and Mattheson's ideas together, it is evident that the *stylus fantasticus* was multifaceted, encompassing contrapuntal textures, unrestrained improvisation, and ostinato bass-lines.

A combination of strict counterpoint and improvisatory freedom is heard in the **Sinfonia a 2** by Antonio Stradella (1639-1682). Stradella worked in Rome until 1677, and later was active in Venice, Turin and Genoa. Although his output is dominated by operatic music, he also wrote sonatas and concerti grossi for strings. His sinfonia begins with

a free dialogue between the violin and violoncello, using rhapsodic improvisatory lines; a more imitative canzona follows, its distinctive theme full of repeated notes. Later a short contrapuntal duo is heard twice, interspersed by a brief gigue. In the second statement the parts are swapped around, demonstrating Stradella's command of invertible counterpoint.

A leading exponent of the *stylus fantasticus* was Dieterich Buxtehude, organist at the Marienkirche in Lübeck from 1668 until his death. Buxtehude's output includes many organ praeludia in improvisatory style, with virtuosic flourishes for the hands and feet. He also used improvisatory devices in his chamber music. Buxtehude's **Sonata a 2 in A minor, BuxWV 272** consists of two sections based on ostinatos, linked by a short chordal 'Adagio'. The first ostinato is a sixteen-beat theme that is repeated twenty-six times, while the violin and gamba wrap roudades, figuration and even a gigue around it. The second ostinato is built on a jagged theme in the bass; this allows dissonant upper parts, especially audible in the triple-stopped passages for the violin.

Buxtehude's **Sonata and Suite in B flat major, BuxWV 273** combines the mesmerising effect of the ostinato with the rhythms of the dance suite. The piece opens with a 113-bar section



based on a fourteen-beat striding ostinato in the bass; the violin and then the gamba have lengthy solos over this ostinato, reminiscent of Mattheson's description of individual players within an ensemble taking their turn to improvise. Later, an 'Allegro' section starts with contrapuntal exchange between the melody instruments, but even here Buxtehude includes short solos for the violin and a gamba over a repeated bass line. The piece concludes with four dance movements – an 'Allemanda', 'Courant', 'Sarraband' and 'Gigue', all linked by thematic likenesses. Buxtehude later revised this piece as his Sonata, op. 1 no. 4 (BuxWV 255), for which he removed the dance movements, possibly so the piece could be used in church.

The *stylus fantasticus* in ensemble music was cultivated with particular intensity at the imperial court of Vienna, as well as in the surrounding Austrian lands. The rich musical life of the Viennese court benefited from Italian expatriates such as Antonio Bertali (1605-1669), who worked there from 1624 until his death. His **Sonata a 2** begins with a cantabile violin melody, against which the viola da gamba interjects rapid flourishes. In later sections, both melody instruments cascade downward in falling figures; there are solos for the violin and then the gamba; and both instruments unite for a triple-time passage.

Another Italian expatriate in Austria was the violinist Giovanni Antonio Pandolfi Mealli (c. 1629-c. 1679). Little is known about his biography, apart from that he worked for Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in 1660. His **Sonata 'La Castella'** for violin and continuo is dominated by a central ostinato section. Over a theme of four descending notes, the violinist uses an array of arpeggiated and scalic figures, with lines that push upwards to the instrument's highest register. This ostinato section is framed by free sections for the violin that combine cantabile writing with frenzied figuration.

Inspired by these Italians in Austria were indigenous composers such as Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (c. 1620/23-1680). Possibly a pupil of Bertali, Schmelzer spent his entire career at the Viennese court, where he was ennobled in 1673 for his musical achievements. His **Sonata a 2 in A minor** is more contrapuntal and tightly organised than many of the other works on this recording; the violin and gamba either imitate a single theme closely, or one instrument plays a plain counter-subject against the running semiquavers in the other instrument.

Another feature of Austrian string music was a tendency for extreme virtuosity, as heard in the **Sonatina for viola da gamba** attributed to Augustinus Kertzing (d. 1678).





Kertzingen was a Benedictine monk who was Kapellmeister at the cathedral in Prague and the church of St Stephen's in Vienna. The Sonatina is a quicksilver composition built out of many short sections, including scalic flourishes, virtuosic displays of multiple stopping, and snatches of two giges. Often a small rhythmic or melodic figure ricochets across the instrument's register from the highest to the lowest notes.

Pre-eminent among the next generation of Austrian instrumentalists was Georg Muffat (1653-1704), who worked at Salzburg, Prague and Passau, and also studied with Jean Baptiste Lully (1632-1687) in Paris and Bernardo Pasquini (1637-1710) in Rome. In his music, Muffat mingled Italian and French styles in a cosmopolitan fashion, as can be heard in his keyboard **Passacaglia** from *Apparatus musico-organisticus* (1690). The genre of the passacaglia arose in Mediterranean lands as a guitar improvisation over a repeated bass-line. Muffat transformed the passacaglia with the French technique of rondeau, bringing the opening theme back every sixth variation. In between these statements of the opening theme, Muffat offers variations on its basic harmonies. Across the whole piece, Muffat steadily increases the rhythmic intensity, moving through quavers, then semiquavers, arpeggiated figures, and finally demisemiquaver tirades.

Although the *stylus fantasticus* was cultivated with particular intensity in German-speaking lands, a version of the style was also found in England. During the late-sixteenth century, English composers such as William Byrd wrote contrapuntal keyboard fantasias; these pieces arguably inspired the contrapuntal notion of fantasia subsequently found on the Continent. John Jenkins (1592-1678) applied the English fantastic style to the viol consort that was favoured among amateur musicians of the early to mid-seventeenth century. His **Fantasia in D minor** for treble, bass viol and keyboard contains imitative sections with the long-breathed, irregular phrases typical of English viol music; there is also rapid figuration in dialogue between the violin and gamba, plus a pleasing turn to the major mode in the middle of the piece.

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Stephen Rose is a senior lecturer in music at Royal Holloway, University of London. His research focuses on German music 1500–1750 in its social, material and performing contexts. He directs Early Music Online, and is a regular contributor to the Oxford University Press journal Early Music. Among his many publications is The Musician in Literature in the Age of Bach (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Fantasticus



Inspired by the gloriously virtuosic music from the end of the 17th century, from which the name *Stylus fantasticus* came, the aim of the ensemble is to recreate repertoire from the early seicento until the late-Baroque searching and exploring the extravagance that flourished when composers and instrumentalists dared to traverse the established limits of the normal.

From the florid excesses of Biber, through the unrestrained harmonic richness of Rameau and the ravishing melodic imagination of Pandolfi Mealli, to the vividness and passion of the forerunners of romanticism as depicted by the generation after Bach, Fantasticus makes no compromises with regard to authentic performance, fearlessly trespassing on the borders of correctness.

Fantasticus is an ensemble based in the Netherlands. Made from three individuals with a wealth of experience on stage, its members are prize winners of important early music competitions (Bruges, Van Wassenauer, Premio Bonporti) and play with the most established Baroque orchestras, including the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra, De Nederlandse Bachvereniging and Bach Collegium Japan. The combination of violin, viola da gamba and harpsichord was very popular during the whole baroque period and this allows the group to bring consistently varied programmes to our audiences.

The three members, Rie Kimura, Robert Smith and Guillermo Brachetta (Japan, UK and Argentina) all came to the Netherlands to profit from the fertile early music scene. They spent time learning from the pioneers of the early music movement at the conservatoires of The Hague and Amsterdam before themselves becoming a part of the thriving Baroque music life in Holland. As individuals and as an ensemble, their music takes them all over the Netherlands and indeed all over the world.

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