



Conversed Monologue

Concerti by JG Graun, J-M Leclair, & WF Bach

Fantasticus XL

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Rie Kimura *Baroque violin*

Robert Smith *viola da gamba*

Guillermo Brachetta *harpsichord*

About Fantasticus:

'[...] Fantasticus have established themselves as a white-hot addition to the early music scene. Fantasticus by name, fantastic by nature!'

BBC Music Magazine

'They combine discrete, soloistic virtuosity with a keen mutual rapport, conversing sensitively and adding complementary embellishment'

The Strad

Johann Gottlieb Graun (1703-1771)

Concerto for Viola da Gamba in C major,

Graun WV A:XIII:2

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------|
| 1. Allegro di molto | [11:34] |
| 2. Arietta e poco andante con sordini | [7:12] |
| 3. Presto | [7:34] |

Jean-Marie Leclair (1697-1764)

Concerto for Violin in G minor, Op. 10, No. 6

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------|
| 4. Allegro ma poco | [8:07] |
| 5. Andante aria grazioso | [3:57] |
| 6. Allegro | [6:07] |

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710-1784)

Concerto for Harpsichord in F major, BR C13 / Falck 44

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------|
| 7. Allegro ma non troppo | [9:58] |
| 8. Molto adagio | [9:29] |
| 9. Presto | [6:04] |

Total playing time [70:08]



The concerto: an Italian export north of the Alps

If there is anything in the world to encourage a person's spirit, to make him ever more skilful at what he has learned, then it is surely the court. One seeks to gain the grace of great lords, the courtesy of nobles, and the love and deep respect of other servants, sparing no effort to reach one's goal, especially when one is still young enough to have the necessary fire for such undertakings.

Writing his autobiographical sketch for Mattheson's *Grosse General-Baß-Schule* (Hamburg, 1731), Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767) describes his early ambitions as a musician. In doing so he neatly encapsulates the pivotal role that the many individual courts made to German musical culture in the eighteenth century. It was perhaps the most significant, if unintended, consequence of the political fragmentation in Germany at the time: the high value placed on music by individual court rulers created a demand for skilled musicians, as well as a voracious appetite for new repertoire. Although other forms were cultivated, most notably the French-style suite, it was the Italian concerto, as pioneered by Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741), which proved most enduringly popular. The demand for concerto repertoire was met in part through printed music imported

from the Netherlands and elsewhere, but partly by the efforts of indigenous musicians. Often using scorings which were more adventurous than their Italian models, the huge number of concertos written by German musicians during the eighteenth century is astonishing, and even now many await rediscovery.

Guided by an enlightened, keenly musical patron, musicians could reach astonishing heights of artistry. Thus, German courts provided a stimulus for much of the development of the post-Vivaldian concerto, extending a link between the north Italian Baroque and the Classical Viennese forms. This was nowhere more so than in Brandenburg-Prussia under the flute-playing monarch Frederick the Great. His passion for music was matched only by the ruthlessness with which he pursued his political and military ambitions. Nor were the two, it seems, mutually incompatible. When on campaign it was not uncommon for him to receive musicians in his tent; 'the muses [...] lighten the efforts of Mars' as he wrote to his sister. But arguably his most significant contribution was to foster the talents of a carefully picked *Hofkapelle* whose roster now reads like a *Who's Who* of leading German musicians of the time: the brothers Graun, (Johann Gottlieb (1703-1771) and Carl Heinrich (1704-1759)) who were

respectively Konzertmeister and Kapellmeister, the brothers Benda (Franz (1709-1786) and Jiří Antonín (1722-1795)), the flautist Johann Joachim Quantz (1697-1773), and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788) are the most recognisable names now. But others equally well regarded in their day formed an integral part of Frederick's core ensemble.

Collecting musicians, acquiring them in a manner rather akin to the way in which top-flight football managers today compete for star players, was part and parcel of Frederick's style. Many of the leading musicians were initially admitted as visitors – 'on transfer', one might say – before being offered permanent positions. Such was the case with one of his earliest 'signings', Johann Gottlieb Graun. While still at the court in Merseburg, he had been a visiting musician to Berlin before accepting a permanent post in Berlin in 1732 while Frederick was still Crown Prince. He stayed in Berlin until his death nearly forty years later.

It was almost a matter of cultural prestige for Frederick who seems to have had a particularly high regard for Graun's playing, referring on more than one occasion to his exemplary bowing and expressive playing in the adagio. Indeed, Graun's was the standard by which Frederick judged all other violinists.

As Konzertmeister, he was responsible for the training of the orchestra and the provision of music for chamber and orchestral ensembles. It is not surprising, then, that the corpus of his instrumental music is correspondingly large and given the number of sources which attribute the music simply to 'Graun' there was – and still is – a considerable amount of confusion in attribution between him and his brother. In writing the present concerto for viola da gamba – one of ten that he composed for the instrument – he was both extending the traditional scoring by incorporating a solo instrument not commonly used in conjunction with an orchestra of violins, but also providing material to exhibit the skills of Christian Ludwig Hesse (1716-1772), Frederick's viola da gamba player. In style it is recognisably a product of the Berlin court: bustling violin writing in the opening ritornelli, contrast used for dramatic effect, all interspersed with lyrical passages for the viola da gamba exploiting the instrument's ability for double stops. In keeping with Frederick's taste, the central 'Arietta' achieves a lyrical and affecting simplicity, heightened by the use of muted strings.

The connection between German musicians, both court and municipal employees, was close. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Grauns were known to the Bach family

well before Johann Sebastian's visit to Potsdam in 1747 when he famously improvised on Frederick the Great's quirky theme, giving rise to the *Musical Offering* BWV 1079. In the late 1720s, Bach had engaged Johann Gottlieb Graun to teach the violin to his eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann (1710-1784). In fact, Friedemann's career neatly bridges the divide between the confines of aristocratic employment and freedom of a publicly-funded post. Although his first official appointment was as organist of the Sophienkirche in Dresden, details of his biography make it clear that he was a frequent performer in the salons of the nobility in the city. Certainly, he was on close terms with the leading musicians at the Dresden court. His contemporary reputation was based largely on his prodigious abilities as a keyboard player, and indeed he was widely regarded as the foremost player of his generation. Unlike his father and younger brother Emanuel, his corpus of surviving compositions is comparatively small, perhaps as a result of the somewhat chaotic nature of his lifestyle in later years, or possibly through living under the shadow of his father's achievement. More probably, since he was immensely able as an improviser he had less inclination to record his musical ideas in the form of completed compositions. Another factor

may be that his musical language can be highly esoteric, and his keyboard writing makes considerable demands on both player and listener. Certainly it is denser and more closely wrought than, say, that of Graun. Nevertheless, there is a certain inexorable logic to his music, despite its often capricious nature.

The harpsichord concerto in F major appears to have been written shortly before Friedemann left Dresden in 1746 for the post of *director musices* at the Liebfrauenkirche, Halle. As one might expect from such an able keyboardist, the solo part is full of virtuoso figuration, but interestingly he develops a trend that can be seen in his father's later harpsichord concertos. Here the left hand is increasingly liberated from the role of reproducing the bass line, often being treated as an independent part through entering into dialogue with the right hand.

Another benefit of courtly patronage of music in Germany was the opportunities given to star players to refine their skills through travel. Graun had travelled to Italy at his employer's expense to study with Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770) in Italy. From the Saxon court, Johann David Heinichen (1683-1729) had been a pupil of Francesco Gasparini (1661-1727) and Antonio Lotti



(1667-1740) in Venice, and Johann Adolph Hasse (1699-1783) had toured extensively to acquire new singers for Dresden. It was on one such journey to Turin that Frederick the Great's flute mentor Quantz encountered a young violinist, dance tutor and professional lace maker by the name of Jean-Marie Leclair. He was evidently something of a prodigy, but perhaps more significantly Leclair was one of those ardent French musicians of the early-eighteenth century who sought an amalgam between their native style and contemporary Italian taste – the *goûts réunis* as it was known. But whereas other musicians such as François Couperin (1668-1733) emulated Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713), Leclair's influence was more obviously Vivaldi. In his concertos, as in the G minor concerto from the Op. 10 set of 1745, he extends the Vivaldian model with frequent excursions into high positions, double stops and trills, and a bewildering array of bowing techniques. The most obvious nod to French taste comes in the slow movement. Here, Italianate embellishments are replaced by a melodic simplicity, the grace and elegance of which recall contemporary French viol playing.

If the enduring worth of an art form can be measured by the way in which it is later imitated and further developed, then the

Italian concerto as received north of the Alps in the early 1700s was certainly a success. In the hands of the very best German and French composers of the period, it proved to be an infinitely adaptable template, providing the vehicle for a synthesis of styles far beyond what its Italian originators might have conceived possible. In turn, the efforts of composers like Graun, Friedemann Bach and Leclair, became models for musicians of the later-eighteenth century. It is perhaps not too much of an exaggeration to say that the music recorded here represents an essential link in the wider history of the concerto form.

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Rie Kimura *Baroque violin*

Rie Kimura is a Baroque violinist from Japan. She won the 2010 Premio Bonporti Baroque Violin Competition in Italy where she was also awarded the public prize. Her solo violin playing has been praised for its 'strong personality imbued with expression and rhetoric' (*The Strad*), while her outstanding skills as a chamber musician mean that she is a violinist very much in demand.

Alongside Fantasticus Rie plays regularly with the likes of the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra, Bach Collegium Japan and De Nederlandse Bachvereniging. Her first solo recording, *Tartini & Veracini: Violin Sonatas* (Resonus RES10148) was released in June 2015 receiving a rare five-star review from Dutch national newspaper, *De Volkskrant*.

Rie studied Baroque violin with Lucy van Dael at the Amsterdam Conservatory where she graduated 'cum laude'.

www.riekimuraviolin.com

Robert Smith *viola da gamba*

Robert Smith is an English Baroque cellist and viola da gambist. In 2012 he won the Bach-Abel Viola da Gamba Competition in Köthen, taking the 1st Prize, Audience Prize and Special Prize. His performance of a heavy-metal song on the viol was especially noted.

Robert is a founding member of the ensemble Fantasticus and plays and records regularly with Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra amongst many others. In 2013 his playing was described by *The Strad* as, 'Intensely expressive, highly dramatic.' In 2014 Robert released his first solo recording of music for viola da gamba, *Tickle the Minikin: 17th century lyra-viol music* (Resonus RES10132). The recording received many enthusiastic reviews and was *BBC Music Magazine's* 'Instrumental Choice'.

Robert studied in Amsterdam with Mieneke van der Velden and in Basel with Paolo Pandolfo.

www.baroquebass.com

Robert Smith (photography: Marco Borggreve)



Guillermo Brachetta *harpsichord*

Guillermo was born and grew up in Argentina and, albeit not a typical Argentinian, he still retains certain national characteristics including the love for cooking, the vehemency for debating and the passion for making music.

Guillermo settled in The Netherlands in 1995 in order to perfect his skills in at least one of those disciplines.

His celebrated debut solo recording, *Ciaconna* (Resonus RES10126), received great critical acclaim, and was followed by *Divine Noise* (Resonus RES10145) – a recording of Jean-Philippe Rameau's opera *Platée* in Guillermo's own arrangement for two harpsichords – together with Dutch harpsichordist and former teacher Menno van Delft.

Guillermo is very active as a researcher and music editor, working in close cooperation with Cambridge University Press and other international institutions, having prepared first editions of numerous works from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

www.brachetta.com

We would like to thank sincerely all the kind people who generously donated to our crowd funding campaign on Voordekunst.nl. Without their support, this recording simply would not have been possible.

*A great many thanks too for our colleagues who, with great musicianship, unending sympathy and tireless patience, turned *Fantasicus* into *Fantasticus XL*.*

We are especially grateful to Adam Binks and Resonus Classics for their trust and support in this exciting venture.

Rie, Robert and Guillermo

Guillermo Brachetta (photography: Marco Borggreve)



Fantasticus XL

Fantasticus stands for intense expression and an affinity with bold, extravagant music. Its core inspiration is drawn from the *stylus fantasticus* of the late-seventeenth century. This was 'a free and unrestrained method of composing' that lent itself to uncharted virtuosity in instrumental music. A unique inspiration and an ensemble 'in thrilling harmony with itself' is the secret of Fantasticus' rare communicative power.

Originally from Japan, the UK and Argentina, the members all came to Amsterdam to study early music. Fantasticus played their first concert in May 2010 in the Bethaniënklooster in Amsterdam. Following that they began a highly productive recording relationship with Resonus Classics.

Their first recording, *Baroque Chamber Works*, in 2012 received glowing reviews including a recommendation in *The Strad* magazine. Their second recording, *Sonnerie & Other Portraits* was released in 2013 to critical acclaim and was Editor's Choice in both *BBC Music* and *Gramophone* magazines. The BBC likened Fantasticus to 'the young Andrew Manze and his collaborators' and dubbed them 'a white-hot addition to the early music scene'.

Fantasticus' 2013 performance at Ton Koopman's *Itinéraire Baroque* was deemed the highlight of the festival by critics. The 2015/16 season saw them play concerts across The Netherlands, France and the UK including their Wigmore Hall debut in June 2015 and the Festival Oude Muziek Utrecht in September 2015 not to mention a plethora of CD releases and recordings including this first project with the expanded 'XL' orchestra.

Violin

Rie Kimura
Joseph Tan
Sara DeCorso (Leclair)

Viola

John Ma

'Cello

Robert Smith
Anton Baba (Graun)

Bass

Robert Franenberg

Theorbo

Jan Čížmář

Harpichord

Guillermo Brachetta

www.fantasticus.nl

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Bound to Nothing: The German Stylus Fantasticus
Fantasticus
RES10156

'I cannot wait to hear what they turn their hands to next – they make me smile.'
Early Music Review



Tartini & Veracini: Violin Sonatas
Rie Kimura (Baroque violin)
Fantasticus
RES10148

'This is an utterly enchanting recording from beginning to end [...] Rie Kimura draws the listener into her intimate sound world'
Early Music Review

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RESONUS LIMITED – UK

info@resonusclassics.com
www.resonusclassics.com

