

**TWO ORCHESTRAL SUITES
THREE ARIAS**

Helena Ek

Karlsson Barock

Göran Karlsson



Georg Philipp Telemann *Ouverture-Suite in C Major*, TWV 55:C6

1. Ouverture
2. Harlequinade
3. Espagniol
4. Bourée en trompette
5. Sommeille
6. Rondeau
7. Menuet
8. Gigue

Three Arias

9. Di, cor mio (Georg Friedrich Händel, from *Alcina*)
10. Gelido in ogni vena (Antonio Vivaldi, from *Farnace*)
11. Tornami a vagheggiar (Georg Friedrich Händel, from *Alcina*)

Johann Sebastian Bach *Orchestral Suite No. 1 in C Major*, BWV 1066

12. Ouverture
13. Courante
14. Gavotte
15. Forlane
16. Menuet
17. Bourée
18. Passepied

BACH'S *Four Orchestral Suites* have helped challenge, alter and reshape what we understand about the composer. Mostly because we don't often associate Bach, the sober Lutheran organist, with exuberant and joyful dance music. But also because we had the facts surrounding the pieces wrong for many years.

These days it is generally agreed that the works originated not during Bach's years in Cöthen, where he worked from 1717, but from the time of his final and most prestigious appointment as Cantor at St Thomas's School and Music Director in Leipzig – a post he took up in 1723.

That difference in chronology suggests orchestral music was a strand of work Bach had actively sought to foster and develop from that point onwards. This reinforces the notion that these are works of considerable maturity and sophistication that deserve their place alongside the great scores of Bach's last decades.

In Leipzig, Bach became the workaholic of common repute. He was responsible for the

music at Leipzig's churches and St Thomas's School but also took on the directorship of a concert society founded in the city by his senior, Georg Philipp Telemann.

Telemann's Collegium Musicum Leipzig consisted of a group of professional and amateur musicians who played together at Gottfried Zimmermann's coffeehouse. Bach took over the directorship of the society in 1729 and had it play works by Telemann, Porpora, Handel, Scarlatti, Locatelli and his own cousin Johann Bernhard, among countless others.

Bach probably wrote his own *Four Orchestral Suites* for the Collegium, even if some of the material was recycled from earlier sources. At the time, suites of movements in the popular French dance styles were widespread in Germany (thanks in no small part to Telemann). They often included an Overture in the French style followed by a string of dances – as do Bach's.

His works, though, were far more than pastiches. Bach began his suites with grand overtures that are overtly French in style but are

alive with detail and innovation. These overtures prove, for Harvard Bach scholar Christoph Wolff, 'among the most impressive and exciting of all Bach's orchestral works'. Bach then filled the dances that followed with advanced takes on the established 'gallant' and rustic styles, sharpening his sense of articulation and expression in the process.

Unlike Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos*, the four Suites were almost certainly *not* conceived as a set and are strikingly different. In No 1, which includes material from before Bach's time in Leipzig, the lucid but majestic overture gives way to a transparent fugue threading two oboes and a bassoon in conversation; a Courante; two Gavottes (Nicholas Kenyon believes the 'fanfaring' string exchanges are surrogates for the unavailable brass instruments); a Forlane in three time and two each of Minuets, Bourrées and Passepieds.

The careers of Bach and George Philipp Telemann intersected closely and Telemann was probably godfather to Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel. Telemann, four years Bach's senior, stood slightly apart from mainstream European trends but still managed to become the most commercially successful composer of the first

half of the 18th century. He was far more interested in earthy folk songs and the 'true barbaric beauty' of indigenous central European music than he was in the instrumental pyrotechnics of Vivaldi or the deep spirituality of Bach.

The idea of the instrumental concerto fascinated Telemann. He started to write concertos while serving as Kapellmeister at the Eisenach Court, a job he took in 1705. There, Telemann began to fashion pieces in which virtuosity gave way to a more nuanced, sophisticated dialogue between instrumentalists. Telemann was arguably the perfect musician to pursue an alternative path like this: he played almost every instrument he wrote for to a high standard.

Telemann's *Orchestral Suites* – also known as 'Ouvvertures' like Bach's – were viewed as the pinnacle of the composer's synthesis of Italian and French styles into something quintessentially German. The composer's Overture-Suite in C major comes from his time in Frankfurt and therefore precedes Bach's own Leipzig suites by more than a decade, almost certainly serving as a model for them or at least a reference point.

And despite the title, the idea of the concerto lingers behind this piece. At the time Telemann was particularly taken with the oboe, perhaps

given his talented oboist colleague Johann Michael Böhm, a member of the court orchestra at Darmstadt. Böhm must have had good section colleagues too, for Telemann included parts for three sparring oboe soloists in his suite. After the grand 'ouverture' comes a clowning 'harlequinade'; a Spanish dance; a Bourrée in which, like Bach, Telemann imitates the sound of unavailable trumpets; a lethargic *Sommeile* and then the three regular dances forms of *Rondeau Minuet* (x 2) and *Gigue*.

Posterity's most cherished composers are usually those who deliver inspiringly unconventional music using ostensibly conventional means. Georg Friedrich Handel was one such composer and the opera *Alcina* is a supreme example of his ability to write a horizon-broadening masterpiece while operating within the aesthetic confines of a prescribed stylistic model: Italian opera seria.

Alcina, first seen in 1735, was one of Handel's biggest successes. It was an opera with something for everybody: spectacle, sensuality, star singers and a clear moral message on the corrosive nature of superstition and desire. Underpinning its apparently conventional recitatives and arias was Handel's idiosyncratic exploration of

compassionate, empathetic truths about human nature.

The larghetto aria 'Di, cor mio' is sung towards the start of the opera by its title character – a temptress of extraordinary intensity who transforms from hypnotic despot to emotionally vulnerable, isolated woman. Here she bids her lover welcome visitors to her enchanted island through the prism of the sites where she fell in love with previous conquests, in music untroubled but deeply alluring in its tenderness.

The aria 'Tornami a vagheggiar', also from *Alcina*'s first act, was originally assigned to the character of Morgana, Alcina's sister (though Handel later adapted it for Alcina herself to sing). Here Morgana professes her love for Ricciardo in music full of the guarded excitability of a new romance that traverses a broad range in its depiction of the heart journeying to new emotional territory. Handel knew his star singer Anna Strada would make the best of it.

Like Handel, Antonio Vivaldi lived during one of the first great periods of artistic preoccupation with fashion – a fate that both helped and hindered him. While the prospect of fame probably urged Vivaldi to step beyond his comfortable life as a teacher at the Pio Ospedale della

Pietà (a Venetian orphanage-conservatoires), the same shifts in taste eventually rendered him old-hat. Conversely, his Romantic flair for placing a higher, other-worldly value on his musical expressions proved way ahead of its time.

Vivaldi was no stranger to orchestral music, which he transformed beyond recognition (significantly influencing both Bach and Telemann). But it's his operas, less well known today but numerous and striking nonetheless, that helped make Vivaldi famous in his day. In the 1730s, the composer was at the peak of his expressive abilities as an opera composer.

The powerful Larghetto aria 'Gelido in ogni vena', was originally designed for a baritone voice in a production of the opera *Farnace* in Pavia 1731, but its inclusion in a compilation of Vivaldi arias that circulated in Dresden quickly led to its commandeering by other voice types. It is a disquieting aria, full of mournful dissonances and Vivaldi's trademark shifts in texture and key, recounts the psychological torture of a father who realises, to his horror, that he has killed his son.

Andrew Mellor



Karlsson Barock

In 2009, following classes in early music held in Italy, some of his students asked Göran Karlsson if he would consider starting up a string ensemble. This hailed the beginning of **Karlsson Barock**. Right from the start, expectations were running high for audience members and musicians alike with a shared passion for 17th and 18th century music.

Karlsson was firmly established as a recorder player and harpsichordist in the European early music community, and today Karlsson Barock is one of the foremost ensembles for this music in Sweden. Their first album, *Characters* (Footprint Records, 2014), was enthusiastically embraced by reviewers around the world. In this most recent production, we are treated to a collaboration where the prominent Swedish ensemble Drottningholms Barockensemble adds woodwinds to the orchestral suites.

In addition, projects that focus on encounters between baroque music and other artistic expressions take the orchestra and their audience to new concert venues ranging from churches and art halls to studios and forges. And Karlsson Barock's playful and inspirational

interpretations of famous and lesser-known works have earned them a devoted fan base.

Another side of Karlsson Barock is how they dedicate time and effort to educational projects where aspiring musicians can find out what it's like to play early music on period instruments. And at the creative hub **Kompani 415**, young musicians get the opportunity to try their hand at early music ensemble work.

Per Sjösten





Göran Karlsson

One of Scandinavia's leading early music harpsichordists and conductors, Göran Karlsson has an impeccable sense of style and form, along with a flair for colorful interpretations and bold contrasts, that has made the world of music sit up and pay attention. He lives by the credo: "Always inspire and engage." Göran Karlsson has performed in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Poland, Germany, Italy, and France, both as a musician and as a conductor. Much in demand, Karlsson's work with Ensemble 1700 and his flagship project Karlsson Barock has garnered a great deal of attention both at home and abroad. His recording of Roman's *Drottningholm musiken* has been showered with praise in reviews around the world. The album *Characters* was ranked as the number one Baroque album in 2014 by the Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter. And to quote the prestigious publication Gramophone: "Karlsson has some ear-catching ideas of his own too: an unusually placed accent here or a skillfully handled transition there (such as the bold opening of Corelli's *Christmas Concerto* or the simple but satisfying solution to the often jarring chord progression

at the end fugue in Vivaldi's RV565 - tr 32, at 2 '34") ensure that his own character has a place alongside those of the composers in the overall success of this disc. Nice to meet you, sir!"

In addition to performing, Karlsson has also held teaching positions at establishments such as the Academy of Music and Drama at the University of Gothenburg, the Piteå School of Music, and the Royal Danish Conservatory of Music.



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Helena Ek

Helena Ek is a Swedish soprano with an impressively extensive repertoire that spans from early music to contemporary. Ms. Ek has teamed up with Göran Karlsson in a number of early music productions, and her collaborations with other prominent ensembles – such as Drottningholms Barockensemble; Rebaroque; Philippe Pierlot and his ensemble Ricercar Consort in Belgium; Arte dei Suonatori in Poland; Holland Baroque Society; and Norsk Barokkorkester

– have been highly acclaimed. Together with lutenist extraordinaire Jakob Lindberg, she has toured England, Japan, and Italy.

Helena Ek is also in demand as a soloist for contemporary music, such as Fredrik Sixten's *Ett svenskt juloratorium/A Swedish Christmas Oratorio*, released by Footprint Records. Ms. Ek was one of the soloists in Karin Rehnqvist's *Requiem Aeternam* performed by Svenska Kammarorkestern; premiering in Scotland with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and recorded by the BBC. Helena Ek is also featured on a number of recordings for Virgin Classics, Sony Classical, and Footprint Records.



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DI, COR MIO

Di, cor mio, quanto t'amai,
mostra il bosco, il fonte, il rio,
dove tacqui e sospirai,
pria di chiederti mercé.

Dove fisso ne' miei rai,
sospirando al sospir mio,
mi dicesti con un sguardo:
peno, ed ardo al par di te.

GELIDO IN OGNI VENA

Gelido in ogni vena
Scorrer mi sento il sangue.
L'ombra del figlio e sangue
M'ingombra di terror.

E per maggior mia pena
Vedo che fui crudele
A un'anima innocente
Al core del mio cor.

Tell them, dear heart, how much I loved you,
show them the grove, the spring, the brook
where I sighed in silence
before asking for your pity.

Where, gazing into my eyes,
your sighs answering mine,
you told me with a look:
I suffer, I burn as you do.

I feel my blood flow
like ice in every vein.
The shadow of my lifeless son
fills me with horror.

And to make my agony worse,
I see that I was cruel
to an innocent soul,
to my heart's beloved.

TORNAMI A VAGHEGGIAR

Tornami a vagheggiar,
te solo vuol amar
quest'anima fedel,
caro mio bene.

Già ti donai il mio cor;
fido sarà il mio amor;
mai ti sarò crudel,
cara mia speme.

Yearn for me again.
This faithful soul of mine
longs only for you,
my darling, my precious love.

I have already given you my heart
My love will be true
I will never be cruel,
My dearest hope.

Karlsson Barock

VIOLIN I Sara Uneback, Marie-Louise Marming, Julia Dagerfelt, Eva Lindal
VIOLIN II Robert Marberg, Pernilla Berg, Rebecka Karlsson, Gabriel Bania
VIOLA Elin Sydhagen, Elsbeth Bergh
CELLO Kristina Lindgård, Ingrid Andersson Kjellsdotter
DOUBLE BASS Yngve Malcus
OBOE I Ulf Bjurehed
OBOE II Kyoko Nakazawa
OBOE III *and* BASSOON Sven Aarflot
CEMBALO *and* CONDUCTOR Göran Karlsson

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