

*How Sweet the Torment:
Madrigals of Monteverdi & his Contemporaries*



In Stile Moderno

Agnes Coakley Cox, soprano
Nathaniel Cox, cornetto and theorbo
Simon Martyn-Ellis, theorbo and baroque guitar

Friday, January 19, 2018
Friends Meeting at Cambridge

Sunday, January 21, 2018
Brattleboro Music Center

Quel sguardo sdegnosetto	Claudio Monteverdi
O come sei gentile	Monteverdi
Tutte le viste homai	Bellerofonte Castaldi
Sinfonia a 2	Francesco Corbetta
Chaccone	
Non è di gentil core	Monteverdi
Aita, aita, ben mio	Castaldi
Lusinuolo Passeggio	Castaldi
Hor che la notte ombrosa	Castaldi
Si dolce è'l tormento	Monteverdi

Capriccio detto Svegliatoio	Castaldi
Ardo misera	Benedetto Ferrari
Canzona detta la Bernardinia	Girolamo Frescobaldi
Et è pur dunque vero	Monteverdi
Ricerca del primo tuono	Domenico Pellegrini
Così mi disprezzate	Frescobaldi
Voglio di vita uscir	Ferrari

For the continuity of the program, we ask you to please hold your applause until after each grouped pair or set of pieces.

“To love is to suffer. To avoid suffering one must not love. But then one suffers from not loving. Therefore, to love is to suffer; not to love is to suffer; to suffer is to suffer. To be happy is to love. To be happy, then, is to suffer, but suffering makes one unhappy. Therefore, to be happy one must love or love to suffer or suffer from too much happiness.”

- Woody Allen

The sentiment that Woody Allen humorously expressed in his 1975 film *Love and Death* is by no means a new one. Poets have always written about the pains of love, and the joy that lovers paradoxically take from their pains. This was a favorite theme for the Italian poets of the late Renaissance, and the desire to faithfully and dramatically set these emotions of love and pain to music propelled the innovation of a completely new way of composing music. Gone were the confusing church modes and intricate counterpoint of Renaissance polyphony, with multiple voices competing for the attention of the listener. In its place was now a single melody, supported by a bass line and chordal harmony. This single melody was now free to express the meaning and emotion of the text with speech-like rhythms, sudden and dramatic shifts of harmony, and even occasional violations of the rules of counterpoint! It is easy for us today to forget the novelty of this style of music: melody, bass line, and chords. Turn on the radio, and every pop song follows this structure. At the beginning of the seventeenth century however, this was new. This was innovation. This was modern.

Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643) was perhaps the most important figure in the development of this new style of music, which came to be known as the *stile moderno*. He spent many years at the court of Mantua before becoming the *maestro di capella* at the

basilica of San Marco in Venice. He is famous for his operas and large-scale works such as his *Vespro della Beata Vergine* of 1610, but it is his smaller pieces for one and two voices that his genius at setting words to music becomes apparent. Our program draws from his seventh book of madrigals (1619) and his *Scherzi Musicale* (1632).

Bellerofonte Castaldi (1581–1649) is one of the more colorful characters of the seventeenth century. His father Francesco got so annoyed with receiving the mail of the other two people in Modena named Francesco Castaldi that he resolved that his children should not suffer the same fate and gave them all ridiculous names. His brothers Sesostro and Oromedonte might rightly argue that Bellerofonte was the lucky one! Castaldi was a virtuosic theorbo player, as well as a poet and composer. His status as gentleman prevented him from stooping so low as to take an appointment as a court musician, so he spent his time dueling and visiting brothels. In one famous incident, Bellerofonte and Sesostro assassinated Count Alfonso Pepoli of Bologna, who they believed to be responsible for the death of their brother Oromedonte.

Francesco Corbetta (1615–1681) was the great guitar virtuoso of his age. His early patrons included Count Odoardo Pepoli (son of the Count that Castaldi and his brother murdered) and Carlo II, Duke of Mantua. His tours around Europe gained him international celebrity. He was employed at the court of Louis XIV in Paris, where he befriended the exiled English King Charles II. After the restoration of Charles in 1660, Corbetta spent the rest of his career traveling between London and Paris. His spectacular playing even impressed the diarist Samuel Pepys, who had a notoriously low opinion of the guitar (“at the best methinks it is but a bawble”), though he was still

“mightily troubled that all that pains should have been taken upon so bad an instrument.”

Benedetto Ferrari (1603–1681) was, like Castaldi, a poet, composer and theorbo player. He very likely knew Castaldi, as he also lived in Modena in the 1620s and 30s. Ferrari collaborated with another composer/theorbo player, Francesco Manelli, to bring the first commercial opera to Venice. Ferrari’s libretti survive, but Manelli’s music for these operas is lost. The words and music for the beautiful love duet “Pur ti miro” from Monteverdi’s opera *L’incornazione di Poppea* were almost certainly written by Ferrari, ironically making his most-heard piece by audiences today one that he almost never credited for! Although all of his music for the Venetian opera stage is lost (except for “Pur ti miro”), his extended recitative “Ardo misera” gives a taste of his dramatic musical style.

Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583–1643) was by all accounts the finest harpsichordist in all of Italy. His toccate and partite for harpsichord solo are some of the most virtuosic and innovative pieces of the early seventeenth century. He was also a well-respected composer of vocal and instrumental music. His “Canzona detta la Bernardina” shows the influence of the new *stile moderno* on the traditional instrumental genre of the canzona. Imitative fugal sections are interspersed with recitative-like adagios and echo effects.

Very little is known about the life of **Domenico Pellegrini** (d. 1682). He was a guitar player and composer active in Bologna, and a member of the Accademia dei Filomusi and the Concerto Palatino. His *Armoniosi concerti* of 1650 contains numerous pieces for guitar combining the *battute* (strummed) and *pizzicato* (plucked) styles. Like many other guitarists of his time, he dedicates a significant portion of

his work to a *passacaglia* that modulates through all 24 major and minor keys before returning to the original tonality. That would be a concert in itself, so we have limited ourselves to the elegant *Ricercata* that opens his work.

The **cornetto** was considered to be one of the most beautiful instruments of the late Renaissance and early Baroque. It was prized above all other instruments for its ability to imitate the sound of the human voice. The combination of cornetti and voices was most commonly heard in the church (the French music theorist Marin Mersenne described the sound of the cornetto as like “the brilliance of a shaft of sunlight appearing in the shadow or in darkness, when one hears in among the voices in cathedrals or in chapels”), but we have decided to bring the sound of the cornetto into the more intimate space of the secular madrigal. While there is no direct evidence of this being a common practice, it vividly demonstrates the degree to which the cornetto is capable of matching and blending with the voice.

The **theorbo**, or *chitarrone* as it was commonly known, was invented in the last decades of the sixteenth century specifically to accompany music in the new *stile moderno*. The first *chitarrone* were simply large bass lutes that were tuned up to normal lute pitch. The top two strings couldn’t withstand the tension of this high pitch, so were replaced with strings an octave lower, giving the theorbo its unusual and distinctive “re-entrant” tuning. These large lutes lost their lowest notes from the high tuning, so extra bass strings were added to extend the bass register of the instrument by an octave. The theorbo was the preferred instrument for accompanying vocal music in the seventeenth century because of its full sound, variety of arpeggiations

and dynamic range (keyboard instruments that could play loud and soft were virtually unknown until the end of the eighteenth century).

The **guitar** arrived in Italy from Spain around the turn of the seventeenth century and immediately took the country by storm. It was popular then for exactly the same reason it is popular now: nearly anyone could pick it up and strum a few chords. Most guitar music was written in a notation system called *alfabeto*, in which each letter of the alphabet represented a different chord shape. Amateur musicians could memorize these shapes and play along without needing to learn to read music. In the hands of virtuosi such as Corbetta and Pellegrini, the guitar was capable of much more nuanced and sophisticated music. The mixed style of *battute* and *pizzicato* that they used for their solo music probably reflects the style of accompaniment the best guitar players would have used better than the simple *alfabeto* letters.

In Stile Moderno was founded in Basel, Switzerland in 2012 by Agnes Coakley and Nathaniel Cox. Named after the "modern style" of music which emerged in Italy around 1600, the ensemble is dedicated to music of the seventeenth century, and combines fidelity to historical performance practice with a drive to make early music accessible and relevant to modern audiences.

British-American soprano **Agnes Coakley Cox** is a soloist, ensemble musician, choral conductor, and teacher specializing in early music. Agnes studied voice at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Basel, Switzerland, where her teacher and mentor was Evelyn Tubb. Now living in the Boston area, Agnes is a member of the Choir of the Church of the Advent, and also appears this season with The Thirteen, the Schola Cantorum of Boston, Les Canards Chantants, Seven Times Salt, Long & Away, and Les Enfants d'Orphee. As a singer, Agnes is

passionate about engaging deeply with the text and making the performance a moment of connection between musician and audience.

Cornettist and lutenist **Nathaniel Cox** studied cornetto with Bruce Dickey at the Schola Cantorum in Basel, Switzerland, earning a master's degree in 2014. He started playing theorbo in 2011, and after six months had his first performance playing Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* with the Kammeroper Schloss Rheinsberg. Since moving back to the United States in 2014 he has performed with some of North America's leading early music ensembles, including Apollo's Fire, The Toronto Consort, Bach Collegium San Diego, and the Dark Horse Consort.

Simon Martyn-Ellis began playing the lute after finding the classical guitar repertoire too restrictive for ensemble performance. After travelling to Europe from his homeland Australia for postgraduate studies, Simon stayed in Germany for over 10 years to continue to work in the Historical Performance arena, appearing regularly with leading orchestras, theatres and chamber groups throughout Europe. In the US, Simon is a founding member of ACRONYM and Duo Corbetta, has appeared with H&H, Apollo's Fire, Les Delices, Bach Collegium San Diego, Opera Theatre of St Louis, Opera Columbus, and at the Oregon Bach Festival. His particular interests are in vocal collaborations, either in opera or intimate recitals, baroque guitar repertoire, and finding the groove in Early Music. But really, he just has a great time making music with people.

Please visit us online at www.instilemoderno.com or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/InStileModerno.

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