



# The English Concert

Sunday 25 May, 7.30pm

## The English Concert

**Fabio Biondi** *Director/Violin*

**A Vivaldi** Concerto in F for strings  
**A Vivaldi** Concerto in G minor for violin  
**A Vivaldi** Concerto in A major for violin & 3 echo violins

interval (20 minutes)

**G B Sammartini** Sinfonia in F  
**P Nardini** Concerto in A major for violin  
**A Brioschi** Sinfonia in D



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# PROGRAMME NOTES



The solo concerto and the symphony were two of the great musical innovations of the eighteenth century, and both originated in Italy. The solo concerto emerged in the years around 1700 at the hands of northern Italian masters such as Torelli, Albinoni and Valentini, but it was with Vivaldi that it reached its first peak; indeed Vivaldi's concertos, with their almost invariable three-movement format, strong ritornello structure in which solos were separated by returning orchestral statements (or *ritornelli*), and firm emphasis on instrumental virtuosity, were to be a major influence on concerto design throughout Europe until well into the twentieth century. The symphony originated in the operatic *sinfonia* or overture as created by early-century composers of the likes of Alessandro Scarlatti, Leonardo Leo and Leonardo Vinci, but escaped from the orchestra pit in the works of early Italian symphonists such as Sammartini and Brioschi before transferring its developmental centre of gravity to Austria, where it would eventually take giant steps with the help of Haydn and Mozart. Tonight's concert reflects aspects of both genres as practised in Italy during this period, putting rarely heard works by Sammartini, Nardini and Brioschi alongside lesser-known concertos by that most familiar figure, Antonio Vivaldi.

## Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

### Concerto in F major for strings, RV141

- 1 **Allegro molto**
- 2 **Andante molto**
- 3 **Allegro molto**

Although at over 200 works the violin concertos represent by far the largest single part of his enormous output, Vivaldi also composed around 60 concertos for string orchestra without soloist. Their *raison d'être* is not known, though it is clear from the fact that in a number of cases the term 'concerto' was interchangeable with that of 'sinfonia', that some functioned as opera overtures. Others, however, must surely have been intended for the all-female orchestra of the Ospedale della Pieta, the Venetian charitable orphanage where Vivaldi served off and on for nearly forty years, first as a violin teacher and later as *maestro de' concerti*. If so, these gem-like miniatures would have been an opportunity for his young players to put their collective virtuosity, uniformity of ensemble and musicianship at centre-stage in a way that would not have been possible when a soloist was involved. Perhaps indeed it was these that constituted their bread-and-butter repertoire – maybe even their ensemble training material – and therefore represent the true heartbeat of the Pieta's orchestral life. The F major Concerto, RV141, though a typical example in many ways – not least its aphoristic brevity – shows a slight leaning towards the *sinfonia* style in its bustling first movement, urbane and tuneful central movement and excitable finale.



## Antonio Vivaldi

### Concerto in G minor for violin, RV319

- 1 Allegro
- 2 [Lento]
- 3 Allegro

For Vivaldi's solo concertos, one of the greatest areas of influence outside Italy was in northern and central Germany. The publication of his Op. 3 concertos (entitled *L'estro armonico*) in Amsterdam in 1711 made a huge impression, with Bach for one falling under their spell, transcribing several for solo harpsichord or organ and adopting them as a model for his own concertos. Within a few years Vivaldi became a figure to seek out for musicians visiting Venice, and when the violinist and composer Johann Georg Pisendel (1687-1755) arrived there in 1716 as a member of the entourage of Friedrich August, the future Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, he entered into a brief period of study with the great man. When he returned to the Elector's court at Dresden the following year he took a considerable number of Vivaldi scores with him, and later, as leader of the orchestra at what was one of Europe's most prestigious musical establishments, continued to keep an important place for Vivaldi's music in the Dresden repertory, becoming an important figure in its wider dissemination.

The Violin Concerto RV319 is one of six from a manuscript belonging to the Dresden court, all of which are described as having been written for 'Monsieur Pisendel'. Unusually for Vivaldi it features a fugal-style orchestral ritornello in which the theme

(repeated notes at first, then becoming more angular) enters successively in the first violins, second violins, violas and finally cellos and basses. The restrained central slow movement has the solo violin shadowing the orchestral firsts (though perhaps offering its own embellishments), while the finale sets a greater technical challenge with a selection of double-stoppings and high notes.

## Antonio Vivaldi

### Concerto in A major for violin & 3 echo violins, RV552

- 1 Allegro
- 2 Larghetto
- 3 Allegro

In December 1739 Friedrich Christian, Pisendel's employer's royal son, arrived on his own visit to Venice, and on 21 March 1740, after much sightseeing, he appeared at the Pietà for a concert in his honour. The 61-year-old Vivaldi was there of course, having supplied four new concertos for the occasion which are duly preserved for posterity in an elegant presentation copy in the Dresden library. They are possibly his last works; he died on a visit to Vienna the following year.

The exact performing conditions of the Pietà chapel are not known to us today, as it was extensively rebuilt shortly after Vivaldi's death (it is now the church of Santa Maria della Pietà), but to judge from the number of pieces which Vivaldi wrote for double choir and double orchestra it must have been conducive



to spatial effects. If so, it is not surprising that Vivaldi would have wanted to show them off to the royal visitor, and so he does in the A Major Concerto, RV552, which features a dialogue between three orchestral groupings: the full band, used sparingly at important structural moments and not at all in the slow movement; the soloist and a reduced accompanying team of upper strings; and a similarly constituted 'echo' band playing somewhere offstage (it is not hard to imagine them playing from behind the Pietà's famous concealing grilles, thereby adding an alluring mystery to their contribution). The music itself is set out on a leisurely scale, with the echoes alternating in relaxed and straightforward fashion in the outer movements, and becoming more intimately interwoven in the sultry central *Larghetto*.

## Interval (20 minutes)

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## Giovanni Battista Sammartini (c1700-1775)

### Sinfonia in F major

1 **Presto**

2 **Andante**

3 **Allegro assai**

Giovanni Battista Sammartini was a leading church composer in Milan from the 1720s onwards, but it is his nearly 70 symphonies that cause him to be remembered today, and indeed which helped spread his fame beyond Italy during his own lifetime. We know, for instance, that Vivaldi directed a performance of a Sammartini symphony in Amsterdam in 1738, that another was heard at the Concert Spirituel series in Paris in 1751, that manuscript copies of two symphonies were held in the library of Haydn's employer Prince Esterházy, and that many of them were published in Europe's two great music-printing capitals, London and Paris. He even gets a mention in Laurence Sterne's quirky novel of 1768, *A Sentimental Journey*.

In fact Sammartini was the first important composer of symphonies, and a vital driving force in the move from the musical forms of the Baroque era to those of the Classical period, in particular its defining structural concept: sonata form. The *Sinfonia in F major* is from the early part of his career, and like many of its companions shows both the influence of the operatic overture in the bustling energy and emphatic chords of first movement, and of the Vivaldian concerto in the atmospheric D minor *Andante* which carries the work's main emotional weight. The short finale enjoys some Scarlatti-style byplay.



## **Pietro Nardini (1722-1793)**

### **Concerto in A major for violin, Op.1 No.1**

1 Allegro

2 Adagio

3 Allegro assai

Pietro Nardini was born in Livorno and studied in his teens in Padua with Giuseppe Tartini, one of the great composers and performers on the Italian eighteenth-century violin scene. After travels in Austria and Germany in his forties and a period spent back in Padua nursing his dying former teacher, he eventually settled in Florence in 1770 as music director of the ducal court, where he remained until his own death 23 years later. His playing was widely admired, above all for its sweet tone and expressiveness; ‘one has seen ice-cold aristocrats cry when he performed an Adagio’ wrote the theorist Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, going on to say that ‘unlike Tartini, he did not tear out the notes by the roots but merely kissed their tips’.

The impression this gives of a musician of polite elegance and dignity is supported by Nardini’s violin concertos, which, like Mozart’s youthful examples composed just a few years later, seem to prize lyrical attractiveness over overt virtuoso display. Indeed, though their formal and (to a lesser extent) stylistic ancestries unsurprisingly lie with Vivaldi, in character they are leisurely products of the Italian early Classical style with which Mozart would have become well acquainted on his childhood and teenage travels to Italy (where he even met Nardini in 1770). Tonight’s A major Concerto comes from Nardini’s set of six, Op. 1, his only published collection, issued in Amsterdam around 1765.

## **Antonio Brioschi (fl1730-1750)**

### **Sinfonia in D major**

1 Allegro

2 Andante piano

3 Presto

Virtually nothing is known of the life of Antonio Brioschi, but since his symphonies were often published alongside others by Sammartini and are generally of the same early Italian type, it seems likely that he lived and worked in or near Milan. Like Sammartini he was both popular and prolific; there are around 90 symphonies surviving in manuscript, while others were published in London and Paris.

The Sinfonia in D major comes from a manuscript held in the Town Library in Casale Monferrato, and is a lively and detailed work, full of wide leaps and syncopations, and displaying one of Brioschi’s particular characteristics – a busy line for the second violin, often crossing over that of the first.

**Programme notes © Lindsay Kemp 2008**

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# The English Concert



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Fabio Biondi

## **Violin 1**

Miles Golding  
Graham Cracknell  
Thérèse Timoney

## **Violin 2**

Walter Reiter  
Iona Davies  
Elizabeth MacCarthy  
Luella Alatiit

## **Viola**

Alfonso Leal del Ojo  
Louise Hogan

## **Cello**

Joseph Crouch  
Timothy Kraemer

## **Double bass**

Peter McCarthy

## **Harpsichord**

David Gordon

Harpsichord provision by Claire Hammett

# FABIO BIONDI



Fabio Biondi

Born in Palermo, violinist Fabio Biondi began his international career at the age of twelve, performing his first solo concert with the RAI Symphony Orchestra. Still in his youth, he was introduced to the new approach to Baroque music, which led to an expansion of his musical vision

and a change in the direction of his career.

At the age of sixteen, he was invited by the Musikverein of Vienna to perform Bach's violin concertos. Since then Fabio Biondi has performed with Baroque ensembles including Cappella Real, Musica Antiqua Wien, Seminario Musicale, La Chapelle Royale and Les Musiciens du Louvre.

In 1990 he founded Europa Galante, which has become the most internationally renowned Italian Baroque ensemble. Fabio Biondi and his ensemble have been invited to play at the most important world festivals and concert halls, from La Scala in Milan to the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome, the Suntory Hall in Tokyo, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Royal Albert Hall in London, the Musikverein in Vienna, the Lincoln Center in New York and the Sydney Opera House.

Their first recording (Vivaldi's concertos) was awarded the 'Premio Cini' of Venice and the 'Choc dé la Musique', and was soon followed by a number of other awards including five Golden

Diapasons, Golden Diapason of the Year in France, RTL Prize, 'Record of the Year' nominations in many countries, and the 'Prix du Disque, 'ffff' of Telerama review. In 2006 their recording of Vivaldi's opera *Bajazet* was nominated for a Grammy Award.

Fabio Biondi's repertoire takes in three centuries of music: from Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, Corelli's Concerti Grossi, the oratorios, serenatas and operas of Alessandro Scarlatti, Handel's operas, and 18<sup>th</sup>-century Italian violin repertoire (Veracini, Locatelli, Tartini etc.) to sonatas by Bach, Schubert and Schumann.

He has collaborated as soloist and conductor with many orchestras, including Santa Cecilia in Rome, Rotterdam Chamber Orchestra, European Baroque Orchestra, Zurich Chamber Orchestra, the Chamber Orchestra of Norway, the Orchestre Nationale de Montpellier, and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. Since March 2005 he has been artistic director for Baroque music at the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra.

Fabio Biondi also performs in duo with piano, harpsichord and fortepiano at many venues including Cité de la Musique in Paris, Hogi Hall in Tokyo, Auditorium Nacional in Madrid and Wigmore Hall in London.

Fabio Biondi plays a 1766 Carlo Ferdinando Gagliano violin, owned by his teacher Maestro Salvatore Cicero and kindly lent to him by the Salvatore Cicero Foundation in Palermo.

This is Fabio Biondi's debut with The English Concert.

# The English Concert



**The English Concert is among the finest chamber orchestras in the world, with an outstanding reputation for inspiring performances of Baroque and Classical music in the concert hall and on CD.**

In addition to extensive touring, it presents a prestigious series of concerts in London each season, at Wigmore Hall, the South Bank Centre and Cadogan Hall, appearing also at London festivals, notably the BBC Proms, the Spitalfields Festival and the Lufthansa Festival of Baroque Music. In the UK it visits the major summer festivals and has developed a particularly close relationship with St George's Bristol.

Internationally The English Concert performs on four continents. Since 2005 it has toured the United States, Australia, Korea and Malaysia, in addition to many European countries, and since its foundation by Trevor Pinnock in 1973 has appeared on the world's most famous stages, including the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, the Musikverein Vienna, the Théâtre des Champs Elysées in Paris, the Philharmonie Berlin, the Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center New York, and the Grosse Festspielhaus Salzburg.

Among the most recorded of chamber orchestras, it has made more than 100 recordings for Deutsche Grammophon Archiv Produktion, including many award winners, and a series of critically acclaimed CDs for Harmonia Mundi USA with violinist Andrew Manze, who succeeded Trevor Pinnock as Artistic Director in 2003. Their latest recording, a recital of Handel scenes and arias by tenor Mark Padmore, was a prize-

winner in the 2008 BBC Music Magazine Awards.

Highlights of recent seasons include Heinrich Biber's rediscovered *Missa Christi Resurgentis*, Mozart's re-orchestration of Handel's *Alexander's Feast* for the BBC Proms, Jonathan Dove's *Köthener Mass* for the Spitalfields Festival, a triumphant 13-city US tour in autumn 2006 featuring Mozart violin concertos, and the orchestra's first visit to the United Arab Emirates, in January 2008, when Harry Bicket directed music by Bach, Handel and Geminiani in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Al Ain.

In September 2007 Harry Bicket became the third artistic director in the orchestra's 34-year history. Bicket is renowned worldwide for his performances of Baroque opera and oratorio with many of the finest singers of the age, and forthcoming seasons will include collaborations with David Daniels, Vesselina Kasarova, Anna Caterina Antonacci, Mark Padmore and others.

Highlights of the 2008-09 season include European and US tours with counter-tenor David Daniels, performances of Monteverdi's *Il Combattimento* with Anna Caterina Antonacci at Wigmore Hall, concert series at the Victoria & Albert and Handel House museums in London, and the welcome return of the orchestra's founder, Trevor Pinnock, as a guest director to conduct Handel and Purcell in November 2008.

The English Concert works regularly with leading guest directors, and in 2007-08 appears in London and abroad with oboist Alfredo Bernardini and harpsichordists Laurence Cummings, Kenneth Weiss and Matthew Halls.

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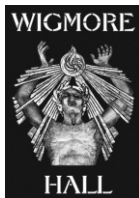
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