

Domenico Gabrielli (1651-1690)

Ricercari No 1 G minor, No 2 A minor No 3 D Major (C 1680)

Domenico Gabrielli was well known in Venice and Bologna as a composer and virtuoso solo cellist. The Cello at this time was recognised as having untapped potential and technical advances in playing the instrument, such as double stopping to produce chords ensured the development of its repertoire. Rapid passages requiring nimble finger work were a feature of Gabrielli's compositions as the Cello moved out from the Continuo section of an ensemble and was promoted as a solo instrument. In Bologna the string makers strengthened the low C and G strings by winding wire round the gut. The result was a clear tone which balanced with the two upper strings, thereby enabling solo performance

The Italian *Ricercare* means to search out, or to seek. In music of this period it refers to searching for the key of the piece by various methods. Many vocal pieces in multiple parts had this title and it was now adopted by Gabrielli reflecting his compositional and performance training. Through these seven pieces he demonstrated his instrument's potential to hold its own unaccompanied melodic profile.

The Ricercari have free improvisatory forms and the development such as it is, comes from each preceding musical idea. There is little repetition and no discernible structure such as dance forms or variations on the opening idea. The outline harmonic progression is implied and through scale passages and sometimes angular leaps, cadences are reached giving a sense of overall form. The listener may search for form and structure through harmonic movement, or they may simply listen to these three short pieces.

J.S.Bach (1685-1750)

Cello Suite No.2 in D minor (C.1730)

Prelude, Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Menuet 1,2, Gigue

It is unlikely that Bach heard Gabrielli's Ricercari since he never left Germany. Some of Bach's music was heard in London however and he was praised highly for his solo Violin Sonatas and Partitas by the writer John Evelyn in 1656. The reason for the Cello Suites' invention is unknown and they are a great departure from the orchestral parts and *obligato* lines accompanying vocal arias. These Suites are said to be more intimate than the solo Violin pieces and less showy. They were not obviously written as exercises to be used in teaching nevertheless amateur players manage many of the movements and the Cello Suites are well known in our present concert repertoire. Each Suite opens with a Prelude which is followed by five dance movements. It is likely that these Suites were written for the Baroque Cello and performed by a Cellist known to Bach in his Kapelle in Köthen.

The writing here demands more technical agility on the part of the cellist than for Gabrielli's Ricercari. There are lengthy passages of semi-quavers which should flow effortlessly and ornaments, as well as double, triple and quadruple stops. Because these are dance

movements a strong sense of their character is also expected. Performance practice has altered radically since these Suites came back into circulation when Pablo Casals recorded them in the mid 1930s and it is possible to hear this by listening to recordings of 20th century Cellists.

Joseph dall'Abaco (1710 – 1805)

Capricci No.2, 4 (1770 s)

Dall'Abaco was born in Brussels where he received tuition from his father, a professional musician. Joseph took a position as cellist in the court orchestra in Bonn where he later became Kapellmeister. His rowdy behaviour and reputation as a swindler and gambler got him into trouble and he moved to Verona to start afresh. Here he became a member of the Academia Filarmonica and was well known as a cellist and composer.

These two Capricci come from a set of eleven. Their style is reminiscent of Bach's Cello Suites though these two are simpler in their linear progression with almost no use of chords at cadence points. Repetition of motifs is evident and the texture is that of continuous movement. A thoughtful performance which allows the music to speak for itself unadorned or encumbered with directions for dynamics is needed here and these Capricci are by no means simple exercises.

Luciano Berio (1925 – 2003)

Les mots sont allés... The words are gone (1979)

Berio was born in Italy and was taught by his father and grandfather before moving to Milan where he took lessons in piano and composition. After his marriage to Cathy Berberian he moved to the USA where he stayed for over 20 years. In 1972 he returned to Italy.

Les mots sont allés was written in response to a request for a piece to celebrate the 70th birthday of Paul Sacher a Swiss conductor. It was one of twelve such pieces by various composers in homage to Sacher. Some of the pieces were performed in 1976 but it was not until 2011 that the complete project was performed.

Berio uses the letters of Sacher's name SACHER at the outset of the short 4 minute piece. S is Eb, A is A, C is C, H is B, E is E, R is D. This is heard three times before Berio gets to work on texture, rhythm and extensions etc. In other words, on composition. There are no bar lines separating one musical idea from another and the instruction '*Intime, comme en parlant*' enables the cellist to deliver the piece as a monologue, however varied in style and rhetoric. Almost every note has an instruction as to vibrato, molto vibrato, sul pont (the bow near the bridge making a nasal sound and adding the high harmonics), sul tasto (the bow over the fingerboard making a thin tone) as well as copious dynamic changes. Roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ through, the instruction is *sempre piu agitato e instabile*. The listener will not hear an obvious ending, but the name SACHER is picked out twice and on an upward gesture this speaker falls silent.

Max Reger (1873-1916)

Suite No. 3 in A minor Op 131c (1915)

Reger was born in Bavaria and he spent his life as a pianist, organist, conductor and academic teacher. As a child he also learned the violin and cello. During his lifetime Reger's music was well known and performed regularly. He considered himself on a continuum from Bach to Beethoven and Brahms and in terms of structure and forms employed, this is certainly clear. His harmonic influences came however from Wagner and Liszt whose chromaticism enriched their musical sound world. Reger's pieces for solo instruments are rarely heard in concert performances and we are fortunate to hear this suite written late in his life.

Three movements *Präludium, Scherzo and Andante con variazioni* make up the suite. The first movement makes much play of double stopping and is solidly crafted with the opening pairs of quavers returning at points throughout the short movement, thus binding it together. The *Scherzo* marked *Vivace* uses staccato contrasted with legato articulations. This is followed by a trio like section which is less spikey and more expressive. The *Andante* starts simply with pairs of quavers echoing the first movement. Five variations follow. All in A minor except var. 4 which is in A Major. Var. 5 shows pizzicato chords dissolving into bowed streams of notes in a more excitable manner but this does not last and the suite closes with a return to the opening theme of this final movement.

Today's repertoire demonstrates much of the development of cello technique over the last 300 years or so in Europe. As the cello left the continuo section of the orchestra and took to playing solo, composers took the opportunity to offer interesting and more taxing music to those who were prepared to be challenged.

Programme notes by Andrew Polmear (dall'Abaco) and by Helen Simpson (Gabrielli, Bach, Berio and Reger).