

D.M.A. in Vocal Performance and Pedagogy Qualifying Recital
Victor Bento, countertenor
Jenny Snyder, harpsichord and piano

Program Notes

Nel dolce tempo, HWV 135B

George Friederich Handel
(1685 – 1759)

George Friederich Handel was a German-born composer, later naturalized as a British citizen. Handel is known as one of the central figures of the late baroque period. Through his compositional technique, he expanded known musical forms and established new ones, such as the English oratorio and the organ concerto. His works can be defined as a synthesis of the Italian, French, and German styles. In pieces such as the oratorio *Messiah*, the opera *Giulio Cesare*, and the orchestral suite *Water Music*, he shows his mastery of the use of counterpoint and innovative approach to dramatic expression.

One of the genres Handel excelled at was the cantata. He wrote over 120 cantatas for different ensemble formations and singers. His cantatas were often performed in private spaces for patrons and private audiences. This is the second version of *Nel dolce tempo*, the first one was written in Italy for soprano and *basso continuo*. The alto version was transposed to be presented to the London public. This secular cantata follows a pastoral theme, where love and nature intertwine. Here, the lover is enamored by a flower adorned nymph that is by the Volturno river. In the first aria, the lover addresses the nymph as a shepherdess and sing praises to her beauty in a simple triple-metered aria that has no instrumental introduction, leaving aside grandiosity and virtuosic lines and instead focusing on a simple bucolic serenade-like melody. For the second aria of the cantata, Handel shows his text painting abilities, using the *continuo* line to imitate birds in fast 16th notes as a representation of the joy of being in love.

Nel dolce tempo, in cui ritorna a noi,
di novello colore,
adorna e piena,
la bella età fiorita,
che a' diletta d'amor ne chiama, e invita,
leggiadra Ninfa e vaga
al bel Volturno in riva,
là dove un alto pin l'erba copriva,
vidi da lunge starsi,
e di rose e viole il petto ornarsi.

Onde ratto ivi giunto, o Dio!
mirai due lumi, un labbro, un senno,
un crin sì vago,
che n'arsi a un tratto,
e del mio ardor son pago.
Quindi volto a colei
ch'ho sempre al core,
dissi così,
pietà chiedendo e amore.

Pastorella, coi be' lumi,

In this sweet time, when spring returns,
adorned anew in youthful bloom,
it calls us forth to love's embrace,
inviting hearts to joy once more.
A graceful nymph, so fair, so bright,
beside the Volturno's gentle shore,
where towering pines cast deep shadows,
I saw her linger from afar,
with roses, violets on her breast.

Then, drawn in haste, O God!
I saw two lights—her shining eyes—
her lips, her brow, her flowing hair,
so wondrously fair, my heart enflamed,
consumed at once in burning love.
Then, turning to the one I hold
forever cherished in my soul,
I said these words,
pleading mercy, pleading love.

Shepherdess, with eyes so bright,

erbe e fiori anch'innamori,
pastorella del mio cor.

E quest'aure, e questi fiumi,
sussurrando, mormorando,
per te sol parlan d'amor.

Senti, di te, ben mio,
cantar dal bosco al rio,
l'augelli ancora.

In questa spiaggia e in quella,
lodar di te, mia bella,
i lumi, i labbri, il cor,
l'onesto e fido amor,
s'ascolta ognora.

Dolc'è pur d'amor l'affanno, HWV 109A

flowers and fields bow to your charm,
shepherdess of my heart.

The whispering breeze, the murmuring streams,
softly sigh, gently cry,
they speak of love—for you alone.

Hear, my love, of you,
singing from the woods to the river,
the birds still rejoice.

On this plain and on that,
they praise you, my beautiful one,
your eyes, your lips, your heart,
your honest and faithful love,
is heard forevermore.

George Friederich Handel
(1685 – 1759)
Paolo Rolli
(1687 – 1765)

George Friederich Handel was highly influenced by the Italian compositional style. It was during his four year visit to Italy that he was in close contact with the music of Alessandro Scarlatti (1685 – 1787) and absorbed into his *oeuvre* the genre of small-scale dramatic works called cantatas. Handel kept writing cantatas even after he was an established composer in London. He would often revisit old works and adapt them to new formations and voices. Handel collaborated with many librettists during his lifetime, one of them being Paolo Rolli. Rolli was an Italian librettist, poet, and translator who resided in London for a while and collaborated with many composers. He was from the same literary school as Pietro Metastasio (1698 - 1782), and his works influenced other poets such as Goethe (1749 - 1832).

It is from the collaboration between Handel and Rolli that *Dolc'è pur d'amor l'affanno* was conceived. This specific version was in the London collection of Elizabeth Legh (1694-1734), the first collector of George Friederich Handel's music. Miss Legh's collection presents the largest group of Handel's alto cantatas, most of them presenting her own written ornaments – some of them sung in the performance - and *continuo* realization. The text of this cantata explores the dichotomy of love: pain and joy. It suggests that pain, when accompanied by hope and affection, makes pleasure even sweeter. This type of duality was greatly explored in the Baroque period when the idea of *chiaroscuro* and contrasts was appreciated.

Dolc'è pur d'amor l'affanno,
se compagno del tormento,
il contento viene ancor.

Se le pene unite vanno,
con la speme e con l'affetto,
il diletto è poi maggior.
Il viver sempre in pene
stanca i desir d'amore,
e il viver lieto sempre
piace, ma sazia il core.

Sweet is love, though filled with sorrow,
if with pain comes hope tomorrow,
if with torment joy is near.

Should our hearts endure love's weeping,
with affection, faith still keeping,
then its pleasure grows more dear.
A life of endless pain and woe
wearies love and makes it fade,
while endless joy delights us so,
yet leaves the heart a love betrayed.

Dolci ripulse e graziosi sdegni,
certe sventure inaspettate e lievi
danno tormento, è ver,
ma fan talora più soave
piacer quanto più brevi.

Se più non t'amo, non ti doler,
ch'amarti, o bella, io più non so.

Ma da te bramo caro piacer,
se tu sei quella che mi piagò.

Pur ti miro
from *L'incoronazione di Poppea*

Soft refusals, tender sighs,
gentle griefs and fleeting fears,
though they bring a lover's cries,
make love's joys more sweet, more clear.

If I no longer love you, weep no more,
for my heart can love you not as before.

Yet still I long for joy from thee,
if you're the one who wounded me.

Claudio Monteverdi
(1567 – 1643)
Giovanni Francesco Busenello
(1598 – 1659)

Claudio Monteverdi was an Italian composer whose work represents the transition between the Renaissance and Baroque period. He is known for being one of the pioneers of the opera genre, with significant works like *L'Orfeo* and *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, significantly influencing the course of Western music history. *L'incoronazione di Poppea* is a result of Monteverdi's collaboration with the librettist and lawyer Giovanni Francesco Busenello. Busenello was part of the *Accademia degli Incogniti*, a group of scholars that influenced the cultural life of 17th-century Venice. Busenello published 5 librettos that were written for Venetian opera and set to music by Claudio Monteverdi and Francesco Cavalli (1602 – 1676.)

Pur ti miro is the last number of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. It is a love duet sung by the characters Nerone and Poppea as they celebrate their love after Poppea is crowned empress of Rome alongside Nerone. It is a deeply intimate duet that celebrates the love and complete surrender between the two characters. The music follows a sensual repetitive motif with voices that intertwining in counterpoint, mirroring the passionate embrace described in the lyrics.

Pur ti miro, pur ti godo,
Pur ti stringo, pur t'annodo.
Più non peno, più non moro,

O mia vita, o mio tesoro.
Io son tua, tuo son io,
Speme mia, dillo, dì!
Tu sei pur, sì mio ben,
Sì, mio cor, mia vita, sì!

I gaze upon you, I delight in you,
I embrace you, I bind myself to you.
No more suffering, no more dying,

O my life, O my treasure.
I am yours, and you are mine,
My hope, say it, say it so!
You are truly mine, my love,
Yes, my heart, my life, yes!

Ego flos Campi
from *Seconda raccolta de' sacri canti*

Claudio Monteverdi
(1567 – 1643)

Claudio Monteverdi's importance to the development of opera has already been mentioned. The compositional devices he used, such as the separation between aria and recitative, are still used today in opera and other dramatic genres. Monteverdi was also an avid composer of sacred music. After his appointment in 1613 as *Maestro di Capela* of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, Monteverdi devoted himself to composing religious works for liturgical and private services. His religious compositional style integrated both Renaissance polyphony - following Palestrina's influence - and the dramatic *seconda pratica* style, where music served the text's emotional expression. *Ego flos Campi* is a perfect example of the *seconda pratica*. The piece is a motet for solo voice and *basso continuo* with text drawn from the *Song of Songs* (2:1-3), a book from the Bible. The passage uses floral imagery to depict the beauty and uniqueness of the beloved. Monteverdi's musical setting captures the intimacy and expressiveness of the text.

Ego flos campi, et lilium convallium.
Sicut lilium inter spinas, sic amica mea inter filias.
Sicut malus inter ligna silvarum, sic dilectus meus inter filios.
Sub umbra illius quem desideraveram sedi, et fructus ejus dulcis gutturi meo.

I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys.
As the lily among thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters.
As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons.
I sat down under his shadow, whom I desired, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

Troisième Leçon de Ténèbres du Mercredi Saint, H 92

Marc-Antoine Charpentier
(1643 – 1704)

Marc-Antoine Charpentier was a French composer. Unlike his contemporaries, he did not train in French cathedral school, instead, he moved to Italy where he studied with Giacomo Carissimi (1605 – 1674). Carissimi's compositional style, particularly his dramatic oratorios and expressive vocal writing, had a profound impact on Charpentier's music. When Charpentier returned to France, he encountered a musical scene dominated by Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632 – 1687), a composer in Louis XIV's court who monopolized all the writing and staging of operas presented at the French court. Due to his deep understanding of the Italian compositional style, he turned to sacred music writing, and with his ties with the French Jesuits, he led a successful career.

The *Leçons de Ténèbres* (Lessons of Darkness) are sacred musical compositions used in the Office of Tenebrae; a liturgical service held during Holy Week in the Catholic Church. These settings, particularly popular in 17th-century France, set texts from the Book of Lamentations to music and were performed in a highly expressive, soloistic style. In the texts used for the *Leçons de Ténèbres*, the prophet Jeremiah mourns the destruction of Jerusalem. In Christian tradition, these laments were interpreted as a foreshadowing of Christ's Passion, linking the suffering of Jerusalem to Jesus' crucifixion. Charpentier's setting of the text is highly melismatic – showing the influence of the old Renaissance polyphonic style - presenting vocal lines that express sorrow and repentance.

JOD
Manum suam misit hostis ad omnia desiderabilia ejus, quia vidit gentes ingressas sanctuarium

JOD
The enemy has stretched out his hand over all her precious things; for she has seen the nations enter

suum, de quibus præceperas ne intrarent in ecclesiam tuam.

CAPH

Omnis populus ejus gemens et quærens panem; dederunt pretiosa quæque pro cibo ad refocillandam animam. Vide, Domine, et considera, quoniam facta sum vilis.

LAMED

O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus; quoniam vindemiavit me, ut locutus est Dominus, in die iræ furoris sui.

MEM

De excelso misit ignem in ossibus meis et erudit me; expandit rete pedibus meis, convertit me retrorsum; posuit me desolatam, tota die mœrore confectam.

NUN

Vigilavit jugum iniquitatum mearum; in manu ejus convolutæ sunt et impositæ collo meo; infirmata est virtus mea; dedit me Dominus in manu, de qua non potero surgere.

Jerusalem, convertere ad Dominum Deum tuum.

her sanctuary, those whom you forbade to enter your congregation.

CAPH

All her people groan as they search for bread; they trade their treasures for food to revive their strength. Look, O Lord, and see, for I am despised.

LAMED

All you who pass by, look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.

MEM

From on high he sent fire; into my bones he made it descend; he spread a net for my feet; he turned me back; he has left me stunned, faint all the day long.

NUN

My transgressions were bound into a yoke; by his hand they were fastened together; they were set upon my neck; he caused my strength to fail; the Lord gave me into the hands of those whom I cannot withstand.

Jerusalem, return to the Lord your God.

Orpheus Britannicus

One Charming Night
Strike the Viol
How blest are Shepherds
I attempt from love's sickness
Hark the ech'ing air!

Henry Purcell
(1659 – 1695)

Arr. Benjamin Britten
(1913 – 1976)

Henry Purcell was a British baroque composer known for his contributions to theater music, sacred choral works, and secular songs. Purcell received his early musical training as a chorister in the Chapel Royal, where he studied under some of England's most prominent musicians, such as John Blow (1649–1708), that mentored him on sacred repertoire, Matthew Locke (c.1621–1677), that introduced him to court music and theatrical compositions, and Pelham Humfrey (1647–1674), that studied in France and influenced Purcell's French style. The French compositional style was dominant at the English court due to the restoration of Charles II, who had spent time in France. Due to that influence, the ornaments chosen for this performance will reflect the French style of ornamentation.

Henry Purcell's *Orpheus Britannicus* is a two-volume collection of songs published posthumously in 1698 (Volume I) and 1702 (Volume II). It was compiled by the publisher Henry Playford (1657 - 1707) and contains many of Purcell's most famous vocal works, including songs from his stage works, odes, and sacred pieces. It is from that collection that the British composer Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) -

who admired Purcell's music – selected and arranged several songs for voice and piano, adapting them for modern audiences. A staple of Purcell's lasting influence on British music.

One Charming Night

Anonymous

This enchanting song from Purcell's semi-opera *The Fairy Queen* captures the magical and dreamlike atmosphere of the work, which is based on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In this piece, the character, Secrecy, sings this aria to enchant the lovers into a deep, peaceful sleep. The delicate, flowing vocal line and graceful accompaniment reflect Purcell's gift for setting text with lyrical elegance.

One charming night
Gives more delight
Than a hundred lucky days.
Night and I improve the taste,
Make the pleasure longer last,
A thousand, thousand several ways.

Strike the Viol

Nahum Tate
(1652 – 1715)

This celebratory song, part of Purcell's birthday ode for Queen Mary II, showcases vivid word-painting. The text is by Nahum Tate, an Irish poet who was England's poet laureate and wrote the libretto for the opera *Dido and Aeneas*. The text encourages joyful music-making, with the viol - a bowed string instrument - as a metaphor for artistic inspiration.

Strike the viol, touch the lute,
Wake the harp, inspire the flute.
Sing your patroness's praise,
Sing in cheerful and harmonious lays.

How blest are Shepherds

John Dryden
(1631 – 1700)

The lyrics of this piece were written by John Dryden, one of the greatest poets of the Restoration era. This pastoral theme of this song from *King Arthur* (1691) celebrates the simplicity of rural life, and Britten's arrangement contributes by adding warmth and expanding the harmonic texture while preserving the song's elegant melody.

How blest are shepherds, how happy their lasses,
While drums and trumpets are sounding alarms!
Over our lowly sheds all the storm passes,
And when we die, 'tis in each other's arms.
All the day on our herds and flocks employing,
All the night on our flutes and soft voices
enjoying.

I attempt from love's sickness

John Dryden & Sir Robert Howard
(1631 – 1700) (1626 – 1698)

This piece is originally an aria from *The Indian Queen* (1695). The lyrics were written in a collaboration between John Dryden and Sir Robert Howard expressing love's torment in a dance-like melody. Purcell's setting is light and ornamented. Britten enriches the harmonic framework, adding deeper sonorities in the piano accompaniment while preserving the flowing of the melody.

I attempt from love's sickness to fly in vain,
Since I am myself my own fever and pain.
No more now, fond heart, with pride no more
swell,
Thou canst not raise forces enough to rebel.

Hark the ech'ing air!

Anonymous

Originally a light, joyful soprano aria, this song is full of lively coloratura and sparkling rhythms that mimic echoes. Britten's arrangement enhances harmonic depth, while maintaining the piece's playful and virtuosic nature. The interplay between voice and piano creates an almost conversational effect, reinforcing Purcell's original text painting.

Hark! The ech'ing air a triumph sings,
And all around pleas'd Cupids clap their wings.