

ALBUQUERQUE BAROQUE PLAYERS  
with special guest Kathryn Mueller, soprano

7:30 p. m., Saturday, 21 April 2012, Fellowship Christian Reformed Church  
3:00 p. m., Sunday, 22 April, Historic Old San Ysidro Church, Corrales

**ONE VOICE: ALL HANDEL!**

Mi palpita il cor, HWV 132

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

soprano, oboe, continuo

Chacone with variations, HWV 435

harpsichord

Das zitternde Glänzen, HWV 203, from *Neun deutsche Arien*

soprano, oboe, continuo

\*\*\*\*\*intermission\*\*\*\*\*

Künft'ger Zeiten, HWV 202, from *Neun deutsche Arien*

soprano, oboe, continuo

Sonata in G minor, HWV 364a

oboe, continuo

Pensieri notturni di filli: Nel dolce dell'oblio, HWV 134

soprano, recorder, continuo

## Notes

For our 2011-2012 season finale we bring you a program of vocal and instrumental chamber music by George Frideric Handel, second only to J.S. Bach as the most revered of Baroque composers. Up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Handel's posthumous reputation rested primarily on a handful of such works as *Messiah* and *Water Music*; we now know him as an innovative composer of Italian opera and English oratorio, not to mention vocal and instrumental works in all genres. For this weekend's program we've chosen two Italian cantatas, two German arias, and two instrumental works.

Handel was born in the North-German city of Halle, near Leipzig. Discouraged by his father from pursuing musical interests, he nonetheless managed (so the story goes) to practice surreptitiously on a clavichord in the attic and, at age nine, was given leave to study organ, harpsichord, and composition with the organist at a local church. After a brief stint in 1702 as a law student at the University of Halle – and, concurrently, a year as organist at Halle's cathedral church – Handel found employment at the Hamburg opera house as a second violinist and, later, as continuo organist. Following the departure of the opera's manager (and principal composer) Reinhard Keiser, he composed a number of German operas that show Keiser's influence, particularly in their mixture of French and German styles. A visit from a Florentine prince piqued his interest in the latest Italian styles, and he set out for Italy in 1706, arriving in Rome the following year. Here he composed church music on commission, but also produced a number of secular cantatas and an Italian oratorio, and began work on *Rodrigo*, his first Italian opera. His second Italian opera, *Agrippina*, opened the Venetian carnival season in 1709, establishing Handel's international reputation as a composer for the theatre and garnering invitations to Hanover and to England. After brief sojourns in Hanover and Düsseldorf, he arrived in London in 1710, and settled permanently in England two years later. He became a naturalized British subject in 1727. During his long English career, Handel produced numerous Italian operas, English oratorios (a form that he essentially invented when subscriptions to his operas fell off), church music, secular cantatas, and instrumental music.

From Handel's Italian period comes the cantata *Nel dolce dell'oblio*, probably composed around 1707 for a private gathering at the home of a Roman patron. Like most of Handel's solo cantatas, this one alternates recitatives with *da capo* (ABA) arias in a sort of mini-drama, although the "action" in the shorter cantatas takes place in the heads and hearts of the protagonists. Unlike their 17<sup>th</sup>-century Italian models, however, Handel's cantatas tend to be tonally open – i.e., they do not begin and end in the same key – alluding, perhaps, to the structure of a larger dramatic work. Speculating on "key symbolism" is always a tricky business, especially if key choice is constrained by vocal range or instrumental capacities, but it's plausible that Handel might have chosen F major for the first aria because of its association with the "pastoral" Lydian mode of ancient Greece. The cantata ends in the (deceptively?) uncomplicated key of C major after a tortured excursion, in the middle section, to E minor, as Phyllis' lover considers the joys and sorrows of fidelity and deception in love.

The other Italian cantata on our program, *Mi palpita il cor*, dates from Handel's early London years and exists in as many as six versions, including two incomplete ones. The original setting, for alto, flute, and continuo, was composed around 1711, possibly for a private or semi-public performance – or perhaps for a benefit performance of Handel's *Rinaldo*, the first Italian opera written expressly for the London stage. In the latter case, the cantata would have been sung by a castrato – a plausible scenario in light of the relatively high tessitura, and extreme virtuosity, of the vocal line. Our version, for soprano, oboe, and continuo, was composed in 1717 or 1718 and contains essentially the same music as the original, but is more than a mere transposition; one modern editor has remarked that, by comparing the various versions, we can watch the young Handel refining his compositional technique. The cantata opens with an arresting bit of text-painting on the word "palpita" – notated more graphically here than in the earlier version, with wedges (a kind of articulation mark) on the strong beats – and the word "agitata" in the following arioso is a natural for further text-painting. Like *Nel dolce*, this cantata is also tonally open, moving from its G-

major beginning, through a lamenting siciliana in G minor, to the optimistic B-flat-major finale, as the lover expresses hope that his passion will one day be requited.

A glance at Handel's sizable inventory of vocal works – operas, odes, oratorios, cantatas, songs, church music – reveals a preponderance of Italian and English settings and a paucity of works in his native German. And in fact Handel did all but abandon German texts after about 1708, with two notable exceptions: a Passion setting and a set of nine songs, both on texts by his friend Barthold Heinrich Brockes. The song texts were taken from a volume of longer texts that Brockes clearly intended to be set to music as sacred cantatas and whose overarching theme is the beauty of nature as evidence of the divine. From this collection of verses variously designated as arias, ariosos, and duets, plus introductory texts to be set as recitatives, Handel chose nine arias to set to music for solo voice with unspecified obbligato instrument – we'll use oboe in our two selections – and continuo. Like the arias in the Italian cantatas, these are in *da capo* (ABA) form; in keeping with the conventions of this form, the affect of the B section contrasts with that of the A sections that bracket it. In "Das zitternde Glänzen," the A sections are given over to depictions of nature, in a major key, while the B section, in a minor key, takes on a more serious tone in keeping with the didactic intent of Brockes' text. "Künft'ger Zeiten," while it doesn't explicitly depict natural phenomena, follows a similar tonal plan, with the contrasting affect of the minor-key section accentuating the theological lesson. Incidentally, this latter aria is set to essentially the same music as one of Handel's Italian songs ("La bianca rosa"). Handel is noted for his habit of borrowing from his own works as well as those of other composers, and one test (not the only test, to be sure) of the authenticity of a piece attributed to him is whether the music appears elsewhere in his *œuvre*!

Determining authenticity has been especially problematic in the case of Handel's instrumental chamber music – a problem exacerbated, in part, by publishers who included spurious works in printed collections of his sonatas and trio sonatas. We can, however, be confident of Handel's authorship of the G-minor oboe sonata on our program. Composed for violin and continuo in 1724, this sonata appeared as "Sonata 6 for oboe" in a volume entitled *Twelve Sonatas or Solo's for the German Flute, Hautboy and Violin* and published in London – without Handel's approval, apparently – by John Walsh. Because Walsh had published a collection of six trio sonatas at the same time (around 1732 or 3) under the rubric "opus 2," the solo-sonatas volume came to be known, retrospectively, as opus 1 (note that HWV, i.e. *Händels Werke Verzeichnis*, is now the preferred numbering system for Handel's works). The G-minor sonata is on the model of the Corellian *sonata da chiesa*: a slow movement with a "walking bass" leads into an Allegro with points of imitation between solo and continuo; the third movement is a short Adagio that calls for ornamentation by the soloist, and the sonata ends with a lively gigue.

Besides the sonatas, Walsh also published two collections of Handel's harpsichord suites. Our harpsichordist will perform the second "suite" – actually, a suite-length chaconne in G major – from the second of these collections. Most of Handel's solo keyboard music was written well before Walsh published his second collection in 1733; the published version of HWV 435 is the fourth of five versions composed between 1705 and 1717. While most of the music on this weekend's program shows Handel's mastery of the Italian idiom (both musically and linguistically), French influences come to the fore in the chaconne. Notice, especially, its stately sarabande-like character and the use of *style brisé* (a style of arpeggiation borrowed from French lute technique), but note also the increasing virtuosity and brilliance of the variations – a hallmark of Italian style.