

PROGRAM NOTES

Notes on the program, by Carly McIlwaine-York

ANTONIO VIVALDI (1678-1741) was a Baroque virtuoso violinist who began his musical career under the tutelage of his father, Giovanni Battista, a professional violinist in the orchestra of the Basilica of San Marco in Venice. At the age of 18, he made his musical debut as a supernumerary violinist for the orchestra, alongside his father. However, the young Vivaldi was also training to be a priest, and in 1703 he was ordained. Unfortunately, he was forced to give up his priestly duties shortly after ordination due to chronic respiratory illness. Subsequently, he began his working relationship as a musician with the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice, which would play a key role in his musical career throughout most of his life. The Pietà was an orphanage which trained boys for jobs in the “trades”, and girls in music and the arts. In 1703, he was appointed as master violin teacher, and in 1716, he was appointed director of music.

Vivaldi began his prolific composition career during the early days of teaching at the Pietà. His first sonatas for violin, as well as sets of concerti for string orchestra with a variety of different solo instruments, were published by the Estienne Roger firm in Amsterdam, beginning in 1705 and continuing until 1719. He began to make a name for himself as a vocal music composer through the medium of sacred choral and solo vocal works, including his famous *Gloria*, RV 589. While teaching and composing for the Ospedale della Pietà, he was free to pursue other musical patrons. From 1718-1720, he was employed as the composer for the city of Mantua, where he predominantly wrote operas.

By the 1720s, Vivaldi had made a name for himself as a composer and had brought the musical achievements of the Pietà students to international acclaim. Between 1720-1730, he composed a great number of his more than 500 concertos, including the famed *Four Seasons*, which were published in 1725, as part of a collection of several other concertos. Also written during this prolific decade is his Concerto in G Major, RV 151, *alla Rustica*, featured this evening. This work is a “ripieno concerto”-- meaning that there are no clear solo instrumental parts in the work; rather, the full group is featured as a unit. That is quite different from the *Four Seasons* and other Vivaldi concertos which feature the interplay between the full orchestra and a solo violin or other instrument. Similarly, the Concerto in G minor, RV 157, does not feature a single soloist, but begins with the interplay of melodic ideas between the two violins. Sadly, in the 1730's, Vivaldi's music began to fall out of fashion, and by 1740, he traveled to Vienna, possibly to seek employment in the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles VI. Not much is known of Vivaldi's final days, only that in 1741, he was given a modest funeral and buried in a common grave in Vienna.

LUIGI BOCCHERINI (1743-1805), was an Italian virtuoso cellist and composer of the Classical Era. He was the son of a professional bass-violinist, Leopoldo Boccherini, and was trained in music at a very young age in the Cathedral of Lucca, Italy. At the age of 13, he began his early professional studies at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, under the tutelage of Giovanni Battista Costanzi. At age 17, he made his debut as a composer, performing his *Six Trios for Two Violins and Cello*, G 77-82, in Vienna (1760). In 1766, at the age of 23, he moved to Paris to work as a cellist and composer. Many of his chamber music pieces for strings, and his *Symphony in D Major*, G. 500, were published by the esteemed French publishing houses of Grangé, Venier, and Chevardière, during his years in Paris.

Legend recounts that it was the Spanish Ambassador to Paris who convinced Boccherini to move to Madrid and work as the Court composer for King Charles III, under the direct patronage of the king's brother, Don Luis. It was then that he began writing his particular style of string quintets which uniquely featured two cellos, rather than the traditional single cello. During that time, he also composed vocal music, including his *Sabat Mater*; a Spanish musical theater work, or zarzuela, entitled *La Clementina*; and a number of concert arias for singers. In 1785, his wife died while giving birth to their sixth child, and the Spanish royal court granted him a pension and the freedom to take other patronage positions. It is rumored that from 1787 to 1797 he served as composer and cellist for the King of Prussia, Frederick William II, who was an amateur cellist and fan of Boccherini's music. After Frederick's death in 1797, Boccherini lost that funding source, and at the same time another important Spanish patroness moved to Paris, leaving him in financial difficulty. In 1802, his second wife died. A few of his children also died around the same time. The loss of his family members and financial difficulties negatively impacted his health. He died in poverty in Madrid in 1805.

Boccherini's *Guitar Quintet No. 4 in D Major*, G.448, *Fandango*, was created by re-arranging movements of his earlier string quintets, G. 270 and G.341, which he originally wrote for two violins, viola, and two cellos. It was commissioned in 1798 by the amateur Spanish guitarist, Marquis de Benavente. The title piece of this evening's concert, *String Quintet in C Major*, G.324, *La Musica Notturna di Madrid*, was written one year later in 1799, and was composed from a re-working of Boccherini's earlier *Piano Quintet*, G.408. Recordings of this work have been used in popular culture over the last few decades, including the opening ceremony of the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, and the 2003 Russell Crowe movie *Master and Commander*, as well as other films and TV Series. While this piece was popular during his lifetime, Boccherini did not actually publish it then. In a letter to his publisher, he described the piece as “absolutely useless, even ridiculous, outside Spain, because the [non-Spanish] audience cannot hope to understand its significance, nor can the performers play it as it should be played.”