

Crossing Borders

Welcome to our musical tour of 17th- and 18th-century Europe. In this journey, we experience works that integrate different regional styles of the Baroque. Each piece in this program represents more than one regional tradition.

Johann Valentin Meder (1649–1719) was born in the Germanic region, and worked extensively in Northern and Eastern Europe. Throughout his life, he was employed in various courts and churches in (today's) Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, and Russia. He was well-versed in the prevalent baroque styles of the Italian and French traditions, which he took with him wherever he went. As the title might suggest, his *Ciaconne* combines the Italian and French styles: the title starts with the Italian syllable *cia-* but ends with the French *-conne*. Although the form chaconne likely originated from the New World, by Meder's time it had become a popular theatrical dance of the French court. To this French dance, Meder incorporates the virtuosic instrumental writing of the Italian tradition.

Next, we visit the work of **Johann Rosenmüller** (1619–1684). He studied and worked in Leipzig until he was about to be incarcerated for a scandal. He fled to Venice, eventually returning north later in his life. His sonatas display influences of the Italian *stylus fantasticus*. Sections and phrases are delightfully asymmetrical, and flow from one to another often in unexpected manners. The virtuosity and imagination of individual parts are especially evident in cadenza-like sections. His musical language could be likened to someone speaking Italian with a German accent.

Bohemian-Austrian **Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber** (1644–1704) was a virtuosic violinist and composer who took the Italian virtuosity to another level. His violin sonatas are full of inventive and extended techniques for the instrument. His *Mensa Sonora* are sets of renaissance and baroque dances. Formally, they are rather traditional, however, his writing for string instruments pushes convention. The first violin part goes as high as fourth position, a technique extremely uncommon at the time and reserved only for a few superstar players.

Like many during this period, **Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre** (1665–1729) was also interested in the Italian instrumental tradition. She was particularly taken by the work of Arcangelo Corelli. Her sonatas are her effort to combine the Corellian virtuosity with the Lullian elegance. Her harmonic progressions reflect the quintessential harmonic sequences of Corelli, while her formal structure builds on the concept of movements as explored by Corelli. de La Guerre dresses her own iteration of these Italian elements in her French fashion. Her music was evidently popular at the court of Louis XIV, who regarded her as one of his favorite composers.

Georg Muffat (1653–1704) was also highly influenced by Corelli. The sonatas in his *Armonico tributo* are said to be modeled after Corelli's *concerti grossi*. Much of his musical language, however, stems from his years in the French court. During his teen years, he worked and studied in Paris with Jean-Baptiste Lully. He was later employed in Vienna and Salzburg as an organist and composer, introducing the French orchestral tradition to the Germanic region.

This musical tour concludes with a work by **George Frideric Handel** (1685–1759), who is arguably the most-traveled musician during this time. His music was performed and loved in (today's) Germany, Italy, England, and more. This passacaglia appears in several of his works, including an opera, ballet, and trio sonata. It is titled *passacaille* in some places and *chaconne* in others, testifying to the interchangeability of those terms. It also appears in two different keys: in G and in A. Our version is in G as in his trio sonata; the first viola part is borrowed from his orchestral versions, while the second viola part was composed by yours truly for our special journey.

– Daniel S. Lee