

The Harmony of Nations

Notes on the program by Jude Ziliak

Francesco Geminiani: Concerto Grosso no. 3 in C major, after Arcangelo Corelli

"It is wonderful to observe what a scratching of Corelli there is every where - nothing will relish but Corelli... And no wonder after the Great Master made that instrument speak as it were with human voice, saying to his scollars - Non udite lo parlare? " ("Do you not hear it speak?")

Roger North, the English lawyer, biographer, and prolific commentator on musical affairs in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, thus neatly summarized the inescapable influence of Arcangelo Corelli on music in Europe. His music's popularity endured for decades beyond his death, and copies of his publications were distributed as far as Asia and the Americas. Corelli himself never left Italy, and he left behind a relatively small body of 70-odd surviving works, but his harmonic and formal innovations attracted imitators among two generations of composers and around the world.

Apart from his compositions, Corelli was particularly known for the eloquence and beauty of his violin playing and for teaching many notable violinists. Perhaps the most accomplished was Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762), who made his career in London, Paris, and Dublin. In the late 1720s, Geminiani published concerti based on all twelve of the sonatas in Corelli's Opus 5. He preserved the melodic and structural bones of the sonatas while adding a second solo violin line, creating call-and-response textures, and adding beautiful countermelodies. The present concerto, based on the third sonata from Corelli's set, also omits a movement (a fast Allegro with continuous sixteenth notes for the violin) from Corelli's original five-movement format.

Jean-Baptiste Lully: Suite from *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*

Le bourgeois gentilhomme is a *comédie-ballet* written collaboratively by Molière and Lully at the behest of Louis XIV. The essence of the genre is a spoken comedy intermingled with music and dance. In the case of *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, the ballet and musical elements are largely diagetic. The plot revolves around a merchant (*le bourgeois*), M. Jourdain, who is obsessed by the desire to become a gentleman. He hires instructors to teach him music, dance, fencing, and philosophy; he buys expensive clothes; he scorns a middle-class suitor for his daughter; and, in the *dénouement*, he permits himself to be mock-ennobled in a sham Turkish ceremony, making him a *Mamamouchi*. The ceremony is performed by Cléonte, the man who wants to marry Jourdain's daughter, disguised as the son of the "Grand Turk" (the Sultan of Turkey) so as to deceive Jourdain into allowing his daughter to marry the bourgeois man she loves.

The selections presented in this evening's program come from three moments in the play. The *Premier Intermède*, a sequence of brief dances, comes early in the play. Jourdain's dancing master gives an object lesson in the most important dance types by quickly demonstrating one after another. In a staged performance, the dancing master would shout the name of each dance before it begins.

The *Marche pour la cérémonie des Turcs* comes, as the title suggests, from the moment of Jourdain's mock ennoblement. This scene fulfilled Louis XIV's request when commissioning the piece. Smarting from the humiliation of the Turkish ambassador Suleiman Aga's refusal to bow to him when visiting Versailles, he had asked for a play that would send up the Ottoman court. One might wonder, though,

exactly whom Molière and Lully saw as the target of their satire; Georgia Cowart suggests a more nuanced reading of the ceremony scene in her book *The Triumph of Pleasure*.

The Spanish Airs and the *Entrée* and *Chaconne des Scaramouches, Trivelins, et Arlequin* come from the *Ballet des Nations* at the end of the play. While the Jourdain family awaits the notary for the wedding, they provide a ballet for the entertainment of the “Grand Turk.” This ballet includes Italian, Spanish, and French musicians and dancers demonstrating their respective national styles. During the *Entrée*, the *commedia dell’arte* characters Scaramouche (a clownish servant), Trivelin (a stupid valet) and Arlequin (an agile and clever servant) act out a sunset and night scene. The chaconne which they dance afterwards is a traditional final dance at the end of an evening of dance.

Johann Heinrich Schmelzer: *Harmonia a 5*

Johann Heinrich Schmelzer was born in obscure circumstances in Scheibbs, in Lower Austria, early in the 1620s. He came to Vienna at a young age, before 1640, but little is known of his life before 1649, when he was appointed violinist to the court of Ferdinand III, Holy Roman Emperor. Schmelzer worked at the Habsburg court from that time until his death in 1680. He developed a particularly close relationship with Ferdinand III’s son, Emperor Leopold I, who ennobled Schmelzer in 1673 and appointed him *Kapellmeister* (master of the court’s music) in 1679, a position which ordinarily went to Italian musicians. Unfortunately, Schmelzer had little time in his new role; he died in a Plague outbreak just a few months later. Little is known of the remarkable *Harmonia a 5*, which he never published. It is tempting to speculate on what significance he may have attached to the number five. Near the end of the piece, the meter changes to 5/4, five beats in every bar – most unusual in the seventeenth century. It is an inviting enigma, with no clear solution.

Georg Philipp Telemann: *Ouverture, Burlesque de Quixote*, TWV 55:G1

Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* has been set in music hundreds of times since its two-part publication in 1605 and 1615. By 1612, part one had been translated into German, among other languages, and the work is believed to have sold ten million copies in the seventeenth century. By the time Telemann first turned to it, a century later, the figure of Quixote was a fixture in the cultural imagination, and the novel was canonic and widely known. Later in life, in 1761, Telemann would return to Quixote as an old man and craft a masterful opera buffa on the subject, but as a newly minted Kapellmeister in Frankfurt around 1715, his first treatment was more modest. Tonight’s *Ouverture* is a characteristic suite consisting of a French-style overture and a series of dances depicting episodes from the novel, one of over one hundred such works in Telemann’s catalog.

Don Quixote’s chivalric and pastoral themes offered Telemann an opportunity to put commonplace musical tropes to use in a narrative context. The overture is not only a conventional evocation of nobility, with the dotted rhythms typical of the genre, but also a depiction of the aspirational grandiosity of a pompous rural hidalgo. The Awakening of Quixote is a quiet melody suggestive of birdsong, coupled with an oddly driven, mostly unison accompaniment in the lower strings. Quixote’s first sally began with sudden determination in the early morning on the hottest day of July. Telemann’s depiction recalls Quixote’s awkward imitations of the floral language of the novels that inspired him:

“Our new-fledged adventurer paced along, talking to himself and saying, "Who knows but that in time to come, when the veracious history of my famous deeds is made known, the sage who writes it, when he has to set forth my first sally in the early morning, will do it after this fashion? 'Scarce had the rubicund Apollo spread o'er the face of the broad spacious earth the golden threads of his bright hair, scarce had the little birds of painted plumage attuned their notes to hail with dulcet and mellifluous harmony the coming of the rosy Dawn, that, deserting the soft couch of her jealous spouse, was appearing to mortals at the gates and balconies of the Manchegan horizon, when the renowned knight Don Quixote of La Mancha, quitting the lazy down, mounted his celebrated steed Rocinante and began to traverse the ancient and famous Campo de Montiel;" which in fact he was actually traversing.

Don Quixote, volume 1, chapter 2, tr. John Ormsby

Awkwardness and failed imitations are themes running throughout Telemann's treatment of Quixote. Johann Gottfried Walther described burlesque music as that in which “laughable melodies, made up of 5ths and octaves, appear along with serious melodies,” and while Telemann's melodic language does not quite meet this description, the concept of comedic juxtaposition well describes Telemann's approach to Cervantes, focusing on broad humor and leaving the irony and pathos of the novel -- let alone its complex narrative structure -- largely untouched.

However, one can observe in Telemann's scoring an exploration of modes of musical representation. The orchestra is sometimes heard to operate as a unit, portraying one emotional state or one scene all together. At other times, the instruments take different roles, apparently representing distinct facets of a scene. The occasional simultaneity of comic and serious elements points away from the simpler juxtaposition of the burlesque as defined by Walther, and towards the integration of disparate elements which Telemann would explore later in life, and which would be among his contributions to the nascent “Classical” style.