

Georg Philipp Telemann

Wassermusik (Hamburger Ebb' und Fluth), TWV 55:C3

I. Overture · II. Sarabande: *Die schlafende Thetis* · III. Bourrée: *Die erwachende Thetis* · IV. Loure: *Der verliebte Neptunus* · V. Gavotte: *Spielende Najaden* · VI. Harlequinade: *Der schertzende Tritonus* · VII. Tempête: *Der stürmende Aeolus* · VIII. Menuett: *Der angenehme Zephir* · IX. Gigue: *Ebb und Fluth* · X. Canarie: *Die lustigen Boots Leute*

George Frideric Handel

'Hush, ye pretty warbling quire', from *Acis and Galatea*, HWV 49

Georg Philipp Telemann

Concerto for Violin in A Major, TWV 51:A4 'Die Relinge'

I. Allegro · II. Adagio · III. Allegro

Alessandro Scarlatti

Bella madre de' fiori

Antonio Vivaldi

Concerto No. 3 in F Major, Op. 8, RV293 'Autumn'

I. Allegro · II. Adagio molto · III. Allegro

George Frideric Handel

'Sweet bird' from *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso ed Il Moderato*

For centuries, music has been inspired by the sounds of the natural world. Building on the ideas of Ancient Greek philosophers, medieval scholars understood music as the cosmos sounding. Composers saw their purpose as imitating nature, in line with the Aristotelian concept of mimesis. However, toward the end of the seventeenth century, priorities began to shift, and Baroque composers began to use music more as a means of engaging in an active dialogue with the world around us. The idea of nature increasingly became an important allegory, as a mirror and a means of understanding man's internal psyche.

In this programme, we draw together music by five leading composers, active in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, each of whose music celebrates and converses with nature. With their respective groundings in the latest contemporary German, English and Italian musical styles, heard together, their music demonstrates the perception of the natural world at the cusp of the Enlightenment.

Georg Philipp Telemann's *Wassermusik* (or *Hamburger Ebb' und Fluth*) was written for the celebrations commemorating the centenary of Hamburg's Admiralitäts-Kollegium (College of the Admiralty), which we know were held on 6 April 1723. The college was once of the city's most important institutions, being responsible for the maritime business in the Hanseatic city, which was one of Europe's busiest ports. Telemann responded to the occasion in suitable style, producing a ten-movement suite depicting the sea in all its various states. After a grand two-part overture, a series of dances follow that invoke Greek mythological characters associated with the sea. We hear, in turn, Thetis, Neptune, the Naiads, Triton (Neptune's), Aeolus and Zephir, before the suite culminates with a

celebratory jig and ‘canarie’ (a dance form that apparently originated in the Canary Islands, which became popular across Europe from the Renaissance onward).

While Telemann and **George Frideric Handel** met in Halle as teenagers and corresponded over the course of their respective careers, Handel was to spend the majority of his professional life in London. **Hush, ye pretty warbling choir** comes from his one-act masque *Acis and Galatea* (which Dunedin Consort has [recorded](#)). Handel composed *Acis and Galatea*, to a text probably by John Gay, while he was employed at Cannons, as composer to James Brydges, Earl of Carnarvon. The story is based on the version in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Following the masque’s overture and opening chorus, *Hush, ye pretty warbling choir* is the first air of the piece. In the preceding *accompagnato*, Galatea addresses the woods, mountains and streams, before calling on the birds to stop singing, as their combined beauty presents a painful reminder of Acis, from whom she has been separated. Handel uses a sopranino recorder to imitate the chirping birds, with rapid musical scales and athletic leaps beautifully evoking their flight, offering a poignant counterpoint as Galatea pines for her absent lover.

Telemann’s **Violin Concerto in A Major**, TWV 51:A4 is known as **Die Relinge** owing to the inscription *Relings Solo* above the solo violin part in the opening movement. *Reling* is an antiquated German word for frog; it is described in the Grimm brothers’ dictionary as a sort of toad. The concerto’s quirky title is mirrored in its unconventional form: after a typical orchestral introduction, the orchestra suddenly drops out, leaving the soloist to play a repeated A — which each of the other parts then imitate in succession. The effect is a sort of frogs’ chorus, with Telemann seemingly mocking the kind of conventions that characterised the contemporary violin concerto. The central slow movement retains the croaking at its opening in the solo violin, before introducing a beautiful lyrical melody (under which the croaking reemerges, without any apparent irony, in the violas). A concise minuet — sadly with no audible reference to any frogs — brings the work to a light-hearted conclusion.

Bella madre de’ fiori is an extended solo cantata for soprano and two violins. It was attributed to **Alessandro Scarlatti** by the Italian musicologist Luciano Bettarini. However, it only exists in one source, now in the library of the Florence Conservatorio, in which no composer is listed. However, it is clearly the work of a top-level musical mind, with an affinity for drawing out the emotive subtexts implied by natural imagery. The text (also by an anonymous author) is typical of Italian Renaissance poetry. The tranquility of the pastoral landscape contrasts with the nymph Clori’s inner turmoil, as she calls in vain for her beloved Fileno, only taking solace in the flowers and the sound of the singing birds. The composer uses a variety of techniques to highlight specific images in the text and represent them in music — for example, in the fast passages setting the word ‘flying’ — as well as creating beautiful melodic lines that express the profundity of the Clori’s pain. The cantata closes with an exquisite lament, as Clori realises that Fileno is unlikely to return any time soon.

Antonio Vivaldi’s Violin Concerto Op. 8, No. 3 in F Major (‘Autumn’) was published in 1725 in a collection of concertos entitled *Il cimento dell’armonia e dell’inventione* (‘The Contest Between Harmony and Invention’). The collection has been justly famous since its publication, largely due to the four concertos that make up the so-called Four Seasons.

Despite their ubiquity, Vivaldi's concertos have an unparalleled brilliance and effervescence. Each of the four seasons was published with an accompanying sonnet (possibly by Vivaldi himself). These each break down into three sections, corresponding with each movement. The first lines of Autumn describe how 'the peasant celebrates, with songs and dance, the pleasures of the bountiful harvest.' Vivaldi's concerto suitably renders this scene, with the solo violin part becoming increasingly acrobatic. After the beautiful middle movement, in which Vivaldi calls on the accompanying strings to use their mutes, the final Allegro depicts the hunt, with the main theme's triple meter and dotted figures signalling the horses' advance. Against this, the solo violin sounds like a wild animal, with its runs and leaps injecting a real visceral energy.

'Sweet bird' is taken from Handel's *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* (HWV 55). Setting verses by John Milton, Handel creates three allegorical characters, each portraying the different qualities of man. This exquisite air is sung by *Il penseroso* (The Melancholic or Pensive Man). The air opens with the flute playing a series of figures that echo the song of the nightingale (in distinction to L'Allegro, who celebrates her nonchalance by associating with the lark). The soprano enters in answer to the flute, before the two join together in a beautiful duet, with the instrumental line weaving beautifully around the vocal line.

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