



Brought to you by the Letter

Jonathan **S**alzedo
plays
music for harpsichord by

Giles **F**arnaby
Girolamo **F**rescobaldi
Johann Jacob **F**roberger
Jean-Baptiste-Antoine **F**orqueray

streamed from Etz Chayim Palo Alto
stream details at
www.albanyconsort.com

Saturday **D**ecember **19** at **7** pst

The music ...

Giles Farnaby

Three pieces from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book
Praeludium; Rosasolis; Daphne

Girolamo Frescobaldi

from Libro Primo 1637
Partite 14 sopra l'Aria della Romanesca

Johann Jacob Froberger

from Livre de 1656
Suite 6
Lamento Sopra la dolorosa Perdita della Real
Msta di Ferdinando IV, Ré de Romani;
Gigue; Courant; Sarabande

Short break

Jean-Baptiste Forqueray

from Pièces de Clavecin
Cinquième Suite
La Rameau; La Guignon;
La Léon – Sarabande; Jupiter

About the music ...

by Marion Rubinstein

Giles Farnaby (1563-1640)

Of our four composers here, Giles Farnaby was the only one who didn't consider himself a professional musician. He was trained by his father to be a joiner, or cabinet maker, and described himself as such for most of his life. He probably got his love of music from his cousin Nicholas, a virginal maker who also made muselars (a type of virginal), harpsichords and probably clavichords. In 1592, Giles received a bachelor's degree in music from Christ Church, Oxford, and was a friend of composer John Bull, who had graduated from Oxford a few years earlier.

Throughout his long life he wrote keyboard works, including 52 in the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, madrigals and other vocal pieces, and taught music to children of a wealthy family in Lincolnshire. He married and had several children, some with odd names like Philadelphia (a girl) and Joy (a boy). His son Richard also became a composer, and is also represented in the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*.

Edmund Rubbra, a 20th century composer, wrote some improvisations on some of Farnaby's virginal pieces. In addition, some of his music has been arranged as jazz and folk music.

Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643)

Born in Ferrara, in what is now northern Italy, Girolamo Frescobaldi was a child prodigy known for his angelic, delicate voice and for the "swiftness of his hand in playing" of both harpsichord and organ, "astonishing those who saw and heard him", according to a source writing a few decades after Frescobaldi's death. He studied with Luzzasco Luzzaschi, an organist and madrigal composer noted in his time. The young Frescobaldi played for important nobles and met Monteverdi, John Dowland and others, who visited Ferrara.

When he was in his twenties, Frescobaldi moved to Rome to become organist at St Peter's Basilica, a plum position, which he constantly tested with frequent travels to other cities to work at other churches and publish his compositions. Clearly, he knew his own worth.

In 1635, Frescobaldi published *Fiori Musicali*, a book of church music including improvisations on church themes from the liturgy, freer pieces such as toccatas and contrapuntal pieces requiring virtuosity. Frescobaldi clearly had a sense of humor, as is evidenced by some of his suggestions for performance. One of the works, a set of variations on a popular tune called *Bergamasca*, is introduced by the words "If you play this piece, you will learn a lot." Another: "Understand me if you can; I understand myself." Pieces from this collection were used into the 19th century as models of counterpoint.

Another of Frescobaldi's innovations was in tempo. He used many different tempo marks, written as time signatures, as well as the Italian words as used today. He wrote a long introduction explaining his use of tempo marks, which today is very helpful in deciphering the various sections of his works as they transition. Some of this had already been used in other works, but Frescobaldi's use of this was new to keyboard music.

Greatly esteemed in his day as a performer on harpsichord and organ, he was seen by at least one of his contemporaries as an ignoramus, "so little knowledgeable that he does not know what a major or minor

semitone is" and asks his (much more educated wife) when he does not understand a word in vernacular poetry. He is seen as coarse and ignorant, except for having "all his knowledge at the ends of his fingers," and even of being a drunkard.

Nevertheless, Johann Sebastian Bach owned a copy of *Fiori Musicali*, which he performed as a young man in Weimar. Frescobaldi's music greatly influenced German organ composers in the 17th and 18th centuries.

One of these composers was **Johann Jakob Froberger** (1616-1667). His father, Basilius, was a tenor in the Wurttemberg court, and of his eleven children, four became musicians. Basilius had an extensive music library of over 100 volumes, containing works by earlier composers such as Josquin des Pres, Michael Praetorius and Samuel Scheidt, as well as later composers. This collection was sold to the court by Johann Jakob and his brother upon their father's death of plague, presumably because they needed funds. The same year, at age 21, young Froberger went to Rome to study under Frescobaldi, converting to Catholicism while there.

Froberger was a traveller, meeting and being influenced by many different players and composers, including Carissimi, Chambonnières, John Dowland, Louis Couperin and many others, living for a time in Vienna, and visiting Dresden, London, Paris, Brussels and other major cities and towns throughout Europe. This explains his mixture of styles, French dance music, Italian fantasias, and German counterpoint. He had many musical friends, one of whom died in his arms.

Only two of Froberger's works were published during his lifetime. Possibly because he wanted to be free to make many revisions, or to show loyalty to his patrons, Froberger would not allow his compositions to be published during his life. His works are still being discovered: in 2006 an autographed manuscript was found containing 35 pieces and sold at Sotheby's. The manuscript is important because it contains 15 heretofore unknown works, including two beautiful laments. Also, since the collection seems to have been written shortly before he died, from it we get the latest revisions and further details about his travels.

Antoine (1672-1745) and **Jean-Baptiste Forqueray** (1699-1782)

Two of the shining stars of French Baroque music were Marin Marais and Antoine Forqueray. Both were superb on the viola da gamba; it was said that Marais played like an angel whereas Forqueray was the devil. Today, the viola da gamba pieces are so difficult to play that they are rarely performed.

Forqueray at the age of ten played for king Louis XIV, and as a result, the king paid for his musical instruction. After that he had a permanent position in the court chamber orchestra, despite his difficult personality. He also gave lessons to the aristocracy.

His marriage to the daughter of a church organist, Henriette-Angelique Houssou, was unhappy, and they eventually separated. They had two sons, one of whom he later sent to prison in a fit of jealousy. Two years after Antoine's death this same son, Jean-Baptiste, rearranged his father's works as harpsichord solos, which is the version we hear today. There were good reasons for this: the original versions were so difficult that no one other than the two Forquerays could play them, (according to a contemporary source), and also the viola da gamba was ceding to the cello, so the market for its music was declining. On the other hand, the harpsichord was still in its prime, and many players were demanding new music. In addition, and perhaps the primary

reason, Jean-Baptiste's wife, Marie-Rose DuBois was a well-known Parisian harpsichordist, who not only encouraged her husband but may well have done some of the arrangements herself.

Telemann met the young Forqueray and was very impressed by his performing ability. Jean-Baptiste also met Rameau; we hear Forqueray's tribute to the great composer in our program tonight.

What is a harpsichord?

The harpsichord was the main keyboard instrument throughout Europe between about 1500 and 1800. The piano began its development as an experimental version of the harpsichord in 1700, and by 1800 had largely taken over from the harpsichord.

The essential difference between a harpsichord and a piano is the way the sound is generated. In the harpsichord, each string is mechanically plucked. In the piano, the strings are hit with felt hammers. An individual note on the harpsichord always sounds at the same volume, however hard the key is pressed. On the other hand, the piano allows notes to be played softly or loudly, and otherwise nuanced depending on the touch.

Despite ingenious attempts to make the harpsichord compete with the piano, the latter won because of its obvious expressive abilities, and became the keyboard of choice. In the 19th century, harpsichords went out of use, while the piano continued to be developed. The 20th century brought harpsichords back for the old repertoire. And since the harpsichord sound is interesting in itself, new music has been written for it, and it has found its way into a surprising number of film scores.

The harpsichords used tonight

For Farnaby, Frescobaldi and Froberger, a single manual instrument in the Italian style by **Owen Daly**, based on existing instruments by Carlo Grimaldi from around 1690. Tuned in meantone.

For Forqueray, a double manual instrument in the French style by **Ted McKnight**, based on existing instruments by Pascal Taskin from around 1760. Tuned in Salzedo #1.

On playing the harpsichord for 50 years

Jonathan Salzedo writes ...

I grew up in England with music. My first piano teacher was a young lady who lived around the corner. Later I was a student at the Watford School of Music. As a young pianist, I played the whole repertoire but gravitated to Bach and Mozart and fell in love with Purcell's opera Dido and Aeneas when I was studying for the music O-level exam. Getting invited to play harpsichord in a small group was the turning point.

There weren't too many harpsichords around, and people with limited resources were building them from kits. When you build one, out of necessity you quickly learn how to tune it and move it. That was me in 1970,

long before tuning apps. After five decades of moving and tuning, those activities remain among the great joys of life. On the rare occasions when I show up and just play, I miss the completeness of the task.

I was a contrarian in my 20's. Instead of working towards a mathematics degree, I was singing and harpsichording. After that came music college, which was great for meeting people, but was one of those places where I thought I knew better than the professors. HIP (historically informed performance) was the revolutionary approach to music that a contrarian could get behind. We were a stealth movement rediscovering 17th and 18th century music with instruments and playing techniques from those times, abandoning our modern instruments and adopting a pretentiously serene attitude while doing so.

We got outed. This is the questionable logic of HIP: Normative non-HIP performance uses robust instruments played loud and in large orchestras, with vibrato and rubato, lush texture and long phrases. This works well for 19th century music, but makes older music sound awful. Therefore it must be wrong. So HIPsters went for small groups, transparent playing style, no vibrato, straight playing, simple expression. As long as we glossed over some of the period documentation, we could justify our approach. But in reality it was more a negation to effect a change than a true step back into the past. Supposedly returning to simple roots was in fact a post-modern redesign on the cutting edge of the avant-garde.

I should not decry HIP. It remains strong. Today you can hear brilliant performances of old music on period instruments without having to search far and wide, and we HIPsters have continued to read and agonize over old treatises, and at the same time have allowed elements of supposedly modern interpretation back in. And performers who choose to stay with all modern equipment listen and learn from HIP performances. Happily we've mostly all met on common ground somewhere in the middle.

I started The Albany Consort in 1974 to explore the music that I was not getting hired to play. I needed to find my own voice. My fascination was to be part of groups that had no conductor, since we learned that conductors were rather rare before well into the 19th century. Few were doing this, and it has its pitfalls – the presence of conductors in orchestras and choirs makes a lot of sense for getting to a result efficiently. After a few years of experimenting, by 1980 I was getting quite good at organizing conductorless groups that could tackle appropriately scaled performances of the major repertoire of the 18th century. It was a slog though, and the magical year of 1981 caused me to give up aspirations of being a professional musician and take up a career in technology.

In that year, I was part of a contentious group for a Handel choral production that left a rather sour taste, but also toured the Pacific North-West playing wonderful concerts with my favorite oboist Sand Dalton, visited and fell in love with Marion Rubinstein in Palo Alto, moved to the USA, and got a job in the nascent micro-electronics industry indulging my new obsession of coding machines in assembly language. Strangely, all the things that had failed to work for me as a musician in London played out differently in the San Francisco Bay Area, and while working in electronics, I gradually became a part of the body of freelance musicians sometimes known as the Freeway Philharmonic.

During the years when I was working hard as a software freelancer making good money, and working hard as a music freelancer making terrible money, Marion, who proxies any worries I might have about the future, was cleverly saving for our eventual retirements. A year ago, I stopped looking for new work in software, and finally got to where I really wanted to be – a full time musician. And happily not needing to compete for gigs that have recently become very sparse indeed. No regrets looking back – I cannot imagine a life working out any better.

And now I have the nerve to try my hand at playing the harpsichord on my own with no group of musicians egging me on. There is an irony to the way conventional conservatory training prepares a musician to be a soloist, while most of us subsequently play as rank-and-file members of pickup orchestras, or more likely give up music completely. So in a way I am back at the beginning, but armed with 50 years of thinking about the music without much interference. True confessions here. I have listened to everyone else, but developed a playing style that is eccentric, and which has no justification, except that it is how the music seems to me to want to go. Some will find it too free, possibly even lazy or chaotic. Others may be put to sleep if it does not awake a kindred spirit. And of course it is work in progress. My comfortable place is in the middle of an ensemble, not alone on the stage. And it is not clear to me that the smallish sound of the harpsichord, an instrument that faded from the limelight more than 200 years ago, can necessarily inspire an hour of attention. In my defense, I absolutely love what I do. And now I await your honest comments on how this plays out.

Given the above, my suggestion is to use this concert in a rather 18th century inspired way. Concerts were background music for the rich at home, or for noisy crowds in the fashionable new coffee houses. I'm happy that you thought tonight's venture worth attending, and if you think of it as background rather than foreground for the evening, and even talk and eat and drink all the way through it, I will not be in any way displeased, and you will confirm my suspicion that eighteenth century thinking makes sense!

What's next?

It would be not be right if **The Albany Consort** was not involved in some **seasonal music**. So on **Thursday December 24** at 4:45pm, a small version of us will be broadcasting from an almost empty but acoustically wonderful First Presbyterian Church, Palo Alto. The following day, **Friday December 25** at 7:30pm, after we have done what Jews love to do with Chinese food on Christmas Day, we'll be zoomed in to the Etz Chayim Solstice Shabbat service.

On **January 18 and 20**, regulations permitting, an **eight-piece** Albany Consort will play at St Ignatius, San Francisco and at Etz Chayim, Palo Alto in a program of **Bach, Vivaldi and Telemann** concertos. Zoomed and/or livestreamed to your home of course.

Breaking news about these, as always, is posted at www.albanyconsort.com.

Thanks

To my great tech crew, **Ron Shipper** and **Sue Weber**. We have learned zooming and livestreaming together, and we're not done yet!

Congregation Etz Chayim, Palo Alto, for support and encouragement, and providing a lovely performance space.

Marion Rubinstein, my excellent wife, who puts up with me on a daily basis on this strange journey.



Thursday **January 28** at 7:30pm PST

produced by **Albany Consort** and **St Ignatius** Livestream Concerts
details at www.stignatius.org

Saturday **January 30** at 7pm PST

an **Albany Consort** production on **zoom** and **youtube**
details at www.albanyconsort.com

Tickets? Donations? Staying in touch ...

Yes, concerts still cost something to launch. No, there are no tickets for any of these. We're all experiencing some level of unexpected financial concern these days, so we're happy if you come and don't pay anything, as has always been our policy. But we are also happy if you would like to pay, thus helping us not to go bankrupt, and www.albanyconsort.com/donate is an easy way to do it by credit card.

A check in the mail also works (**1071 Blair Av, Sunnyvale Ca 94087**). And email (consort@albanyconsort.com) and phone (**408-480-0182**) are also great ways to reach us.

And we do love hearing from you ...