

# QUICKSILVER

EARLY MODERNS: THE (VERY) FIRST VIENNESE SCHOOL

Early Music Vancouver

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## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM:

Vienna, that splendid city on the very edge of Europe, is best known today in music for two great epochs: the era of Mozart and Haydn in the 1780s, and the "Second Viennese School" of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern in the 1900s. But there was another, earlier, historical period in which Austrian music flourished. This was during the seventeenth century, when the court of the Holy Roman Emperors became the only serious European rival to the more famous court of Louis XIV in Versailles. This *very* first Viennese school began with the patronage of the Hapsburg Emperor Ferdinand II and continued to flourish under his successor Ferdinand III, reaching a high point with the music-loving Leopold I, who came to the throne in 1658.

The Italian musicians who sought employment at the wealthy Viennese court brought with them their most recent invention, the sonata. Unlike its later Classical descendant, the early sonata has no agenda but the imagination of the composer, and no standardized form except the passionate give-and-take of friends in conversation.

The sonata was quickly taken up by the Austrian virtuosi at the Imperial court. Towards the end of the century, Vienna even had a native-born Kapellmeister, **Johann Schmeltzer**. Schmeltzer's great mid-century collection of ensemble pieces, the *Sacro-profanus concertus musicus*, includes several sonorous five-part works, among them the highly atmospheric *Sonata settima*.

The gifted composer and organist **Giovanni Legrenzi** was one Italian who, despite his best efforts, did not win a position in Vienna. He spent much of his career in cities like Bergamo and Ferrara. As part of his efforts to win favor in Vienna, Legrenzi named one of his books of sonatas "La Cetra" after Emperor Leopold's emblem; the word means both "The Scepter" and "The Lyre." *Sonata Terza* from this collection is an excellent example of how the sonata was changing by mid-century, influenced by the lyricism of Venetian opera composers like Cavalli and Cesti.

Among Leopold's musicians was the organist **Johann Caspar Kerll**, who first studied with Valentini before traveling to Rome to study with Carissimi. In *Sonata à 2*, Kerll explores the extravagance of the *sonata concertata*, with extended solos for both violins, but places all this virtuosity in a characteristically South German lyric melancholy.

Yet another influential Italian migrant was the "valoroso nel'violino" **Antonio Bertali**, who arrived in Vienna around 1624 and became Kapellmeister to the Emperor in 1649. His *Sonata à 3*, with a heartfelt adagio that frames a truly rocking ciaccona, is a striking example of his highly theatrical style. This sonata turns up in at least two sources. We use the version that appears as the fourth sonata in Book II of *Prothimia suavissima*, with a *da capo* return to the opening Adagio after the spectacular *ciaccona*.

**Johann Schmeltzer's** fame reached far beyond Vienna. By the mid-1660s, he was in correspondence with Karl Lichtenstein-Castelcorno, the Prince-Bishop of Olmütz and son of Emperor Ferdinand II. Karl kept an elaborate musical establishment at his court in the town of

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Kremsier (modern-day Kroměříž). He commissioned several works from Schmeltzer including the festive *Sonata la Carolietta*, probably written in celebration of the Prince-Bishop's name-day.

With **Johann Rosenmüller**, we come to a major composer whose unexpected life events led to some interesting musical developments. Rosenmüller's instrumental music had been largely made up of dance suites in Leipzig, but once he got to Venice, he discovered the power of operatic melody and theatrical gesture. The *Sonata Decima à 5* comes from his last set of sonatas published in 1682, which combine heartbreaking adagios with dramatic, precipitous allegros.

Like Froberger, **Johann Caspar Kerll's** keyboard works fall into two styles: Italian toccatas and canzonas and French dance suites. His elaborate *Passagaglia* is a great example of how the South Germans incorporated Italian virtuosity into this classic French form.

**Johann Jacob Fux** is best known today for his guide to counterpoint, the *Gradus ad Parnassum*. Fux's music, like his career, traces a generational shift. Some of his chamber works like the *Sonata à 4* are very much in the mode of the seventeenth-century sonata, but by the end of his career he was creating High Baroque trio sonatas.

**Kerll's** *Sonata à 2* appears in a huge anthology of 157 trio sonatas assembled by a cleric, Franz Rost. In this sonata, Kerll explores the extravagance of the *sonata concertata*, with extended solos for both violins, but places all this virtuosity in a characteristically South German lyric melancholy.

We close with a work by the Austrian monastic **Romanus Weichlein**, a student of Biber's in Salzburg. His wonderful collection of *Encænica musices* indulge in a very Southern German atmosphere of rhapsodic melancholy; the third sonata in this collection features a large *Bassaglia* in the middle, which unrolls its motives with a great sense of spaciousness.