MATTHEW
DIRST
ARTISTIC
DIRECTOR





LOVE LETTERS SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2015, 7:30 PM ZILKHA HALL • HOBBY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Happy Valentine's Day, and welcome to *Love Letters*, Ars Lyrica's fourth program of the 2014/15 season and our contribution to the 2015 Houston Early Music Festival. Tonight we're delighted to welcome back to the Zilkha Hall stage two extraordinary singers—mezzosoprano Ellie Jarrett Shattles and countertenor John Holiday—for a program that may require parental consent: its lyrics range from ardent declarations of love to shouts of betrayal.

Baroque Italy had a special fondness, it seems, for vibrant Cupids in practically all realms of art, from fleshy *putti* to flashy music. The "heart on sleeve" nature of so much of this repertory allows one to experience both joy and pain vicariously. What could be more appropriate on a day when we commemorate the paton saint of courtly love?

We hope to see you on March 28 for the second installment of *Bach & Sons*. This program, which features violinist Ingrid Mathews and yours truly on the harpsichord, includes solo concerti and sonatas by papa Bach and his two eldest sons, Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emanuel. On May 17 Ars Lyrica's 2014/15 season closes with a rare treat: *Alexander's Feast* by G. F. Handel, produced in collaboration with Bach Society Houston. Subtitled "the power of music," this grand oratorio is full of spectacular sonic effects.

For tickets and the latest information, including notes for upcoming programs, consult the Ars Lyrica website: www.arslyricahouston.org.

Many thanks for your support and enjoy the program!

Matthew Dirst, Ars Lyrica Artistic Director

Pu.) (M/8)

PROGRAM

O come si gentile Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1743)
Ciaccona Giovanni Felice Sances (c1600–1679)
Dice la mia bellissima Licori Monteverdi

Chiacona a 2 Tarquinio Merula (c1595–1665) Sonata Seconda Biagio Marini (1594–1663) Ballo del Gran Ducca Giovanni Battista Buonamente (c1595–1642)

Non è di gentil core Monteverdi
Ohimè dov'è il mio ben Monteverdi

INTERMISSION

Cessate, omai cessate Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741)

Accompagnato: Cessate, omai cessate

Aria: Ah, ch'infelice sempre

Accompagnato: A voi dunque ricorro

Aria: Nel l'orrido albergo

"Fermati! / No, crudel" from *Rinaldo* George Frederic Handel

(1685–1759)

Piangete, occhi dolente Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757)

Recitativo: Piangete, occhi dolenti

Aria: *Sono amante* Recit: *Lumi no più*

Aria: Messagier, di questo foglio

"Ricordati, mio ben" from *Flavio* G. F. Handel

PROGRAM NOTES

In his lifelong search for verse to set to music, Claudio Monteverdi must have devoured contemporary collections of poetry, especially those that harbored lofty aims. The most iconic such publication of his day was Giovanni Battista Guarini's *II pastor fido* (1590), a highly refined pastoral about the eponymous "faithful shepherd" and his beloved. This kind of love—always ardent but rarely chaste—proved ideal for musical settings, especially the late Renaissance partsongs so beloved of Italian courtiers and an emerging professional class of musicians in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. We still call these pieces "madrigals," a generic label that serves as a kind of catch-all for verses and musical settings that span the gamut from witty to wicked.

Over the course of an exceptionally long career, Monteverdi set some 250 madrigal texts. Within this large and diverse group of pieces, one can see a gradual change in his musical language, from the old-fashioned polyphonic partsong to the new rhetorical monologue of opera. Criticized by the music theorist Giovanni Artusi in the first decade of the 17th century for breaking the rules of dissonance treatment, Monteverdi clearly followed a different muse; his late madrigals especially are neither domestic music nor polyphonic showpieces but instead highly expressive, supple works in the new style for highly skilled professionals.

His seventh book of madrigals, from which this evening's excerpts are drawn, simultaneously paid tribute and gave new life to a genre whose day had clearly passed. Published in 1619, Book VII consists primarily of duets with continuo support, which embrace the flexible "arioso" style of early opera. Our program features three duets whose poetry comes largely from Guarini, with a single example (*Ohimè*, *dov'è il mio ben*) from Torquato Tasso.

Around these four duets are grouped instrumental works of a similar texture and style. Two chaconnes (= ciaccona or chiacona) consist essentially of variations on a standard harmonic pattern, while the "Ballo del Grand Duca" is an arrangement of a "little dance of the Grand Duke," a tune written by Emilio de Cavalieri for the 1589 Florentine wedding of Christine of Lorraine to the Grand Duke Ferdinand de Medici. Marini's Sonata Seconda, by contrast, represents the avantgarde side of 17th-century instrumental composition, with its intense chromaticism and unpredictable embellishments.

The genre of the Italian cantata, though likewise invented around the turn of early 17th century, came into its own 100 years later, thanks to Alessandro and Domenico Scarlatti, Antonio Vivaldi and dozens of other composers trained in the Italian style—including a young Saxon wunderkind by the name of George Frederic Handel. Such works typically comprise a couple of recitative/aria pairs, just enough to relate a brief narrative or paint an evocative picture without the need for a large orchestra or full staging. Vivaldi's Cessate, omai cessate is a full-throated lover's complaint, with strong echoes of Guarini's tragicomedy from a century before, while Scarlatti's Piangete, occhi dolenti frames its sorrow within a deliciously ironic musical language. Their shared pastoral world, in which the beloved is adored and scorned in more or less equal measure, reminds us how love has always been a challenge, though an immensely rewarding one.

Two duets from Handel's early London operas complete this program by encapsulating the same opposing sentiments. "Fermati! Non crudel," which Handel borrowed from his own *Clori, Tirsi e Fileno* (1708) for his smash hit *Rinaldo* (1711), pits the hero Rinaldo against the sorceress Armida, who tries to seduce him but is quickly rebuffed. By contrast, "Ricordati, mio ben" from *Flavio* (1723) begins with a tender love duet between Vitige and his sweetheart Teodata, who take leave of each other as the sun rises on the first scene of a remarkably tuneful opera.

© Matthew Dirst

ARTISTIC PERSONNEL

Ellie Jarrett Shattles mezzo-soprano John Holiday countertenor

Brandi Berry violin
Alan Austin violin
Stephanie Raby viola
Deborah Dunham violone

Becky Baxter Baroque harp

Michael Leopold theorbo

Matthew Dirst harpsichord & organ

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Special thanks to the Moores School of Music, University of Houston, for the use of its Florentine-style harpsichord (John Phillips, 2006) and its continuo organ (Bennett-Guittari, 1998), and to St Philip Presbyterian Church for providing rehearsal space for this program.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



In repertoire encompassing George Frideric Handel's Giulio Cesare in Egitto to Jonathan Dove's Flight and beyond, *countertenor* **JOHN HOLIDAY**'s expressive and richly beautiful voice has made him an increasingly sought after artist, possessing a "vocal instrument that threatens to equal the name artists in his range." (Herald Times) Mr. Holiday debuted at the Los Angeles Opera in Barrie Kosky's acclaimed production of Purcell's *Dido* and *Aeneas* as the Sorceress and returned to the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra in a program of Baroque arias

under Jonathan Cohen in the 2014 - 2015 season, as well as Baroque programs with Ars Lyrica and Mercury. He debuts at the Glimmerglass Festival in Vivaldi's Catone in Utica and will sing the world premiere of Huang Ruo's Paradise Interrupted at the Spoleto Festival USA during the summer of 2015. He was third place winner of Domingo's Operalia competition in the summer of 2014. Recently, John Holiday made his debut with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra in Handel's Messiah. He was also seen as the title role in Radamisto at the Juilliard School, with the Juilliard Orchestra in Giva Kancheli's And Farewell Goes Out Sighing... under Anne Manson, and in Scarlatti's La Sposa dei Cantici with Ars Lyrica in Houston. He will debut at Wolf Trap Opera as the title role in Handel's Giulio Cesare. Mr. Holiday made his Carnegie Hall debut as soloist in Bernstein's Chichester Psalms with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra under Robert Spano, as well as in performances for audiences in Atlanta. He also joined the roster of the Metropolitan Opera to cover Nireno in Giulio Cesare under Harry Bicket in David McVicar's new production and reprised his roles in Philip Glass's Galileo Galilei at Cincinnati Opera. having first performed the work at Portland Opera for his debut.



ELLIE JARRETT-SHATTLES, mezzo-soprano, is thrilled to be singing again with Ars Lyrica during their 2014-2015 season. She has sung various Händel works with Ars Lyrica, the Houston Symphony, Mercury Baroque and the Richmond Symphony. Ellie has had the opportunity to sing opera roles with many prestigious young artist programs, including Marcellina and Mercédès for Nashville Opera, Rosina for Aspen Opera Theatre, and Dorabella for the Merola Opera Program. In 2011 and 2012, Ellie covered Marthe in Faust and The Fortune Teller in Arabella as an Apprentice Artist for the Santa Fe

Opera, and returned in 2013 as part of their Education Development Program to sing Mrs. Noye in Britten's Noye's Fludde. Currently, Ms. Jarrett is pursuing her Doctorate from the University of Texas where she is performing Der Komponist in Ariadne auf Naxos, The Baker's Wife in Into the Woods, and Cherubino in Le nozze di Figaro.

Artistic Director MATTHEW DIRST is the first American to win major international prizes in both organ and harpsichord, including the National Guild of Organists Young Artist Competition and the Warsaw International Harpsichord Competition. Widely admired for his stylish playing and conducting, the Dallas Morning News recently praised his "crisp but expressive direction" of the Monteverdi 1610 Vespers while naming this performance "Best Classical Performance of 2010." Dirst's recordings of music by Scarlatti and Hasse with Ars Lyrica, have earned a Grammy nomination (for Best Opera 2011) and widespread critical acclaim. His degrees include a PhD in musicology from Stanford University and the prix de virtuosité in both organ and harpsichord from the Conservatoire National de Reuil-Malmaison, France, where he spent two years as a Fulbright scholar. Equally active as a scholar, his book Engaging Bach: The Keyboard Legacy from Marpurg to Mendelssohn was published in 2012 by Cambridge University Press.

ABOUT ARS LYRICA

Founded in 1998 by harpsichordist and conductor Matthew Dirst, ARS LYRICA HOUSTON presents a diverse array of music from the 17th and 18th centuries on period instruments. The ensemble's distinctive programming favors little-known Baroque dramatic and chamber works, and its pioneering efforts have begun to attract international attention: the ensemble's world première recording of Johann Adolf Hasse's *Marc'Antonio e Cleopatra*, hailed by *Early Music America* as "a thrilling performance that glows in its quieter moments and sparkles with vitality," was nominated for a Grammy Award® for Best Opera 2011.

Ars Lyrica's most recent recording, of Domenico Scarlatti's comic intermezzo *La Dirindina* and his chamber cantata *Pur nel sonno*, features mezzo soprano Jamie Barton (recently crowned Cardiff Singer of the World 2013) and soprano Céline Ricci. Details about forthcoming recordings and upcoming programs can be found at www.arslyricahouston.org.



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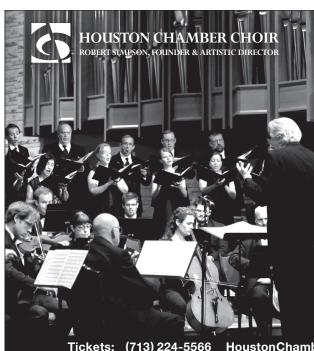






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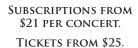
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