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ORCHESTRA CONTROCORRENTE
& CATHERINE JONES

NEAPOLITAN CELLO CONCERTOS

THURSDAY 16 JANUARY 2020 - 7:30 PM



TEATRU MANOEL







Orchestra Controcorrente & Catherine Jones

Neapolitan Cello Concertos

Thursday 16 January 2020 - 7:30 pm
Teatru Manoel, Valletta



The Valletta Baroque Festival

Since its launch in 2013, the Valletta Baroque Festival has treated audiences to a unique event featuring some of the best soloists and ensembles in the baroque music scene. Taking as its main venue one of the oldest working theatres in the world, Teatru Manoel, this prestigious two-week festival also plays out within many wonderful baroque and historical venues, such as St. John's Co-Cathedral and the Verdala Palace. This year's musical programme has once again secured some of the best contemporary exponents of Baroque music from the international and local sphere to contribute to the celebration of Malta.

Front Cover Image

Detail from the composite portrait of the Van Lennep Family by Antoine Favray (1706-1798) from the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

Partners



Sponsors





Programme

Nicola FIORENZA (c. 1700 - 1764)

Concerto per violoncello in F Major

Presto-largo-grave, allegro, largo, allegro

Leonardo LEO (1694-1744)

Concerto for 4 violins and basso continuo in D Major

Maestoso, fuga-allegro moderato, (moderato), allegro

Nicola FIORENZA

Concerto per violoncello in D Major

Largo, allegro, largo, allegro

ilInterval]

Francesco DURANTE (1684-1755)

Concerto n.1 in F minor

Poco andante-allegro, andante, amoroso, allegro

Nicola PORPORA (1686-1768)

Concerto per violoncello in G Major

Adagio, allegro, adagio, allegro

Musicians

Orchestra Controcorrente

Catherine Jones, cello soloist



Programme notes

Neapolitan music of the 18th century resembles a two-faced Janus, looking in opposite directions: On the one hand it was open to the innovations of the new galant style that started to dominate Naples and the rest of Europe in the early decades of the century; on the other hand, it looked back at the learned counterpoint of the so-called “stile antico” that had characterized the 17th century. These opposite tendencies were championed by two leading figures of the Neapolitan school - Leonardo Leo (1694-1744) and Francesco Durante (1684-1755). The former showed an interest for counterpoint and the intertwining of parts, paying attention more to “the artifice and mastery than to spontaneity,” while the latter pursued a melodic disposition of the voices and elegance, with a music that “could please more than surprise.” Yet, the works of these two celebrated musicians, as most of the Neapolitan instrumental music of the 18th century, present a unique combination and balance of these two conflicting compositional approaches.

Durante was celebrated by J. J. Rousseau as “the greatest harmonist of Italy, that is of the world”; he was the teacher among others of Pergolesi, Jommelli, Traetta, and Paisiello at the Conservatory of Sant’Onofrio and then at that of S. Maria di Loreto, and devoted his attention mostly to the composition of sacred and instrumental music. The opening of the orchestral concerto in F minor shows the dramatic intensity of Durante’s harmonic writing, especially in the slow intro that precedes a fast fugal section. The first movement, however, is the only contrapuntally complex of the concerto; the core of the work is indeed the *Andante* characterized by a simple elegiac elegance. A similar directness of language emerges also in the *Amoroso*, a delicate moment of intimate and sensuous expressivity that precedes the rhythmic vigour of the final *Allegro*.

Leonardo Leo, organist and *primo maestro* in two conservatories, teacher of Piccinni, as well as *maestro di cappella* of the Royal Chapel, was instead well known for his large production of operas and oratorios. His Concerto for four violins was written around 1729 and dedicated to the marquis del Vasto, Giovanni Battista d’Avalos. Although by that time Vivaldi had already published most of his concerti, Leo follows only partially the concerto principles and the inclusion of the strictly imitative second movement shows rather the influence of the Neapolitan tradition. It is indeed this movement, the largest and most complex of the entire concerto, a *Fuga* that, capitalizing on the four violins, creates a densely contrapuntal texture in which subject and countersubject, together with an underlining descending tetrachord, are elaborated in constant repetitions and recombination between the parts. As several other concertos by Neapolitan composers - the term often simply implies the presence of solo sections - Durante’s work consists of the four-movement plan typical of the *sonata da chiesa*. The cantabile *Moderato* in G minor and the final bipartite *Allegro* present instead echoes of the expressive gestures of the





contemporaneous theatrical language.

Very little is known about Nicola Fiorenza's (ca. 1700- 1764) life and early career. After his studies at the S. Maria di Loreto Conservatory, Fiorenza was employed in the 1720s as a violinist in the newly inaugurated Teatro Nuovo; ten years later, he was hired in the Royal Chapel where he became first violin in 1758. Most extraordinary were the circumstances in which he was elected as teacher at the Conservatory of S. Maria di Loreto. On May 22, 1743 the Governors of the conservatory faced a difficult decision: Having to select a new string teacher and being undecided on whom to choose among five excellent candidates, they "decided it best, so as not to do injustice to any of them, to put their names in a box and elect one at random; and when the draw was made, it was found that Nicola Fiorenza had been the lucky one." Soon after his appointment as teacher at the conservatory, however, Fiorenza manifested his quite unorthodox methods: several complaints relate that he used "to beat [the students] indiscriminately and to draw his sword upon them" and that he made some students "run away from the Conservatory in desperation."

Fiorenza's concertos coincide with the considerable success enjoyed by the cello repertoire in Naples among professional and amateur musicians alike. The school of string players instituted in the four Neapolitan conservatories produced the first cello virtuosi, performers such as the legendary Francesco Alborea ("Franceschiello"), Giulio de Ruvo, Francesco Paolo Supriani, and Salvatore Lanzetti. Coming out from a rigorous training, these talented musicians reached the major European courts where they established their fame. This brilliant, virtuosic approach to performance, together with the cultivation of the galant style brought about by the Neapolitan cello players exerted a decisive influence over the advance of the modern violoncello in Europe.

There is little doubt about the virtuosic intention of Fiorenza's cello concertos. All the fast movements tend to show off the soloist's abilities, particularly in the last movement of the concerto in F Major and in the first *Allegro* of that in D Major where the virtuosic writing is in full display. Fiorenza generally spotlights the solo episodes by leaving the cello with the accompaniment of only the continuo. The plaintive Largo of the F Major concerto reveals another trait of Fiorenza's cello writing, the intensely expressive cantabile style.

These cello concertos certainly bear the mark of the new stylistic trends that were emerging in Naples in the 1720s and 1730s in vocal and instrumental music. One can just listen to the exquisite elegance of the themes in the opening movement of the D Major cello concerto based on expressive triplets and syncopations to admire Fiorenza's mature command of the galant style. Fiorenza, however, adopts highly original solutions that attract and surprise the listeners. The stunning opening of the Concerto in F Major adapts Vivaldi's ritornello principle to create a unique multi-sectional movement that alternates sudden contrasts of tempo, key, texture, dynamics, and character. The two following bouncy *Allegro* form attractive bookends - respectively on the virtuosic and the galant sides - to the extremely lyrical the *Largo*, one of the most beautiful pages written by Fiorenza for this instrument.





The European fame of Nicola Porpora (1686-1768) is certainly linked to his extraordinary success as an opera composer and the influential activity as a voice teacher: two of the greatest singers of the century, Farinelli and Caffarelli, came out of his school. Porpora's operatic career brought him to the most important music European centres: he travelled to Rome, Venice, Munich, London – called to compete with Handel – Dresden, and in 1752 to Vienna – where the young Haydn became Porpora's keyboard accompanist and acknowledged later he had learned "the true fundamentals of composition" from the Neapolitan master.

Among the limited number of instrumental works written by Porpora, the cello Concerto in G Major occupies a prominent place in the repertoire. The expressive power of the instrument is highlighted in the second *Adagio*, a lyrical movement in which the cello voice intertwines with the lines of the violin parts, while the fast movements are filled with highly virtuosic passages, which, however, are always incorporated in a tight dialogue between the soloist and the full orchestra.

With their frequent use of double stops and chords, extensive passages of arpeggios, and elaborate string crossing as well as with the exploration of the full register and expressive range of the violoncello, both Porpora's and Fiorenza's concertos offer a remarkable picture of the advanced technical and expressive capabilities reached by the cello in 18th-century Naples.

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Artist Biography

Orchestra Controcorrente

Orchestra Controcorrente is a classical ensemble on historical instruments. An original project, born in 2018, it was created by a group of young musicians who already have an international profile both as soloists and chamber music players in some of the most prestigious European ensembles of Early Music.

The orchestra is animated by a lively spirit of musical research and a visionary ideal in their desire to bring to life a musical dream of finding another way to make music; 20 musicians from 6 countries (Italy, Russia, Mexico, UK, Germany, Switzerland) The group performs without a conductor or director and is completely independent in their choice of repertoire and artistic collaborators. Each performance is supported by the work and energy of every single player.

Eager to harvest the rich heritage of the musical past, Controcorrente looks to the future with a courageous vision combining tradition with creativity. Each musician is a unique part of the ensemble and the artistic interpretation is a moment of collective activity.

In July 2019 Orchestra Controcorrente recorded its first cd dedicated to Bach's sons and the development of the Symphony in Germany during the second half of the eighteenth century.

Catherine Jones, cello soloist

Catherine Jones began her career as a modern cellist in Australia, but after receiving a Post-graduate scholarship she relocated to The Hague to follow her passion for baroque music and Historically Informed Performance. Following four years of specialised tuition with Jaap ter Linden at the Royal Conservatorium she received her Diploma in Baroque and Classical Cello.

She has worked and recorded extensively with ensembles of international renown; The Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra, The Academy of Ancient Music, Il Complesso Barocco, Concerto Copenhagen, La Scintilla, I Barocchisti, Il Pomo D'Oro.

As soloist she has performed with Frans Brüggen and The Orchestra of the 18th Century in the Utrecht Early Music Festival performing concerti by JC Bach and Leonardo Leo. She has also featured as soloist in the Festival of Cremona with Il Complesso Barocco and recorded the Leo Cello Concerto for the Deutsche Harmonia Mundi label with this group. She has recently performed the Haydn C





Major Cello Concerto in Madrid's Auditorio Nacional de Música with renowned Spanish conductor José Antonio Montañó and his orchestra La Madrileña and is also a regular soloist with the Baroque Orchestra of the Ernen Musikdorf Festival in Switzerland where she has performed concertos by Vivaldi, Fiorenza, Porpora, Monn and Platti.

This season Catherine joined L'Arte del Mondo in the Bonn Beethoven Festival where she performed the cello concerto of Josef Reicha in D Major and the Duo Concertante of Romberg, which was also broadcast on the German radio station WDR 3.

Her first disk of Boccherini and Cirri cello sonatas for Sony DHM was released in September 2014 to great acclaim and 5 star reviews; the CD has been featured on Italian Radio 3's New CD release programme Primo Movimento and Catherine was also guest artist on the Swiss Radio Programme "Sheherazade" and has performed live on Radio 3 Milan "Piazza Verdi" and the Quirinale concert series in Rome. In 2017 Catherine recorded her second disk, the cello concerti of Fiorenza with the new Tasmanian baroque orchestra Van Diemen's Band, for ABC Classics. This recording was released by the ABC in October 2017 and stayed at the top of the Australian Classical charts for many weeks. Catherine returned to Australia in October 2018 as soloist with Van Diemen's Band in important venues throughout the country, including the Melbourne Recital Centre, the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival (VIC) and the UKARIA cultural centre.

In Europe she has performed with prestigious international artists such as William Carter and Enrico Baiano and given recitals in the Utrecht Early Music Festival (NL) the Urbino Early Music Festival (IT) International Baroque Festival of Valletta (Malta), Festival de Musica Veche in Timisoara (Romania), Trigonale Festival der Alten Musik (Austria).

Catherine is a Visiting Professor at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague (NL) and has given Masterclasses in Novia University in Finland, Austria Barock Akademie in Altmünster, Forum Alte Musik, in Sankt Gerold Austria and The University of Western Australia.

Since 2015 she is Professor of Baroque Cello at the Felice Dall'Abaco Conservatorium in Verona and since September 2017 also at the Civica Scuola di Musica Claudio Abbado in Milan.

www.catherinejones.it







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