

Count Unico Wilhelm
van Wassenaer (1692-1766)

SOMMCD 0141

DDD

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

Six Concerti Armonici
(formerly attributed to Pergolesi)

INNOVATION CHAMBER ENSEMBLE (players from the CBSO)
Richard Jenkinson *Artistic Director*

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| Concerto No. 1 in G major (11:08) | Concerto No. 3 in A major (8:25) | Concerto No. 5 in F minor (8:27) |
| 1 Grave 1:58 | 9 Grave sostenuto 0:35 | 17 Adagio 2:16 |
| 2 Allegro 3:02 | 10 Da cappella. Presto 2:26 | 18 Da cappella 1:45 |
| 3 Un poco andante 3:48 | 11 Largo andante 2:37 | 19 A tempo comodo 2:57 |
| 4 Allegro 2:20 | 12 Vivace 2:47 | 20 A tempo giusto 1:29 |
| Concerto No. 2 in B flat major (10:35) | Concerto No. 4 in G major (10:00) | Concerto No. 6 in E flat major (8:18) |
| 5 Largo andante 4:04 | 13 Largo 2:23 | 21 Affettuoso 3:03 |
| 6 Da cappella. Presto 1:39 | 14 Da cappella. Non presto 1:51 | 22 Presto 1:33 |
| 7 Largo affettuoso 2:06 | 15 Largo affettuoso 3:52 | 23 Largo 1:27 |
| 8 Allegro moderato 2:46 | 16 Allegro 1:54 | 24 Vivace 2:15 |
| Total duration: | | 56:54 |

Recorded at the CBSO Centre, Birmingham on 19 & 20 February 2012
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6 Concerti Armonici



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Van Wassenaer: Six Concerti Armonici

THE SET OF SIX *CONCERTI ARMONICI* (Harmonious Concertos) for strings and basso continuo published without ascription in The Hague in 1740 is such good music that it has seldom if ever been out of circulation since, though its authorship has been a mystery – and a fertile field for confusion – until comparatively recently.

The *Concerti* were first printed by the Italian violinist Carlo Ricciotti (1681-1756), with a dedication to Count Willem van Bentinck (1704-74), a distinguished Anglo-Dutch musical amateur. Ricciotti, also known as Charles Bachiche, and nicknamed ‘Bacciccia’, had worked in The Hague since 1702, eventually becoming the director of a French opera company there. Ricciotti and Bentinck were both involved in a musical society in the city where such works were played, and the composer of the *Concerti* was in fact one of their associates in that society; but his true identity would remain unknown for over 200 years.

In his edition Ricciotti made no claim to have composed the works. In fact in his dedicatory letter to Bentinck he says, mysteriously, that ‘I limit myself thus merely to begging you to accept even more willingly this work, since it is the creation of an Illustrious hand that Your Lordship respects and honours, and if I owe this work to this personage, that is thanks to your intercession’. But the London publisher John Walsh, when he reprinted the *Concerti* in 1755, confused matters by assuming that Ricciotti was indeed the composer, describing them on the title-page as *VI. Concerti Armonici a Quattro Violini obbligati, Alto Viola, Violoncello obbligato e Basso continuo. Composti da CARLO BACCICCIA RICCIOTTI*. Thus Ricciotti became the first of several candidates for authorship: over the years, others included Handel, J. A. Birkenstock, Fortunato Chelleri and Willem de Fesch.

The most popular of these supposed authors, however, was the Italian Baroque master Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-36), who was claimed as the true composer early in the 19th century by a the Pole, Franciszek Lessel. The *Concerti armonici* are certainly

in the Italian (more precisely, the Roman) style, with four violins (rather than the Vivaldian/Venetian three), four movements and rich textures, made popular by Corelli and Locatelli, so – even though they do not sound much like genuine Pergolesi – this ascription had a certain plausibility that soon seems to have hardened into supposed fact. They appeared in the Collected Edition of Pergolesi’s works under the title *Concertini*, and the lustre of his name certainly boosted their reputation and circulation during the 19th century. Eventually, in common with the vast majority of Baroque composers, Pergolesi was forgotten for a while, but became the subject of a revival of interest in the early 20th century – not least through Igor Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella*, that ‘ballet after Pergolesi’ which became a seminal document of modern musical neo-classicism, and which is founded on various pieces that Diaghilev and Stravinsky believed to have been written by Pergolesi, including a movement from No. 2 of the so-called *Concertini* (this became Stravinsky’s ‘Tarantella’).

These matters remained until the winter of 1979-80, when the Dutch musicologist Alfred Dunning followed up a report of the discovery of some music manuscripts in the library of Twickel Castle near Delden in Overijssel, the seat of the aristocratic van Wassenaer family. Here he found an actual manuscript of the *Concerti Armonici*, with a preface by the composer explaining the circumstances in which they were composed and published, and the mystery of his identity was solved. The composer was in fact the distinguished Dutch diplomat, Count Unico Wilhelm van Wassenaer (1692-1766), a person of some importance on the European stage. He was the grandson of the famous Jacob van Wassenaer Obdam, supreme commander of the Dutch fleet in the second Anglo-Dutch War who perished at the Battle of Lowestoft (1665) when his flagship blew up in combat against the Duke of York (the future King James II), and the son of a general who served under Marlborough in the War of the Spanish Succession.

Unico Wilhelm van Wassenaer studied law and went on to occupy important diplomatic, military and commercial posts. As a young man he spent time in Düsseldorf before going on a Grand Tour of Germany, France and (perhaps) Italy during 1717-18. He

was known to have musical talent and studied with Quirinus van Blankenburg (1654?-1739), a famous teacher of the harpsichord and music theorist. Later, as a diplomat in Paris and in Cologne (he was also a member of the Dutch Admiralty and a Director of the East India Company), Wassenaer was apparently admired as much for his musical as his political talents. It is difficult to gauge how widely he was known as a composer, but independent corroboration of his authorship has emerged in a letter written by his elder brother Johann Hendrik in 1725 that mentions Unico Wilhelm's *Concerti Armonici* by name. The *Concerti* are not, in fact, his only surviving works – some Sonatas for recorder and continuo, dating from 1713-15, were discovered in the 1990s – but they attest to Wassenaer's extraordinary skill.

The account of the *Concerti* that he wrote on the manuscript in Twickel Castle reads in full: *Score of my concertos, engraved by Signor Ricciotti. These concertos were composed at different times between 1725 and 1740. When they were ready, I took them along to the musical gathering organized in The Hague by Mr Bentinck, myself and some foreign gentlemen. Ricciotti played the first violin. Afterwards I allowed him to make a copy of the concertos. When all six were ready, he asked permission to have them engraved. Upon my refusal he enlisted the aid of Mr Bentinck, to whose strong representations I finally acquiesced, on condition that my name did not appear anywhere on the copy and that he put his name to it, as he did. Mr Bentinck wanted to dedicate them to me; I refused absolutely, after which he told Ricciotti to dedicate them to him. In this way these concertos were published against my wishes. Some of them are tolerable, some middling, others wretched. Had they not been published, I would perhaps have corrected the mistakes in them, but other business has left me no leisure to amuse myself with them, and I would have caused their editor offence.*

This clarifies the allusions in Ricciotti's preface, but does not wholly explain why Wassenaer was so adamant that his name should not appear in connexion with the works. Perhaps he (or members of his family and immediate circle) shared the widespread prejudice that it was inappropriate for a great nobleman to have his name associated with a commercial

publication; more likely perhaps is Wassenaer's own lack of satisfaction with the *Concerti*, as expressed in his note on the manuscript. If he thought them only 'tolerable ... middling ... wretched' – and his annotations on the pieces in the manuscript (eg 'un peu trop long', 'trop uniforme') point out what seemed to him various shortcomings – it is clear that they fell below his own high artistic standards, and it seems natural enough that he should not wish to be associated with them.

Generations of later listeners have not accepted Wassenaer's verdict, however, and since Alfred Dunning brought out a modern scholarly edition of the *Concerti* in 2003 aimed at producing a text that comes closest to the composer's final conceptions, it has been possible to enjoy them anew. Written as they seem to have been over a 15-year period, what is perhaps most remarkable about these works are the range of expression and technique that they display, the variations in style between movements, marking out Wassenaer as a learned musician who was curious about contemporary styles and techniques. The works are generally but not always conservative for their period, the various movements offering a fascinating blend of early and late Baroque idioms and even anticipations of the Galant style. Wassenaer was evidently also an adept at variations in texture and knew how to handle a group of string instruments in a most expert way. The first and second violins generally have the lion's share of the musical argument in these concertos, but by no means always – the other instruments have material of interest to contribute, and sometimes the texture is elaborated into genuine seven-part writing with the four violins, viola, cello and bass on more or less equal terms. He is adept at imitative writing in general contrapuntal texture, writes fugues and, occasionally, canons, and there are some unusual features such as the allusion to Palestrina in the Third Concerto and the muted movement of the Fifth. Above all, however, it is the beauty of these works – and the unique voice of their composer – that give them a legitimate claim on our interest even today. They radiate a very individual character, both noble and poetic, which continues to earn them a high place among the instrumental music of the early 18th century.

INNOVATION CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

The Innovation Chamber Ensemble was formed in 2001 by the principal string players of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. The ensemble's first concerts were at their home of the CBSO Centre, Birmingham and at London's Wigmore Hall. The group has played at many of the U.K's leading festivals and most prestigious venues. The ensemble has made several recordings (which have included being featured as Classic FM disc of the week) and broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and 4. Recently the ensemble has recorded for Somm Records including the first recording of Elgar's Powick Asylum Music, Wassanaer – Six Concerti Armonici and most recently a disc of piano concertos with the pianist Mark Bebbington. In its larger formation with winds and brass, ICE has performed Mahler 4 and *Das Lied von der Erde*, Bruckner 7 and Mussorgsky *Pictures at an Exhibition* at the Buxton, Deal, Fishguard, Newbury, Petworth and Sounds New (Canterbury Cathedral) Festivals.

INNOVATION CHAMBER ENSEMBLE players on this recording

| | | | |
|----------|---------------------------------------|-------------|--|
| VIOLIN 1 | Zoe Beyers - leader Moritz Pfister | VIOLA | Adam Romer Michael Jenkinson |
| VIOLIN 2 | Martin Cropper Imogen Richards | CELLO | Richard Jenkinson Jessica Burroughs |
| VIOLIN 3 | Colin Twigg Amy Marshall | BASS | John Tattersdill |
| VIOLIN 4 | Ciaran McCabe Dianne Youngman | HARPSICHORD | Martin Perkins |

Richard Jenkinson ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

RICHARD JENKINSON artistic director

Richard Jenkinson studied the cello from the age of five with Florence Hooton, Raphael Wallfisch and William Pleeth. As a cellist he won many awards and prizes including the Gold Medal (Guildhall School of Music & Drama), Vittorio Gui Chamber Music Competition (Florence, Italy) and has played concertos in the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Symphony Hall, Birmingham and recitals at the South Bank, Wigmore Hall and in chamber groups at most festivals and venues around the U.K. He was principal cello with the Irish Chamber Orchestra and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and is currently cellist with the Dante String Quartet. He has made recordings for Somm, Hyperion, Nimbus, Blue Rhythm and the Toccata labels.

Richard studied conducting with Michael Salter (Repton School), Alan Hazeldine (Guildhall School of Music & Drama) and more recently has been fortunate of the support of Ilan Volkov, Andris Nelsons and Professor Simon Halsey at the University of Birmingham. He is currently Music Director and conductor of the Innovation Chamber Ensemble, Orchestra of St John and the British Police Symphony Orchestra. He has conducted at the Bromsgrove, Buxton, Deal, Fishguard, Newbury, Petworth (including in his own arrangement of Mussorgsky *Pictures at an Exhibition*), Sounds New (Canterbury Cathedral) and will perform at Hereford Cathedral and Birmingham Symphony Hall during 2014. Richard is currently studying for a Ph.D in music at the University of Birmingham where he is a Bramall Scholar.

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