

a brilliant escape

with john mckean



september 29 - october 2 2022

cambridge, ma | greenfield, ma | portland, me



palaver
STRINGS

program

Palaver launches its ninth season with an escape into the brilliant world of early music, joined by harpsichordist John McKean. This program includes classic concertos such as Corelli's Christmas Concerto and Geminiani's La Folia, full of florid violin melodies and driving bass lines sure to sweep you away. Two lesser-known works by Casulana and Lusitano, originally written for voices, are full of harmonic twists and turns. We round out the program with Durante's La Pazzia and Telemann's aptly-named Suite La Bizarre.

"Morir non può il mio cuore" - Maddalena Casulana, arr. Jesse MacDonald

Concerto VIII "La Pazzia" - Francesco Durante

Allegro, Affettuoso

Affettuoso

Allegro

Overture Suite La Bizarre - Georg Philipp Telemann

Overture - La Bizarre

Courante

Gavotte en Rondeau

Branle

Sarabande

Fantasie

Minuet I, Minuet II

Rossignol

intermission

"Heu me domine" - Vicente Lusitano, arr. Lysander Jaffe

Concerto Grosso Op. 6, No 8 ("Christmas Concerto") - Arcangelo Corelli

Vivace - Grave - Allegro

Adagio - Allegro - Cadenza - Adagio

Vivace - Allegro

Pastorale

Concerto Grosso in D minor, "La Folia" (after A. Corelli Op. 5, no. 12) - Francesco Geminiani

program notes

Maddalena Casulana (c. 1544-1590) made her living as a singer, lutenist, and composer in Venice. She is credited as the first woman to publish her own music in the Western classical tradition. She hoped, in her own words, to “show the world the futile error of men who believe themselves patrons of the high gifts of intellect, which according to them cannot also be held in the same way by women.” In her four-voice madrigal **Morir non può il mio cuore**, the music is a vehicle for a dramatic text about love and death: “My heart cannot die, though that would make you happy. It’s impossible to pull my heart out of your chest, where it has lived for so long. And if I killed my heart, as I wish I could, I know you would also die.”

Francesco Durante (1684-1755) was a composer and teacher (unfortunately of ill repute) in Naples for most of his life. He succeeded his teacher, Alessandro Scarlatti, as the head maestro di cappella at the Sant’Onofrio, later renamed the Naples Conservatory of Music, teaching the likes of Paisiello and Pergolesi. **La Pazzia (“the madness”)** is the eighth of his nine concerto grossi, and lives up to its bizarre title. The first movement, full of dueling violas, explores the partnership between soloist and orchestral tutti. Stylistically, it most closely resembles the German Empfindsamer Stil (sensitive style) of the mid-1700s. A touching and delicately brooding slow movement takes us down from our high. With a full tutti finale, we shake off the cobwebs, find a partner, and dance our pent-up energy away.

George Philipp Telemann (1681-1767) was a prolific composer whose works are still well-known today, though they are often relegated to the role of background music. If you dig into his extensive catalog, you will find a wealth of music full of wit and subtlety. His **Overture-Suite “La Bizarre”** is one such piece, named for the rhythmic irregularities in the overture. Other oddities can be found throughout the suite, including mixed-metered writing in Branle and the surprisingly light and birdsong-filled ending of the Rossignol (“nightingale”). Telemann was largely self-taught; his family discouraged him from pursuing music and he studied law before dedicating himself to music full-time. Despite these setbacks, he became a highly influential composer during his own lifetime. By pursuing exclusive publication rights for his compositions, he set an important precedent for music as intellectual property of the composer.

program notes cont.

Vicente Lusitano (ca. 1520-1561) was an innovative Afro-Portuguese composer and theorist, now recognized as the first published Black composer in the Western classical tradition. In 1551 he defeated fellow composer Nicola Vicentino in one of the greatest music theory showdowns of all time. Vicentino proceeded to both slander Lusitano's reputation and copy his style, leading to his literal erasure from the canon; Lusitano's name was even scratched off his own counterpoint treatise. His motet **Heu Me Domine** is full of groundbreaking chromaticism and startling harmonies.

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713) wrote his **Christmas Concerto** in Modena in northern Italy, and it became one of his most celebrated works. While it was absolutely meant for Christmas Eve, we don't know if Corelli actually wrote it closer to the High Holidays or if he even saw Irving Berlin's 1954 classic White Christmas. Probably not, but the piece's lush ornamentation, acrobatic leaps between solo and tutti, and pristine Pastorale all exude "shepherds kneeling by a manger fair." Audience participation quiz: Which famous piece (and who is the composer) in the not-so-distant future copied Corelli's Pastorale melody? Hint #1: This Pastorale melody is repeated throughout many movements of the first "act" of the piece (there are 3 "acts" in total). Hint #2: This piece is also usually played at a certain religious holiday.

Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762) was a virtuosic violinist as well as a composer, and a student of both Scarlatti and Corelli. From 1726-27, Geminiani published two sets of concerti grossi reworking Corelli's sonatas for solo violin, including **La Folia**. Corelli's original virtuosic violin part remains largely unchanged, but is now brilliantly paired with material contrasting solo and tutti playing. A Spanish dictionary from 1611 defines "folia" as meaning "mad" or "empty-headed," describing it as a dance so raucous and fast that the dancers seem "out of their minds." While the later baroque variations are considerably tamer fare, the Corelli/Geminiani concerto still retains the spirit of the original dance. One of Geminiani's largest lasting contributions to the field of music is his 1751 treatise Art of Playing the Violin, an invaluable resource on late baroque performance practice and 18th-century Italian violin technique in particular.

musicians + artists

violin: Josie Davis, Kiyoshi Hayashi, Maya French,
Jesse MacDonald, Abby Swidler, Molly Tucker

viola: Brianna Fischler, Lysander Jaffe, Elizabeth Moore

cello: Dara Hankins Matthew Smith, Nathaniel Taylor

bass: Asa Maynard

harpsichord: John McKean

longy student artists: Aspen Barker, Jubilee Chen, Ana Ospina, Simone Cartales

John McKean is a harpsichordist and musicologist based in Boston, where he serves on the faculty of the Historical Performance Department at the Longy School of Music. In frequent demand as both a soloist and continuo player, he has performed throughout Europe and North America, with concert engagements bringing him to venues as far afield as the Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Fondazione Cini (Venice), Museu da Música (Lisbon), St. Martin-in-the-Fields (London), Norðurljós Hall (Reykjavík, Iceland), and the Philips Collection (Washington, DC). Critically acclaimed for his “intelligent” and “precise” playing (The Washington Post) as well as his “sonorous brilliance and thrilling, dance-like energy” (Allgäuer Zeitung), John has appeared with numerous noted ensembles and orchestras, including Apollo’s Fire, Emmanuel Music, Catacoustic Consort, Sarasa Ensemble, Camerata Vocale Freiburg, Bay Chamber Concerts, as well as the Jacksonville, Naples, Portland, and Pittsburgh Symphony orchestras. John holds degrees in German Studies and Harpsichord Performance from Oberlin College/Conservatory and an advanced performance diploma from the Hochschule für Musik Freiburg (Germany). He also holds an M.Phil. and a Ph.D. in historical musicology from the University of Cambridge (U.K). For several years he served as an assistant editor of the Oxford University Press journal Early Music. Beyond his musicological work and performing career, he also maintains an active interest in instrument-building (he regularly performs on a 17th-century style Flemish harpsichord of his own making), music publishing, typography, and exploring the remote corners of his home state of Maine.

Tuere Lawton (Season 9 Visual Artist) has always been in love with drawing. She has spent the past 5 years of her life practicing her craft between the US and Spain, and is focused on diversifying visual storytelling by illustrating scenes using people of color. She grew up in Brooklyn, NY and Zaragoza, Spain and is bilingual. She is fascinated by her experience as a Black woman and aims to share her experiences through her art. She has used her abilities to help teach at risk children how to use art to improve their lives both abroad and in the US and is passionate about the opportunity for liberation through making.

Palaver Strings is a musician-led string ensemble and nonprofit organization based in Portland, ME. Founded in 2014, Palaver has established itself as a forward-thinking ensemble whose mission is to strengthen and inspire community through music. In our musician-led model, Palaver's musicians share artistic and administrative leadership, guided by a passion for engaging new audiences, addressing social justice issues, and amplifying underrepresented voices. Each year, Palaver presents a full series of live performances featuring diverse musical programming, cross-genre projects, and community collaborations. Learn more at palaverstrings.org.

Palaver Strings affirms that Black lives matter and acknowledges that systemic racism continues to affect our community. Our mission is to strengthen and inspire community through music, and we believe that true community is not possible without sustained work to dismantle these oppressive structures that can separate us and impair the development of the community we seek. As performers, educators, and collaborators, we strive to create a culture of equity, inclusion, and accountability. One necessary part of this work is examining classical music's legacy of exclusion and white supremacy, and the ways in which this legacy shapes our playing, decision-making, and ways of being together. We will coordinate that effort with a continuing awareness of the effects that exclusion and white supremacy have on our day-to-day lives. Our work cannot end here; it must continue with concrete action to disrupt these systems and practices.

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Our sincere gratitude goes out to the movers and shakers at **Mechanics' Hall, Longy School of Music at Bard College, and Hawks + Reed** for presenting live music and supporting the arts; to the dozens of hosts and audience members who welcome musicians into their homes during Palaver's performance weeks, Roland Robitaille for his logistical and audio support; Tuere Lawton for the poster artwork; Haley Maiden for her marketing expertise; Fiona Hilton for her beautiful graphic design; and our Board of Directors and generous sponsors and supporters who continue to make our work possible.