

THE ATLANTA BAROQUE ORCHESTRA

Presents

“*Overtures*”



With Guest Director

Gesa Kordes, Baroque violin

Saturday 27 September 2003, at 8:00 p.m.
Peachtree Road United Methodist Church
Atlanta, Georgia

“Overtures”

Gesa Kordes

Guest Director & Leader

Overture and Suite from *Alcina*

George Frideric Handel
(1685 - 1759)

Overture – Musette – Menuet – Gavotte –
Sarabande - Menuet – Tamburino

Overture and Suite from *Venus and Adonis*

John Blow
(1649 – 1708)

Overture – Act Tune – The Grace’s Dance –
Act Tune – Gavatt – Saraband for the Graces – Ground

Overture and Suite from *Les Indes Galantes*

Jean-Philippe Rameau
(1683 - 1764)

Overture – Entrée des quatre nations – Musette –
Air grave pour deux polonais – Menuet – Air pour les Amours -
Rigaudon – Tambourin

~ *Intermission* ~

***Balletto Secondo* from op. 22**

Biagio Marini
(ca. 1587 – 1663)

Entrata grave – Balletto allegro – Gagliarda –
Corrente – Retirata

Overture in C Major, BWV 1066

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685 - 1750)

Ouverture – Courante – Gavotte – Forlane – Menuet
Bouree – Passeped

Finis



Orchestra Personnel

Baroque Violin

Gesa Kordes
Irene Chung
Ute Marks
Shawn Pagliarini
Martha Perry
Ruth Johnsen

Baroque Viola

Melissa Brewer
Chereé Mitchem

Baroque Violoncello

Brent Wissick
Eckhart Richter

Baroque Bass

Melanie Punter

Baroque Flute

Catherine Bull
Janice Joyce

Baroque Piccolo

Catherine Bull

Baroque Oboe

George Riordan
Susan Brashier

Baroque Recorder

Catherine Bull
Jody Miller

Baroque Bassoon

Keith Collins

Harpsichord

Daniel Pyle

The Atlanta Baroque Orchestra was founded by a group of musicians who felt the need for a permanent professional historical-instrument orchestra in the Southeast. The unique, transparent sheen of “early” instruments, coupled with their capability of a delightful variety of articulations, allows voices and instruments to blend into a unified, yet clear, sound that is very difficult to achieve with “modern” instruments. Since its founding in 1997, the ABO has been applauded for its freshness and verve, and for its delightful, convincing performances of a wide range of earlier works. As the leading orchestra of its type in the southeastern region of the U.S., the ABO is now in demand not only in Georgia, but also all of the neighboring states.

The Orchestra received initial generous support from the Atlanta Early Music Alliance and a variety of individuals, and has also depended on donations of time and money from the musicians themselves. The ABO has received its own independent 501(c)3 status, and can now accept direct tax-deductible donations. Contributions such as these are not only greatly appreciated, they are central to the survival of a venture such as this. If you would like to support the ABO and its future programming, please send checks made out to “The Atlanta Baroque Orchestra,” 303 Augusta SE, Atlanta, GA 30315. There is also a great opportunity for friends of the arts in the community to serve on the new Atlanta Baroque Orchestra board. **If you are interested in serving on the board or volunteering, please contact Janice Joyce (770.537.0744), or Catherine Bull (404.627.9077) after the concert, or go to our web-site at www.atlantabaroque.org.**



Gesa Kordes performs with numerous chamber groups across the U.S. and Europe, including Ensemble Ouabache, Milwaukee Baroque, *The Comic Intermezzo*, B.O.M.B. (Seattle), the Apollo Ensemble (NY), Tra i Tempi (Bonn), and Ensemble Corund (Lucerne). In addition, she serves as member of the Atlanta and Indianapolis Baroque Orchestras and as Lecturer for Baroque violin at Indiana University. She has toured as a soloist and chamber musician throughout the US, Europe, Costa Rica, and Israel, and has recorded for NPR, FONON, Dorian, and harmonia mundi. Her teachers include Stanley Ritchie and Franco Gulli at Indiana University, where she earned a double masters in violin and musicology and is currently working towards a Ph.D. in musicology. In Spring 2000, Ms. Kordes was a finalist in the second Dorian/EMA recording competition with her chamber groups *Naked Fifth* and *Liaison*.

Program Notes

Tonight's program explores the concept of overture (derived from the French "ouverture," or opening) in different European countries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In general, we use the term "overture" to mean an opening to a long musical work, such as an opera or more generally an opening to a larger event, such as a personal relationship or – for our purposes – a concert season. The idea of an overture being played by itself, like the concert overtures by Beethoven or Brahms, was primarily an invention of the early nineteenth century. In the Baroque era, musical overtures served either as beginnings of operas or dance suites, or as openings of "hit parades": suites of movements extracted from popular operas or ballets. Our program includes overtures from two contexts: the first half presents works excerpted from Italian, English, and French operas, whereas the second half focuses on dance suites popular in court culture.

The first piece on our program is a suite from Handel's *Alcina*, his last great success as a composer of Italian operas. The work was premiered at the Covent Garden opera house in London in 1735 as part of the final lucrative season of Handel's opera company, the Royal Academy of Music. Although the Academy was founded under the patronage of the King in order to promote Italian opera in England, *Alcina* contains a good deal of French dance music. These dances were designed to showcase the talents of a well-known ballet company led by the famous French dancer Marie Sallé, which Handel employed in all his operas of the 1734-35 season. Instead of raising the curtain directly on the opening scene, the brilliant, virtuosic overture was followed in the original performance by two ballets danced to a stately Musette and a charming Minuet. In our extracted suite, we combine these two dances with ballet music from the opera's first act, finishing with a rousing Tambourin. The inclusion of the ballet must have strongly contributed to *Alcina*'s initial success, since the opera was performed 18 times with dancers. When Handel tried to revive the work in the following season *without* the ballet, he had to end the run after two performances.

The English composer, John Blow, composed his chamber opera, *Venus and Adonis*, around the time of Handel's birth, ca. 1685. Blow was a contemporary and colleague of Purcell, first as a boy soprano and then as organist of the Royal Chapel in London. Unlike Purcell, however, his interests lay primarily in sacred music, and thus *Venus and Adonis* is his only work for the stage. The dances from his opera show, however, that he was a talented ballet composer who knew how to combine incisive rhythm and memorable tunes and a typically English penchant for surprising harmonic turns. Blow shared Purcell's fondness of the "Ground" – a series of variations over a repeated bass –, and the dance suite concludes with a virtuosic ground on a chromatic bass theme.

Jean-Philippe Rameau, a close contemporary of both Handel and Bach, was the leading French composer of his time in the field of opera and an important innovator in harmonic theory. Like Handel, his parents expected him to embark on a career in law, while his own interests lay in music. After he was expelled from a Jesuit college at age 18 for having concentrated all his energy on music instead of his studies, his parents finally consented to his becoming a musician and sent him to Milan to study. He held several posts as organist before settling in Paris, where he eventually became the house composer and orchestra director of a wealthy financier, Joseph Le Riche de la Pouplinière. La Pouplinière provided for Rameau's needs over 20 years, which enabled him to spend a good part of his time on his theoretical studies while also composing a plethora of dramatic works, cantatas, and instrumental pieces. *Les Indes galantes* (1736) is an "opéra-ballet," a genre about halfway between an opera and a ballet, which was very popular in France in the early eighteenth century. The brilliant overture is followed by a series of dances depicting different scenes and/or characters, such as the grand entrance of youths from France, Spain, Italy, and Poland in the "Entrée des quatre nations." The different groups then display typical national characteristics in the following dances: the French are portrayed by the sounds of a popular French instrument in the "Musette" (a kind of hurdy-gurdy). This is followed by a "serious air" for the Polish, after which the Italians and Spanish dance a minuet with oboes and flutes, respectively. The gracious "Air pour les Amours" (Cupids' melody), an energetic Rigaudon, and a virtuosic Tambourin round out the suite.

In the second half of our program, we leave the realm of opera for that of the court and the dance suite. The idea of a string of dances to be performed – and danced – in a specific order dates back to the fifteenth century, when it became customary to pair slow dances with fast dances. In sixteenth century court balls, two pairs of dances often formed a suite: pavan (slow) and galliard (fast), and passamezzo (slow) and saltarello (fast). By the beginning of the seventeenth century, Italian and French courts had elevated dance suites to a semi-theatrical art form that served both as entertainment and as a showcase for the grandeur of the nobility who danced to them. Marini's Balletto from 1655 evokes these semi-theatrical court ballets in sandwiching a dance suite between an "entrata," for the dancers' entry, and a "retirata" which portrays the dancers' exhausted departure with a series of jarring harmonic juxtapositions. Although most of Marini's numerous vocal and instrumental works are lost, this balletto and his other surviving music attests to his stature as one of the most imaginative and innovative musicians of the early seventeenth century.

By contrast, Bach's work presents a much later stage in the development of the orchestral suite: an overture followed by a suite of highly stylized, abstract dances that are no longer meant for dancing, but rather to dazzle the aristocratic audience with brilliant instrumental and contrapuntal virtuosity. Bach's four orchestral suites (BWV 1066-69) were probably composed during the period 1717-1723, when he served as orchestra leader to Prince Leopold of Cöthen. Much of Bach's instrumental music was composed for the prince who was an accomplished amateur musician and employed some of the foremost instrumentalists in Germany at the time. Although the C major overture has the typical form of the period—a French overture with its pompous section pervaded by dotted rhythms and fugue which prefaces a suite of dances popular in the era—each movement has its own special touch. The overture's fugue, for example, turns into an extended concerto for a trio of 2 oboes and bassoon, and the forlane, instead of being a simple melody with accompaniment, is set by Bach as an elegant counterpoint of three contrasting ideas, a sprightly melody in the high instruments, a flowing middle voice, and a lively rhythmic bass.

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Dr. Rick Wilson

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