

Sunday, November 9, 2025, 3pm Hertz Hall

## Twelfth Night All'Italiana

David Belkovski, harpsichord and direction
Rachell Ellen Wong, violin and direction
Shelby Yamin, violin
Andrew Gonzalez, viola
Andrew Koutroubas, cello
Adam Cockerham, theorbo
Nicoletta Berry, soprano

## **PROGRAM**

Antonio VIVALDI (1678–1741) Overture to Il Giustino (1724)

Georg Philipp TELEMANN (1681–1767) Sonata in A minor, TWV 43:a5

(c. 1715–1725)

Largo - Allegro - Adagio

George Frideric HANDEL (1685–1759) "Se vago rio" from *Aminta e Fillide* (1708)

TELEMANN Sonata in A minor (cont.)

Largo e staccato - Allegro

Johann Friedrich FASCH (1688–1758) Sonata in D minor, FaWV N:d3 (c. 1750)

Largo - Allegro - Largo - Allegro

VIVALDI Violin Concerto in E minor, RV 278

(c. 1730-31)

Allegro - Largo - Allegro

INTERMISSION

HANDEL Armida abbandonata (1707)

Recitative: "Dietro l'orme fugace"

Aria: "Ah crudele!"

Recitative: "Per te, mi struggo infido"

Recitative: "O voi, dell'incostante

e procelloso mare" Aria: "Venti, fermate"

Recitative: "Ma che parlo, che dico?"

Aria: "In tanti affanni miei"

Francesco DURANTE (1684–1755) Concerto in G minor (1730s or 1740s)

Affettuoso - Presto

HANDEL "É un foco quel d'amore"

from Agrippina (1709-1710)

DURANTE Concerto in G minor (cont.)

Largo Affettuoso

HANDEL "Al dispetto di sorte crudele" from *Aminta e Fillide* 

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## PROGRAM NOTES

The unparalleled wellspring of inspiration throughout Baroque Europe was undoubtedly Italy. Desperate to breathe the same air, taste the same food, and hear the same music, composers such as George Frideric Handel rushed to Rome, Venice, Florence, and Naples early in their careers. Those without the means, or whose employers would not allow the time off, absorbed what they could by poring over score after Italian score, as did Johann Friedrich Fasch. Others, like Georg Philipp Telemann, were content to let their imaginations run wild, fusing fashionable Italian music with the rigor of German technique. Throughout this afternoon's program, All'Italiana, these three Teutonic figureheads collide with trailblazing icons from the North and South of Italy, respectively Venice's Antonio Vivaldi and Naples' Francesco Durante.

Vivaldi naturally takes top billing on any program highlighting Italian influence. The overture to his 1724 opera *Il Giustino* shows his keen sense of dramatic timing, opening with sharp stops and starts that jolt the audience to attention. A bittersweet middle movement, with its aching violin line, offers a brief moment of repose before giving way to a rustic, almost martial finale.

Known for pursuing a "mixed taste" throughout his life's work, Telemann strove for a cosmopolitan style that could appeal to French, Italian, and German musicians alike. Yet his A minor sonata in four parts shows no such pretensions; it is unabashedly Italian. Contemporary manuscripts and catalogues even reveal his youthful infatuation with Italy by way of his playful anagrammatic pseudonym, Georgio Melante. The sonata opens with a haunting, disjunct re-

frain that passes restlessly from one instrument to another, followed by a gigue-like movement (ironically, a dance Italians had borrowed from the English), which is suddenly cut short by more unsettled, haunting music. The mood is appropriately set for Handel's unforgettable aria of profound melancholy, "Se vago rio," composed during the composer's Roman visit in 1708. Here the accompaniment undulates in a Sicilian rhythm, at once a backdrop for the voice and reflection of the protagonist's subconscious. The sonata recommences with brusque, declamatory chords followed by a tumbling, restless finale.

Unable to find his way to Italy, Fasch was forced to admire from afar. His D minor sonata is even more à la mode than Telemann's, balancing learned imitation with sumptuous textures. The opening movement is dark and lyrical, followed by a second that shifts between lively instrumental conversation and what sound like playful shouting matches. The third turns to France with the sumptuous *ouverture*-like rhythm, before morphing into a miniature violin concerto. The finale unleashes a whirlwind of counterpoint, this time purely for raucous, theatrical effect.

Plucked from his seemingly bottomless output, Vivaldi's E minor concerto for violin showcases traits of the Italian style that became notorious abroad, namely, startling harmonies and a penchant for surprise and effect above all else. The first movement is a case study in Italian audacity, veering abruptly across the emotional spectrum. The second is a master class in sustained tension, built on little more than a throbbing accompaniment and a desperate violin line. By the third movement, the chromatic turbulence of the earlier music breaks loose, underpinned by a rumble that can only be described as a seismic event.

The centerpiece of the program is Handel's cantata Armida abbandonata, written during his formative years in Italy. The work draws on the legend of Armida, the sorceress from Torquato Tasso's epic Gerusalemme liberata, who falls in love with the crusader Rinaldo only to be abandoned by him. Handel seizes on her moment of betrayal, giving voice to her anguish in a single-voiced cantata of striking intensity. Written in Rome at a time when opera was routinely suppressed, the cantata offered Handel an outlet to experiment with operatic drama in miniature. Its virtuosic demands and searing emotional range foreshadow the great operatic heroines of his later career.

The true beating heart of Italy was, of course, Naples, the largest European city along the Mediterranean at the time. Here, Durante reigned supreme as a composer of both instrumental and sacred music, as well as a pedagogue who trained countless 18thcentury superstars. His G minor concerto opens with a movement marked "affectionately," immediately revealing the operatic vocality that pervades his slow music, despite his lack of interest in staged works. The second movement begins without pause or preparation—a brilliant use of elision that showcases Durante's dramatic flair-careening and whipping all instruments into a frenzy. This energy paves the way for Handel's showstopping "E un foco quel d'amore," drawn from his Venetian triumph Agrippina. A gentle return to Durante anticipates Mozart and the elegance of the Classical era, again marked "affectionately."

The program closes with Handel's "Al dispetto di sorte crudele," a playfully defiant and joyful outpouring of vocal and instrumental virtuosity.

—David Belkovski





"Bold, often brusque, always brilliant" (The Boston Musical Intelligencer), Twelfth Night is the newest period-instrument ensemble making a splash on concert stages at home and abroad. Based in New York City, the ensemble is dedicated to reanimating forgotten repertories as vivid, living art; bridging the past, present, and future. Co-founded and co-led by keyboardist and conductor David Belkovski and violinist Rachell Ellen Wong, Twelfth Night presents programs ranging from intimate chamber configurations to full operatic and orchestral productions, all grounded in historically informed performance. Founded in 2021, the ensemble has already earned praise for its "zesty, impeccable playing" and "sensitivity and virtuosity" (New York Classical Review).

Both artistic directors are regarded as leading young representatives of early music. Wong made history in 2020 as the only Baroque violinist ever to receive an Avery Fisher Career Grant, and she continues to distinguish herself internationally on both modern and period violins. Belkovski, born in Skopje and trained in both folk and classical traditions, has gained recognition as a dynamic conductor, continuo player, and composer. In 2024, the duo codirected the New World Symphony in a landmark period-instrument program, and they have since led projects with other major ensembles. Recent appearances include Cal Performances (with cellist Coleman Itzkoff during the 2022-23 season), Carnegie Hall, Caramoor, the Friends of Chamber Music Kansas City, and the Newport Classical Festival. Looking ahead, Twelfth Night will make its Philadelphia debut at Penn Live Arts, return to Carnegie Hall, and launch new productions exploring lesser-known Baroque operas and chamber works.

At its heart, Twelfth Night is more than a historical ensemble: it is a revel of musical community, where old voices speak freshly and new ones resonate with echoes of history. Born in Skopje, Macedonia, David Belkovski's musical journey began with Balkan folk traditions and has evolved into a vibrant career as conductor, soloist, and continuist. Known for his vivid programming and compelling interpretations, he has directed ensembles including Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Juilliard415, the New World Symphony, the Milwaukee Symphony, and Les Violons du Roy. Recent appearances at the Norfolk, Ryedale, and Aix-en-Provence festivals highlight the breadth of his artistry. This season, he joins the San Antonio Philharmonic to direct the complete Brandenburg Concertos, makes his directorial debut with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and returns to conduct the Juilliard School's production of Saverio Mercadante's I due Figaro.

Performing regularly on harpsichord, fortepiano, and modern piano, Belkovski has won first prize in several national and international competitions, including the 2019 Sfzp International Fortepiano Competition. He has served as an assistant conductor to Richard Egarr, Raphaël Pichon, and John Butt; prepared orchestras for William Christie; and held the post of Assistant Conductor with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra.

Continuo playing remains central to his creative life, with recent collaborations including Vox Luminis, Jupiter Ensemble, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and Trinity Baroque Orchestra. Belkovski is also active as a composer, with commissions including one for Juilliard415, and teaches courses and workshops on continuo performance and historical pedagogy at Juilliard. He is the recipient of the Robert A. and Patricia S. Levinson Award, the first in the field of early music to receive this honor.

Violinist Rachell Ellen Wong is a unique performer equally at home in Baroque and standard violin repertoire. In 2020, she made history as the only Baroque artist to receive the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant. Her blend of technical virtuosity on gut strings, expressive musicianship, and understanding of period performance practices has earned international acclaim and a dedicated following. Named "most approachable virtuoso" by the *New York Classical Review*, Wong has appeared as a soloist across six continents and collaborated with esteemed ensembles including the Academy of Ancient Music, Jupiter Ensemble, Bach Collegium Japan, The English Concert, and Ruckus.

Equally accomplished on modern violin, she debuted publicly with Philharmonia Northwest at age 11 and has performed as a soloist with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and Seattle Symphony, among others. Wong also teaches for the Valley of the Moon Music Festival in Sonoma, CA.

Recent appearances include the New World Symphony, Camerata Pacifica, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, Ilumina Festival in São Paulo, Reno Chamber Orchestra, the Northwest Sinfonietta, and the Rome Chamber Music Festival. Among her many awards, Wong won the inaugural Lillian and Maurice Barbash J.S. Bach Competition. Originally from the Pacific Northwest, she studied at the University of Texas at Austin, Indiana University, and the

Juilliard School, where she was a Kovner Fellow. She performs on a Baroque violin from the school of Joachim Tielke ca. 1700, and a 1953 Carlo de March violin, and currently resides in New York City with her two bunnies.

Nicoletta Berry is a rising soprano whose artistry spans early music, the classical canon, and contemporary works. During the 2024–25 season, she was praised by the Boston Musical Intelligencer for her "clear soprano" in the world premiere of Phil Kline's ghost story, a new song cycle presented at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Other recent highlights include Polissena in Handel's Radamisto with Opera Essentia and appearances with the New York Festival of Song in their Tour de France program.

In 2024, Berry made her Carnegie Hall debut as the Seraph in Beethoven's *Christ on the Mount of Olives*. She also performed Despina in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* at Opera Saratoga and previously appeared as Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* at the Aspen Music Festival, where she was a Renée Fleming Artist. Additional operatic credits include Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Tytania in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Clizia in Handel's *Teseo*.