



Francesco Geminiani
*Sonatas for Cello
& Continuo, Op. 5*


deux-elles


Father
& Son


George Ross, *cello*
Alastair Ross, *harpsichord*

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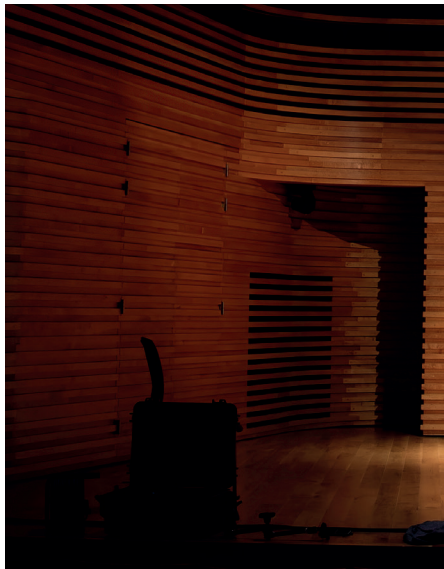


PHOTO BY TOM MURKILL

In April 2023 Frederick and Elizabeth Howe hosted a fund-raising evening for this recording at Penn House, their home near Amersham. It was a wonderful event in one of the house's beautiful rooms, using their Eric Dodson harpsichord, and with food provided by Gilly and George's brother Jack. George and Alastair are so grateful to Freddie and Elizabeth for arranging this event.

Later in the year Penny Wright and Andrew Neubauer of Syde Manor, Cheltenham organised a concert for an invited audience, making available their Tithe Barn and their harpsichord by Huw Saunders, and giving us warm and entertaining hospitality. Alastair and George wish to thank them very much, and also Simon Neal who prepared and tuned the harpsichord. ■



DEUX-ELLES: Tell us about your relationship with Geminiani's Cello Sonatas. When did it all start?

ALASTAIR: Well, my relationship with these pieces actually started via my wife, who knew them before I had even met her. When she was a very young girl she'd listened to Anthony Pleeth's recording with Christopher Hogwood, which was a ground-breaking one at the time. She fell in love with them and listened to them over and over again, and in time introduced them to me.

D-E: Amazing! Had you actually played them at all?

ALASTAIR: No, I'd never played them.

D-E: How about you, George?

GEORGE: Well, when I was in my second year at college, I got hold of a baroque cello for the first time, and I started to explore the music that my parents had been doing for so long. I played these sonatas with my dad and also with my classmates. About ten years ago, my parents gave me the edition I used for this album.

D-E: Which edition was that?

GEORGE: It's the one from The Hague from 1746. I started with the D Minor Sonata, which has a nice substantial Andante introduction, very melancholic and panoramic. It's also the only sonata that has a presto movement following the introduction. Then I turned the page and played the next sonata and it was also completely unique - even to this day I couldn't really tell you which is my favourite.

D-E: People often play these sonatas with an extra bowed bass because the bass line goes quite high. Here, you've chosen to do them with only harpsichord continuo. Are there specific reasons for this?

ALASTAIR: Geminiani's bass lines are terrific, but I think his harmony is equally important and provides the whole centre to the sonatas. That was the reason I wanted to do them this way. Geminiani is very specific about his harmonies. He hardly leaves any chords for the player to decide: it's all fully figured.



D-E: You mentioned to me that Geminiani had written something about the way he wanted to be accompanied. Can you tell us what he said?

ALASTAIR: Yes, I have it here. In *The Art of Accompaniment*, he writes: “the art of accompaniment consists in displaying harmony, disposing the chords, in a just distribution of the sounds whereof they consist, and in ordering them after a manner, that

may give the ear the pleasure of a continued and uninterrupted melody”. He calls it melody, but I think we know what he’s talking about: the melody of harmony. He makes this very clear on the next page: “the art of accompaniment chiefly consists in ‘rendering’ the sounds of the harpsichord lasting, for frequent interruptions of the sound are inconsistent with true melody.” He wants “the learner”, as he calls his intended reader, “not to exhaust the harmony ▶

all at once, that is to say, never to lay down all his fingers at once upon the keys, but to touch the several notes whereof the chords consist in succession". He's basically talking about arpeggiating everything, getting the harpsichord to speak and then to resonate.

GEORGE: I don't know if you found that bit in one of his books where he says that if you don't take enough care to listen to what you are doing on the harpsichord, then you may as well use a drummer to accompany.

ALASTAIR: Yes, that's from his *Rules for Playing in a True Taste*. He was very particular in how he wanted to be accompanied.

D-E: That's amazing!

GEORGE: There's also a famous quote about Geminiani that really inspired my feeling about these pieces. In Charles Burney's account of Geminiani's time in Naples, it says that he "was soon discovered to be so wild and unsteady a timist, that instead of regulating and conducting the band, he threw it into confusion; as none of the performers were able to

follow him in his *tempo rubato*, and other unexpected accelerations and relaxations of measure." That's been a big inspiration for us.

D-E: I love that. You were very thoughtful about the sound as well - it's a beautiful, warm, intimate sound. Had you talked about different recording venues or the kind of listener experience that you wanted to capture?

GEORGE: Well, we scheduled the recording for January, and we had various romantic ideas about trying out different churches. We ended up going with the Menuhin Hall, which I had been to on a couple of occasions. It's an incredibly warm space, and you're surrounded by wood and round edges. The space is big enough for a grand playing style, but also small enough for an intimate one.

D-E: The CD is called "Father and Son". Is this the first time you've fully collaborated on a project like this?

GEORGE: Yes, that's right.

D-E: I remember sitting next to Nick Parker in the control room when you started to play, and he remarked on what a privilege it is to hear a father and son working together and making music together. I'd be interested in knowing what that process was like for you and how it developed. What was easy and what was difficult?

GEORGE: We've been playing these sonatas together on and off for about ten years, so it's been a slow-burning thing. However, the process of recording them was funny, because whenever I tried to explain myself to my dad using words, it always came across as gibberish. So we just had to play more.

D-E: Well, you talked about Geminiani being an unsteady timist, so I suppose the melody line needs to be like a balloon on a string?

GEORGE: Exactly. With some sort of anchorage.

D-E: Was the dynamic different, working together as a father and son duo, as opposed to a regular colleague?



PHOTO BY TOM MURKELL

ALASTAIR: I think there's bound to be a difference if you're related: emotions can be different in a family. George is very spontaneous, very emotional, whereas I keep things a bit more bottled up, with all the emotion under the surface. George is more ▶

inclined to blow up in a recording situation than I am, but I can perhaps reach that point later. Our worst rehearsal ever was when we were rehearsing for our first fundraising concert, at Penn House - a good time to have a bad rehearsal! It went really badly, didn't it? We stopped the rehearsal, left Penn House, and went and drank lots of cups of tea and then had fish and chips in a cafe and felt better about it.

D-E: Okay, so you didn't storm off?

ALASTAIR: No, no, we didn't. We had just reached a dead end. It didn't really matter, because we knew we could get it back.

GEORGE: We have that sort of relationship in my string quartet as well - that closeness. I think it's part of the magic. It's getting your feelings out there, which you can't get in a bigger group, because you don't get that emotionally deep with one another. I think you have to let loose somehow with chamber music.

D-E: Yes, and of course it comes through in your playing. ■





ALASTAIR ROSS

Alastair was a choirboy at Christ Church, Oxford, and then an organ scholar at New College, where he gained a First in Music in spite of his attention to Finals being distracted by the arrival that summer of Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. He then went to America for two years to study the organ, returning home after deciding that possible drafting to the war in Vietnam might not be a wise career-move.

As a freelance organist and harpsichordist for fifty years Alastair has played for The Sixteen and the Academy of Ancient Music, appearing on all their award-winning recordings for most of that time.

For twenty years, with his wife Gilly, he directed *Concerto delle Donne*, a three-soprano group specialising in music from 17th and 18th century Italy and France. They made two recordings for Signum Records, the first one of music by Carissimi, and a visit to a historic organ outside Paris resulting in a further CD of Charpentier's church music.

Alastair and Gilly are involved with, and thrilled by, their other three sons' musical activities, which include commercial music (Laurie), reggae bands (Sam) and orchestral and 'natural' trumpet (Jack). ■

GEORGE ROSS

Life for George took a different turn when he failed the 11+ and ended up at the Purcell School with a scholarship. His teacher Alexander Boyarsky sent him off to competitions and summer courses across Europe where he met many talented, inspiring peers, and also finally discovered meat eating.

George earned his Bachelor of Music at the Royal College of Music in London where he encountered the baroque cello, receiving lessons from Richard Tunnicliffe. He plunged into playing continuo for whoever needed it, then pursued a Masters in historical cello at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague

with Jaap ter Linden, transforming George's musical outlook.

In 2013 George founded the Consone Quartet which became the first period instrument string quartet to be selected as BBC New Generation Artists. The Quartet has been enthusiastically received at London's major venues, as well as further afield in Europe, South America and Canada and at festivals including Edinburgh, Cheltenham, Buxton, MA Festival, Bruges, Heidelberger Streichquartettfest and Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Most recently, George has enjoyed returning to the English Haydn Festival as a soloist to perform concertos by C. P. E. Bach and Schumann. He has worked with such groups as the English Concert, the Academy of Ancient Music, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Arcangelo, and the Hanover Band.

Ever since he first got his hands on a baroque cello, George and Alastair have been playing these Geminiani sonatas together. Performing and recording this programme as father and son is an intensely special experience. ■



DXL1199

FRANCESCO GEMINIANI

Sonata No. 4 in B-Flat Major

- 1. *Andante* 0:25
- 2. *Allegro moderato* 3:25
- 3. *Grave* 0:56
- 4. *Allegro* 1:22

Sonata No. 5 in F Major

- 5. *Adagio* 0:39
- 6. *Allegro moderato* 1:23
- 7. *Adagio* 2:53
- 8. *Allegro* 3:23

ALESSANDRO SCARLATTI

- 9. *Folia, from Toccata VII* 8:44

GEMINIANI

Sonata No. 2 in D Minor

- 10. *Andante* 2:29
- 11. *Presto* 2:32
- 12. *Adagio* 0:44
- 13. *Allegro* 6:16

Sonata No. 1 in A Major

- 14. *Andante* 2:02
- 15. *Allegro* 3:33
- 16. *Andante* 0:50
- 17. *Allegro* 3:59

JACQUES DUPHLY

- 18. *Chaconne in F Major* 9:03

GEMINIANI

Sonata No. 6 in A Minor

- 19. *Adagio* 0:45
- 20. *Allegro assai* 3:35
- 21. *Grave* 0:28
- 22. *Allegro* 4:07

Sonata No. 3 in C Major

- 23. *Andante* 2:07
- 24. *Allegro* 4:15
- 25. *Affettuoso* 4:01
- 26. *Allegro* 3:11

Total playing time: 1:17:07