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CC1001

Luigi Boccherini

FIVE SONATAS
FOR
VIOLONCELLO

SEBASTIAN
COMBERTI

VIOLONCELLO

ELIZABETH KENNY
ARCHLUTE/GUITAR

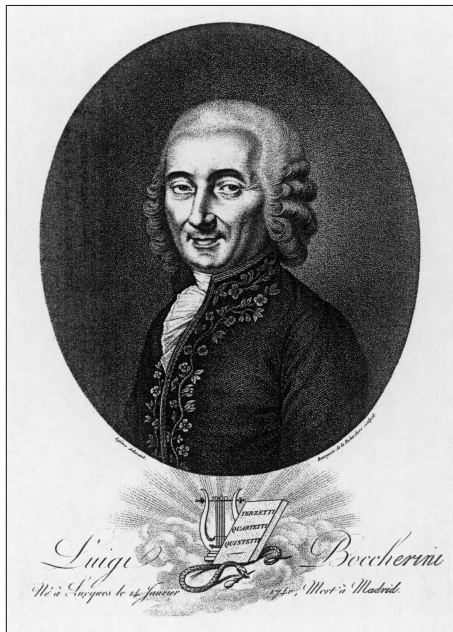
RUTH ALFORD
VIOLONCELLO

PREMIÈRE
RECORDING

PERIOD INSTRUMENTS

Luigi Boccherini

FIVE SONATAS FOR VIOLONCELLO



Sonata in D G.564

- | | | |
|-----|-----------|------|
| I | Allegro | 4.54 |
| II | Cantabile | 2.59 |
| III | Rondo | 2.46 |

Sonata in g G.562

- | | | |
|-----|---------|------|
| I | Allegro | 7.28 |
| II | Adagio | 5.52 |
| III | Presto | 2.04 |

Sonata in Eb G.567

- | | | |
|-----|---------|------|
| I | Andante | 4.34 |
| II | Largo | 2.45 |
| III | Allegro | 2.20 |

Sonata in C G.6

- | | | |
|-----|------------------|------|
| I | Allegro | 5.39 |
| II | Largo Assai | 4.03 |
| III | Allegro Moderato | 3.49 |

Sonata in G G.5

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------|------|
| I | Allegro Militare | 6.27 |
| II | Largo | 4.13 |
| III | Tempo di Minuetto | 3.17 |

The Composer

Luigi Boccherini was born in the Italian town of Lucca in 1743 into a family already rich in artistic talent. The young Luigi evidently showed great early promise, for by the age of thirteen we find him studying under G.B. Costanzi, the *maestro di capella* at St. Peter's in Rome. Only one year later, Luigi and his father were summoned to Vienna where their concerts in the Imperial Court drew great praise. Until the age of twenty, several more visits were undertaken until eventually in 1764, the young man's much sought after post at the Chapel of the Grand Council in Lucca was granted.

His duties, in addition to playing, included a good deal of composition, and several large-scale choral works date from this period. It was also during this time that Boccherini is said to have taken part in the first public string quartet performances, in Milan in 1765.

Under the patronage of Baron Bagge, Boccherini then travelled in 1767 to Paris, where over many months he enjoyed varying degrees of success. Several of his early string trios and quartets were taken by Parisian publishers, together with a number of his early concertos for cello.

Invitations were extended by the Spanish Ambassador to Paris, who persuaded Boccherini to travel to Madrid, where after an unsettled period, he was appointed "Virtuoso di Camera e Compositore di Musica" to the Infante Don Luis in 1770. During the following years, under the stability of a secure patronage, he composed a great deal of music in all forms: chamber, orchestral, choral and operatic.

After the death of Don Luis in 1785, Boccherini was able to accept other commissions. Through the introduction of the Prussian Ambassador in Spain, he was appointed chamber composer to Prince Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia, himself a cellist, although it is now almost certain that he fulfilled this position while continuing to live in Madrid. In fact no record exists of the composer's activities between 1787 and 1796.

Towards the end of the 1790s he continued to have dealings with publishers in France, and his letters to Ignaz Pleyel give us some idea of the demand for his works by printing houses in London and Paris. After the death in 1798 of the Prince, and hopeful of finding a new patron, Boccherini dedicated his set of quintets Op.57 "à la nation Française" but an offer of a post at the Paris Conservatoire was rejected. His second wife and two daughters died during an epidemic in 1804, and the composer ended his days in Madrid, existing on a meagre pension from the Court.

The Sources

In the catalogue of the composer's works, compiled by Yves Gerard in 1969, no fewer than 32 sonatas for violoncello are listed. Whilst the sources for the sonatas are dispersed throughout Europe, there are in fact none existing in Boccherini's own hand. Interestingly, while it is now considered beyond doubt that the works are indeed by Boccherini, no mention of any of his sonatas for cello are made in any document that he compiled himself. Scholars of the composer have established that the compositions date from between the composer's fourteenth and twenty-fifth year; as is the case

with many such works of the period, the accent is on virtuosity, the primary purpose of the material being for the use of the composer as soloist to take with him on tour.

At the time that the above-mentioned catalogue was compiled in 1969, not all of the available sources were available for detailed examination. The performers are indebted to Keith Harvey for allowing access to the volume of sonatas previously in a private collection in Liverpool. Of the 11 works contained in this volume, six have hitherto never been published, three of which, G.562 in G minor, G.564 in D major and G.567 in Eb Major, are here recorded for the first time.

Performance

The question of how exactly to perform the violoncello sonatas of Boccherini is one that has given rise to much debate over the years. The sonatas are usually marked on their title pages “Per un violoncello Solo con Accompaniment di basso” and are without exception written on two staves, giving rise to various interpretations.

On close inspection the lower part is very often imitative of the upper, and frequently imitates bowing indications; coupled with the occurrences of double-stopped passages in the lower part this would suggest very strongly that another bowed bass instrument is required for realisation.

The fact that the young Luigi is known to have toured with his father, a bass player, has in modern times often been taken literally to imply that the ‘Basso’ of the accompanying team was in fact a double bass. However the disparate registers, often leaving a gap of some two octaves between solo and accompaniment, would tend to belie this fact; a second cello is surely the most satisfactory answer.

A good continuo violoncellist of the day would have had no trouble in providing a harmonic foundation on his own, as evidenced by much recent research. However, given the imitative and often fugal writing in the continuo line, it was felt for this recording that a greater independence of harmonic realisation was called for. The solution has been to have the latter provided by a plucked instrument, guitar or archlute as the key of the particular work dictates, eminently more portable than any keyboard instrument – an important factor given the itinerant nature of an 18th century virtuoso.

From the end of the sixteenth century, Italians had led the way both in the development of continuo playing and of new designs and tunings for the family of long-necked lutes that included the archlute (*arciliuto*) and theorbo (*tiorbo* or *chittarone*). By the eighteenth century the archlute – often a little smaller and certainly with a greater range of octaves, though not as loud as the bigger theorboes – was commonly used to accompany the higher, faster bass lines of later baroque music. Solo, obbligato and continuo parts marked ‘*arciliuto*’ continued to appear in operatic, sacred and instrumental music, particularly in Italian-influenced London and Austro-German courts, until the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

The late baroque character of Boccherini’s early sonatas seemed particularly suited to this sound. The 5-course baroque guitar – so associated with its Spanish origins as to be named the “*chitarra spagnola*” was also much in vogue in C18 Italy and beyond, with a sophisticated solo repertoire and a wide range of uses in cantatas, operas and instrumental

accompaniments. Again, leading players were often Italian, though a late C18 painting by Ollivier called “le Thé à l’Anglaise” shows a Paris concert where guitarist Monsieur Jelyotte and a very young W.A. Mozart share the stage.

The Sonatas

The **Allegro** of the sonata in **D G.564** opens with a flourish which sets the spirited concertante feel for the whole movement. The use of double-stopping in both voices, particularly in the development in the second half, provides unusual richness to the sounds giving the impression at times of a larger number of cellos in the ensemble. The **Cantabile** is a slow melody, varied in the minor which leads directly via a short cadenza to the **Rondo**. Between the statements of the Rondo theme there are episodes in various keys. The work ends surprisingly in a passage marked to be played in harmonics, a device not found elsewhere in Boccherini’s entire cello output. The guitar is used throughout this sonata.

The sonata in **G minor G.562** enters an entirely different world as the key would suggest, the opening phrase of the **Allegro** sounding as if it belongs more to the composer’s baroque roots. The beautiful **Adagio** in Bb unfolds slowly, with the solo voice beginning on a long-held note over a descending bass line; with once again the clever use of double-stopped passages, the two cello lines weave in and out of each other’s register, the movement ending in a cadenza which leads straight into the fugal Presto.

The sonata in **Eb G.567** is one of no fewer than five sonatas in this key to be found in the “Liverpool” collection. The opening **Andante** includes some beautifully lyrical writing for both voices in thirds and sixths. An expansive **Largo** again fools the listener with the extra voices in the solo line and, as in the previous sonata, leads by way of a cadenza directly into a fugal **Allegro**. As before, the fugal ideas are thrown between the two voices until the sonata ends with a coda revelling in the chordal writing of the solo part.

Unlike the three previous works, the sonata in **C G.6** was published in the composer’s lifetime and has appeared in editions since the C18. The key of the work explores all the resonance of the open strings of both instruments and the **Allegro** opens with a rolling chord that uses this to great effect, setting the joyous tone for the whole sonata. The **Largo Assai** employs typically Italianate florid writing which never seems to disturb the stillness of the mood. The final **Allegro Moderato**, despite the cautious speed indication, is a virtuoso romp which revels in the brightness of the key in which it is written.

G.5 in **G major** is the only one of any of Boccherini’s sonatas to employ anything approaching a programmatic title, the opening **Allegro Militare** amply describing the tone of the movement. Towards the end of the movement a beautiful tune in thirds is introduced, which quite unexpectedly reappears as the theme of the ensuing **Largo**, a device not to be found elsewhere in these works. The apparently staid **Tempo di Minuetto** title of the last movement disguises a robust virtuosic character to the music, interspersed with short moments of heart-on-sleeve chromaticism.

Born in London, **Sebastian Comberti** studied in Italy with Amedeo Baldovino and later with Derek Simpson and Sidney Griller at the Royal Academy of Music, from which he graduated in 1977.

In 1976 he became a founder member of the Bochmann Quartet, giving concerts throughout the British Isles and in Europe. In 1983 he was appointed principal cello with the London Mozart Players with whom he has appeared on numerous occasions as soloist.

As a member of several chamber groups, he has recorded for CPO, CRD, EMI, Harmonia Mundi, Hyperion, Meridian, Phoenix and RCA.

A keen interest in historically informed performance has resulted in participation with a great many of London's period instrument groups, frequently appearing as principal cello with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and soloist with the Hanover Band. Research into early cello repertoire has led to several recitals being recorded by the BBC.

The cello by Francesco Rugeri used by Sebastian Comberti on this recording dates from circa 1680 and was kindly loaned by the Royal Academy of Music, London. It has been returned to its original condition, and was strung with two gut and two silver-wound gut strings.



Photo: Robert McBain

Ruth Alford has been specialising in period instrument performance since the early 1990s, after establishing herself as continuo cellist and chamber musician with many orchestras and ensembles in London. She graduated from Manchester University with an honours degree in Music, having studied with Bernard Gregor-Smith and the Lindsay String Quartet. Further studies followed with David Strange, the Amadeus Quartet, Jenny Ward-Clarke and William Pleeth. She now performs and records regularly as a principal player with the English Baroque Soloists and the Orchestre Revolutionnaire et Romantique as well as other period instrument ensembles, including the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Brandenburg Consort and the Revolutionary Drawing Room.

Cello anonymous English circa 1800.

Elizabeth Kenny has established herself as one of the UK's foremost lute players. Her solo repertoire ranges from the renaissance to the eighteenth century. She is in great demand as a continuo player with the leading London period instrument ensembles (Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Gabrieli Consort, Taverner Players etc.), and has been a regular part of William Christy's *Les Arts Florissants* since 1993. With these ensembles she has made dozens of recordings for CD, radio and television, and toured throughout Europe, North America and Japan.

She plays chamber music with Monica Huggett's The Great Consort and with the viol consorts Concordia (UK) and *L'Ensemble Orlando Gibbons* (France).

Elizabeth Kenny is professor of Lute at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where she also advises on English song and French baroque repertoire. She gives monthly classes at the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin.

Archlute by Martin Haycock (1994), after Venere.

Guitar by Klaus Jacobsen (1995), after Venetian original.

Cover Picture: 'The Reverend Chafy' by Gainsborough – Courtesy of Agnew's, London

Programme notes by Sebastian Comberti and Elizabeth Kenny © 2001

Translations into French and German can be found at www.celloclassics.com/CC1001.htm

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