The Three Sopranos
Earthly Delights for Angelic Voices

Amanda Forsythe, soprano
Dorothee Mields, soprano
Cecilia Duarte, mezzo-soprano

Boston Early Music Festival Continuo Ensemble

Paul O’Dette & Stephen Stubbs, Musical Directors

Folle cor
Domenico Mazzocchi
(1592–1665)

Mio core languisce
Luigi Rossi
(ca. 1597–1653)

Dorothee Mields

Speranza al tuo pallore
Rossi

Amanda Forsythe & Cecilia Duarte

Disperate speranze
Rossi

Sdegno, campion audace
Virgilio Mazzocchi
(1597–1646)

Amanda Forsythe

The Boston Early Music Festival extends heartfelt thanks to
Joan Margot Smith
for her leadership support of tonight’s performance by Amanda Forsythe, Dorothee Mields, Cecilia Duarte, and the Boston Early Music Festival Continuo Ensemble.
Occhi belli
Dorothee Mields & Cecilia Duarte
ROSSI

Anima peccatrice
Marco Marazzoli (ca. 1602–1662)

Amanti piantete
Cecilia Duarte
ROSSI

Di questo sen la piaga
Marazzoli

Ai sospiri, al dolore
Dorothee Mields & Amanda Forsythe
ROSSI

Fan battaglia
ROSSI

Notes on the Program

The idea of a group of three “singing ladies” may be a Platonic ideal residing deep in the human psyche to judge from cultural artifacts ranging from Egyptian wall paintings through Botticelli’s Muses and on to well-known emanations in our own time including the Andrews Sisters and the Supremes. A particular focus on three women as a vocal performing unit was given by the Este court of Ferrara in the latter part of the sixteenth century where the music master Luzzasco Luzzaschi (1545–1607) composed music for a treasured, secret cappella comprised, at its height, of Laura Peverara, Anna Guarini, and Livia d’Arco, and known far and wide as the Concerto delle donne. Of course, it was no secret that they existed and that their performances were breathtaking, but they were kept as a musica secreta, and the pleasure of hearing and seeing them was reserved for the lucky few esteemed worthy by the Este rulers. The development at this time of the arts (music, poetry, acting, dancing) as a professional career path for women had much to do with the emergence of the modern woman in Western history. For the first time, an occupation other than that of wife, nun, or courtesan opened entirely new vistas of female accomplishment. Collectively the Italians called the new professional female artists “le cortegiane honeste,” and a wonderful legacy of music for their performance forms the bulk of tonight’s program.

At the nearby court of Mantua, Monteverdi served as court composer, and along with his groundbreaking achievements in the first years of the seventeenth century...
(Orfeo, Arianna, and the 1610 Vespers among them), he also contributed some music to the genre of three singing ladies because of a trio of singing sisters then in Mantua. The ensemble included the famous Andreana Basile—La sirena di Posilipo (Posilipo is a hillside neighborhood of Naples overlooking the bay)—who not only sang but played the harp, lira, and Spanish guitar. While she was in Mantua, Andreana gave birth to two daughters: Leonora in 1611 and Caterina in 1620.

After that first flowering in Ferrara and Mantua, the epicenter of music for three women's voices moved, with Andreana Basile and her daughters, to Rome. Nowhere else in seventeenth-century Italy was the musical world so rich, varied, lively, and well-patronized as in Rome. The pope, his cardinals, and all the old and well-respected noble families competed with one another to be known as the most lavish of Roman patrons.

Both of Andreana’s daughters became singers, and in 1633 they gave their début in Rome and became known as Le Canterine Romane. In terms of the repertoire composed for them they were destined to become even more important than the original Concerto delle donne in Ferrara. Leonora emerged as the brightest star of the ensemble, inspiring a collection of poems dedicated to her called Applausi poetici alle glorie della Signora Leonora Baroni published in 1639. The great English poet John Milton heard her on a visit to Rome and paid her homage in three Latin epigrams entitled Ad Leonoram Romae canentem.

This remarkable ensemble was also known to accompany themselves on lute, harp, lira, viol, theorbo, and guitar in various combinations. They inspired both directly and indirectly the greatest Roman composers of the time, including Luigi Rossi, the brothers Domenico and Virgilio Mazzocchi, and Marco Marazzoli, to write a large body of ecstatic and sensuous music for three sopranos.

Like Andreana Basile, Luigi Rossi had been at the court of Naples before settling in Rome. He studied the organ, lute, singing, and composition with Giovanni de Macque, maestro di cappella at the Neapolitan court. Among the many pieces he copied as an apprentice composer was the Lamento d’Arianna of Monteverdi. In Rome, Rossi served first the Borghese family and later the Barberinis. The Barberini were instrumental in bringing his opera L’Orfeo to Paris in 1647 (BEMF 1997), the expense of which helped create an anti-Italian backlash known as the Fronde, but also had a lasting legacy in the establishment of opera in France. Despite his fame and importance as an opera composer, his largest body of work was in the genre of chamber cantata (for one, two, and three voices with basso continuo) which number more than 300! Luigi Rossi was pronounced head of the Roman school of composers by Bonini in his Discorsi e regole sovra la musica in 1649.

Domenico Mazzocchi was born in Civita Castellana, to the north of Rome. His early studies as a priest and a doctor of philosophy and law could have led to a brilliant career in the service of the Curia, but at the age of twenty-eight he entered the service of Cardinal Ippolito Aldobrandini. The Aldobrandini were one of the oldest and most respected aristocratic families in Rome, and Domenico remained in their service until his death in 1665. Mazzocchi composed at least one opera (La catena d’Adone in 1626), several oratorios, as well as many solo and polyphonic pieces in both Italian and Latin, reflecting the wide range of musical culture in Rome at the time of Pope Urban VIII. Mazzocchi was interested in matters of performance as well as composition. More than any other composer of his time, he wrote about details of interpretation by which he expected singers to perform his works. These include particularly the dynamic shaping of notes known as messa di voce and the expressive bending or sliding of notes from one pitch to its chromatic alteration. Virgilio Mazzocchi, as the younger brother of Domenico, and like him providing sacred works for various papal chapels, began his career in the shadow of his more famous sibling. His most significant legacy took the form of the opera Chi soffre, speri (He who suffers, may hope) in collaboration with Marco Marazzoli. The opera was performed at the Palazzo Barberini in Rome on February 12, 1637. Virgilio Mazzocchi created the main body of the work and Marazzoli created intermezzi called La fiera di Farfa, featuring characters derived from the commedia dell’arte.

Marco Marazzoli is perhaps the least familiar of the many brilliant composers working in mid-seventeenth-century Rome, yet at the time he was one of the most celebrated. Marazzoli worked as a harpist, tenor, and composer for the Barberini family from 1626 until his untimely death in 1662. One of his instruments, the famous “Barberini harp,” is housed in the Musical Instrument Museum in Rome, and is also depicted in Lanfranco’s painting Venus playing the harp displayed in the Barberini Palace in Rome. Marazzoli wrote extensively in most of the vocal genres in use at the time, including sacred vocal music and oratorios, operas, and more than 380 cantatas for one to six voices. His distinctive musical language is filled with memorable melodies, a remarkable variety of rhythmic motives, masterful counterpoint, and hair-raising dissonances. Marazzoli’s interest in the integrity of each musical line frequently results in passages in which none of the vertical sonorities results in theoretically permissible harmonies, but the shape and directionality of each of the lines make perfect sense. Marazzoli’s works survive primarily in a series of autograph composing manuscripts which are extremely difficult to decipher, perhaps the primary reason his music is not performed more frequently today. Next spring, we will be presenting a program of Marazzoli’s magnificent cantatas for six voices and strings. Several of the cantatas were written in celebration of Pope Alexander VII’s role in concluding the Peace of the Pyrenees in 1659.
between France and Spain, and we will be dedicating this concert to our fervent hope for world peace.

The French musician and writer André Maugars, who visited Rome in 1639, had the luck to see and hear Le Canterine Romane perform some of this music in the year before Andreana Basile’s death. As he wrote in his Response faite à un curieux sur le sentiment de la musique d'Italie the following year:

This concert transported me into such ravishment, that I forgot my mortal condition and believed myself to be among the angels. ✠

—Stephen Stubbs, 2023, with thanks to Erin Headley and Silke Leopold

### Texts & Translations

**Folle cor (Breve è la vita nostra) — Domenico Mazzocchi**

**Foolish heart (This life of ours is short) — Domenico Mazzocchi**

**Folle cor, ab non t’alletti**  
Lo splendor de bei sembianti,  
Che tra lievi pompe erranti  
Spiran sol falsi diletti.

Flee! For as soon as it is born  
The era of serenity disappears.

**Fuggi pur, che nata a pena**  
Sparir suol l’età serena.

**Flee!**

**Splende il di, ma nel Aurora**  
Perde il vago de’ suoi Fiori  
E del sole agli splendori  
Langue l’Aura, e manca Flora.

**Flee!**

**Fuggi pur...**  
Scherzi il mar, ma di procelle  
Nidi sono i suoi zaffiri,  
Ben ch’eterni habin’ i giri  
Pur nel Ciel moion le Stelle.

**Flee!...**

**Mio core languisce — Luigi Rossi**

**My heart languishes**

**E mai non si more**  
Madre ohimè, non fusse amore.

**Yet never dies.**

**Mother, alas, might it be love?**

**Un dolce veleno,**  
Penoso diletto,**  
Tormenta’l mio petto,**  
Lusinga il mio seno,**  
Sospiro, vien meno,**  
S’affligge il mio core,**  
Madre ohimè, non fusse amore.

**A sweet poison,**

**Painful delight,**

**Torments my bosom,**

**Beguiles my breast;**

**I sigh, I faint,**

**My heart is afflicted**

**Mother, alas, might it be love?**

**Di duolo si rio**  
Hor godo hor mi doglio  
Non so quell ch’io voglio,

**From such suffering**

**Now I thrive, now I grieve,**

**I know not what I want,**

—Text by Ottavio Tronsarelli
Yet endlessly desire,
My heart is full
Of cold and burning,
Mother, alas, might it be love?

Pleasing hope
Beguiles the mind,
But one soon repents
And the soul is undone,
Happiness is short-lived,
Pain is eternal,
Mother, alas, might it be love?

Hope, from your pallor
I know you don’t hope anymore,
And still you continue
To deceive my heart.
Like a sick doctor
Who tries to sustain life
Against all odds
And has no strength for herself.
Listen to what I tell you, shrivelled hope:
First recover yourself, then attend to me.

Desperate hopes, farewell,
If the beautiful woman I adore
Has forgotten how to be merciful to me
And does not care to hear that I am dying for her,
Alas, what can I expect from my idol?
Desperate hopes, farewell.

Alas, false hopes,
And through weeping and sighing
Leave me to suffer, and languish alone
Unable to find mercy for my torments.
If you still find enjoyment in my great pain,
Alas, false hopes, fly away.

Disdain, bold champion
Warrior of reason
Unfurling its banner
Wants no more truce, no, and no more peace.

If disdain invites you
O Soul, with its fury,
Break that unworthy yoke,
Ah, the heart has no heart
Once disdain has enlivened it,
Long live disdain,
Ch’innalzando la face
Non vuol più tregua nò, non vuol più pace.

—Text by Giulio Rospigliosi

Occhi belli — Luigi Rossi

Occhi Belli, occhi miei cari,
Raffrenate il vostro sguardo,
Per pietà del foco ond’ardo
Siate a me, pregovi, avari.
Troppo il sen mi ferrite
Quando penso, occhi miei, chè altri gradite.
Ma lasso! E che diss’io?
Stolto che fui!
Chiamai quegl’occhi miei,
Che son d’altrui.

Anima peccatrice — Marco Marazzoli

Trio
Anima peccatrice, a penitenza!
Un Dio dal ciel ti chiama
E, perché di salvarti avido brama,
Vuol che freni al fallir l’empia licenza.

Soprano I
Di sangue ricoperto,
Di spine incoronato,
Tutto nel sen piagato,
Ei per le colpe tue dona il suo merto.
Ma non sazia abbastanza,
Ecco dall’alta croce
In cui per te mori spiega una voce
Di sicura speranza
E gridà, colmo ancor di sofferenza:

Alto
“Anima peccatrice, a penitenza!”

Soprano duo
T’influisce ogni ventura
Un recordo ai funesto.
FESTIVAL CONCERT

Un momento mi protesto
E de’ secoli misura,
E nel cor non ti rimbomba
Che sei fragile e caduco?
L’udirai, se ti conduco
Col pensier dentro una tomba!
Ed a pentirsi l’uom non si risolve?
Sappi, o folle mortal, che sei di polve!

Soprano II
Chi di gemme e di corone
Fe’ rispellere il suo crime,
Giace anch’ei tra le rovine
D’una putrid prigione.
Ove i Dari e dove i Xersi
E gli Annibale temuti?
Ne’ sepolcri sconosciuti
Sono in cenere dispersi.
Ed a pentirsi l’uom non si risolve?
Sappi, o folle mortal, che sei di polve!

Trio
La beltà che insuperbisce
Perché intorno ha rose e gigli,
Pensi ai fiori di perigli:
Ogni fior quaggiù languisce.
Goddan pur su bionde chiome
Sospirar alme idolatre:
Voi, Lucrezie e Cleopatre,
Di voi resta appena il nome.
Ed a pentirsi l’uom non si risolve?
Sappi, o folle mortal, che sei di polve!

Soprano I
Deh, ritornino i pensieri
A mirar nel ciel le stelle,
Né follia d’empia Babelle
Gonfi il cor di spiriti altieri.
Già di polve fabbricarti
Volle Iddio: mortal, l’intendi?
Tu sei polve e, se ti emendi
In un Dio puoi trasformarti.

Trio
Ah no, non serbar empio il desio,
Ch’un uom tu sei ma, se ti penti, un Dio.

—Text by Sebastiano Baldini

Amanti piangete — Luigi Rossi

Amanti, piangete a miei piani,
S’eccede ogni penar la pena mia,
Maggior d’ogn’altro
Il mio lamento sia.
Crudeltade inedita
Di bellezza infinita

Lovers, cry at my tears,
For my pain exceeds all others,
Greater than any other
Is my lament.
Unheard-of cruelty
With infinite beauty
La mia donna trovò,
Un si che dice nò.

Dolenti, uscite lamenti,
Mentre così vicina è la mia morte,
Dolcetevi del Cielo
E della sorte.

Inaudita rigore,
Inaudito dolore,
Il mio cor sol provò,
Un si che dice nò.

Di questo sen la piaga — Marco Marazzoli

Di questo sen la piaga
Si cara e dolce fu,
Ch’ogn’hor l’anima è vaga,
Per lei di languir più.

Si questo petto
Sempre ricetto
Di due bei guardi
Ai fieri dardi,
Che la piaga d’amore
È dolce più quando si fa maggiore.

Al lampo de’ bei rai,
Si lieto il cor gioi,
Che non si satia mai
D’amar chi lo ferì,
Ogni tormento
Soffre contento,
E gode solo
Quando è nel duolo,
Che la piaga d’amore
È dolce più quando si fa maggiore.

My lady has found:
A “yes” which says “no.”

Mourners, let loose your laments,
For thus my death is near,
You enjoy the sweetness of heaven
While my heart alone
Suffers this fate:
The unheard-of rigors,
Unheard-of sadness of
A “yes” which says “no.”

The wound in this bosom,
Was so dear, and so sweet,
That my soul always longs
To languish more for her.
May this bosom
Always be the shelter
For two beautiful glances,
With their fiery darts,
For the wound of love
Is sweeter the greater it becomes.

At the flash of beautiful eyes
How happily the heart rejoices,
As it is never satiated
By loving those who wound it,
It is content to suffer
Every torment
And rejoices only
When it is in pain,
For the wound of love
Is sweeter the greater it becomes.

—Translation by Paul O’Dette

Ai sospiri, al dolore — Luigi Rossi

Ai sospiri, al dolore,
Ai tormento, al penare
Torna, torna, torna o mio core,
Su, su, torn’al servire.
Chi visse in lacci avvolto
Non più lunga stagione irne discolto.
Dunque mio core, a che resistere più
Viva, viva la servitù.

Alla gioia, al diletto,
Al contento, al gioire
Torna, torna, torna o mio petto
Su, su, torn’al servire.
Che d’amor’ le carezze amarezze
Non son, ma son dolcezze.
Dunque mio core, a che resistere più
Viva, viva la servitù.

Go back to the sighs, to the pain,
To the agony, to the suffering
Return, return, return, return my heart,
Go, go, return to love.
He who has lived entangled in love’s web
Is never free for long.
Therefore my heart, why resist any more
Hurrah, hurrah for slavery.

To joy, to pleasure,
To contentment, to rejoicing
Return, return, return, let me return
Go, go, return to the slavery of love.
For love’s caress is not bitterness,
It is sweetness.
Therefore my heart, why resist anymore
Hurrah, hurrah for slavery.
Fan battaglia — Luigi Rossi

Fan battaglia i miei pensieri
Et al cor dan fiero assalto.
Un mi dice: “In van tu sperì,
Perché Fillì ha il sen di smalto.”
Un poi con baldanza
Il colpo ribatte
E’l cor mi combatte
Gridando: “Speranza!”
“Si vincerà!”
“Si perderà!”
“Fuggi, timor!”
“Fuggi, sì, sì!”
“Taci Speranza tì!”
“Non più, tac!”
“Si vincerà!”
“Fermate!”
“Si perderà!”
“Tacet!”
“Pensieri non più, non più!”
Così al core, empi guerrieri,
Dan battaglia, fan guerra i miei pensieri. ❭

My thoughts are waging war
And cruelly assault my heart.
One says: “You hope in vain,
For Phyllis has a heart as hard as enamel.”
Another yet boldly
Inflicts a further blow
And my heart enters combat
Crying: “Hope!”
“We shall win!”
“But what if we lose!”
“Away Fear!”
“Away, away, get out!”
“Silence! Hope!”
“No more! Quiet!”
“We shall win!”
“Stop!”
“But what if we lose!”
“Shut up!”
“My thoughts, no more, no more!”
Thus my thoughts, like evil warriors,
Enter battle and declare war against my heart. ❭

—Text by Carlo Eustacchi

—All translations by Stephen Stubbs
unless otherwise specified