



**Lecture Recital**

*La voce di Orfeo:  
gli amori di Francesco Rasi*

**Philippe Canguilhem: Lecture**

**Furio Zanasi: baritone**

with

*Ensemble La Chimera, directed by Eduardo Egüez*

**Marina Bonetti: harp**

**Sabina Colonna Preti: viola da gamba**

**Eduardo Egüez: theorbo, archlute, baroque guitar**

**Sinfonia 1**

Benedetto Ferrari (1603-1681) : Io son amante

*Musiche varie a voce sola (Venezia, 1633)*

Francesco Rasi (1574-1621) : Filli mia, Filli dolce

*Madrigali ... posti in musica dal S. Francesco Rasi nobile aretino (Firenze, 1610)*

Sigismondo d'India (1582-1629) : Vorrei bacciarti

*Le musiche ... da cantar solo (Milano, 1609)*

Giulio Caccini (1546-1618) : Dolcissimo sospiro

*Le Nuove Musiche (Firenze, 1601)*

**Sinfonia 2**

Francesco Rasi : È sì lieto il mio core

*Madrigali ... posti in musica dal S. Francesco Rasi nobile aretino (Firenze, 1610)*

Francesco Rasi : Dove misero mai

*Madrigali ... posti in musica dal S. Francesco Rasi nobile aretino (Firenze, 1610)*

Sigismondo d'India : Cara mia cetra

*Le musiche ... da cantar solo (Milano, 1609)*

Francesco Rasi : Un guardo ohimè ch'io moro

*Madrigali ... posti in musica dal S. Francesco Rasi nobile aretino (Firenze, 1610)*

Sigismondo d'India : Che veggi'io ohimè

*Le musiche ... a una et due voci ... libro quarto (Venezia, 1621)*

### Sinfonia 3

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) : Et è pur dunque vero

*Scherzi musicali cioè arie et madrigali in stil recitativo* (Venezia, 1632)

Sigismondo d'India : Sovente allor

*Le musiche ... da cantar solo* (Milano, 1609)

Josquin Desprez (c1450-75) : Mille regretz

*Diminutions by Eduardo Egüez*

Antonio Brunelli (1577-1630) : Non avea Febo ancora

*Scherzi, arie, canzonette e madrigali ... libro secondo, opera decima* (Venezia, 1614)

'I cannot tell you more of this Arcadia than that it is at present a happy abode, for the ladies go graciously about in the guise of scantily clad nymphs, and we, like wanton shepherds, follow in their tracks.'

This delighted description of the watering-place of Spa was written by one of the most fascinating musicians produced by the early Baroque era in Italy, and reveals one of the many facets of his extraordinary personality. **Francesco Rasi (1574-1621)**, poet, composer and singer, already knew Spa, since he had accompanied the Duke of Mantua there for the first time in 1599. But when he wrote these lines in 1608, he had already spent almost ten years as an active participant in productions of the first operas, having sung the leading roles in the Florentine and Mantuan works of Peri, Caccini, Monteverdi, and Gagliano. As a result of impersonating Amyntas, Orpheus or Apollo, Rasi had become so steeped in the pastoral universe of the *favole in musica* that he could take Vincenzo Gonzaga's courtiers for nymphs and shepherds straight out of a libretto by Striggio or Rinuccini.

However, the complex psychological profile of the greatest singer of his day cannot be reduced to the ideal, naive life of a utopian theatrical Arcadia. Rasi represents an instance – frequent at the time – of the musician of noble descent cursed with a disturbed, restless character, the consequence of a veritable existential schizophrenia: like Fabrizio Dentice or Giulio Cesare Brancaccio, Rasi was torn between his prodigious musical gifts, which gained him a reputation at court and the appreciation of the prince, and the desire to assert his aristocratic status, which for him was incompatible with exercising his art in the same way as a professional musician whose connection with the prince was one of servile dependence. This ambiguous relationship with the practice of music, which appears in some of his letters, must surely have played a role in building his personality. It also explains his frenetic urge to travel, which allowed him to differentiate himself from ordinary musicians whose movements were limited to those of the court which employed them. Hence Rasi spent his life travelling, not merely covering the whole of Italy from north to south, but criss-crossing Europe with the same appetite: two expeditions to Flanders in the entourage of the Duke of Mantua, as we have seen, but also Vienna (where he broke a leg falling from a carriage), Poland, or Prague, with the dissatisfaction of someone perpetually in search of a recognition not due solely to the universal admiration for his talents as a musician.

For all these reasons, his highly eventful career can be no more than outlined here. Rasi was born in Arezzo, and maintained links with the Medici court in Florence all his life. A pupil of

Giulio Caccini, he appeared in the court accounts from the age of fourteen year, quickly establishing a reputation as an exceptionally gifted singer and a virtuoso exponent of the lute and chitarrone, on which he generally accompanied himself. Then began a period when the princes and cardinals of Italy vied with one another to obtain his services; foremost among them was Carlo Gesualdo, who managed to persuade Ferdinando de' Medici to lend him his musician for a few months in 1594. His trip to Poland took place a year later, in the company of Luca Marenzio, another outstanding madrigalist. These wanderings came to a temporary halt in 1598, when he settled in Mantua in the service of the Gonzagas.

His meeting with Claudio Monteverdi undoubtedly represented a crucial turning-point in his life as a musician. After their first visit to Spa in 1599, Rasi returned to Florence to take part in the festivities surrounding the marriage of Maria de' Medici and Henri IV of France, in the course of which he sang in Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* and Caccini's *Il rapimento di Cefalo*. It matters little whether Monteverdi was in fact present at these performances, since Rasi will have been able to pass on his experience when the time came to produce *L'Orfeo* at the ducal palace in Mantua in 1607. He took the leading role in Monteverdi's opera, as he did the following year in *L'Arianna* and Marco da Gagliano's *La Dafne*, before setting out on his second Flemish trip. Rasi was then at the peak of his artistic career. But a few months later, his unstable temperament was to plunge him into horror. Unlike his former patron Gesualdo, who committed a crime of passion by murdering his unfaithful wife, Rasi was guilty of a genuinely premeditated killing, a foul, sordid act: he strangled his stepmother and stabbed her steward, with the complicity of the latter's young wife, for a handful of crowns, six gold rings, and five silver spoons and forks. We are far from the bucolic Arcadian loves of which Rasi had sung for so many years.

The programme devised by *La Chimera* today is organised in three sections, each of them representing one of the amatory conditions that Francesco Rasi regularly treated in the works he sang or composed.

The first, focusing on desire, highlights the two chronological extremes of this repertory through the figures of Benedetto Ferrari and Giulio Caccini: while the latter, Rasi's teacher in Florence, was one of the first to have composed for solo voice and basso continuo, Ferrari belonged to a generation for which the monodic style constituted the natural vehicle of musical expression.

The central section evokes the figure of Orpheus in a succession of pieces retracing the story of the mythical singer. Worthy of special mention here is the remarkable aria by Sigismondo d'India depicting Orpheus' final loss of his beloved. D'India, surely the greatest composer of monodies of his time alongside Monteverdi, made several visits to the courts of Florence and Mantua during the first decade of the seventeenth century.

The final section is devoted to impossible love and the sufferings it causes, that theme so dear to the poets of the Renaissance and Baroque eras (a set of diminutions on Josquin's *Mille regretz* here also recalls Rasi's fame as a virtuoso instrumentalist as well as singer). The nature of the last work calls for some explanation. Antonio Brunelli's extremely light-hearted musical setting of the celebrated lament by the Florentine poet Rinuccini is at the furthest possible extreme from the well-known masterpiece of Monteverdi on the same text. Perhaps one should see it as a reflection of the insouciance with which Rasi, condemned in his native city to the penalty of death by hanging and quartering, continued to sing at the courts of Italy and Europe for more than ten years without being troubled by the authorities, protected as he was by his splendid vocal and instrumental talents.

**Philippe Canguilhem**