

RED PRIEST

Piers Adams – recorders
David Greenberg – violin
Angela East – cello
Howard Beach – harpsichord

Nightmare in Venice: a Baroque Fantasy
October 2008

ANTONIO VIVALDI (1676-1741)

The Nightmare Concerto (“La Notte”) in G minor RV 439

Largo

Phantoms (Presto, Largo, Presto)

Sleep (Largo)

The Chase (Allegro)

GIOVANNI PAULO CIMA (17th Cent.)

Sonata a Tre

ROBERT JOHNSON (1583-1633) / NICHOLAS LE STRANGE (17th Cent)

An English Fantasy Suite:

The Satyrs' Masque

The Flatt Masque

The Furies

The Witches' Dance

HENRY PURCELL (1659-1695)

Two in One upon a Ground

MAURIZIO CAZZATI (1620-1677)

Zephiro's Ground

DIEGO ORTIZ (fl.1550)

Two Ricercadas

ANTONIO VIVALDI

Concerto Grosso in A minor RV 522

Allegro

Larghetto

Allegro

*****INTERMISSION*****

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

Prelude from Suite No. 5 for Cello

JACOB VAN EYCK (1590-1657)
The English Nightingale

GIUSEPPE TARTINI (1692-1770)
Sonata in G minor “The Devil’s Trill”
Largo
Andante/Allegro/Adagio

CHRISTOPHE WILIBALD VON GLUCK (1714-1787)
Dance of the Blessed Spirits

JEAN-MARIE LECLAIR (1697-1764)
Demon Airs and Simphonie

RED PRIEST (1997-)
Fantasy on Corelli's “La Folia”

All musical arrangements by Red Priest

Red Priest appears by arrangement with Lisa Sapinkopf Artists, www.chambermuse.com

PROGRAM NOTES

Throughout musical history composers have been inspired by the themes of the night: from strange dreams, ghosts, spirits and demons to joyful evening songbirds and wild dances. With that in mind, we invite you to suspend your worldly beliefs and join us on a fantastical tour around baroque Europe—commencing in Venice, home to the original Red Priest, **Antonio Vivaldi**.

Venice itself has long been associated with magic and alchemy. In the renaissance era it held firm against the bloody tide of the crusades which swept across Europe, becoming instead an unofficial centre of hermetic study and practice, a melting pot of western mystery traditions, Islamic and oriental culture. It was here that the baroque ethos was born a century before Vivaldi’s day in the form of a dramatic new style of composition referred to as *Stilus Phantasticus*—music without rigid form or structure, prone to considerable eccentricities and flights of fancy, and often requiring unprecedented virtuosity to perform. The idea of regularity—a fixed beat, even phrases, predictable harmonies—was anathema to the musical pioneers from this time, and indeed this rebellious spirit of adventure was to continue to the end of the baroque era.

It is from this perspective that we can best appreciate the music of Vivaldi himself. The opening bars of the famous concerto *La Notte* instantly dispel the myth that the Red Priest’s writing is repetitive and formulaic (as summed up by Stravinsky’s flippant comment that he composed “not 400 concertos, but the same concerto 400 times.”) This extraordinary work sounds as shocking today as it must have done in the 18th century, with jagged rhythms and weird harmonies conjuring up a night of ghosts and fitful sleep, reminiscent of a Hammer House of Horror movie score. The Concerto Grosso in A minor is another fine example of

Vivaldian wizardry, the outer movements typically inventive, full-blooded and sparkling, whilst the central slow movement is powerfully barren and melodramatic.

One of the very earliest examples of the *Stilus Phantasticus* is the Sonata à Tre by the Milanese organist Giovanni Paolo Cima, composed in 1610. In this short piece elements of dance, song and operatic gesture are combined in a freewheeling, unpredictable fashion.

Shakespearean England too was home to its share of musical fantasy—especially in the masque tradition, where the impossible was made possible in the dramatization of mythological tales; mystical characters abound, and the genre is richly laced with fairies, witches, demons and satyrs, represented here in the theatre music of Robert Johnson and Nicholas Le Strange. As little information survives today about the performance of this music we have created our own versions of the simple, rustic tunes with the addition of rolling harpsichord accompaniments, tremolos, offbeat fiddle chords and hideous cackling.

One of the most popular compositional forms in the baroque era was that of variation, in which simple melodies are transformed through repetition, often into elaborate, virtuoso fantasias—as with Van Eyck’s solo recorder variations on the “English Nightingale.” More often than not, variations were composed above a constantly repeating bass-line, or “ground.” The works by Purcell, Cazzati, and Ortiz give a snapshot of the immense creativity and variety with which composers treated this form.

Johann Sebastian Bach was a great admirer of the Italian style, and despite his reputation as a sublime, cerebral composer, would often write music of extreme eccentricity and virtuosity. He is represented here by a darker and more mysterious side, through the prelude to his fifth Cello Suite.

The violin has long been associated with the devil, perhaps as a result of the instrument’s ability in days past to tempt churchgoers away from the fold and into the seductive, secular world of dance. Giuseppe Tartini’s *Devil’s Trill* sonata is perhaps the most famous example of demonic fiddling, which came to the composer quite literally in a dream, in which the Devil stood at the foot of the bed and played to him on the violin “*with such mastery and intelligence, on a level I had never before conceived was possible.*”

It was in the realm of opera that baroque music achieved its most dramatic expression. Through this medium composers could bring vividly to life other-worldly entities, such as Leclair’s mischievous dancing demons from his opera *Scylla et Glaucus*, and the Blessed Spirits encountered by Orfeo in his visit to the underworld, as depicted with haunting beauty by Gluck.

Our closing fantasia on one of the most famous of all grounds, “La Folia,” takes the idea of musical transformation to its natural conclusion, adding to Corelli’s version in ways which may not fit the currently accepted boundaries of “authenticity,” but we hope will be taken as it is intended, in the true, “bizarre,” spirit of the baroque!

—Piers Adams

RED PRIEST

Red Priest is one of the major success stories on the international early music scene today. Named after the flame-haired priest, Antonio Vivaldi, this extraordinary English ensemble has redefined the art of baroque music performance, combining the fruits of extensive research with swashbuckling virtuosity, creative re-composition, heart-on-sleeve emotion and compelling stagecraft. The group performs largely from memory, allowing an operatic level

of freedom and interaction, and its programs are drawn from myriad baroque sources to create a kaleidoscopic range of moods and colours.

Formed in 1997, Red Priest now gives over 60 concerts a year in some of the most prestigious venues in Europe, Australia, the Far East, Russia and especially the USA together with Radio and TV broadcasts and a series of highly acclaimed CD recordings: *Priest on the Run*, *Nightmare in Venice*, *The Four Seasons* and the forthcoming release, *Pirates of the Baroque*. 2005 saw the launch of Red Priest's "Red Hot Baroque Show"—a dramatic marriage of baroque instrumental wizardry with modern stage and lighting technology, and a major TV documentary for the UK's premier arts program, the South Bank Show.

International music critics have described the Red Priest style as "*electrifying*," "*sheer daring*," "*immaculately forged*," "*sonically supercharged*," "*brilliant and inspired*," "*deliciously twisted*"—but the group's extravagantly baroque ethos is perhaps best summed up in the words of English musicologist and broadcaster George Pratt: "*If nobody goes over the top, how will we know what lies on the other side?*"

To find out more about Red Priest, including details of recordings and concert performances, please visit their website at www.redpriest.com.

Piers Adams was recently heralded in the Washington Post as "*the reigning recorder virtuoso in the world*". He has performed in numerous festivals and at premiere concert halls throughout the world, including London's Royal Festival, Wigmore and Queen Elizabeth Halls, as soloist with orchestras including the Philharmonia, the English Sinfonia, the Irish Chamber Orchestra, the Academy of Ancient Music, the Singapore Symphony and the BBC Symphony. Piers has made several solo CDs reflecting an eclectic taste, ranging from his award-winning Vivaldi debut disc to David Bedford's Recorder Concerto—one of many major works written for him. He has also researched, arranged and recorded a variety of romantic showpieces, which are a mainstay of his recital programs. Full details of his performing activities can be found on www.piersadams.com.

David Greenberg taught himself folk fiddle tunes by ear as a young child growing up in Maryland. In the mid 80s he studied baroque violin with Stanley Ritchie. Greenberg spent the 1990s with Tafelmusik while developing a specialty in Scottish baroque-folk music, recording three groundbreaking CDs in this genre with his group Puirt A Baroque. He immersed himself in Cape Breton traditional music and co-authored the popular treatise on Cape Breton fiddle music, the DunGreen Collection, with his wife Kate Dunlay. He lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In addition to Red Priest, regular collaborators include his own Tempest ensemble, David McGuinness, Chris Norman, and Doug MacPhee.

Angela East is widely respected as one of the most brilliant and dynamic performers in the period instrument world, praised in The Times, London, for the "*elemental power*" of her cello playing. She has given numerous concerto performances in London's Queen Elizabeth and Wigmore Halls, and has performed as soloist and continuo cellist with many of Europe's leading baroque orchestras. Among her impressive list of concert credits are La Scala, Milan, Sydney Opera House, Versailles and Glyndebourne. In 1991 Angela formed "The Revolutionary Drawing Room" which performs chamber works from the revolutionary period in Europe on original instruments, and whose first eight CDs have received glowing reviews world-wide. Her CD recording of the complete Bach Cello Suites will be released in 2008.

Howard Beach's uniquely wide-ranging style of keyboard playing has been developed through years of partnering fine musicians in many different fields of music, as well as his own experience as an accomplished singer and violinist. Since 1989 he has worked regularly with Piers Adams in concert and in the recording studio as both harpsichordist and pianist - including several performances in London's Wigmore Hall and tours throughout Europe,

Canada and the Far East. He has also performed and recorded as a concerto soloist and continuo player with Les Arts Florissants, the Apollo Chamber Orchestra and the London Mozart Players. Howard broadcasts frequently on radio and has been consultant and performer on programs for UK's Channel 4 TV.