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# THE ART OF THE FLUTE

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# BOCCHERINI:

## *Sinfonia Concertante in C Major with Guitar Obbligato*

### *Sinfonia in D Minor, "La Casa del Diavolo"*

Orchestre de l'Angelicum de Milan, UMBERTO CATTINI, Conductor

Luigi Boccherini was born in Lucca in 1743. His first musical teaching was from his father, an able double-bass player, and from the Abbate Vanucci, *maestro di cappella* to the archi-episcopal court. At an early age he demonstrated his great skill as a 'cellist, and in 1757, at the age of 14, he went to Rome where he established a considerable reputation as both a 'cellist and a composer. He returned to his native Lucca in 1764 and played in the town band until 1769, when he went on a tour with Filippo Manfredi, a pupil of Tartini, and made his way to Paris. Boccherini and Manfredi were well received by the French musicians and audience; a performance at the Concert Spirituel was a great success. Boccherini published his first sets of trios and quartets while in Paris. At the suggestion of the Spanish ambassador, both Boccherini and Manfredi went to Spain. Neither King Carlos III nor his son, the Prince of the Asturias (later Carlos IV) offered them patronage, but the king's brother, the Infante Don Luis, took them under his protection. Boccherini stayed in Spain until about 1785, making extensive tours of Germany from 1782 onward. In 1787 he became the chamber composer to Frederick William II of Prussia, but this patronage ended with the death of the king in 1797. He returned to Spain and received patronage from the Marquis Benavente. When the French invaded Spain in 1799, Boccherini dedicated some quartets to Lucien Bonaparte and became an adherent of republicanism. This decreased his popularity in Spanish nationalist circles, and he died in Madrid in poverty in 1805. There is nothing unusual in this; most people who die in Madrid seem to die in poverty even though Spain has traditionally boasted a degenerate nobility, a rapacious clergy, and lately a Fascist dictatorship.

Boccherini's facility was incredible, comparable only to that of Telemann in the previous generation. Published during his lifetime were 20 symphonies, including 8 *concertante*, 113 string quintets for 2 violins, viola, and 2 'cellos, 12 string quintets for 2 violins, 2 violas, and 'cello, 102 string quartets, 48 trios for 2 violins and 'cello, 12 trios for violin, viola, and 'cello, 21 sonatas for violin and piano, 4 'cello concertos, and a number of other works as well. The violinist, Puppo, is credited with the ill-chosen and inaccurate remark that "Boccherini is the wife of Haydn." To be sure, Boccherini knew Haydn's music

and admired it. Indeed, it was through Boccherini and their mutual publisher, Artaria, that Haydn was commissioned in 1785 by a canon of Cadiz to write the *Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross*. However, Boccherini's music takes its root from Italian instrumental song while Haydn's derives from the coordination of various musical elements.

A contemporary French writer described Boccherini's music as "...enchanted. He captivates us in a rapt atmosphere of music... It is like listening to melodious poems, like breathing air filled with most exquisite perfumes... The themes... transport the soul on an enchanted voyage. Boccherini rocks us and lulls us to delight. He is more intoxicating than Haydn. He is the Racine of music." While few critics would write so extravagantly today, Boccherini deserves more than to be perpetually in Haydn's shadow. He has a voice and style of his own. Whatever his chamber music may not have in force or contrast in musical ideas, is more than compensated for by his gift for expressive melody, sound formal construction, and consistency of style. It is unfortunate that more of Boccherini's music is not heard in concert today, as it embodies many of the classical and neo-classical virtues.

The *Sinfonia Concertante in C Major with Guitar Obbligato* was probably composed about 1799. It has been reconstructed from instrumental parts in manuscript in the Library of the Paris Opéra which bear the inscription "*Sinfonia a grande orchestra da Luigi Boccherini, Compositore di Camera che fu dal S.S. Infante Don Luigi Borbon e della Maestra Guiellmo 2<sup>o</sup> Re di Prussia. Per il Signor Marchese di Benavente.*" The work is scored for 2 oboes, 2 horns, bassoon, 2 solo violins, and string orchestra. The guitar does not have a virtuoso role, but its instrumental color is essential to the effect of the work. Boccherini was fond of the guitar and used it on more than one occasion in his chamber music to impart this instrumental color which is so characteristically Iberian. The *Sinfonia Concertante* is in three movements: (1) Grave - Allegro con imperio. (2) Grave. (3) Allegro. The middle movement is in C minor; in this movement, at its very climax, the guitar plays an important melodic role. Structurally, there is nothing unusual about the composition. Following the slow introduction, the allegro of the first movement is in sonata form with two dignified, somewhat contrasting

themes. The slow movement is based on a single melodic line elaborated by various instrumental combinations. The finale is gay and galante in a fashion established well before the turn of the 18th century.

The *Sinfonia in D Minor*, subtitled "*La Casa del Diavolo*" was not published during Boccherini's lifetime. Like the *Sinfonia Concertante*, it, too, has been put together from instrumental parts in manuscript. There is every reason to believe that the parts for both compositions are autographs, i.e. in Boccherini's own hand. The work is scored for 2 oboes, 2 horns, and strings. It is in three movements: (1) Andante sostenuto. (2) Allegro assai - Andantino con moto - Andante sostenuto. (3) Allegro assai con moto. The fact that the middle movement is in three parts, each melodically independent, gives the effect of five movements, somewhat akin to Bartók's "arch-like" structures written over a century later. However, it is the last movement which will impinge most strikingly upon 20th century ears, for in it one hears echoed the chromatic scales from Gluck's *Dance of the Furies in Orpheus and Eurydice* composed in Paris in 1774. Whether Boccherini was familiar with Gluck's opera is problematic. However, this particular melodic figuration also appears in Gluck's ballet music for *Don Juan* as the *Höllenfahrt* (Descent into the Underworld) written in Vienna in 1761, and a modification of it is echoed in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* written in Vienna in 1787. When one hears the same (or similar) musical idiom in such diverse places as Paris, Vienna, and Madrid over a period of 30 years or more, one is led to two alternative hypotheses: (1) Later composers deliberately borrowed an effective piece of musical language from a known original source, or (2) The piece of musical language was common coinage of the period, in this instance a ready way communicating to the audience the idea of hell-fire and brimstone with all the *diablerie* that accompanies it. Originality of musical material was not so important a consideration in the 18th century as it is today - witness how variations on someone else's theme are no longer fashionable. What was important was the way in which the material was treated, and in this finale Boccherini creates an effective musical picture of the devil's house (to say nothing of its inhabitants) and builds the music to an effective climax.

Notes by DR. WILLIAM B. OBER

