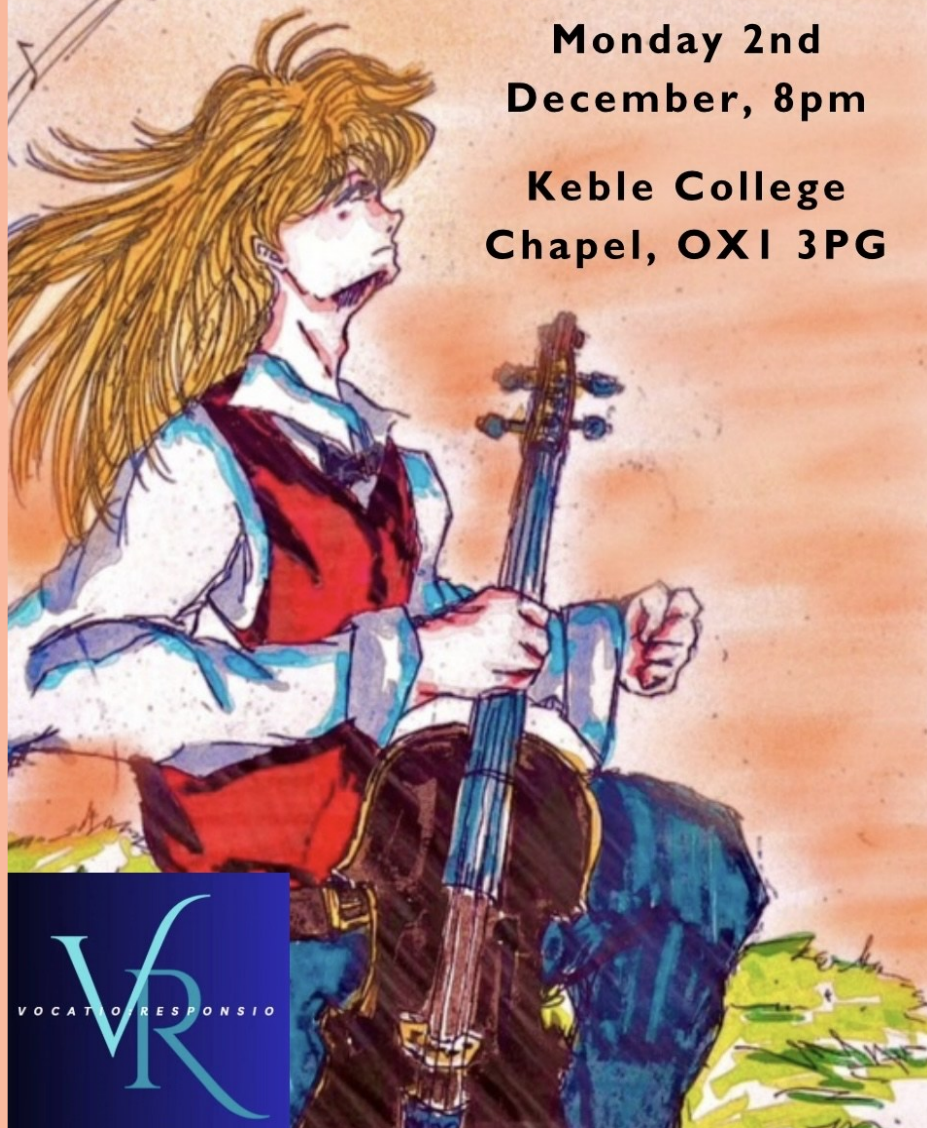


# **L'ARMONIA**

## **Rules vs Innovation**

**Monday 2nd  
December, 8pm**

**Keble College  
Chapel, OX1 3PG**



# PROGRAMME

## **Unico Wilhelm van Wassenaer (Delden, 1692 — The Hague, 1766)**

Concerto in A Major, No.3 from *Sei Concerti Armonici* (1740)

1. Grave sostenuto
2. Da capella. Canone [Presto]
3. Largo andante
4. Vivace

## **Georg Muffat (Savoy, 1653 — Passau, 1704)**

String Sonata in D Major, No.1 from *Armonico Tributo* (1682)

1. Sonata. Grave — Allegro e presto
2. Allemande. Grave
3. Grave
4. Gavotta. Allegro e forte
5. Grave
6. Menuet. Allegro e forte

## **Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (Česká Lípa, 1644 — Salzburg, 1704)**

Trio Sonata in D Major, No.6 from *Harmonia Artificioso-Ariosa* (1696)

1. Praeludium. Adagio — Allegro
2. Aria with 13 Variations
3. Finale. Adagio — Allegro

- - - - INTERVAL - - - -

## **Antonio Vivaldi (Venice, 1678 — Vienna, 1741)**

Concerto for Four Violins in E Minor, No.4 from *L'estro Armonico*, Op.3 (1711)

1. Andante
2. Allegro assai
3. Adagio
4. Allegro

Concerto in E $\flat$  Major “La tempesta di mare”, No.5 from *Il cimento dell'armonico e dell'invenzione*, Op.8 (1725)

1. Presto
2. Largo
3. Presto

# VOCATIO:RESPONSIO

Looking to make a difference in the way classical music is consumed, Vocatio:Responsio is a project-based ensemble working in the University of Oxford currently directed by Samuel Oliver-Sherry, a second-year undergraduate music student from Merseyside studying at St Anne's College. The ensemble will usually give two concerts per Oxford University term, operating on intensive rehearsal weekends with musicians specially invited by the director to suit the needs of each programme. This is our second concert, after a programme of Mozart & Mendelssohn called "The Boy Wunders".



As a performing ensemble, Vocatio:Responsio's main emphasis is on devising unique and compelling programmes that invite audiences to engage with wider musicological discourse within the familiar context of a performance setting. With its Latin name literally translating to 'Call:Response', the aim is to break the staunch barrier between performer and audience, creating an informal space for anyone to join in with musical discussion and immerse themselves as part of the concert experience.

## THE ORCHESTRA

### Violins

Samuel Oliver-Sherry (director)

Music @ St Anne's College

Leader, L'pool Philharmonic Youth Orchestra (2022-23)

Founding Member, Early Music as Education

Concertmaster, Oxford University Philharmonia

Nick Raptakis

Pharmacology @ Hertford College

Co-Founder/Coordinator, Warwick Festival Orchestra

Violinist & Violist, Odyssey Festival Orchestra

Award-winning composer, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

Allegra Hannan

Music @ St Peter's College

Violinist, Oxford University Orchestra

Instrumental Scholar, St Peter's College

Performed with European Youth Orchestra of Madrid

Isabella Worster

Music @ Trinity College

Violinist, Oxford University Philharmonia

Former member of National Youth String Orchestra &

City of Birmingham Symphony Youth Orchestra (CBSO)

### Harpsichord

Alexander McNamee

Music @ St Hilda's College

Composer and performer, BRICKWORKS

Former member of Edinburgh Youth Orchestra (d. bass),

& National Youth Jazz Orchestra of Scotland (piano)

### Violas

Mary Corcoran

Music @ Jesus College

Former member of the Halle Youth Orchestra

Violinist, Oxford University Philharmonia

Choral Scholar, Choir of Jesus College's Chapel

Choo Ray Low

Maths & Computer Science @ St Anne's College

Viola Scholar, St Anne's Camerata

Frequently in demand with the St Anne's Music Society, regularly performing and accompanying as a pianist.

### Cello

Grace Farrell

Medicine @ Christ Church College

Principal Cellist, Oxford University Philharmonia

Frequently in demand with the Music Society, such as Oxford Festival Orchestra and in opera productions

Celeste Pan

Asian & Middle Eastern Studies @ Balliol College

Cellist, Oxford University Philharmonia

Cellist, Orchestra VOX

Performed with Oxford Student Opera Society

For £3.00 tickets to  
our concerts, scan  
the QR code or visit  
us at:

[www.ticketsource.co.uk/vocatio-responsio](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/vocatio-responsio)



# STABAT MATER

Monday 3rd February 2025, 8pm  
Magdalen College Chapel, OX1 4AU

Tomaso Albinoni  
*Symphony in B-Flat Major, Si 6*

Emanuele d'Astorga  
*Stabat Mater in C Minor*

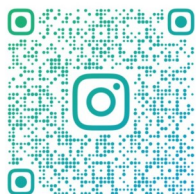


Buy £3 tickets using the  
QR code or the URL link  
[www.ticketsource.co.uk/vocatio-responsio](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/vocatio-responsio)



We are very grateful for Keble College for  
lending the use of its chapel for tonight's concert.  
You can read more about the chapel, as well as  
the services and evensongs (sung by its student  
choir) below as well as general information about  
the college on the same website.

<https://www.keble.ox.ac.uk/about/chapel>



@VOCATIO\_RESPENSIO

INSTAGRAM



FACEBOOK

The poster for this concert was  
kindly designed by St Anne's  
music student **Wing Hei Woo**.  
For any high-quality design  
services such as this fabulous  
poster, you may contact him on  
the below email address:

[winghei.woo@st-annes.ox.ac.uk](mailto:winghei.woo@st-annes.ox.ac.uk)



## Part 1: Conceptualisation, Contextualisation

So, I don't know what sports you enjoy. Personally, I'm a big fan of the football: as I mentioned in my programme note as leader of Oxford University Philharmonia in last week's concert, Everton Football Club is my second passion after music (please do stifle your mocking at my choice of team). One sport I can never enjoy watching though is the boxing – unlike my choice of football team where I stupidly followed my father's guidance, I'm well in my mother's camp here in hating the violence of boxing, especially seeing someone knocked out.

However, in preparing and brainstorming for this particular concert, it was a boxing match of years gone by that illuminated this programme for me. The year is 1974, the location the Democratic Republic of the Congo: undefeated and undisputed heavyweight champion George Foreman is following all the rules of how to win a boxing match, with his heavy hitting, punch-as-hard-as-you-can approach, but is defeated and humbled by Muhammed Ali's innovative rope-a-dope tactic, leaning against the ropes of the boxing ring, neutralising Foreman's attacks by forcing him to tire himself out by drawing offensive punches that were non-injuring.

The 'Rumble in the Jungle', as it is now known, is one illustrative example of this concert's synopsis, and I very nearly named the concert after this fight (but perhaps copyright would have destroyed me). As aesthetics of long-eighteenth-century composition start to change, particularly becoming tailored to consumers with the rise of music publication, one can not only identify a divide between conservatism (rules) and progressivism (innovation) in composition, but in some cases even a divide where the two

engage in their own mental boxing fight, striving for control within musical creation.

The second half of this concert gives a case study of this, as I will discuss further, between the Opus 3 and Opus 8 set of concertos by Antonio Vivaldi, where this mental fight between rules and innovation is explicitly shown through the titles of the sets. However, before any good heavyweight clash, we need some pre-match analysis, and so in this block of music, we give two contrasting examples from the late seventeenth-century, as the world of composition is moving into its new evolutionary stage.

So, let's analyse the first camp: harmony, which in the eighteenth-century has greater connotation towards rules, or traditional compositional technique (think of the idea of man being in "perfect harmony", the state of music agreeing with tradition). Composers in the long eighteenth-century were quite obsessed with this idea, and even dedicated their music to harmony: we've just heard one of six harmonic concerti by Unico Wilhelm Wassenaer, and the next piece we'll play is the first of five harmonic tributes by Georg Muffat. Why would composers want to create tributes to the 'rules' that they follow?

Perhaps because musical harmony, the combination of simultaneously sounded notes, was thought to be something that controlled the universe. This is an idea originating from Pythagoras, who proposed that the Sun, Moon and planets all emit their own unique hum, and that proportions in the movements of celestial bodies could be regarded as a form of music. This noise is inaudible to us, but something that was keeping the world together, if you know what I mean. Boethius created this distinction more explicitly later on, with *musica mundana* (the same as *musica universalis*)

distinguished between *musica humana* (the internal music of the human body) and *musica instrumentis* (sounds made by musicians). *Musica mundana*, he says, can only be discovered through the intellect. Johannes Kepler's 1619 publication *Harmonices Mundi* (literally *Harmonies of the World*) expands on this in adopting a religious outlook, believing that this harmony (while inaudible to us) could be heard by the soul, giving a "very agreeable feeling of bliss, afforded him by this music in the imitation of God."

Harmony, then, is a regulating force, not only on the motion of celestial bodies but also the human soul, and for Pythagoras and Kepler harmony is something that creates such cosmic agreement and unity. This links with the Christian idea of divine harmony as a concept that resonates deeply with God's divine plan, encompassing unity and peace beyond human relationships to our connection with nature and the world around us. This idea, then, remains popular throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and harmony in musical composition stands on a pillar, if you like, something for musicians to aspire to: Muffat highlights this through the word tribute in his title *Armonico Tributo*, highlighting immediately not only where his aspirations lie, but what his focus is in composing this music. There are five in total, but personally I believe the first to be a highlight. I made a very bold claim in the first tutti rehearsal of this series to the orchestra, to many surprised and confused looks, but I stand by my belief that this concerto in D Major is the best concerto grosso ever written, and do listen out for the fourth movement 'Grave' after the Allemande, which is a stunning example of harmonic, but also textural and dynamic progression.

Yet, it actually doesn't take the form of a concerto grosso at all! Not only does the music seem well suited to single players, with his stipulations between tutti and solo passages interpreted by many as an afterthought, it also works perfectly without the two viola parts, making complete harmonic and textural sense without them. In short, this is more than a concerto grosso: it can work as a concerto for 5 parts, 4 parts (without second viola) or 3 parts (just 2 violins and bass). However, I use the full orchestra here because it maximises the beauty of the music, and do listen out for some fabulous viola parts in the Allemande.

So, that's the first idea then, conceptualising harmonic rules as a form of inspiration, but the flipside of this is not quite as dualistic as I advertise. Using innovation does not mean ignoring rules, but rather transcending them. The final chapter of Christopher Small's outline of 'Musicking' (the verb of music) illustrates this well: telling a parable of a herdsman playing his flute as he guards his flocks in the night, he makes three stipulations as to what this person could be doing as he plays:

- He may be working in the exact manner that relates completely to his society.
- He may be innovating society's expectations, by ornamenting a famous melody.
- He may be violating society's expectations, launching out from basic ideas in novel ways.

It is through musicking, then, that humans can forge their own relationships with society, having the power to either articulate or perhaps explore and respond to its ideas. And, in Heinrich Ignaz von Biber's trio sonatas, he uses the latter two of these concepts especially in his work.



Harmonia artificioso-ariosa is a title in two parts, referring to two things: firstly, the artificial nature of scordatura tuning, which is required for six out of the seven works (naturally, with synthetic strings, we play the odd one out in this case); secondly, the ariosa refers to how in each piece he takes a variation form, complete with introduction and finale.

The prelude is in two sections, the first slow, the second fast, creating a very strong and dramatic contrast and working towards an exciting climax. In addition, these sonatas explores many techniques that at the time may well have been considered extended, with the two violins given an extraordinarily difficult part. With flying up-bow staccato, bariolage bow strokes in rapidly changing strings, and extremely fast passage work, this is a showpiece for one of the seventeenth-century's greatest violinists. Of course, this is a fully-fledged Trio Sonata, so we reduce the forces to just two violins, cello and continuo. Fortunately, myself and Nick Raptakis (a masters fresher reading Pharmacology at Hertford) are well up to the task, accompanied by Grace Farrell (into her fifth year of medicine studies at Christ Church) and Alexander McNamee (into his second year of studying music at St Hilda's). But, all in all, these next pieces should provide the framework for this concert, which will explode into the Vivaldi case study in the second half.

## Part 2: Case Study – Vivaldi

So, the undercard is over and the main event is ready to start. In one corner we have Vivaldi's Op.3 concerti, *L'estro armonico*, or "Harmonic Inspiration", which I pit against his Op.8 concerti written fourteen years later, *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'inventione* (The Contest Between Rules

and Innovation). Here, I'll describe each set in turn before pitting them together in a final conclusion.

First, the opus 3 set. What you will have noticed in our performance of the fourth concerto is that there are four distinct violin parts. This is a look backwards to Roman models such as the concerto grosso, which use four violin parts that may have solo lines independently, or with two solo violins and two ripieno violins like in the Muffat. Here, Vivaldi combines both ideas, in that while all four violins display soloistic tendencies, the tutti sections are divided into 'first' and 'second' violins, with the pairs being me and Allegra, Nick and Bella in this case. These concertos can be seen as concerti a 7, with four violins, sometimes two violas (though in this case, only one part) and continuo. Similarly, in each consecutive group of three concertos, the first is a concerto for four violins, the second for two violins, and the third a solo violin concerto. Notice the sense of unity and consistency here: it may surprise our modern values to see different types of concertos in the same opus, but remember that this is a norm in early collecting: Biber's collection also includes music for 2 violas and 2 violas d'amore, as well as solo violin music.

Perhaps most important, however, is that these are concertos without any external influences other than the music itself: they are absolute music, and deal with absolute principles. The concerto you've just heard is in the form of a church sonata, slow-fast-slow-fast, and adheres to the characters required for each movement: this is most important for the last movement, a dance-like character in triple meter. All of this rigorous form, strict pattern and lack of extra-musical concept links to this idea of letting

rules guide the composer's genius or creative imagination: the title prizes the melding of technical mastery central to Baroque artistry.

So what you've just heard, to what's coming up: both written by the same man, but couldn't be more different aesthetically. The fifth concerto of Opus 8 is a solo violin concerto which will be performed by myself this evening, but strikingly contains an extra-musical title, *La Tempesta di Mare*, or 'The Storm at Sea'. This is not a programmatic piece, in that there is no storyline attached to it, so perhaps the most appropriate word I can think of to describe it is that it is impressionist in quality: Vivaldi uses musical painting to evoke the imagery of the storm at sea.

I think it's best I don't tell you any explicit details about how Vivaldi does this, not just because I don't want to ruin the surprise but also because of another thing. It's important to establish at this point that performance of this music at its time is heavily performer guided, and as a result early music scores often omit information that we might deem important to know. It's not like modern music in that every dynamic, hairpin, metronome marking and so on is utterly calculated. I've probably given enough away now to wet your appetite, so I think I'll move on, but this is important to understand as you hear this piece in a second.

So, who gets knocked out in this fight? Rules or Innovation? Quite clearly, particularly in composition today, I think any self-respecting composer would tell you the winner is pretty obviously innovation, or to be precise, their "own" innovation. As music becomes so heavily composer based into the nineteenth and twentieth century, a composer's individualised genius takes over, and so frequently we speak of a composer's individual voice as a consequence of their own innovation. But, in the eighteenth-century, we

often look at composition as heavily rule based: an Oxford student might look to techniques of composition or stylistic composition as a blueprint of this. Hopefully, this Vivaldi concerto will highlight the very versatile nature of composition in the eighteenth-century, taking Christopher Small's approach of building on what's known, both innovating and violating on expectation.