

BELSIZE BAROQUE

Kati Debretzeni

Director and soloist



Autumn Baroque

Veracini
Avison
Handel
Castrucci
Geminiani

Sunday 13 September
2026, 6.30 pm

St Peter's Church,
Belsize Square,
Belsize Park,
London, NW3 4HY

www.belsizebaroque.org.uk

Autumn Baroque

Tonight we are delighted to welcome Kati Debretzeni as our director, leading us through this London-centred corner of the 18th century Baroque world. Although the composers represented come from Italy and Germany, all of these works have connections with the vibrant musical life of London during the 1720s and 1730s, when opera, concerto and orchestral music flourished side by side. The programme also traces a fascinating chain of influence. Corelli's music lies in the background of several works, whether through Geminiani's famous reimagining of *La Follia* or the wider concerto grosso tradition that continued to inspire English musicians throughout the 18th century. As well as familiar names such as Handel and Geminiani, we encounter two figures who deserve to be heard more often: the virtuoso violinist Francesco Maria Veracini and Handel's own orchestra leader Pietro Castrucci. As always, we hope you enjoy hearing some well-known repertoire alongside music that remains a genuine rarity.

Francesco Maria Veracini (1690–1768): Overture to *Adriano in Siria*

Allegro – Allegro (fugal) – Andante – Gavotte

Francesco Maria Veracini was one of the most colourful musical personalities of the 18th century. Born in Florence, he achieved fame throughout Europe as a violin virtuoso, and his contemporaries regarded him as a musician of exceptional brilliance and originality.

Adriano in Siria was composed for London in 1735 for the Opera of the Nobility, an ambitious company established to compete directly with Handel. The cast included some of the biggest stars in Europe, including Farinelli.

Unlike the familiar French-style overture, this opening sequence follows the pattern of an Italian opera sinfonia. A short, bold opening movement immediately gives way to a vigorous fugal Allegro, full of the energetic string writing and contrapuntal detail for which Veracini was admired. The contrasting slow movement is a lyrical Andante in a minor key, providing the emotional centre of the piece in typical Italian fashion. Finally, rather than ending with the Andante (which completes the sinfonia in Veracini's score), we have chosen to continue directly into a Gavotte adapted from the opening chorus that follows in the opera itself. Because that chorus is built around a dance rhythm, it provides a convincing conclusion, completing the sequence in a way that feels natural for a concert performance. The result is an opening work that offers a glimpse into the world of London opera at the height of its popularity.

Charles Avison (1709–1770) after Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757): Concerto Grosso No. 9 in C

Largo – Con spirito – Siciliana – Allegro

Published in the 1740s, Avison's set of twelve concerti grossi after keyboard sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti remains one of the most imaginative acts of musical borrowing in the 18th century. Rather than simply orchestrating Scarlatti's music, Avison reshapes it into something that feels entirely natural in concerto grosso form.

One of the most striking features of No. 9 is its tonal plan. The opening Largo is the only movement in C major; after that, the concerto unexpectedly shifts into A minor and remains there for the rest of the work. The second movement transforms Scarlatti's original keyboard writing into a whirlwind of violin virtuosity, while subtly refining Scarlatti's harmonic structure and progressions to make them clearer and more effective in an orchestral setting. The gentle Siciliana making a feature of a solo violin provides a moment of repose before the finale, which constantly teases the listener by switching between major and minor.

The effect is playful, unpredictable and occasionally humorous, as though the music cannot quite decide where it wants to settle.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)/Johann Friedrich Fasch (1688–1758):

Suite after *Radamisto*

Overture – Bourrée – Aria Andante – Menuets I & II

Handel's *Radamisto* was one of the great successes of his early London operatic career, first performed in 1720. The suite we hear tonight survives in Dresden and appears to be the work of multiple musical hands. The overture comes directly from Handel's opera, while the remaining dance movements are generally associated with Johann Friedrich Fasch, although we do not know this with complete certainty. It is quite possible that Johann Georg Pisendel, concertmaster of the Dresden court orchestra, assembled the music in its present form using movements borrowed from another Fasch composition.

The overture itself is one of Handel's most vigorous. Its fast fugal section is driven by a flowing theme that seems almost unstoppable in momentum, with particularly effective passages where the oboes continue the theme over a sustained pedal note in the bass. The later dance movements inhabit a rather different world. The Bourrée is direct and energetic, while the Aria features an elegant dialogue between solo oboe and violin. The final pair of Menuets culminates in a trio scored for two oboes and bassoon, typical of the colourful wind writing for which German court composers were especially admired.

Pietro Castrucci (1679–1752): Concerto Grosso in F major, Op. 3 No. 5

Andante moderato – Allegro – Adagio un poco Andante – Allegro – Gavotta

Pietro Castrucci spent much of his career in London, where he led Handel's opera orchestra and worked at the centre of English musical life. His own music has never achieved the same recognition as Handel's, but this concerto shows that he was a composer of considerable imagination.

In many ways the concerto contains elements that listeners might associate with both Handel and Geminiani. The opening Andante is graceful and warmly melodic, with themes that occasionally sound remarkably Handelian in character. It is followed by a lively Italianate Allegro that delights in contrasts of texture and includes a few unexpected harmonic twists and turns. A short, punctuated Adagio acts as a bridge to the second fast movement, where a rising arpeggio is passed around the ensemble in a kind of musical question-and-answer. The concerto concludes with a substantial Gavotte that gradually unfolds as a series of variations. Changes of tempo, texture and tonality constantly refresh the material, allowing what begins as a straightforward dance to develop into an inventive and highly satisfying finale. Whilst keeping very much in the Baroque style, it contains the seeds of the theme and variation finales that would become commonplace in later Classical music.

Francesco Geminiani (1687–1762): La Follia in D minor

Theme and Variations

Few melodies have travelled further through European music than La Follia. Originating as a popular dance progression, it inspired composers for centuries, including Corelli, whose violin sonata on the theme became one of the most famous instrumental works of the Baroque era.

Geminiani, a pupil of Corelli who later settled in London, transformed that sonata into a concerto grosso. As with his other arrangements of Corelli, he did far more than simply orchestrate the original. The concertino group remains at the heart of the work, but Geminiani broadens the dynamic range, enriches the textures and heightens the drama.

The piece unfolds as a series of variations over the famous harmonic sequence. Some are brilliant and virtuosic, others surprisingly gentle and reflective. One of the pleasures of the work is hearing how many different moods can emerge from a single recurring idea. By the end, what began as a simple dance progression has become a large-scale orchestral showpiece. It is easy to understand why La Follia became one of Geminiani's most enduringly popular works.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759): Concerto Grosso in C major, HWV 318, *Alexander's Feast*

Allegro – Largo – Allegro – Andante non presto

We conclude with one of Handel's finest standalone orchestral works. The concerto was originally performed during a staging of his ode *Alexander's Feast* in 1736, serving as music between the two parts of the larger work.

What makes it particularly interesting is the way it demonstrates how the concerto grosso continued to evolve in England long after Corelli had established the model several decades earlier. By the 1730s Handel was working with a broader orchestral palette and a more expansive approach to structure than Corelli generally employed, yet the essential contrast between concertino and ripieno remains at the heart of the piece.

The concerto combines memorable themes, energetic orchestral writing and elegant solo passages into a form that feels at once Italian and distinctly English. The opening Allegro and central Largo are among Handel's finest inspirations. The second Allegro restores the energy before an unusually poised concluding Andante, which includes variations provided by the solo violins.

This concerto neatly brings together many of the strands heard throughout the evening: the Corellian concerto grosso tradition, the musical life of Georgian London, and the extraordinary creativity (and rivalry) of composers who were constantly borrowing, adapting and reinventing one another's ideas

Programme notes by Richard Austen

Design/layout by Andrew Welsh



A fourth generation musician, **Kati Debretzeni** began playing the violin with Sofia Szabó in her native Romania, finishing her studies with Ora Shiran in Israel. Her passion for historical performance took her to London, where she studied the Baroque violin with Catherine Mackintosh and Walter Reiter.

From 2000 to 2024 Kati led the English Baroque Soloists under John Eliot Gardiner, with whom she has performed the world over. Her playing can be heard in the group's recordings of J.S. Bach's cantatas (recorded live during the unforgettable Bach Cantata Pilgrimage 2000) and Brandenburg concertos, and in the more recent recordings of the Mass in B Minor, the St Matthew Passion and Monteverdi's operas. In 2018 she recorded violin

concertos by J.S. Bach with the orchestra to critical acclaim, including her own arrangement of BWV 1053. Since 2024 she has led John Eliot Gardiner's Constellation Orchestra and Choir. Since 2008 she has been one of the leaders of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and has collaborated with Simon Rattle, Adam and Ivan Fischer, András Schiff, William Christie, Ottavio Dantone, Vladimir Jurowski, Maxim Emilianichev and Ricardo Minasi. She has directed the group from the violinist's chair the US, the UK and in Europe, in works ranging from Baroque repertoire to Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Berlioz, and has recorded Vivaldi's Four Seasons following performances in collaboration with the Henri Oguike Dance Company. Kati is in demand internationally as leader, soloist and director with groups such as the Orchestra of the 18th Century (Holland), Zefiro (Italy), Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin (Germany), Barokkanerne (Norway), Sevilla Baroque Orchestra (Spain), Les Siècles (France), Victoria Baroque (Canada) and the Jerusalem Baroque Orchestra (Israel). A keen chamber musician, Kati has recorded award-winning CDs with Ricordo and Florilegium, and is about to record early 19th century Norwegian repertoire with the Christiania String Quartet. In the last decade and a half she has been a member of Trio Goya, with whom she has recorded trios by Haydn and Beethoven to critical acclaim.



Photo by John Watson



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Belsize Baroque

The orchestra comprises music professionals, music students and amateur players. Our amateur musicians come from many different walks of life, and our players in general come from all over the world. Many musicians who joined us as students over the years have gone on to successful careers in top orchestras. Since 2016 the generosity of supporters has in addition made our formal scholarship programme possible.

Over the past two decades, we have been privileged to work with renowned directors and many talented musicians. We have performed many large-scale works with numerous choirs, and have given performances in aid of charities, as well as working with the Handel House and the London Handel Festival. Our first concert at St Peter's was on 22 June 2013, since when we have been orchestra in residence at the church, enjoying the support of its staff and the local community.

Belsize Baroque Orchestral Society Ltd is a registered charity (number 1108596) and company (number 5267265). The orchestra can be hired for orchestral or choral concerts and other events, and is delighted to assist other charities. www.belsizebaroque.org.uk; Twitter: @Belsize_Baroque



Belsize Baroque would like to thank Richard Link and The Rofeh Trust for their generous donations in support of the orchestra, and the churchwardens of St Peter's for their assistance.

First violins

Kati Debretzeni
Tamsin Ireland
Michael Jenner
Christine-Marié Louw
Carsten Maass

Second violins

Nick Hardisty
Miranda Ford
Rachel Ambrose Evans
Val Hudson
Jenny Frost
Trisha Montague

Violas

Elizabeth Hart
Graham Nicholson
Roger Mears

Cellos

David Winfield
Sam Whitby
Isaac Harrison Louth

Bass

Tess Miles

Harpsichord

Michael Strange

Theorbo

Quentin Miller

Harp

Jane Bliss

Oboes

Susan Cooksley
Craig White

Bassoon

Hilary Ougham

Putting on performances, running workshops, and maintaining our scholarships all require funds. Concerts alone cannot cover the costs of these and we receive no regular external funding. All of the administration is carried out by unpaid volunteers. We hope that tonight's concert will inspire you to donate to the orchestra, which you can do very easily via the link. Thank you for your generosity. www.justgiving.com/campaign/belsizebaroque



THE OLD MASTERS IN NEW HANDS

Sheku Kanneh-Mason MBE plays on a cello by Matteo Goffriller, Venice c1700, the 'Ex-Goritzki', made possible by the Florian Leonhard Fellowship, and an exceptionally fine bow by Nicolas Maire c1855, lent by a private sponsor.



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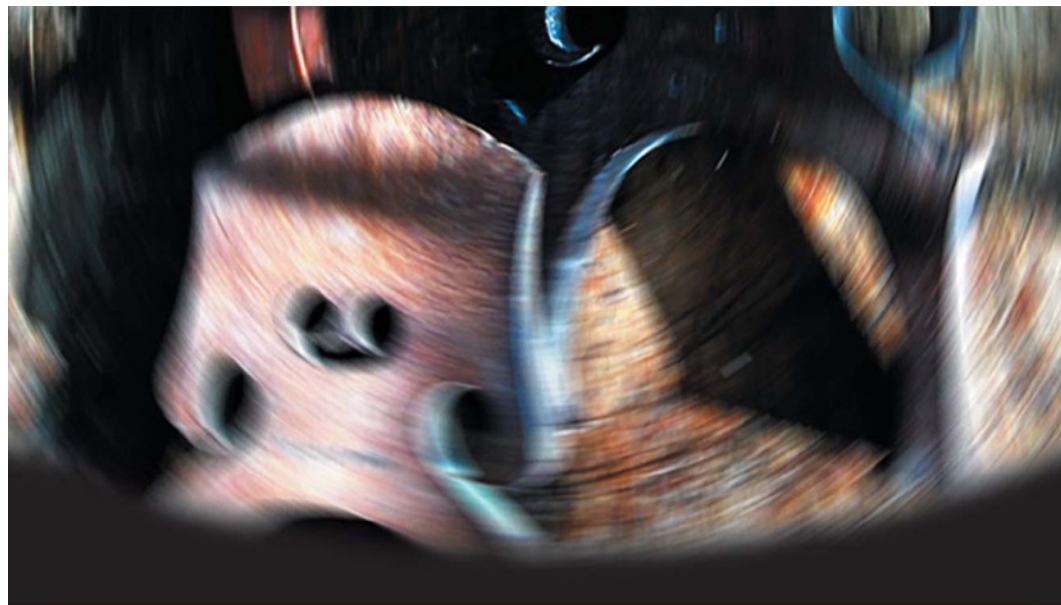
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Save the date! Our next concerts will be on Sunday 15 November 2026, Sunday 4 April 2027, Sunday 13 June 2027, Saturday 10 July 2027, Sunday 12 September 2027 and Sunday 5 December 2027, at St Peter's Belsize Park. The orchestra will also be performing Handel's *Rodelinda* with the newly formed opera company London Opera Ensemble on 27 and 28 February 2027. Details will be available soon at www.belsizebaroque.org.uk.



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