



Friday 11 October, 7.30pm

St George's Church

TRULY MADLY BAROQUE

Red Priest

Piers Adams *recorders*

Julia Bishop *violin*

Angela East *cello*

David Wright *harpsichord*

Antonio Vivaldi 1678–1741

Concerto in A minor (orig. B minor) RV 580
from *L'Estro Armonico*

Allegro – Largo – Larghetto – Allegro

Johann Sebastian Bach 1685–1750

Adagio in Bb BWV 1029

(theme from 'Truly Madly Deeply')

George Frideric Handel 1685–1759

Sonata in F major Op. 2 No. 4

*Larghetto – Vivace – Adagio – Alla Breve –
Allegro*

Henry Purcell 1659–1695 / **Maurizo Cazzati**
1620–1677 / **Diego Ortiz** 1510–1576

A Suite of Grounds

JS Bach

Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 in D major
BWV 1050 Part One

Allegro

Interval

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JS Bach	Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 in D major BWV 1050 Part Two <i>Affettuoso – Allegro</i>
Georg Philipp Telemann 1681–1767	Largo and Presto from Concerto in E minor
Joseph–Nicolas–Pancrace Royer 1703–1755	Vertigo
Handel	Aria Amorosa from Op. 2 No. 1
Arcangelo Corelli 1653–1713 / Red Priest	La Folia (Madness) Op. 5 No. 12

The 2024 Festival was curated and programmed by artistic director Deborah Roberts BEM who died on 9 September. We are so grateful to Deborah for her creative, innovative and fearless programming, always seeking to bring the music she loved to new audiences.

The music

The word ‘baroque’ means many different things: irregular, strange, bizarre, florid, over-the-top, extravagant... words that sum up one of the most extraordinary periods in the history of music. This was a time when musical rules were cast out of the window in favour of improvisation, creation and re-creation; all music was fresh and ‘in the moment’. Performers had total liberty to change and develop the composers’ original scores, and much of it was about the thrill of the new, the surprise of the unexpected. The top performers were, by all contemporary accounts, wild showmen – a far cry from the often rule-bound early music scene of today. As one well-known performer and composer at the time put it: *‘rules are what I like, and when I like it!’*. Thus at the heart of ‘authentic performance’ lies a paradox: it is inauthentic to be ‘authentic’ – or rather, it is arguably more authentic to be ‘inauthentic’... if that makes any sense! So it is in this spirit that we try to reach to the true, and occasionally mad, heart of the baroque...

Antonio Vivaldi, the original Red Priest of Venice, was certainly a man who liked to live – and perform – on the edge. He was often criticised for the ‘frightening speed’ of his violin playing, as well as his hot-headed dealings with his musical employers and promoters, ultimately resulting in his demise in a pauper’s grave; but the quality of his music has never been in doubt. The Concerto in A minor – originally written in B minor for four solo violins (and subsequently arranged by JS Bach for four harpsichords) – typifies the composer’s infectious energy and invention.

The music of **Johann Sebastian Bach** needs little introduction, although it is worth noting that his reputation as the greatest of all baroque composers is a relatively recent one, and in his day he was not held in quite such high esteem. When Mozart famously commented ‘Bach is the father. We are the children!’, he was referring not to JS Bach but to his son, Carl Philipp Emanuel! However, more than with any other composer of his era, father Bach’s music seems to transcend its cultural heritage and thrive in virtually any context. The tear-jerking Adagio from the Viola da Gamba Sonata in G minor was made famous through its inclusion in the 1990 movie *Truly, Madly, Deeply* – hence its place in this programme – whilst the fifth

Brandenburg Concerto remains an epic masterpiece and possibly the all-time greatest showpiece for the harpsichord.

George Frideric Handel, best known for his operas and choral masterpieces, was also a prolific composer of chamber music, especially in his younger days, and leaves a wealth of sublime sonatas for various combinations of instruments. The Sonata in F major Op. 2 No. 4 is his only composition for our exact line-up of recorder, violin, cello and harpsichord, whilst the beautiful 'Aria Amorosa' from Op. 2 No. 1 employs a flute in place of the recorder. Much of the material in Handel's chamber works also turns up in recycled form in his dramatic vocal works (the opening movement of the present sonata also appearing in the overture to his opera *Esther*), and this gives us in turn a good clue as to how to approach these instrumental versions; indeed his sonatas can be viewed as mini-operas in themselves, full of rhetorical gestures and meaningful statements, with contrasting characters in discussion and argument, and occasionally frenzied action.

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 virtuoso showpieces. More often than not, variations were composed above a constantly repeating bass-line, or 'ground'. The works by **Henry Purcell**, **Maurizio Cazzati**, and **Diego Ortiz** give a snapshot of the immense creativity and variety with which composers treated this form.

Another giant of the baroque period was **Georg Philipp Telemann**, a composer whose music may not have stood the test of time in quite the manner of his compatriots Bach and Handel, but who certainly rivals them in the sheer quantity of his output! A highly cosmopolitan artist, he delighted in combining styles from all over Europe, and had a special affinity for folk music from the east of the continent; he travelled to these regions many times, absorbing the local melodies and incorporating them into his sonatas and concertos – as with the mellifluous Largo and flamboyant, gypsy-flavoured Presto from his Concerto in E minor.

The French composer **Joseph-Nicolas-Pancrace Royer** was particularly known for his extravagant and virtuosic harpsichord music, and the aptly named 'Vertigo' is a fine example of highly dramatic late baroque programme music – its alternating moods of teasing calm and thunderous consternation reminiscent of a 1920s silent movie score!

Our final work, *La Folia* began life as an innocent 16-bar melody and ground bass, composed in the 16th century in Portugal – and whoever wrote it should have posthumous claim to some substantial, overdue royalty payments, as the tune was to become one of the most enduring and widely used of all grounds, subjected to expansion and variation by composers from Vivaldi to Rachmaninov and beyond. One of the most famous sets of *Folia* variations was written in 1700 by the celebrated violinist **Arcangelo Corelli** – a musician who, according to a contemporary report, became so carried away in performance that 'he doth not look like the same man' – and was later arranged for recorder and continuo. It is this latter version that we have used as a framework for ours, adding a second part for the violin and freely infiltrating our own material throughout. Whilst the resulting musical madness may not fit the currently accepted boundaries of 'authenticity', we hope that it is taken in the truly baroque spirit in which it is intended!

The performers

Red Priest – recently described in the New York Times as *'the wildly virtuosic little band'* – has been at the cutting edge of baroque music performance for over a quarter of a century. The brainchild of recorder virtuoso Piers Adams and violinist Julia Bishop, and named after the original 'red priest' Antonio Vivaldi, the quartet has developed a truly unique style, combining high-energy performance, boundary crossing arrangements and theatrical presentation, delighting audiences across the globe – including over 50 tours of America and Canada, and performances in prestigious festivals in almost every European country, Russia, Ukraine, Israel, Lebanon, Japan, China, Malaysia, Mexico, Cuba, Australia and New Zealand. The group has given numerous radio and TV broadcasts, including a documentary for the South Bank Show which attracted a million viewers.

Red Priest's discography includes an iconic take on Vivaldi's Four Seasons, hailed by *Gramophone* magazine as one of the all-time best recordings of the work, and 'The Baroque Bohemians', which surprised the major labels by reaching No. 1 in the UK classical charts.

redpriest.com

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