



LIVE  
FROM  
HOME  
SERIES

**A note from La Grande Bande's  
Music & Artistic Director and Board of Directors**

**W**hen the COVID-19 pandemic began, we had no idea exactly how, or how much, La Grande Bande would be affected. Obviously, we were profoundly disappointed that we were forced to postpone the two remaining performances of our 2019 – 2020 Concert Season. Thankfully, we were able to complete all of our educational programming before all large gatherings were not allowed.

Nothing can replace or make-up for not being able to perform for all of you in person. As musicians, we thrive on the direct connections we are able make with each of you before, during, and after each of our performances, masterclasses, outreach concerts, open rehearsals, and every single interaction in between. The new **Live From Home** series is designed to continue our programming, albeit in a radically different format: with videos recorded in our homes across the country made with the same passion and excitement we present in our concerts. We hope that the performances we'll be sharing over the next few months will provide you with joy in these historic times.

If you enjoy the program notes, the preview videos, or both, we encourage you to become a Sustaining Contributor. As a Sustainer, you will be able to access (1) all of the **Live From Home** series videos, (2) our Music & Artistic Director's Sustainer-level Director's Blog, and (3) other great perks like special invitations to private rehearsals. You can rest easy knowing that your monthly contribution will ensure La Grande Bande will be able to continue into the future. Want to find out more about becoming a Sustainer? We have the full list of benefits listed on our website at [sustainers.lagrandebande.org](http://sustainers.lagrandebande.org).

Until we see each other in person again, we send each of you our best wishes.

Sincerely,

*La Grande Bande*

# Live From Home Series

Michael Thomas Asmus  
harpsichord

Friday 29 May 2020

## Program

Suite in g, Z. 661 (before 1695)

Henry Purcell (1659–1695)

- I. Prelude
- II. Allemande
- III. Courante
- IV. Saraband

## Program Notes

Purcell's short life, lasting just 36 years, left an indelible mark on English music. As a stage composer, his *Fairy-Queen* (1692) is one of the most often produced English operas of the modern era. As a court composer, his coronation anthem for James II, *I Was Glad* (1685), was used for almost every English coronation until Hubert Parry wrote his rendition in 1902.

Purcell began singing as a chorister at the Chapel Royal in 1669. During his tenure, Purcell was trained by two Masters of the Children of the Chapel Royal: Henry Cooke (c. 1616–1672) and Pelham Humfrey (1647–1674). Cooke was not known as a composer, but he was well-known for the excellent care and vocal training he provided the Children of

the Chapel Royal. Humfrey was a well-regarded composer and singer, who had also been a member of the Children of the Chapel Royal. Cooke, Humfrey, and Matthew Locke (c. 1621–1677), a member of the English Court's musical establishment and Purcell's composer-colleague, profoundly influenced the young composer.

As a chorister in the Chapel Royal, Purcell experienced Charles II's (1630–1685) preference for French-styled music. Charles's preference for French music from the dances to the petit and grand motets, is documented by the seventeenth-century biographer Roger North (1653–1734) and by members of the King's own musical establishment.

During the English Civil War and the reign

of the Commonwealth of England, Charles II spent from 1652 through 1660 in exile across Europe. The first two years of his exile were spent in France with his mother, Henrietta-Maria and his cousin Louis XIV.

What does all of this have to do with Purcell? Like much of Europe, the English court enjoyed much French culture: dancing, music, architecture, clothing, and more. Much of the keyboard music written by Purcell and Locke were also influenced by the French style. Harpsichord pieces by French composers Louis Couperin (1626–1661) and Jacques Chambonnières (1601–1672) look strikingly similar to the harpsichord pieces by Purcell and Locke. These similarities illustrate just how deep the French influence runs.

Much of Purcell's harpsichord pieces were never published in his life. The piece which I am playing for the **Live From Home** series was published by Purcell's wife after his death in 1696 as *A Choice Collection of Lessons for the Harpsichord or Spinnet*. Little of Purcell's output is dedicated to solo keyboard suites. However, the pieces that are extant are remarkable.

What is really unfortunate is that Purcell's keyboard music is relatively unknown, is often overlooked, and is commonly misunderstood. Part of the difficulty with understanding and learning Purcell's harpsichord pieces is how they look on the printed page: simple, boring, uninventive, and so on.

The prelude from the *Suite in g*, which opens my LFH performance, looks as if it is a keyboard etude—pieces which performers use to increase their technical proficiency. (You see the first page of the prelude on the page.) However, as soon as one approaches the prelude as a French unmeasured prelude,

which focuses on harmonic tension and resolution rather than exact rhythmic patterns, Purcell's prelude takes on a whole new life.

Purcell's notation can also be rather frustrating in the dance movements. For Purcell and many of his contemporaries, indicating French *notes inégales* or staggered entrances between the hands were notated with dotted rhythms and syncopations, respectively. This type of rhythmic notation was the only way for many composers to indicate these two quintessential French harpsichord techniques for non-French, non-French trained players.

Many modern performers take the written notation as exact as exact can be. However, I've tried my best to perform the piece in a manner which represents Purcell's understanding of the French style and to come closer to his compositional intentions.

The dance movements in the suite follow the standard French pattern: an allemande, a courante, and a sarabande. The quintessential dance rhythms that one might expect in the courante and sarabande are easily distinguishable in Purcell's suite. Purcell may have been English, but he was certainly well-versed and well-trained in the French style.

I hope you enjoy the second installment of La Grande Bande's new **Live From Home** series. It was great fun to explore just one of many rarely heard pieces within the harpsichord repertoire. I think we'll have to add some of Purcell's and Locke's suites to an upcoming season.

Program notes by MTA.



The prelude from the Suite in g, Z. 661 as it appeared in the first edition of *A Choice Selection of Lessons for the Harpsichord* (1696)

## About La Grande Bande

With performances called “warm and sensitive” by the Minneapolis Star Tribune, La Grande Bande strives to present innovative, unique, and inspiring musical programs played on the instruments that premiere audiences might have heard. LGB is composed of musicians from across the United States and from around the world who are specialists in the field of Early Music—music written between c. 1600-1800—and who play on historical instruments and sing in an historical manner.

We aim to present “masterworks” alongside lesser-known compositions, illustrating the extensive musical production during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Education is crucial to our mission, be it through program notes, through directed-educational events, open rehearsal sessions, or another method. We see incredible value in resurrecting the music written by the great masters of our past; it’s a historical, cultural, and musical lesson rolled into one.

To learn more about our musicians, or about our programming, visit [www.lagrandebande.org/about](http://www.lagrandebande.org/about).

## About the Musicians

Harpichordist & Conductor, **Michael Thomas Asmus**, is currently studying at Stony Brook University for a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Harpsichord Performance with Arthur Haas. As a



conductor, he has been praised as a “conscientious [conductor]” with “a natural talent” and “a bright future” by audiences and ensembles alike. He has been lauded as a “versatile” continuo player (CNVC.org) with “judicious, rhythmically supple harpsichord playing” (Star Tribune). He is consistently lauded by his colleagues as a great musical collaborator.

In 2019 he made his Opera NEO (San Diego) debut as the Assistant Conductor and Vocal Coach for their production of Francesco Cavalli’s *La Calisto*. He was scheduled to return in 2020 as the Assistant Conductor and Vocal Coach for Opera NEO’s production of Jean-Philippe Rameau’s *Platée*. Opera NEO will resume their 2020 production calendar in 2021.

Since June 2011, Michael has acted as the Music and Artistic Director of La Grande Bande, a non-profit, period instrument orchestra and chorus he founded in the same year. La Grande Bande will produce its first full concert series for the 2019–2020 season.