



LIVE
FROM
HOME
SERIES

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

When 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.

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

Sincerely,

La Grande Bande

Live From Home Series

Maryne Mossey, viola da gamba
Michael Thomas Asmus, harpsichord

Friday 24 July 2020

Program

Sonatina in d for viola da gamba (before 1680)

Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (1644–1704)

- I. Sonatina
- II. Allemande & variation
- IV. Sarabande & two variations

Program Notes

Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (1644–1704) is arguably one of the greatest violin virtuosos of all time. Biber's use of scordatura violin tuning is synonymous with his musical output.¹ Although Biber is often thought of as a violinist today, he was also an accomplished viola da gamba player. Biber's output of sonatas for solo viola da gamba are no longer extant.

Like other composers of his era, little is known about Biber's early life or education. It is possible that Biber was educated at a Jesuit Gymnasium near his Bohemian birthplace of Wartenberg (now Stráž pod Ralskem, Czech Republic).

By at least the mid-1660s, Biber was employed as a musician in Graz, Austria. In 1668 he entered the employ of Prince-Bishop Karl Lichtenstein-Kastelkorn as a musician and a valet. The Bishop was a well-known collector and patron of the arts and amassed a quite staggering collection of paintings and a library of music.

The Bishop's reign began about 20 years after the end of the Thirt Years' War (1618–1648) which devastated large swath of his territory. Cities like Olomouc, Kremsier, and Kromeriz were still largely in ruins even 20 years later. The Bishop restored large swathes of these cities back to their former glory.

¹ Aka, using a tuning system that is different than normal. For the violin, it's normal tuning of G-D-A-E

might be changed to C-F-C-F.

Biber only remained in Kromeriz until Summer 1670. When, on the request of the Bishop, Biber was sent to purchase new instruments for the string ensemble from luthier Jacob Stainer. Biber actually never returned with the instruments and never went to Jacob Stainer's shop. Biber instead went to Salzburg where he entered the Archbishop's service.

It is not clear why Biber left the Prince-Bishop's service so suddenly and one can only speculate as to the reasons for his departure. It is clear that by 1676, the Prince-Bishop finally formally released Biber from his services.

In the intervening six years, however, Biber frequently sent works to back to Kromeriz. These were perhaps bribing the Prince-Bishop to release Biber, or tokens of thanks for the Prince-Bishop refraining from punishing Biber's desertion. Regardless, this is where the piece on today's installment of the Live From Home series originates.

Sonatina in d

The sonatina we are performing today exists in two versions: one for viola da gamba and continuo and the other for violin and continuo. The only extant manuscript of the piece is held in the library at the Kromeriz Bishop palace and does not contain a composer's name. Scholars generally agree that the Biber is the composer because of the sonatina's technically demanding writing.

As is often the case, it is quite difficult to give an exact date for the sonatina's composition. The manuscript copy, which was the source for the modern edition we are using today, has been dated to 1680 and is not in Biber's hand. As Marc Strümper notes, "since the manuscript is written very cleanly, it is obviously a copy" of another

original. Due to our knowledge of Biber's shipments of music to Kromeriz, the sonatina may have, ultimately, been composed at least by 1676, if not later.

The sonatina, which is also the title of the piece's first movement, consists of an opening prelude (first movement) and followed by a series of the typical dances Allemande, Courente, Sarabande, and two Gigues. To the typical arrangement, Biber adds variations to the Allemande (1), Courente (1), and Sarabande (2). We have chosen to use the variations for the Allemande and Saraband as repeats.

The most technically demanding part of the piece is the opening movement ("sonatina"). The movement is really a series of sections, each separated by slower, more straight-forward "Adagio" sections, which are similar in style to the toccatas of Frescobaldi and other followers of the *stylus fantasticus* (Lat, "fantasia style"). Often, these pieces are multi-sectional, through-composed, and are used to establish the tonal center of the composition and "warm up" the player's hands. Biber does just that in this example using large leaps, quasi-polyphonic sections, and chains of thirds.

The remainder of the piece is much less technically demanding, but no less musical and expressive. The most beautiful, in my opinion, is the sarabande with two lovely variations which demonstrates the viola da gamba's range of tonal color.

Maryne and I had so much fun putting this together. We so hope you enjoy the latest installment of La Grande Bande's new **Live From Home** series.

Program notes by MTA.

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.

About the Musicians

Hailed by the Minneapolis Star Tribune as “nimble expressive” and possessing “warmth and sensitivity”, Baroque cellist and violist da gamba, **Maryne Mossey**, is an active performer and teacher based in the Twin Cities. She has performed regularly at venues ranging from Carnegie Hall and Merkin Concert Hall in New York, to the Baroque Room and Sundin Music Hall in Minnesota, with such ensembles as Ensemble 212, the New York Youth Symphony, and the South Dakota Symphony Orchestra. On Baroque cello and viola da gamba, she currently plays with La Grande Bande, and Lyra Baroque Orchestra, as well as other collaborative early music projects around the upper midwest.

Maryne was selected as violist da gamba for the 2019 American Bach Soloists Academy. She has also performed at workshops for the Amherst Early Music Festival and International Baroque Institute at Longy. Maryne’s teachers have included cellists Jerome Carrington (Juilliard Pre-College), Clive Greensmith (Tokyo String Quartet), and Marcy Rosen (Queens College). Her studies in early music have been with Julie Elhard, Sarah Cunningham (Juilliard), and Phoebe Carrai (Juilliard). She holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Queens College and a Masters from the University of Minnesota. Maryne plays on an 1806 Thomas Dodd cello and a 1991 François Bodart viola da gamba. Maryne resides in St. Paul with her two Italian greyhounds.



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.