



From Masque to Opera

Cupid in Trouble

Pre-concert: Winds chamber music in foyer

Christopher Gibbons and Matthew Locke: *Cupid and Death* (1653)

Interval: Keyboard suite in the hall, String suite in foyer

John Blow: *Venus and Adonis* (1681)

Post-concert: Catches and (bawdy) songs in bar

“*Cupid in Trouble*” is a program reminding us of the problems love sometimes brings... In *Cupid and Death*, a collaboration between two of the leading English composers around 1650, these powerful allegorical figures end up in the same hotel during a stormy night. But the chamberlain wants to have a bit of fun, so swaps their arrows, with predictable, yet still surprising consequences: healthy young lovers suddenly expire in each others’ arms, while bored, infirm old couples – and even soldiers in battle – suddenly feel a heated affection for each other...

Christopher Gibbons is the central link between the late-renaissance style (embodied by his father Orlando) and the growing baroque of the Restoration. He was a boyhood friend of Matthew Locke – they sang in the same cathedral choir – who would become the leading composer for the newly-liberated London stage, and exert great influence on Purcell’s theatrical composition. *Cupid and Death* can be seen as the first attempt to write an opera in English, although its spoken text and numerous dance numbers link it as firmly with the masque tradition: it clearly builds a bridge between Jacobean court entertainment and the increasingly influential Italian cantata and opera style. James Shirley’s hilarious text is carefully abridged and translated to conserve the storyline and scenic intent as much as possible.

Gibbons was also John Blow’s teacher, whose *Venus and Adonis* relates the well-known story of Venus, in love with Adonis, the mighty hunter. She tries to further stimulate his passion for her by sending him on a revitalising hunt, but with disastrous consequences: he is fatally wounded by a giant boar, and dies in her arms. This work is the earliest surviving all-sung English opera, and was the model for Purcell’s famous *Dido and Aeneas* of a few years later. More coherent as a musical stage-piece, *Venus and Adonis* contains fully-formed “modern” Italian arias and recitatives, alongside French dances and choruses, exhibiting the growing influence of the Italian baroque in England from 1670.

The dance company *Folia* – expert in the area of baroque choreography – grace the stage with a refined mix of solo and ensemble dances.

8 singers, 4 strings, 3 winds, 2 continuo, 4 dancers