



PANDOLFI MEALLI

Violin Sonatas Op. 3 & 4



Eva Saladin violin

Jonathan Pešek violoncello

Vera Schnider harp

Johannes Keller organ & harpsichord

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DOMENICO GIOVANNI ANTONIO PANDOLFI MEALLI (1624-ca.1687)

Violin Sonatas Op. 3 & 4

Sonate à Violino solo per chiesa e camera, opera terza & opera quarta (Innsbruck 1660)

[1]	La Cesta Op. 3, No. 2	7:55
[2]	La Melana Op. 3, No. 3	5:36
[3]	La Clemente Op. 3, No. 5	8:08
[4]	La Stella Op. 4, No. 5	4:31
[5]	La Monella Romanesca Op. 4, No. 3	6:53
[6]	La Sabbatina Op. 3, No. 6	7:26
[7]	La Viviana Op. 4, No. 2	5:47
[8]	La Biancuccia Op. 4, No. 4	8:12
[9]	La Castella Op. 3, No. 4	8:15
[10]	La Bernabea Op. 4, No. 1	8:38
[11]	La Stella Op. 3, No. 1	4:04
[12]	La Vinciolina Op. 4, No. 6	6:01

Total time 81:34

While his music has formed part of the standard Baroque repertoire for some time now, we know very little about the life or personal circumstances of "D. Gio, Antonio Pandolfi Mealli". Born in 1624 in Montepulciano as Domenico Pandolfi (the family names of Giovanni Antonio and Mealli were added at some later point), he was brought up partly in Venice, where his brother was a castrato at San Marco at the same time as Claudio Monteverdi, and ended up in Innsbruck as a member of the Hofkapelle of the avid music connoisseur, Grand Duke Ferdinand Karl. His names also occurs later as a church and court musician in Messina and finally in Madrid, where it is likely that he died in 1687.

Was this man's life really undistinguished, or has he been of less interest to musicologists thus far because his modest output is difficult to categorise?

There were two important stylistic periods for violin literature in the 17th century. In the early decades, a repertoire of instrumental music appeared in northern Italy, with the first solo music explicitly for violin being written by composers such as Castello, Fontana and – most of all – Marini. Towards the tail-end of the century, we see the flowering of a refined culture of instrumental music in Austria, dominated by virtuosi such as Biber, Walther and Schmelzer. Pandolfi Mealli was caught in the middle, not belonging to either school, and may have been somewhat lost from view among all these more prominent composers.

His opus 1 and 2 are regarded as lost. A work that was later attributed to him was published in Rome in 1669, in a book of "Sonate ovvero Balletti, ...Capriccetti", and the only other repertoire still surviving comprises the twelve sonatas on this album. These were published in Innsbruck in 1660 as two volumes, opus numbers 3 and 4, generally considered to be one entity. Each sonata has its own title, most of which refer to Mealli's fellow musicians in Innsbruck. The volumes are dedicated to the Grand Duchess Anna de Medici and Grand

Duke Sigismund Franz, though we have no further details about the occasion for which they were composed or performed.

While there is little objective information available about the composer or the context of the works, the music itself conveys a good deal of subjective information to the musician, since each musical element has its own associations, whether individual or universal. This is the reason for my writing a few words on the interpretation of the works for this CD, with an emphasis on the character and style of the work and the instrumentation used.

At first sight, the sonatas might offer little in the way of variety. Most of them seem to follow a pattern (which may have been typical for Mealli), starting with a slow introduction leading to a fermata, and then followed by a series of connected movements. Almost all of the sonatas come to an end on a long, written out trill in the early 17th century style. There is relatively little dialogue or counterpoint between the bass line and the melody, and no double-stopping or idiosyncratic bowing effects (except for staccato signs). With one exception, there is no obvious programmatic link between the titles and content of the sonatas. Some older literature even voices disdain at these works because of their alleged lack of individualist, virtuoso or violinistic elements.

Closer inspection, however, reveals a good number of interesting features in the collection: each sonata seems to have its own pronounced and unique character, varying from the obsessively chromatic to the heavenly naive. We can see subtle differences between ostensibly similar movements and the music is full of unexpected twists and turns. Stylistically, some of the sonatas clearly refer to early 17th century Venetian examples. Others introduce elements that would play an important part in later Austrian repertoire for violin.

Many of the sonatas are surprisingly vocal, a sort of reference to contemporary vocal music. These singing moments invite the violin to embellish the melody with small figuration, trills and “accenti”. That apart, and with the exception of some cadences, fermatas and extended opening or closing notes, there is little scope for personal ornamentation by the performer: most of the music is already there in black and white.

It is also hard to determine what instrumentation would have been used as the continuo for this repertoire. My own choice, for the colourful combination of harp, organ and cello, is based in part on contemporary sources but also on my own curiosity about the tonal possibilities of this ensemble.

A medium-sized chamber organ, with at least one 8-foot principal register of wood or metal pipes, was a standard continuo instrument in the 17th century for smaller groupings, whether the music was sacred or secular. The cello is suitable for supporting the slightly weaker bass register of such an instrument; in this case it is an early, appropriately tuned model with plain (unwound) gut strings, played standing with a bowing technique similar to that of the viola da gamba. We can trace clues about the “arpa doppia” as a continuo instrument in various sources; it is described as the equivalent of keyboard instruments, suitable for accompanying dance or song and supporting the rhythm, an instrument mostly played in its lower register but also capable in the right hands of counterpoint and decorative figuration in the upper register. The estate inventory of Grand Duke Sigismund Franz, successor to Ferdinand Karl, refers to a “doppelte Harpfen”.

The ensemble is occasionally supplemented by a harpsichord, introducing yet another tonal quality and with extra keys for solving some practical problems with notes such as D sharp and A sharp in meantone temperament.

The final choice of instrumentation for each sonata is both personal and intuitive. On the one hand, a work may inspire the use of a particular continuo instrument, while on the other hand that instrument or ensemble will influence the character of the sonata, and possibly even how I play the violin part.

As an example, “La Viviana”, opus 4 no. 2, is a sonata whose character is clearly in an early Baroque, recitative-like style, and it is accompanied simply by the harp, turning it into a type of instrumental monody. The particular thing about a harp accompaniment – in contrast to an organ or harpsichord – is the possibility of seeking out the most extreme pianissimo, giving the performer a great deal of extra freedom. The same applies to “La Stella”, opus 3 no. 1, a sonata that is largely based on organ pedal notes, apart from a somewhat sullen section in triple time. It is never really clear whether it is in a major or minor key. The harp is supported by cello in this sonata.

We opted for the combination of harp and harpsichord in “La Stella”, opus 4 no. 5, which was dedicated to the same individual as the other sonata with this name. The two plucked instruments – one plucked directly by the fingers on gut strings and the other by a keyed mechanism with thin plectra and metal strings – form an extremely attractive combination, their contrasting natures complementing each other perfectly.

The bass line in this sonata is clearly more substantial. The final passage contains elements of what was described as the *Stylus Phantasticus*, a “free form of instrumental music, in which the composer’s imagination is unfettered by rules” (cf. A. Kirchner 1650), a style of improvisatory caprice that permeated later Austrian instrumental music.

For “La Biancuccia”, opus 4 no. 4, which contains several dialogues between the violin and bass, we used the pronounced combination of cello and harpsichord. This work also reveals some moments of *Stylus Phantasticus* and its extreme chromatic passages are remarkable.

Another sonata in which we opted for minimal instrumentation in order to emphasise the emotion, which deepens with each movement, is the particularly expressive “La Clemente”, opus 3 no. 5, in E minor. The movement entitled “adagissimo” clearly demonstrates the cantabile options offered by the combination of violin and harpsichord: the very slowly shifting bass line sustains the violin’s long lines with widely spread chords. The movement is structured like an aria, with couplets and a refrain, and we felt it to be immeasurably melancholic.

This vocal quality can also be heard in “La Vinciolina”, opus 4 no. 6: it resembles a sort of miniature cantata, following the examples of Mealli’s colleague Antonio Cesti. The work opens with a recitative over a steady organ pedal note, followed by an aria with a similar structure to the “adagissimo” movement I have already mentioned. The violin seems to be narrating a story, continually illuminating new facets, with a short refrain from the continuo to close each section. The “adagio” marking appears at several points, suggesting that the tempo before the marking is different. This invited me to perform the work really as a singer might, over a transparent accompaniment from the cello and harp, varying the tempo according to the rhetoric of the text.

“Adagissimo” is a very unusual tempo marking, certainly for those times. That said, it appears twice in Mealli’s sonatas. “La Bernabea”, opus 4 no.1, also has a slow movement with this marking, in this case an aria in two parts. These measures, where time seems to stand still, are in sharp contrast to the remainder of the sonata, which is the most agitated of all of the works, consisting primarily of faster movements. Interestingly, the entire work appears to be based on a single motif in the bass line; not exactly a consistent ostinato, but a path guiding us through the structure of each movement.

Ostinato, a repetitive bass motif over which one traditionally improvises melodic lines, became an increasingly important compositional element during the 17th century and developed into one of the most characteristic features of Austrian instrumental music. Pandolfi Mealli also used known ostinato lines extensively. They appear in his sonatas sometimes in their simple form and sometimes in variation, cropping up just occasionally or sometimes even dominating the entire work.

Examples include "La Melana", opus 3 no. 3 and "La Sabbatina", opus 3 no. 6, both in major keys (fairly rare in the cycle) and generous in their nature, demanding the full continuo complement with organ for an extended Passacaglia in one and a Chaconne in the other. These two works generally tend more towards the "new" Austrian style than the "old" Italian style as far as structure and rhetoric are concerned.

The Passacaglia is one of the most frequently occurring – and simplest – bass lines. Many composers used this falling scale pattern of four notes as the basis for monumental sets of variations. "La Castella", opus 3 no. 4, is one of these works: flanked by playful, positive sounding opening and closing movements, in which the cello plays an important part, the heart of this sonata is a long Passacaglia, with the violin displaying a whole spectrum of figuration in different registers over the minimalist accompaniment by the harpsichord alone.

"La Cesta", opus 3 no. 2, includes a particular form of Passacaglia in the minor key: the bass line falls chromatically, accompanying tortured dissonances in the melody and also the upper lines of organ and harp. A complicated bass line of this type always offers continuo players a wealth of interpretative options, and plenty of discussion material.

Finally, I present "La Monella Romanesca", opus 4 no.3, the only sonata with a different structure, as it opens without the solo violin. The work consists entirely of variations on the well-known Romanesca, a 16th century

bass model, and has just an extended cadenza as its final movement. We decided to have this repeating phrase played on organ alone, as a stable basis for the sound, over which the violin “improvises” ever more complex figurations.

It always presents a major opportunity when musicians can express themselves through a number of works by a single composer. It offers the chance to discover the richness and multi-faceted nature of the music, with the aim of reflecting this in the performance.

Eva Saladin

Translation: Bruce Gordon/Muse Translations



Eva Saladin studied at bachelor and master levels on modern violin with Kees Koelmans and baroque violin with Lucy van Dael at the Amsterdam Conservatory. In 2013, she finished her master's degree, summa cum laude, on baroque violin with Leila Schayegh at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis. During her studies in Basel, she was a regular member of Rudolf Lutz's improvisation class.

She is currently living in Basel (Switzerland) as a freelance musician. She gives solo recitals and performs with various chamber music ensembles and orchestras with a repertoire from the early 17th up to the early 19th century, focusing on historical playing styles and technique, improvisation and embellishment.

Apart from her solo engagements, she is the leader of her own Ensemble Odyssee in Amsterdam, of La Cetra Barockorchester Basel and of Gli Angeli Genève. She regularly plays with groups such as Collegium Vocale Gent, Il Profondo, Profeti della Quinta, Il Gusto Barocco and Capricornus Ensemble Stuttgart. She is also active in the field of free improvisation and contemporary music theatre.

In 2021, she was Artist in Residence at the Utrecht Early Music Festival. She also plays at the Festival de Saintes, Festival Lanvellec, Barockfestspiele Bad Arolsen, Händelfestspiele Halle, Barockfestspiele Sanssouci, Thüringer Bachwochen, MA Festival Brugge, Les Nuits de Septembre, Festival de Verbier, York Early Music Festival, Crete Senesi and many others. She has recorded several CDs for various labels. Her first solo album "The Di Martinelli Manuscript" was issued by Glossa in 2021.

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Jonathan Pešek pursued a career in romantic cello repertoire before turning towards historically informed performance practice. He graduated in 2008 from the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, where he studied baroque cello with Christophe Coin and viola da gamba with Rebeka Rusó. He also plays basse de violon, double bass and early violoncello types. His main field of research is basso continuo realisation on the cello.

As a freelance musician living in Basel, he is a sought-after soloist, chamber musician and first continuo cello in orchestras such as La Cetra Barockorchester Basel, Il Gusto Barocco, Il Profondo, Musica Fiorita, Concerto Köln, La Scintilla, Ensemble Inégal, Collegium 1704, Collegium Marianum, Freitagsakademie and Deutsche Händelsolisten. He performs at the most renowned international festivals and has recorded numerous CDs with varied repertoire.

From 2010 until 2017, he was a teacher at the Musikhochschule Freiburg and from 2013 until 2018 he was professor for baroque cello, continuo playing and chamber music at the HMDK Stuttgart. He gave masterclasses at the Internationale Händel-Akademie Karlsruhe 2016, Sommerkurse Kloster St. Michaelstein 2018, Sommerakademie Neuburg a.d. Donau 2019 and at the Internationale Meisterkurse für Kammermusik des Forum Alte Musik: St. Gerold 2021.

Vera Schnider is a freelance harpist with a very wide-ranging repertoire. During her studies on modern harp (pedagogical and solo performance master in Luzern and Detmold), she specialised in contemporary music. At the same time she pursued her interest in historically informed performance, which led her to the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis after finishing her modern instrument studies. In Basel she obtained a master's degree with distinction in the interpretation of music from the middle ages up to the romantic era.

Her broad knowledge about performance practice and the tension between the present and the past are main elements of her daily work. She collaborates in her projects with musicians and artists of varying styles and backgrounds. She performs with groups such as Ensemble Proton, La Cetra Barockorchester Basel, Zürcher Kammerorchester and ZARIN MOLL.

Her current focus lies on the art of improvising on the harp and on the late 18th century lied repertoire. Apart from her international concert career, she is a teacher at the music school of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, a member of the expert team of the Basler Kulturförderung and one of the curators of the Musikfestival Bern.

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Johannes Keller is a harpsichord player, ensemble leader and specialist in period performance practice who graduated from the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in 2010. As an internationally active freelance musician based in Basel, Switzerland, his main focus is music theatre and chamber music. He is a founding member of the early music groups Il Profondo and L'Istante and collaborates regularly with various groups such as La Cetra Barockorchester Basel and Venice Baroque Orchestra performing in Europe's most renowned festivals. He is also a member of the theatre group "La Cage" (Berlin/Paris).

He has been the musical assistant in opera productions at Theater Basel, Oper Frankfurt, Staatstheater Stuttgart, Theater Heidelberg, Dutch National Opera, Bolshoi Theatre Moscow and the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, with conductors such as Andrea Marcon, Christian Curnyn and Michael Form.

As a musical director, he has conducted several opera and musical theatre projects at Theater Basel, Neues Theater Dornach and elsewhere.

Since 2013, he has been the teacher of tuning and intonation at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis.

From 2015 until 2017 he led a research project about the reconstruction of an organ with 31 keys and a harpsichord with 36 keys per octave, which resulted into the collective "Studio 31+", a collaboration between performing musicians, composers, researchers and instrument builders concentrating on music with more than 12 tones per octave.

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Instruments:

Early baroque violin after Amati 1627, built by Daniel Frisch (Zell im Wiesental 2017)

Bow after mid-17th century original in Carolino Augusteum, Salzburg by Claudia Unterkofler (Innsbruck 2020)

Basso di Viola built by Marco Salerno (Zagarolo 2010)

Bow by Fred Walther Uhlig (Basel)

Arpa doppia after "Barberini harp" 1625, Museo degli strumenti musicali, Rome, built by Eric Kleinmann (2015)

Harpsichord after early Italian examples with split keys, built by Matthias Griewisch (Bammental 2014)

Principal organ "ad ala" with 4 registers, based on an anonymous mid-17th century instrument in Ancona.

Built by Giorgio Carli di Pescantina (Verona 1999)

Provided by Massimo Cialfi

Pitch 465Hz, temperament 1/4' meantone



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