

LARA HALL & RACHAEL GRIFFITHS-HUGHES



Sunday, August 23rd 2020

Tauranga Park Auditorium

Presented by
Tauranga Musica

in association with

**music
up
close**
Chamber Music
New Zealand

Georgian England: Country Fiddle to Court

Lara Hall, violin

Rachael Griffiths-Hughes, harpsichord

- PLAYFORD** 'Paul's Steeple' from *The Division Violin*
- GIBBS** Sonata VI in F major
Vivace – Allegro – Largo e piano – Gavotta
- HANDEL** Sonata in A major HWV361
Andante – Allegro – Adagio – Allegro
- GIBBS** Sonata V in E major
Adagio – Vivace – Sarabande – Gigue
- HANDEL** Sonata in D major HWV371
Affetuoso – Allegro – Larghetto – Allegro
- interval—
- GIBBS** Sonata VIII in E-flat Major
Grave – Siciliano – Fuga – Corno poco allegro
- HANDEL** Sonata in G minor HWV364a
Larghetto – Allegro – Adagio – Allegro
- GIBBS** Sonata IV in B-flat major
Largo – Allegro – Affetuoso and variations – Minuet Allegro
- PLAYFORD** 'La Folia' from *The Division Violin*

Duration: 90 minutes including interval

The popularity of the violin as a solo instrument in England didn't really take off until the very late 17th century, and enjoyed a flourishing of interest in the 18th century with the arrival of several virtuosic European performers. Geminiani, Veracini and Viotti, among others, were all domiciled in London at a time when the institution of the public concert was thriving. The presence of 'a solo upon the violin' in these concerts developed interest in the instrument and in the composition of new works by British composers. Although the sonatas of Geminiani, Handel and Veracini are and were considered that pinnacle of violin writing in the day, recent researches into works by 18th century British-born composers has uncovered and renewed interest in some worthy and interesting additions to the repertoire. The East-Anglian organist Joseph Gibbs is the composer of one such collection.

Joseph Gibbs (1698–1788) was the son of musician John Gibbs, a member of the Colchester waits, and is believed to have studied with Thomas Roseingrave. The next we hear of him is 1744 when he was appointed organist in Dedham, Essex, and it was from here two years later that his first works were published, the 'Eight solos for a Violin with a Thorough Bass.' In 1748 Gibbs took up the position of organist at St. Mary le Tower, Ipswich. He was to remain here for the rest of his life and played a central role in the music of this community. He was a member of the Ipswich Musical Society, along with the town's best-known resident, painter Thomas Gainsborough. The two were close friends; the portrait of Gibbs, and the inclusion in the painting of the names Geminiani and Corelli, are perhaps Gainsborough's mark of respect for the violin sonatas of Gibbs.

Although working in provincial England rather than London, and having had no previous publications of his music, Gibbs' violin sonatas attracted some important subscribers, including composers William Boyce and Maurice Greene, celebrated tenor John Beard,

and academics from Cambridge and Oxford. The sonatas have been widely praised in recent times as the finest examples of 18th century English violin sonatas, along with those by Michael Christian Festing. However, the complete set has only been recorded once to date and they have still not found a place on concert or teaching repertoire beside those of Handel or Geminiani.

The eight sonatas are extremely varied in style and movement type: they generally conform to the *sonata da chiesa* pattern of Corelli's sonatas (four movements in a slow-fast-slow-fast arrangement), but dance movements (Allemanda, Minuetto, Saraband, Giga, Gavotta and Siciliana) rub shoulders with luscious slow movements, arias with variations and in the 8th sonata, a fugue and *Corno*—a hunting call piece.

Technically, the sonatas contain some challenging sections for the violinist: high passage work, multiple stopping, counterpoint and virtuosic ornamentation. A particular feature of these sonatas is the prevalence of the 'Scotch snap'. (The Royal Scots Greys regiment were in residence in Ipswich and their presence, or that of their bands, may have had an influence on Gibbs. It is noted that they played at his funeral service.) In fact, there are many passages in the sonatas that may feel more at home in a folk song. The number of 'Aria with variation' movements in the Gibbs sonatas is also reminiscent of the type of work published by Playford a generation earlier.

John Playford (1623–1686) was a prolific publisher of music during the Commonwealth and Restoration periods. His two most well-known publications are the *The English dancing Master*, a volume of dance tunes that would have been in circulation orally, with instructions for dancing, and *The Division Violin*. The latter is a book of elaborate variations on tunes popular in the day; it is unlikely Playford actually composed any of the tunes though. *Paul's Steeple* is a ballad, thought to have originated in 1561, just months after the steeple of St. Paul's Cathedral in London was struck by lightning and burnt down. *La folia* is also an old tune – the chord progression that forms the ground for it emerging in the late 15th century. The name comes from the frenetic nature of the dance, making the dancers look mad.

The violin sonatas of **George Frederic Handel** (1685–1759) are much more widely appreciated, both as charming concert works and as teaching works. Of the 12 sonatas that have variously been published as violin sonatas by Handel over the centuries, only five are authenticated as such; three of those we will be presenting today. The A major and G minor sonatas (originally erroneously published by Walsh as for oboe) date from the 1720s, while the D major sonata is a much later work, circa 1750. All follow the *sonata da Chiesa* form, and contain lyrical slow movements, virtuosic and exciting fugato movements and spritely jigs.

Lara Hall is Lecturer in Violin and Viola at the University of Waikato, Concertmaster of Opus Orchestra, and a member of the New Zealand Chamber Soloists. She has given masterclasses at the Australian National Academy of Music, the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music and the National University of Singapore. Baroque violinist Graham McPhail was a major influence on Lara during her formative years. She holds a DipMus (Adv) in baroque violin from the University of Auckland and a DMA in violin from the University of Michigan. Lara recorded a CD of violin concerti with NZ Barok as soloist, and chamber music on both the Atoll and Naxos labels.

Rachael Griffiths-Hughes is Senior Lecturer and Convenor of Music at the University of Waikato Conservatorium of Music, where she teaches Music History, Harpsichord and Organ and also Musicianship. She is director of the University Chamber Choir, Director of Music at St. Peter's Cathedral Hamilton, and for 15 years was conductor and Music Director of the Hamilton Civic Choir. In 2014 she formed Vox Baroque, a 12-voice choir who perform 17th and 18th century cantatas once a month, and with early music ensemble Affetto she has toured for CMNZ and recorded on the Atoll Label. Rachael has a DMA in harpsichord performance from the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and MMus (Hons) from the University of Auckland.
