

Luigi Boccherini

CHARLES MOSTERT

Correspondent

This year we celebrate the 200th anniversary of a musical birth and death - that of two brilliant musicians and composers who were overshadowed, one by a more famous brother and the other, as in our hero's case, by an entire school of famous composers centred around Vienna.

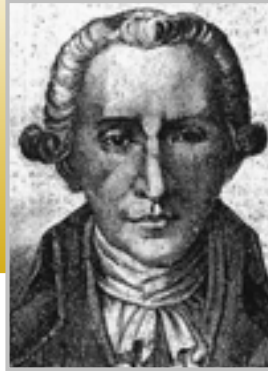
In 1805, Fanny Mendelssohn was born in the City of Madrid and Luigi Boccherini left for the unknown. Boccherini will best be remembered for his charming little **Minuet in G**, which I am sure more people could whistle than remember the name of its creator. Although I am certain that he himself was fond of this minuet - his greatest hit, I am also convinced that he would have chosen rather to be remembered for the great oeuvre of exquisite chamber music he left the world.

Ridolfo Luigi Boccherini was born on 19 February 1743 in Lucca, (his first baptismal name never seems to have been used), the third child of musician Leopoldo Boccherini. When one reads the history of the Boccherini family, it is clear that every member of the family was encouraged to develop their artistic talents and that not only Luigi made a name for himself in the arts.

His older brother Giovanni Gastone embarked on a career as a ballet dancer and performed in Venice, Trieste, Vienna and many other cities. Later he would become known as a dramatic poet, as well as a comic librettist. He created libretti for both Antonio Salieri and Florian Gassman and was also the librettist for Joseph Haydn's oratorio, **Il Ritorno di Tobia**.

Luigi's elder sister, Maria Ester became a successful solo dancer and worked with Gluck. She performed as prima ballerina in Bologna, Venice and Florence between 1753 and 1777.

Luigi's introduction to music and music education was initiated by his father and later he would attend the Archiepiscopal Seminario di S Martino in Luca where he received comprehensive musical training from the maestro di cappella and cellist D Vannucci. He received tuition in theory, composition, singing and cello and excelled



as a cello soloist. In 1753 he left for Rome to study the cello with famed cellist G B Costanzi. He was back in Lucca by the summer of 1756, where he made his debut as cellist in a cello concerto. For the next ten years he accompanied his father and siblings touring various European cities, including Venice, Vienna, Florence, Rome and Genoa.

He encountered strong competition as a soloist in Vienna. Sources indicate that he did not appear at academies of the Imperial Court as often as other cellists in the city. However, in Florence, as the celebre Suonatore di Violincello he earned much applause for a concert of music by himself, its mode of composition being described by the diarist, who left an account of the event, 'of being a completely new kind'.

Neither Vienna, nor any Italian city could offer cello virtuosos at the time the means to earn a living purely as a soloist, consequently during a time of intensive creativity (1760-1761) Boccherini wrote his first significant compositions, a set of trios **Op 1**, quartets **Op 2** and duets **Op 3**. In April 1764 an application for a post as cellist in the Cappella Palativa at Lucca was granted as well as a commission to compose a cantata for the election festivities in 1765. This indicated that he was by then recognised as a composer. He also joined a quartet with three other virtuoso soloists, J Manfredi (with whom he would keep a long-time friendship as well as a musical partnership), P Nardini and G Cambini.

Soon after his father's death in 1760, Luigi and Manfredi left for Genoa where they enjoyed the patronage of the nobility. He

wrote at least one of his two oratorios for the oratorian congregation of Genoa. In September 1769 they left Genoa together, intending to travel to London but got sidetracked in Paris where they stayed for six months. In Paris, where he published most of his works, Boccherini published some of his string quartets as **Op 2**.

His only recorded public performance was at the Concert Spirituel in March 1768, where Manfredi played one of his own concertos and Boccherini a cello sonata by himself. The *Mercure de France* praised his performance. After a concert that Manfredi played on the fourth of April, both left Paris. On account of the Spanish Ambassador's promise of posts in the Italian Opera Company in Aranjuez, they changed their plans and travelled to Madrid instead of London. On arrival in Madrid they were appointed.

The Compagnia dell Opera Italiana dei Sito Reales enjoyed the patronage of Crown Prince Carlos, Prince of Asturias to whom Boccherini's 6 trios, **Op 6**, are dedicated. Boccherini remained a member of the company till 1770.

After leaving the company he entered the service of Don Luis in Aranjuez as compositore e virtuoso di camera. It is for him that he wrote most of his beautiful chamber works, including his quartets **Op 8**. Here he had the chance to experiment with different genres of chamber works as well as varied musical instruments. Luigi created many quartets, quintets and sextets for strings with additional flute parts, oboe parts as well as guitar. His guitar quintets are some of the most beautiful and inspired chamber music of the genre and of its time.

From the seclusion of Las Arenas, Boccherini made energetic efforts to resume contact with the outside musical world. He set up a business relationship with the publishing firm of Artaria in Vienna in 1780 and entered into a short correspondence with Joseph Haydn, whom he greatly admired. In 1783 he sent compositions, written in his own hand, to Crown Prince Frederick Wilhelm of Prussia, who was an enthusiastic cellist. The prince replied that he was interested in more works, but due to contractual obligations with Don Luis (which

stated that he may only compose for Don Luis), he could only send the prince some of his earlier compositions.

In 1785 both his patron and his wife died. Although sad, this freed him from his contract with Don Luis and although he received a annual pension of 12 000 reals, he was appointed compositeur de notre chambre to Crown Prince Wilhelm of Prussia, who was crowned as King Friedrich Wilhelm II in the same year. He chose, however, to stay in Madrid and therefore received his annual salary of 1 000 reals by post. For this, he sent his new patron 12 instrumental works a year, most of them string quartets and quintets.

From March 1786 onwards he was also engaged in Madrid at a salary of 1 000 reals a month as director de orquesta y compositor by Maria Josefa Alfonsa Pimentel, Duchess-Countess of Benavente and Duchess of Osuna, a notable patron of music. According to the writings of an English writer, William Beckford, he was still in her service at the end of 1787.

The last nine years of his life was troubled by illness and misfortune. His unmarried daughter Joaquina, died at the age of 25 in 1796. The same year he entered into negotiations with the publisher Pleyel. After brief negotiations with the publisher he sold 58 works for 7 200 Reals. In 1797, his patron Friedrich Wilhelm II died unexpectedly and his successor declined his re-instatement as well as a pension. He then had to sell another 110 works to Pleyel for 9 600 Reals.

The patronage of the house of Benevente-Osuna also came to an end when the duke and duchess moved to Paris in 1799. It was at this time that he started to turn more to the composition of vocal works. He finally found a new patron in November 1800 in the French Ambassador, Lucien Bonaparte. Boccherini organised musical performances and continued writing works dedicated to him even after Bonaparte was recalled from Spain in 1801. In 1802 Bonaparte granted Boccherini a pension of 3 000 francs a year.

Towards the end of his life, Boccherini's financial circumstances were modest and his health poor. He gave up composition in 1804 and later died in 1805 of peritoneal tuberculosis.

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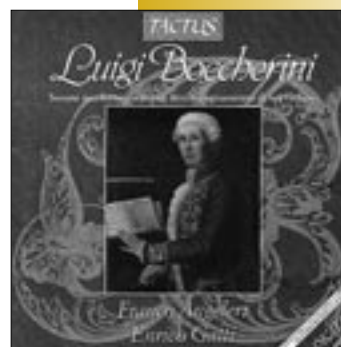
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