

Gotham Early Music Scene (GEMS) presents



Thursday February 24, 2022 1:15 pm
The Church of the Transfiguration in NYC
Live Streamed to midtownconcerts.org and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com)

Canzonetta Ensemble

Tracy Cowart ~ Mezzo-soprano Fiona Gillespie ~ Soprano
Christa Patton ~ Triple harp Richard Kolb ~ Theorbo and Archlute

The London Stage c. 1700 ~ Music of Purcell and Eccles

Oh the sweet delights of love	Henry Purcell (1659–1695)
To little or no purpose Many I've liked and some enjoyed	John Eccles (1668–1735)
Corant (<i>Musick's Handmaid</i> , 1689) Restless in thought	Anon. John Eccles
Ground (<i>Musick's Handmaid</i> , 1689) Lost is my quiet forever	Giovanni Battista Draghi (1640–1708) Henry Purcell
She that would gain a faithful lover	Henry Purcell
Stretched in a dark and dismal grove	John Eccles
Aire (from <i>The Double Distress</i> , 1701) Scotch Aire (from <i>As You Find It</i> , 1703)	John Eccles William Corbett (1680–1748)
Love's but the frailty of the mind	John Eccles
No, no, resistance is but vain	Henry Purcell

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www.gemsny.org

About the Program

Throughout the seventeenth century opera was the height of fashion and prestige in most of Europe, but in England the genre remained a foreign oddity. Home-grown English theater traditions remained strong, based on continued regard for the masterpieces of the generation of Ben Johnson and William Shakespeare. English audiences considered the idea of characters conversing in continuous song to be unnatural and nonsensical, and many people were adverse to the invasion of a foreign genre. At the same time music was an important part of almost all English theatrical productions, and while audiences resisted all-sung opera, they demanded ever increasing musical content in English plays. Music was interpolated on the slightest pretext, often at the expense of dramatic coherence. The effect was similar to some Broadway musicals, where the plot and spoken dialogue serve largely as pretexts for elaborate musical numbers.

Playwrights often had little control over the music that was inserted into their plays by stage directors, lead actors, or wealthy patrons. Song texts were often only vaguely connected with the plot, merely expressing standard affects more or less appropriate to the scene, such as melancholy, joy, or anger. Comic songs and dances were performed by minor characters or by musicians and dancers introduced as stock pastoral figures or supernatural beings. Theatrical producers leaned heavily on the drawing power of famous virtuoso singers and dancers, and frequently inserted musical numbers to display their talents with little regard for the play. As Thomas Shadwell lamented in the prologue to *The Royal Shepherdess* (1669):

We've stuff'd in Dances, and we have songs, too,
As senceless, as were ever sung to you.
If all these things will not support our Play,
Then Gallants you may damn it, yes you may;
But if You do, you'l suffer a Curse --
Our Poet swears he'll write one Ten times worse.

Today's program features songs drawn from plays produced in London, composed by the two leading composers for the theater of the period, Henry Purcell and John Eccles, along with a few instrumental interludes by two rival composers for the stage, William Corbett and Giovanni Battista Draghi. Although Purcell died in 1695, plays with his music, including *King Arthur*, *The Fairie Queen*, and *Dioclesian*, remained popular and were revived as "classics" well into the eighteenth century. While Purcell has long been one of the favorite song composers of all time, those of John Eccles have been little known until recently. His melodic style has a flexibility and expressiveness in setting the English language that compares with that of Purcell but framed in more "modern" idioms influenced by the then fashionable Italian style heard in the music of Alessandro Scarlatti and George Frideric Handel.

—Richard Kolb

NEXT WEEK: *Kevin C. Devine*
Music by 18th Century Women Composers

About the Artists

Canzonetta was founded by Richard Kolb to bring together vocalists and instrumentalists specializing in historical performance and the musical rhetoric of the Late Renaissance and Baroque eras. The ensemble delights in exploring little-known areas of 16th and 17th-century music, and its performances are crafted to give a meaningful overview of a specific area of repertoire, musical genre, or European cultural center. Recent programs have presented works by women composers in Italy, music of the world of Galileo Galilei, and songs from the London stage at the turn of the 18th century. Canzonetta has also embarked upon an ambitious recording project, inspired by Richard Kolb's complete edition of the works of Barbara Strozzi, beginning with a recording of her Opus 8 with soprano Elissa Edwards.

Tracy Cowart (co-director) enjoys a wide range of vocal interests, from twelfth-century polyphony to contemporary art music. Based in New York City, Tracy has been praised by the *New York Times* as "the real attraction" with a voice that is "light and lithe". Tracy has performed and recorded with period ensembles including the Apollo's Fire, La Donna Musicale, Musica Sacra, the Newberry Consort, Publick Musick, Rose of the Compass, and the Washington Bach Consort; she is a staff alto at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Tracy holds a D.M.A. in Historical Performance from Case Western Reserve University. She is on the faculty of the Amherst Early Music Festival and co-directs the Fordham University Collegium, where she also teaches voice. Tracy is co-director of the medieval ensemble *Alkemie*, with which she has appeared on series including Music Before 1800, Arizona Early Music, Capitol Early Music, and Beacon Hill Concerts.

Fiona Gillespie is a classical singer, folk musician, and songwriter based in Philadelphia. She works with professional choral and chamber ensembles around the nation, and teaches voice at Muhlenberg College. Fiona holds degrees in voice performance from Westminster Choir College (BM) and the University of North Texas (MM). Recent and upcoming engagements include The Queen's Baroque Ensemble Paris, The Academy of Sacred Drama, Screen Door Festival, Labyrinth Ensemble, The Bach Choir of Bethlehem, Alkemie, and The Pennsylvania Sinfonia Orchestra. Raised in a family of traditional Celtic musicians, she grew up step dancing, singing ballads, and playing the Irish whistle, on which she still performs regularly with her band, The Chivalrous Crickets. She has two albums released with the classical-folk crossover collaborative group Makaris of both historical and original music. fionagillespiemusic.com.

Christa Patton, historical harpist and early wind specialist, has performed throughout the Americas, Europe, and Japan with many premier early music ensembles including Piffaro, Early Music New York, Boston Camerata, The King's Noyse, Folger Consort, Newberry Consort, Apollo's Fire, Parthenia, ARTEK, and Chatham Baroque. As a specialist in 17th-century opera, Christa has performed with New York City Opera, Wolf Trap Opera, Opera Atelier and the Opera Theater of Saint Louis. She has served on the faculty of Rutgers University and the Graduate Center at CUNY, and is musical director of the Baroque Opera Workshop at Queens College. She can be heard playing historical harps and a multitude of wind instruments on recordings including *Istampitta* (Lyrachord) *Chacona* (Dorian), *Nobile Donna* (ATMA), *Los Ministriles in the New World*, and *Back before Bach* (Navona).

Richard Kolb (director) has performed with a wide range of Baroque ensembles and opera companies, including Opera Atelier, New York City Opera, Les Musiciens du Louvre, Chicago Opera Theater, Waverly Consort, Handel & Haydn Society, and Concert Royal. Since completing a Ph.D. at Case-Western Reserve University in 2010, he has combined performance with scholarly writing and publishing, which has included editing the complete works of Barbara Strozzi, published by Cor Donato Editions. Richard has recorded CDs of lute music by Robert Ballard (*Centaur CRC 3747*) and Barbara Strozzi's *Opus 8* with soprano Elissa Edwards (*Acis APL90277*). He teaches and serves as Scholar in Residence for the New York Continuo Collective, and has held teaching positions at the University of Toronto, the Royal Conservatory of Music (Toronto), and Case-Western Reserve University. canzonettalabyrinth.org