

# **CHATHAM BAROQUE**

*Ramsi P. Tick Concert Series  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Buffalo, New York  
Wednesday April 22, 2009*

## ***Il Tedesco a Roma: The music of Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger (c1580-1651)***

Gagliarda prima  
Corrente sesta  
Alla Luce  
Stelle vezzose  
Sinfonia terza  
Ballo secondo  
All'ombra alla fonte

Toccatà  
Interrotte Speranza

Sinfonia Decimaquinta à quattro  
S'io Sospiro  
Sinfonia Decimaterza à un canto  
Lascivette Pastorelle  
Gagliarda sesta  
Corrente seconda

### *Intermission*

Colascione  
Piva  
Canario

Sinfonia duodecima à due canti  
Lacrimosa pietade  
Ballo sesta: uscita  
Gagliarda quinta  
Corrente quinta  
Rigida Eurilla  
Sinfonia decimasettima à quattro  
Torna di Novo

Toccatà  
Anima Mea

Alla Caccia  
Correte Pescatori  
Sarabanda  
Belle Ninfe

Avrila Mia

## *Program Notes*

### *Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger*

If Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger (c. 1580-1651) were alive today he might be a rock star or an opera composer. He might be a professional socialite who moves in the most elite social circles or a mad scientist. He might be friends with both the Pope and humble poets. He might write pop songs or operas. He could perhaps rival Jimmi Hendrix or John Williams as the most amazing guitarist of his time. In his music, he would move seamlessly from the most elegant classical pieces to the most experimental *avant garde* sounds, to dance music, church music, and folk songs. He would be controversial, difficult, and self-serving, and would surely make some enemies along the way, but he would also inspire and win the hearts of countless people through his music.

Kapsperger (c. 1580-1651), despite his German sounding last name, was brought up in Italy and his music has a thoroughly Italian feel. He was raised in Venice, the son of a noble colonel from the Imperial House of Austria. He was a one of the most virtuosic players of the lute and theorbo and published music for these instruments. He also published music for voices and continuo, as well as instrumental dances and *sinfonias* for strings and continuo. Our program explores all of these aspects of Kapsperger's output, but there are many other types of music he wrote that will need to be explored another time.

Kapsperger carried with him his German identity (he was known as “*Il Tedesco della Tiorba*”) and often added the title “*nobile alemano*” to his name, which gave him access to the noble circles of such powerful families as the Bentivoglio and the Barberini. From 1605 he was in Rome, where he served various noble families. In 1624 he began to work for Pope Urban's nephew, Cardinal Francesco Barberini, where for 30 years he worked with such famous composers as Girolamo Frescobaldi, Luigi Rossi, Domenico Mazzocchi, and others.

### *Will the Real Kapsperger please stand up?*

Alternatively hailed as a genius of his time, and scorned as “a bad composer,” Kapsperger suffered for many years, if not centuries, from a negative public relations problem. His posthumous reputation declined when one or two negative opinions were published well after his death. Until quite recently, this negative publicity seemed to follow him, tainting public opinion about him even through the 1980s and 1990s

Adding to the problem, much of Kapsperger's music is either not readily available in modern performing editions, or exists in arcane formats that are accessible to only the most intrepid musicians who are willing to spend a great deal of time and energy interpreting his music notation that is notoriously difficult to read. Much of Kapsperger's music includes tablature notation for theorbo or *alfabeto* symbols for the guitar, both instruments and notation systems not widely known today. It is not surprising, therefore, that there have not been many musicians willing to make the kind of investment to recreate the music of a composer whose reputation had been somewhat tarnished over the centuries.

In the last few decades, however, performers have begun to play Kapsperger's music again and music lovers are forming their own opinions. To be sure, one can ascribe certain adjectives to Kapsperger's music: unusual, quirky, imaginative, dramatic, tender, exotic, sometimes tuneful, sometimes not at all tuneful. And the list could go on. But as we acclimate our 21<sup>st</sup> century ears to the less familiar sounds of the past, many aspects of Kapsperger's music that were previously criticized are now being looked at in a fresh light.

As it turns out, public opinion during Kapsperger's lifetime was quite favorable, and he was admired and respected as being one of the most virtuosic players of the lute and theorbo, and also one of the most inventive composers. Even in early seventeenth-century Italy, a time of great experimentation in music, Kapsperger stood out as one of the most imaginative and unusual of all composers.

He was praised by forward-looking modern thinkers, such as art collector Vincenzo Giustiniani and the world-traveller Pietro della Valle. He was also praised by more conservative thinkers, such as the theorist G.B. Doni and the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher, who believed Kapsperger to be the successor to Monteverdi. The fact that Kapsperger could impress such a wide array of diverse thinking individuals is a testament to his ability to work in many different styles and genres, from the most experimental and wild *toccatas* for theorbo, to earthy village songs called *villanelle*, to charming dances and *sinfonias*.

*Scott Pauley*