

Chiaroscuro

G.G.Kapsperger's "Libro primo di madrigali"

Concert with optional lecture

The new programme of the *Accademia degli Stravaganti* represents a premiere: the first complete performance of the *Libro primo de madrigali* by Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger, highly emotional five-voice madrigals with basso continuo.



Anne Marie Dragosits, Photo: Theresa Pewal



G.G. Kapsperger, *Libro Primo de Madrigalia quinque voci*, Roma, 1609

This collection was Kapsperger's first publication of vocal works. In 1604, the publication of his first theorbo book had broken new ground for the solo instrumental literature of the time.

The *Libro primo de madrigali* was published around the turn of the year 1608-9, and acted as his calling card as a composer in Rome, where he had settled permanently in 1606 after a number of years in Naples.



Ulrike Hofbauer, Photo: Anna Yurienen Gallego

It is certainly no coincidence that he chose for this publication the madrigal, the Renaissance genre *par excellence*. For the texts, he selected a combination of well-known madrigal verse and more modern literature, with a focus on poems by Giovanni Battista Marino.

As Marino did in poetry and Caravaggio in painting, Kapsperger presented himself here as an innovator. His *madrigali* are the first madrigals with basso continuo to be printed in Rome, and have little in common with the mixture of *stile nuovo* and *stile antico* found (for example) in Monteverdi's madrigals; instead, they represent the expressive *stile nuovo* in its purest form. Their rapid changes of affect speak the same aesthetic language as Caravaggio's chiaroscuro, an exaggeration of the effects of light and dark.

Kapsperger spent several years of his life in Naples. His wife Girolama de Rossi was Neapolitan, and two of his children were born there in 1602 and 1604. Neapolitan influences are clearly audible not only in his works for theorbo, but also in his vocal music.

Although there is still no concrete evidence, there are many indications that he knew Gesualdo personally, and that Gesualdo influenced him as a composer during these years.

In 1623, Kapsperger included a virtuoso diminution on Gesualdo's "Com'esser può" in his third theorbo book. However, his *madrigali* in particular, with their extreme interpretation of the text, their bold



Niels Pfeffer, Photo: Marc Weber

chromaticism and the exotic shifting of keys, are strongly reminiscent of Gesualdo - and yet, stylistically, they have clearly outgrown the Renaissance.



Jan Fadri Hofstetter, Photo: Franzi Blömer

Until now, Kapsperger's madrigals have occasionally been performed individually. This programme by the *Accademia degli Stravaganti* now focuses on them in their entirety.

Variety is provided by Kapsperger's *arie passeggiati*, *villanelle* and instrumental music, as well as by his homage to Gesualdo, the diminutions on *Com'esser può*.

An optional accompanying lecture by Anne Marie Dragosits could present this wealth of new biographical information, contained in her new monograph on the composer (LIM, Lucca, autumn 2025).

Accademia degli Stravaganti

Ulrike Hofbauer, soprano

Veronika Mayr, soprano

Julien Freymuth, countertenor

Jan Fadri Hofstetter, tenor

Raphaël Joanne, tenor

Jorge Martínez Escutia, bass

Niels Pfeffer, theorbo

Anne Marie Dragosits, harpsichord



Veronika Mair, Photo: Eva Schoeler

Accademia degli Stravaganti

In the 17th century, the term *Accademia* not only referred to larger and well-organized associations of artists, scholars or intellectuals who intensively pursued a common goal, but also to more informal meetings of like-minded people who shared their passions and hobbies.

The *Accademia degli Stravaganti*, founded by Anne Marie Dragosits, wants to do both - we want to delve deep into the background of the music played through research and artistic exploration and live out musical passions as like-minded people.

The flexible formation offers exciting programmes that portray musicians of the Baroque era, open up previously unheard repertoire and place the familiar in new contexts.



Jorge Martínez Escutia, Photo: Georgina Moñoz Ibáñez



Julien Freymuth

The *Stravaganti*'s first projects are exemplary of this. "Lucia", a programme about the Frescobaldi pupil and singer Lucia Coppa Rivani, her patron Marchese Filippo Niccolini and his *Accademia*, was released with the label Albus in 2022: In a trio line-up with Ulrike Hofbauer, David Bergmüller and Anne Marie Dragosits, the *Stravaganti* play music by Frescobaldi, Kapsperger, Marazzoli, Carissimi and Caproli.

Our programme around Antonia Padoani Bembo was launched at the Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik in 2023, this time with a larger cast: with Ulrike Hofbauer, the violinists Leila Schayegh and Rahel Wittling and a continuo group with Julian Behr, Jonathan Pesek and Anne Marie Dragosits.

In January 2025 the *Accademia* presented a Renaissance-programme, “Gemalte Musik – das musikalische Umfeld der Familie Tintoretto” at the Festival Resonanzen in Vienna: with Maria Ladurner, Christine Gnigler and Anne Marie Dragosits.

In 2025 and 2026 the group’s projects are revolving around Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger: with our trio-programme and, with 6 singers, harpsichord and theorbo, his exciting five-part madrigals with continuo from 1609.



Raphaël Joanne, Photo: Sophie Alimi