

Il Parlatorio

Music and instruments in Italian female convents

Aleksandra Brzóskowska, early violin & artistic direction



IL PARLATORIO was founded by its artistic director, the violinist Aleksandra Brzóskowska, as part of her doctoral research into musical instruments in female convent surroundings in northern Italy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Aleksandra is fascinated by the condition of these women musicians who amazed the entire Europe, invisible behind the barred windows of their convents, and by their music, whose sensuality and vitality have nothing to envy their more famous contemporaries. Faced with the relative oblivion into which this repertoire has fallen for contemporary audiences, she decided to create an ensemble dedicated exclusively to the performance of this repertoire. In this way, she hopes to give a voice back to these women, who have been overlooked by history, and to share their music with today's audiences.



During her studies at the CNSMD in Lyon, she developed a close working relationship with musicians who shared her passion for seventeenth-century music and the rediscovery of rare and little-known repertoires, and then completed her team with musicians trained at the Schola Cantorum in Basel. The ensemble began its journey by creating the programme ...*con tanta suavita, e legiadria...* for a soprano and four instrumentalists in the summer of 2021 at the end of a residency organised by Harmonia Sacra (Embaroquement Immédiat festival) in Valenciennes (FR).



Aleksandra Brzóskowska

Adrien Pièce

Miriam Trevisan

Lucas Alvarado

Félix Verry

Jean-Marc Delombe
PHOTOGRAPHY



Il Parlatorio invites you to embark on a journey back to 17th-century Italian convents, to discover the musical performances that resounded within their walls and hear the unique sounds that earned the nuns of that time the nickname of 'celestial sirens'. Thanks to her expertise in this field, Aleksandra aims to recreate the musical dynamics of a nuns' ensemble as closely as possible, including the male parts, which are sung in the upper register. These voices interact with instrumentalists keen to reproduce the playing techniques of early seventeenth-century instruments with precision, including the practice of improvised ornamentation, using copies of violins from this period designed to interact with the strong and brilliant sound of Italian organs.

Originally from Warsaw, Poland, Aleksandra Brzóskowska studied baroque violin with Odile Édouard at the Conservatoire Supérieur de Musique et de Danse in Lyon, where she graduated with honours in 2018. She has performed under the direction of musicians such as Martin Gester, Gabriel Garrido, Raphaël Pichon, Sébastien Daucé, and William Christie, and is the co-director of the ensemble Uranometria with violinist Félix Verry. Alongside her work as a musician, Aleksandra is also a researcher in musicology, and since 2022 has been a contract doctoral student at the University of Paris Sorbonne, where she obtained her Master's degree.



Listen to Aleksandra talk about her research on France Musique's "La Pause Thèse" broadcast:

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Programs

...con tanta suavita, e legiadria...

This programme presents an overview of instrumental and vocal pieces with instruments from the surroundings of various convents in northern Italy, either dedicated to nuns or written by the nuns themselves. These pieces, with their great expressive variety, invite us to rediscover a repertoire that has nothing to envy of that composed outside religious institutions, and offer an immersion into the musical life of a female convent, augmenting the programme with readings of nuns' epistolary correspondence and ecclesiastical decrees.

Pieces by Claudia Rusca, Chiara Margarita Cozzolani, Isabella Leonarda, Caterina Assandra, Francesco Rognoni, Benedetto Re, Michelangelo Grancini

Musicians: soprano, 2 violins, violone, organ/harpsichord



A violin lesson at the parlor

This entirely instrumental programme features various pieces for violin and continuo dedicated to nuns, as well as Isabella Leonarda's violin sonata, the only piece for solo violin by a nun. The virtuoso diminutions of Francesco Rognoni, the sensuality of Agostino Guerrieri's "melancholic" sonata, the fantasy of Angelo Berardi's sonatas and the dancing movements of Isabella Leonarda's sonata contrast with the preconceived idea of austere, functional music that one might have of the musical atmosphere of a convent.



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Pieces by Isabella Leonarda, Angelo Berardi, Francesco Rognoni, Agostino Guerrieri

Musicians: violin, viola da gamba, theorbo/lute or organ/harpsichord



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Celeste Nume Strumentale

This entirely instrumental programme features both instrumental pieces and vocal pieces played on instruments, a common practice in the early 17th century when the voice remained the model for instrumental



playing. The dancing, virtuosic character of the sonatas by Isabella Leonarda and Agostino Guerrieri contrasts with the gravity of the vocal lines in the motets by Claudia Rusca, Caterina Assandra and Adriano Banchieri.

Pieces by Isabella Leonarda, Claudia Rusca, Caterina Assandra, Adriano Banchieri, Francesco Rognoni, Agostino Guerrieri, Michelangelo Grancini

Musicians : 2 violins, viola da gamba, organ/harpsichord

Bellezza di Maria Vergine

The importance of the Virgin Mary in women's convents seems obvious, and devotion to her plays an important part in the music composed within their walls. Through the expressive intimacy of the solo pieces by Claudia Rusca and Chiara Margarita Cozzolani, the majesty of Isabella Leonarda's Litanies and the joyful character of pieces probably influenced by dance music, it is clear that Virgin Mary accompanied all the stages in the lives of the nuns, which they translated into their music. This programme presents a feminine view of the greatest female figure in Christianity.

Pieces by Isabella Leonarda, Claudia Rusca, Adriano Banchieri, Maria Xaviera Peruchona, Chiara Margarita Cozzolani

Musicians: 2 violins, 2 sopranis, violone, organ/harpsichord,



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ILLUSTRATIONS :

Frontispiece from *Philomela Angelica*, Daniel Speer, 1688

Girolamo Martinelli, *Concerto in casa Lazzari*, 1680