

REBECCA CYPRESS

Salonnières at the Keyboard

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ

VIRTUAL CONCERT

PREMIERE: THURSDAY, MAY 26 | 12pm

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

In eighteenth-century Europe, musical salons—and the women who hosted and made music in them—played a crucial role in shaping their cultural environments. Musical salons served as a testing ground for new styles, genres, and aesthetic ideals, and they acted as a mediating force, bringing together professional musicians and their audiences of patrons, listeners, and performers. At a time when women’s access to education and their participation in public life was curtailed, the salon offered women an opportunity to attain an education and assert their ideals. The musical salon formed a space between the public and private spheres that allowed the salonnière to exercise cultural agency. The program “Salonnières at the Keyboard” explores works associated with five musical salonnières with diverse agendas and approaches.

The Sonata in G major by Marie-Emanuelle Bayon is a two-movement work in the sentimental style. In the 1760s, Bayon, a professional musician, participated in salon gatherings hosted by Caroline-Stéphanie-Félicité, Comtesse de Genlis, who later explained that these gatherings featured games and theatricals as well as music. When Bayon married the architect Victor Louis, the couple moved to Bordeaux, and she began hosting a salon of her own. She was thus one of many salonnières who “apprenticed” under another salon hostess before assuming the role of hostess herself.

The Sonata in G minor by Madame Brillon is another two-movement work with a lyrical first movement and a contrasting rondo, fast and brilliant, as the second movement. Unpublished during her lifetime, Brillon’s music survives in manuscripts and was undoubtedly used for music-making within her salon. There, she and her daughters played and sang alongside professional musicians such as Luigi Boccherini, one of several composers who dedicated published compositions to her. Accounts of these soirées survive in the writings of figures such as Benjamin Franklin, who explained that he spent two evenings each week at Madame Brillon’s

home while he was living in Paris. Brillon owned at least three keyboard instruments of various sorts, but her favored instrument was an English square piano of precisely the sort used in this program.

Born in Vienna, Marianna Martines studied counterpoint, composition, singing, and keyboard (the last with a young Franz Joseph Haydn), and she was mentored in humanistic learning by the imperial poet, Pietro Metastasio. In the early 1760s she published two sonatas, including the Sonata in A major, in an anthology published in Nürnberg. Martines was the only woman represented in the anthology and the only one who did not hold a post as a professional musician; instead, she was called a “dilettante”—one who “delights” in music, rather than earning her living through it. Martines’s other compositions—virtuosic vocal cantatas, motets, masses, and keyboard concertos—remained unpublished. In 1773 Martines became the first woman inducted into the Accademia Filarmonica of Bologna, one of the most venerable musical institutions in Europe. Yet, despite this attention, Martines avoided many of the attacks leveled at other women composers in her orbit. She crafted her persona very carefully, rarely performing in public. Instead, she used her salon as her primary locus of performance.



The Jewish salon hostess Sara Levy, who lived in Berlin, never composed, but she attained an excellent musical education under the tutelage of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, eldest son of Johann Sebastian Bach. Levy also amassed an enormous collection of music that apparently reflected the practices in her salon in the 1780s–90s. She donated much of her collection to the Sing-Akademie, a bourgeois choral society, starting in the 1810s, thus leaving her mark on Prussian culture at a time when the status of Jews as members of Prussian society was hotly debated. The Concerto in G major by W. F. Bach seems to have had special significance for Levy; musicologist Peter Wollny has suggested that, when Bach turned the middle movement into a song titled “cantilena nuptiarum consolatoria” (a consoling wedding song), he did so in honor of Levy’s marriage.

Thomas Arne was one of the most popular composers of operas and other vocal works in eighteenth-century England; he also composed instrumental music, including some for solo harpsichord, designed for use in homes. Arne was also involved in the salon gatherings hosted by women such Ann Ford in London. A description of Ford’s salon published in the journal *Public Characters* counts Arne among the “professors” who frequented these gatherings, and who collaborated in music-making with “amateurs” such as the Earl of Kelly and Ford herself. Is it possible that the variations that make up his Sonata VIII, made “at the request of a lady,” were written for Ford? While this will probably never be known, the sociability that Arne’s title implies would have been very much at home in the institution of the musical salon.

-- Rebecca Cypess

This program features three instruments:

- Double-manual, five-octave Franco-Flemish harpsichord by Robert L. Wilson (1970s), rebuilt by Willard Martin. Courtesy of the Department of Music, Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University.
- Single-manual, four-and-a-half-octave Italian harpsichord by Dale Munsch (2005), rebuilt by Willard Martin.
- Five-octave square piano by Johannes Zumpe (1780), restored by Tim Hamilton. Courtesy of Leslie Martin.

The program was recorded on March 13, 2022, at Nicholas Music Center, Mason Gross Performing Arts Center, Rutgers University. The stage was set for the Opera at Rutgers performance of Benjamin Britten’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Sound/video engineer: Loren Stata

Producer: Elly Toyoda