

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Department of Music
presents

The Baryton: A Royal Instrument at Esterhaza and in Vienna

Brent Wissick, *baryton*

assisted by Stephanie Vial, cello, Suzanne Rousso, *viola*, and Jeanne Fischer, *soprano*

Wednesday, September 4, 2024

7:30 pm

Person Recital Hall

Program

Trio for Baryton, Viola and Cello in G Major
Allegretto, Menuet/Trio, Finale: Presto
Joseph Burgksteiner
(1736-1797)

Trio No. 87 in A Minor
Adagio, Allegro di molto, Menuet/Trio
Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732-1809)

Divertimento à Tre in D Major
Adagio, Allegro, Menuet/Trio
Luigi Tomasini
(1741-1808)

— intermission —

Trio in G Major
Adagio (Mvt 1)
Anton Neuman
(1720-1776)

Sonata No. 4 in A Major for Baryton and Cello
Andante (Mvt 1)
Andreas Lidl
(1730?-1789)

Aria from Miserere: Auditui meo
Emperor Leopold I
(1640-1705)

Aria from Marte Placato: Sa'il crudel
Attilio Ariosti
(1666-1729)

Trio No. 67 in G Major
Allegro moderato, Menuet/Trio, Finale: Allegro di molto
Haydn

Program Notes

The baryton I play today is a modern copy of the type used by Haydn and his patron Prince Nicholas Esterhazy in mid-18th century Austria/Hungary. It has a total of 15 strings and is essentially a 6 string viola da gamba with sympathetic strings that can also be plucked by the left-hand thumb. An expensive and beautiful piece of equipment, then as now, it was played mainly by wealthy nobles in central Europe, and a few of their professional court musicians, some of whom became virtuoso performers. A number of original instruments survive in museums, but cannot be played, so the small number of revival players use modern copies that can handle the stress of the extra strings.

The origins of the baryton are not completely clear, although it probably developed in early 17th century England, where wire strings were added to gut strung viols, initially for sympathetic vibrations, but eventually for self-accompaniment. The first players were English professionals, some of whom took them to Germany when they accepted court appointments there. None of the earliest barytons (or Paritones as they were sometimes called) survives, but a few bodies that were later converted into more conventional viols, show that a few even had 2 sets of plucked strings, with a large range and many chromatic notes. The first pieces for baryton that were written down were solos in the style of lute music.

The baryton found its way into the music of Austrian Catholic courts in the mid-17th century, and was even used in a sacred composition by the young and musically talented Austrian Emperor Leopold I in 1670. His *Miserere* uses solo baryton in 4 of its arias, probably because the tone color was considered appropriately lamenting for a penitential text, but the pieces do require some plucking as well. The Hofkapelle of the Hapsburg court in Vienna employed a large number of superb musicians, including several viola da gamba players who could also play the baryton, and over the next 50 years, Fux and a number of Italian composers who worked there composed arias with baryton parts. One of the most famous of these was Attilio Ariosti, a priest who composed and played a number of instruments, including the viola d'Amore, which also has sympathetic strings. He used the baryton in a 1707 dramatic work dedicated to the Emperor Joseph I. The aria "Sa il crudel" is demanding as a viol solo, set in E Major, but does not require any plucking of the sympathetic strings, so again it is the tone color that seems sought after. Maria Theresa became Empress in 1740, and she had much less interest in music than her ancestors, so the colorful music of the previous years at the Hofkapelle declined, and there seems to have been no baryton playing at the Imperial Court in Vienna from then on.

But one of the wealthy Austrian nobles, Prince Nicholas Esterhazy, was a passionate music lover who retained a large retinue of professional performers and composers at his estate, Esterhaza (Eisenstadt) in the Hungarian countryside. Most famous was his music director, Franz Joseph Haydn, who composed his first symphonies, string quartets, operas and church music for the Prince; and led the performances there. Between 1765 and 1778, Nicholas had a special interest in playing the baryton himself, using a version of the instrument with the standard 6 bowed and now only 9 plucked strings; and he expected Haydn and other court musicians to compose for it regularly. His favorite genre was a trio of baryton, viola and cello, in which he played baryton, Haydn the viola, and one of the court cellists, Wiegler or Kraft, played cello. Haydn ended up composing over 170 works for the baryton, which also document the prince's development as a player, since Haydn tailored the baryton parts carefully to what he could play and what he liked. Trio #87 seems to come from a time when Nicholas was focusing on his gamba playing, because there are no plucked notes. But the piece also documents how thoughtfully Haydn used music he was required to compose with his own artistic growth. This trio is similar to aspects of his Op 20 String Quartet writing and even predicts the motive development in the Op 33 quartets. Trio #67 uses plucks, and ends with a fugal movement as do several of the Op 20 quartets. (Haydn had taught himself counterpoint as a starving teen living in a freezing garret in Vienna after his voice broke and he lost his place in the St Stephens Boy Choir.) All of the Trios by Haydn and others written for Esterhaza are cast as *Divertimenti*, that is the lighter music appropriate for evening gatherings, but Haydn was able to use them as studies for his mature "concert" genres.

Four other musician/composers from Esterhaza are represented on this concert. Joseph Burgksteiner was hired in 1766 as a singer who could also play violin and compose. Anton Neuman was a Moravian musician who had worked for the Bishop of Olomouc where he may have heard baryton playing, and his trios with their frequent use of plucked notes may have been intended as a job application for Esterhaza. Luigi Tomasini was hired as a violinist around 1761 when Haydn was engaged, and eventually became concertmaster. His baryton trios are composed with the idea that the baryton part might also be played on violin, and the plucked notes are not identified with string numbers as was the convention. But when plucks are used, the baryton part becomes more difficult than the prince was likely to play well. In this case, they might have been played by one of the virtuoso court baryton players such as Andreas Lidl. He had arrived there in 1769 and left by 1774 for a touring career throughout Europe, including some time in Paris, where several of his compositions that were certainly originally for baryton were copied as viola da gamba pieces. There were a handful of French nobles who still played the gamba in the years just before the French Revolution, and would have wanted to play music they had heard performed by this Austrian. Haydn himself had a visit to Paris in the 1780s where one of his symphonies became a favorite of Marie Antoinette, Maria Theresa's daughter.

We are fortunate that so much of the Esterhazy music survived the many wars of Europe; and that modern instrument builders have been able to re-construct barytons from the 18th century. The baryton I am playing today was made for the wonderful gambist/cellist John Hsu in 1985, his second. He played it on many concerts and recordings, and sold it to Ken Slowik of the Smithsonian in 2000, who also played it extensively in concerts and recordings. I acquired it in 2022, having had one myself since 1995. Stephanie, Suzanne, Jeanne and I have already performed with it several times, and I am grateful for their artistry in exploring this repertoire.

— Brent Wissick