

Bizzarrie!



OSLO CIRCLES

Bizzarrie!

Bizzarria is a beautiful Italian word, linked to other interesting words, such as the adjective *bizzarro* (bizarre) or the noun *bizza* (whim) or the verb *imbizzarrire* (to go wild). The range of possible meanings is quite broad, although almost all of them are related to something different from normality or everyday life: *bizzarro* means ‘extravagant’, ‘unusual’, but also ‘fantastic’; *bizzarria* can mean ‘oddity’, but also ‘invention’ or ‘whim’ (*fa le bizzarrie* can be said in Italian about a capricious child). A *imbizzarrito* horse suddenly becomes enraged to the point of throwing its rider off its back. Therefore, the root of *bizzarria* is also linked to the idea of agitation, speed and excitement.

The Italian seventeenth century, as everyone knows, loved a certain irregularity, which is also inherent in the meaning of the term ‘baroque’, often used to define the period. It is an imaginative irregularity that breaks the mould to surprise, breaks the rules to be more expressive (Monteverdi’s *seconda pratica*), invents new styles to better adapt to the needs of the time.

In this recording all these aspects are present under the label of *Bizzarria*. The term returns in many titles—some synonymous with it, like “capriccio”—but more importantly, it captures the essence of the project. Another *fil rouge* linking the programme is the relationship of many composers with the Habsburg area. Some of them, such as Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (1620/23-1680) and Johann Joseph Fux (c. 1660-1741), were active at the court of Vienna for many years. Others, such as Cesare Negri (c. 1536-post 1604) or Andrea Falconieri (1585-1656) and Nicola Matteis (1650-c.1713) are linked to Italian cities under the rule of the Habsburgs of Spain, such as Milan and Naples.

Bellerofonte Castaldi (1580-1649) and Giuseppe Colombi (1635-1694) were from the Modena area, at a time when the Este family, having lost Ferrara in 1598, moved the capital of their duchy to Modena, which enjoyed a period of particular splendour.

Many of the pieces proposed are related to dance: ballet proper or stylized dance that has become an instrumental form. Dance was a fundamental element in court life and an essential component of the education of the nobility and the ruling class. Together with fencing and music, dance was part of a range of disciplines offered to students by noble colleges as a complement to their ordinary education. It was a physical exercise that helped to keep fit, but also to achieve a harmonious posture and controlled gestures, which were useful in social relations. Dancing existed in its ‘ballroom’ version, practised by the nobility (or in other contexts by other social classes) for their own entertainment, or as theatrical dance, generally intended for professional dancers.

Ballets were included in operas at the end of the acts and were generally inspired by the preceding scene, developing a small sketch, often in a comic or grotesque style, related to that of the *commedia dell’arte*. A helpful contemporary source is Gregorio Lambranzi’s *Neue und Curieuse Tanz-Schul* (Nuremberg, 1716), describing theatrical court dances. Though slightly later than our repertoire, it illustrates late-17th-century practice—miniature theatrical scenes choreographed with engravings, often pantomimic, featuring *commedia* masks or characters like sailors, cooks, prisoners, or statues: figures commonly seen in Viennese 17th-century ballets.

Composers of dance music were often excellent violinists who, alongside their performing and compositional activities with and for the instrument, specialised in the composition and musical direction of ballets. The Austrian composer Johann Heinrich Schmelzer was a recognised violin virtuoso and made a considerable contribution to the repertoire of his instrument with his sonatas. Virtually all the music for court dances between 1665 and 1680 bears his signature. Schmelzer’s ballets survive in chronologically organised manuscript books in the form of ‘particella’ (a melody line and basso continuo), at the Austrian National Library in Vienna, and in collections with all the parts in Kroměříž (Czech Republic). Thanks to these parts, we are able to reconstruct many ballets in their original polyphonic form. The *Balletto di matti* (*Ballet of Madmen*) and the *Balletto di filosofi* (*Ballet of Philosophers*) belong to the genre of theatrical dances, although the relationship of the former to a specific opera has not yet been fully established; the *filosofi* can be identified with the ‘*ginnosofisti*’ who “come out [...] and dance for joy” at the end of the first act of *La lanterna di Diogene* (Vienna 1674). The *Musicalische Fechtschule* (musical fencing school) however, seems to be a composition for carnival celebrations, where masquerades, pantomimes and ballets were also performed. All the ballets are in several sections; some are simply called *aria* and are in binary time; others make explicit reference to dance forms (canario, sarabande, gavotte, bergamasco, etc.). In some cases, the reference is rather to pantomime action, specific characters or contexts. Since these ballets presumably alternated between pantomimic moments and academic dance moments, we can imagine that the generic ‘arias’, with their

‘generic’ binary metre, accompanied the action, the pantomime.

The *Fechtschule* can be interpreted quite well in this sense; we must also consider that the practice of fencing, like that of dance, was part of the training and daily life of courtiers at the time, and was therefore a very concrete reference to something well known and practised. We can imagine either a fencing lesson, with a master and a pupil, or an exercise between two fencers challenging each other. The two opening arias could constitute the respective entrances of the two fencers, in a freer form: the moment of presentation and greeting, which is still mandatory today before crossing swords with the master or opponent. Sarabande and Gavotte (I take my cue from Charles Brewer) could constitute a warm-up moment, in the form of structured dance. The moment of the lesson or the actual duel is very clear, the fifth movement, entitled *Fechtschule*, which clearly reproduces in music the course of a duel (or lesson), with fast, repetitive and nervous figures. Finally, the ‘Bader Aria’ could refer to the intervention of improvised doctors to treat wounds, given that in Viennese dialect ‘Bader’ means quack. The choreographers of the period were Santo Ventura (until 1665) and then his son Domenico (c. 1640-1695); Santo can be considered a ‘grandson’ of Cesare Negri, as he studied with Carlo Beccaria, who in turn had worked and learned the art from Negri at the court of Rudolf II.

Cesare Negri was a central figure in 16th-century dance culture; in 1602 he published *Le gratie d’amore*, a treatise that provides a valuable insight into the world of dance in the

16th and 17th centuries. His approach seemed to endure for a long time, at least in courtly dance in the Italian tradition and beyond. In his dedication to Philip III of Spain, Negri mentions his service to “the Knights of Milan, your vassals” and to “the most serene Rodolfo, Ernesto and Giovanni of Austria”. La *Bizzaria d'amore* was published in *Gratie d'amore*, where the choreography is described in minute detail. The ballet “is danced by four, two knights and two ladies”; the music is printed as a melody accompanied by a part in tablature for lute. This rather concise musical form is certainly susceptible to richer instrumentation, as is the case in the recording.

In addition to the actual dances, in which ‘bizarre’ can be embodied on the one hand in the ‘oddities’ of Viennese pantomimes and on the other simply in the novelty of the choreography, we have many works in which the concept is more fantasy-oriented. We refer to the many compositions for basses such as the ciaccona or the follia: originally dances themselves, they became an omnipresent element of the Baroque soundscape as ostinato basses serving the exuberant capacity for variation of the composers of the time. This type (with the exception of the *Corriente dicha la Cuella*) includes the compositions of Andrea Falconieri, all published in *Primo libro di canzone, sinfonie, fantasie, capricci, brandi, correnti, gagliarde, alemane, volte* (Naples 1650), dedicated to Don Giovanni D'Austria. Falconieri, a Neapolitan by birth, was a lutenist and theorbo player; he held a series of positions in many Italian courts and cities, such as Parma, Mantua, Florence, Modena and Genoa, but he also worked in Spain and

France. In 1639, he returned to Naples and settled there, becoming maestro of the royal chapel. The *First Book* is an important anthology in which the various instrumental genres are well represented, as is evident from the title. In the *Folias echa para mi Señora Doña Tarolilla de Carallenos* the two violins play their variations on the well-known bass, and both cello and the theorbo join in this game from time to time, breaking away from the continuo group. The *Ciaccona* from *L'Eroica* follows the model of the Italian ciaccona, on whose bass the two violins chase each other with a series of variations in crescendo of difficulty. The *Corrente dicha la cuella* (for solo violin and basso continuo) refers instead to the dance form, with the typical rhythmic ‘bizarre’ nature of the corrente.

Also belonging to the ciaccona or variations genre are *Diverse Bizzarrie sopra la vecchia sarabanda oppure ciaccona* and *Ground after the Scotch Humour* by Nicola Matteis, and the *Chiaccona* by Giuseppe Colombi, a relatively unknown composer. The piece is preserved in a manuscript in the Estense Library in Modena and has only one bass part, here reworked for cello and continuo. Matteis, originally from Naples, enjoyed considerable success in London, where he won over the public with his exceptional violin technique, rich in nuances and variety of bowing, but also in virtuosity, and his incredible ability to invent variations on a basso ostinato. We have a taste of this extraordinary inventiveness in the two compositions recorded here, published respectively in the collections *Ayrs for the Violin [...]. The First Part* (London, ca. 1679), and *Other Ayres and Pieces For the Violin [...]. The Fourth Part* (London, ca. 1685).

The last remaining ‘oddities’ are each a special case. Fux's *Partita K331 'Turcaria'* is preserved in a manuscript source in Kremsmünster (Austria), and is of dubious attribution; its extravagance is evident in the titles of the individual movements. The Turks were a recurring nightmare for Austria, and although the situation had changed considerably with the victory following the siege of Vienna in 1683, the aftermath of the war continued throughout the 18th century. Between 1716 and 1718, Charles VI, for whom Fux was Kapellmeister, intervened alongside the Republic of Venice against the Ottomans; the war ended with the Peace of Passarowitz in July 1718. Fux's suite, originally intended for two violins and bass, is orchestrated here in such a way as to highlight the ‘exotic’ references to ‘Turkish’ music.

Bellerofonte Castaldi was a bizarre character in his own right. His *Capriccio detto l'Hermafrodito* (also a rather extravagant title) is part of his collection *Capricci a due stromenti, cioè tiorba e tiorbino e per sonar solo varie sorti di balli e fantasticarie* (Modena 1622). The work is here performed with two theorboes.

The genre ‘capriccio’ is the embodiment of eccentricity, even though it first appeared in music in the second half of the 16th century. The term is suited to particularly ingenious compositions, free in form and without a fixed pattern, extremely varied in inspiration. A perfect synthesis of the idea of compositional ‘capriccio’ is the piece at the centre of the programme, the *Capriccio stravagante*. Carlo Farina's career took off at the court of Dresden in the position of Kapellmeister in 1625; he then moved to Parma, then

to Danzig and in 1638 arrived in Vienna in the service of Empress Eleonora Gonzaga; he died there shortly afterwards, in 1639. The *Capriccio* was published in his second collection, *Ander Theil newer Paduanen, Gagliarden, Couranten, französischen Arien* (Dresden 1627). The work consists of a series of short sections that imitate the sound of other instruments (two different types of lyre, pifferino, trumpet, clarino, soldier's flute, drum, Spanish guitar) or the sounds of animals (hen, cock, cat, dog), but on the other hand refers to specific violin techniques: we find instructions such as “here strike with the wood of the bow on the strings” or *il tremulo*; at the end of the Cantus partbook preserved in Dresden, there is a table in Italian and in German entitled “Some reminders in the soprano around the capriccio stravagante”, which explains in detail how to perform the effects requested by the composer, offering valuable technical information. Just one example: “The cat is played by making those notes die away, that is, by bringing the hand back little by little, but the semiquavers are played badly, that is, by making the bow run in and out of the bridge, as cats do when they run away”.

Capriccio, therefore, but as entertainment, fantasy, ingenuity and perfect mastery of composition and performance technique: this, in the end, was the true substance of Baroque *bizzaria*.

Angela Romagnoli

OSLO CIRCLES

Bizzarrie!

Some thoughts about the program.

The idea for *Bizzarrie!* goes back to the pandemic, when I found myself craving the delight of playing live music. I asked myself, “What music do I really want to play once the pandemic is over?” And the answer was clear: it had to be about joy and humour, embracing life and music in all their fantastic eccentricity—the wilder and more colourful, the better!

That guiding line stayed with me during the programming process of *Bizzarrie!*. The word *bizzarrie* —Italian for “follies” or “quirks”—perfectly captures the spirit of this project. Naturally, I chose plenty of dance music, and several pieces even reference *bizzarrie* directly, such as all Baroque violinists’ favourite *Diverse bizzarrie sopra la Vecchia Sarabanda ò pur Ciaccona* by Nicola Matteis (ca 1650–1713) and the popular Renaissance dance *Bizzarria d’amore* by Cesare Negri (ca 1535–ca 1604). With a fabulous team of two lutenists and a percussionist on board, we also plunged into the world of Andrea Falconiero (1585–1656), furious and languishing dances over the repeated pattern of ground basses, including the irresistible *Folias*.

At the heart of the program is the 17thcentury joke book *Capriccio Stravagante* by Carlo Farina (ca 1600–1639), a surprisingly avantgarde piece for its time (1627). It features plenty of

modern violin techniques—ponticello, pizzicato, col legno, tremolo, guitarstyle strumming, and more. I like to think of the work as a “baroque day,” beginning with a burst of morning energy, passing through various figures and animals (hens, roosters, cats, dogs), encountering war instruments (then as now war never being far away), transitioning to a tranquil church interlude, dreaming of a Spanish lover, and finally falling into bed with a contented evening yawn. Between all those curious episodes, we enjoy delightful and rustical dances. What an incredible joy to play the piece, and how much fun we had rehearsing it, and giving character to each animal and person in the kaleidoscope!

I grew up just a few metres from the Austrian border, and I’ve always loved the music of the Austrian composer Johann Heinrich Schmelzer. In this program we’ve included several of his *balletti*, composed for the Habsburg court, perfect for stage, court festivity and masquerade. I really would have loved to see these ballets performed live: masked *matti* (the crazy ones), solemn *filosofi*—surely these *balletti* were full of humour! In Schmelzer’s *Die Fechtschule*, our percussionist Tomas Nilsson even clashed real opera swords in the famous *battaglia*, while his Turkish crescent – handcrafted by himself for this project! - adds an exotic sparkle to Fux’s *Turcaria*.

Speaking of percussion, our percussionist is the custodian of Norway’s largest percussion collection—from Arabic drums to Turkish cymbals, all sorts of whistles, tambourines, bells - he has it all! Collected over decades, his instruments feel like treasure. Visiting his enormous percus-

sion studio, I felt like a child in a candy store, exploring and selecting the perfect sounds for our dances. *Bizzarrie!* is everything I longed for during uncertain times, and now it’s here, and again the world out there is in uncertain times. Maybe this is what we all need right now: a heartfelt homage to the playful, bizarre spirit of the Baroque.

Astrid Kirschner



OSLO CIRCLES

The critically acclaimed baroque ensemble Oslo Circles was founded in 2015 by baroque violinist Astrid Kirschner, and brings together leading musicians from the Scandinavian and international early music scenes. With curiosity, playfulness, and deep passion, the ensemble breathes new life into old scores – revealing how vividly baroque music can speak to modern audiences.

The members of Oslo Circles are also active in renowned baroque ensembles such as Concerto Copenhagen, B'Rock, Academia Montis Regalis, Barokkanerne, Barokksolistene, and Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin.

The ensemble has collaborated with a wide range of celebrated soloists, including mezzo-soprano Marianne Beate Kielland, countertenor David Hansen, bass-baritone Johannes Weisser, soprano Hana Blažíková, soprano Berit Norbakken, harpsichordist Rinaldo Alessandrini, flautist Barthold Kuijken – among many others.

Oslo Circles has appeared at international festivals such as Barocktage Melk (Austria), Froville Festival (France), Tage Alter Musik in Regensburg (Germany), Baroque & Beyond (Sweden), Oslo Chamber Music Festival (Norway), Korkyra Baroque Festival (Croatia), Trondenesdagene (Norway), Spazio & Musica (Italy), and Varaždin Baroque Nights (Croatia), where Oslo Circles was awarded the Croatian Critics' Prize in 2019 for best musical interpretation for their program *Lamento* at the festival.

Oslo Circles' CD recordings (*One Charming Night*, theatre music by Henry Purcell, with David Hansen, countertenor, and *Lamento*, with Marianne Beate Kielland, mezzo-soprano) have received high praise in international media, earning superlative reviews. Their album *Lamento* was also nominated for the German Opus Klassik Award 2022 – in three categories.

MUSICIANS:

OSLO CIRCLES:
 ASTRID KIRSCHNER, BAROQUE VIOLIN AND ARTISTIC LEADER
 KAROLINA RADZIEJ, BAROQUE VIOLIN
 MARIA INES ZANOVELLO, BAROQUE VIOLA
 TOMASZ POKRZYWIŃSKI, BAROQUE VIOLONCELLO
 KARIN HANNISDAL, BAROQUE VIOLONCELLO
 EINAR SCHØYEN, VIOLONE
 CAROLINE EIDSTEN DAHL, RECORDER
 TOMAS NILSSON, PERCUSSION
 KARL NYHLIN, THEORBO/BAROQUE GUITAR
 THOMAS C. BOYSEN, THEORBO/BAROQUE GUITAR
 MARIANGIOLA MARTELLO, HARPSICHORD

SOLOISTS

TRACK 5: CAROLINE EIDSTEN DAHL, RECORDER
 TRACK 9: TOMASZ POKRZYWIŃSKI, BAROQUE VIOLONCELLO
 TRACK 28: ASTRID KIRSCHNER, BAROQUE VIOLIN
 TRACK 29: THOMAS C. BOYSEN & KARL NYHLIN, THEORBOES
 TRACK 36: ASTRID KIRSCHNER, BAROQUE VIOLIN

JOHANN HEINRICH SCHMELZER

(1623 – 1680)

Balletto di matti

- 01. Aria I 00:38
- 02. Aria II (Bergamasco – Canario
– Gavotte – Sarabanda) 01:14
- 03. Aria III 01:09

ANDREA FALCONIERI

(1585 – 1656)

- 04. Folias echa para mi Señora Doña
Tarolilla de Carallenos 04:11

NICCOLA MATTEIS

(1650 – 1714)

- 05. Bizzarrie all'umor Scozzese
(Ground after the Scotch Humour) 02:28

JOHANN HEINRICH SCHMELZER

(1623 – 1680)

Balletti di filosofi

- 06. Aria I 01:17
- 07. Aria II 01:38
- 08. Aria III 00:45

GIUSEPPE COLOMBI

(1635 – 1694)

- 09. Partite sopra il basso di
ciaccona 02:40

CESARE NEGRI

(CA. 1535 – CA. 1604)

- 10. Bizzarria d'amore 03:07

JOHANN JOSEPH FUX

(1660 – 1741)

Partita ex C K 331 «Turcaria»

- 11. Turcaria 02:11
- 12. Passa gallia 02:32
- 13. Janitshara 01:32
- 14. Posta Turcica 02:33

CARLO FARINA

(1600 – 1639)

Capriccio Stravagante

- 15. Entrata 01:53
- 16. La Lira 01:52
- 17. Il Pifferino – Lira variata 01:31
- 18. Qui si batte con il legno 00:34
- 19. [...] 01:00
- 20. Presto – Adagio – La Trombetta
– Il Clarino – Le Gnachere 01:24
- 21. La Gallina – Il Gallo 00:41
- 22. Il Flautino pian piano 00:39
- 23. Forte – Presto – Adagio 01:28
- 24. Il Tremulo 01:50
- 25. Pifferino della soldatesca/Il Tamburo
– Il Gatto – Il Cane 01:06
- 26. Presto – La Chitarra Spagnuola 01:15
- 27. Finale 00:55

NICCOLA MATTEIS

(1650 – 1714)

- 28. Diverse Bizzarrie sopra la vecchia
sarabanda ò pur ciaccona 04:54

BELLEROFONTE CASTALDI

(1580 – 1649)

- 29. Capriccio detto Hermafrodito 02:38

JOHANN HEINRICH SCHMELZER

(1623 – 1680)

Balletto á 4 «Die Fechtschule»

- 30. Aria I 01:12
- 31. Aria II 01:03
- 32. Sarabande 00:33
- 33. Courante 00:45
- 34. Fechtschule 02:20
- 35. Bader Aria 01:02

ANDREA FALCONIERI

(1585 – 1656)

- 36. Corriente dicha La Cuella 01:08
- 37. Il primo libro di canzone:
Ciaccona (L'Eroica) 02:50

RECORDED IN SOFIENBERG CHURCH, OSLO,
14. – 17. MARCH 2024

PRODUCER: VEGARD LANDAAS

BALANCE ENGINEER: THOMAS WOLDEN

EDITING: VEGARD LANDAAS

MASTERING: THOMAS WOLDEN

BOOKLET NOTES: ANGELA ROMAGNOLI

BOOKLET EDITOR: TORGEIR M. LANDAAS

PHOTO & COVER DESIGN: ANNA JULIA GRANBERG / BLUNDERBUSS



LWC1376 © 2025 LAWQ © 2025
LAWO CLASSICS www.lawo.no

