Spiritillo Mediterraneo

Cristina Prats Costa

SPIRITILLO MEDITERRANEO

Andrea Falconieri (1585–1656)

Il primo libro di canzone

1	Il Spiritillo Brando	1. 01
2	La Suave Melodia	2. 42
3	Corriente dicha la Cuella	1. 15
4	Brando dicho el Melo	1. 09

Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644–1704)

5	**Sonata No. 5 in E Minor C. 142**	11. 23

Nicola Matteis (1650–1714)

Ayres for the Violin

6	Aria malinconica. Adagio	3. 07
7	Ground in E Major	4. 38
8	Sarabanda amorosa. Adagio	2. 48

Santiago de Murcia (1673–1739)

9	**Fandango** (Arr. by Cristina Prats Costa)	3. 12

Nicola Matteis

Ayres for the Violin

10	Adagio in A Minor	2. 05
11	Aria in D Minor	1. 27

Gaspar Sanz (1640–1710)

12	**Españoleta** (Arr. by Cristina Prats Costa)	6. 32

Nicola Matteis

Ayres for the Violin

13	Giga. Al genio Turchesco	1. 01
14	Aria. Adagio in C Minor	1. 50
15	Allegro. Preludio prestissimo	0. 58
16	Diverse Bizarrie sopra la vecchia Sarabanda ò pur Ciaccona	4. 43
17	Preludio in A Minor	2. 02
18	Passaggio rotto. Andamento veloce	2. 12
19	Un poco di maniera Italiana	1. 17

Antonio Vivaldi **(1678–1741)**

Violin Concerto in D Major RV 208 "Grosso Mogul"

20 Recitativo. Grave 2. 25

Nicola Matteis

21 **Ayres for the Violin** Aria ridicola 0. 57

Johann Schop **(1590–1667)**

22 Arrangement of Alessandro Striggio's "Nasce la pena mia" from 't Uitnemend kabinet 6. 50

José de Nebra **(1702–1768)**

23 **Seguidillas** (Arr. by Cristina Prats Costa) 2. 08

Jean-Féry Rebel **(1666–1747)**

Violin Sonata No. 7 in G Minor

24 Sarabande 3. 53

Nicola Matteis

25 **Ayres for the Violin** Aria burlesca 2. 18

Total playing time: 74. 08

Cristina Prats Costa, violin

Lucas Harris, archlute, theorbo and Baroque guitar
Charlotte Nediger, harpsichord
Michael Unterman, violoncello
Joseph Phillips, viola da gamba & bass
Naghmeh Farahmand, daf, darbuka & tambourine
Esmeralda Enrique, castanets

Spiritillo Mediterraneo invites listeners into the vibrant and expressive soundworld of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Mediterranean music. Inspired by the mischievous sprite of Falconieri's *Il Spiritillo Brando*, the album explores the imagination, freedom, and ornamented dialogue that defined Baroque performance.

In this period, the Mediterranean was not a boundary but a crossroads. From Naples and Venice to Cádiz and Barcelona, musical styles travelled through ports and courts, blending Italian virtuosity, Spanish rhythmic fire, and French elegance. Falconieri's dances shine with Neapolitan colour; Matteis fuses Italian brilliance with English taste; and composers such as Biber, Rebel, and Vivaldi reveal how Italian musical language shaped the wider European landscape.

This project is deeply personal. As a Spanish musician, the Mediterranean has always been both my heritage and my artistic compass. Its colours—the tension of a Phrygian cadence, the pulse of a dance, the melancholy of a lament—feel like echoes of home. It was especially meaningful to create my own arrangements of three Spanish works on this recording: *Españoleta*, *Seguidillas*, and *Fandango*. Shaping these pieces allowed me to honour the sounds I grew up with while re-imagining them through a Baroque violinist's lens.

May the spiritillo guide you through this journey of colour, rhythm, and wonder.

Cristina Prats Costa
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The violin played a vital role in the birth of instrumental music in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In 1640, the great music theorist and critic Giovanni Battista Doni (1595–1647) captured the dawn of the violin's new versatility: "In sum, when it is in the hands of an expert player, the violin represents the sweetness of the lute, the suavity of the viol, the majesty of the harp, the fervour of the trumpet, the vivacity of the fife, the fretful complaint of the flute, the pathetic quality of the cornetto; as if every variety, as in the great machinery of the organ, is heard with marvellous artistry."

When the expert Naples-born violinist Nicola Matteis (c. 1650–after 1715) took England by storm some 30 years later, the diarist John Evelyn (1620–1706) reacted similarly, writing on November 19, 1674: "I heard that stupendious Violin Signor Nicholao (with other rare Musitians) whom certainly never mortal man Exceeded on that Instrument: he had a stroak so sweete, & made it speake like the Voice of a man; & when he pleased, like a Consort of severall Instruments: he did wonders upon a note: was an excellent Composer also ... but nothing approch'd the Violin in Nicholas hand: he seem'd to be spiritato'd & plaied such ravishing things on a ground as astonish'd us all" (ed. E. S. de Beer).

The *Ground* on this album is from Book 4 of Matteis' *Ayres for violin*, published in 1685. Like all of the works in the Ayres, dating back to the first book published in 1676, Matteis carefully notated the melodic patterns above the ground bass, from the initial *adagio* lyric melody, to the *presto* dotted rhythm, to the scalar passage work, back to another lyrical variation, before returning to a dotted rhythmic pattern.

He even notated the placement of trills, though he still left room for improvised ornamentations. It was unusual for Italians to notate melodic figurations in such detail in their publications. These details tended to circulate in manuscript copies, while publications generally only included the compositional skeleton, leaving the passagework and ornamentation to the player. However, from the first book of *Ayres*, Matteis was able to take advantage of developments in copper-plate printing, which allowed for the replication of manuscript-style notation, as opposed to the movable-type printing process still holding on in Italy, which was more cumbersome and did not lend itself to florid passagework.

Matteis likely grew up on the violin music composed by lutenist Andrea Falconieri (1585–1656), whose pioneering collection of works for violin, *Il primo libro di Canzone*, was published in 1650 in Naples, the hometown of both of them. Publishing his collection while under Spanish rule, his music is a remarkable fusion of Spanish and Italian styles. Falconieri was also widely traveled in Italy, France, and Spain. Thus, he was no stranger to French dance-types either. *La Suave Melodia* brings out the beautiful, poised, lyrical capacities of the violin, while the rustic, buoyant sound of the two "brando" dances pay homage to a popular dance originating in 16th-century France ("branle"), in which circles or lines of dancers link arms and swing first in one direction in larger steps, then in the other in smaller steps. The *Corriente dicha la Cuella* is an Italianized form of the French courante. Falconieri's works were published using movable type, so the less florid figuration compared to Matteis' may have as much to do

with printing technology as it does to belonging to an earlier generation.

Prior to the era of Doni and the groundbreaking works of Falconieri, the violin had largely been a functional instrument, used by professional and amateur entertainers to accompany dance, with localized dance styles developing especially in France, Germany, Italy, and Spain. By the time Doni penned his statement, composers had begun to write dances "for the ears, rather than for the feet," as Matteis would go on to put it. Dances for listening contained elaborate figuration that pushed the technical limits of the instrument and drew attention to the skills of the violinists, while maintaining the variety of tempi and rhythmic characteristics of the various national dances.

During the same period, the violin also shifted from a functional status in the context of vocal music, where it typically doubled the basic shape of the melody of the solo voice within arias in operas and related vocal genres. Composers began to write aria-like melodies that were idiomatic for the solo violin. In many cases, the violinists themselves improvised their own dances and arias, dazzling their audiences with their virtuosity and range of national and melodic styles. They published their creations so that others could imitate their style.
The earliest work on this album is based on a vocal work. Johann Schop (c. 1590–1667), who was one of the first violin virtuosi in Germany, published an arrangement of Alessandro Striggio's most famous and widely circulated Renaissance madrigal "Nasce la pena mia" for violin and accompaniment in 1649. It had been subject to numerous vocal and instrumental arrangements, most of which maintained Striggio's

intricate six-voice polyphony by transcribing the madrigal for lutes or using it as the model for a parody mass. By contrast, Schop separated the solo line from the rest of the polyphony to create a solo violin and continuo texture that was highly characteristic of the Baroque soundscape. His arrangement transformed the canto line through "diminutions," a kind of variation technique that maintained the framework of the melody while creating rapid, technically demanding passagework.

The reliance of instrumental music on vocal arias or dance forms during the Baroque era is evident from titles of other early collections of music dedicated to the violin represented on this album. The full title of the collection by Andrea Falconieri is *Il primo libro di Canzone*, *Sinfonie*, *Fantasie*, *Capricci*, *Brandi*, *Correnti*, *Gagliarde*, *Alemane*, *Volte per Violini*, *Viole overo altro Strumento á uno*, *due, et tré con il Basso Continuo* (Naples, 1650). Nicola Matteis called his collection *Ayres for the Violin* (1676 & 1685), and the title page of the first book, dated 1676, specified that it contained "Preludes, Allmands, Sarabands, Courantes, Gigues, Divisions, and double Compositions fitted to all hands and Capacities." The French names of these dances, familiar from the French suite, were undoubtedly a concession to England's Francophile tastes. At the time, England was ruled by Charles II, a Francophile. On his arrival in England, Matteis himself performed before the King, seeking employment. The King was apparently neither impressed by the florid brilliance of the Italian style nor was he taken by Matteis' "incomparable pride and arrogance." Matteis was apparently one of the first performers to demand silence and

full attention from audiences while he played.

Although Matteis is famous for converting the English to the Italian style, he also boasted that he could compose in all national styles. Some are on display in this album, though the popular Turkish style, as heard in *Giga: Al genio Turchesco*, was highly stylized. Less immediately obvious is the English reference in the *Aria malinconica*. Melancholy was a fashionable affliction associated with artistic genius, particularly in England prior to the establishment of Bethlem Royal Hospital. Many of Matteis' arias and dances offer a blend of Italian, French, English, and Scottish styles. When he specified his native Italian in a title, Matteis was not averse to mocking its flamboyant, theatrical nature, as in the *Aria poco di maniera Italiana*, or to warning audiences to the whimsical or bizarre stylistic turns, as in his *Diverse bizzarrie sopra la Vecchia Sarabanda ò pur Ciaccona*.

It took some time before an assembly of contrasting dance movements became known as a sonata, a term that in the Baroque era was often used interchangeably with the suite. The most standard grouping, developed in France, was the Allemande (moderate duple meter), Courante (fast triple meter), Sarabande (slow tiple meter), and Gigue (fast compound meter), as in Jean-Féry Rebel's Violin Sonata No. 7 in G Minor (of which we hear the Sarabande). This sonata belonged to a collection of twelve published in 1713, in which for the first time Rebel omitted descriptive nicknames, a sign of the move—albeit a slow one, particularly in France—towards the increasingly abstract nature of instrumental music. By contrast, the extraordinarily challenging Sonata No 5. in E Minor by German violinist Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644–1704) seems inspired more by the aria and vocal genres than explicit dance forms. It begins with repeated high notes at the top of the violin's register, setting out in an accompanied recitative style. Soon it bursts into a cadenza or coloratura style before calming into a double-stop *adagio*. The next section, labelled "Variatio," begins anew with three repeated Es, this time at a lower register and aggressively. The variations explore contrasting tempi and figurations over a repeated bass, which breaks off for yet another contrasting *adagio*, followed by a frenzied imitative compound-meter *presto*. The sonata ends with an aria and four contrasting variations. Published in a group of eight sonatas for violin in 1681, Biber's playing and compositions set a standard of virtuosity for the violin that few could match for generations.

Even the exquisite and highly florid middle movement of the Violin Concerto in D Major RV 208 by Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741) alludes to vocal music: it is labelled in the autograph "Recitative: Grave." Bach arranged this concerto for organ, transposing the outer movements from D major to C major, and this middle movement from B minor to A minor and changing "grave" to "adagio." Indeed, adopting this common Baroque habit of arranging works to change instrumentation, Cristina Prats Costa has here arranged the highly characteristic Spanish dance types by guitarists Santiago de Murcia (1673–1739), Gaspar Sanz (1640–1710), and organist José de Nebra (1702–1768) for solo violin and accompaniment.

Suzannah Clark
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