

## THE HISTORY OF THE CAPPELLA COLONIENSIS

Dr. Eduard Gröninger, founding father of the Cappella and musicologist for the Northwest German Radio (later WDR), and the cellist and conductor, August Wenzinger, were responsible for the orchestra's first concert on 18 September 1954. In the presence of music historians and critics from around the world, the Cappella performed the music of Johann Sebastian Bach in the radio's concert hall on Wallrafplatz in Cologne. Also present on this historic evening were the President of the young German Federal Republic, Theodor Heuss, and Ludwig Erhardt, "Father of the *Wirtschaftswunder*".

With this performance by the Cappella Coloniensis, an important first step was taken toward a new kind of musical interpretation, one no longer relying primarily on the performer's subjective feelings, but based on an understanding of a composition's roots and the composer's intentions.

It was the beginning of Historical Performance Practice in the world's concert halls. The history of the Cappella Coloniensis from this date forward can be divided into three main periods:

1. The era of Dr. Eduard Gröninger was initially devoted to research into instrumental playing techniques, the reconstruction of wind instruments, the collecting of original string instruments (which had to be rebuilt to their original specifications), and the discovery of little known scores. It was especially important to seek out musicians interested in experimentation and ready to pursue unconventional ways of performing Early Music.

Gröninger brought together an ensemble made up of university professors and professional orchestra musicians from Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, and France who came together in Cologne for four to six rehearsal periods each year to produce recordings for the West German Radio (WDR), the orchestra's sponsor. The point of departure from a musicological perspective for the Cappella was the 17<sup>th</sup> century court orchestra in Dresden, on which the string section was based: six first violins, six second violins, four violas, four celli, and two double bass players. As for the woodwind instruments, in addition to a single flute and bassoon, the oboe group ranged in size from six to eight players.

The Cappella Coloniensis soon began to attract attention around the world. Under August Wenzinger's direction, the orchestra played in Stockholm (1958) and in Switzerland (1959 and 1960). The Cappella was the first German orchestra to visit the Soviet Union after the Second World War. Invitations greatly increased in the 1960s and '70s. In 1963, the orchestra was again invited to the Stockholm Festival; in 1964 it performed in seven Italian cities (with Fritz Wunderlich as soloist), in Japan (as the first and only German radio orchestra to appear at the Osaka Festival), in Hong Kong, New Delhi, and in Athens. In 1966, there followed Warsaw, Lodz, Posen, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, Lima, and Mexico City; in 1967, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Uppsala, and Stockholm.

In 1968, the orchestra travelled to North America, appearing in Montreal, Ottawa, Boston, New York, New Haven, Washington, San Francisco and Los Angeles – a similar tour followed in 1972. An invitation to participate in the 2500th anniversary

celebrations of the Iranian monarchy in Teheran led to a concert tour also including Bucharest, Cairo, Beirut, Ankara, and Nicosia.

Whether in Carnegie Hall in New York, the Bunka Kaikan Hall in Tokyo, or the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, the Cappella Coloniensis was enthusiastically received as an ambassador for the Federal Republic of Germany, a representative of the cultural metropolis of Cologne, and as a pioneer in the movement toward historical performance practice.

2. A new, second era in the orchestra's development began with Klaus L. Neumann, the successor to the Cappella's founding father. It was a period of consolidation and expansion in the choice of programming. Under Gabriele Ferro in the 1980s, Rossini's operas *Tancredi*, *La Cenerentola*, and *L'italiana in Algeri* were recorded for the first time with historical instruments.

These mammoth productions with major singers such as Fiorenza Cosotto, Lucia Valentini Terani, Francisco Araiza, and Werner Hollweg, among others, attracted considerable attention in the recording market.

After many years of playing under the direction of conductors not entirely specialized in historical performance, the Cappella chose as their regular conductor Hans Martin Linde, an Early Music specialist with an international reputation as a flutist.

In the 1990s, the orchestra's personnel structure also gradually changed, as more and more musicians trained in Early Music playing techniques joined the ensemble.

Conductors such as William Christie, John Elliot Gardiner, René Jacobs, and Sigiswald Kuijken enriched the Cappella and extended the ensemble's repertoire.

Since 1954, the orchestra has made more than 400 radio recordings, many of which were released as commercial LPs or CDs.

3. In January 1997, the current period of the Cappella Coloniensis's history began. Bruno Weil conducted a Schubert program and won the hearts of the orchestra's members. His clear and informed interpretations of the original scores consistently fascinate the musicians; his energy and aura of musicianship excite players and listeners alike.

In cooperation with the producer Dr. Richard Lorber, there appeared under Bruno Weil's direction acclaimed performances and CD recordings of Weber's operas *Der Freischütz* (2001) and *Abu Hassan* (2003) as well as Johann Christian Bach's *Endimione* (1999). The most recent CD features the critically acclaimed live recording of Richard Wagner's opera *The Flying Dutchman* (2005, world premiere recording of the original version from 1841). The most visible signs of the ideal working relationship that Bruno Weil and the Cappella Coloniensis enjoy are two Echo Klassik awards, the German recording industry's highest honor.

The recordings with Bruno Weil bear witness to the close relationship with BMG Classics/deutsche harmonia mundi, for whom the orchestra also recorded Christoph Willibald Gluck's *L'innocenza Giustificata* under the direction of Christopher Mould in

2004. Harmonia Mundi France has also released critically acclaimed recordings by the orchestra, such as the Handel opera *Siroe* (2004) and Haydn's *Esterhazy Cantatas* (2002); both projects were conducted by Andreas Spering.

In September 2004, in celebration of a new era of independence following 50 years of association with the WDR, the Cappella Coloniensis presented the series "Paths to Beethoven" with concerts in the Essen Philharmonie and at the Deutschlandfunk in Cologne.

Together with Bruno Weil, whom the musicians elected as their Artistic Director, the Cappella Coloniensis is enthusiastically devoted to bringing innovative ideas to the works of the Classical and Romantic periods, always ready to view early music in a new way and to offer it to listeners in masterful performances in the service of historical performance practice.

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