

Body & Soul: Cavalieri's Rappresentazione – A Turning Point in Music

Crescendo presents a concert with the first Italian opera by Emilio de' Cavalieri

LAKEVILLE, CT, UNITED STATES, March 25, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ --

Crescendo presents their last concert of the 2024–25 season, offering two performances of a rarely heard early Baroque work for soloists, chorus, and orchestra: *Rappresentazione di Anima et di Corpo* (Representation of Soul and Body) by Emilio de' Cavalieri. This musical drama in three acts was composed in 1600 and is the first musical work of its kind. Written and published at a turning point in musical history, the beginning of the

revolutionary Baroque era, this work is considered both an opera and an oratorio. Among a cast of allegorical figures, the two main characters Soul and Body argue about the meaning of their existence. They are tempted to enjoy material goods by Pleasure, World, and Worldly Life, and

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Christine Gevert, founding artistic director of Crescendo



Baroque allegorical characters combined Greek mythology, Christian iconography, and humanist ideals. Gian Lorenzo Bernini's Apollo and Daphne

urged to pursue a virtuous life by Counsel, Intellect, and the Guardian Angel. The conflict also includes visions of hell, with the appearance of the Damned Souls, and of heaven in the voices of the Blessed Souls and the Angels. Also on the program are two short compositions by Cavalieri and his contemporary Cristofano Malvezzi, composed for the marriage of their patron Ferdinand I of Medici to Christina of Lorraine. Malvezzi's piece features thirty voices, divided into seven choirs, creating an auditory climax for this performance.

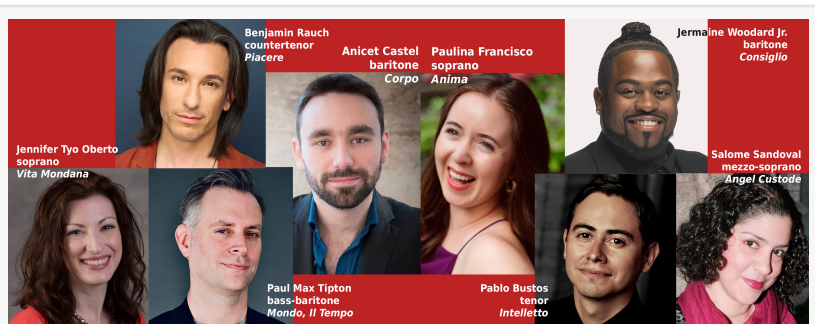
Crescendo's Founding Artistic Director remarks: "The turning point in music around 1600 was that composers

began to use the music, and specially the voice, to express intense feelings, and began setting

dramatic texts to music in an attempt to recreate the ancient dramatic experience. Cavalieri's Rappresentatione is one of the first compositions where an entire drama is set to music. What I enjoy most about this work is the clarity of the message of the characters, supported by the music. This is accomplished by simple, but highly effective changes, like the juxtaposition of major and minor tonalities, the alternating of rhythmical patterns, the beautifully crafted melodies, and overall the pace of the drama. None of the solos and choruses is overly lengthy, so one can follow the plot easily, and the mind gets drawn in to the back and forth of the arguments. I personally love the contrasting portrayal of heaven and hell in the third act, with the Damned Souls, a quartet of low voices chanting a dirge accompanied by brass, and the Blessed Souls, a quartet of high voices singing in beautiful harmonies.

Remarkable are also the echo effects, in which voices are placed off stage, and respond to the questions that Soul asks God. And of course the choral numbers, impersonating everyone's responses to this dilemma, are very moving also. I'm not surprised that this piece was so successful in its times, and I recommend this work as a highly enjoyable listening experience that touches our senses and emotions."

The cast of soloists includes internationally and nationally renowned early music specialists from Montreal, Canada to New York City. Soprano Paulina Francisco, Anima, "delivers a strong performance [and] showcases her clarity, control and her agility" (The Washington Post). Baritone Anicet Castel, Corpo, has performed with famous European Baroque ensembles such as Les Arts Florissants, Le Concert d'Astrée, Le Poème Harmonique, and Accentus. Bass-baritone Paul Max Tipton, Mondo, is a soloist for Bach Collegium Japan and has been described as "a dignified and beautiful singer" (Atlanta Journal-Constitution). Tenor Pablo Bustos, Intelletto, "sang elegantly, with his own brilliant set of flourishes in the da capo" (The Boston Musical Intelligencer). The cast also includes baritone Jermaine Woodard Jr., Consiglio; countertenor Benjamin Rauch, Piacere; mezzo soprano Salomé Sandoval, Angel Custode; and soprano Jennifer Tyo Oberto, Vita Mondana. The award-winning Crescendo Chorus of thirty-five singers includes both amateur and professional singers of the tri-state area. They are joined by Crescendo Period



Vocal Soloists of Body and Soul concerts.



Crescendo singers in concert. Photo by Stephen Potter

Instrument Orchestra, an ensemble of fourteen period instrument players from New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, and Bloomington, IN.

The performances are on Saturday, May 10 at 6:00 PM at Trinity Church, 484 Lime Rock Rd., Lakeville, CT, and on Sunday, May 11 at 4:00 PM at Saint James Place, 352 Main St., Great Barrington, MA. Tickets range from \$10 to \$75, and are available online at www.crescendomusic.org, or on a first-come-first-served basis at the door, 45 minutes prior to the concerts.

A pre-concert talk will be held on Saturday, April 26 at 2:00 PM at Trinity Church, 484 Lime Rock Rd., Lakeville, CT, and on Saturday, May 3 at 10:30 AM at Mason Library, Community Room, 231 Main St., Great Barrington, MA. Crescendo's Founding Artistic Director Christine Gevert will explain the background of Cavalieri's Rappresentatione. The 4/26 talk will also be live streamed via Zoom (register to join online by writing to crescendo@crescendomusic.org).

Support for these concerts has been provided to Crescendo by the Connecticut State Department of Economic and Community Development/Connecticut Office of the Arts (COA) from the Connecticut State Legislature. We also thank NBT Bank and WMNR Fine Arts Radio for their support.

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