

Johan Helmich Roman was born on 26 October 1694 in Stockholm, the son of a musician, who since 1683 was active as violinist in the Royal Chapel. After receiving violin and oboe lessons, Johan Helmich was permitted to enter into the service of the Royal Chapel at the beginning of 1711, aged only 16, but King Charles XII soon sent him to England for further education. It was the king's sister, the later Queen Ulrike Eleonore, who was responsible for encouraging this journey. Around the end of 1715 Roman travelled to London, where he played in Handel's orchestra at the King's Theatre from 1716–1717, and subsequently worked for Thomas Pelham-Holles, the newly wed Duke of Newcastle. Before Roman returned home, he was active from 1719–1721 as violinist in the Royal Academy of Music, Handel's new opera company, which was supported by Newcastle. During these years, in which he continued to receive his salary from the court at Stockholm, Roman became well acquainted with Handel, studied composition with Pepusch, and socialised with composers such as Ariosti, G. B. Bononcini, Geminiani and Loeillet de Gant.

Back in Sweden, Roman was appointed deputy master to the Royal Chapel. Charles XII had died in 1718, and his successor, the musically interested Queen Ulrike Eleonore, had already passed the sceptre on to her husband Frederick in 1720. As a result the Queen, now relieved from the tasks of governance, may have had more time to occupy herself with music. In any case, during the 1720s Roman composed several significant works for the court, including a birthday cantata for the queen, to whom he also dedicated his flute sonatas:

“At Your Majesty's feet have I humbly ventured to lay these juvenile endeavours, encouraged by the sublime genius of Your Majesty toward the sciences and the arts, to which you bestow life and soul, that these my pages might attain the merit they would not be able to enjoy of their own accord. Just as the great light of the world does not refuse its benign rays to tender scions, giving them nourishment and warmth, so will a single glance from Your Majesty's radiant sun impart utmost perfection upon these feeble efforts, which Your Majesty has magnanimously collected, preserved and approved, as well as insured against any envious assault. Thus do I offer my most gracious Queen this small tribute as token of my humblest obedience, with which I remain Your Majesty's most humble, devoted and obedient servant and subject. Johan Helmich Roman. In Stockholm, the 4th of July 1727.”

It is the only work of the author printed during Roman's lifetime, who into the 1730s continued to sign his name “Rohman”. Apparently the spelling on the title page engraved by Eric Geringius prevailed: “Sonate / a flavto traverso, violone / e cembalo / da / Roman, Svedese. / Neque ab indoctissimis neque a doctissimis legi vellem. Cic[ero] de Orat[ore] Lib. II. / Stockholm / Ericus Geringius sculps.” Advertisements for the edition appeared in Stockholm as early as November and December 1726, but later also in Hamburg, where Telemann acted as agent for the distribution of the sonatas.

In January 1727 Roman had advanced to the position of Chapel Master. From 1731 on he began to organise public concerts with his own compositions as well as such by contemporaries. Roman married in 1730, but a year after his wife's demise in 1734 he went abroad again. During the journey, which lasted from Autumn 1735 until June 1737 and brought him to London, Paris, several Italian towns, Vienna and a few German towns, he collected music for performances in Stockholm. In Italy he also composed the *Assaggi* for solo violin.

His benefactress Ulrike Eleonore died in 1741, Roman's second wife in 1744. Although during the latter year he managed to compose the large-scale wedding music “Drottningsholmsmusiken”, his health was already waning. He sought solace in the seclusion of his father-in-law's estate Haraldsmåla near Kalmar, where he composed twelve clavichord sonatas among other works and translated works of music theory into Swedish. He died there on 20 November 1758. Subsequently he received the title of “The Father of Swedish Music”.

It was then common to cite works by other composers; this was not considered to be plagiarism, but rather a complement to the creator of the adapted melodies. Among Roman's sketches can be found a collection of quotations from works by 45 composers. Most frequently one finds works by Handel, followed by those of G. B. Bononcini. Thus it is not surprising that various movements of the flute sonatas remind us of Handel. The Largo of Sonata 11 quotes the beginning of Handel's recorder sonata HWV 360 (Amadeus BP 360).

The motto printed on the original title page from Cicero's *De oratore* (“On the ideal orator”): “I wish to be read neither by the most learned nor the most illiterate” illustrates Roman's desire for the dissemination of his sonatas. We hope to oblige this wish with an unostentatious realisation of the figured bass and an edition in modern notation.

COVER

Andrea Celesti (1637–1711): *Winter*. Museum Brukenthal in Sibiu (Hermannstadt)