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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Ottavio Dantone

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Some anniversaries are marked with speeches; the finest are marked by musicians simply doing what founders did, and doing it as if it still mattered. "Ottavio plus", the penultimate concert of the 50th Innsbrucker Festwochen at the Spanischer Saal of Schloss Ambras, is exactly that sort of tribute. In his second summer as musical director of the festival, Ottavio Dantone invites the flutist Giovanni Antonini.

He sits beside him and reconstructs — in the same duo formation of recorder-plus-harpsichord — a concert that Gustav Leonhardt and Frans Brüggen gave in the Riesensaal of the Hofburg on 23 August 1981, during only the sixth year of the festival's existence. The gesture would be moving even if the players were unknown; with these two on stage, it is an act of pietas as musical as it is filial. The two artists have been colleagues for more than three decades. Dantone joined Antonini's Il Giardino Armonico as harpsichordist and organist in 1994 and remains a regular contributor; their 2003 Arthaus DVD Music of the French Baroque, recorded with Enrico Onofri, Luca Pianca and Vittorio Ghielmi.

This is one of the most engaging documents of the "second wave" of Italian historically informed practice. Antonini, since co-founding Il Giardino Armonico in 1985 in Milan — the ensemble that celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2025 — has become that rarest of specialists: a recorder player whose interpretive authority equals any conductor's, currently steering the complete Haydn symphonies through the Haydn2032 project with Kammerorchester Basel and Il Giardino Armonico. Dantone, who took over the Innsbruck artistic direction in 2024 from Alessandro De Marchi, has already reshaped the festival's centre of gravity toward the Italian tradition Cesti himself embodied.

The programme moves in loose orbit around the 1981 evening. Corelli, Telemann and J. S. Bach — the composers Leonhardt and Brüggen would inevitably have played — are joined by Frescobaldi and Carl Heinrich Graun, reflecting Dantone's own predilection for the earlier Italian repertoire and the northern-German court style that Leonhardt did so much to reintroduce. The choice is more than programmatic: Bach's flute sonatas (BWV 1030–1035) and the Corelli-Telemann Italo-German axis are still the natural laboratory in which a recorder and a harpsichord can test everything that "historically informed" is supposed to mean.

Antonini's tone — grainy, speaking, capable of turning on a semiquaver — and Dantone's rhetorical, deeply argued continuo-turned-solo playing were made for this repertoire. The great virtue of the concert is that it

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refuses to be either purely commemorative or purely retrospective. Where 1981 was an act of pioneering restoration, 2026 can afford to be an act of consolidation, and Dantone knows it. By adding Bach and further composers to the original spine, he shows how the interpretive tradition has itself matured, and how the questions Leonhardt and Brüggén asked have been quietly answered without being neutralised.

The Spanischer Saal — the Renaissance banquet hall in which the Festwochen has staged so many of its most intimate evenings — is exactly the right room. Two friends, two instruments, two generations of the same argument. If any single concert makes the case that Innsbruck's 50th anniversary is a living event rather than a museum piece, this understated, deeply personal masterclass will be the one.

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