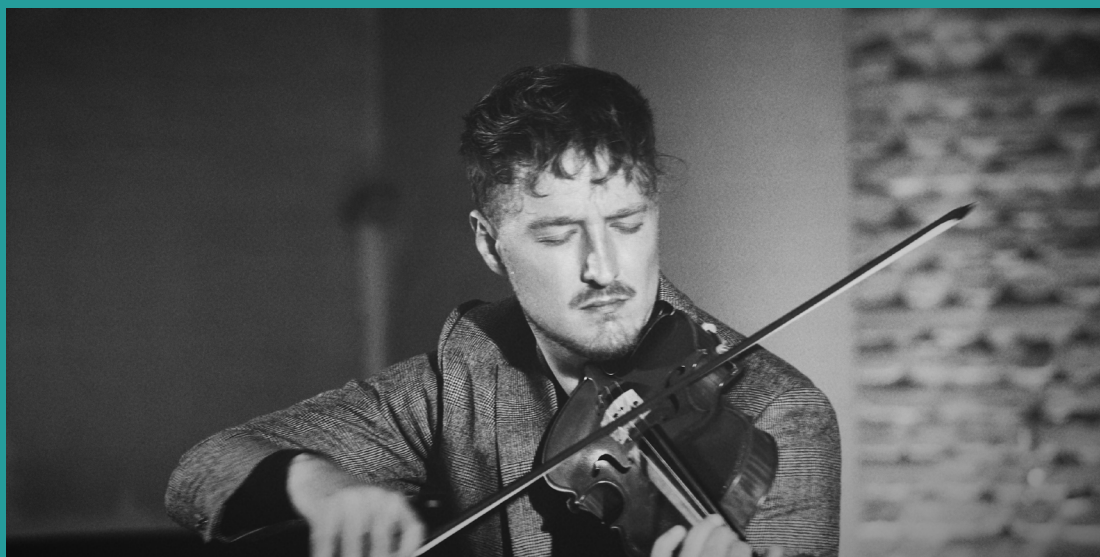


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MYSTERY SONATAS

BY HEINRICH BIBER

Daniel Piro violin

James McVinnie chamber organ

Part 1: The Joyful Mysteries

1. The Annunciation
2. The Visitation
3. The Nativity
4. The Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple
5. The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus

Part 2: The Sorrowful Mysteries

6. Christ on the Mount of Olives
7. The Scourging at the Pillar
8. The Crown of Thorns
9. Jesus Carries the Cross
10. The Crucifixion

Part 3: The Glorious Mysteries

11. The Resurrection
12. The Ascension
13. Pentecost
14. The Assumption of the Virgin
15. The Beatification of the Virgin
16. Passacaglia

It's thanks to his notoriously difficult music that violinist and composer Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber's name was never quite forgotten. In 1789, eighty-five years after his death, English music historian Charles Burney described Biber's violin music as 'the most difficult and most fanciful of any music I have seen of the same period.' It seems that Burney's knowledge of Biber's output was limited to just one or two works; today he remains misunderstood and his music neglected.

Biber was born in 1644 in Wartenberg in Bohemia, present day Czech Republic. The son of a field guard, there is scant record of his early life; he re-emerges as a valet and musician to the bishop of Olomouc, in the Moravian town of Kroměříž, in 1668, where he quickly established himself as a violinist of the first rank and composer that pushed the limits of what his instrument could do.

His adventurous musical mind is perhaps best exhibited in the Mystery Sonatas for violin and continuo, written as musical representations of the Fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary, and dedicated to the prince-archbishop of Salzburg, Max Gandolph. In these sonatas, Biber uses a technique called scordatura, which translates as 'mistuning.' Rather than keeping the violin strings tuned to the notes G-D-A-E as is typical, Biber has a different tuning for each of the fifteen sonatas. In 'The Visitation' the strings are tuned A-E-A-E, 'The Nativity' is B-F sharp-B-D, and so on. Of particular note is 'The Resurrection', tuned G-D-G-D: Biber asks for the two middle strings to physically cross over, making the sign of the crucifix visible on the instrument.

To conclude the work, Biber wrote a monumental Passacaglia, probably the first piece ever written for the violin completely on its own. Using a repeating pattern quoted from a hymn to the guardian angel as its foundation, it's a work of incredible power, and great representation of the coming together of Italian virtuosity and German contrapuntal writing, with the violin taking on multiple voices simultaneously.

Biber's use of scordatura is more than simple trickery; rather, it serves to heighten the emotional power of the music. As we journey through, the tone of the instrument changes with each new tuning. More resonant, transparent tunings are used for 'The Annunciation,' 'The Visitation,' and 'The Beatification of the Virgin.' Tighter, raspier tunings are used for 'Christ on the Mount of Olives' and 'The Crown of Thorns,' and manoeuvrings for the violinist become more difficult and strained. While composers from Mozart to Paganini and Mahler to Stravinsky have used scordatura since Biber's time, the way he fully embraced it is unparalleled in Western music. The result is a set of works constantly questing, striving, contorting to plumb ever-deeper emotional and spiritual states.

The Mystery Sonatas were unpublished during Biber's lifetime, and remained so until 1905. The only existing manuscript, now kept in the Bavarian State Library in Munich, is beautifully set out, with engravings of the fifteen scenes of the rosary pasted into the score. The original purpose of the work is not clear, but it's quite possible the sonatas were written to accompany the dedicatee's private devotions, and were perhaps never intended for public ears.

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Daniel Pioro is a soloist, collaborative artist, and advocate for new and experimental music. He actively promotes new music and is interested in finding new ways of listening to and creating sound, as well as developing strong collaborations with composers, artists, choreographers, dancers, and writers.

His celebrated association with the composer and guitarist Jonny Greenwood led Greenwood to write and dedicate a new violin concerto *Horror vacui* for Pioro. Daniel premiered the piece to much acclaim at the BBC Proms in 2019 with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales conducted by Hugh Brunt, which was described as “the most inventive and engaging” by *The Daily Telegraph* and praised by the BBC as “the ultimate display of musical virtuosity”. In September 2019, Daniel’s recording of Bach’s *Partita No. 2* was the first release on Greenwood’s label, Octatonic Records.

The 2021/22 season sees Daniel Pioro give two world premieres: Tom Coult’s *Violin Concerto Pleasure Garden* with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra and Joseph Davies’ *Violin Concerto Parallax* with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. Other highlights of the season include returns to the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the BBC Philharmonic, an appearance at the Norfolk and Norwich Festival performing Biber’s complete *Rosary Sonatas*, and his debut at the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg performing music from his debut album *Dust*, as well as other works by his close collaborator, Valgeir Sigurðsson.

Last month Daniel Pioro was announced as Artist in Residence at London’s Southbank Centre. Daniel will kick off his residency with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Andrew Manze on 26 October 2022 performing the London premiere of Tom Coult’s violin concerto *Pleasure Garden*, and a performance of Vaughan Williams *Lark Ascending* as part of the composer’s 150th anniversary celebrations. The second half of the season (yet to be announced) will see Daniel return for a further two projects, incorporating his love for the classic repertoire, as well as his passion for new and electronic music.

James McVinnie’s work as a performer encompasses music from the 16th century to the present day. His boundless approach to music making has led him to collaborations with many leading figures in music including Philip Glass, Tom Jenkinson/Squarepusher, Angélique Kidjo, Nico Muhly, Martin Creed, David Chalmin, David Lang, Richard Reed Parry, Bryce Dessner & Darkstar, many of whom have written large scale works for him. He has released music on Bedroom Community, Orange Mountain Music and Warp Records.

Last year saw the launch of the James McVinnie Ensemble, a collective of virtuoso keyboardists from London specialising in new music. Launch projects were composer portraits of John Adams, Philip Glass alongside Gabriella Smith whose music has been described as ‘high-voltage and wildly imaginative’ (*Philadelphia Inquirer*), and ‘the coolest, most exciting, most inventive new voice I’ve heard in ages’. In November 2021 the ensemble performed a new version by McVinnie of Philip Glass’s seminal *Glassworks*, together with Glass *Music in Fifths* & *True Stories & Rational Numbers* by Brooklyn based composer Chris P Thompson scored for just intonation keyboards at London’s Barbican Centre.

2021/22 season premieres include *Infinity Gradient*, an hour long work written for McVinnie by Tristan Perich for organ and 100 speakers in 1bit audio, *Breathing Forests* a new Organ Concerto about the complex relationship between humans, forests, climate change, and fire by Gabriella Smith for McVinnie and LA Philharmonic/Esa Pekka Salonen, and a new work by Ellen Reid as part of *SOUNDWALK*, a 3 year, GPS-enabled work of public art in London’s Regent’s Park that uses music to illuminate the natural environment.

This season’s solo performances include appearances at St David’s Hall Cardiff, St Martin in the Fields London, *Organ Reframed 2022* at Union Chapel, STRP Eindhoven NL, Big Ears Knoxville TN USA, *Hidden Notes Festival* Stroud, and in France at Lyon Auditorium, Bel-Air Claviers Festival Chambéry, Festival Ravel.

In the manuscript of the Mystery Sonatas, each is introduced by an engraving, reproduced here.



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