

# WIGMORE HALL

Friday 24 February 2023  
7.30pm

## Vox Luminis

Zsuzsi Tóth soprano  
Viola Blache soprano  
Stefanie True soprano  
Victoria Cassano soprano  
Jan Kullmann alto  
Vojtěch Semerád alto  
Philippe Froeliger tenor  
Raffaele Giordani tenor  
Jacob Lawrence tenor  
Olivier Berten tenor  
Lionel Meunier artistic director, bass  
Sebastian Myrus bass

## Freiburg Baroque Consort

Simen van Mechelen trombone  
Miguel Tantos Sevillano trombone  
Josephus Swinkels trombone  
Veronika Skuplik violin, concertmaster  
Julia Krikkay violin  
Christa Kittel viola  
Werner Saller viola  
James Munro violone  
Hille Perl viola da gamba  
Lee Santana lute  
Torsten Johann organ

Christoph Bernhard (1628-1692) Herr, nun lässest du deinen Diener

Heinrich Biber (1644-1704) Requiem in F minor (after 1692)

*Interval*

Agostino Steffani (1654-1728) Stabat mater (by 1728)

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The works in this programme are settings of sacred texts composed in German-speaking lands during the late 17th or early 18th Century.

**Christoph Bernhard**, who wrote the first work, was born in what is now Kołobrzeg (Poland) but worked mainly in Dresden, where, under Schütz (the greatest German composer before Bach), he became vice-Kapellmeister in 1655. He paid two or more visits to Italy, in order to study music, and in 1663 was appointed civic music director of Hamburg. Recalled to Dresden in 1674, he became Kapellmeister in 1681. He is probably best known today for his theoretical work *Tractatus compositionis augmentatus*, but his treatise *Von der Singe-Kunst, oder Maniera* reflects his experience as a teacher of choirboys and the influence of Italian ornamentation. This influence is heard in *Herr, nun lässest du deinen Diener*, a setting of the *Nunc dimittis* in which the first verse of the Song of Simeon (Luke 2: 29-32), scored for five voices and instruments, is repeated as the conclusion. Within this frame the other biblical verses are expanded into a poem that comprises three stanzas, each ending with a refrain; these stanzas are differently scored but identical in length, the refrain alone being in triple time. It seems that Bernhard favoured well proportioned structures.

The other two works are settings of Latin texts for the Catholic church. Notwithstanding the impact of the Reformation, the Catholic church was still thriving in many parts of Germany and Austria. It was in Austria that **Biber**, a Bohemian violinist and composer, spent most of his adult life. Burney described him as the best violinist of the 17th Century and his sonatas as 'the most difficult and most fanciful of any music' he had seen from that period; Biber's Mystery (or 'Rosary') Sonatas call for *scordatura* – abnormal tunings of the instrument. From 1670 the composer was employed by the Archbishop of Salzburg, becoming Kapellmeister and Dean of the choir school in 1682. His works include ensemble music, operas, school dramas and numerous sacred settings.

The *Requiem in F minor*, the later of Biber's two settings of the Mass for the Dead, dates from after 1692. The identity of the deceased is unknown. The work sets all the words normally sung to plainsong, including those that are repeated. It is scored for five voices, two violins, three violas, three trombones and continuo. The violin parts eschew the virtuosity of Biber's Mystery Sonatas, but the ensemble offers a range of sonorities that is skilfully exploited and supported by contrasts of key, metre, tempo and texture.

Biber's handling of the repeats is interesting. For the restatement of the words 'Quam olim Abrahæ' (in the *Offertorium*) and 'Osanna in excelsis' (*Sanctus*) he repeats the first setting, but for the returns of 'Requiem aeternam' and 'Cum sanctis tuis' in the *Introit* and *Agnus Dei* he invents something new. In

the first 'Requiem aeternam' a peaceful atmosphere is evoked by oscillating pairs of voices. The second setting, also in the *Introit*, is mainly chordal and full – a foil to the fugal *Kyrie* that follows. The final repeat of 'Requiem aeternam' is entirely chordal, lies low in the voice and begins in a major key; the sonority is consequently warm and rich. This passage is framed by the two statements of 'Cum sanctis tuis', of which the second is extended to form the conclusion.

Like Bernhard but unlike Biber, **Steffani** began his career as a singer. Born in the Veneto, he spent nearly all his life in Germany – in Munich (1667-88), Hanover (1688-1703), Düsseldorf (1703-9) and Hanover again. As well as being a revered musician, he achieved prominence as a diplomat and politician, as a bishop and as the Apostolic Vicar of North Germany – the culmination of an ecclesiastical career that had begun in the 1670s.

*Stabat mater* is a medieval sequence that meditates on Mary at the foot of the cross and prays for protection on the day of judgement. The text was removed from the liturgy in the 16th Century by the Council of Trent but restored in 1727. It was set by several of Steffani's contemporaries, including Alessandro and Domenico Scarlatti, Caldara, Vivaldi and Pergolesi.

A month before his death in 1728, Steffani described his *Stabat mater* as his final work and 'masterpiece', adding that 'there is no power of number in sound [...] that is not to be found in abundance in that composition'. It is tempting to assume that his setting dates from 1727-8, but this would be to ignore the stylistic difference between the bulk of the work and its final section. For the 1720s, most of the music would be archaic. Steffani clearly finished the piece in 1727-8 but may have begun it much earlier, probably at the Catholic court of Munich. It could have been prompted by the death of the Elector in 1679 and abandoned because the new Elector required the composer to write operas.

The setting is scored for six voices and six instruments. This combination may be explained by Steffani's interest in theology: the properties of the number six are discussed in his treatise *Quanta certezza habbia da suoi principii la musica* (1695), where the relevant pages also refer to St Augustine's *De Trinitate*. In this book we read that 'from the evening of [Christ's] burial to the dawn of the resurrection are thirty-six hours, which is six squared'. This statement from Steffani's namesake (Augustine/Agostino) may have convinced the composer that, for a work on the crucifixion, six voices and six instruments would be the ideal complement. The scoring probably explains 'the power of number in sound', a phrase that recalls Bernhard's interest in proportion.

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## Christoph Bernhard (1628-1692)

### Herr, nun lässest du deinen Diener Lord, now lettest thou thy servant

*Liturgical text*

Herr, nun lässest du deinen Diener in Frieden fahren, Wie du verheissen hast.	Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.
Gott gab herzbrennende Begier, Nach Jacobs Stern uns früh zu sehnen; Mein Auge lehrt' ich sich gewöhnen, Zu sehen stets nach Zions Zier.	God gave our hearts a burning desire early to yearn for Jacob's star; I taught my eyes to become accustomed ever to watch for Zion's adornment.
Nun froh die Augen zgedrückt, Weil ich den Heiland hab' erblicket.	Now I close my eyes in contentment, for I have seen the Saviour.
Den Heiland, den verlangten Glanz, Den Gott bereitet und geschenkt Den Völkern so weit als sich lenket Die Sonne an den Himmelskranz.	The Saviour, the longed-for radiance whom God has prepared and granted to all people, as far as the sun reaches in its celestial orbit.
Nun froh die Augen zgedrückt, Das Licht der Welt hab' ich erblicket.	Now I close my eyes in contentment, for I have seen the Light of the World.
Ein Licht, das finst're Heidentum Mit Gnadenstrahlen zu erleuchten, Für dem sich nur Hebräer neigten, Als Israels besond'rer Ruhm.	A light to lighten the darkness of the heathen with rays of grace, before whom only the Hebrews bowed as the special glory of Israel.
Nun froh die Augen zgedrückt, Was ich geglaubt, hab' ich erblicket.	Now I close my eyes in contentment: what I believed in, now have I seen.

## Heinrich Biber (1644-1704)

### Requiem in F minor (after 1692)

*Liturgical text*

#### Introitus

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine, Et lux perpetua luceat eis.	Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and may perpetual light shine upon them.
Te decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion, Et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem.	Thou, O God, art praised in Sion, and unto thee shall the vow
Exaudi orationem meam, Ad te omnis caro veniet.	be performed in Jerusalem. Hear my prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.
Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine, Et lux perpetua luceat eis.	Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and may perpetual light shine upon them.

#### Kyrie

Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison.	Lord have mercy upon us. Christ have mercy upon us. Lord have mercy upon us.
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#### Dies Irae

Dies irae, dies illa Solvat saeculum in favilla, Teste David cum Sibylla.	Day of wrath, that say will dissolve the earth in ashes as David and the Bibyl bear witness.
Quantus tremor est futurus Quando judex est venturus Cuncta stricte discussurus.	What dreat there will be when the Judge shall come to judge all things strictly.

Tuba mirum spargens sonum Per sepulcra regionem Coget omnes ante thronum.	A trumpet, spreading a wondrous sound through the graves of all lands, will drive mankind before the throne.
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Mors stupebit et natura Cum resurget creatura Judicanti responsura.	Death and Nature shall be astonished when all creation rises again to answer to the Judge.
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Liber scriptus proferetur In quo totum continetur, Unde mundus judicetur.	A book, written in, will be brought forth in which is contained everything that is, out of which the world shall be judged.
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Judex ergo cum sedebit Quidquid latet apparebit, Nil inultum remanebit	When therefore the Judge takes his seat whatever is hidden will reveal itself. Nothing will remain unavenged.	Confutatis maledictis, Flammis acribus addictis, Voca me cum benedictis. Oro supplex et acclinis, Cor contritum quasi cinis, Gere curam mei finis.	When the accursed have been confounded and given over to the bitter flames, call me with the blessed. I pray in supplication upon my knees. my heart contrite as the dust, safeguard my fate.
Quid sum miser tunc dicturus, Quem patronum rogaturus, Cum vix Justus sit securus?	What then shall I say, wretch that I am, what advocate entreat to speak for me, when even the righteous may hardly be secure?	Lacrimosa dies illa Qua resurget ex favilla Judicandus homo reus.	Mournful that day when from the dust shall rise guilty man to be judged.
Rex tremendae majestatis, Qui salvandos salvas gratis, Salve me, fons pietatis.	King of awful majesty, who freely saves the redeemed, save me, O fount of goodness.	Huic ergo parce, Deus, Pie Jesu Domine, Dona eis requiem.	Therefore spare him, O God. Merciful Lord Jesus, grant them rest.
Recordare, Jesu Pie, Quod sum causa tuae viae, Ne me perdas illa die.	Remember, blessed Jesus, that I am the cause of thy pilgrimage, do not forsake me on that day.	<b>Offertorium</b> Domine, Jesu Christe, Rex gloriae, Libera animas omnium fidelium Defunctorum de poenis infernii, Et de profundo lacu: Libera eas de ore leonis, Ne absorbeat eas tartarus Ne cadant in obscurum, Repraesentet eas in lucem sanctam, Quam olim Abrahae promisisti Et semini ejus. Hostias et preces, tibi, Domine, laudis offerimus; Tu suscipe pro animabus illis Quarum hodie memoriam facimus: Fac eas, Domine, De morte transire ad vitam Quam olim Abrahae promisisti Et semini ejus.	Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory, deliver the souls of all the faithful departed from the bottomless pit. Deliver them from the lion's mouth. Neither let them fall into darkness nor the black abyss swallow them up. Let St. Michael, thy standard-bearer, lead them into the holy light, which once thou didst promise to Abraham and his seed. We offer unto thee, O Lord, this sacrifice of prayer and praise receive it for those souls whom today we commemorate. Allow them, O Lord, to cross from death into the life which once thou didst promise to Abraham and his seed.
Quaerens me sedisti lassus, Redemisti crucem passus Tantus labor non sit cassus.	Seeking me thou didst sit down weary, thou didst redeem me, suffering death on the cross let not such toil be in vain.		
Juste judex ultionis Donum fac remissionis Ante diem rationis	Just and avenging Judge, grant remission before the day of reckoning.		
Ingemisco tamquam reus, Culpa rubet vultus meus, Supplicanti parce, Deus.	I groan like a guilty man. guilt reddens my face. Spare a suppliant, O God.		
Qui Mariam absolvisti Et latronem exaudisti, Mihi quoque spem dedisti.	Thou who didst absolve Mary Magdalene and didst hearken to the thief to me also hast thou given hope.		
Preces meae non sunt dignae, Sed tu bonus fac benigne, Ne perenni cremer igne.	My prayers are not worthy, but thou in thy merciful goodness grant that I burn not in everlasting fire.		
Inter oves locum praesta, Et ab haedis me sequestra, Statuens in patre dextra.	Place me among thy sheep and separate me from the goats, setting me on thy right hand.	Sanctus Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth! Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua, Hosanna in excelsis.	Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth Heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Hosanna in the highest.

## Benedictus

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini. Hosanna in excelsis.	Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!
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## Agnus Dei

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, Dona eis requiem. Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, Dona eis requiem sempiternam.	Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant them rest. Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant them everlasting rest.
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## Communio

Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine, Cum sanctis tuis in aeternum, Quia pius es. Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine, Et lux perpetua luceat eis, Cum sanctis tuis in aeternam, Quia pius es.	May eternal light shine upon them, O Lord, with thy saints for ever, because thou art merciful. Grant the dead eternal rest, O Lord, and my perpetual light shine upon them, with thy saints for ever, because thou art merciful.
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## Interval

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## Agostino Steffani (1654-1728)

### Stabat mater (by 1728)

*Liturgical text*

I Stabat mater dolorosa luxta crucem lacrimosa, Dum pendebat filius.	The Mother of Sorrows stood weeping next to the Cross on which her Son was hung.
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II Cuius animam gementem Contristatam et dolentem Pertransivit gladius.	A sword transfixed her groaning soul, anguished and lamenting.
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O quam tristis et afflicta Fuit illa benedicta Mater unigeniti Quae maerebat et dolebat. Et tremebat, cum videbat Nati poenas incliti.	O how sad and afflicted was that blessed Mother, Mother of the Only- Begotten. She mourned and grieved and trembled when she saw her glorious Son in torment.
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III Quis est homo qui non fleret, Matrem Christi si videret In tanto supplicio?	Who is the man that could not weep if he should see the Mother of Christ in such agony?
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Quis non posset contristari,	Who could not feel compassion,
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Piam matrem contemplari Dolentem cum filio?	contemplating the Holy Mother sorrowladen with her Son?
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IV Pro peccatis suae gentis Vidit Iesum in tormentis Et flagellis subditum.	She saw Jesus in torment, subjected to scourging for the sins of mankind.
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V Vidit suum dulcem natum Moriendo desolatum Dum emisit spiritum.	She saw her sweet Son dying forsaken as he yielded up the ghost.
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VI Eia mater fons amoris, Me sentire vim doloris Fac ut tecum lugeam. Fac ut ardeat cor meum In amando Christum Deum, Ut sibi complaceam. Sancta mater, istud agas, Crucifixi fige plagas Cordi eo valide. Tui nati vulnerati Tam dignati pro me pati, Poenas mecum divide!	Blessed Mother, fount of love, make me feel the depths of thy sorrow that I may mourn with thee. Make my heart burn with love for Christ my God that I may please Him. Holy Mother, do this for me, let the wounds of the Crucified be engraved deep upon my heart. Thy Son, wounded grievously, deigned to suffer for me; let me share his pain.
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VII Fac me vere tecum flere, Crucifixo condolere, Donec ego vixero. luxta crucem tecum stare Te libenter sociare In planctu desidero.	Let me truly weep with thee; may I suffer with Christ on the Cross for as long as I may live. To stand with thee by the Cross and freely to join with thee in thy weeping.
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VIII Virgo virginum praeclara, Mihi iam non sis amara, Fac me tecum plangere.	Virgin of virgins most blessed, do not be harsh with me; let me weep with thee.
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IX

Fac ut portem Christi  
mortem,  
Passinis eius sortem  
Et plagas recolere.

Grant that I may bear  
Christ's death,  
let me share His Passion  
and think upon his wounds.

X

Fac me plagis  
vulnerari,  
Cruce hac inebriari  
Ob amorem filii.

Let me be wounded with  
His wounds,  
inebriated with the Cross  
for love of your Son.

XI

Inflammatum et accensum,  
Per te virgo sim  
defensus  
In die iudicii.

Inflamed and burning,  
may I be defended by  
thee, o Virgin,  
at the Last Judgement.

Fac me cruce  
custodiri,  
Morte Christi  
praemuniri,  
Confoveri gratia.

May I be protected by the  
Cross,  
saved by the death of  
Christ  
and supported by His grace.

XII

Quando corpus morietur  
Fac ut animae donetur  
Paradisi gloria.  
Amen.

When my body dies  
may my soul be granted  
the glory of Paradise.  
Amen.

*Texts and translations kindly provided by the artists.*