

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 25 September 2023  
7.30pm

Jean Rondeau harpsichord, chamber organ

Thomas Dunford lute

Myriam Rignol viola da gamba

Sophie Gent violin

Heinrich Biber (1644-1704)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in D minor (pub. 1681)

Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger (c.1580-1651)

Toccata No. 2 from *Libro primo d'intavolatura di lauto*  
(pub. 1611)

Johann Jakob Froberger (1616-1667)

Méditation sur ma mort future from *Suite No. 20 in D*  
transcribed for solo viola da gamba (1660)

Toccata No. 2 in D minor FbWV102 (pub. 1649)

Heinrich Biber

Violin Sonata No. 5 in E minor (pub. 1681)

Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger

Toccata No. 6 from *Libro primo d'intavolatura di lauto*

Johann Jakob Froberger

Toccata No. 6 in G minor 'Da sonarsi alla Levatione'  
FbWV106 (pub. 1649)

Heinrich Biber

Violin Sonata No. 6 in C minor (pub. 1681)

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Tonight's programme combines virtuoso chamber music by three Germanic composers, who each specialised in a different instrument – violin, lute and keyboard – and brought its technical and expressive possibilities to new heights.

**Heinrich Biber** (1644-1704) was born in Bohemia, and worked at Kroměříž for the Bishop of Olomouc. In 1670 he moved to Salzburg (taking advantage of a violin-buying trip to switch employers, to the Archbishop of Salzburg) and devoted much effort to publishing his works for solo violin and his chamber music. He became Kapellmeister at Salzburg in 1684 and was ennobled by the Emperor six years later, becoming 'von Biber' - a rare honour for a musician of the time.

The eight violin sonatas from Biber's 1681 collection stretch the possibilities of mid-Baroque violin technique, in terms of agility, range and chordal playing. They often comprise a free introductory section, then a set of variations, concluding with a final flourish. The Sonata No. 2 in D minor, for example, takes the violin from the bottom of its compass to the top, in scales and broken arpeggios, followed by increasingly ornate variations on a ground bass, entitled 'aria'. Extreme virtuosity is required both from the left hand (numerous fast chords) and the right (complex bowings). The finale involves chromatic decoration over a pedal G, before the return to the home chord at the end. The Sonata No. 5 in E minor uses a varied form of the same structure, this time starting right at the top of the instrument, and with a set of variations over a triple-time bass; the tempo and style of each section vary greatly. A fast interlude is followed by a second set of variations, the last of which is continuous fast scales. The Sonata No. 6 in C minor opens with a theme imitated between continuo and violin, followed by a ground bass variation set (this time called a passacaglia) with a great deal of chordal writing for the violin. Remarkably, the soloist then has to very quickly tune down their top string by a tone and launch into an improvisatory interlude, which introduces a set of variations on a gavotte. Everything concludes with an extravagant section where the tempo and style change rapidly (in the manner called the *stylus phantasticus*), chromatic semiquaver lines bringing the work to an end.

**Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger** (c.1580-1651 and sometimes known as Johannes Hieronymus) was of German extraction (his father was an Austrian military colonel) and appears to have been brought up in Italy, working in Rome from 1605. His instruments were the lute and the newly-invented theorbo (a large low-pitched lute with many bass strings), on both of which he was a virtuoso. From 1624 he was employed by the young Cardinal Francesco Barberini, whose musical entourage also included Landi and Frescobaldi. Kapsberger's publications included six collections for lute and theorbo (four other sets are missing), as well as motets, songs and chamber music; a number of stage works have been lost, as well as his treatise *Il Kapsperger della musica*.

The *Libro primo d'intavolatura di lauto* of 1611 contains eight toccatas, 12 gagliards and 12 correntes, written for a lute with four additional bass strings. In terms of style they have many similarities with the keyboard works of Frescobaldi; although less extravagant than some of Kapsberger's theorbo works, the improvisatory lute toccatas in particular explore interesting harmonies. Both of those here use similarly free structures, with full chords alternating with scales or scale fragments passing from one end of the instrument to the other, and passages with imitation and suspended dissonances. Toccata No. 6 adds some of the composer's characteristic chromatic harmony and syncopation.

**Johann Jakob Froberger** (1616-1667) was among the most famous and influential keyboard composers of the early German Baroque, but his historical reputation was limited by his refusal to allow publication of his works, and he was only rediscovered in the late 19th Century as a result of scholars studying the predecessors of JS Bach. Fortunately, elegant manuscript copies of many of his collections have survived in the archives.

Born into a musical family (his father was Kapellmeister in the Württemberg court chapel in Stuttgart), Froberger moved to Vienna in about 1634, becoming a singer in the Imperial chapel and then one of the court organists. Two extended study trips to Italy under Frescobaldi and (probably) Kircher deepened his knowledge of counterpoint and of international style. His court activities back in Vienna were followed by extensive travels to places such as Dresden, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Brussels, The Netherlands, London (on the way to which he was robbed, an event commemorated in his keyboard lament *Plainte faite à Londres*) and Paris, where he met some of the leading composers of the day. After further time in Vienna, he seems to have retired to the estates of his patron, the dowager Duchess of Montbéliard.

Froberger's deeply personal *Méditation sur ma mort future* ('Meditation on my future death') is a programmatic allemande dated 1 May 1660, directed in the manuscript to be played slowly and freely. The broken-chord style and expressive harmonies lend themselves to transcription for viola da gamba. The two toccatas come from the calligraphic manuscript collection of 1649 entitled *Libro Secondo*, which was likely compiled as a presentation copy for Emperor Ferdinand III. After a free opening, Toccata No. 2 develops a fugal passage incorporating a rising chromatic motif, which is followed by one in 12/8 rhythm using a descending variant, a device typical of the composer. The Toccata No. 6 in G minor is of the type known as an 'elevation toccata', used in the Mass at the lifting of the host; this style uses the more sustained harmonies typical of the organ, as well as lombardic dotted rhythms and numerous written-out cadential trills.

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