



*Biber* MYSTERY  
SONATAS

JULIA WEDMAN



# Biber MYSTERY SONATAS

JULIA WEDMAN  
violin

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cello, viola da gamba

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organ, harpsichord

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harp

*Disc One* ~ 1:13:26

## Joyful Mysteries

1. Sonata No. 1, "The Annunciation" – Praeludium - Aria - Variatio - Finale ~ 5:49
2. Sonata No. 2, "The Visitation" – Sonata - Allemande - Presto ~ 5:17
3. Sonata No. 3, "The Nativity" – Sonata - Courente - Double - Adagio ~ 7:19
4. Sonata No. 4, "The Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple" – Ciacona ~ 7:53
5. Sonata No. 5, "Finding the 12-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple" – Praeludium - Allemande - Guigue - Sarabanda - Double ~ 7:22

## Sorrowful Mysteries

6. Sonata No. 6, "The Agony in the Garden" – Lamento ~ 7:26
7. Sonata No. 7, "The Scourging at the Pillar" – Allemande - Variatio - Sarabanda - Variatio ~ 9:28
8. Sonata No. 8, "The Crowning with Thorns" – Sonata - Guigue - Double ~ 6:05
9. Sonata No. 9, "Jesus Carrying the Cross" – Sonata - Courente - Double - Finale ~ 7:41
10. Sonata No. 10, "The Crucifixion" – Praeludium - Aria - Variatio ~ 9:04

*Disc Two* ~ 55:20

## Glorious Mysteries

1. Sonata No. 11, "The Resurrection" – Sonata - Surrexit Christus hodie - Adagio ~ 8:29
2. Sonata No. 12, "The Ascension" – Intrada - Aria Tubicinum - Allemande - Courente - Double ~ 7:41
3. Sonata No. 13, "Pentecost" – Sonata - Gavott - Guigue - Sarabanda ~ 8:12
4. Sonata No. 14, "The Assumption of Mary into Heaven" – (Praeludium) - Aria - Guigue ~ 8:40
5. Sonata No. 15, "The Coronation of Mary in Heaven" – Sonata - Aria - (Variatio) - Canzon - Sarabanda - (Double) ~ 11:30
6. Passacaglia, "The Guardian Angel" ~ 10:47

If ever there was a work of music that most closely captured St. Ignatius' direction to use all five senses in meditation, it would be the *Mystery Sonatas*. Composer and violinist Heinrich Biber created a set of pieces that engages a performer's senses of sight, hearing and touch unlike any others written for the violin. For listeners, Biber paints meditative, repetitively rapturous moods that encourage them to listen and contemplate the fifteen "mysteries" of the Catholic Rosary. In order to more deeply appreciate the beauty and complexity of the *Mystery Sonatas*, we will explore how both of the performer's and listener's experiences are created musically. Let us set the stage by examining what we know of Biber's life and the circumstances under which he composed these sonatas.

## Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644-1704)

Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber was one of the most well-known virtuosos of his time. Over 80 years after Biber's death, historian Charles Burney declared: "Of all the violin players of the last century, Biber seems to have been the best, and his solos are the most difficult and most fanciful of any music I have seen of the same period." Like many of the early virtuosos of this time, we know very few specifics of Biber's early education and whereabouts. However, we do know that he was probably trained at a Jesuit gymnasium in Opava, a town about 200 miles from Salzburg, and was in contact with many musicians from both that institution and other nearby gymnasia. With a Jesuit education, Biber was able to receive a broad humanistic training in addition to his musical studies. His devotion to the Jesuits became apparent in his adding of both the names Ignatius and Franz – two founders of the order – to his own. Neither appeared on his birth certificate. Biber's broad education, combined with his spiritual devotion, gives us a better insight into the creative context of the *Mystery Sonatas*.



As a violinist, Biber soon began taking jobs in courts. He first started in Graz, Austria, for Prince Johann Seyfried Eggenberg, and later in Kroměříž (in today's Czech Republic) in the service of Bishop Karl Lichenstein-Castelcornio. At Kroměříž, Biber was valued as a violin virtuoso, and popular at court. However, this popularity wasn't enough to make him stay. When the Bishop sent Biber in 1670 on a trip to Absam to buy new violins from Jakob Stainer (the "Stradivarius" of the North), Biber was offered a job in Salzburg, and never returned to his position in Kroměříž. Instead, Biber entered the service of Archbishop Maximilian Gandolph von Khuenberg (1622-1687), where he would stay the rest of his life. It is here that he began compiling the *Mystery Sonatas*.

The *Rosary* or *Mystery Sonatas* are today among Heinrich Biber's most often performed works. Interestingly, they were never published until their re-discovery much later in the late nineteenth century. We don't even know the original title of the *Mystery Sonatas*, as the title page was lost, although Biber's dedication page – presented to the Archbishop Maximilian Gandolph von Khuenberg – has been preserved. Scholars have also been unable to determine the exact composition dates for the sonatas, but we believe they were probably composed in the mid-1670s; most likely 1676, certainly no later than 1687 – the year the Archbishop died. The title of the *Mystery Sonatas* is inspired by Biber's



original presentation manuscript, which contains small copper plate engravings of the fifteen mysteries of the Catholic Rosary – one engraving accompanying each sonata. Each of these mysteries (also known as *decades*) corresponds to events in the lives of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. The engravings included in Biber's manuscript were probably cut from a Rosary Psalter – a kind of devotional book published by Rosary confraternities and the Jesuits. Practices of Rosary worship were strong in seventeenth-century central Europe, and especially in Salzburg. Archbishop Maximilian was a proponent of Marian worship and founded a Rosary confraternity, which met in the Aula Academica (now in the University of Salzburg), a hall decorated with paintings of the mysteries. As mentioned above, it was the archbishop to whom Biber presented the *Mystery Sonatas*, with the dedication: "I have consecrated the whole work to the glory of the XV Sacred Mysteries that you honor so highly."

Both Biber's dedication of the sonatas to the mysteries of the Rosary, and the engravings that correspond to each piece, have interested performers and audiences alike since their discovery. Going further, we can distill two main elements of fascination. The first element has to do with relating the accompanying engravings to the degree of "programmaticism" in each of the sonatas. These are the evocative portions of the *Mystery Sonatas* that seem to be imitating events or sounds, such as the trumpet calls in Sonata XII ("The Ascension") or the hammer strokes of the pounding of nails in Sonata X ("The Crucifixion"). The second element of fascination in Biber's *Mystery Sonatas* is one that specifically performers have puzzled over – namely, Biber's use of scordatura, or the intentional detuning of the violin to create specific unusual effects. Of the sixteen sonatas in the collection, fourteen feature this technique. Let us examine both these elements in greater depth.

## Performing Faith: Scordatura, Meditation and the Violinist in the Mystery Sonatas

When considering the degree of "programmaticism" in these works, the issue and role of the actual Rosary is one that is often overlooked. In fact, the *Mystery Sonatas* can be heard as evoking the performative process of reciting the stations of the Rosary itself. In order to better understand this, let us first review the ritual of Rosary prayer, where the practitioner speaks a series of repetitive prayers while meditating. Before one can even begin to meditate on the actual decades or mysteries, a devotee says one *Pater Noster*, three *Ave Marias*, and one *Gloria Patri*. The devotee can then begin the meditation on each event, which begins with a *Pater Noster*, a statement of the decade, ten *Ave Marias*, and closing with one *Gloria Patri*. The worshipper then moves on to the next decade, then the next, and so on. As he says the prayers, the worshipper moves his fingers along the Rosary beads. The Rosary beads are used as a memory aid to keep track of where in the prayer sequence the practitioner is, allowing him to more deeply meditate on the mystery. The use of repetition as a devotional aid, as exemplified in the Rosary, has been used for centuries as a way of intensifying the meditative experience and helps bring the devotee into a state of contemplation.

In order to represent this process in music, Biber uses musical form to simulate the repetitive nature of Rosary prayer and meditation throughout the sixteen sonatas. He utilizes the structures of "Theme and Variations" for Sonatas I, VII, X, XI, XIV, and XV. This framework allows for a gradual buildup of intensity over a short theme, as if with each repetition, the meditation becomes increasingly fervent. For Sonatas III, V, VII, VIII, IX, and XII, Biber uses dance

movements, which in traditional binary form have each section repeated. In order to intensify the repetitions, Biber then adds on a *Double*, in which the dance is then repeated with virtuosic passagework. Yet other sonatas, like Sonatas IV and XVI, utilize the ciaccona and passacaglia – two musical forms that contain a simple harmonic structure, which is then built upon and developed in increasing layers of complexity and virtuosity. Even in movements in which there isn't a structural repetition, meditative affects are infused with repetitive motives. For example, Sonata VI ("The Agony in the Garden"), is a through-composed movement with no repeats or other formal repetitive structures, but it is based almost entirely on a single descending triadic motive that is repeated in different registers on the violin. While there aren't clearly labeled "variation" or variations, the sonata is divided into two halves that each start simply and then build in intensity and complexity in free variations.

In the *Mystery Sonatas*, Biber creates a hybrid between purely repetitive structures and pictorial sections. Before delving into the repetitive portions of a sonata, he provides some sort of brief vivid introduction, such as the "echoes" of the empty tomb in Sonata XI ("The Resurrection"). However, as Julia Wedman also mentions in her notes, the suggested images don't always correspond to Biblical text. In the meditative tradition of Rosary devotional books, it was not unusual for a devotee to impart their own imagining of what kind of images or sounds they might experience in their own personal exercises or devotions. A good example is the "Intrada" movement from Sonata XII ("The Ascension"). There's no mistaking the sound of the violin imitating trumpet fanfares, but there's no mention of trumpets in the Bible verses of Christ's ascension into heaven.

Yet what is most remarkable about the *Mystery Sonatas* from a player's perspective is the extensive use of scordatura – the technique of detuning the violin from its normal tuning in order to achieve special sonic effects, as mentioned above. While the notation resembles tablature, which was a standard form of notation for both guitar and lute at the time, it was relatively foreign to violin writing. It actually makes the process of playing the sonatas easier once the violin is properly detuned in the appropriate scordatura, but until that point, what appears on the page appears completely mysterious.

### Example 1: Chart of the Scordatura used in each of the *Rosary Sonatas*

The chart displays the scordatura for each of the 16 Rosary Sonatas. The staves are arranged in two rows. The first row contains staves I through VIII, and the second row contains staves IX through XVI. Each staff shows a specific scordatura pattern with notes on the strings. Staff XI is marked with an asterisk (\*).

\*For Sonata XI, the order of the strings is g-g'-d'-d''

If the *Mystery Sonatas* are played on a normally tuned violin as notated, the sonatas don't make any sense, harmonically or melodically. However, when the violinist then plays the notes as written on a "properly" detuned instrument, suddenly the correct pitches will sound. The violinist, in essence, takes a "leap of faith," trusting that what looks like nonsense on the page sounds pleasing to the ear.

#### Example 2: Excerpt from the Allemanda of Sonata XII- The Ascension of Jesus

The image shows a musical score for an excerpt from the Allemanda of Sonata XII, 'The Ascension of Jesus'. It is presented in two systems. The first system has two staves: 'Violin Scord.' (top) and 'Violin' (bottom). The second system also has two staves: 'Vln. Scrd.' (top) and 'Vln.' (bottom). The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The first system consists of two measures. The second system consists of two measures, with a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure of the second system.

The process of scordatura alters the sounding body of the violin and transforms the resonating acoustics in interesting and sometimes symbolic ways. The most dramatic example is Sonata XI ("The Resurrection"), where the violin is tuned in octaves and the D and A strings are switched, making the shape of the Cross behind the bridge of the violin: creating a situation where the string in the D-string spot is actually higher in pitch than the string in the A-string location—a complete reversal of all normal string orders. In order to successfully perform the Sonata XI ("The Resurrection"), the scordatura causes down to become up, up to become down, and forces the violinist to have to relearn basic principals of violin playing. Sonically, the parallel octave tuning allows the violin to create dramatic echoes and octaves. Symbolically, the violin and violinist's rational and normal order has been turned into one of impossibility, much like the miracle of the Resurrection.

Sometimes Biber uses scordatura tunings in ways that work counterintuitively to the way a violin is supposed to sound. This is apparent in the opening movement of Sonata XIII ("The Pentecost"), where the tuning of adjacent strings in thirds intensifies ambiguous harmonies. There are numerous passages in which the violinist fingers a fifth—a single finger stopping two strings at the same point—but the instrument sounds a third. However, when Biber writes a series of thirds, it's extremely difficult to play in tune, for bracing one finger across both strings makes fine adjusting almost impossible. Julia Wedman remarked that in practicing Sonata XIII, it posed a challenge for this very problem. "I found Biber had an extremely specific kind of third in mind when he composed this sonata. If my strings were just right, it

worked, but if the third was off, everything could go very wrong very quickly." Through difficult scordatura tunings in Sonata XIII, Biber uses this tuning to create a mood of eeriness and anticipation.

Early in the seventeenth century, the violin was often played in Mass during the Elevation of the Host, and by the 1670's, specific violin sonatas were typical during Mass. In many ways, it seems that the violin becomes a kind of symbol, like the Host itself, with symbolic activities enacted on it in representational ways. This is exemplified in Sonatas nos. VII, VIII and IX of the "Sorrowful Mysteries," which deal with the torture of Jesus leading up to his crucifixion. In these sonatas, the standard, fifth-based *g-d'-a'-e* tuning has been completely transformed by the removal of the violin's low range — the lowest G string is yanked up to either C or D, confining the violin in a reduced sonic space. We hear the sound of a string stretched to its breaking point. It is something that not only sounds very tense and tortured in timbre, but feels fraught to the violinist, almost to the point of creating a kind of performer's guilt. Every bow stroke brings the risk of overpowering the string and breaking it. The extreme tension on the G in contrast to the more slack tension on the E string inevitably causes warping of the violin's bridge over the course of practicing and performing the sonatas — damage which results in having to remove the bridge to re-straighten it, and eventually replace the bridge entirely. The performer causes the physical harm and torture done to the instrument, perhaps an allusion to the suffering brought on Jesus by mankind's sin.

To an audience, the degree to which any or all of these effects can be heard is variable; perhaps often not even noticeable. But to the violinist, each of these tuning systems are felt very deeply, through the response of the strings to the bow in the right hand, all the way up through the minute resonance changes. Violinists identify with the sound of their instruments almost as intimately as the sound of their own voices. With scordatura, the violinist *feels* the effective changes taking place. If the purpose of the Rosary meditation is to focus on the moment at hand, and the mystery of the decade, then scordatura fulfills this purpose for the performer. The violinist trusts that the correct pitches will emerge despite the evidence of her eyes. This requires that she focus solely, in a hyperaware fashion, on the sonic and kinetic experience of playing the violin. In essence, then, the performer is meditating on the mystery.

The Latin *meditatio*, is defined as a "reflection, contemplation (of an action), a rhetorical exercise," and, most specifically, "a practice." One literally has to prepare oneself and one's instrument for the act of playing the *Mystery Sonatas*. One has to create the sonic space in which one is going to practice a particular sonata—one cannot just sit down and sight-read these sonatas. This preparation is analogous to what is called in performance studies "creating ritual space" or what Mircea Eliade calls in his book *The Sacred and Profane*, "the creation of Sacred Space." When performing ritual, there is some sort of symbolic gesture that prepares both the body and mind for worship and devotion. This may be the covering of heads when entering a church, the removal of shoes, or anointing of the head with water. It is only when the body and mind have been properly prepared for the meditative and ritual acts that the transformational practices of worship and devotion can occur.

For a Rosary practitioner, ritual space is created both physically and mentally. The opening six texts, which correspond to the crucifix-pendant portion of the Rosary beads, fulfill this function. During the time of reciting the opening texts, the practitioner's mind is quieted and body is prepared to settle into the calm and repetitive motion of meditation, and the ritual action that will take place.



Through scordatura, ritual space is also created for the violinist when approaching the *Mystery Sonatas*. The action of detuning the instrument causes the performer to alter both the body of the violinist and the violin to perform a particular mystery. With each sonata, the violinist has to re-teach her left hand how to create the perfect finger spacing and kind of intonation. Because of the unique difficulties of the scordatura, the performer often can practice only one sonata at a time. Julia Wedman remarked how she had to re-transition both her violin and her own sense of intonation when rehearsing the *Mystery Sonatas*. It is impractical to switch between tunings on one violin, as the strings must settle into the new tuning system. Biber, as a professional violinist, would have known this intimately.

Each sonata's challenges can only be worked out through careful practice. The result is one of self-discovery through which the performer learns to alter instrument and body in order to meditate on the Mysteries.

This ties in, once again, with the act of Rosary prayer. Ann Winston-Allan, in her book on Rosary history entitled *Stories of the Rose*, writes "In dealing with the Rosary it is even more necessary to stress that the meaning is not in the text, but in the context, that is, in the performance of the ritual." Both historical and practical sources on Rosary prayer constantly come back to the central idea of Rosary prayer as a meditation as well as a series of texts. When performing the ritual of Rosary prayer, the goal is to know the texts so well that the spoken words and the individual's mental concentration disconnect – that is, to get to the point where prayers and movements can be done essentially on autopilot, leaving the mind free to further meditate on the actual mystery itself. In essence, the body becomes so immersed in the routine that the mind is freed from worldly constraints to further explore and contemplate the Divine.

The specificity of altered tunings requires that the violinist start over with each "decade" and intensely "practice-into" the ability to be comfortable with each sonata. By looking at the violin part, which indicates finger placement but not sounding pitch, the violinist has to alter the violin, create the ritual space, and place herself in that sonic and mental space to meditate on the mystery; taking a leap of faith to discover what sonic experience she will encounter.

However, once the violinist has fully devoted herself to the practice of the mystery, after a while she becomes comfortable within the sonic space: the difficulty of each sonata disappears for those 5-10 minutes. "After all the preparation, all the tuning, all of the adjustment—finally, the Sonata just feels like any other piece," said Wedman. "You're able to just get in the zone and experience something new and different that you made your own." In essence, the violinist is able to achieve her own ecstatic experience through the ritualistic repetitive act of practicing in scordatura, as well as through the musical repetition and intensification prescribed by the sonatas themselves.

Heinrich Biber's *Mystery Sonatas* represent a synthesis of different musical and religious practices. By combining the repetitive musical structures and complex scordatura techniques, he creates in the *Mystery Sonatas* a kind of musical meditation that encourages unique personal encounters for all who discover these fascinating pieces.

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I first discovered Biber's *Mystery Sonatas* when I was a graduate student at Indiana University, and hearing them inspired me to become a baroque violinist.

Although these pieces aren't programmatic like Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, or even Biber's own *Sonata Representativa*, the programmatic or descriptive elements of the music continue to surface as I study and perform them.

One of the most valuable revelations about the programmatic nature of these pieces occurred in September 2009, when I visited the Aule Academica (AA) at the University of Salzburg. Just minutes away from Biber's home in Salzburg, the AA was the meeting place of the rosary confraternity of which the dedicatee of the *Mystery Sonatas*, Archbishop Maximilian Gandolf von Khuenberg, was a member.

I spent hours in the room (now a concert hall) studying the paintings of the Mysteries of the Rosary that hang on the walls. I am convinced that Biber was inspired by these paintings, because as I played through each of the sonatas facing its corresponding painting, suddenly many elements in the music became crystal clear.

As Biber most likely would have taken inspiration from the *Spiritual Exercises* by St. Ignatius of Loyola, I also used the Exercises to further my understanding of the Mysteries. One of the methods of meditation that St. Ignatius encourages is the use of all of our senses in the contemplation of each event in the life of Christ. What was Jesus seeing? What did the noise of the crowd sound like? How did Mary's feet feel trudging mile after mile carrying a full-term baby? Learning the sonatas, I examined each mystery from many angles and tried to imagine the elements that might have prompted Biber's compositional choices.

These are some of my ideas at the time this recording was made, which I know will change and grow as my relationship with these pieces does. My hope is not that you will necessarily agree with all of them, but that the ideas will be a starting point for further thought and meditation as you listen to these complex, layered works.

Julia Wedman





Sonata 1:  
The Annunciation

“The Annunciation” is the only sonata other than the Passacaglia in “normal” tuning. I have always thought of it as a conversation between Mary and the angel Gabriel. The first time I performed this sonata I divided the violin line into two parts. I played the “angel” from an upper balcony, and a colleague played “Mary” from ground level in response. To highlight this conversation, I chose organ to accompany the “angel” from the beginning of the sonata and added cello and theorbo to accompany “Mary.” In this sonata, I explore Mary’s fear of the angel, her trepidation and insecurities about her future as well as her purity of character, her humbleness and honour at the prospect of becoming the mother of God.



Sonata 2:  
The Visitation

“The Visitation” is one of the most playful, lighthearted sonatas. I travel with Mary on her journey to Elizabeth’s home and we arrive at their happy meeting; the excitement that the two women would have shared as they talked about pregnancy and hopes for their children’s future is reflected in the bright A major scordatura tuning, the cheerful Allemande and the bubbly coda.



Sonata 3:  
The Nativity

When I first heard “The Nativity,” I was immediately struck by its darkness. We tend to think of Christmas as the happiest time of year, but this sonata with its difficult scordatura in one of the most difficult keys (B minor) and anguished harmonies, does not reflect peace and joy. It wasn’t until I saw the Nativity painting at the AA in Salzburg, which is almost entirely black, that I began to understand the darkness. Many rosary prayer books from Biber’s time encourage the exploration of the hardships Mary and Joseph endured; travelling to Bethlehem on foot so late in her pregnancy and delivering a baby in a dark, dirty stable would have been terrifying and brutally exhausting for Mary. I chose to orchestrate this sonata with violin and gamba alone to emphasize the sense of loneliness and isolation Mary and Joseph must have felt.



Sonata 4:  
The Presentation in  
the Temple

The Ciaccona in “The Presentation in the Temple” presents a wonderful opportunity for reflection on the future life of the baby Jesus. There are so many elements of other sonatas in the variations that it becomes like a microcosm for the entire set. Some elements are quite obvious, like the rhythmic quotation from “The Crucifixion” in Variation 9 symbolizing the nails being hammered into the cross. I also used different orchestrations to highlight different elements, such as the use of gamba and violin alone in Variation 4 to recall “The Nativity” and violin and lute in Variation 5 to foreshadow “The Scourging at the Pillar”.





Sonata 5:  
Finding the 12-Year-Old  
Jesus in the Temple

The opening of “The Finding in the Temple” represents Mary’s desperate search for her lost son. However, the dance movements of the sonata characterize Jesus’ positive feelings at finding himself at home in God’s house and Mary’s relief at finding her son safe and sound. The Sarabande illuminates Mary’s love for her son and the pride she might have felt seeing her son as an independent grown-up preaching in the temple. The Double is my favourite part of this sonata because it reminds me of the excited chatter of kids on the way home from an exciting day. I always imagine Jesus saying to Joseph “Dad – guess what happened???”



Sonata 6:  
The Agony in the Garden

“The Agony in the Garden” is the first of three mysteries that Mary was not directly involved in. Curiously, this is also the first of three AA paintings that portray an angel comforting Mary as the main focus and Jesus as a vision in the background. It is one of the few through-composed pieces in this collection, and is entitled “Lamento” in the manuscript. The music is riddled with despair, hopelessness, frustration and anguish. Nevertheless, there is a wonderful respite in the middle section, a lovely 3/2 aria with a sarabande-like rhythm which I think of as an angel comforting Jesus (or Mary?). The coda further accentuates this idea of paradox with its pattern of five *forte* chords immediately echoed by “broken” double stops (playing the notes one after another instead of together). Here, Jesus both embraces and resigns himself to his fate.



Sonata 7:  
The Scourging at the Pillar

Until I saw the AA paintings, the opening Allemanda of “The Scourging at the Pillar” confused me. The Sarabande with its three note chords and dramatic variations reflect the story more readily: repeated sixteenth notes in the first variation represent lashes of a whip, written thirds in the second variation (which sound like unisons when the violin is tuned in scordatura) could depict oozing blood, and the last variation is harsh and violent. But the Allemanda is a sweet, mournful and lovely F-major dance. Keeping Mary as the central focus in the painting explains the opening – it is a portrayal of her. The length of this dance with its double gives us time to contemplate the horrible events in Christ’s life, but it may not be so easy to personally relate to Jesus as the Messiah. By shifting our focus to Mary, we are more able to identify with someone being concerned for the safety of her precious child.



Sonata 8:  
The Crowning with Thorns

If I had to choose a sonata that I did not enjoy playing, it would be “The Crowning with Thorns.” The scordatura is one of the most difficult - the lowest string is tuned up a fifth, which makes the string feel like it will break and causes the instrument to feel choked and nasally bright. Not only does the instrument sound ugly to my ears, but the writing is awkward and both physically and mentally tiring. This piece is “thorny” from the opening tortured sonata to the mocking, nastiness of the Guigue and its doubles. By the end of this sonata my instrument, my brain and my body always feel stretched to their breaking point.



Sonata 9:  
Jesus Carrying the Cross

By contrast, “Carrying the Cross” is one of my favourite pieces to play. Finally the top two strings are tuned “normally,” and the violin is able to sing again. I love the highly intense loneliness of the opening of this sonata as Jesus is forced to carry the cross alone. For this reason, I have scored it for violin and cello only, and added theorbo only in the fast figuration to represent the chaos of the crowd around him. Biber’s clever use of two increasingly difficult doubles for the Courente and the emotionally charged final improvisation make this sonata highly satisfying to play.



Sonata 10:  
The Crucifixion

“The Crucifixion” restores the violin to almost “normal” tuning. Finally the lower strings are restored to *g-d'-a'* and the top string lowered a whole tone to *d'*. The first time I played through all of the sonatas in order, I was struck by the feeling that this sonata with its violent chords (the “hammering of the nails”) was actually a release of tension. The violin feels very open and I have a good sense of which notes my fingers will be playing. In the AA painting, Mary lies at the foot of the cross with tears streaming down her cheek. I chose the first Aria to represent her and again used only theorbo for accompaniment. I have always liked the idea that the last variation represents the earthquake after Jesus has died; as the earth shakes and spirals out of control, I feel as if I too lose control (of my bow) by the end of all of the repeated notes and wild arpeggiations.



Sonata 11:  
The Resurrection

After an introduction full of echo effects generally thought to represent the echoes of an empty tomb, the body of “The Resurrection” is based on a popular Latin hymn tune *Surrexit Christus Hodie* (Christ has risen today). This sonata employs Biber’s most creative and symbolic use of scordatura. The middle two strings are crossed behind the bridge and in the peg-box to create two crosses on the violin and a tuning of *g-g'-d'-d'*. The result of having the middle two strings in opposite places to what one is used to is (at first) utter disorientation and confusion. For this sonata more than any other, I have to get into the “zone” and retrain my brain to contend with new spacings in my left hand and a new balance in my right hand. I love the peaceful triumph of this piece and the intense focus I need in order to play the correct notes on the correct string.



Sonata 12:  
The Ascension

One of the most joyful sonatas, “The Ascension” is the only one that Biber writes in the tuning of a root position chord (*c-e'-g'-c'*). In the opening section, he uses the wonderful effects of the open strings to emulate the exuberant sound of trumpets. This is also the only sonata that Biber himself makes a suggestion for a continuo orchestration - in the Aria Tubicinum, he writes “violone” in the continuo part.





Sonata 13:  
Pentecost

“The Pentecost” is perhaps the most mysterious and fascinating. The tuning is in A-Major (*a-e'-c#'-e''*) but the piece is in D-Minor. A prominent feature is Biber's use of parallel thirds (written for the violinist as parallel 5ths) on the two upper strings. I chose to use harp as an added colour in the continuo section to emphasize the unusual, almost creepy tonal colours which highlight the strange and frightening experience of the Holy Spirit's descent. I especially like the lack of restraint in the Guigue which reminds me of the wild abandon of speaking in tongues.



Sonata 14:  
The Assumption of  
Mary into Heaven

After one of Biber's signature improvisational introductions, the main part of “The Assumption of Mary” is an aria with variations which culminate in the final Guigue, in some ways resembling a 17th-century Austrian hoedown. It is an absolute joy to play this piece and Biber ends it perfectly: Mary disappears as the instruments drop out one by one.



Sonata 15:  
The Coronation of  
Mary in Heaven

“The Coronation of Mary” is a portrait of Mary in all her goodness and purity. It is a particularly beautiful tuning (*g-c-g'-d''*), and my violin feels like an open resonant viola. I call the Aria and Variations in the middle of the sonata the “Angel Variations” because to me each one represents a different playful angel surrounding Mary in heaven. A characteristic to watch for in the Canzona is Biber's use of descending chromatic figures. In rhetorical terms, a descending figure (*catabasis*) represents sorrow, while the ascending figure (*anabasis*), which this sonata is based on, represents joy. Biber's juxtaposition of the *anabasis* and *catabasis* in the Canzona is the perfect illustration of a beautiful line from a Rosary Psalter describing Mary: “[F]or never any suffered so great martyrdom as this most Blessed Virgin did in this world, who never had joy that was not mingled with travail, pain and sorrow.”



Passacaglia:  
The Guardian Angel

The last piece in this set of sonatas is the Passacaglia for solo violin with an accompanying engraving showing an angel holding a child's hand. After meditating on the complete cycle of the rosary, this final passacaglia becomes the vehicle for an intensely personal response to the spiritual journey and reflects the pain, frustration, sorrow and humility of our own mortality. After being in the presence of God, we are again left alone to face our own lives with the openness and vulnerability of a child. Biber gives us the ever repeating four-note passacaglia theme (*g'-f'-e<sup>b</sup>'-d'*) as a reminder that God is always with us as our “guardian angel,” and even though we may forget it is there, it is ever present as a guide and source of strength.

# Julia Wedman

Originally from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canadian violinist Julia Wedman was invited to join the internationally renowned Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra in 2005. She quickly developed a reputation for her solo performances with the ensemble and is frequently showcased on Tafelmusik's recordings, videos and their home concert series in Toronto. Julia has played concertos with Tafelmusik on many tours throughout Canada, the U.S.A., Mexico, Puerto Rico, Europe, China and Korea, and teaches at the Tafelmusik Baroque Summer Institute.

Julia is a member of the innovative young baroque ensemble I Furioli, whose CD *Crazy* is also available on Sono Luminus. She is also one quarter of the Eybler Quartet, a period instrument ensemble who specialize in music of the classical era and are champions of excellent but underrated composers. Their debut CD explored the works of Josef Leopold Edler von Eybler (a close friend of Mozart's), and they are joined by British clarinetist Jane Booth on their latest CD featuring clarinet quintets of W.A. Mozart and J.G.H. Backofen. As a part of the the Aradia Baroque Ensemble and Toronto Camerata under the direction of Kevin Mallon, Julia also recorded many CDs which are available on Naxos. She has been invited to teach short-term intensive courses at many universities including the Guildhall School of Music, Indiana University and Fredonia University and is often invited to play concertos and guest direct baroque ensembles and symphony orchestras throughout North America.

Julia studied at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario (Bachelor Degree) with Lorand Fenyves, the University of Toronto with Mayumi Seiler and Indiana University at Bloomington (Masters Degree) with Stanley Ritchie and Franco Gulli. She played a Hendrick Jacobs violin made in Amsterdam in 1694.





## Felix Deak



Cellist and viola da gambist Felix Deak is one of the rare musicians who had an instant affinity and love for baroque music at an early age. As one of the only undergraduates specialising in Early Music at the University of Toronto, Felix founded I FURIOSI Baroque Ensemble with soprano Gabrielle McLaughlin. Felix also studied at the International Baroque Institute at Longy and the Amherst Baroque Academy. He has been influenced by Michael McCraw, Jed Wentz and Susie Napper (viola da gamba), with whom he studied in 2009 after winning a prestigious Chalmers Grant from the Ontario Arts Council. He has performed and recorded with a great variety of ensembles in Canada and Europe including Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Opera Atelier, Arion Baroque Orchestra (Montreal), and Musica ad Rhenum (Amsterdam). He recently returned from giving a set of concerts featuring Fantazias & Fugues (Purcell & Bach) in France with Les Voix Humaines. In addition to performing, Felix is a deeply committed teacher. He is on the faculty of the Toronto District School Board, and maintains a private studio.

## Lucas Harris



Lucas Harris studied the lute and continuo playing at the Civica scuola di musica di Milano (as a Marco Fodella Foundation scholar) and then at the Hochschule für Künste Bremen. Based in Toronto since 2004, Lucas enjoys a very busy freelance career, adding plucked continuo to dozens of ensembles. He also makes time for special projects such as the solo recording Baroque Lute Recital. Lucas is on faculty at the Tafelmusik Baroque Summer Institute as well as Oberlin Conservatory's Baroque Performance Institute. He is founder and director of the Toronto Continuo Collective and also co-directs Beaches Baroque with violinist Geneviève Gilardeau. He has been a guest music director for projects with the Ohio State University Opera and the Pacific Baroque Orchestra.

## Charlotte Nediger

A native of southwestern Ontario, harpsichordist Charlotte Nediger joined the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra as principal keyboard player in 1980 at age 21 and has held that position ever since. She is one of few keyboard players to specialize in orchestral continuo playing, but also enjoys exploring the rich solo and chamber repertoire of the baroque. She appears regularly as concerto soloist with Tafelmusik in concert and on recordings. Charlotte teaches at the University of Toronto and Glenn Gould School, and is Artistic Coordinator of the annual Tafelmusik Baroque Summer Institute. She has an extensive background in music research, and works behind the scenes at Tafelmusik as Assistant to the Music Director, Librarian and Programme Editor. She holds Bachelor and Master degrees from the University of Western Ontario and a Solo Diploma from the Royal Conservatory of The Hague in the Netherlands.



## Julia Seager-Scott

Julia Seager-Scott is a graduate of the University of Toronto, where she obtained a Bachelor of Music in Performance and a Master of Music studying with Judy Loman. Currently, Julia is principal harpist of the Stratford Festival Orchestra and teaches at a private studio in Toronto. She is also a freelance harpist doing solo, orchestral, choral, chamber, radio and television work. Julia has recently performed with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the National Ballet of Canada Orchestra and the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra. Julia is currently studying Baroque music on her Italian triple harp with Maxine Eilander and Lucas Harris, and is a founding member of the Toronto Continuo Collective. A recent highlight in Julia's Baroque harp career was accompanying Dame Emma Kirkby with the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra. She has also performed with the Toronto Consort, Opera Atelier and the Catacoustic Consort of Cincinnati.



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Patrick Jordan

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### Instrumentation:

Felix Deak - cello (1,6,10,11,12,13,14) and viola da gamba (3, 4 and 7)

Lucas Harris - theorbo (1, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14) and archlute (7 and 15)

Charlotte Nediger - organ (1, 4,5, 6, 11, 12, 14,15) and harpsichord (2, 5, 8, 10, 14)

Julia Seager Scott - harp (13)

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