

Chatham Baroque & RENAISSANCE BAROQUE

Apollo's Fire *Violin Fantasy*

Sunday, February 18
4:00pm
Calvary Episcopal Church

ALBUM RELEASE CONCERT

Biber Sonatas on the Mysteries of the Rosary



23/24 SUBSCRIPTION SERIES

Apollo's Fire

Violin Fantasy

Alan Choo violin

Jeannette Sorrell harpsichord & organ

Andrew Fouts violin

William Simms theorbo & guitar

Anna O'Connell triple harp

Rebecca Landell cello & viola da gamba

Kivie Cahn-Lipman lirone & viola da gamba

Partita V in G Minor Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (1644 – 1704)
from *Harmonia Artificioso-Ariosa*

Mystery Sonata I, “The Annunciation” Biber

Mystery Sonata IV, “The Presentation” Biber

Ciaccona in A Major Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (c. 1620 – 1680)

Mystery Sonata X, “The Crucifixion” Biber

Intermission

Tombeau pour Blancrocher Johann Jakob Froberger (1616 – 1667)

Mystery Sonata XII, “The Ascension” Biber

Mystery Sonata XIV, “The Assumption of Mary” Biber

Pars III in A Minor from *Mensa Sonora* Biber

PROGRAM NOTES

Virtuosity, Drama, and Mystery from Heinrich Biber and his Circle

The 17th century was a time of highly imaginative and “fantastical” composition, in which German and Austrian composers often used virtuosity to convey moods of drama and mystery. Our program explores this *stylus phantasticus*, as it was known, primarily through the works of Heinrich Biber, but also touching on two of his contemporaries – Johann Heinrich Schmelzer and Johann Jakob Froberger.

Living in the second half of the 17th century, Heinrich Biber was a daring composer who pushed the limits of the current style, and of the current instruments. (Beethoven did much the same, 150 years later.) The greatest violin composer of his century, Biber was also admired for his virtuosity as a performer; for his astonishing ability to reach the high 6th and 7th positions on the violin (very rare for a baroque violinist, due to the lack of a chinrest); and for his skill with multiple stopping of strings, which allowed him to bring out polyphony in the music (playing multiple voices at the same time). This latter technique was emulated by J. S. Bach one generation later. Indeed, Bach’s famous *Chaconne in D Minor* for solo violin was clearly influenced by Biber’s *Passacaglia in G Minor*.

Biber’s *Mystery Sonatas* come down to us in a manuscript dating from around 1676, housed in the Bavarian State Library in Munich. One needs only to look at the florid, fantastical writing on the first page to guess that this is programmatic music (music that tells a story). Biber’s masterful use of the *stylus phantasticus* in these sonatas includes rhapsodic and virtuosic passages to convey emotions and moods. But unlike Vivaldi in *The Four Seasons*, Biber did not use words to indicate what the music was depicting. The only clue he provided is a copper engraving illustration at the start of each sonata in the manuscript.

For a person who is familiar with the story of Jesus, these engravings are recognizable as illustrations of the major events in the life of Jesus and the Virgin Mary – the events known in Catholic tradition as the Mysteries of the Rosary. Thus, each sonata in this cycle is depicting one of these events in the lives of Jesus and Mary.

In Biber's day, the fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary were divided by the Catholic Church into three categories:

- **The Joyful Mysteries** (the Angel Gabriel brings the good news to young Mary that she will be the mother of the Messiah; the babe is born in a manger in Bethlehem; he is presented in the Temple; and later, as a precocious boy, he is found in the Temple discussing theology with the elders);
- **The Sorrowful Mysteries** (Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing he is about to be betrayed and arrested; he is whipped or scourged by Roman soldiers, then crucified);
- **The Glorious Mysteries** (the Resurrection of Christ, his ascension to Heaven, the descent of the Holy Spirit who visits Jesus' disciples at Pentecost; and the assumption of Mary, in which she is taken up body and soul into heavenly glory).

In Catholic tradition, each "mystery" provides an anchor for meditation and prayer, providing insights for our own lives today. Biber seems to have echoed this philosophy by challenging the performers of this music to discover the meaning and significance of the story in each sonata, and in each section of each sonata. Thus, a journey through the Mystery Sonatas is a spiritual undertaking for the performers, as well as for the listeners.

Biber's *Mystery Sonatas* are also remarkable for their use of *scordatura* ("mis-tuning" or "wrong tuning" in Italian). *Scordatura* is the alteration of the standard tuning of a stringed instrument. Biber's contemporaries, including Schmelzer and Pachelbel, also incorporated this technique in their compositions to some degree. But Biber's extensive and highly imaginative use of *scordatura* was and remains unsurpassed. He used *scordatura* to achieve three different goals: (1) allowing the performer to execute otherwise impossible chords on the instrument; (2) enabling the violin to ring more vibrantly than would otherwise be possible, by tuning the open strings to match the tonic (or dominant) chord of the key of every sonata; and (3) highlighting the storytelling by choosing tunings that provide a brighter color for the *Joyful* and *Glorious Mysteries*, in contrast with a darker color for the *Sorrowful Mysteries*.

Biber's use of *scordatura* was not limited to just the *Mystery Sonatas* – he uses them also in his ***Harmonia artificioso-ariosa***, a set of seven instrumental partitas (or dance suites), of which six of them incorporate *scordatura*. Here, "artificioso" in the title refers to the use of *scordatura*. The **fifth Partita in G minor** features both violins with their highest E string tuned down to a D, allowing for a full G-minor triad to be played right at the beginning of the piece. The heart of this piece lies in the final *Passacaglia* – where both violins engage in a dialogue of increasingly exciting figuration and technical virtuosity.

Our program includes two of the **Joyful Mystery Sonatas**:

No. 1 "The Annunciation" (tuning: G – D – A – E)

No. 4 "The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple" (tuning: A – D – A – D)

In "The Annunciation," the archangel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary that she would conceive and bear the son of God – Jesus Christ. We imagine this to be a dramatic event, brought vividly to life through Biber's use of *stylus phantasticus*. This is contrasted with the following tender *Aria* and variations, which seem to convey Mary's inner world upon hearing such news. The *Finale* returns to *stylus phantasticus* writing, conjuring up a mysterious and dramatic atmosphere, as the final D major chord seemingly symbolizes that the deed is done.

In "The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple," Biber uses a *scordatura* with two fourths side by side to form a resplendent quality in D minor. This sonata is based on a ground bass from start to finish, a common 17th-century musical form that allows composers to explore the wide range of instrumental techniques depicting various effects. With the D as the top string, passages of *bariolage* (string crossings) toward the end are even more effective with a ringing open string at the top.

We juxtapose Biber's *Presentation Sonata* with another ground bass piece by his alleged teacher, **Johann Heinrich Schmelzer** (ca. 1620-1680). Originally written for violin and continuo, this beautiful **Ciaccona in A major** has been arranged to feature our colorful continuo team, with musical dialogue between the players.

From the **Sorrowful Mysteries**, we perform **Sonata No. 10 – “The Crucifixion”** (tuning: G – D – A – D). Beginning dramatically with a four-note motif symbolizing the crucifix, the *Praeludium* is relentless in its rhythmic figures evoking the nailing of Jesus to the cross. Here, we see the same *scordatura* as the opening Partita from *Harmonia artificiosa-ariosa* – a simple lowering of just the top string from an E to D, which generates lots of overtones in the sorrowful key of G minor. The tender *Aria* that follows could symbolize Mary weeping at the foot of the cross, and the remarkable virtuosity of the last variation rounds off the Sorrowful Mysteries with ruthless intensity.

The second half of our program opens with the renowned **Tombeau sùr le mort de Blancrocher**, a solo harpsichord piece by Johann Jakob Froberger, one of the most important and innovative keyboard composers of the 17th century. He was highly renowned in his time, but did not allow his compositions to be published. This led to his relative obscurity in modern times. In addition to being an important influence on J. S. Bach in the next generation, Froberger was also a master of the Tombeau – a lament in honor of a person who has died (usually a royal patron).

While Froberger was visiting Paris in 1652 as a young man, he became friends with the musicians at the court of Versailles, including the harpsichordist Louis Couperin and the lutenist named Blancrocher. One night, Blancrocher unfortunately fell down a flight of stairs and died in the arms of his friend, Froberger. Both Froberger and Couperin were devastated by the loss of their friend, and both composed Tombeaux in his memory. In doing so, they honored their friend as if he had been royalty.

The tombeaux of the 17th c. were meant to be played very freely. There are some outbursts of anguish, and other moments of gentle sadness and resignation. Froberger’s tombeaux have many strange dissonances and jagged intervals, conveying grief. In this particular tombeau, towards the end we hear the repeatedly tolling bell, surrounded by dissonances evoking the anguish of Blancrocher’s friends. Many tombeaux ended with an upwards scale, representing the soul of the dead person ascending to heaven. But this one ends grimly, by depicting the fatal fall down the stairs.

Turning to the **Glorious Mysteries** in the **Rosary Sonatas**, we perform **Sonata No. 12 – “The Ascension”** (tuning: C – E – G – C) and **Sonata No. 14 – “The Assumption of Mary”** (tuning: A – E – A – D).

In **The Ascension**, the *scordatura* forms a full chord in C major, a key associated with triumph and glory. Rising scales symbolizing Christ’s ascension to Heaven abound in the opening *Intrada*, followed by an *Aria Tubicinum*, imitating the sounds of a trumpet. The march-like military nature of this extraordinary movement (with its glorious C-major goodness on the open strings) evokes a grand, triumphant procession.

A glorious *Praeludium* with *stylus phantasticus* opens **The Assumption**, followed by a substantial ground-bass party-piece which evokes pure joy. The *scordatura* tuning allows access to brilliant overtones both in the tonic D major and dominant A major, and we accentuate this atmosphere by adding a strumming guitar to the mix. The ending of this sonata curiously sees the solo violin drop out mid-phrase, leaving the continuo section to end alone. To us, we see an image of the Virgin Mary ascending up to Heaven and disappearing from earthly view, inspiring us to orchestrate the ending with continuo instruments dropping out in sequence, leaving the celestial harp with the final word.

We close our program with another ensemble work by Biber – his **Mensa sonora** (“Sonorous table”), written in standard tuning – for a change! **Pars** (or “**partita**”) **III in A minor** from the set consists of five movements, beginning with an upbeat *Gagliarda* and featuring one of the most beautiful chaconnes. Scored for four active parts that come together to create lush harmonies, it evokes the older consort style of the Renaissance and early Baroque.

Jeannette Sorrell & Alan Choo

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

SOLOIST

Alan Choo, violin

Violinist **Alan Choo**, whose performances have been described by *The Straits Times* (Singapore) as “an intoxicating brew of poetry and dare-devilry,” performs on the global stage as a leading soloist, chamber musician, and historical specialist. He made his solo debut with Apollo’s Fire at the Tanglewood and Ravinia Music Festivals in 2017. He then served as an Artistic Leadership Fellow under the guidance of Jeannette Sorrell for four years, before being named Concertmaster and Assistant Artistic Director for the ensemble in September 2022. He is also Founder and Artistic Director of Red Dot Baroque, Singapore’s first professional period ensemble, which is Ensemble-in-Residence at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music.

Choo has performed as guest concertmaster and soloist with the Shanghai Camerata in China; and as soloist with the St. Petersburg Symphony Orchestra, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Singapore Chinese Orchestra, Orchestra of the Music Makers, and more. He won 1st prize in the Singapore National Piano and Violin Competition in 2011. He has given masterclasses and lectures at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Michigan State University, and other colleges in the U.S. and Singapore. Alan holds a Doctorate in Historical Performance from Case Western Reserve University, as well as degrees from the Peabody Conservatory and the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory.

ENSEMBLE

Kivie Cahn-Lipman, lirone, is the founder of baroque string band ACRONYM and Scottish HiP ensemble Makaris, and a founding gambist and co-director of viol consorts LeStrange and Science Ficta. His more than fifty recordings on over a dozen labels include the complete cello suites of J. S. Bach, which have been praised for their “eloquent performances,” “fresh thinking,” and “energy and zeal” (*The Strad*). He is an Associate Professor of Cello at Youngstown State University.

Andrew Fouts, violin, is co-artistic director of Chatham Baroque. His playing has been noted for its “mellifluous sound and sensitive style” (*Washington Post*), and “superb technique and spirit” (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*). Andrew is concertmaster with the Washington Bach Consort. For the upcoming 2023-2024 season, he will also appear as a featured artist with Apollo’s Fire, American Bach Soloists, and Ars Lyrica Houston. In 2008 Andrew won first prize at the American Bach Soloists’ International Baroque Violin

Competition. He can be heard on recordings with Chatham Baroque, Apollo’s Fire, American Bach Soloists, Philharmonia Baroque, Musik Ekklesia, and Alarm Will Sound.

Rebecca Landell, cello, has been praised for her “luminous” (*Cleveland.com*) and “notable” (*The New York Times*) sound, which elicits a range of expression “from classically evocative to Hitchcock horrifying” (*Washingtonian*). Her solo appearances include performances with Apollo’s Fire, Les Delices, Atlanta Baroque, Columbus Symphony, and Batzdorfer Hofkapelle. She pursues a variety of educational opportunities, including working with the faculty at Oberlin Conservatory, where she teaches baroque cello and viola da gamba.

Anna O’Connell, harp, is a soprano and harpist who works to accompany herself in every era. Her love of Celtic music was cemented by a visit to Ireland at a young age, and led to her lifelong fascination with harps. Her research interests include medieval troubadour and minnesang repertoires, and self-accompanying in medieval, renaissance, and early baroque songs from across Europe. She earned her doctorate in Historical Performance from CWRU in 2023.

William Simms, lute & theorbo, appears regularly with Apollo’s Fire, The Thirteen, Heartland Baroque, Indianapolis Baroque, The Arcadia Players, and The Washington Bach Consort. He has performed numerous operas and oratorios with such ensembles as The Washington National Opera, Opera Philadelphia, and American Opera Theater. His performance venues have included Carnegie Hall, The Kennedy Center, The Barns of Wolftrap, Tanglewood, and the National Cathedral. He may be heard on the GRAMMY®-winning *Songs of Orpheus* with Apollo’s Fire and Karim Sulayman.

Jeanette Sorrell, conductor

“Sorrell is an absolute dynamo onstage and a pleasure to see conduct.... a force to be reckoned with.” – SAN FRANCISCO CLASSICAL VOICE

“Sorrell led a splendid performance. Wonderful vitality ... lithe, glowing and elegant. It’s difficult for a ‘Messiah’ performance to stand out. But this one did.” – THE NEW YORK TIMES, Anthony Tommasini, chief critic (review of Messiah with New York Philharmonic), 2021

GRAMMY®-winning conductor Jeannette Sorrell is recognized internationally as one of today’s most compelling interpreters of Baroque and Classical repertoire. She is the subject of Oscar-winning director Allan Miller’s documentary, *PLAYING WITH FIRE: Jeannette Sorrell and the Mysteries of Conducting*, commercially released in 2023.

Bridging the period-instrument and symphonic worlds from a young age, she studied conducting under Leonard Bernstein, Roger Norrington, and Robert Spano at the Tanglewood and Aspen music festivals; and studied harpsichord with Gustav Leonhardt in Amsterdam. She won First Prize in the Spivey International Harpsichord Competition, competing against over 70 harpsichordists from four continents.

As a guest conductor, Sorrell made her **New York Philharmonic** debut in 2021 and **Philadelphia Orchestra** debut in 2022, both to rave reviews. She has repeatedly conducted the **Pittsburgh Symphony**, St Paul Chamber Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Utah Symphony, Florida Orchestra, Philharmonia Baroque in San Francisco, and New World Symphony; and has also led the **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic**, the **National Symphony** at the Kennedy Center, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Opera St Louis with the St Louis Symphony, and the Calgary Philharmonic (Canada), among others.

In 2023-24, she returns to the **New York Philharmonic**, and makes debuts with the **Royal Scottish National Orchestra**, Baltimore Symphony, Houston Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony, the National Arts Centre Chamber Orchestra (Ottawa), and the Orchestra of St Luke's at **Carnegie Hall**.

As founder and conductor of APOLLO'S FIRE, she has led the renowned ensemble at London's BBC Proms, Carnegie Hall, and many international venues. Sorrell and Apollo's Fire have released 30 commercial CDs, including 12 bestsellers on the Billboard classical chart and a 2019 GRAMMY® winner. Her CD recordings of the Bach *St John Passion* and Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* have been chosen as best in the field by the **Sunday Times** of London (2020 and 2021). Her Monteverdi *Vespers* recording was chosen by **BBC Music Magazine** as one of "30 Must-Have Recordings for Our Lifetime" (2022).

With over 15 million views of her YouTube videos, Sorrell has attracted national attention and awards for creative programming. She received an honorary doctorate from Case Western Reserve University and an award from the American Musicological Society.

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ABOUT CHATHAM BAROQUE

Each year, Chatham Baroque presents a series of captivating, historically informed performances, drawing from a vast repertoire of classical music styles, eras, and locales from the Medieval Period through the early 19th century. As one of the country's leading period instrument ensembles, the distinguished Chatham Baroque features Andrew Fouts (violin), Patricia Halverson (viola da gamba), and Scott Pauley (theorbo and baroque guitar). Each season, Chatham Baroque performs several concerts on its own, and presents concerts by renowned touring ensembles specializing in music of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque, and early Classical Period. Chatham Baroque concerts are performed with period instruments, which are restored or replica versions from the time when the music was written. Concerts are held in a variety of settings across Pittsburgh from churches to concert halls, and performers actively engage audiences with lively commentary and insights into the music.

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