

Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643)  
FIORI MUSICALI

SOMMCD 0661

Richard Lester *organ*The Greenwood Consort<sup>a</sup> (Eden Bishop *baritone*, Liam Fleet *baritone*,  
Joshua Thomas-North *baritone*, Mark Bennett<sup>b</sup> *baritone/director*)

<b>Missa [No.2]: In Festis duplicibus I (Cunctipotens Genitor Deus)</b>	[26:56]	<b>15</b>	Recercar dopo il Credo	3:28
<b>1</b> Toccata avanti la Messa degli Apostoli	2:05	<b>16</b>	Toccata Cromatica per l'Elevatione	5:12
<b>2</b> Kyrie – Kyrie Plainchant – Kyrie <sup>a</sup>	2:14	<b>17</b>	Canzon post il Comune	3:58
<b>3</b> Christe Plainchant – Christe – Christe Plainchant <sup>a</sup>	1:24			
<b>4</b> Kyrie – Kyrie Plainchant – Kyrie <sup>a</sup>	3:17	<b>Missa [No.3]: In Festis Beatae Mariae Virginis I (Cum jubilo)</b>	[29:27]	
<b>5</b> Canzon dopo l'Epistola	3:26	<b>18</b>	Toccata avanti la Messa della Madonna	1:27
<b>6</b> Toccata avanti il Recercar	1:24	<b>19</b>	Kyrie – Kyrie Plainchant – Kyrie <sup>a</sup>	1:57
<b>7</b> Altro Recercar	5:49	<b>20</b>	Christe Plainchant – Christe – Christe Plainchant <sup>a</sup>	1:07
<b>8</b> Toccata per l'Elevatione	3:58	<b>21</b>	Kyrie – Kyrie Plainchant – Kyrie <sup>a</sup>	2:11
<b>9</b> Canzon quarti toni, Dopo il Post Comune	3:19	<b>22</b>	Canzon dopo l'Epistola	2:23
		<b>23</b>	Toccata avanti il Ricercar	1:31
		<b>24</b>	Recercar con obbligo di cantare la quinta parte senza toccarla <sup>b</sup>	4:17
<b>Missa [No.1]: In Dominicis infra annum (Orbis factor)</b>	[23:40]	<b>25</b>	Toccata per l'Elevatione	2:58
<b>10</b> Toccata avanti la Messa della Domenica	1:30	<b>26</b>	La Bergamasca	5:45
<b>11</b> Kyrie – Kyrie Plainchant – Kyrie <sup>a</sup>	2:20	<b>27</b>	Capriccio sopra la Girolmeta	4:49
<b>12</b> Christe Plainchant – Christe – Christe Plainchant <sup>a</sup>	1:41			
<b>13</b> Kyrie – Kyrie Plainchant – Kyrie <sup>a</sup>	2:28			
<b>14</b> Canzon dopo l'Epistola	3:03			
			<b>Total duration:</b>	<b>79:53</b>

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Pope Urban VIII's coat of arms, Santa Maria in Aracoeli, Rome

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Organ: William Drake Ltd. (1983)

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Pope Urban VIII's coat of arms, Santa Maria in Aracoeli, Rome

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## FIORI MUSICALI

ORGAN MASSES

GIROLAMO FRESCOBALDI

Richard Lester *organ*The Greenwood Consort, Mark Bennett *director*

**FIORI MUSICALI**, written in 1635, was Frescobaldi's last work, representing a final flowering and significant celebration of his musical genius and creativity. As organist at St Peter's, Rome, alongside other distinguished posts including those bestowed by Dukes and Cardinals, Frescobaldi's influence and fame had spread throughout Europe and beyond, establishing him as a beacon for the enlightenment of Baroque and beyond. But before examining *Fiori*, it is prudent to embrace the historical background that prompted its evolution.

The history of the Organ Mass in which choir and organ alternate (*alternatim*), dates back to around the early 15th century, elements of which evolved from the earliest known source – the Codex Faenza. In essence, this manuscript contained one of the first collections of keyboard music, including versions of the Kyrie and Gloria, plus the oldest surviving example of an organ Mass, *Cunctipotens Genitor Deus*, which was clearly intended to alternate with voices. By the 1560s, the genre had become a regular part of the Mass Ordinary.

A few composers of the mid- to late-Renaissance, including Giammateo Asola, Girolamo Diruta, and Adriano Banchieri, refer to the way in which organists improvised around the chant melody. Of the written-out Italian variety, those by Girolamo Cavazzoni, Andrea Gabrieli, Claudio Merulo and Girolamo Frescobaldi were probably designed as a guide for those organists who were not so adept at improvising around the melodic lines of chant. They have also served to preserve for posterity unique examples of an important genre.

Although widely practised at the time, the form received adverse criticism from those in ecclesiastical authority, who considered that the sacred wording of the liturgy should be more distinctly audible; in some cases liturgical text was

recited aloud whilst the organ played during the verses. The Credo after 1600 was forbidden to be sung (*alternatim*) and was notably recited aloud.

Prior to Frescobaldi's *Fiori musicali* (1635), organ masses by Girolamo Cavazzoni (c.1525-77) were published in 1543 and included settings of the Kyries, Credo, Gloria, Sanctus and Agnus Dei. Those masses by Andrea Gabrieli (1533-85) of 1560 that were discovered in one of the Turin tablatures (another key source of early organ music) do not contain a version of the Credo, but interestingly those by Claudio Merulo (1533-1604) published in 1568 conform to the full Mass structure which included the Credo.

Various writers including Adriano Banchieri comment on additional music that could enhance the atmosphere of the Mass, and indeed to this day music is often prescribed as 'covering' for silences and movement of the clergy or as support for an activity. In latter times these included works that varied between the serious and dignified *ricercar*, and the more tuneful and lightly buoyant nature of the *canzone*, and were designed to mask 'awkward' moments. In addition, motets were often transcribed (*Intavolatura*) for keyboard and performed with diminutions (ornamentation) during the Communion.

Frescobaldi's *Fiori musicali* is unusual in that although the Kyries are represented (albeit with irregular numbers) the Gloria, Sanctus and Agnus Dei are completely omitted from each of the three masses.

Another anomaly is the presence of pieces that end the *Missa: In Festis Beatae Mariae Virginis I* (Feasts of the Virgin Mary) in the form of 'La Bergamasca' and 'Capriccio sopra la Girolmeta'; considered disrespectful in religious terms as they possessed secular themes and connotations.

'La Bergamasca' relates to a well-known tune and dance associated with the city of Bergamo in Northern Italy. The melody itself is by Lodovico Viadana (1560-1627) and became popular as a rustic dance associated with clowns and buffoonery. Frescobaldi precedes the piece with the comment, "Chi questa Bergamasca sonarà, non pocho imparerà" (Who will play this Bergamasca, will learn not a little). The melody itself was originally arranged and published as a Sinfonia in eight parts (*Sinfonie musicali a 8*. Vincenti Press, Venice 1610). It is still strange, given certain restrictions of the Council of Trent concerning anything profane, that Frescobaldi should choose these themes as part of *Fiori musicali*.

The concluding work in *Fiori*, the 'Capriccio sopra la Girometa', is taken from a *Girolmeta*, a 15th-century song in various guises, including a dance, and a children's nursery rhyme that originated in Northern Italy. Frescobaldi's 'Girolmeta' is multi-sectional, comprising two subjects from the folk tune.

I have recently discovered that the melodies of these last two works also appear in a 16th- and 17th-century carol book entitled *Laude Spirituale*; 'La Bergamasca' as a Christmas carol, and 'Girolmeta' sung at the Feast of the Holy Mother of God.

The three *Fiori* Masses were originally presented in Italian keyboard *partitura*; an open-score format in four parts that was then the main way of presenting polyphonic keyboard repertoire; a practice that lasted for a period of almost 100 years; and a vital working skill for keyboard players to achieve.

In his opening letter to organists, Frescobaldi explains his principal aims, which are to help organists in how to improvise freely around the opening Kyrie chants. He then explains that the *Canzoni* and *Ricercari* can be terminated if desired at

various points if they are too long. He then advises on the manner in which they should be performed: in total freedom and emotion.

### THE THREE MASSES

The title page of *Fiori musicali*, dedicated to the Barberini family is shown by their crest of three bees (see cover) on the original frontispiece. Cardinal Francesco Barberini was Frescobaldi's last patron and *Fiori* is dedicated to Francesco's elder brother, Cardinal Antonio Barberini. The first printed Mass in the order that all three Masses appear in the original manuscript – ***Missa: In Dominicus infra annum (Orbis factor)*** – opens in declamatory style with a Toccata in the Dorian mode that introduces the opening Kyries. Frescobaldi writes 12 Kyries in all, from which I have chosen five that conform to the conventional nine-fold manner, in both plain and *alternatim* practice: Kyrie (organ), Kyrie (chant), Kyrie (organ), Christe (chant), Christe (organ), Christe (chant), Kyrie (organ), Kyrie (chant), Kyrie (organ).

*A Canzon dopo l'Epistola* (canzona after the epistle reading) ensues, comprising two lively and contrasting sections that lead to an *Adasio (Adagio)*, heralding the final *Allegro (Allegro)*, that contrasts to the first two motifs, but blend in joyful imitation.

The *Recercar dopo il Credo* (not heard on this disc but available on SOMM's website\*) is an example of Frescobaldi's excursion into gentle chromaticism. I say 'gentle' as he does not explore this intense, emotional expression as brazenly as in the later examples of *Fiori*.

The central part of each Mass contains the most beautiful and poignant music in the form of the Toccatas for the Elevation of the Host. Frescobaldi highlights this *affetti* with sensitive chromatic nuance and anticipation on the phrase's likely

destination; a place of solitude, peace and further contemplation. To my mind, although this is the Mass for Ordinary Sundays in the year, this particular Elevation toccata in the traditional E mode is the most poignant of all.

The final *Canzon post il Comune* is a lightly buoyant example of Frescobaldi's playful writing in three main sections interspersed with brief expressive *Adasios*.

The Mass for the Apostles, which is presented first on this recording, ***Missa: In Festis duplicibus I (Cunctipotens Genitor Deus)***, opens with a powerful Toccata that I play at 16' pitch, i.e. an octave lower than written, which to my mind gives greater majesty. From the eight Kyries that follow I have chosen five that again conform to the accepted pattern.

The *Canzon dopo l'Epistola* that follows is unusual as it begins with a slow, chordal introduction; incidentally played at 16' pitch which, coupled with the higher elemental ranks, offers a full but bright sound. *Canzoni* are generally bright and brisk, but this opening *Adasio* paves way for a lighter four-in-a-bar *Alegro* in imitation of the opening. The final triple-meter imitative section gives way to a common time conclusion on variations of previous thematic subjects.

A rather subdued Toccata ensues; reminiscent of the opening Toccata, but more reflective in mood. Of the two *Ricercars* that follow, I have chosen the *Altro Ricercar* (limitations of a CD's capacity means that something has to give way); perhaps highlighting Frescobaldi's advice that, "If the *Canzoni* as well as the *Ricercari* are too long, they can be concluded at cadences or pauses."

The Elevation Toccata is again reflective in mood, aided by the semiquaver movement that creates a mild tension through expressive figuration and vocal

tonality. (The following *Ricercar, con obligo del Basso come appare* is again omitted, but also appears online\*.)

The final *Canzon quarti toni, Dopo il Post Comune* of the Apostles' Mass is quite varied in structure and interspersed with three *Adasio* sections that instigate contrasting *Alegro* themes and material.

The third Mass, ***Missa: In Festis Beatae Mariae Virginis I (Cum júbilo)***, opens with a majestic Toccata, followed by six Kyries, from which of which I have again chosen five organ versets. The *Canzon dopo l'Epistola* contains two sections with an opening theme, based on the *Fiamenga* dance tune from the Low Countries, that is first stated in common time, and followed by a brief *Adasio*, concluding with an *Alegro* in triple time.

The *ricercar dopo il Credo* (omitted here and available online\*) returns to Frescobaldi's favoured chromaticism, leading to a finale that moves from the dignified opening to a more cursive section that adds fluid momentum. Before the next *ricercar* Frescobaldi adds an introductory Toccata, again in relatively reflective mood.

The last *ricercar* of this third Mass, *ricercar con obligo di cantare* (with obligato singer), is similar, being built on only two subjects. This piece is famous for the composer's instruction to the performer that provides a brief vocal *cantus firmus* to be sung as the fifth voice at certain key points during the *ricercar*. Frescobaldi remarks in the score: "Intendami chi puo che m'intend'io" ("He who can understand me, will understand me; I understand myself.") It is unclear what text was intended here, but the words *Ave Maria* seem appropriate. I have adapted the following verses from that prayer:

*Ave Maria, gratia plena.*

*Dominus tecum.*

*Santa Maria, Mater Dei.*

*Ave Maria, Sancta Maria. Ora pro nobis.*

*Nunc et in morte. Amen.*

Hail Mary, full of Grace.

The Lord is with thee.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

Hail Mary, Pray for us,

Now, and in death. Amen.

The Mass continues with a quietly contemplative and alluring Toccata for the Elevation. As already mentioned, Frescobaldi concludes with 'La Bergamasca' and 'Capriccio sopra la Girolmeta'.

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*\*The three omitted passages are available online on  
Fiori musicali Bonus Tracks playlist:  
[youtube.com/@sommrecordings](https://www.youtube.com/@sommrecordings)*

The organ on this recording is a two-manual instrument built by the firm of William Drake Ltd of Buckfastleigh in 1983.

## Organ by William Drake (1983) at St John's Church, Bridgetown, Totnes, Devon



<b>Great Organ C – g3</b>	<b>Choir Organ C – g3</b>
Open Diapason (8')	Chimney Flute (8')
Stopped Diapason (8')	Principal (4')
Principal (4')	Recorder (4')
Chimney Flute (4')	Nasard (2 2/3')
Twelfth (2 2/3')	Gemshorn (2')
Fifteenth (2')	Tierce (1 3/5')
Cornet (III)	Mixture (III)
Mixture (IV)	Cremona (8')
Trumpet (8')	

**Pedal Organ C – f1**  
Bourdon (16')  
Principal C-A tr. (8')  
Bourdon 8ve tr. (8')  
Fifteenth (4')  
Mixture\* (III)  
Fagott\* (16')  
Trumpet tr. Great (8')

\* prepared for

**Couplers:** Great to Pedals, Choir to Great.  
General Tremulant

Temperament: Werckmeister III

**RICHARD LESTER** studied harpsichord with George Malcolm, who initially sponsored a series of debut concerts for him at Wigmore Hall and the Purcell Room, Southbank Centre in London in the 1970s. Lester was subsequently hailed by David Money in *The Telegraph* as “one of our leading players”.



Photograph: Carolyn Stilwell

Since that time, he has received high acclaim from *Gramophone*, *MusicWeb International* and *Classical.Net* for his complete recordings of Scarlatti Sonatas for Nimbus Records. He has now recorded over 80 CDs of harpsichord and organ music of Italian Renaissance and early keyboard music, Frescobaldi, Seixas, Soler, plus fortepiano music by Haydn and Mozart on period and modern instruments. He is the author of a book, *Girolamo Frescobaldi: A Variety of Inventions*, and has written numerous articles for *Harpsichord and Fortepiano* magazine and *Organists' Review*. He has regularly given recitals in this country and abroad, and at major festivals.

[www.richardlester.org.uk](http://www.richardlester.org.uk)

**THE GREENWOOD CONSORT** is a flexible ensemble of singers and instrumentalists, based in Devon. It focuses on historically-informed performance of Baroque and pre-Baroque music, going out to communities with limited access to live music, given Devon's distance from major cultural centres. Founded in 1995, the consort is co-directed by Mark Bennett and his husband, the conductor, composer and harpsichordist, Ian Hiscock. Mark and Ian are also integral to promoting amateur music-making in schools, adult recorder groups, choirs and the South Hams Community Orchestra.

Mark Bennett studied singing under Christopher Teuton at the University of Exeter, in masterclasses with Jonathan Veira and Evelyn Tubb, and then for three years with tenor James Gilchrist. He has an MA in Voice Pedagogy and also performs on recorders, flutes and viols.

The three young singers with Mark in this recording are at the start of their professional training: Liam Fleet is studying modern and period bassoons at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, while Eden Bishop and Joshua Thomas-North studied singing with Mark and are currently exploring their options for further study and training.

The Greenwood Consort believes that music is a profound and positive force and wants to help people experience that to the full, as students, performers, composers and audiences.

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