

# COSMIC MYSTERIES

11:30AM

SUNDAY 13 OCTOBER 2024

ST JOHN'S CHURCH



Heinrich Ignaz Franz BIBER (1644 – 1704)

*Mystery Sonatas*

**Sonata No. 16 in G minor 'The Guardian Angel'**

*Passacaglia*

## The Joyful Mysteries

**Sonata No. 1 in D minor 'The Annunciation to the Virgin by the Archangel Gabriel'**

1. *Prelude*

2. *Aria with two variations*

3. *Finale*

**Sonata No. 4 in D minor 'The Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple'**

*Chaconne with twelve variations*

## The Sorrowful Mysteries

**Sonata No. 7 in F major 'The Scourging of Jesus at the Pillar'**

1. *Allemande with one variation*

2. *Sarabande with three variations*

## The Glorious Mysteries

**Sonata No. 13 in D minor 'Pentecost (The Descent of the Holy Spirit)'**

1. *Sonata*

2. *Gavotte*

3. *Gigue*

4. *Sarabande*

**Sonata No. 14 in D major 'The Assumption of the Virgin into Heaven'**

1. *[Sonata]*

2. *Aria I*

3. *Aria II*

4. *Gigue*

Zoë Black *Violin*

Hannah Lane *Triple Harp*

Molly Kadarauch *Cello*

Stefan Cassomenos *Organ*

## Heinrich Ignaz Franz BIBER (1644 – 1704)

### *Mystery Sonatas*

Though still a relatively unrecognised composer, at least compared to the likes of Bach, Vivaldi, or Handel, Heinrich Biber ranks among the greatest and most innovative figures in the history of music. Internationally renowned in his own time as a violin virtuoso, the sheer difficulty of his compositions kept them from falling completely into oblivion – over 80 years after Biber's death, the English writer Charles Burney remarked, "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."

One of Biber's crowning achievements and most often-played works is the set of 16 sonatas for violin and continuo known as the *Mystery (or Rosary) Sonatas*, written some time in the mid-1670s. They take their name from the fact that in the original manuscript, each sonata is prefaced with an engraving of a Mystery of the Rosary. To the devout, the Mysteries of the Holy Rosary are meditations on central events in the life of Jesus and the Virgin Mary (for example, the birth, death and resurrection) grouped into three sets known as the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries.

Part of what makes these sonatas so innovative and challenging is their extensive use of *scordatura* (Italian for 'mistuning'), a practice used rarely until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but which Biber embraced wholeheartedly. Apart from the first sonata and final passacaglia which retain the standard violin tuning in fifths, Biber requires the soloist to change the tuning of at least two and sometimes all four strings, never using the same tuning twice. The tuning chosen for each sonata allows for special tone colours, sonorities, and multiple stops (playing chords or multiple notes at the same time) not ordinarily obtainable on the violin. Generally Biber uses brighter or more sonorous tunings for the Joyful and Glorious Mysteries, and darker or more muted sonorities for the Sorrowful Mysteries.

This morning's performance provides a captivating selection of sonatas, from the whipping of the lash in the sarabande of the Seventh Sonata to the divine winds of the Holy Spirit near the beginning of the Thirteenth. Of particular note is the passacaglia that opens this concert, but which actually ends the Mystery Sonatas. Using a repeating pattern quoted from a hymn to the guardian angel as its foundation, it is possibly the first piece ever written for solo, unaccompanied violin, and stands with Bach's chaconne as one of the two pinnacles of Baroque music for solo violin.