

Recital II: 17 October 2021: The Italian Organ Mass

Girolamo Alessandro Frescobaldi (1583-1643)

Messa della Madonna (from Fiori Musicali)

Girolamo Frescobaldi was one of the most important renaissance and baroque keyboard composers and virtuoso musicians of his time. Born in Ferrara into a musical family (it is suggested that his father may also have been an organist, and it is known that his half-brother, Cesare, was), he studied under Luzzasco Luzzaschi and was twice appointed as organist of St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

His large musical output includes music for both vocal and instrumental ensembles, though it is for his keyboard works that he is rightly most famous. Eight collections of keyboard compositions were published during his lifetime, with more either published after his death, or passed on to future generations through the original (but unpublished) manuscripts. His two books of *toccatas* and *partitas* (1615 and 1627), alongside his last published and only religious work, the *Fiori musicali* (1635) from which today's performance is taken, are his most important outputs. The 1615 book of *toccatas* contains works that could be used in liturgical situations and were designed to either be used as introductions to other pieces or, for those amongst them of a grander scale, as substantial works in their own right.

The more technically challenging of his works, of which there are many, combine an improvisatory style with rapid flourishes, softer, more intimate parts known as *affetti*, as well as perfectly composed contrapuntal writing. He was clearly aware that his bravado keyboard technique (he had been marked out as a child prodigy and toured around as a young performer to be shown off to the noblemen of Italy) could prove challenging for those performing his music, as his scores sometimes come with small notes to the performer, almost teasing them about the work ahead of them. One of the *toccatas* from his second book of 1627 contains the line "Non senza fatica si giunge al fine" (not without toil will you get to the end)!

His *Fiori Musicali* (musical flowers) of 1635, contains three organ masses. This set of works is the only one in his output devoted solely to a directly religious context, and each contains music set directly on the plainchant themes of each of three different *Kyriales* (musical settings of the ordinary of the mass): *Messa della Domenica* (mass for Sundays, or *Kyriale XI*, Orbis Factor), *Messa delli Apostoli* (mass for the Apostles, or *Kyriale IV*, Cunctipotens genitor Deus, and the same mass on which Couperin's *messe pour les paroisses* was based which was performed in the September recital), and finally, for the performance today, *Messa della Madonna* (mass for Our Lady, or *Kyriale IX*, Cum Jubilo).

Though only half a century earlier than the Couperin organ mass in the previous recital, this work comes from a totally different stylistic period. Though, like the Couperin mass, it dates from after the important *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* of Pope Clement VIII in 1600, codifying the liturgical decisions of the Council of Trent, which set out the use of the organ to replace alternate

verses of the mass ordinary (so they were not sung by the choir), this new style was never adopted in Italy at the scale or with the enthusiasm it had been in France. (More information on this idea of *alternatim* organ masses is available in the programme notes for the previous recital which can be found on our website or with the YouTube recording of it.)

In *Fiori musicali*, the organ replaces the voices only in the first sung part of the mass, the *Kyrie eleison* (Lord, have mercy), in the same way as was typical in France: the organ provides the first of the nine petitions, followed by choir and organ in turn. All other parts of the mass are fully sung by the choir, and you will hear today the Sister Adorers of the Royal Heart of Jesus sing *Missa Cum Jubilo* (*Kyrie IX*) in full (apart from the *Kyrie* as above), and also *Credo V*, the fifth melody of the creed, traditionally reserved for Feasts of Our Lady within the Institute.

The Italian organ mass was never as formally developed as that in France, having various different numbers of movements, and each of the three Frescobaldi masses in *Fiori musicali* has a different number of movements, though there is a general pattern around which most revolve. In the *Messa della Madonna* for today's performance, there are 12 principal movements, arranged around the typical Italian organ mass order (a *toccata* for before the mass, six sections for the *Kyrie*, and works for after the Epistle (the gradual), after the Creed (the offertory) and for the elevation of the consecrated elements. Today's mass omits a piece for after communion which the other two contain (and is normal in the Italian organ mass), though two other, but not religious pieces, are included instead.

Please see the main recital series brochure for the organ specification to which the registration notes refer.

1. **Toccata avanti la Messa della Madonna** (*Toccata before the mass of Our Lady*)

The toccatas of the *Fiori musicali* are rather different to those in Frescobaldi's earlier keyboard works and, instead of consisting of multiple different sections, are instead rather exquisite miniatures with typical renaissance phrases—shaping of gently rising and falling melodic lines. Frescobaldi gives detailed notes to the performer in the preface to the work, noting that the trills should be played expressively, and the tempo should fluctuate, starting slowly at the beginning of passages and accelerating as the phrases progress.

Registration: 2, 4, 7, 9

Kyrie

2. Kyrie eleison (*Lord, have mercy*)

As is traditional, the organ begins the first petition of the *Kyrie eleison*, to which the choir will respond with the second. This short verset is based directly on the plainchant it replaces and all of them are written in an exemplary four-part counterpoint. The plainchant is heart in long notes (as a *cantus firmus*) in the alto part (the second highest of the four) with a countersubject with some unusual chromaticism.

Registration: 2, 4, 7

Schola cantorum: Kyrie eleison.

3. Kyrie eleison (*Lord, have mercy*)

In the third petition of the *Kyrie*, the plainsong of the petition just sung by the choir is heard again in long notes, first in the bass (the lowest of the four voices) before appearing again in the alto and finally in the soprano, the highest voice.

Registration: 41, 43, 45

Schola cantorum: Christe eleison. (*Christ, have mercy*)

4. Christe eleison

Unusually, Frescobaldi provides two organ versets for the *Christe eleison*, even though only one is needed in the normal *alternatim* arrangement. In *Kyriale IX*, there are two musical themes present in each of the three main petitions, the first *Kyrie*, the *Christe*, and the final *Kyrie*. This first of the two *Christe* petitions is based on the first of the two *Christe* themes, the one normally sung by the choir, and so isn't strictly needed. There are some suggestions that occasionally in Italy the order of organ and choir was reversed, with the choir starting, meaning that this switch would be needed. It is also possible that this is simply an additional verse for variety; the other two masses in *Fiori musicali* both provide many more verses for the *Kyrie* than would ever be required in one performance, and this may simply be for variety.

The plainchant melody is heard first in the soprano and then the bass, before concluding in the soprano.

Registration: 2, 4

5. Christe eleison

In an original performance in seventeenth-century Italy you wouldn't hear both versions of the *Christe* organ verses together, but we provide it here so that you may enjoy it. It takes its theme from the other melody of the *Christe*, beginning in the tenor part before appearing in the alto.

Registration: 41, 43

Schola cantorum: Christe eleison.

6. Kyrie eleison

Again, this verset is based on the plainchant that it replaces, beginning in the opening tenor part before passing through every voice as it progresses.

Registration: 2, 4, 7

Schola cantorum: Kyrie eleison.

7. Kyrie eleison

The final *Kyrie* once again uses the plainchant just heard by the choir rather than that which it replaces for its theme. As the final section of this part of the mass it is more musically developed and quicker paced with the motif moving around all voices before the carefully prepared and developed cadence.

Registration: 2, 4, 7, 9

Gloria in excelsis Deo

Celebrant: Gloria in excelsis Deo. (*Glory to God in the highest*)

Schola cantorum:

Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis (*And on earth peace to people of good will*)

Laudamus te. (*We praise You*)

Benedicimus te. (*We bless You*)

Adoramus te. (*We adore You*)

Glorificamus te. (*We glorify You*)

Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam. (*We give You thanks for Your great glory*)

Domine Deus, Rex caelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens. (*Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father*)

Domine Fili unigenite Jesu Christe. (*Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son*)

Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris. (*Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father*)

Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. (*You take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us*)

Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostrum. (*You take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer*)

Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis. (*You are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us*)

Quoniam tu solus sanctus. (*For you alone are the Holy One*)

Tu solus Dominus. (*You alone are the Lord*)

Tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe. (*You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ*)

Cum Sancto Spiritu, in gloria Dei Patris. Amen. (*With the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.*)

8. Canzon dopo l'Epistola (*Canzona after the Epistle*)

This canzona, written for performance after the reading of the epistle, may have been designed to wholly replace the chant of the gradual and alleluia customarily sung at this point of the mass. In this way, it would provide musical “cover” for the liturgical preparation and procession for the reading of the gospel which would follow it.

The canzona is in two clear sections using an imitative style between the four voices who each get a form of the main theme (which was used by the Parisian organist Jean Langlais in his 1951 work *Hommage à Frescobaldi*) throughout the piece. This rather jolly section, in 4/4 time, gives way rather abruptly to a slow *adagio* section, which provides the link in to the second part of the work where the same theme is used only now in triple-time, but losing none of the brightness that is typical of this movement within the Italian tradition.

Registration: first section: 2, 4, 7; second section 41, 43, 45, 46, 47

Credo in unum Deum

Celebrant: Credo in unum Deum. (*I believe in one God*)

Schola cantorum:

Patrem omnipotentem (*the Father almighty*)

Factorem caeli et terrae (*maker of heaven and earth,*)

visibilium omnium et invisibilium. (*of all things visible and invisible.*)

Et in unum Dominum, Jesum Christum (*And [I believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ,*)

Filii Dei unigenitum (*the Only Begotten Son of God,*)

et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula. (*born of the Father before all ages.*)

Deum de Deo, Lumen de Lumine, (*God from God, Light from Light,*)

Deum verum de Deo vero, (*true God from true God,*)

genitum non factum, consubstantialem Patri; (*begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;*)

per quem omnia facta sunt. (*through him all things were made.*)

Qui propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem. (*For us men and for our salvation*)

descendit de cælis (*he came down from heaven,*)

Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine, (*and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,*)

et homo factus est. (*and became man.*)

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato, (*For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,*)

passus, et sepultus est, (*he suffered death and was buried,*)

et resurrexit tertia die, (*and rose again on the third day*)

secundum Scripturas (*in accordance with the Scriptures.*)

et ascendit in cælum, (*He ascended into heaven*)

sedet ad dexteram Patris (*and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*)

Et iterum venturus est cum gloria, (*He will come again in glory*)

iudicare vivos et mortuos, (*to judge the living and the dead*)

cuius regni non erit finis; (*and his kingdom will have no end.*)

Et in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem, (*And [I believe] in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,*)

qui ex Patre Filioque procedit. (*who proceeds from the Father and the Son,*)

Qui cum Patre et Filio simul adoratur et conglorificatur: (*who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,*)

qui locutus est per prophetas. (*who has spoken through the prophets.*)

Et unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam. (*And [I believe] in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.*)

Confiteor unum baptisma in remissionem peccatorum. (*I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins*)

Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum, (*and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead*)

et vitam venturi sæculi. Amen. (*and the life of the world to come. Amen.*)

9. Recercar dopo il Credo (Recercar after the Creed)

This movement forms the largest and most developed of the work so far, starting with a bold theme that contains a chromatic scale. After a cadence into the major key, the theme moves to form a *cantus firmus* in long notes in the bass part whilst a second motif appears repeatedly woven around it. It can be considered as a musical response to the text of the creed itself, reaffirming meaning of the words just sung.

Registration: 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9

Offertory

10. Toccata avanti il Ricercar (*Toccata before the ricercar*)

Though the previous movement could be considered part of the offertory, it seems more fitting to consider that that role is performed by the next two movements which, because of the title of the first, are clearly considered by the composer as linked.

This opening toccata is highly typical of Frescobaldi, taking only a small amount of musical material and weaving an intricate and delicate web that gains in tempo as it develops with more abrupt motifs that almost hint at the fun that is coming in the next movement.

Registration: 41, 43, 45, 46

11. Ricercar con obbligo di cantare la quinta parte senza toccarla

(*Ricercar with obligatory singing of the fifth part without playing it*)

This is surely one of the most confusing pieces in this work. It begins with an elegant six-note theme, but *before* the first bar is written, Frescobaldi writes the same six notes, but in a different time signature and metre, saying that this should be sung, but without playing it, and without indicating where within the work it should be sung. There are a number of places where the addition of this fifth part fits within the four-part texture, but it is clearly left up to the performer to work out where these are. To further tease the musician, Frescobaldi leaves a quote from Petrarch: “Intendomi chi puo che m’intend’io” (understand me who can, for I understand myself). A musical riddle, certainly! If it is to be sung, Frescobaldi gives us no words, though some suggest that the tradition could be to sing “Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis” (Holy Mary, pray for us), or perhaps it would be left to an instrumental musician in the organ gallery. It remains a puzzle to this day, and that is perhaps how Frescobaldi intended it.

Registration: 2, 4, 7, 9

Sanctus & Benedictus

Schola cantorum:

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth (*Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Hosts*)

Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua. (*Heaven and earth are full of Your glory*)

Hosanna in excelsis. (*Hosanna in the highest*)

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini. (*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*)

Hosanna in excelsis. (*Hosanna in the highest*)

12. Toccata per l’Elavatione (*Toccata for the elevation*)

The elevation of the host and chalice is the central and most holy part of the celebration of the mass. Amongst the many musical styles that Frescobaldi typified, his elevation toccatas are perhaps the most famous, and their simplicity and beauty fit this part in the mass perfectly. Composed in the phrygian mode (mode 3) which has an aethereal and other-worldly quality, signifying the arrival of God Himself in the consecration of the bread and wine. It is indicated by

the composer to be played slowly, giving time for the congregation to be transported in prayer through its unusual chromatic tonality, strong rhythmic patterns, and filled with suspensions.

Registration: 41, 51

Agnus Dei

Schola cantorum:

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi: miserere nobis (*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us*)

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi: miserere nobis. (*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us*)

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi: dona nobis pacem (*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace*)

13. Bergamasca (Chi questa Bergamasca sonarà, non pocho imparerà)

(Bergamasca (Who will play this Bergamasca will learn not a little))

The last two movements of the *Fiori musicali* stand out for being rather secular in their nature and, because of that, would surely have been forbidden under the strictures of the *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* as being “lascivious and impure”, but many letters of the period from cardinals in Rome suggest that this rule did not stop all organists from exercising their musical freedom!

The melody of this bergamasca was regularly set to instrumental music by a variety of composers from the middle of the sixteenth-century onwards, and its text, clearly popular, seems somewhat out of character for an organ piece during holy mass: “Franceschina m’è garbata” (Franceschina is pleasing to me). However, despite this odd choice, Frescobaldi turns this (for the time) extremely well known tune (and it is catchy) into a fascinating set of seven variations. It is similar in structure to some of his earlier *capriccios* from his 1624 publication, where each section of the work treats the same theme with different rhythmic styles and metre, figuration and texture. The lively sixth section, written in faster movement triplets, is reminiscent of Frescobaldi’s earlier *toccatas*.

Registration: various combinations of the grand orgue and positif choruses

Dismissal

Celebrant: Ite, missa est. (Go forth, the Mass is ended)

Schola cantorum: Deo gratias (Thanks be to God)

14. Capriccio sopra la Girolmeta (Capriccio on the Girolmeta)

The Girolmeta, like the Bergamasca earlier, is a well-known and popular folk-tune of the time, and similarly has a text that hardly seems appropriate for sacred liturgy: “Chi t’ha fatto le belle scarpe che ti stan si ben, Girometta? ‘Me l’ha fatte lo mio amore che mi vol gran ben” (“Who

made you the fine shoes that suit you so well, Girometta? 'My lover who loves me well made them for me"). Girolmeta is a diminutive and feminine form of Girolamo (Frescobaldi's first name) and so there may be some form signature by the composer here, light-heartedly placing himself at the heart of this work.

Again, like the earlier bergamasca, the work takes the simply (and highly memorable) tune and weaves a set of four differently figured and metred variations around it. One cannot help but sense that, with these last two movements, the composer was really enjoying himself. Taking the banal (common folk-tunes) and raising them both to exquisitely figured counterpoint and to the sacred liturgy itself, is something that only a true genius can achieve.

Registration: various combinations of the *grand orgue* and *positif* choruses