



Sunday 19 October, 7.30pm
St Martin's Church

RICORDANZE: A RECORD OF LOVE

Musica Secreta

Ailsa Campbell, Amy Carson, Victoria Couper, Yvonne Eddy,
Hannah Ely, Elspeth Piggott, Kristiina Watt *sopranos*
Katharine Hawnt *mezzo-soprano*
Caroline Trevor *alto*
Kristiina Watt *lute*
Claire Williams *organ*
Alison Kinder *bass viol*

Laurie Stras *director*
Claire Williams *ensemble director*

with **Celestial Sirens**

Elspeth Barnett, Maria Birch, Kat Elliot, Hannah Loach, Jenny Hansell, Agatha Holloway,
Bibi Lees, Natasha Raybould, Silvia Reseghetti, Kate Rouse, Rachel Taylor, Rosie Taylor



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

**Brighton Early Music Festival gratefully acknowledges financial support from our
Guardian Angels:**

Christopher & Jo Baron
Nicolas & Auriol Chisholm
Mike & Jenny Clemens
Michael Cotgrove
Maya & Richard Davis

Gavin Henderson
Frances Lindsay-Hills
Pam Mason
Simon & Penny Mathews
Neil & Hannah Parkinson

Margaret Polmear
Maurice & Patricia Rigby
Richard Vernon
& anonymous donors

Become a Festival Friend at bremf.org.uk/festival-friends

PART 1

Veni Creator Spiritus

Plague and destruction

Messa a tre voci (Messa sopra Je le larray): Kyrie and Gloria

Da pacem Domine in diebus nostris

Taking the veil

Nigra sum sed formosa (chant)

Veni sponsa Christi

Regnum mundi et omnem ornatum contempsit (chant)

Salve sancte pater Francisce

The convent's special days

In illo tempore

Salve sponsa Dei

Lightning strikes the bell-gable

Messa sopra Recordare Virgo Mater: Sanctus

Interval

PART 2

Magnificat ottavo tono

Cantare amantis est

Vergine bella

Non è alcun di gloria degno

Visiting the altars

O crux splendidior

Adoramus te

Sancta Dei genitrix

Sancta Maria, letaniæ della Madonna

Suor Maria Celeste and Suor Maria Eletta

Inter natos mulierum

Messa sopra Recordare Virgo Mater: Agnus Dei

Salve regina

The music

The ex-convent of San Matteo in Arcetri sits nestled in the hills about 45 minutes' walk south from Florence's medieval city walls. Making the way up the slope, coming from a city where the past is continually and dazzlingly on show, there is still a sense that you are leaving the 21st century behind. The route passes convents, churches, *palazzi*, a military fort, observatories and two of Galileo Galilei's houses, gradually becoming less urban, more rural; eventually you arrive in the Pian de Giullari, with its narrow, long street and its private villas, their olive groves and vineyards spilling down the hillside.

San Matteo's nuns once tended their own vineyard on the slopes, from which they made Verdea wine, a variety still served in the city's bars and restaurants below. But their winemaking was always secondary to their principal labour: the Opus Dei or Divine Office: eight services, or 'hours', that divided the day. The bell in its gable above the church would call them to prayer, and they were instructed to respond to it as if they were hearing Christ's own voice.

Musical prayer was the key component of a choir nun's life; she was motivated not so much by the sound of music, but the sounding of music. In the great cities of the Italian Renaissance, convents fostered musical excellence as enthusiastically as did the cathedrals, basilicas and monasteries. It is perhaps, then, surprising that the only surviving manuscript of 16th-century polyphony that can be traced to a specific convent should come from a place like San Matteo: small, rural and not particularly well off.

The Biffoli-Sostegni manuscript, MS 27766 of the Library of the Royal Conservatory in Brussels, is a large, very fragile, leather-bound book; many of its paper pages have been eaten through in part by the iron-gall ink used to copy its contents. Its name comes from the dedications embossed on its covers – 'Sorori Angiolette de Biffolis' and 'Sorori Clementie de Sostegni' – 'to Sister Agnoleta Biffoli' and 'to Sister Clemenzia Sostegni.' Tiny illustrations attest to the bond between the nuns, their initials entwined in the elaborate filigree letters that adorn each page, with miniatures of singing nuns peering out from the decorations. I found their names in San Matteo's 16th-century *Ricordanze* – an account book that somehow survived when almost everything else from the early years of the convent had disappeared.

The *Ricordanze* tells us that Suor Clemenzia and Suor Agnoleta entered San Matteo in the 1540s, as the convent was recovering from the devastation of years of war, plague and political unrest suffered by the Florentines at the beginning of the century. By the time the music manuscript was copied in the 1560s, the convent was as prosperous as it would probably ever be. The manuscript provides a window into not only those prosperous years, but also the convent's recent history, with music that appears to relate to the decades of turmoil and renewal and their lasting impact on the nuns' lives.

Suor Clemenzia was elected abbess at least twice in the first decade of the 17th century. When she died in 1612, her numbered place at the convent became free and was allocated to a 12-year-old girl, Virginia Galilei, eldest daughter of Galileo Galilei. Two years later, aged just 14 and 13, Virginia and her sister Livia took their first vows, becoming respectively Suor Maria Celeste and Suor Arcangela.

Even before Virginia was born in 1600, the archbishop had prohibited convents from using the new 'concertato' styles of solo voices with violins and instruments, permitting only older-style polyphony with organ and viols, and solo voices accompanied by the organ – as long as they sang in Latin. So Suor Agnoleta and Suor Clemenzia's manuscript, however old-fashioned by the time of the old nun's death, would still have been a valuable resource for the convent's choirmistress.

Suor Maria Celeste wrote over a hundred letters to her father, some of which contain clues about her musical life. She taught psalmody to the girls, and for the last five years of her life she was in charge of the Daily Office, in effect the convent's choirmistress, collaborating with the convent's organist, Suor Maria Eletta Archilei, daughter of the Florentine court's *prima donna assoluta*, Vittoria Archilei.

The seeming contradiction between the abundant manuscript and the scarcity of information about San Matteo's music in later years might be explained by the ubiquity of music in a nun's daily life, and that the music, based in the chanted liturgy, changed only very slowly over time. Certainly, if the manuscript remained at San Matteo until it was dissolved by the Napoleonic regime in 1808, it might have fallen out of use, but its words and its images would still have worked on the community memory, of lives dedicated to the love of Christ, and to each other.

Laurie Stras

The texts

Veni Creator Spiritus,
mentes tuorum visita,
imple superna gratia
quae tu creasti pectora.

Qui diceris Paraclitus,
altissimi donum Dei,
fons vivus, ignis, caritas,
et spiritalis unctio.

Tu, septiformis munere,
digitus paternae dexterae,
Tu rite promissum Patris,
sermone ditans guttura.

Accende lumen sensibus:
infunde amorem cordibus:
infirmi nostri corporis
virtute firmans perpeti.

Hostem repellas longius,
pacemque dones protinus:
ductore sic te praevio
vitemus omne noxium.

Per te sciamus da Patrem,
noscamus atque Filium;
Teque utriusque Spiritum
credamus omni tempore.

Deo Patri sit gloria,
et Filio, qui a mortuis
surrexit, ac Paraclito,
in saeculorum saecula.
Amen.

Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison.

Gloria in excelsis Deo: et in terra pax hominibus
bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te,
glorificamus te, gratias agimus tibi propter
magnam gloriam tuam, Domine Deus, Rex
caelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens.
Domine Fili Unigenite, Iesu Christe, Domine

Come creator Spirit,
visit the souls of your people:
fill with grace from above
the hearts that you have created.

You who are called advocate,
gift of the most high God,
the living fountain, fire, love
and balm of the spirit,

You bestow sevenfold gifts;
you, the finger of God's right hand,
you the duly promised of the Father, providing
toughs with speech,

Kindle a light in minds;
pour love into hearts,
strengthening the weaknesses of our bodies
with perpetual vigour.

Drive the enemy far away,
and give peace forthwith,
so that with you leading the way as our guide
we may avoid all harmful things.

Grant that through you we may know the
Father and also come to know the Son,
and may we ever believe in you,
the Spirit of both.

Glory be to God the Father,
and to the Son, who rose from the dead,
and also to the Holy Spirit,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have
mercy.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace
to people of good will.
We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we
glorify you, we give you thanks for your great
glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God almighty
Father. Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, who

Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis; qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram. Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis. Quoniam tu solus Sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe, cum Sancto Spiritu: in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.

Da pacem, Domine, in diebus nostris, quia non est alius qui pugnet pro nobis, nisi tu Deus noster.

Summer Histories 'de Machabæis'

Nigra sum sed formosa filiae Jherusalem ideo dilexit me rex et introduxit me in cubiculum suum.

Veni sponsa Christi, accipe coronam quam tibi Dominus praeparavit in aeternum

Regnum mundi, et omnem ornatum saeculi contempsi propter amorem Domini mei Jesu Christi: quem vidi, quem amavi, in quem credidi, quem dilexi.

Salve sancte pater, et dulce praesidium, patriæ lux forma minorum, virtutis speculum, recti via, regula morum, carnis ab exilio, duc nos ad regna polorum. Sancte pater Francisce, ora pro nobis.

Modified antiphon text, St Francis

In illo tempore: Vidit Jesus hominem sedentem in telonio, Matthæum nomine. Et ait illi: Sequere me. Et surgens, secutus est eum. Et factum est, discumbente eo in domo, ecce multi publicani et peccatores venientes, discumbebant cum Jesu, et discipulis ejus. Et videntes Pharisei, dicebant discipulis ejus: Quare cum publicanis et peccatoribus manducat magister vester? At Jesus audiens, ait: Non est opus valentibus medicus, sed male habentibus. Euntes autem

takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Give peace in our time, O Lord, because there is none other who fights for us, but only you, O God.

I am black but comely, daughters of Jerusalem, Therefore have I pleased the Lord and he has brought me into his chamber.

Come, bride of Christ, receive the crown which the Lord has prepared for you for all eternity;

I despised the kingdom of the world, and all the beauty of the world, for love of the Lord Jesus Christ: whom I saw, whom I loved, in whom I have believed, in whom I have delighted.

Hail, holy father, and sweet protector, the light of the homeland, the model of the Minorites, mirror of virtue, the right way, the rule of conduct, exiled from flesh, lead us to the realms of the heaven. Holy Father Francis, pray for us.

At that time: Jesus saw a man sitting in the custom house named Matthew; and He said to him: "Follow me." And he arose up and followed him. And it came to pass, as He was sitting at dinner in the house, behold, many tax-collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and His disciples. And the Pharisees, seeing it, said to His disciples: "Why does your master eat with tax-collectors and sinners?" But Jesus, hearing it, said: "It is not the healthy

discite quid est: Misericordiam volo, et non sacrificium. Non enim veni vocare justos, sed peccatores.

*Mass Gospel, Feast of St Matthew
(Matthew 9:9-13)*

Salve sponsa Dei

virgo sacra planta minorum
tu vas munditie
tu previa forma sororum
Clara tuis precibus
duc nos ad regna polorum.

Magnificat antiphon, Vespers 2 of St Clare

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus.

Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt cæli et terra gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.

Magnificat anima mea Dominum;
et exsultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo,
quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae;
Ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes
generationes.
quia fecit mihi magna, qui potens est,
et sanctum nomen eius,
Et misericordia eius a progenie in progenies
timentibus eum.
Fecit potentiam in brachio suo;
dispersit superbos mente cordis sui;

deposuit potentes de sede,
et exaltavit humiles;
esurientes implevit bonis et divites dimisit
inanes.
Suscepit Israel puerum suum, recordatus
misericordiae suae,
sicut locutus est ad patres nostros, Abraham
et semini eius in saecula.
Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto,
sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper:
et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

that need a physician, but the sick. Go then and learn what this means: 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice'. For I have not come to call the just, but the sinners."

Hail bride of God,
sacred virgin, flower of the Minorites;
you, the spotless vessel;
you, the predecessor of the body of sisters,
Clare, with your prayers,
lead us to the heavenly realm.

Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he that comes in the name of the
Lord: Hosanna in the highest.

My soul doth magnify the Lord
and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
Because he hath regarded the humility of his
handmaid; for behold from henceforth all
generations shall call me blessed.
Because he that is mighty, hath done great
things to me; and holy is his name.
And his mercy is from generation unto
generations, to them that fear him.
He hath shewed might in his arm:
he hath scattered the proud in the conceit of
their heart.
He hath put down the mighty from their seat,
and hath exalted the humble.
He hath filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich he hath sent empty away.
He hath received Israel his servant, being
mindful of his mercy:
As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and
to his seed for ever.
Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Vergine bella, che di sol vestita,
coronata di stelle, al sommo Sole
piacesti sì, che 'n te Sua luce ascose.
Amor mi spinge a dir di te parole:
ma non so 'ncominciar senza tu' aita,
et di Colui ch'amando in te si pose.

Invoco lei che ben sempre rispose,
chi la chiamò con fede:
Vergine, s'a mercede
miseria extrema de l'humane cose
già mai ti volse, al mio prego t'inchina,
soccorri a la mia guerra,
bench'ì sia terra, et tu del ciel regina.

Text: Francesco Petrarca

Non è alcun di gloria degno
sopra il virginal stato,
che da Dio tanto esaltato
sempre fu nel sommo regno.

Tanto piacque al sommo Padre
la virginità perfetta,
che nel mondo per sua Madre
una vergine ebbe eletta:
santa, casta, pura, e netta,
sempre integra in questo stato.

Text: Benedetto Cinguli

O crux, splendidior cunctis astris,
mundo celebris hominibus,
multum amabilis, sanctior universis,
quæ sola fuisti digna portare talentum mundi.
Dulce lignum, dulces clavos,
dulcia ferens pondera.
Salva præsentem catervam in tuis
hodie laudibus congregatam.

Adoramus te, Christe, et benedicimus tibi,
quia per sanctam crucem tuam redemisti
mundum: miserere nobis.

Antiphon, Invention, and Exaltation of the Cross

Lovely Virgin, clothed with the sun,
crowned with stars, you so pleased the high
Sun that he hid his own light in you.
Love urges me to have a word with you:
but I cannot begin without your help,
and the help of Him who placed himself
lovingly in you.

I call on Her who always responds positively to
those who call on Her with faith.

Virgin, if you are always willing to take extreme
misery away from the human condition, then
incline yourself to my prayer; help me in this
war, though I am on earth and you are queen
of Heaven.

There is no other [state] more worthy of glory
than the virginal state,
which has always been so exalted by God
in the highest realm.

Perfect virginity so pleased
the Supreme Father,
that he chose a virgin
for his earthly Mother:
holy, chaste, pure, and clean,
forever untouched in this state.

O cross, more resplendent than all the stars,
famous to the world and men,
most lovable, holier than all, who alone was
worthy to bear the gift of the world.
Sweet wood, sweet nails,
bearing sweet weight.
Save this present company
gathered together today in your praises.

We adore You, Christ, and we bless You,
who by Your Holy Cross have redeemed the
world: have mercy on us.

Sancta Dei genitrix, virgo semper Maria:
intercede pro nobis ad Dominum Jesum
Christum.

*Antiphon, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin
Mary*

Sancta Maria, letaniae della Madonna

Sancta Maria, sancte dei genitrix.
Sancta mater Christi.
Sancta mater Creatoris.
Sancta mater Apostolorum.
Sancta mater navigantium.

Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Inter natos mulierum, non surrexit maior
Ioanne Baptista.
Fuit homo missus a Deo cui nomen erat
Ioannes. Alleluia.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona nobis pacem.

Salve, regina, Mater misericordiae,
vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus exsules filii Hevae,

Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes in hac
lacrimarum valle.
Eia, ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos
misericordes oculos ad nos converte;
Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis
post hoc exilium ostende.
O clemens, O pia, O dulcis virgo Maria.

Antiphon, Compline, Trinity Sunday to Advent

Holy mother of God, eternal virgin Mary:
intercede for us to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Holy Mary, Holy mother of God.
Holy mother of Christ.
Holy mother of the Creator.
Holy mother of the Apostles.
Holy mother of the seafarers.

Among those born of women, there has not
risen a greater than John the Baptist.
There was a man sent from God whose name
was John. Alleluia.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the
world, have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the
world, have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the
world, grant us peace.

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
Hail our life, our sweetness and our hope.
To you do we cry, poor banished children of
Eve;
To you do we send up our sighs, mourning and
weeping in this vale of tears.
Turn then, most gracious advocate, your eyes
of mercy toward us;
And after this our exile, show unto us the
blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus.
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

The performers

Musica Secreta was founded by the late Deborah Roberts, co-founder of the Brighton Early Music Festival. For over thirty years, its members have performed, taught and recorded music written by and for women from the 15th to the 17th centuries. The musicians have performed with major ensembles, including The Tallis Scholars, The Sixteen, Tenebrae, Magnificat, Siglo d'Oro, Voces8, Ensemble Plus Ultra, BBC Singers, Joglaresa, and the Rose Consort. They have made eleven CDs, four of which are of music exclusively by historic women composers. Their pioneering research has been recognised by awards from the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women and the American Musicological Society. Their most recent recording, *Mother, Sister, Daughter* was named among the best albums of 2022 by *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*.

musicasecreta.org

Laurie Stras is Emeritus Professor of Music at the University of Southampton. She is a regular contributor to print and broadcast media and has published extensively on women singers in early music and popular music. Her 2018 monograph, *Women and Music in Sixteenth-Century Ferrara* (Cambridge University Press), was awarded the Otto Kinkeldey Prize from the American Musicological Society in 2019. She is grateful to the Leverhulme Trust for the award of a 2023/24 Emeritus Fellowship, which gave financial assistance for the research and recording of this project.

Celestial Sirens is a South Coast-based amateur and student women's voice choir dedicated to exploring a wide range of music associated with convents in the 16th and 17th centuries. The choir works both on its own and alongside Musica Secreta in a wide range of venues; one particular highlight was performing Sacred Hearts with Sarah Dunant at the Latitude Festival, clad in habits and wellies and appearing in a tent!