



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New from Lyrichord Early Music Series

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Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (1644-1704)

*The Sacred Mysteries: The Rosary Sonatas for violin & continuo*

Leah Gale Nelson, violin – with Daniel Swenberg, theorbo & Dongsok Shin, organ  
2CD set/LEMS 8079

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Joyful – Sorrowful – Glorious  
15 violin tunings – 16 evocative pieces

*“My four-stringed lyre, re-tuned in 15 different ways.” --H.I.F. Biber*

In this new Lyrichord recording, 21st century understanding of 17th century performance practice meets the formidable virtuosity of Biber’s violin writing. With the most extensive use of *scordatura* (re-tuning) in violin repertoire, each piece is given its own sound-world. Using a facsimile of the only surviving manuscript, gut strings, short bows, theorbo and chamber organ, these highly regarded period players offer a historical and impassioned approach to these improvisatory preludes, hymn-like sonatas, and spirited dance movements honoring the Mysteries of the Rosary. Listeners are moved by the power of this music, carrying us through joy, sorrow, and glory, reflecting scenes of life, death, and rebirth.

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In these unique and demanding works of early virtuosic violin writing, the player is urged to coax a variety of unusual sounds and effects from the instrument. In *scordatura*, the virtuosity is heightened as the violin strings are tightened or relaxed, harmonies and resonances are opened or restricted, tensions rise and fall, enhancing the distinctive character of each evocative piece.

With their collective research of historical performance practice, styles, contexts, and performing tools, and in keeping with the style of the time, these players indulge the imagination without obscuring the purpose of the music. The small continuo team is powerful and flexible, reflecting the extensive variety of color and character found throughout the collection.

Inspired by the Mysteries of the Rosary, 17<sup>th</sup> century Bohemian-born H.I.F. Biber put quill to paper to create this exquisite collection that moves the soul and connects the spiritual with the temporal. Regardless of one’s faith, the listener cannot help but be moved by the power of these pieces.

Violinist Leah Gale Nelson says of this journey, “I was first moved by the music and intrigued by the different tunings, then wanted to understand the original context for this music. We know that the 17th century listener easily recognized the sacred-music forms in the preludes, sonatas and fugues, as well as the dances, their feel and their pulse. We also know from the early sources that composers of this era conveyed specific and often intense emotions through musical rhetorical gestures. These are all things we strive to honor and hope to bring through in our music making, filled with imagination, letting the music speak through us today.”

The booklet includes extensive program notes written by Ms. Nelson, along with reproductions of sections of the manuscript showing violin tunings and Rosary scenes.

## Biographies

Violinist **Leah Gale Nelson** specializes in the historical performance practices of the 17th and 18th centuries. Based in New York City, she has performed as a chamber musician and soloist throughout North America and in Europe. Her expert and polished artistic interpretations of baroque and classical music have put her in demand as concertmaster throughout the United States. She has led performances of landmark literature for some of the finest choirs in New York, including Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610*, J.S. Bach's passions, cantatas, and *Mass in B Minor*, numerous mass settings of Haydn, Mozart, and Schubert, and the New York premiere of Telemann's *St. Matthew Passion* (1746). Ms. Nelson has served as concertmaster with Chicago Opera Theater and conductor Jane Glover in critically acclaimed productions of Monteverdi's operas in Chicago and New York; as guest director for Lyra Baroque Orchestra in Minneapolis; and has led Handel's *Messiah* in countless performances throughout the country. She frequently collaborates with dancers, filmmakers, and stage and choral directors, joining early music and historical practice with modern performance. With BALAM Dance Theatre she created *Fandango Fantasie*, performing her solo violin arrangement of Boccherini's "Fandango" Quintet, and her rendition of Biber's *Passacaglia* is in the repertoire of the dance company Isabel Gotzkowsky and Friends. In 2007, Ms. Nelson began a traversal of Biber's *Sacred Mysteries* in concerts at the Church of St. Luke in the Fields in New York and in Minneapolis at the Basilica of Saint Mary, a journey that inspired this recording. She spent her early days in early music primarily along the Northeast Corridor, playing with most of the early music ensembles from the Boston Camerata to the Smithsonian Chamber Orchestra, including the American Classical Orchestra, Clarion Music Society, Concert Royal, and Dublin's Opera Theatre Company (at the Brooklyn Academy of Music). Born in Texas and raised in Minnesota, Ms. Nelson holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Chicago Musical College and a Master of Music degree from Mannes College of Music in New York, where she studied violin with David Nadien and baroque violin with Nancy Wilson.

**Daniel Swenberg** specializes in historical plucked strings: Renaissance and Baroque lutes, theorbos, baroque and 19th-century guitars, and baroque mandolino. He performs regularly throughout North America and internationally with ensembles including ARTEK, REBEL, The Metropolitan Opera, Mr. Jones & the Engines of Destruction, Ensemble Viscera, New York City Opera, Opera Atelier/Tafelmusik, Catacoustic Ensemble, Orchestra of St. Luke's, Apollo's Fire, with soprano Nell Snaidas, and with Lizzy & the Theorboys. He has accompanied Renee Fleming and Kathleen Battle at Carnegie Hall. Daniel received awards from the Belgian American Educational Foundation (2000) for a study of 18th century chamber music for the lute, and a Fulbright Scholarship (1997) to study in Bremen, Germany at the Hochschule für Künste. He studied previously with Patrick O'Brien at Mannes College of Music, receiving a Master's degree in Historical Performance (Lute).

**Dongsok Shin** was born in Boston and played the piano from the age of four. Since the early 1980s he has specialized exclusively in early keyboard instruments. Much in demand as a soloist and continuo player, Mr. Shin has performed with ARTEK, Concert Royal, Early Music New York, Carmel Bach Festival, Clarion Music Society, Mark Morris Dance Group, New York Collegium, New York Philharmonic, Orchestra of St. Luke's, and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. He has toured throughout North America, Europe, and Mexico, has been heard on numerous radio broadcasts, and has recorded for Lyrichord, Newport Classic, Helicon, ATMA Classique, Hänssler Classic, Dorian Recordings, and Bridge Records. A member of the internationally renowned baroque ensemble REBEL since 1997, Mr. Shin was a founding member of the Mannes Camerata, receiving critical acclaim as music director for their productions of early-Baroque operas. He has been guest director as well as a member of NYS Baroque in Ithaca, NY. In his spare time, he tunes and maintains harpsichords in the New York area (he is the harpsichord technician for the Metropolitan Opera), and is known as a recording engineer, producer, and editor of numerous early music recordings.

**Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (1644-1704)**

***The Sacred Mysteries: The Rosary Sonatas for violin & continuo***

Leah Gale Nelson, violin, Daniel Swenberg, theorbo & Dongsok Shin, organ  
with Motomi Igarashi, violone (XII, The Ascension)

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**CD 1**

THE JOYFUL MYSTERIES

- I. The Annunciation
- II. The Visitation
- III. The Nativity
- IV. The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple
- V. The Finding of Jesus in the Temple

THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES

- VI. The Agony in the Garden
- VII. The Scourging at the Pillar
- VIII. The Crowning with Thorns
- IX. The Carrying of the Cross
- X. The Crucifixion

**CD 2**

THE GLORIOUS MYSTERIES

- XI. The Resurrection
  - XII. The Ascension
  - XIII. The Descent of the Holy Spirit
  - XIV. The Assumption of Mary
  - XV. The Coronation of Mary, Queen of Heaven
- The Guardian Angel (*Passaglia*)
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Recorded at St. Peter's Church-Chelsea, New York City, May 2010

Pitch: a<sup>2</sup> = 415 Hz

Temperament: quarter-comma meantone

Producer: Leah Gale Nelson

Recording Engineers: Michael P. Hesse, Dongsok Shin

Recording Producers: Charles Weaver, Grant Herreid

Digital Editing and Mastering: Dongsok Shin

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