

Programme Note by Chris Darwin: please use freely for non-commercial purposes

Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644 – 1704) Passaglia (1670ish)

Biber was a skilled Bohemian violinist and composer who at the time of writing the Passaglia, had started to work for the Archbishop of Salzburg. Biber had been sent by his previous employer, Prince-Bishop Karl II of Kroměříž, to Innsbruck to negotiate the purchase of new instruments from Jacob Stainer; but *en route* he defected to the Archbishop's court at Salzburg. He flourished there, producing not only instrumental music, but also both small and large scale sacred choral works. He became Kapellmeister and was ennobled as Biber von Bibern.

The Passaglia is the 16th and final sonata of his *Mystery*, or *Rosary Sonatas*. The first 15 are for violin and continuo, each depicting a different Mystery of the Rosary. All except the first and the final Passaglia employ a different *scordatura*, or mis-tuning of the open strings from the usual GDAE. In addition, the 11th (Resurrection) Sonata symbolically crosses the middle two strings to give a tuning of GGDD. One of the themes from the 15th Sonata almost exactly matches, and so was probably the inspiration for, Paganini's 24th Caprice for solo violin, which in turn inspired Brahms, Liszt and Rachmaninov. The Passaglia itself together with the 1696 suites for unaccompanied violin by Johann Paul von Westhoff provided models for J.S.Bach's monumental solo violin sonatas and partitas. Biber's Passaglia is a continuous sequence of variations on an ostinato 2-bar, 4-note motif.

