

Erbarme dich!

AYRES EXTEMPORAE



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BIOGRAPHY



Erbarme dich!

AYRES EXTEMPORAE

XENIA GOGU violin

VÍCTOR GARCÍA GARCÍA five-string cello

TERESA MADEIRA cello

Matthew Locke (c. 1621–1677)

Suite No. 5 in E minor (from *The Little Consort*)

1. Pavane 3:04

Heinrich Ignaz Biber (1644–1704)

Sonata No. 5 in E minor, C. 142

2. [...] – Adagio 2:13
3. Variatio – Presto 5:03
4. Aria – Variatio 3:03

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Sonata for viola da gamba No. 2 in D major, BWV1028

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5. Andante* 3:58

Ich armer Mensch, ich Sündenknecht, BWV55

6. ‘Erbarme dich’* 3:58

Heinrich Ignaz Biber

Sonata No. 6 in C minor, C. 143

7. [...] 1:17
8. Passacaglia 4:13
9. [...] – Adagio 2:54
10. Gavotte 2:44
11. Adagio – Allegro 3:13

Johann Sebastian Bach

Sonata for viola da gamba No. 3 in G minor, BWV1029

12. Adagio* 5:28

In allen meinen Taten, BWV97

13. 'Ich traue seiner Gnaden'* 5:15

Sonata for viola da gamba in G major, BWV1027*

14. Adagio 3:50

15. Allegro ma non tanto 3:32

16. Andante 2:30

17. Allegro moderato 3:14

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Andreas Oswald (1634–1665)

Violin Sonata in D major (No. 6 of *Partiturbuch Ludwig*)

18. Ciaccona 4:22

Johann Sebastian Bach

Violin Sonata in A major, BWV1015

19. Andante un poco* 3:07

*Transcribed for five-string cello, violin and cello

Total Running Time 67:35

A note from Ayres Extemporae

Our journey as Ayres Extemporae, began with the idea and desire to experiment with the realization of the basso continuo on the cello. The practice of using the cello as a harmonic instrument is well documented and was customary amongst proficient players until well into the nineteenth century. Taking the skillset of those cellists as a source of inspiration, we started exploring the different possibilities when combining two cellos of different sizes in a search for new colours in the continuo lines. Therefore, we unite in our experiment a four-string baroque cello – played with an underhand bow grip when playing the bass line only – with a smaller five-string cello. The larger instrument takes the task of providing a grounding bass line, resembling the role of a violone or of the left hand of a keyboard player, while the smaller five-string cello is free to fully realize the harmonies, introduce countermelodies and extemporize ornaments, as the right hand of a keyboard player would do. The presence of a top string, usually tuned to an E (one octave lower than the violin’s open E string), also acts as a connecting element between the top line and the continuo accompaniment, from which it can depart at times to dialogue with the violin.

With flexibility in the roles taken by each of the instruments, we are continuously in search of all the colours and textures available to us within the combination of these three instruments of the violin family, which quickly made us realize that this specific instrumentation was also suited for the performance of consort music in three parts, as well as for any music in three equal parts.

As the five-string cello has a tessitura similar to that of a viola da gamba, we also realized it would be possible to adapt J. S. Bach’s sonatas for viola da gamba and obbligato harpsichord into a trio sonata version with equal parts, in which the violin and the larger cello each take one hand of the harpsichord. This naturally also led us to arrange Bach sonatas for violin and obbligato harpsichord with the same approach, where the five-string cello plays the right hand of the keyboard, with only minor changes such as octaviating.

Additionally, the vocal character of the instrument inspired us to make instrumental versions of tenor arias, where the five-string cello takes over the voice and becomes the singer. This album is the result of all these experiments we did in the last few years. We are now very excited to present it.

Erbarme dich! represents a spiritual journey from torment to redemption built around the instrumental transcriptions of arias and sonatas by J. S. Bach, interwoven with the expressive depth of works by Biber and Locke. It is a profound reflection on these universal themes, tracing the full spectrum of human emotion from anger, guilt or remorse to acceptance and, ultimately, peace. The aria from the cantata BWV55 lends its name to this programme: a plea for mercy of touching vulnerability, signalling the beginning of the journey towards absolution.

TORMENT

Matthew Locke's E minor *Pavane* from *The Little Consort* acts as a prelude to Biber's Sonata in E minor, establishing a dark and introspective atmosphere. Its sombre character sets the emotional stage from which the journey of the programme unfolds.

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The Bohemian-born Austrian violinist and composer Heinrich Ignaz Biber is regarded as one of the greatest violin virtuosos of the seventeenth century. His Sonata in E minor, C. 142, is part of a set of eight violin sonatas published in 1681, a bold and groundbreaking set where he pushes the boundaries of form, dissonance, and technique – often featuring complex double stops, extreme upper-register passages, and striking expressive effects. This composition gives voice to a sense of helplessness and internal struggle. In the version presented here, the virtuoso violin writing is supported by a realization of the basso continuo with the two cellos, providing resonance and profoundness to the expressive display of the top line.

PATH TO REDEMPTION

As we move from darkness towards redemption, the opening *Andante* from J. S. Bach's Sonata for viola da gamba and harpsichord in D major, BWV1028, introduces a moment of reflection. It resonates with the 'Erbarme dich' aria from the St. Matthew Passion and echoes a similar emotional core, setting the stage for the heart of the programme that is the aria 'Erbarme dich' from the cantata *Ich armer Mensch, ich Sündenknecht*, BWV55. The five-string cello takes the role of the voice, finding a different way of displaying this music through its instrumental tone. This aria represents the soul's plea for mercy and forgiveness.

8 Biber's Sonata in C minor, C. 143, follows as a symbol of transformation. Beginning with a haunting *Passacaglia* in C minor that suggests the weight of inevitability and guilt, it gradually evolves towards a search for redemption. Biber is best known for his imaginative style and for the extensive use of *scordatura*, a technique involving alternate tunings to achieve unique tonal colours and expressive effects, as heard at the end of the *Passacaglia*. A *scordatura* is indicated to be used by the violin, which must tune the top E string a whole step down to D. In our performance, the five-string cello joins the violin with the same tuning. Thanks to this change, there are five open D strings vibrating together in the ensemble, which produces a wonderfully resonant effect. In this new *scordatura* tuning, a melancholic, yet lighter *Gavotte* follows, and the sonata concludes triumphantly in C major, in a dramaturgical arc that captures the emotional shift from remorse to self-acceptance and release.

FORGIVENESS

The *Adagio* from Bach's Sonata for viola da gamba and harpsichord in G minor, BWV1029, marks the transition into self-forgiveness. Its luminous B flat major key and the lyrical dialogue between the five-string cello and the violin offer a moment of stillness and warmth after the turbulence of the preceding pieces. The aria 'Ich traue seiner Gnaden' from the cantata *In allen meinen Taten* further deepens this mood; its text, 'I trust his mercy', becomes a musical statement of inner peace and self-compassion. Again, the

five-string cello assumes the vocal line, supported by the obbligato violin and continuo line, evoking a gentle, reassuring embrace.

Personal absolution is reached with Bach's Sonata for viola da gamba and harpsichord in G major, BWV1027, here transcribed for five-string cello, violin and cello, underlining the genre of the trio sonata. Bach frequently reused and reshaped his own material, so the existence of a trio version for two flutes and continuo (BWV1039) could indicate that this sonata may well have grown out of this practice. The composer wrote extensively for the five-string cello and violoncello piccolo (a yet smaller four- or five-string instrument) as an obbligato instrument in many cantata arias and famously for the solo cello suite BWV1012 'à cinq cordes'. Therefore, presenting this sonata in a three-voice texture with the five-string cello taking the gamba line remains true to Bach's musical language. It opens on a serene, almost contemplative first movement, followed by a vivid *Allegro ma non tanto* and an introspective *Andante*, before the finale lifts the mood with a lively fugal theme, bringing the journey to a jubilant resolution.

PEACE

The *Ciaccona* from Andreas Oswald's Sonata in D major (*Partiturbuch Ludwig*, 1662) brings us to peace at last. A predecessor of Bach as court organist in Weimar, Oswald wrote in the *stylus phantasticus*, the free, imaginative and seemingly extemporaneous style of composing also cultivated by Biber. This peaceful yet vivid and spirited *Ciaccona* creates a serene and luminous atmosphere.

As a final reflection, the *Andante un poco* from J. S. Bach's Sonata for violin and harpsichord in A major, BWV1015, brings our journey to a close. It is written as a strict canon from beginning to end between the violin and the harpsichord's right hand – here performed by the five-string cello. The canon unfolds over a bass line played by the larger cello in pizzicato, evoking a serene sense of inevitability, as if everything is exactly as it is meant to be. The movement's perfect form and its melancholic character invite an introspective, timeless gaze on the journey completed at last.

AYRES EXTEMPORAE

Ayres Extemporae is an early music ensemble based in Belgium and the Netherlands. It is formed by Moldovan violinist Xenia Gogu, Spanish cellist Víctor García García, who plays a five-string cello, and Portuguese cellist Teresa Madeira. Winners of the York Early Music International Young Artists Competition in 2024, they were also awarded the First Prize and the Audience Prize at the Semana de Música Antigua de Estella-Lizarra in 2022. The same year, they won the Second Prize at the Biagio Marini International Early Music Competition in Germany. They have performed at festivals such as MA Festival Brugge, York Early Music Festival, Schwetzingen SWR Festspiele, Brighton Early Music Festival, FestiVita! Brussels Early Music Festival, Ecos Festival, Festival Impulso Canarias in La Palma and À Corda Cello Festival in Portugal.

10 An innovative feature of their proposal is the experimentation in the realization of the basso continuo, inspired by recent research on the use of bowed string instruments in the basso continuo in Corelli's time. The combination of a four-string cello and a five-string cello brings new textures to the traditional instrumentation of cello and harpsichord. Through *ex temporae* improvisation of countermelodies, ornamentation, and chordal realization, they aim to enhance the diverse affects in the music and search for a variety of textures and colours, also achieved by the changes in the roles of each instrument.

They met in Belgium at the Collegium Vocale Gent Academy, in 2020, and have since then continued to develop a shared passion of playing together. The members of Ayres Extemporae have studied at the departments of early music of the Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles, the University of Arts in Berlin, and the University of Arts in Bremen; and Víctor concluded his doctorate at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in 2024. They perform regularly in ensembles such as Collegium Vocale Gent, Balthasar Neumann Choir & Orchestra, Vox Luminis, B'Rock Orchestra, Utopia Orchestra, Orchestre des Champs-Élysées, Cappella Mediterranea, Orchestre de l'Opéra Royal de Versailles, Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique and Orquestra Barroca Casa da Música.

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— Ayres Extemporae



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The biennial competition for early music ensembles takes place as part of the York Early Music Festival and is recognised as a major international platform for emerging talent in the early music world.

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