Marco Antonio
CAVAZZONI
(c. 1490–c. 1560)

Complete Works
Italian Ricercars

Glen Wilson, Harpsichord

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'Julio Segni's playing is certainly of a rare beauty, but he is worth far more on quilled instruments than on the organ.'

This reference to the initiator of the epochal *Musica Nova* of 1540 is just one of many contemporary documents that show the importance of the harpsichord and its smaller cousins in early 16th-century Italy. Our recording is an attempt to do something about the universal blindness to their significance during the high Renaissance. Everybody knows something about Raphael, Michelangelo, and Titian, but nobody knows the names of the musicians who were their close friends, who played the harpsichord for their patrons – Pope Leo X, the procurators of San Marco and the Doges in Venice, the brilliant court of Urbino – and who were members of the private academies that flourished in every Italian city. My reasons for believing the masters represented here to have been primarily harpsichordists are set out for the interested reader in an essay available online at **www.naxos.com/notes/572998** and on my website **www.glenwilson.eu**.

We take as our centrepiece the second surviving printed edition of music for the instrument, by Marco Antonio Cavazzoni (1523). He may well have been the arranger of the pieces in the first (*Andrea Antico, 1517*, Naxos 8.572983). A second focus is on the transformation of the main form, the ricercare. This term for a while covered anything played on a lute or keyboard instrument with which no words were associated, but basic line of development of such works is from something (semi-) improvised to a work of the greatest complexity.

The lost art of polyphony – the simultaneous interweaving of more than one melodic line – was once the glory and pinnacle of Western music. As it was perfected in Italy during the early 16th century, it had the straightforward, muscular beauty of ancient Greek, and is now equally as dead to a world drowning in ephemera. Its Hellenistic late flowering in the 17th and 18th centuries, the fugue, still echoes faintly, thanks largely to the harpsichord works of J.S. Bach. But the foundation upon which that last great master of polyphony built his edifices – the Italian ricercare for instrumental ensemble or keyboard – has been consigned, if anywhere, to university classrooms, where one imagines reluctant students of music history yawning as they consult their social media.

Cavazzoni was born into a noble family in Bologna at an unknown date toward the end of the 15th century. His playing was called 'divino' while he was still a teenager, and his precocious talents, together with his good upbringing, must have smoothed his path into the service of the Duchess of Urbino, daughter of Isabella d'Este, before 1512; he most likely followed her into exile back at her hometown Mantua in 1516. Those early years earned him the sobriquet 'd'Urbino'. Later he is documented as a private harpsichordist to Leo X in Rome, as colleague and eventual successor to Vincenzo da Modena, who had played a pedal harpsichord to the famous Duke of Ferrara, Ercole I (his patroness's grandfather) on his deathbed. The oldest harpsichord still in existence was owned by that most extravagant and most melomane of the Renaissance popes, who is said to have kept Cavazzoni 'very close to him'; it is pictured on our cover. Later still we find Cavazzoni as a member of the charmed Venetian circle around Bembo, Aretino (who addressed two of his famous letters to him), and Titian. Posts as organist at Chioggia and as a chorister at San Marco (intermittently from 1517) rounded off his illustrious career; he died sometime after 1560.

The 1523 print is divided into two sections of four pieces each; the first comprises two ricercars as preludes to two arrangements for keyboard of motets in praise of the Virgin Mary – a customary initial nod to the Church authorities, found even in as raucous a gathering as that described in Antonfrancesco Doni's *Dialogo della Musica* (1554). Similar works of private devotion are found in other sources where the harpsichord is specifically indicated. In the second group we find arrangements of French *chansons*. Much effort has been expended on finding the composers of the original vocal versions of these, but Cavazzoni claims them as his own on the title page, and there is no reason to be amazed at such a sophisticate dabbling in the fashionable new form. The deconstructed textures of all six of the texted pieces reveal the work of a keyboard player, not that of a composer of serious polyphony.

But it is the two ricercars which are landmarks of the highest order. Their length alone, and especially their consistent use of a small number of motifs and bold modulation, are unparalleled in previous instrumental music. They rather surprisingly have their roots in Austria, where the harpsichord had been invented a century and a quarter previously: the lengthy improvisations by the emperor Maximilian's keyboardist Paul Hofhaimer are praised to the skies by (among many others) the brother of his student Dionisio Memo, who was organist at San Marco by around 1510 and later a bosom friend of England's king Henry VIII. A very few pieces by Memo may have survived under the cloak of anonymity, but I think that in Cavazzoni's ricercars we have the clearest evidence of Hofhaimer's late style, one of the quantum leaps in the keyboard tradition, as transmitted to Italy by Memo.

A couple of Memo's relics possibly come down to us in the first printed lute books of 1507, which contain the earliest known ricercars, which are usually attributed to the arranger of the other pieces in these two collections, Francesco Spinacino. In fact, all but one of the ricercars are anonymous, and are of such diverse complexion that they could not possibly be by one man. The publisher Petrucci, in one of the strangest forewords in music history, offers his blessing to anyone doubting their true authorship. The musical texts are often disastrously corrupt, to the point of incomprehensibility. Petrucci was clearly in over his head in attempting to print lute tablature; he soon gave up, and lost his monopoly to Antico in Rome. A few of the ricercars, once deciphered, closely resemble Cavazzoni's. Our track 1 is my attempt to reconstruct one of them for harpsichord. These pieces are far too organised to be classed as simple, improvised lute-preludes, as they always are in the musicological literature; they are embryonic toccatas, such as continued to flourish until Ercole Pasquini changed the landscape a century later.

This is followed by a ricercar in a different style by the oldest named composer of such works, Jacobo (or Giacomo) Fogliano. A prodigy who got into trouble with a lady in his early teens, he is already described in 1483 as a master of the harpsichord. He spent most of his long life (c. 1468–1548) in Modena, where his tomb-monument can still be seen in the splendid cathedral. Our track 2 is preserved in the precious manuscript collection at Castell'Arquato, and cannot be dated; hence its place in the evolution of the form is difficult to determine. It is clearly more contrapuntally oriented than the freer types, but not to the extent of some of our later examples.

Cavazzoni's two ricercar-motet pairs come next 3–6. In order to offer some contrast to the consistent liveliness of the four *chansons* 7 9 11 13 that end his collection, I have inserted three works by other composers between them. The first of these is a masterpiece beyond all praise, by the most influential composer/teacher of early 16th-century Italy, the 'eccelentissimo e rarissimo' (*sic* Zarlino) Adrian Willaert from Flanders. With two countrymen, Clemens non Papa and Nicolas Gombert, he established the classic late-Renaissance style of vocal composition: a short theme is passed in imitation through the several voices of a polyphonic texture, and dovetails with the next, in a tightly-woven network which requires the highest level of musical craftsmanship. Only students of the art who have attempted such things in counterpoint class can appreciate how difficult it is to make it seem as easy as the great masters did.

The aforementioned *Musica Nova* of 1540 marks a watershed in the development of the ricercar, and of instrumental music in general. Here, ephemeral improvisation is set aside, and the new imitative style is transferred to the keyboard (and to consorts of other instruments if so desired), in works of a length and complexity which might exhaust and confound a church choir. The print, which survives only in a bass part-book, can be largely reconstructed using a reprint from Lyons, which is advertised on the title page as a means of 'learning to play the harpsichord'; the organ is not mentioned. Giulio Segni dominates the publication with thirteen pieces, but Willaert is present as a kind of godfather with at least three. The longest of them (the masterpiece previously mentioned) 8 is an exploration of the tetrachord, hexachord and octave scales, with a central section on la-sol-fa-re-mi, in homage

to the 'Prince of Music', Josquin des Prez, and one of a long line of pieces on this theme (which means *Iascia fare mi* – 'let me do it'). A series of longish canons – difficult to hear, and hard even to find on paper – densely surrounded by imitations of fragments, hold the piece together. It culminates with two joyous melodies developed from the previous material, the last one breaking into triple time at the end.

Segni himself, noted in several sources as a brilliant harpsichordist whose playing was enough to utterly distract Pope Clement VII from an important political conference in the Vatican, is present with a ricercar 10 of yet another type. A more standard example from *Musica Nova* can be found on my Naxos recording of the *Tientos and Variations* of Antonio de Cabezón [8.572475–76], since it was falsely attributed to the wonderful blind Spaniard in an edition of 1557. The present slow, solemn work is from Castell'Arquato, and may be intended for the mystical moment in the Mass when the priest prepares the communion host. If so, it belongs to the organ, but I have appropriated it with the same license used by organists for the rest of this music.

The final insert 12 acquaints the listener with Cavazzoni's son Girolamo, who proudly took his father's honorific 'd'Urbino'. His two published books of keyboard music establish him as a distinguished composer in his own right, in spite of the first, printed in 1543 when he was probably in his late teens, consisting of mere juvenilia, as he modestly informs his dedicatee. These early works are in a transitional style between the free and the strictly contrapuntal. Not so our track 14, a brilliant and thoroughly worked-out piece with no trace of youthful exuberance, which, astoundingly, had already appeared in *Musica Nova*; the young man's name appears there in small print, indicating a student relationship with one of the project's guiding spirits – probably Segni, whose Roman career paralleled that of Girolamo's father.

Title page of *Recerchari Motetti Canzoni Libro Primo Composti per Marcoantonio di Bologna* (1523) (Newberry Library, Chicago)

We then return to that remarkable master for his only other preserved work, a ricercar 15 clearly composed later than 1523, in the style of the classic Venetian toccata: a slow opening, and sections of passage-work alternating with fugal episodes.

The term ricercar was broad enough to cover the complete reworking of a madrigal such as that by Jacques Brunel of Cipriano de Rore's five-part 'Cantai *mentre ch'i arsi*' 16. Brunel, a famous French-born keyboardist in Ferrara whose 'normal' ricercars preserved in manuscript helped pave the way for a yet more learned style, takes each of de Rore's brief themes and gives them a treatment even more expressive than that of the great Netherlander's original, heightening the colours suggested by Giovanni Brevio's lovely sonnet on the old topic of a rejected lover in tearful contemplation of his new-found liberty. Brunel steps back and lets de Rore speak unaltered for the final line, 'Alas, there is no place for peace in the heart of a lover'. To balance all five voices and make them clearly audible is as great a challenge as a harpsichordist can face.

Claudio Veggio was an early madrigalist from Piacenza; his few keyboard compositions reveal him as one of the most advanced experimenters of his time. This magnificent ricercar 17 shows yet another direction into which the form veered, since it clearly points the way to the colourful, many-sectioned Venetian sonata from the beginning of the 17th century.

Both Veggio and Girolamo Parabosco make rare personal appearances in Doni's *Dialogo*, Veggio as a feisty character eager to make music, and jealous of Parabosco's many-sided genius; the latter as madly in love with a woman who is the main subject of the evening's debate. Parabosco was not only first organist of San Marco, but also a respected poet and composer of stage works. At the time of *Musica Nova*'s publication he was still listed among the students. His ricercar on the ancient prayer for peace, *Da pacem Domine* 18, may have been connected to the end of a war of Venice against the Ottomans. It is a rare example of a ricercar taking the form of the oldest type of Western organ music: a *cantus firmus* from Gregorian chant in long notes in the tenor, with added counterpoint. In this case, each line of the plainsong is preceded in the discant or the alto by a pre-imitation. Improvising similar pieces from a book of liturgical chant was a church musician's main job for a thousand years, but he learned his art on stringed instruments, not in cold churches where somebody had to be paid to pump the bellows.

Claudio Merulo, Parabosco's successor in the foremost organist's post in the world, was the most famous keyboardist of the late 16th century, a kind of Franz Liszt *avant la lettre*. His brilliant but superficial pieces, mostly published by himself, cannot stand comparison with those of his second organist, Andrea Gabrieli, with whom he is said to have 'duelled' on the two organs of the Doge's incomparable chapel. His early ricercars are especially disappointing. One of them is offered here 19 to mark the beginning of the decline and eventual fall of Italian keyboard music; it is rich in effect, but poor in contrapuntal substance. For that, the reader is invited to listen to my recording of a selection of Gabrieli's masterworks [Naxos 8.572198]. Merulo – tired, as I suspect, of being out-duelled by Gabrieli – quit his post at San Marco, and opted for an easy life serving the corrupt nobility of Florence and Parma. His best ricercars can be found, in a show of late regret, as sections of a toccata printed shortly after his death in 1604. By that time, a young man from Ferrara named Girolamo Frescobaldi was beginning to spread his wings. Like J.S. Bach a century later, he both heralded a new golden age and defended what was greatest from the past.

Glen Wilson

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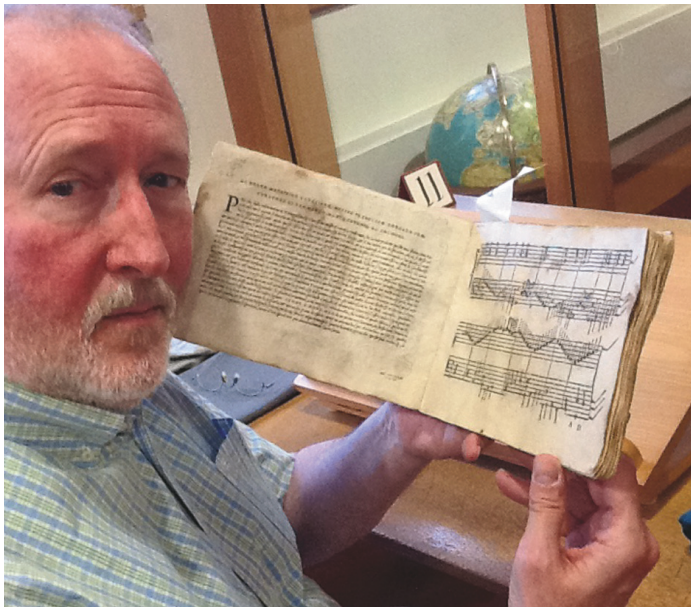
Glen Wilson was born in Illinois in 1952. He studied at The Juilliard School before moving to Holland in 1971 as a student of Gustav Leonhardt. He was active in Dutch musical life for twenty years (harpsichordist of the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, Netherlands Opera, Quadro Hotteterre and duo-partner of Leonhardt, Wieland Kuyken, Alice Harnoncourt, Michael Chance, and many others) before moving to Bavaria as professor at the Music University of Würzburg. He has since conducted his edition of Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* for the Netherlands Opera over sixty times on three continents (DVD on BBC Opus Arte). Wilson's recordings include seven solo CDs for Teldec/Das Alte Werk, a continuing solo series for Naxos, the Mozart/da Ponte operas with Nikolaus Harnoncourt, and many chamber music discs. His edition of the *Préludes* of Louis Couperin, which he ascribed in a recent article to Louis' brother Charles, was awarded the German Music Publishers' Prize for best scholarly edition, and his recent Naxos recording of the complete works of Ferdinando Richardson [Naxos 8.572997] received the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik. For more information, visit **www.glenwilson.eu**



Glen Wilson with Marco Antonio Cavazzoni's 1523 print, one of two copies extant *(Newberry Library, Chicago)*

Marco Antonio Cavazzoni – private harpsichordist to the Duchess of Urbino and Pope Leo X, friend of Titian and Bembo – composed some of the most important milestones in the history of instrumental music. They were published in Venice by Vercellese (1523), the second edition of Italian keyboard music after that of Andrea Antico [Naxos 8.572983]. Usually assigned to the organ, they are restored here to the harpsichord where they originally belonged, as explained in an online essay by Glen Wilson. Contemporary examples further illustrate the fascinating development of Cavazzoni's major form, the ricercar. The project celebrates the 500th anniversary of the harpsichord on the cover (the world's oldest), which was owned by Leo X and undoubtedly played on by Cavazzoni.

ACCADEMIA MUSICALE CHIGIANA

Marco Antonio CAVAZZONI
(c. 1490 – c. 1560)

1. Anonymous: **Ricercare No. 34 from *Intabulatura de Lauto Libro Primo* (1507)** (arr. for keyboard by Glen Wilson) 1:57
2. Giacomo FOGLIANO (c. 1468–1548): **Ricercare** 2:32

Marco Antonio CAVAZZONI: ***Recerchari Motetti Canzoni Libro Primo Composti per Marcoantonio di Bologna* (1523)***

3. **Recercare primo*** 4:55
4. **Salve Virgo*** 2:53
5. **Recercare secondo*** 6:11
6. **O Stella Maris*** 4:04
7. **Perdone moi si je folie*** 2:37
8. Adrian WILLAERT (c. 1490–1562): **Ricercar XIV (*Musica Nova*)** 7:07
9. Marco Antonio CAVAZZONI: **Madame vous aves mon cuor*** 3:21
10. Giulio SEGNI (1498–1561): **Ricercar per musica ficta** 3:56
11. Marco Antonio CAVAZZONI: **Plus ne regres*** 2:21
12. Girolamo CAVAZZONI (c. 1525–after 1577): **Ricercar terzo (*Libro Primo*, 1543)** 5:03
13. Marco Antonio CAVAZZONI: **Lautre jor per un matin*** 2:54
14. Girolamo CAVAZZONI: **Ricercar XX (*Musica Nova*)** 5:54
15. Marco Antonio CAVAZZONI: **Recercada (Castell'Arquato)** 2:49
16. Jacques BRUNEL (d. 1564): **Ricercare sopra 'Cantai mentre ch'i arsi' (Cipriano de Rore)** 8:13
17. Claudio VEGGIO (c. 1510–after 1543): **Recercada del primo tono** 5:00
18. Girolamo PARABOSCO (c. 1524–1557): **Da pacem Domine (*Musica Nova*)** 2:08
19. Claudio MERULO (1533–1604): **Ricercar del quarto tuono (Libro Primo, 1567)** 4:46

Glen Wilson, Harpsichord

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Playing Time 79:34