



# Lammermuir Festival

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11 September 2021, 11:00am | Stenton Parish Church

**Alex McCartney** theorbo

*The Apollo of the Theorbo*

**Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger** (1580–1651)

Prelude No. 5, Book 4  
Prelude No. 6, Book 4  
Toccatà No. 3, Book 3  
Prelude No. 14, Book 4  
Prelude No. 12, Book 4  
Toccatà No. 7, Book 3  
Toccatà No. 9, Book 4  
Toccatà No. 10, Book 4  
Prelude No. 1, Book 4,  
Corrente No. 7, Book 4  
Gagliarda, Book 3  
Passacaglia, Book 4  
Prelude No. 9, Book 4  
Prelude No. 10, Book 4  
Toccatà No. 5, Book 3  
Toccatà No. 8, Book 4  
Caponà, Book 4  
Kapsberger, Book 4  
Canarios, Book 4  
Piva, Book 4  
Sarabanda, Book 4



**LOTTERY FUNDED**

# Lammermuir Festival 2021

Welcome to the 12th Lammermuir Festival — we're so glad to be back!

Two years ago, when we celebrated the landmark of our 10th festival we (perhaps fortunately!) had no inkling of what would unfold only a few months later. Then last year we mounted a small online festival and were grateful for the enthusiastic support, not only of our regular audience, but of many new Lammermuir followers around the world.

This year feels like both a celebration and a rebirth — not quite 'business as usual', but very much a festival that we have yearned, through many bleak months, to bring back to this beautiful part of Scotland and to share with you.

We have made a virtue of the new reality of international travel restrictions by inviting many old friends among our distinguished artists, but there are new faces too — headed by our Artist in Residence, the American pianist Jeremy Denk, and by vocal ensemble The Gesualdo Six. We explore a rich variety of repertoire and offer unique projects such as Hugo Wolf's *Italian Songbook*, an anniversary tribute to Dennis Brain, an intriguing afternoon chez the Wagners and a recital dedicated to a great British piano duo. We are delighted to welcome Scottish Opera back and look forward to BBC Radio 3's series of live vocal recitals.

For Covid-safety reasons we have concentrated many of our events in the larger venues in order to retain social distancing of one metre in our audience seating.

We are most grateful to Creative Scotland for their continuing support and to EventScotland for generously supporting our online streaming programme which will add a new and, we hope, permanent dimension to the festival.

We are fortunate indeed to have a number of generous individual donors, trusts and sponsors who, along with the support of our Friends of the Lammermuir Festival, make the festival possible. We thank each and every supporter most warmly, for without them we simply would not exist.

**Hugh Macdonald and James Waters**  
Joint Artistic Directors

Next year's Lammermuir Festival dates:

**9-19 September 2022**



## Lammermuir Festival

### Become part of the Lammermuir Festival Family

Our valued supporters are at the very heart of our festival, helping it flourish, prosper and reach out so that as many people as possible can enjoy it every year.

To ensure that we can continue to bring people together in celebration of beautiful music in beautiful places, we need your support and invite you to become a Lammermuir Festival Friend.

To learn more about the benefits of becoming a Festival Friend and to sign up, please visit [www.lammermuirfestival.co.uk/friends](http://www.lammermuirfestival.co.uk/friends).

#### Welcome to Stenton Parish Church

William Burn, pioneer of the Scottish Baronial style, designed many fine buildings in Scotland including St John the Evangelist in Edinburgh's Princes Street.

His splendid little church (1829), Stenton Parish Church, in the tranquil village of Stenton brings St John's to mind with its impressive square tower. Beautifully simple inside, its acoustic is ideal for chamber music.

*Lammermuir Festival is grateful to the Minister and Kirk Session of the Parish of Traprain for making the church available for this concert.*

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## Programme notes

**Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger's** (c.1580-1651) works for theorbo are virtuosic, exploratory and peculiar: his baffling and brilliant use of rhythm (at a time when most other virtuoso players were pounding the semi-quavers) stewed with his surprisingly-odd chromatic harmony lends his music an obscure and surprising quality.

Aside from what Kapsberger himself wrote in the prefaces to his publications, most of what we now know comes from snippets such as this description from his associate Kircher:

Noble musician Hieronymus Kapsberger Germanus, author of innumerable writings and distinguished musical publications, who with his superb genius and other scientific skills in which he was expert, successfully penetrated the secrets of music. He is the one to whom posterity owes all those elegant graces, which are called *strascini*, *mordenti*, and *gruppi*, to speak unclassically, applied to the tiorba and lute

Kapsberger died in January 1651 in Rome at the age of about seventy-one. He arrived in Rome after 1604 and, with the exception of occasional excursions and travel, remained there for the rest of his life.

Knowing Kapsberger was working creatively in Rome raises several questions: How is it to work creatively in an environment that bears so many traces of ancient history? How does one begin to formulate the new, the modern, in a place where the past is so present? The thought of innovating alongside such history, attempting to (in the modern vein) surpass it, and encourage a nascent development in a new style seems formidable. Yet in the seventeenth century, Rome fostered a remarkable diversity in Kapsberger's compositions for the solo theorbo; from the polemically wacky to the serene and sublime.

Working and living in the city of Rome, as with all habitats, is a unique cultural experience. In the seventeenth century much more of the vast ruins of Ancient Rome were still standing and the presence of these monumental buildings (as we still see now) is unavoidable. Wherever you might turn in the city, history — both the city's history and therefore one's own — is present.

At the turn from the sixteenth into the seventeenth century Italy was still resonating from the almost-constant internal wars that had torn the country up for over a hundred years (from 1454 until the time of peace in 1559). Part of the reason for the country appearing to be a thriving exponent for warfare was the indelicate power-seeking of not only the internal city states (Florence, Venice and Milan, for example) but the external forces looking for wealth and influence (such as the two main culprits in the Habsburg-Valois struggle). Aside from the devastating squabbles of Francis I (Valois) and Charles V (Habsburg) the nature of the Italian city-state inherently effused selfish and aggressive behaviour. Each city, ruled by a prince (or similar) or council, considered themselves to be autonomous and diplomatic entities — there was little federal convergence, aside from the various peace and trade treaties the cities would make and break at their whim (often

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in order to behave more selfishly and aggressively). These factional cities were nonetheless united by many factors including Catholicism and historical lineage. Rome had long been in a symbiotic relationship with the Vatican and the seat of God's power on earth — and indeed the 'Papal States' controlled a large area of Italy in the 1400s. Most Italian cities also linked their own heritage to Rome (whether true or invented) and manufacturers would proudly advertise their blood-connection to Rome's noble families. In a synecdochal sense, Rome might be considered Italy, as the other cities would ostensibly often seek the foundation of their own cultures to Rome (all roads lead to... etc.) — forming a diasporic image.

Boccaccio, in the fourteenth century, described the ruins of Baiae (near Naples) as 'old walls, yet new for modern spirits.' A sentiment that Ciriaco de' Pizziccolli seemingly shared, as when he was asked why he made countless sketches of the monuments and antiquities of ancient Rome, he replied 'to wake the dead'.

With these thoughts one can conjure an idea of the many-sized wheels of time turning at different rates offering re-cyclings of history at different ages, always aware of the past and always creating the modern — a gesture that those of us involved in historical performance also express.

It is extremely difficult to trace Kapsberger's musical influences; this is partly down to the lack of information regarding his early life and presumed musical tuition. Nothing was known about him until the publication of *Libro primo d'intavolatura di chitarrone* in 1604 — his fame throughout his career makes it surprising that we know so little about him now. However, we can easily construct a narrative for Kapsberger's life once he arrives in, the then thriving, city of Rome.

Wealthy Roman families, such as the Bentivoglio, the Aldobrandini and the Barberini had a great deal of influence on the musical scene in Rome and it was in this environment of patronised experimentalism that Kapsberger's compositional style would flourish. By 1623, Kapsberger was indisputably one of Rome's premier musicians. He was certainly one of the busiest, having published fourteen works since his arrival in the city. Within another year Kapsberger's status would be augmented even further, for in August of 1623 the Pope's crown changed heads for the second time in only three years, and Maffeo Barberini was crowned Pope Urban VIII.

Kapsberger was lucky, or talented enough to be patronised by the Barberini household and he was officially given a salary with payments dating from December 1624. Kapsberger and Frescobaldi were non-resident musicians in Francesco Barberini's household. We know that Kapsberger's name is not present on the records of the Barberini operas and therefore he does not appear to have been active as a continuo player for these performances. This limits his appearances to the academies that met inside and outside the Barberini Palace — sadly, there are no records of these.

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This programme focuses primarily on Kapsberger's preludes and toccatas with only a few dance movements (gagliarda, corrente etc.) thrown in for their notable and enjoyable peculiarities. All the pieces are from Kapsberger's 3rd (1626) and 4th (1640) books for theorbo (chitarrone). Kapsberger's 2nd book of theorbo music still remains to be found. By the 1610s the toccata was a fantasy form born out of sixteenth-century preambulatory forms such as the prelude, ricercar and 'tastar de corde' (to tune the strings): juxtaposed sections of blindingly florid passages and fugal polyphony are abruptly joined in a theatrical improvisatory style.

I have selected these works not only for their obvious virtuosity, but also for their subtlety. The liberty offered within the toccata style leads the performer to indulge urges to rush through fantastically quick passages and also to calmly tend moments of hesitation and silence. It feels to me that the colliding of intense and frantic passages with the hesitant and tardy holds a particularly human charm.

Alex McCartney

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**Alex McCartney** has a busy performing schedule which takes him to concert halls across the world.

Alex's latest recording *Weiss in Nostalgia* was released in 2018: 'He plays it as if he'd never done anything else or had never considered any other music.' *Guitarre & Laute*

Alex is also a BBC Introducing Artist and performs on BBC Radio 3.

Alex specialises in chamber music. His continuo playing has been described as 'sinewy and sensuous, ornaments rarely exaggerated' (*Observer*). He primarily performs recitals, accompanying artists such as Iestyn Davies, Alison Balsom, Rachel Podger, Monica Huggett, Peter Whelan, Bojan Cacic, Sabine Stoffer (Ensemble Libro Primo), and Tabea Debus. He is the principal lutenist for La Nuova Musica, The Irish Baroque Orchestra and Poeticall Musicke.

Alex is a life member of The Royal Society of Musicians.

Alex teaches the lute at the University of Aberdeen and at home in Glasgow. He has also created an Online Lute Tutor to encourage the proliferation of lute playing and enthusiasm.

In his spare time he enjoys making lutes and managing the Veterum Musica micro record label.

'McCartney virtually shreds his accompaniments with fervent plucking and percussive strumming.' *The New Yorker*



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