

2025  
**YORK**  
EARLY  
MUSIC  
FESTIVAL

**Ayres Extemporae**

*Erbarme Dich!*

**National Centre for Early Music**

**Friday 11 July 1.00pm**

# Ayres Extemporae

## *Erbarme Dich!*

### **The torment**

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

**Matthew Locke** c.1621/1622-1677

Sonata for violin and continuo in E minor, C.142:

- i. –
- ii. *Variatio*
- iii. *Aria e variatio*

### **The path to redemption**

Sonata for viola da gamba and harpsichord no. 2 in D major, BWV1028

**Johann Sebastian Bach** 1685-1750

- iii. *Andante*

Aria: *Erbarme dich*

**JS Bach**

from Cantata *Ich armer Mensch, ich Sünderknecht*, BWV55  
for tenor, violin and continuo

Sonata for violin and continuo in C minor, C.143:

**Biber**

- i. –
- ii. *Passacaglia*
- iii. –
- iv. *Gavotte*
- v. *Adagio – Allegro – Adagio*

### **The forgiveness**

Sonata for viola da gamba and harpsichord in G minor, BWV1029

**JS Bach**

- ii. *Adagio*

*Ich traue seiner Gnaden*

**JS Bach**

(from Cantata *In allen meinen Taten*, BWV97 for  
tenor, violin and continuo)

Sonata for viola da gamba and harpsichord in G major, BWV1027

**JS Bach**

- i. *Adagio*
- ii. *Allegro ma non tanto*
- iii. *Andante*
- iv. *Allegro moderato*

*Erbarme dich!* is a spiritual journey from torment to redemption built around the instrumental transcriptions of arias and sonatas by JS Bach, interwoven with the expressive depth of works by Biber and Locke. We will go through a spectrum of universal emotions: anger, guilt, remorse, acceptance and, ultimately, redemption. These are feelings which everyone has experienced in some form and as we go through this musical journey, we share our humanistic take on the path toward personal absolution.

### **Torment**

The programme opens with Matthew Locke's E minor Pavane from *The Little Consort*. As a prelude, this piece establishes a dark and introspective atmosphere. With its sombre mood, it creates the emotional setting from which the journey unfolds. It is followed by the Sonata in E minor by Heinrich Ignaz Biber: a Bohemian-born Austrian violinist and composer, regarded as one of the greatest violin virtuosos of the seventeenth century. This sonata is part of a set of eight violin sonatas published in 1681 – bold and groundbreaking works pushing the boundaries of form, dissonance, and technique often featuring complex double stops, extreme upper-register passages, and striking expressive effects. The E minor Sonata gives voice to a sense of helplessness and internal struggle. Virtuositic violin writing is supported by a realisation 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 toward redemption, the *Andante* from Bach's Gamba Sonata no. 2 in D major introduces a moment of reflection. It resonates with the aria 'Erbarme dich' from the *St Matthew Passion*, arguably the most devastating moment in that masterwork, and echoes a similar emotional core, setting the stage for the heart of our programme: the aria 'Erbarme dich' from the cantata *Ich armer Mensch, ich Sündenknecht*. The *piccolo cello* takes the role of the voice in the Bach arias in this programme, encouraging a different way of listening to this music through the tone of this instrument. The aria from which the programme draws its title expresses a soul's plea for mercy and forgiveness.

Biber's Sonata in C minor follows as a symbol of transformation. Beginning with a haunting Passacaglia in C minor that suggests the weight of inevitability and guilt, it evolves gradually. Biber is best known for his imaginative style and for the extensive use of *scordatura* in his compositions – a technique involving alternative tunings to achieve unique tonal colours and expressive effects, as at the end of the Passacaglia for which the violin is required to tune down the top E string a whole tone to D. For this piece, the *piccolo cello* joins the violin with the same tuning. Thanks to this

change, there will be five open D strings vibrating in the ensemble, producing a wonderfully resonant sound palette. A melancholic yet lighter Gavotte follows this retuning, and the sonata concludes triumphantly in C major, reflecting acceptance and release. This dramaturgical arc powerfully captures the emotional shift from remorse to self-acceptance.

### ***Forgiveness and peace***

The Adagio from Bach's Gamba Sonata no. 3 in G minor marks the transition into self-forgiveness. Its luminous B-flat major tonality and lyrical dialogue between the piccolo cello — which takes the part of *gamba* — and violin offer a moment of stillness and warmth after the turbulence of the preceding works. 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 *piccolo cello* assumes the vocal line, supported by the violin obbligato and continuo, evoking a gentle, reassuring embrace.

The programme concludes with Bach's Gamba Sonata in G major, here transcribed for *piccolo cello*, violin and cello, underlining its trio sonata form. This sonata represents the personal absolution and joyful resolution of the journey. In the first movement, flowing melodic lines move among the instruments, creating a wholesome and serene atmosphere. The second movement gives equal voice to all parts in a perfectly crafted counterpoint. The third movement revisits a more introspective mood, its fate-like bass line and dramatic harmonic path give a final glance at the fragility of human nature. Nevertheless, the closing Allegro moderato brings the journey full circle through its joyful character, bringing us peace.

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## **Ayres Extemporae**

Xenia Gogu Mensenin *violin*

Víctor García García *piccolo cello*

Teresa Madeira *cello*

Ayres Extemporae is a historically informed group based in Belgium and The Netherlands. Winners of the 2024 York International Young Artists Competition, they received, among other prizes, a professional recording contract from Linn Records for their debut album, which they will record following this year's festival. In 2022, they were awarded the first prize and the audience prize at the Semana de Música Antigua de Estella-Lizarra, which led them to be programmed at the 2023 edition of the festival. In the same year, they also won the second prize in the Biagio Marini International Early Music Competition in Germany. They have performed at

the FIAS in Madrid, Femàs in Sevilla, Festival À Corda in Portugal, the FestiVita! Early Music Festival in Brussels and the Festival Impulso Canarias in Spain.

An innovative feature of the ensemble is their experiments in the realisation of the basso continuo, inspired by recent research on the use of bowed string instruments used in the basso continuo of Corelli's time. The combination of a four-string cello and a five-string *piccolo cello* brings new textures to the traditional instrumentation of cello and harpsichord. Through extempore 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, which is also achieved by the changes in the roles of each instrument.

Moldovan-Spanish violinist Xenia Gogu, Spanish cellist Víctor García García and the Portuguese cellist Teresa Madeira 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 studied at the departments of Early Music of the Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles, the University of Arts in Berlin, the University of Arts in Bremen; Víctor finished his doctorate at the Royal Scottish Conservatoire in 2024.

[ayresextemporae.com](http://ayresextemporae.com)



***We are grateful to the John Feldberg Foundation for supporting events in the Festival that showcase the achievements of young musicians***

John Feldberg was a talented violinist and harpsichord builder who died aged 30 in 1960. He and his future wife Ann met at Cambridge, where she was a music student and keyboard player with passion for early music. In 1957 they set up a harpsichord building workshop. John died just as the workshop was beginning to take off; Ann continued the business with great success for another 22 years.

The John Feldberg Foundation aims to support some of the many charitable causes Ann and John Feldberg espoused, in particular:

- encouraging people to access music and the arts
- finding ways to live sustainably and protect and conserve the environment
- enabling people to bring about change through their activities in these spheres – even where the challenge seems impossible

The John Feldberg Foundation is a Charity registered in Hamburg: Charity No. 922.20-64 (2367) and recognised by the UK Charity Commission.

# YORK EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL

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York Early Music Festival is administered by the National Centre for Early Music through the York Early Music Foundation (charity number 1068331)

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