

The music

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| Claudio Merulo | Canzona 18 (strings) |
| Johann Nauwach | ‘Cruda Amarilli’ (voice, lute) |
| Claudio Monteverdi | ‘Cruda Amarilli’ (strings) |
| Reading: Giovanni Artusi | from The Imperfections of Modern Music |
| Toby Carr | Prelude (lute) |
| Giovanni Battista Bovicelli | Diminutions on ‘Anchor che col partire’ by Cipriano de Rore (voice, lute) |
| Oliver Webber | Diminutions on ‘Signor mio caro’ by Cipriano de Rore (violin, lute) |
| Reading: Emanuele Tesauro | ‘Pleasant and unpleasant sounds’ from Vocabolario Italiano |
| Monteverdi | Entrata and Ballo (from Il Ballo dell’Ingrate) (strings) ‘Ah, dolente partita’ (voice, strings) ‘Ahi, troppo è duro’ (from Il Ballo dell’Ingrate) (tutti) |
| Reading: Fabrizio Caroso | from The dancer |
| Emilio de Cavaliere | O che nuovo miracolo (strings) |

INTERVAL

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| Cristofano Malvezzi | Sinfonia a 6 (strings, lute) |
| Giulio Caccini | ‘Io che dal ciel’ (voice, strings) |
| Reading: Pietro della Valle | from Of the music of our age |
| Oliver Webber | Diminutions for soprano and bass on ‘Vestiva i colli’ by Palestrina (voice, strings) |
| Oliver Webber | Diminutions on ‘Cosi le chiome mie’ by Palestrina (violin, lute) |
| Reading: Publius Ovidius Naso (Ovid) | ‘You powers that sway the world beneath the earth’ from Metamorphoses |
| Monteverdi: from L’Orfeo | Toccata Prologue ‘Lasciate i monti’ ‘Ahi caso acerbo’ ‘Ma io ch’in questa lingua’ Sinfonia (Act II) Sinfonia (Act III) ‘Vanne Orfeo’ Moresca |

The Madrigal Reimagined

The poet, staunch defender of Dante and member of the fascinating and fruitful Strozzi family, Giambattista the Blind, published a treatise on the madrigal which he presented at the Accademia Fiorentina in 1574. From this we learn that it was a short poetic form of variable rhyme and structure, ideally suited to the depiction of gentle scenes of love. Tragic love, great deeds, or epic romances, by contrast, were better represented by more serious forms such as the sonnet, canzone, or the heroic stanzas of ottava rima.

In an attempt to encapsulate the madrigal’s elusive charm, Strozzi uses the phrase *un non so che del frizzante* – ‘a little something sparkling’ – or perhaps, according to some dictionaries of the period, ‘stinging’. The range of contemporary definitions of *frizzante* is intriguing. For John Florio in 1610, it can be ‘smacking in taste as good wine’, while the related verb *frizzare* means ‘to bite, to burne or be tarte upon the tongue’, or ‘to quaver and run nimbly upon any instrument’. The Accademia della Crusca, the newly formed authority on the developing Italian vernacular, offers an even wider range of connotations: a stinging sensation in the skin, the feeling in the mouth of certain kinds of wine, or, curiously, ‘false, graceful writing which moves’ – and it is perhaps this enticing cross-section of qualities and associations which gave enduring life to a form which, on the surface, may not seem to have offered much in the way of profundity.

Musicians quickly came to love the madrigal, and honed their compositional craft in book after book of settings, most commonly (at first) for four or five voices. The paradoxical, multifaceted quality of *frizzante* seemed to spark a creative spirit in the best composers, whose endeavours enabled this relatively minor poetic form to lead an extraordinary, independent life and to play a decisive role in the transformation of musical style.

Over the course of the next two generations, the musical embodiment of the madrigal evolved in a number of different directions. Madrigals are at the heart of the transgressive *seconda prattica*, in which harmonic conventions were deliberately subverted for emotional impact, as we hear so powerfully in Monteverdi’s fourth and fifth books. Instrumental performances transformed madrigals into virtuoso showpieces through spectacular ornamentation, and madrigal-writing techniques were used to profound effect in some of the most moving scenes composed for the stage.

Today’s programme explores some of these reinventions and transformations, in a variety of textures from solo voice or

violin with lute, through strings alone, to the full ensemble. We present a series of five themed tableaux:

Cruda Amarilli, the madrigal which gave rise to **Monteverdi’s** (1567-1643) ‘original sin’ in breaking the orthodox ‘rules’ of counterpoint, inspires the first ‘scene’. After an opening canzona for strings, we hear a lesser-known solo setting of the madrigal by the composer **Johann Nauwach** (1595-1630), student of Heinrich Schütz, followed by the famous Monteverdi version played by string band alone.

The fluid, twisting diminutions of singer **Giovanni Battista Bovicelli** (1550-1594) form the heart of scene two, in which, after a short lute improvisation, we hear ornamental versions of two madrigals by **Cipriano de Rore** (c1515-1565). *Anchor che col partire*, with the essential message that ‘parting is such sweet sorrow’, is heard in Bovicelli’s own hands. *Signor mio caro*, in which Petrarch mourns, at a distance, the death of both his lover and his lord, has been ornamented for violin by Oliver Webber in the style of Bovicelli, combining measured *passaggi* with syncopations and rubato to create an ethereal, other-worldly effect.

The next scene focuses on the pain of departure with no hope of return. The poignant final farewell of *Il Ballo dell’Ingrate* is underpinned with bitter harmonic knife-twists and nestles together with the hopeless lover’s lament, *Ah, dolente partita*, performed with all its grating dissonance by strings intertwining with the lone soprano.

The music either side of the interval is taken from one of the most lavish entertainments in history: the 1589 Florentine *Intermedii*, part of the wedding celebrations of Ferdinando de’ Medici and Christine of Lorraine. No expense was spared for this politically vital union and talent of every kind was sought from all over Tuscany. The sixth and final *Intermedio* closes in pure exultation with a chorus by **Cavaliere**, *O che nuovo miracolo*, performed here instrumentally, an outpouring of joy and celebration promising a new Golden Age. After the interval we return to the Fourth *Intermedio* in which the Golden Age is foretold by demons who dwell in the fiery upper reaches of the atmosphere. Most accounts of the 1589 *Intermedii* focus on the astonishment felt by spectators at the inconceivable ingenuity of the special effects; however, **Caccini’s** song, *Io che dal ciel cader farei la luna*, for a sorceress who invokes the demons and sung by his wife Lucia, was said to have distracted the spectators from the spectacle of the flying chariot long enough to wonder at her brilliant ornamentation. The *sinfonia* by **Malvezzi** accompanies the approach and opening of a fiery cloud revealing the demons.

In scene four of our programme we visit the 'modern' ornamental style of Francesco Rognoni (1570-1626) used as a model for our own diminutions on **Palestrina's** (c1525-1594) 'madrigal' version of the Petrarchan sonnet *Vestiva i colli*, a celebration of springtime and blossoming love. Part one is set for voice and strings and part two (*Così le chiome mie*) for violin and lute.

We conclude with a brief tour of one of Monteverdi's masterworks, *L'Orfeo*, in which the techniques developed in his madrigal books underpin an ancient tale of loss, redemption and the power of music. The prologue, containing some of Monteverdi's most extraordinary monodic writing, uses an elaborate counterpoint of poetic and musical rhythm which, in *La Musica's* own words, draws in our souls, ready to hear the story.

There follow well-known scenes of celebration, tragedy and reconciliation. Although Orfeo's godly music won the day at first, he could not overcome his human frailties and, as the end of his story is celebrated with a joyful chorus and dance, we struggle to shake off the haunting memory of his loss, so powerfully imprinted on our souls by Monteverdi's virtuosic interplay of text, harmony and rhythm.

These musical vignettes are interspersed with readings, offering a flavour of the cultural milieu in which the transformations and reimaginings to which we're listening were developing. The traditionalist **Giovanni Artusi** (1540-1613) – hailed in the introductory sonnets to his book as a quasi-religious musical crusader against the 'heresy' of new practices – stubbornly misses the point of Monteverdi's new approach. The encyclopaedist **Emanuele Tesauro** (1592-1675) delights us with a virtuosic range of metaphors for ornamental singing. **Fabrizio Caroso** (c1527-1605) was a dancing-master whose two voluminous instruction manuals contain not only dance step notation but also lute tablature. Traveller, scholar and composer **Pietro della Valle** (1586-1652) marvels at the ornamental skills of ensemble musicians. And finally, **Ovid** (43BC-18AD), in the words of English traveller and poet George Sandys, unfurls Orfeo's ultimately futile rhetoric against the powers of the underworld.

Notes by Oliver Webber

(Continued on insert) >>

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The 2026 Little Missenden Festival will run from Friday 2nd to Sunday 12th October.

Festival Website little-missenden.org

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- Email: contact@little-missenden.org

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Programme Notes

MONTEVERDI STRING BAND with **HANNAH ELY** and **TOBY CARR**

The Madrigal Reimagined



8pm, Friday October 3rd, 2025
Little Missenden Church

65th Little Missenden Festival

The artists

MONTEVERDI STRING BAND: **Oliver Webber,**
Theresa Caudle *violin* **Wendi Kelly, David Brooker** *viola*
Mark Caudle *bass violin*

with guest artists

Hannah Ely *soprano* **Toby Carr** *lute, theorbo*

“the very embodiment of sprezzatura” *Early Music Today*

Monteverdi String Band is dedicated to celebrating the sound and style of the early violin consort, in both well-established repertoire and innovative new programmes. Their instruments are carefully chosen and modelled on originals from the early decades of the 17th, rather than the 18th century when developments which led the violin away from its origins as a consort instrument transformed its sound into something perhaps more brilliant but less rich and grounded. The Band relish the sound of pure gut strings in equal tension. This and the use of matching instruments brings a unique sound to the ensemble: as one critic wrote, “The MSB’s sound is quite unlike that of any other ensemble I know that plays this music”.

They very much enjoy bringing their expertise to well-known works such as the operas of Monteverdi and Cavalli, or the *1610 Vespers*, and have also created a number of original programmes, ranging in scale from chamber programmes to full-scale staged productions which take inspiration from the wider cultural milieu. Featured themes (musical and non-musical) include Galileo, madrigals, swordsmanship, ornamentation and poetry.

The Band has released two CDs. The first, *Con Arte e Maestria*, in 2021 and the second (a version of tonight’s programme, *The Madrigal Reimagined*) last year. Both are on *Resonus*.

Based in Brussels, **Hannah Ely** specialises in the Renaissance and Baroque. As well as performing with a range of early music groups, she’s also Music Director of the Purbeck Art Week Festival, co-Artistic Director of the Brighton Early Music Festival and founder of the Fieri Ensemble which performed here at Little Missenden in 2017.

“Radiant, clearly articulated and without any false pathos, soprano Hannah Ely sang her way into the ears and hearts of the audience”. (*Tage Alte Musik Regensburg*)

Lutenist and guitarist **Toby Carr** is known as a versatile and engaging artist, working with some of the finest musicians in the business. He was introduced to historical plucked instruments while studying the classical guitar at Trinity Laban, and pursued this interest during a postgraduate degree at the Guildhall

School of Music & Drama. Graduating from there in 2016, he was welcomed back as a professor in 2021. Now in demand as a soloist, chamber musician and continuo player, his playing has been described as “sensuous and vivid” (*The Guardian*), “eloquent” (*BBC Music Magazine*) and “mesmerising” (*Opera Today*).

monteverdistringband.com hannahely.co.uk tobycarr.co.uk

Visit www.little-missenden.org