

**Rachel Podger (violin),  
Biber Rosary Sonatas 3**

St Cecilia's Hall



Rachel Podger held her violin (well, one of the four she brought on stage) aloft, to show us the two middle strings reversed below the bridge. They formed a cross, and it was the most extreme of the symbolic demands that early Baroque composer Heinrich Biber made in his mystical Rosary Sonatas charting the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

Those crossed strings were there for (what else?) 'The Resurrection', the first sonata in Biber's closing set of 'Glorious Mysteries' celebrating the wonders after Christ's crucifixion. But the composer's unconventional requirement also meant, as Podger wittily explained, that it was a pain to play, simply

because most of her notes were now in the wrong places. But that was all part of Biber's plan too. There's no avoiding lengthy periods spent setting up and adjusting instruments with these works. But Podger took us inside the processes, explaining the challenges behind the music, but also showing her abundant enthusiasm. Her performances, accordingly, were sublime: fresh, spontaneous, lithe, with each sonata occupying its own sound world and with its own vivid character. Marcin Swiatkiewicz on harpsichord and organ and Daniele Caminiti on theorbo supplied graceful, incisive continuo, and Podger's closing 'Guardian Angel', for violin alone, proved a beautifully thoughtful conclusion to her three concerts, its immovable bassline speaking of a steadfast, reassuring presence.

**DAVID KETTLE**