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# News

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## CHICAGO'S BAROQUE BAND DEBUTS ON CD WITH A BANQUET OF BIBER

Baroque Band, Chicago's period-instrument orchestra, makes its recording debut with a CD of works by the remarkably innovative, late-17<sup>th</sup> century composer Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644-1704).

The album, available February 23, includes Biber's *Mensa Sonora* and *Battalia* for violin, strings, and basso continuo in D major (Cedille Records CDR 90000 116).

Founded in 2007 by British violinist and period instrument specialist Garry Clarke, Baroque Band has taken the city by storm with its vibrant, buoyant, and exhilarating musicianship. It's the city's newest and only current period-instrument orchestra.

Clarke says Baroque Band's mission is to change the public perception of early music. "A lot of people still see it as some strange area, with oddballs and eccentrics playing unpleasant-sounding instruments," he says.

Clarke and recording producer James Ginsburg of Cedille choose an all-Biber program because, as Clarke observes, "There aren't a huge number of recordings of Biber, and, as far as I know, no other recording of the *Mensa Sonora* uses more than one string player to a part, as we do." Clarke believes his approach to the piece reflects how it was performed in its day and is more rewarding for the listener.

The CD illustrates the ingenious and entertaining ways that Biber, a Bohemian-born, Austrian violinist, enriched the repertoire and technique of string playing. Paul Hindemith called Biber “the most important Baroque composer before Bach.”

*Grove Music Online* says of Biber, “There have been very few composers of the first rank — and Biber must be counted in the first rank of his time — who were so completely outstanding in their instrumental virtuosity. Fortunately, his virtuosity as a violin composer was at the service of a splendid musical mind.”

Both of the works on the disc date from Biber’s time in Salzburg and are dedicated to the Archbishop of Salzburg, whom Biber served as a court musician.

The *Mensa Sonora* (“Harmonious Table” or “Sounding Table”), from 1680, is a set of six suites composed for aristocratic dining, though it’s anything but superficial background music. “Biber employs a range of unexpected melody, harmony, and rhythm, much of which must have been lost for those original diners above the clattering of their knives and forks,” Clarke writes in the CD liner notes.

Clarke makes the case that Biber intended the work to be performed with more than one player to a part based on several considerations. The simplicity of the parts, devoid of what Biber himself called “eccentric dishes,” seems designed to accommodate multiple players. The archbishop had a large number of musicians on his payroll, and many court banquets were extravagant affairs. So, Clarke reasons that larger ensembles were drafted to assure that the archbishop could hear “at least some of the music over the din of the meal” — and provide rich textures commensurate with the regal cuisine.

*Battalia*, or “Battle,” from 1673, shows Biber at his programmatic best. The piece depicts scenes before, during, and after an armed conflict, including the drunken revels of a “dissolute horde” of musketeers. Biber uses several devices that prefigure 20<sup>th</sup>-century

techniques: knocking the bow against the violin to represent rifle shots, placing paper on the strings of the basses to imitate a snare drum on the march, plucking the bass strings to simulate cannon shots — anticipating the “Bartok pizzicato” by more than 200 years — and rendering folks songs in eight different keys simultaneously to portray drunken soldiers, anticipating Ives.

Baroque Band performed the *Battalia* and selections from the *Mensa Sonora* at the opening concerts of its first full season in October 2007. Chicago Tribune critic John von Rhein wrote of “a crispness of articulation and a vibrancy of rhythm and accentuation that was infectious” in the Biber performances.

Baroque Band’s 15 core instrumentalists include some longtime stalwarts of Chicago’s early music scene, such as keyboard virtuoso David Schrader (a prolific Cedille Records artist).

Baroque Band performs each of its subscription concerts in three venues, including the Grainger Ballroom at Symphony Center, home of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. It’s a resident ensemble of WFMT Radio and the Music Institute of Chicago in Evanston. It made its Ravinia Festival debut in 2009 and plans a return engagement in 2010. The ensemble’s Web site is [www.baroqueband.org](http://www.baroqueband.org).

Clarke’s European period-instrument pedigree includes performances, as violinist, with Les Arts Florissants, the Academy of Ancient Music, the European Baroque Orchestra, The Hanover Band, The King’s Consort, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Scholars, and The Sixteen. He’s worked with an A-list of period instrument notables, including William Christie, Harry Christophers, Christopher Hogwood, and Ton Koopman,

Celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary season, Grammy award-winning Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE) is dedicated to showcasing the most noteworthy classical artists in and from the Chicago area.

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**Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber:**

*Mensa Sonora*

Pars I in D major (8:42)

Pars II in F major (6:10)

Pars III in A minor (7:53)

Pars IV in B-flat major (8:57)

Pars V in E major (6:16)

Pars VI in G minor (9:22)

*Batallia* for violin, strings, and basso continuo  
in D major (8:49)

(Cedille Records CDR 90000 116)

**Baroque Band**

Garry Clarke, director