

SINGING INTO SPACE

Spatially Conceived Music for Men's Voices
by Giovanni Bonato
and Giovanni Gabrieli

Estonian National Male Choir
Mikk Üleoja

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

GABRIELI AND BONATO, SINGING INTO SPACE

Äli-Ann Klooren

The works of two Giovannis – Gabrieli and Bonato – alternate on this album. Both Italian composers share an interest in the possibilities of sound, and in their works, composed primarily to liturgical texts, the spatial aspect of performance is important. One can no longer ask Gabrieli what he might think of such a pairing, but Bonato sees the combination in this way:

It is truly curious and surprising for me, as well as a source of enormous satisfaction, to note the happy coincidence – and for this I am truly grateful to the Estonian National Male Choir – of being paired with one of the greatest exponents of polychoral music of the historic Venetian School of 1500–1600. It is precisely from that School that my great attention and attraction towards spatialised music derives. When I was a student at the Milan Conservatoire, Signor Adriano Guarneri introduced me to sixteenth-century polychoral technique. For me it was the opening of a sound-world infinitely full of charm, beauty, magnificence and magic. Since that period of my youth this attraction has never left me and it continues to influence my compositional production significantly. It goes without saying that the pairing on this album with the great Giovanni Gabrieli offers me the huge honour and wonderful opportunity, through the extraordinary, if not unique, qualities of the Estonian National Male Choir and its director Mikk Üleoja, to present some ‘spatially’ conceived pieces, also taking advantage in this sense of the significant musical experiences of those composers of the twentieth century, who particularly dedicated their attention to spatialised technique with the aid of electronics (one name above all, Luigi Nono ... not by chance another Venetian composer!).¹

¹ Interviewed for this booklet in October 2023 by Äli-Ann Klooren. The other inset quotations from Giovanni Bonato in this text are from the same source.

Giovanni Gabrieli (1553–1612) studied under his uncle, Andrea Gabrieli, and Orlandus Lassus, and after his uncle's death, in 1585, he became the organist and music director at the St Mark's Basilica in Venice, staying there for almost three decades. St Mark's was known not only for its stunning beauty but also for its unique architecture, which allowed two organs to be placed opposite each other in the choir area – a practice common also in Spanish cathedrals. What distinguished music-making in St Mark's is that there could similarly be two to five choirs, located facing one another on balconies, as well as on both sides of the altar and in the middle of the church. This arrangement gave rise to the distinctive Venetian practice of dispersed choral singing, known as *cori spezzati*, which encouraged the writing of polychoral music. Echo effects written into compositions and the natural acoustics of the church were also essential elements that the composers employed by St Mark's used with skill. It is likely that acoustics played a role in Gabrieli's being the first to introduce into music the dynamic markings *piano* and *forte*: it was very effective to contrast various choirs and instruments alternately playing softly and loudly.

Gabrieli's creative legacy is rich, featuring both instrumental and vocal music, published in various collections. Among the most important are two entitled *Sacrae symphoniae*, published in 1597 and 1615. The first contains 63 pieces, including 45 motets, and the second 32 polychoral pieces.

Aare Kruusimäe has arranged two motets from the first collection and one from the second for the Estonian National Male Choir. Kruusimäe graduated from the Estonian Academy of Music as a composition of Raimo Kangro, and since 2000 has been a bass in the Estonian National Male Choir.

Giovanni Bonato, born in Schio (a town between the Lago di Garda and Venice) in 1961, began his composition studies with Fabio Vacchi in Vicenza and continued them with Adriano Guarnieri and Giacomo Manzoni at the Milan Conservatoire. He also studied orchestral conducting at the Scuola Civica di Musica in Milan. He is currently employed as a lecturer in composition at the Cesare Pollini Conservatory in Padua. Bonato's creative output is diverse and extensive, encompassing chamber, choral and

orchestral works. He has acquired an impressive list of competition prizes and awards, and his works have been performed by important musicians at major festivals.

In spite of the centuries-long gap between them, what connects Gabrieli and Bonato is a deep interest in sound. However, unlike Gabrieli, Bonato does not compose his music with a specific space in mind. His vocal works are primarily created for ‘coro spazializzato,’ that is, spatial choirs, where the singers are dispersed throughout the hall; their precise position is indicated in the score, so that some of the richness of the music lies in the spatial dimension, which is thus integral to the composition.

The Estonian National Male Choir has been working with Giovanni Bonato for around two decades. Bonato discovered the Choir through its website and sent it the score for his *Crux fidelis* (2001) [3]. After hearing the ENMC recording of the piece, he composed *Signum magnum* (2005) for the male choir and cello [9]. Later, the choir included other works by Bonato in their programmes and so the idea was conceived of recording an album where Gabrieli’s and Bonato’s works, mutually enriching and balancing each other, would alternate. In 2014 these pieces were recorded under the direction of Mikk Üleoja, though, regrettably, this recording became the last work of Estonia’s highly regarded sound engineer Mairo Maadik before his tragic death in a domestic accident at the age of only 54, on 13 December 2014. In a posting on the website of the Arvo Pärt Centre, Pärt himself remembered Maadik’s importance:

It is very difficult to accept such an unexpected and painful event. Mairo has been an integral part of the professionalism and quality of character in the Estonian music scene and the sound recording industry for an entire epoch. There is so much to our musical life that we could not begin to imagine without him.²

The album opens with the sombre *Tenebrae factae sunt* by Bonato (‘Darkness fell’) [1], composed in 2005 to a commission from the Italian male choir Coenobium Vocale, which is based in Piovene Rocchette, near Schio. The text is from the responsories of the Passion, presenting the most dramatic biblical texts. The Estonian Male Choir

² <https://www.arvopart.ee/en/maido-maadik-dies-1960-2014/>.

performed this piece for the first time under the direction of the then chief conductor, Ants Soots, on 16 February 2006, in Tallinn.

A sacred piece which encapsulates all the human desperation in Jesus' last appeal to God on the cross. An appeal, alas!, always of absolute and tragic relevance, full of a drama expressed by me not only by the harmonic, dynamic, phonetic contents, but also, primarily, through the spatialised musical fabric (in Greek 'drama' precisely) – an action which I intended to envelop the listener in a sonic dimension teeming with 'pathos' and emotional engagement.

Gabrieli's *Exaudi Deus* ('Hear, O God') [2] is a motet is from the first volume of *Sacrae symphoniae* and is based on the text of Psalm 54. Unlike most of Gabrieli's choral works, it is composed for a seven-voice choir rather than multiple choirs. Even so, typical polychoral techniques are still used – musical motifs are repeated in various groups within the choir, creating a dense and interwoven homophonic texture. It is sung here in Gabrieli's original version, as in the Denis Arnold edition of 1956,³ but transposed a tone higher.

Bonato's *Crux fidelis* ('Faithful Cross') [3] was composed in 2001 for an eight-voice spatial male choir and tubular bells and won second prize at the G. D'Arezzo International Competition for Polyphonic Music a year later. The text is based on the Good Friday hymn 'Pange lingua,' attributed to St Venantius Fortunatus (c. 530–ca. 600/609).

A collaboration with Estonian National Male Choir dates back to 2004 with the premiere in Tallinn of 'Crux fidelis,' when the then chief conductor Ants Soots (to whom I will always be grateful for having opened the doors of his choir to me) wanted to include this piece in a concert dedicated exclusively to Italian music through various centuries of history. It's impossible for me to forget the funny title of that concert: 'From Donato'⁴

³ Giovanni Gabrieli: *Collected Works*, Volume One, American Institute of Musicology, Rome, 1956, pp. 77–85.

⁴ That is, Baldassare Donato (1525/30–1603), *maestro di cappella* at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice from 1577 and, from 1588, assistant *maestro di cappella* at St Mark's and full *maestro di cappella* from 1590 until his death. He helped developed lighter secular music in the form of the *villanella*, but his sacred music used the polychoral effects favoured by the Gabriellis.

to Bonato! This is a piece that I wanted to introduce with the original Gregorian hymn layered on eight real parts, in a game of artificial ‘reverberations’ and its resulting artificial harmonic phases.

Gabrieli’s *Regina caeli* (‘Queen of Heaven’) [4], from the 1597 volume of *Sacrae symphoniae*, is a motet for two six-voice choirs, with the text taken from the antiphon sung during Easter. When set for a single choir, it has a dense texture, primarily homophonic, with different choral groups alternating the text lines.

Bonato’s *O lilium convallium* (‘O Lily of the Valley’) for two cellos and an eight-voice spatial male choir [5] was created in 2008 to a commission from the Asiagofestival, in Asiago, a small town to the north-east of the composer’s native Schio. The first part of the text is from the ancient Aquileian liturgy, while the second, in Greek, is from the Orthodox liturgy.

This piece has certainly given me the most satisfaction also on an international level, considering the feedback from various performances by choirs including the aforementioned Coenobium Vocale (premiere, with the participation of two world-famous performers such as Julius Berger and Hyun Jung Soon), the well-known Vokalna Akademija Ljubljana (dir. Stojan Kuret) and the Rutgers University Glee Club (dir. Patrick Gardner). It is characterised by the presence here of two cellos, as the pivot of the entire phonic structure. Furthermore, the combination of two texts creates the alternation and interaction between two ‘souls’, at times quite different but complementary, in order to best enhance the human and divine figure of the mother of Christ.

Gabrieli’s *Maria virgo* (‘Virgin Mary’) [6] is from the 1597 volume of *Sacrae symphoniae* and was originally written for ten voices and two choirs. Musically, this piece is the most transparent of Gabrieli’s works on the album, with less use of the typical imitation techniques found in polyphonic choral music, except for the Alleluja at the end.

Bonato’s *Stetit angelus* (‘An Angel Stood’) [7] was created in 1995 to a commission from the female-voice choir Ergo Cantemus, from the town of Este, south-west of Venice. The original version is for an ‘equal voice’ choir, thus implying the possibility

of its transposition for a male choir as well. The text in the first half is in Latin and represents the offertory for the feast of the archangel Michael and all the angels. It is extracted from the antiphon of the Roman Catholic liturgy (Apocalypse). The second part of the text is in German, written by the poet Marcel Schmid (b. 1979).

Compactness and a homogeneous timbral amalgam are the basis of *Stetit angelus*. In fact, it is a piece that enjoys a circulation in the contemporary choral panorama and fortunately for me there are many vocal ensembles that have had it in their repertoire for a long time. Born from a very personal story that borders on the field of extra-sensorial perception, the piece, with its very prolonged and long notes held to form a harmonic continuum under a very tight and ‘timeless’ melodic line, with its slow and gradual intervocalic passages with consequent slow transformations of the harmonics, intends to evoke a situation of sonorous and static suspension, bordering on the dreamlike.

Gabrieli’s *Buccinate in neomenia tuba* (‘Blow the trumpets when the moon is new’) [8] was published in the 1615 volume of *Sacrae symphoniae*. Originally composed as a nineteen-voice motet, the text is a compilation of Psalms 80 and 97. Unlike the other Gabrieli pieces recorded here, this composition features a polyphonic texture with an emphasis on imitation.

Bonato’s *Signum magnum* (‘A Great Sign’) for cello and a spatial male choir [9] was written to a commission from the Estonian National Male Choir, who performed it for the first time under the direction of Ants Soots in 2006. The Latin text is taken from the Book of Revelation and Psalm 44, and the English text from William Blake’s poem ‘Auguries of Innocence’.

Signum magnum is a piece where the centrality (including physical) of the solo cello (for the occasion the excellent Aare Tammesalu) characterises the general timbral spectrum of the work together with the subtle and ethereal sounds of glass goblets. A centrality from which the various lines derive and unfold with the consequent spatial geometries, created by the voices of the choir itself, which generates an intense plot suspended on texts and lyrics, taken from Psalms of the Bible and from William Blake.

Bonato's *Genuit puerpera regem* ('The Mother Brought Forth the King'), with its text based on an antiphon sung on the first day of Christmas, was composed in 2009 and has been performed by various choirs at festivals and competitions.

Genuit puerpera is dedicated to Maria and her motherhood and I originally wrote it for a five-voice mixed choral group (SATTB). It is a very short piece with an almost didactic nature, composed specifically for a choral-music course dedicated to amateur singers in Schio in 2009. It was conceived to be deliberately very easy to read and intone at first sight and limiting the overall vocal range around a medium-low and compact timbral register, which could offer a certain idea of warmth and intimacy to the listener. The creation for the Estonian National Male Choir, without any adaptation compared to the original version or transposition, admirably increases and enriches the timbral intent I sought.

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Texts and Translations

[1] Giovanni Bonato

Tenebrae factae sunt

Fifth of the Nine Responsories for the Matins
of Office of Tenebrae on Good Friday

Tenebrae factae sunt,
dum crucifixissent Jesum Judaei:
et circa horam noman
exclamavit Jesus voce magna:
Deus meus, ut quid
Me derelinquisti?
Et inclinato capite,
emisit spiritum.

Exclamans Jesus
voce magna, ait:
Pater, in manus tuas
Commendo spiritum meum.

*Shadows covered the earth,
when the Jews crucified Jesus,
and toward the ninth hour
Jesus cried out loudly:
'My God, why
hast Thou forsaken me?'
And lowering his head,
he gave up the spirit.*

*Jesus, crying out
loudly, said:
'Father, into thy hands
I commend my spirit'.*

[2] Giovanni Gabrieli

Exaudi Deus

Psalm 54 (55):2–4

Exaudi Deus orationem meam
et ne despexeris deprecationem meam;
Intende mihi et exaudi me contristatus
sum in exercitatione mea et conturbatus sum
a voce inimici et a tribulatione peccatoris;
quoniam declinaverunt in me iniquitates
et in ira molesti erant mihi

*Give ear to my prayer, O God;
and hide not thyself from my supplication.
Attend unto me, and hear me:
I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise;
Because of the voice of the enemy,
because of the oppression of the wicked:
for they cast iniquity upon me,
and in wrath they hate me.*

[3] Giovanni Bonato

Crux fidelis

Based on the Good Friday hymn 'Pange lingua',
attrib. St Venantius Fortunatus (c. 530–c. 600/609).

Crux fidelis, inter omnes
Arbor una nobilis:

Pange, lingua, gloriosi
praelium certaminis,
et super Crucis trophaeo
dic triumphum nobilem,
qualiter Redemptor orbis
immolatus vicerit.

De parentis protoplasti
fraude Factor condolens,
quando pomi noxialis
morte morsu corrui,
ipse lignum tunc notavit,
damna ligni ut solveret.

Hoc opus nostrae salutis
ordo depoposcerat,
multiformis proditoris
arte ut artem falleret
et medelam ferret inde,
hostis unde laeserat.

Quando venit ergo sacri
plenitudo temporis,
missus est ab arce Patris
natus orbis Conditor
atque ventre virginali
carne factus prodiit.

*Faithful cross, above all other,
one and only noble tree!*

*Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle,
Sing the ending of the fray;
Now above the Cross, the trophy,
Sound the loud triumphant lay:
Tell how Christ, the world's Redeemer,
As a victim won the day.*

*God in pity saw man fallen,
Shamed and sunk in misery,
When he fell on death by tasting
Fruit of the forbidden tree;
Then another tree was chosen
Which the world from death should free.*

*Thus the scheme of our salvation
Was of old in order laid,
That the manifold deceiver's
Art by art might be outweighed,
And the lure the foe put forward
Into means of healing made.*

*Therefore when the appointed fullness
Of the holy time was come,
He was sent, who maketh all things,
Forth from God's eternal home;
Thus he came to earth, incarnate,
Offspring of a maiden's womb.*

Vagit infans inter arcta
conditus praesepia:
membra pannis involuta
Virgo Mater alligat:
et manus pedesque et crura
stricta cingit fascia.

Lustra sex qui iam peracta
tempus implens corporis,
se volente, natus ad hoc,
passioni deditus,
Agnus in crucis levatur
immolandus stipite.

En acetum, fel, arundo,
sputa, clavi, lancea:
mite corpus perforatur,
Sanguis, unda profluit
terra, pontus, astra, mundus,
quo lavantur flumine!

Crux fidelis, inter omnes
arbor una nobilis;
nulla talem silva profert,
flore, fronde, germine.
Dulce lignum, dulci clavo,
dulce pondus sustinens!

Flecte ramos, arbor alta,
tensa laxa viscera,
et rigor lentescat ille,
quem dedit nativitas,
ut superni membra Regis
miti tendas stipite.

*Lo! He lies an infant weeping,
Where the narrow manger stands,
While the Mother-maid his members
Wraps in mean and lowly bands;
And the swaddling clothes is winding
Round his helpless feet and hands.*

*Thirty years among us dwelling,
His appointed time fulfilled,
Born for this, he meets his Passion,
For that this he freely willed.
On the Cross the Lamb is lifted
Where his life-blood shall be spilled.*

*He endured the nails, the spitting,
Vinegar, and spear, and reed;
From that holy body broken
Blood and water forth proceed:
Earth, and stars, and sky, and ocean
By that flood from stain are freed.*

*Faithful cross, above all other,
One and only noble tree:
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be.
Sweetest wood and sweetest iron,
Sweetest weight is hung on thee!*

*Bend thy boughs, O Tree of glory!
Thy relaxing sinews bend;
For a while the ancient rigour
That thy birth bestowed, suspend;
And the King of heavenly beauty
On thy bosom gently tend.*

Sola digna tu fuisti
ferre saeculi pretium,
atque portum praeparare
nauta mundo naufrago,
quem sacer cruor perunxit,
fusus Agni corpore.

[4] Gabrieli

Regina caeli

Easter antiphon

Regina caeli, laetuja.
Quia quem meruisti portare, alleluja.
Resurrexit, sicut dixit, alleluja.
Ora pro nobis Deum, alleluja.

[5] Bonato

O lilium convallium

From the Aquileian liturgy
held in the Archivio Capitolare di Cividale

O lilium convallium,
flos virginum,
stirps regia,
spes omnium fidelium,
lux luminum,
o filia: Eve matri contraria,
Ave Mater de gracia
nos redimens per filium.
Ave, ave remedium
nos eximens miseria.

*Thou alone wast counted worthy
This world's ransom to uphold;
For a shipwrecked race preparing
Harbour, like the Ark of old;
With the sacred Blood anointed
From the smitten Lamb that rolled.*

*Queen of heaven, rejoice, alleluia.
The Son you merited to bear, alleluia,
Has risen as he said, alleluia.
Pray to God for us, alleluia.*

*O lily of the valley,
flower of virgins,
royal offspring,
hope of all the faithful,
light of lights,
o daughter: contrary to mother Eve,
hail, Mother of grace,
who redeems us through your son.
Hail, hail, o healer
Who cures us of our misery.*

From the Greek Orthodox liturgy

Axion estin os alithòs makarizin
se tin Theotòkon,
tin aimakàriston kje panamòmiton
kje mitèra tu Theu imòn.
Tin timiotèran ton Hjeruvim,
kje endhoxotèran assingritos ton Serafim,
tin adhiafthòros Theòn Lògon tekùssan,
tin òndos Theotòkon, Se megalinomen.

[6] Gabrieli

Maria virgo

Marian antiphon

Maria virgo, regia de radice Jesse,
virgo ante partum, virgo in partu,
virgo post partum, incontaminata:
Mater Domini, inventrix gratiae, genitrix vitae:
aurea porta gratia plena;
benedicta in mulieribus,
honorabilior cherubim, gloriosior seraphim:
cujus beatus venter Christum tulit;
cujus beata ubera Dei filium lactaverunt:
te laudamus Deus noster: alleluja.

*It is truly meet and right to bless you,
O Theokotos [= God-bearer]
ever-blessed and most pure
Mother of our God.
more honourable than the Cherubim,
and, beyond compare, more honourable than the
Seraphim,
who without corruption gave birth to God the
Word,
true Theotokos, we magnify you.*

*O virgin Mary, from the royal stock of Jesse,
virgin before giving birth, virgin while giving
birth,
virgin after giving birth, unsullied:
mother of the Lord, discoverer of grace, mother
of life:
Golden door full of grace;
blessed among women,
more honourable than the cherubim, more
glorious than the seraphim,
whose blessed belly bore Christ;
whose blessed breasts suckled the son of God:
We praise you, our God: Alleluia.*

[7] Bonato

Stetit Angelus

Rev. 8:3–4/Marcel Schmid

Stetit Angelus
habens thuribulum aureum
et ascendit fumus in conspectu Dei.
Ein Glas Wasser gegen den Durst in der Wüste
Ein Feuer gegen die Kälte im Herzen
Liebe gegen die Verlorenheit in der Welt

*An Angel stood
holding a golden censer.
And the smoke ascended before the presence
of the Lord.
A glass of water against thirst in the desert
A fire against cold in the heart
Love against being lost in the world*

[8] Gabrieli

Buccinate in neomenia tuba

Text based on Psalms 81, 150, 98, 95 and 47

Buccinate in neomenia tuba,
in insigni die solemnitis vestrae. Alleluia.
In voce exultationis, in voce tubae corneae
exultate Deo,
adiutori nostro.
Alleluia.
Jubilemus Deo in cordis et organo,
in tympano et coro.
Cantate et exultate et psallite sapienter.
Alleluia.

*Blow the trumpet when the moon is new,
at the sign of your solemn feast day. Alleluia.
With a voice of rejoicing, with the sound of the
trumpet
rejoice in the Lord our help.
Alleluia.
Let us rejoice in God with strings and organ,
with drum and in chorus.
Sing and rejoice and sing psalms as you know best.
Alleluia.*

[9] Bonato

Signum magnum

Rev. 12, 1; Ps. 97

Signum magnum apparuit in caelo:
mulier amicta sole,
et luna sub pedibus eius,
et in capite eius corona stellarum duodecim.

*And there appeared a great sign in heaven:
a woman clothed with the sun,
and the moon under her feet
and on her head a crown of twelve stars.*

Ps. 44, 10/45, 9

Filiae regum in honore tuo,
astitit regina a dextris tuis
in vestitu deaurato,
circumdatus varietate.

Blake, 'Auguries of Innocence'

To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.

10 Bonato

Genuit puerpera Regem

Plainchant for the Feast of the Nativity

Genuit puerpera Regem,
cui nomen aeternum,
et gaudium matris habens
cum virginitate pudoris:
nec primam similem visa est,
nec habere sequentem.
Alleluja.

*The daughters of kings are among your
honourable women,
at your right hand stands the queen
in gilded clothing,
surrounded with coloured attire.*

*The mother brought forth the King,
whose name is eternal;
having the joy of being a mother,
and remaining a modest virgin;
neither before was there one like her,
nor will there be a successor.
Alleluia.*

—Translations: various sources



The Estonian National Male Choir is one of the best-known Estonian music ensembles in the world, with a repertoire spanning from the Renaissance to contemporary music. Over its long history, the Estonian National Male Choir has given more than seven thousand concerts, in Estonia but also in locations as far afield as North America and Asia. Over the past eight years their concert tours have taken them to Belgium, China, Great Britain, Japan, Switzerland and elsewhere. Besides many Estonian composers, the Choir has premiered compositions by such luminaries as Giovanni Bonato, Gavin Bryars, Henrik Ødegaard, Dmitri Shostakovich and others.

The Estonian National Male Choir was founded in 1944 by the Estonian choral conductor and composer Gustav Ernesaks and from the 2011–12 season has been led by its chief conductor and artistic director Mikk Üleoja. Each season the Choir gives around 50–60 concerts both in Estonia and abroad.

The Choir frequently records for Estonian National Broadcasting and has collaborated with such labels as Alba, Aurora, Chandos, Deutsche Grammophon, Finlandia, GB Records, Ondine, Sony, Soond, Toccata Classics and Virgin Classics. In 2004 the Choir was awarded the Grammy award for the best choral performance, a first for Estonia (Sibelius cantatas, in collaboration with the Ellerhein choir, Estonian National Symphony Orchestra and conductor Paavo Järvi).

Over the past ten years the Estonian National Male Choir has recorded no fewer than eight albums. The first, *In Paradisum*, featuring the music of Galina Grigorjeva, was awarded the title of 'Best Classical Music Album' at the Estonian Music Awards gala in 2015. In 2016, *Te lucis ante terminum*, with works by the Norwegian composer Henrik Ødegaard, was released by Aurora. In 2018, Sony released a recording of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 13, with the Dresden Philharmonic conducted by Michael Sanderling. Ondine brought out Sibelius' dramatic symphony *Kullervo*, with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Hannu Lintu. *REGIRAM* features arrangements of ancient 'runo' songs performed by the choir along with an ensemble which consists of Celia Roose, Tuule Kann, and Robert Jürjendal. In 2023, two more albums were released: *Galina Grigorjeva: Music for Male Choir*, from Toccata Classics in the spring, with the Choir joined by the cellist Theodor Sink, and with Mikk Üleoja conducting. In May of the same year *Baltic Contrasts* on the label Soond presented music by the Estonian Erkki-Sven Tüür, Latvian Pēteris Vasks and Lithuanian Justė Janulytė, performed by the Estonian National Male Choir and the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra, the conductor again being Mikk Üleoja.

The Choir's most recent release, from Chandos in May 2024, featured Arvo Pärt's *De profundis* and Shostakovich's Thirteen Symphony, performed by Estonian National Male Choir and BBC Philharmonic, conducted by John Storgårds. This CD was nominated for Estonian Music Awards (EMA) in 2025.

The Estonian National Male Choir has cooperated with a phalanx of outstanding conductors, among them Nikolai Alekseyev, Teodor Currentzis, Marko Letonia, Hannu Lintu, Neeme Järvi, Paavo Järvi, Vladimir Jurowski, Andrew Litton, Paul Mann, Kent Nagano, Markus Poschner, Peter Ruzicka, Michael Sanderling, Leif Segerstam, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Christoph Spering, Jac van Steen, John Storgårds, Yuri Temirkanov and Lothar Zagrosek.

The Choir has also worked with many world-class orchestras and ensembles, such as the Raschèr Saxophone Quartet, the SWR Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra, the NHK Symphony Orchestra, the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, the Dresden Philharmonic, the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Kontzerthausorchester, Berlin, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg, the NDR Radiophilharmonie in Hannover,

the Orchestre National d'Île de France, the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the Bremer Philharmoniker, the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra and the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra.

In 2015 Estonian National Male Choir and Mikk Üleoja were awarded the State Cultural Award.

*Chief Conductor
and Artistic Director*
Mikk Üleoja

First Tenors

Arvo Aun
Aivar Kaldre
Andrus Kirss
Jaan Krivel
Mart Kroon
Priit Lehto
Lennart Mängli
Valnar Neidre
Madis Reinsoo
Valter Soosalu
Mati Valdaru

Second Tenors
Aleksander Arder
Ero Esko

Olev Koit
Indrek Kost
Ants Reinhold
Grigori Rutškin
Kaido Tani
Sander Tamm
Erkki Targo
Mati Tuisk
Margus Vaht
Margus Vellmann

Baritones

Peeter Hillep
Hanno Hint
Ott Indermitte
Rene Keldo
Benjamin Kirk
Mareks Lobe
Mait Männik
Igor Nikiforov

Hideyuki Nishimura
Andrus Poolma
Alo Rammo
Andrus Siimon

Basses

Andres Alamaa
Jüri Eensoo
Rasmus Erismaa
Juhan Heinapuu
Ülo Krigul
Aare Kruusimäe
Geir Luht
Joosep Sang
Juss Tamm
Lembit Traks
Endel Valkenklau
Jaan Viks

Mikk Üleoja graduated from the Estonian Academy of Music in 1997 as a choir conductor (from the class of his father, Ants Üleoja) and completed his Master's Degree in music at the same place in 2004 (supervised by Toomas Siitan). He has sung in the World Youth Choir (1989–92), the Estonian National Male Choir (1994–96), the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (1996–2000) and in the Gregorian ensemble Vox Clamantis (1998–2011).

He has been the conductor of the St Michael's Boys' Choir, the chief conductor of the chamber choir Mattone and the Kaarli Church Concert Choir, and taught conducting at the Viljandi Culture Academy of the University of Tartu. From 1998 to 2011, he worked as choirmaster of the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir. Since the 2011–12 season, he has been the Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Estonian National Male Choir. He was named Conductor of the Year in 2014.





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SINGING INTO SPACE Spatially Conceived Music for Men's Voices

GIOVANNI BONATO

b. 1961

[1] *Tenebrae factae sunt* (2005)* 5:27

GIOVANNI GABRIELI

1553–1612

[2] *Exaudi Deus* (publ. 1597) 3:28

GIOVANNI BONATO

[3] *Crux fidelis* (2001) 9:21

GIOVANNI GABRIELI arr. AARE KRUUSIMÄE

[4] *Regina caeli* (publ. 1597)** 2:05

GIOVANNI BONATO

[5] *O lilium convallium* for two cellos and male choir (2008) 8:12

GIOVANNI GABRIELI arr. AARE KRUUSIMÄE

[6] *Maria virgo* (publ. 1597)** 3:45

GIOVANNI BONATO

[7] *Stetit angelus* (1995) 11:39

GIOVANNI GABRIELI arr. AARE KRUUSIMÄE

[7] *Buccinate in neomenia tuba* (publ. 1615)** 3:26

GIOVANNI BONATO

[8] *Signum magnum* for cello and male choir (2005)* 1:32

[9] *Genuit puerpera* for male choir and tenor soloists (2009) 2:50

TT 61:45

* FIRST RECORDINGS

** FIRST RECORDINGS IN THESE VERSIONS

Estonian National Male Choir

Mikk Üleoja, conductor

Margus Vaht, bells [3]

Levi-Danel Mägila, cello [5]

Aare Tammesalu, cello [5] [8]

Ero Esko, Rene Keldo,

Aare Kruusimäe, Priit Lehto,

Alo Rammo, Ants Reinhold,

Juss Tamm, Margus Vaht,

wine-glasses [8]

Margus Vellmann, Mart Kroon,

tenors [9]