

PROJECT REPORT

'THE EXCELLENCE OF WOMEN: CASULANA & STROZZI'

RECORDING 2024

Singers from Fieri Consort: Lucy Cox, Hannah Ely (sopranos), Sarah Anne Champion, Lucy Goddard (mezzo-sopranos), Tom Kelly, Josh Cooter, (tenors), Ben Rowarth (bass)

Instrumentalists: Harry Buckoke (viola da gamba), Aileen Henry (harp), Toby Carr & Kristiina Watt (lutes)

Sound produced by Adrian Peacock and engineered by David Hinitt

In collaboration with Professor Laurie Stras

Recorded at St Michael and all Angels, Blackheath, London during October 2022.

Summary

This recording project came about after one of the most important discoveries of recent years was made by Professor Laurie Stras. The lost Alto partbook of Maddalena Casulana's 1583 First Book of five-voice madrigals was tracked down from the printed edition to the Russian State Library in Moscow. Other fragments of music were pieced together from the Gdańsk Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences. It was from that Polish archive that the missing parts had disappeared in the second world war (presumably looted), and they still bear Gdańsk's catalogue numbers now.

Being able to complete this 5-voice madrigal book puts Casulana firmly on the map as a fantastic composer. We know that her contemporaries thought very highly of her, but until now we haven't been able to fully appreciate her skills in polyphony, as we only had her 4-voice compositions.

Once Laurie had put together her edition of this music, we were able to premiere them (in the modern time) at Kings Place, London, in a live broadcast on BBC Radio 3, which was also broadcast via the European Broadcasting Network to several European stations, on International Women's Day 2022.

Funding

The project was funded through private donations (with gift aid), Angel Early Music and the Ambache Charitable Trust

Challenges

Due to multiple personal issues, the editing was heavily delayed. Our original planned launch of International Women's Day 2023 soon got delayed, and we replanned the launch for 2024 on the same date. Again this was delayed, but we eventually managed to launch the album with enough preparation time to garner some media attention and for our supporters to be able to plan to attend the launch.

Outcomes

- Instead of cancelling the musicians completely on the planned launch dates, we instead arranged to use these days to film promotional material (see the video below) and to prepare for future performances. The filming session at the Wallace Collection was very helpful - it was the first time we had used a professional and non-musical crew to make a video. We decided to make two short extracts featuring both Casulana and Strozzi. The project was expensive but was underwritten by a private donation.
- Media:
 1. [Listen to the album recordings here](#)
 2. [Watch the "trailer" video here](#)
- In the press
 - [Album review](#), Early Music America, July 2024
 - [Groundbreaking female composer'](#) - article in The Observer March 6th 2022
 - ['Rediscovering Maddalena Casulana'](#) - article in Gramophone 2024
 - Listed amongst 'best classical albums of 2024 so far', The Times, 2024
 - [Article on Continuo Connect](#), 2024
 - [The Latest, Brighton 2023](#) (performance review)
- Album release - 3rd May 2024
 - 300 copies manufactured - physical distribution through Naxos and our website.
 - Digital distribution through Record Union on all major streaming/download platforms: Spotify, 7Digital, AppleMusic, Amazon Music, Napster, Deezer, 24/7, Tidal, Shazam, Anghami, Pandora, YouTube Music, TikTok, NetEase Cloud Music, iMusica, iHeartRadio, Qobuz, Soundcloud, Twitch.
 - This album has garnered a lot of interest in the US. We are looking into finding direct distribution there.

- several independent podcasts and radio stations have been playing tracks and talking about the album on their shows, e.g. [Musica Antiqua](#)
- Launch event held at the London Sketch Club, 3rd May 2024
 - Capped at 60 attendees, this was a wonderful event where we performed a selection of the tracks on the album by both Casulana and Strozzi. Prof Laurie Stras was also in attendance and introduced her work on Casulana to our supporters and friends.
 - The success of this event has encouraged us to consider holding an annual event like this at the same venue to share our upcoming projects and programmes with our Fieri Friends and general supporters.



Future plans

We are looking forward to performing the programme abroad in September 2025, at the [Forum für Alte Musik, Zurich](#). We have also had firm interest from the Brugge Concertgebouw for 2026 and BOZAR in Brussels for their 2025/26 season and we hope to have other future performances.

Impact

The support from Angel Early Music was crucial in the development of this project. It enabled the recording and subsequent marketing of the music of Maddalena Casulana to a wide range of listeners around the world - reaching both academic specialists interested to hear more from a composer they were already aware of, as well as amateur singers discovering Casulana for

the first time, and even first-time listeners who stumbled upon it, perhaps through the radio or social media.