

Eastern Early Music Forum



San Matteo, Arcetri

Music and Ritual in a 16th Century Florentine Convent

A workshop for upper voices
with keyboard and/or viol or harp accompaniment

on **Saturday 16th November 2024**

at **Swaffham Prior, near Cambridge**

with **Laurie Stras**

This workshop is for upper voices, but we would also welcome a continuo keyboard player (a keyboard will be provided) and a bass viol or harp.

Music The Biffoli-Sostegni manuscript, MS 27766 in the library of the Brussels Conservatoire, is the only surviving manuscript of polyphonic repertoire from a sixteenth-century convent. The two nuns named on its binding, Clemenzia Sostegni and Agnoleta Biffoli, lived at the convent of San Matteo in Arcetri, which later became home to Suor Maria Celeste Galilei, ‘Galileo’s Daughter’. The manuscript contains 78 works for equal voices (do not worry – we will divide throughout into S and A parts) that would have adorned the convent’s worship at its most solemn feasts and for its daily devotions. This workshop will introduce you to this fascinating record of the musical lives of Florentine nuns at the end of the Renaissance, exploring its song, psalmody, motets, and imitation masses.

Music will be provided on the day (loan only) or can be sent in advance as PDFs to download and print, or read from a device. (If you want advance copies please let Janet know as soon as you have booked.)

Tutor Laurie Stras is an expert in the convent music of C16 Italy and has undertaken extensive research into the original sources, music often written by women for women.

She is Professor Emerita of Music at the University of Southampton and director of the ensemble Musica Secreta, with whom she has made six critically acclaimed recordings of polyphony from the 15th to the 17th centuries. Her research focus over many years has been the music and musical activities of women in Renaissance Ferrara and Florence: she is currently preparing a Cambridge Element on the Biffoli-Sostegni manuscript, and Musica Secreta have recently recorded this repertoire for a forthcoming album <https://musicasecreta.org/>

Venue The workshop will take place in the small village of Swaffham Prior, about nine miles outside Cambridge. The majority of the time we will be in the beautiful village hall, but for a session in the afternoon will we sing in the church of St Cyriac and St Julietta, a fascinating church that is no longer used for services, but which is maintained by the Churches Conservation Trust. The village hall and St Cyriac are only three minutes’ (at a slow pace) walking distance apart. St Cyriac has the amazing acoustics of a much larger abbey, but it is not possible to hold an entire workshop there because of the

lack of facilities. Although we will be able to have the use of chairs, lighting and a toilet, there is no heating. This means we are partly dependent on the weather, and partly dependent on you **bringing warm clothing** for the session in St Cyriac. The colder we are, the shorter the session at St Cyriac will be, and that would be a real shame. As a veteran of rehearsing in a cold church, Janet recommends warm footwear, a hat, and fingerless gloves if you have them!

Transport and Parking Swaffham Prior can easily be found from the A14. The easiest thing to do is to follow the signs for Anglesey Abbey, although the Swaffhams are also clearly signposted from the junction of the A14. Go past Anglesey Abbey and through Swaffham Bulbeck to reach Swaffham Prior. Look for the parking sign as you go along the High Street, and the village hall is the building right next to it. We will begin there with tea and coffee starting at 10.15, and music starting at 10.45, and finish around 5.15.

Public transport. There is a bus that runs between Cambridge and Newmarket bus stations, and which stops in Swaffham Prior. It is run by Stephensons and from either direction will get you to the venue at an appropriate time. The bus back to Cambridge is slightly less convenient but still do-able, but I am sure there will be lifts available to Milton Park and Ride or Cambridge itself, from other participants at the end. Please contact Janet if you have difficulty in finding the timetable.

We may be able to offer lifts from Cambridge or Cambridge North station. If you are able to offer lifts from and back to Cambridge stations, or indeed from other destinations, or if you need a lift, please indicate this on the application form.

Lunch NB there is no shop in Swaffham Prior. You can of course bring your own lunch, and there is a microwave in the village hall kitchen. The shop in Swaffham Bulbeck is only two minutes away by car, and has a quite adequate supply of sandwiches and fruit etc. Lunches are served at the Red Lion just across the road, or the Black Horse Inn in Swaffham Bulbeck, which also offers accommodation.

COVID precautions and well-being Covid is still with us. At the AGM earlier in the year, those attending expressed the view that we should continue to be cautious in order to protect those attending workshops. Therefore you should not attend if you have symptoms that could indicate Covid or flu-like symptoms (e.g. fever, coughing, loss or change to your sense of smell, taste or appetite, shortness of breath, feeling tired or exhausted, aching body or headache, sore throat, runny nose, diarrhoea, feeling sick), and it would be appreciated if you would please take a lateral flow test before attending with a view to avoiding passing on asymptomatic Covid. If you are unable to attend as a result of covid or other ill-health, your fees will be refunded to you.

Cost and booking The cost will be £20 for members of EEMF or of other Fora, or £22 for non-members. (If you are not already a member, EEMF's annual subscription is only £6 if paid by Standing Order!)

To apply please send your details to Janet at janetmtanburn@gmail.com (preferred method) or send it by post to Janet Tanburn, 5 Meadow Rise, Bourn, Cambridge, CB23 2TG (tel 01954 718842). I do not mind whether you used the form or just send me your details in the body of an email. This flyer and the booking form can also be found on the EEMF website at www.eemf.org.uk under Forum events.

Please make payment by bank transfer if possible.

A/c name: Eastern Early Music Forum (business account with HSBC bank)

A/c No: 33888401

Sort code: 40-16-08

Reference: Stras [your name].

Cheques will of course be accepted from anyone who is unable, or does not wish, to use electronic banking.