



Death of Gesualdo

The Gesualdo Six + actors

Tuesday 20 October 2026

Created and Directed by **Bill Barclay**
Performed by **The Gesualdo Six and six actors**
Music Director **Owain Park**

Choreography by **Will Tuckett**
Costumes by **Arthur Oliver**
Puppet by **Janni Younge**

The Gesualdo Six

Owain Park director
Joshua Cooter tenor
Joseph Wicks tenor
Guy James countertenor
Alasdair Austin countertenor
Simon Grant baritone

Concert Theatre Works Actors

Bill Barclay
Doria Bramante
Ivy Corbin
Markus Weinfurter
Siân Williams
Ryan Winkles



Duration 75 mins approx. (no interval)

Music by Carlo Gesualdo, edited by Bill Barclay

Prologue
O vos omnes

Act I
Tristis est anima mea (excerpt: Et ego vadam)
Unus ex discipulis meis (excerpt: Melius illi erat)
In monte Oliveti (excerpt: Vigilate et orate)
O dolce mio tesoro
Resta di darmi noia

Act II
In più leggiadro velo
Ecce vidimus eum (excerpt: Ecce vidimus eum)
O crux benedicta
Tirsi morir volea
Itene, o miei sospiri

Act III
Hai rotto e sciolto
Dolcissima mia vita
Se così dolce è il duolo (excerpt: Ma s'avverrà)
Eram quasi agnus (excerpt: Eram quasi agnus)
Unus ex discipulis meis

Act IV

Mentre madonna il lasso (excerpt: Ahi, troppo
saggia nell'errar)
Una hora non potuistis (excerpt: Vel Judam)
Beltà, poi che t'assenti

Act V

In monte Oliveti
Felice primavera
Piagne e sospira - by Claudio Monteverdi Qual
fora, donna, un dolce "ohimè"

Act VI

Ahi, disperata vita
Deus, refugium et virtus
Languisce al fin
In monte Oliveti (excerpt: Vigilate et orate)
Moro, lasso, al mio duolo
Languisco e moro, ahi, cruda

Epilogue

Tristis est anima mea (excerpt: Et ego vadam)



What to do with the Art of Odious Men?

'Death of Gesualdo' Programme Note

We are safe from the crimes of Carlo Gesualdo now. Of course it helps that he's been dead for centuries, yet we are less safe from Richard Wagner's, from Bill Cosby's, from Roman Polanski's. The reasons are manifold and different for each of us: their copycats live amongst us, we recall moments when we enjoyed their work before we knew what they did, and we have strong feelings about giving our money to the morally corrupt. It is easier to cut them out and focus elsewhere - if we can.

What if we're enamoured with the work? People who once cherished Woody Allen movies avoid them to this day. Studios have left Kevin Spacey to plead homelessness. Cancel culture has left a graveyard of reputations who deserved it alongside some who surely didn't. Guilt spreads instantly on social media today, requiring the innocent (or ashamed) to get to work - a total inversion of centuries of moral progress. Perhaps we can turn away from all of these examples of odiousness, but we cannot turn away from ourselves. The culture in cancel culture is us. We are the attention economy.

Carlo Gesualdo (1566-1613), Prince of Venosa, left us six books of secular madrigals, two collections of sacred music, two murders, stories of witchcraft and masochism, and several undiagnosed psychotic ailments.

Stravinsky was an avid fan of his peculiarly haunting compositional style for decades. Myriad musicians like me cherish his music. His chromaticism seems to have anticipated the romantic period by some 200 years. His signature style is singular and difficult to sing. One of his sacred collections, the 'Tenebrae Responsoria', was the first piece that tonight's singers ever sung together, giving them their name, The Gesualdo Six. But I ascend...

Back to odiousness. The fascinating complexity with watching The Cosby Show today is that (for most of us, one hopes), it is no longer comedic but tragic. The laugh tracks, the brilliant costars, the family man ruse - even his avuncular pullovers - have all changed. Each glint of lightness around the glorious patina of Black excellence is now a penumbra of horror. Because now we know.

Art isn't something that exists out there - it is only in the mind. We label Beethoven's Ninth Symphony an excellent artwork, but an indigenous Venda person from South Africa has none of the hard-wired capability to agree. Works themselves are phenomenally detailed treasure maps. We bring our entire life's personal experiences to a performance by living artists who trace this map for us, in a particular space amidst social conditions. As Brian Eno recently said this year, a piece of music is "the latest sentence in a conversation you've been having for your whole life."

I humbly submit that 'Death of Gesualdo' is one way to deal with the pernicious problem of odious artists. I superimpose Gesualdo's life over his music in order to give our minds a more complete understanding of both, and to elicit an impression in the mind that is more complex than either alone. I find Gesualdo's music more fascinating the more I study his life and vice versa. I do not feel compelled to judge him, nor fear my own reputation in being misunderstood as an apologist for his crimes. Perhaps I ought to, because the truth gets worse: the murder of his wife and her lover would have been almost required of him, given his status as an Italian prince of the 16th century, as an honour killing.

Is compassion even remotely appropriate in this context?

At the end of his life, our anti-hero locked himself in his castle with several male servants and two imprisoned witches. These women

had been his lovers and were sentenced to reside there by the state, perplexingly, for the crime of witchcraft against him - episodes which are documented in such graphic detail that I could never repeat them here.

It is reported that his servants beat him several times a day in order to defecate and to sleep. At the end of his life he was sleeping with a man. I find these final years more fascinating (and far less examined in the literature), than the two licentious murders which punctuate his reputation.

What does such a person experience in the last fleeting seconds of this life? This is the framing device of the work.

I chose the moth-balled art of tableaux vivants

as my formal starting point, because I find stillness onstage awkward yet powerful - much like the man himself. My goal is to propose a solution to how we could engage fully with great art from bad people, and to shine a light on all of us as products of our own peculiar time, and (cancellable) culture.

If Picasso was a womanizer, there he is still, painting the female body ecstatically, distorting the subject as he did in life. Do I find that beautiful still, or horrible? The work has just accreted electricity.

As Stravinsky once said: "There is no beauty in Music itself. The beauty is within the listener."

Bill Barclay is the creator and director of *Death of Gesualdo*



The Gesualdo Six is an award winning British vocal ensemble comprising some of the UK's finest consort singers, directed by Owain Park. Praised for their imaginative programming and impeccable blend, the group formed in 2014 for a performance of Gesualdo's *Tenebrae Responsories* in Cambridge and has gone on to perform at major festivals worldwide. Their programmes often explore both the golden age of Renaissance polyphony as well as newer works that speak across the centuries.

They appear frequently throughout the UK and Ireland, including concerts at BBC Proms, Snape Maltings, Cheltenham Music Festival, Lammermuir Festival, York Early Music Festival and Kilkenny Arts Festival. In London they give regular performances at Wigmore Hall, St Martin-in-the-Fields and Sinfonia Smith Square. Highlights worldwide include Miller Theatre New York, Sydney Opera House,

Melbourne Recital Centre, Esplanade Singapore, Tokyo Bunka Kaikan Hall, Shanghai Symphony Hall and Muziekgebouw Amsterdam.

The ensemble has collaborated with Fretwork, the Brodsky Quartet and trumpeter Matilda Lloyd who appears on their tenth album *Radiant Dawn*, released in August 2025. They continue to tour the immersive concert-theatre work '*Secret Byrd*' directed by Bill Barclay, with whom they collaborate again on '*Death of Gesualdo*'.

New music forms an integral part of their work and they regularly commission composers such as Shruthi Rajasekar, Joanna Marsh and Héloïse Werner. The ensemble has curated two Composition Competitions, with the most recent edition drawing entries from over three hundred composers worldwide. The Gesualdo Six is committed to music education, regularly hosting workshops for young musicians and composers.

The ensemble has harnessed the power of social media to make classical music accessible to millions worldwide, creating captivating videos from beautiful locations whilst on tour. The group released their debut recording *English Motets* on Hyperion Records in early 2018, which was described as "exquisitely done" by BBC Music Magazine and "spellbinding" by The Daily Telegraph. This was followed by further critically acclaimed releases, ranging from single composer discs of music by Gesualdo and Byrd to carefully curated sequences such as their discs '*Fading*', '*Lux Aeterna*' and '*Queen of Hearts*'.

Director, writer, and composer Bill Barclay has created dozens of theatrical concerts with the world's most prominent ensembles. He is Artistic Director of Concert Theatre Works and was Director of Music at Shakespeare's Globe (from 2012-2019).

Major tours include 'The Chevalier' (London Philharmonic Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Center, Tanglewood, Chautauqua, Music of the Baroque, Harlem Chamber Players, Caramoor, Snape Maltings, Buffalo, Virginia, Indianapolis); 'Secret Byrd' for The Gesualdo Six and Fretwork (30+ cities on tour); Anthony & Cleopatra (LA Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Virginia Symphony); 'Peer Gynt' (Boston, Cincinnati, St. Louis and Milwaukee Symphony Orchestras); and 'Markus Passion' for Oregon Bach Festival, Dunedin Consort & The Sebastians (NYC, Pittsburgh, Edinburgh, Aldeburgh, Portland, Seattle, Eugene, Chicago). He has been commissioned five times by The Boston Symphony Orchestra, appearing across nine seasons.

Other projects include directing the Silkroad Ensemble on tour, 'Beyond Beethoven 9' for

Marin Alsop, Romeo & Juliet and 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' for Andris Nelsons, 'L'Histoire du Soldat' for Charles Dutoit, 'Four Seasons Reimagined' for Max Richter and puppeteers Gyre & Gimple, and '1791: Mozart's Last Year' for Gianandrea Nosedà and The National Symphony Orchestra.

As a composer, Barclay composed the historic 'Hamlet Globe-to-Globe' which toured to 189 countries, and 'Call of the Wild' that performed in 42 US states. He has composed three times for the British Royal Family, for President Obama, for the Olympic Torch, at the United Nations, and in refugee camps in Jordan and Calais.

His newest work 'Letters to a Young Poet' premiered with The Brodsky Quartet at The Aldeburgh Festival before performances at Lincoln Center and Tanglewood. He regularly appears in major international festivals in Kilkenny, Spoleto, Lammermuir, Edinburgh, Death of Classical, Chelsea, Oxford, Bath, Teatro a Mil, Perth, Canterbury, Aldeburgh, and many others. Boston Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and more.



Trio Bohémo / Sunday 15 November 4pm

Dazzling and virtuosic, the award-winning Czech chamber ensemble perform Dvořák's 'Dumky' Trio, alongside works by Beethoven, Reicha and Martinů.

Tickets from £12 (students and under 18s £10)



Jack Liebeck & Katya Apekisheva / Tuesday 24 November 7.30pm

The charismatic violinist performs a romantic programme of Brahms, Debussy and Schumann with pianist Katya Apekisheva.

Tickets from £12 (students and under 18s £10)



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