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Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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Saturday, August 5th, 2006, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

- [Carlo Gesualdo](#) (c.1560-1613) *Dulcissima mia vita* (1611)
- transcribed for string orchestra (1939) by [Tibor Serly](#). 6:00
- [Kile Smith](#) (b.1956) *The Voice of One Who Spoke* (2003). 20:00

This week, music suggests words to us, but instead of voices, we hear only instruments. Tibor Serly transcribed for strings a madrigal of the late Renaissance composer, Carlo Gesualdo, called *Dulcissima mia vita*, and this gives us a chance to hear music we wouldn't normally hear on our orchestral program. And we meet the composer, so notorious in his life that even his outlandish harmonies for 1611 pale in comparison.

Gesualdo, Prince of Venosa, was from a family that included Pope Pius IV and St. Charles Borromeo, but he squandered whatever moral advantage he might have gained from these connections. In 1590, he caught his wife and her lover together, brutally murdered them both, and dragged their bodies into the town square. As an aristocrat he would not be tried for the crimes, but he fled because of possible reprisals, and may have even killed others along the way. He spent the rest of his life in near solitude, wracked with guilt and depression, and though he remarried and later returned to his castle, his subsequent spouse left him. He hired musicians to play and sing the music he wrote and published alone. But what music it is! With chromatic shifts not seen until centuries later, Gesualdo poured violent extremes of emotion into his madrigals: "The sweetest of my life, why do you withhold the help I crave?" Whatever could he have been thinking? Serly's wonderfully fluid transcription captures the power and sadness of this music.

We're about to begin the fifth year of *Discoveries*, and some of you have asked why we haven't heard music by one certain composer yet, so we offer a work called *The Voice of One Who Spoke*. It's for orchestra with no voices, and is based on the words of the prophet Ezekiel. This tone poem is an account of Ezekiel's vision of the four creatures who move as one, the wheels moving within wheels, the fire, and the throne. It is a literal setting of the Hebrew text in that the letters generate pitches in a musical scheme perhaps of interest to the composer but probably to no one else.

In episodic fashion the piece unfolds as a ballet might, the music following texts such as, "they went in any of their four directions, without turning as they went," and "Over the heads of the living creatures was something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of ice." The score puts sandblocks, maracas, and other Latin percussion in the roles cymbals and snare drum might play. Chimes signal the apotheosis at the text, "I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one who spoke." Here, the horns proclaim a "Sanctus" melody of Martin Luther, also based on a prophet—Isaiah, not Ezekiel as we might expect. When music "translates" words, it seems that words, music, and meaning will always tumble over themselves.

Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of WRTI. In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music in the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).