oratorios of Luigi Rossi and the sacred opera, *Il San Alessio* by Stefano Landi in performances and recordings with Les Arts Florissants. These are works that specifically call for the lirone, and they give us valuable clues as to how the instrument is to be used. In the 1990s I conceived of several recordings of Roman music for Tragicomedia (Teldec), but my dream to explore and make the repertoire even better known to the music world was only made possible when I was awarded an AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) of Great Britain fellowship in 2007 to complete my life work on the lirone.

As an important part of the research I specifically formed Atalante to perform, record and video as much Roman music for the lirone as possible. This first recording, which focuses on independent laments, is supported by a further grant from the AHRC, as is our second and forthcoming recording, *L’Oratorio di Santa Caterina* by Luigi Rossi and Marco Marazzoli. A second AHRC grant has made three more Roman recordings possible in 2011.

The sound-world of the lirone was utterly beguiling – one felt transported to a 17th-century camera privata, musing on the bleak messages of mortality and transience.

Classical Music Magazine

Their voices were garlanded by the otherworldly sounds of the lirone, played by Erin Headley, who pioneered the instrument’s revival and is its greatest exponent.

Classical Iconoclast

This recording is dedicated to the memory of my mother Romette, an inspiring keyboard and bowed-bass player whose unusual name means ‘little Rome’.
My life was changed forever in 1975 when a colleague handed me a manuscript as we were looking at scores in the Vatican Library. Here was a folio with the curious annotation ‘Cain con la lira’ from Bernardo Pasquini’s oratorio Cain e Abele. This recitative was the oratorio’s central lament; it offered some startling melodic writing, and wonderful shifts from the simplest of tonalities to the most distant and outrageous. As I read up on the little literature then available, I concluded that in the 17th century at least, ‘lira’ was the Roman term for lirone, a multiple bowed string instrument whose bizarre tuning was perfectly set up to accommodate such an extreme harmonic style.

My preoccupation with this extraordinary instrument and its astonishingly dark and fascinating repertoire led me on an exciting historical, cultural and musical journey. In 1980 I commissioned the building of my first lirone; I soon became the only player of it in the world since the 17th century. It was my great privilege to participate in hundreds of performances and recordings on the lirone (and the viola da gamba) in Europe, North America and the Far East with numerous leading early music groups, most notably Les Arts Florissants. But the most valuable experience and insight that I gained about 17th-century music and continuo playing was within my own group, Tragicomedia with co-founder, Stephen Stubbs.

Unfortunately Roman music did not figure prominently in most of my regular professional work, with the exception of the operas and

Non sol la Croce inonda
Ma sopra questo monte in più
D’un rio già s’apre e si discioglie.

Ma se nel farti esangue
A me tolto ha la morte ogni mio bene
Fra tormenti di sangue, fra diluvi di pene,
Come, ah come pos’sio
Viver senz’alma e senza te, mio Dio?

Almen già che mi vieta aspra doglia infinita
Sperar co’ miei tormenti
O pace, o tregua di quest’afflitta vita
Consenti, almen consenti,
O mio Signore, che si tronchi lo stame
Se quanto sento e miro
Sembra a’ miei lumi tragico e funesto
E che sarà di me se’n vita io resto?

Non più con queste chiome
t’asciugherò le piante
Se chiamerotti a nome
Non fia più chi m’ascolti e mi risponda.

Del tuo soccorso priva
Non veggo più chi posa
In fra gli scogli scorgere mia nave
E ricondurla a riva.

A chi nel duro esiglio
Riccorrerò per medicina o scampo?
Da chi nel proprio inciampo
L’anima sconsigliata havrà consiglio?
E negl’affanni miei
Chi mi consolerà s’estinto sei?

not only inundates the Cross, but has already opened up upon this mount into more than one river, and dissolves.

But if by rendering you bloodless, death has taken my only love from me, between bloody torments and floods of pain, how then can I live without my soul and without you, my God?

Since bitter and infinite sorrows and torments allow me no hope of peace or respite from this troubled life, O my Lord, at least grant that the thread [of life] be broken, and that I may follow you, for since the air I breathe brings me horror instead of solace, and since all that I hear and see appears to my eyes as tragic and pernicious, what, then, shall become of me if I stay alive?

No longer shall these locks of mine dry your tears;
if I call you by name, there is no one who will hear me and answer.

Without your aid, I no longer see anyone who might spy my ship among the rocks and lead it to shore.

To whom, in this harsh exile, shall I run to for cure or safety? From whom will my stumbling and misguided soul seek counsel? And who will console me in my sorrows if you are deceased?
Erin Headley’s sensational new group Atalante is named in honour of Leonardo da Vinci’s friend and pupil Atalante Migliorotti, inventor of the lirone. That magic and ethereal bowed instrument has been Erin Headley’s domain for the past 30 years, through an astonishing number of performances and recordings that have been acclaimed worldwide. In the 17th century the lirone was said to ‘move the soul and transport the spirit’. Its true realm was the lament, a genre covering the whole spectrum of human emotions. Atalante’s luxurious continuo band of double harp, chitarrone, keyboards, viol consort (a Roman speciality for accompanying the voice) and lirone enhance the sublimely dark repertoire of 17th-century Rome, including music not heard for over 300 years. Their début in October 2009 at the Southbank Centre in London – in staged performances of the laments of Artemisia, Helen of Troy, Mary Magdalene and the Blessed Virgin – was a major success with rave press reviews. Atalante’s exploration of this fascinating repertoire, including the staging and filming of it, has received generous support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council of Great Britain. Atalante’s members include many valued musical colleagues whom Erin Headley has attracted internationally over the years. Her viol players, who are all lirone players, hail from Sweden, Holland and the USA, and her continuo specialists come from Germany, Ireland, Italy, South Africa and Great Britain.

Nadine Balbeisi, soprano, is a Jordanian-American who performs throughout Europe and North America; in Germany she concentrates on the opera and oratorio repertoire, and with the viol player Fernando Marín, she co-founded the duo Cantar alla Viola to explore vocal music accompanied by the viola da gamba.

Theodora Baka is a Greek mezzo-soprano whose repertoire ranges from Renaissance and Baroque to contemporary music. She has appeared in numerous opera productions on the continent, most notably with Alan Curtis and Il Complesso Barocco; she also performs and records traditional Greek music.
Musical performance in the 17th century was also enhanced by a kaleidoscopic continuo palette. In addition to the chitarrone, harpsichord and double harp, the most exotic colour to hand was that of the lirone whose haunting and ethereal sound was specifically recommended to accompany laments and tragic scenes in Italian operas and oratorios. This multi-string bowed instrument had from nine to fourteen strings, which could produce sustained, purely tuned chords, even in the most far-reaching tonalities. Here we have cast the lirone in independent ‘scenas’ where it can be used more generously and to greater effect than in the discreet lament scenes found in large-scale dramatic works.

Viol consorts also served Roman vocal music well, especially for the accompaniment of the voice. Antonio and Francesco Barberini each owned a chest of viols, as did Queen Christina of Sweden at her Roman residence; G. B. Doni, the music scholar had two as part of his eccentric Greek tuning experiments. Occasional evidence of viol consorts providing chordal accompaniments to vocal pieces led us to experiment with our own realisations in the Helen and Magdalene cantatas. The purely instrumental items here are transcribed from vocal works, a common practice for the viol consort from the early 16th century.

Rome was the most important centre for the male voice, and Marc-Antonio Pasqualini was one of the most renowned of the soprano castrati who sang in Roman opera and oratorio. The castrato voice appeared in the Sistine chapel in 1562, and as opera later developed, these male singers became marvels of the musical stage. Since women were forbidden to sing in any papal institutions, female roles in operas, oratorios and cantatas were sung by men. The famous castrato, Loreto Vittori was praised for his moving renditions of Mazzocchi’s Mary Magdalene and Dido laments. Although women were banned from performing in public, the applauded female singing trio of Leonora Baroni, her sister Catarina and their mother Andreana held musical academies in the family’s private palace. Their self-accompaniment on an impressive array of instruments (harp, lirone, theorbo, viola da gamba and Spanish guitar) stole the limelight, to the envy of rival groups like the Lolli sisters, and even Vittori and Pasqualini.

It is tempting to imagine these talented and graceful divas portraying ancient heroines with the backdrop of one of the richly coloured, gold-threaded Artemisia tapestries loaned to them by cardinal Francesco. Such soirées were patronised and attended by the Barberinis, and among their special guests was the French viol player André Maugars, who recalled one such concert in 1639:

"This concert transported me into such ravishment, that I forgot my mortal condition and believed myself to be among the angels."

Ah, if you cannot do otherwise, weep, eyes, weep, and weep until my end brings an end to your weeping.”

For such fervent words, mixed with love and grief, the dolorous winds, exceptionally, stop in mid-air.

The rocks are filled with self-loathing, and impiety itself, at the sight of such pious tears, also weeps.

6. Sopra la nascita di n. S.
Perché dolce bambino
Da sacrosanti lumi
Versi di salso humor due caldi fiumi?
Ah risponde il mio Dio,
Perché non pianga tu, pianger voglio.

Ah, if you cannot do otherwise,
weep, eyes, weep,
and weep until my end
brings an end to your weeping."

On the birth of our Lord
Why, sweet child,
from your sacred eyes
do you pour two hot rivers of salty tears?
"Ah", my God responds,
"I wish to weep so that you weep not."

- S. Casino