

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 7 October 2021 7.30pm

Musick's Monument

Fretwork

Richard Boothby Asako Morikawa Sam Stadlen

Emily Ashton Joanna Levine

Lucy Crowe soprano

William Byrd (c.1540-1623)

Prelude and Ground a5 'The Queen's Goodnight'

O Lord, how vain

Two parts in one the fourth above

O that most rare breast

Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)

2 fantasias in 3 parts

Now each flowery bank of May

William Byrd

My mistress had a little dog

Interval

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

2 fantasias in 4 parts

O solitude, my sweetest choice Z406

Christopher Simpson (c.1602-1669)

Duo in G for 2 bass viols

Orlando Gibbons

2 In nomines

Faire is the rose

Henry Purcell

2 fantasias in 4 parts

Music for a while from *Oedipus, King of Thebes*

When I have often heard young maids complaining from *The Fairy Queen*

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This series of concerts is called *Musick's Monument*, a title taken from the eponymous book by Thomas Mace, an extremely long-lived musician, born in the reign of James I, who died in the reign of Queen Anne. He had been a choirboy and then a 'singing-man' at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1635. By the time he wrote his book in 1676, he had become a musical conservative, bitterly decrying the current fashions in music and writing wistfully about the music and practices of his youth.

And indeed, by the 1670s the 'Golden Age' had come to an end. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the new king's taste came to dictate musical styles, and all things continental became the fashion, much to Mace's disgust. The 'Golden Age', while not in any way homogeneous in itself, was nevertheless an age of complex counterpoint, as much as anything else, and viol consort music was an important part of that age.

In Elizabethan England the composer who dominated the musical landscape was **William Byrd**, and, while he was a known Catholic, his closeness to the Queen gave him protection. He was also an astute politician, and in his 1588 publication produced not one but two moving elegies on the death of Sir Philip Sidney, England's leading poet and Protestant hero, who had died of wounds inflicted at the battle of Zutphen in 1586 at the age of 31. Byrd's intense elegy 'O that most rare breast' sets a poem by Edward Dyer, who puns on his own name in the final line.

But Byrd's comprehensive genius encompassed humour and piety, low- and high-brow music, sometimes within a single piece. His viol consort music often has a similar shape, where a rather solemn opening, involving serious counterpoint, gradually gives way to dance music and folksongs. Such a plan is to be found in the Fantasia *Two parts in one the fourth above*. Here the top-most part repeats what the alto part has just played a fourth higher - a canon, in other words. The serious opening gets livelier and snatches of folksong is heard on the way before a rich and harmonious coda brings the work to an end.

While he may have honoured Protestant heroes in public, in private Byrd was able to hint at more controversial figures. 'My mistress had a little dog' could be a story about a dog that was killed: equally, it could be a covert story about the Earl of Essex and his sister, Penelope Rich, alluded to in the third verse, who was also the model for Sidney's 'Stella'. It's found in a manuscript copied by Edward Paston, a fellow Catholic who lived in Appleton Hall in Norfolk, also mentioned in the text, which is likely to have been written by Paston. But the tone of Byrd's masterly setting is light and frothy, rather than tragic. The dog has his brains dashed out, but the response is ironic, and we are left in no doubt that this outrage is mock and we are encouraged to laugh rather than cry.

Byrd died in 1623, nearly 80 years old: **Orlando Gibbons** died just two years later, barely over half that age. He was without doubt Byrd's worthy successor as England's leading composer. After singing as a chorister at King's College, Cambridge, he joined the Chapel Royal in 1603 and stayed there until his sudden death in 1625. He was one of the group of composers at young Prince Henry's court that included

Lupo, Ferrabosco and Coprario, who were all greatly affected by the Prince's death in 1612. His only book of madrigals was published the same year and yet contains a sequence of laments that surely mourn the passing of the Prince. Both of tonight's songs come from that collection, which opens with the briefest and most famous of all madrigals, 'The Silver Swan'. Yet the music is of such sophistication that 'madrigal' hardly seems the correct term. Gibbons's ability to move seamlessly from one affect, or one mood to another, without making an obvious break is so perfect that it is a case of 'art concealing art'. Witness both the subtle transitions in the pastoral 'Now each flowery bank of May' and his extraordinary second In Nomine, which moves from an almost static calm to frenetic energy in the space of a few minutes.

The young **Henry Purcell** would have been very aware of his illustrious predecessor at the Chapel Royal. He was a choirboy there, and then he was taught by Orlando's second son, Christopher. He was also apprenticed to John Hingston, who had been a pupil of Orlando, then Cromwell's master of music, and thrived even after the Restoration. And there are echoes of Gibbons in the series of Fantasias the young Purcell chose to compose, seemingly for no reason, in the summer of 1680, before his 21st birthday. They are not explicitly for viols, but the inclusion of two In Nomines in the set, and the range of the parts strongly suggests that viols were intended. But it seems they were not played in his lifetime, and this brief dalliance with the English consort tradition was the last consort music composed before the 20th century.

He went on to concentrate on music for the church and the newly invigorated theatre, and this is where we find the majority of his wonderful songs. 'Music for a while' is from *Oedipus*, an adaptation by John Dryden of Sophocles, and is part of a musical interlude which seeks to calm the audience in the middle of this intense drama. Alecto, by the way, is one of the Greek furies, with snakes for hair, wings of a bat and blood-drenched eyes. 'When I have often heard young maids complaining' is from the semi-opera *The Fairy Queen* of 1692, in which Purcell's music is inserted into the gaps in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, without having anything to do with the original drama. Here, a Nymph sings a light and cynical song.

'O solitude, my sweetest choice', however, is a 'single song' and employs one of Purcell's favourite devices, the ground bass, where the bass line is repeated unchanged, while the voice moves in sensuous and expressive shapes above it. It is an English translation by Katherine Philips of a much longer poem by Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant.

All these songs were composed with just a vocal line accompanied by a bass part, originally intended for any assortment of continuo instruments - lute, harpsichord, organ, spinet, theorbo etc. - to realise the (mostly) implied harmony. I have made a version where viols express the harmony.

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William Byrd (c.1540-1623)

Prelude and Ground a5 'The Queen's Goodnight'

O Lord, how vain

Sir Philip Sidney

O Lord, how vain are all our frail delights;
How mix'd with sour the sweet of our desire;
How subject oft to Fortune's subtle sleights;
How soon consum'd like snow against the fire.
Sith in this life our pleasures all be vain,
O Lord, grant me that I may them disdain.

How fair in show where need doth force to wish;
How much they loathe when heart hath them at will;
How things possess'd do seem not worth a rish,
Where greedy minds for more do covet still.
Sith in this life our pleasures all be vain,
O Lord, grant me that I may them disdain.

What prince so great as doth not seem to want;
What man so rich but still doth covet more;
To whom so large was ever Fortune's grant
As for to have a quiet mind in store.
Sith in this life our pleasures all be vain,
O Lord, grant me that I may them disdain.

Two parts in one the fourth above

O that most rare breast (1588)

Sir Edward Dyer

O that most rare breast, crystalline, sincere,
Through which like gold thy princely heart did shine.
O sprite heroic, O valiant worthy knight!
O Sidney! prince of fame and men's good will.
For thee both kings and princesses do mourn:
Thy noble tomb three cities strange desir'd,
Foes to the cause thy prowess did defend.
Bewail the day that crossed thy famous race!
The doleful debt due to thy hearse I pay,
Tears from the soul that aye thy want shall mourn:
And by my will my life itself would yield,
If heaven blame ne might my faith distain.
O heavy time! that my days draw behind thee.
Thou dead dost live, thy friend here living dieth.

Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)

2 fantasias in 3 parts

Now each flowery bank of May

Anonymous

Now each flowery bank of May
Woos the streams that glides away.
Mountains fann'd by a sweet gale
Loves the humble looking dale.
Winds the loved leaves do kiss,
Each thing tasteth of Love's bliss.
Only I though blest I be
To be loved by destiny,
Love confessed by her sweet breath
Whose love is life, whose hate is death.

William Byrd

My mistress had a little dog

Anonymous

My mistress had a little dog
Whose name was Pretty Royal
Who neither hunted sheep nor hog
But was without denial
A tumbler fine, that might be seen
To wait upon a fairy queen.

The goddess which Diana hight
Among her beagles dainty
Had not a hound so fair and white
Nor graced with such beauty;
And yet his beauty was not such
But his conditions were as rich.

Upon his mistress he would wait
In courteous wise and humble,
And with his craft and false deceit,
When she would have him tumble,
Of coneys in the pleasant prime
He would kill twenty at a time.

But out, alas! I'll speak no more.
My heart with grief doth shake.
This pretty dog was wounded sore
E'en for his mistress' sake:
A beastly man, or manly beast
Knocked out his brains; and so I rest.

A trial royal! Oyez!
Ye hounds and beagles all,
If ye sat in Appleton Hall,
Would you not judge that out of doubt
Tyburn were fit for such a lout?

Interval

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

2 fantasias in 4 parts

O solitude, my sweetest choice Z406 (1684-5)

Katherine Philips after Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant

O solitude, my sweetest choice!
Places devoted to the night,
Remote from tumult and from noise,
How ye my restless thoughts delight!
O solitude, my sweetest choice!
O heav'ns! what content is mine,
To see these trees, which have appear'd
From the nativity of time,
And which all ages have rever'd,
To look today as fresh and green
As when their beauties first were seen.
O, how agreeable a sight
These hanging mountains do appear,
Which th'unhappy would invite
To finish all their sorrows here,
When their hard fate makes them endure
Such woes as only death can cure.
O, how I solitude adore!
That element of noblest wit,
Where I have learnt Apollo's lore,
Without the pains to study it.
For thy sake I in love am grown
With what thy fancy does pursue;
But when I think upon my own,
I hate it for that reason too,
Because it needs must hinder me
From seeing and from serving thee.
O solitude, O how I solitude adore!

Christopher Simpson (c.1602-1669)

Duo in G for 2 bass viols

Orlando Gibbons

2 In nomines

Faire is the rose

Anonymous

Faire is the Rose, yet fades with heate or colde;
Sweet are the Violets, yet soone grow olde;

The Lillie's white, yet in one day tis done;
White is the Snow, yet melts against the Sunne,
So white, so sweet is my Mistris face,
Yet altred quite in one short houres space
So short live'd beautie a vain glosse doth borrow,
Breathing delight to day, but none tomorrow.

Henry Purcell

2 fantasias in 4 parts

Oedipus, King of Thebes (1692)

Music for a while

John Dryden/Nathaniel Lee

Music for a while
Shall all your cares beguile:
Wond'ring how your pains were eas'd,
And disdainig to be pleas'd,
Till Alecto free the dead
From their eternal bands,
Till the snakes drop from her head,
And the whip from out her hands.
Music for a while
Shall all your cares beguile.

The Fairy Queen (1692)

When I have often heard young maids complaining

Anonymous, after William Shakespeare

When I have often heard young maids complaining
That when men promise most they most deceive,
Then I thought none of them worthy my gaining,
And what they swore, I would never believe.

But when so humbly one makes his addresses
With looks so soft, and with language so kind,
I thought it sin to refuse his caresses;
Nature o'ercame, and I soon changed my mind.

Should he employ all his arts in deceiving,
Stretch his invention and quite crack his brain,
I find such charms, such true joy in believing,
I'll have the pleasure, let him have the pain.

If he proves perjur'd, I shall not be cheated,
He may deceive himself, but never me,
'Tis what I look for, and shan't be defeated,
For I'm as false and inconstant as he.