

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 12 June 2022 7.30pm

Fretwork

Emilia Benjamin viol

Emily Ashton viol

Joanna Levine viol

Sam Stadlen viol

Richard Boothby viol

Susanna Pell viol

Silas Wollston organ

CLASSIC *fm* Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

John Taverner (c.1490-1545)

Sanctus from *Missa 'Gloria tibi Trinitas'* (?1520s)

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

In Nomine a6 Z746 (c.1680)

William Byrd (c.1540-1623)

Pavan and Galliard a6

Fantasia a6 No. 1 (pub. 1611)

Alfonso Ferrabosco (1543-1588)

Almain for lyra viol

Coranto for lyra viol

William Lawes (1602-1645)

Consort Sett a6 in C

I. Fantasy • II. Fantasy • III. Aire

Interval

William Lawes

Consort Sett a6 in G minor

I. Paven • II. Fantasy • III. Aire

Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)

Two Fantasies a6

Robert Parsons (c.1535-1571)

De la court

Thomas Ford (d.1648)

The wild goose chase (pub. 1607)

Why Not Here (pub. 1607)

Snatch and Away (pub. 1607)

A Pill to Purge Melancholie (pub. 1607)

William Lawes

Consort Sett a6 in F

I. Aire • II. Fantasy • III. Aire • IV. Fantasy

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We open tonight's concert with the alpha and omega of English consort music, separated by a century and half, but connected by a tradition that was exclusive to these islands.

John Taverner's six-part Mass, *Gloria tibi trinitas*, was probably composed sometime in the 1520s and is based on the plainsong of that name. For some reason that we cannot now fathom, other composers took the short section in the Benedictus that is in four parts, where the *cantus firmus* is played in its entirety, and imitated it, using the same plainsong in long equal-value notes and weaving their own imitative counterpoint around it. They were called '*In Nomines*' because the words to this section are '*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domine*'. While not all *In Nomines* are for viols, the vast majority are and the tradition extended into the 17th Century when William Lawes and John Jenkins both penned masterly examples.

And then, when a 20-year-old **Henry Purcell** started exploring the music of his predecessors, he must have come across many *In Nomines*; so, when he wrote his viol *Fantazias* in June of 1680, the idea of trying his hand at this ancient and venerable tradition must have seemed very appealing. Purcell's autograph manuscript is almost the only surviving source, and while the four-part *Fantazias* are all exactly dated, it's not clear when the *In Nomines* were composed. It could be that, after having finished the 4-part *Fantazias* on 31 August, and casually polished off the masterpiece that is the *Fantazia Upon One Note*, he then entered into the manuscript book:

Here Begineth ye 6, 7 & 8 part Fantazias

Sadly, he wrote no 8-part piece. But the *In Nomines* in 6 and then 7 parts are masterpieces, written in an ancient style, yet using a distinctly Purcellian harmonic palette and finding contrapuntal possibilities that eluded even those masters who had come before.

And writing contrapuntal music in six parts is not for the faint hearted: only the very best masters succeed. Tonight, we have assembled as many of those as we can, and in particular, we have included three consort sets by **William Lawes**. One reason for doing so is that they demand performance with a chamber organ - they alone have independent material in the organ part, while most other organ parts are a kind of short score or fully-realised continuo part, reproducing the viol parts as much as possible.

But his music stands out for other reasons: there is a theatrical element that leaps out at the listener; dramatic moments abound as he is always prepared to sacrifice musical purity for extravagant effect. Some of this comes from the influence of Italian madrigals, Monteverdi in particular; but much comes from an extreme force of personality. His wonderful invention in idiosyncratic, dynamic themes, intense and unusual harmony, thrilling instrumental virtuosity and masterly handling of textures marks Lawes out as exceptional.

He built his music on the foundations of more traditional fare. He was apprenticed to Giovanni Coprario (born plain John Cooper) and, though of a younger generation, probably knew all the other major

composers of consort music at court - Ferrabosco, Gibbons and Lupo. **Gibbons's** six *Fantazias* in six parts are probably the most perfect example of the genre: perfect in the sense of a complete and unalterable utterance, satisfying in every way. The works are wonders that continue to astonish players and listeners. It is chamber music to stand proudly beside the quartets of Beethoven and Haydn.

None of the six-part music in tonight's programme was published in the 17th Century - it has come down to us in manuscript form, mostly in individual parts without bar-lines. None, that is, except for **Byrd's** *Fantasia*, which appeared in his 1611 publication. It had probably been composed in the 1590s, and shows Byrd at his masterly, characteristic best: at home moving from serious 'vocal' counterpoint through to folk music - we hear snatches of *Greensleeves* at one point - and onto a full-throated *Galliard* before concluding with a grand coda.

Robert Parsons was Byrd's predecessor in the Chapel Royal, but had lived only a short life before he died in 1572: His death is tersely recorded in the Cheque Book of the Chapel Royal:

Robt. Parsons was drowned at Newark upon Trent the 25th of Januarie, and Wm. Bird sworne gentleman in his place at the first the 22d of Februarie followinge.

He was probably only around 35 years old; yet he had been appointed a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1563. He was well represented in Robert Dow's celebrated part-books compiled in the 1580s. Dow lamented Parsons' early death in a Latin couplet:

*Qui tantus primo Parsones in flore fuisti,
Quantus in autumno in morere fores.*

*Parsons, you who were so great in the springtime of life,
How great you would have been in the autumn, had not death intervened.*

The lyra viol owes its birth to the Elizabethan theatre, and it's first heard in Ben Jonson's play *Cynthia's Revels* of 1600 where it is described as 'an instrument that alone is able to infuse souls in the most melancholique and dull disposed creature upon earth'. Jonson and Ferrabosco were to become close collaborators over the next few decades, and the latter's publication of 1609 is the high point of music for the lyra viol. The instrument in these early years was a small bass viol that often included sympathetic strings. But these were abandoned later as being impractical, and players were content to play the music on any suitable viol. It was most often tuned in a variety of different tunings, and notated in tablature.

Ferrabosco was clearly a virtuosic performer on the lyra and wrote the most serious and demanding music for it. At the other end of the spectrum was **Thomas Ford**, who included several light and amusing duets for two lyras in his 1607 publication 'Musicke of Sundrie Kindes'.

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