

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 19 December 2024
1.00pm

Fantasies, Battles and Dances: The Golden Age of European Consort Music 1550-1750

Hespèrion XXI

Jordi Savall director, treble viol

Christophe Coin treble viol, bass viol

Lixsania Fernández tenor viol

Filipa Meneses bass viol

Philippe Pierlot bass viol

Anna Lachegyí tenor viol

Xavier Díaz-Latorre guitar

David Mayoral percussion

Innocentio Alberti (c.1535-1615)

Christopher Tye (c.1505-1572)

Robert Parsons (c.1535-1571)

Pierre Attaignant (1494-1552)

Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)

John Dowland (1563-1626)

Giovanni Maria Trabaci (c.1575-1647)

Gioseffo Guami (1542-1611)

Clement Woodcock (c.1540-1590)

Antony Holborne (1545-1602)

John Ward (c.1589-1638)

Anon

William Brade (1560-1630)

Alfonso Ferrabosco (1543-1588)

William Brade

John Jenkins (1592-1678)

Sebastián Aguilera de Heredia (1561-1627)

Samuel Scheidt (1587-1654)

William Lawes (1602-1645)

Robert Johnson (c.1583-1633) & William Brade

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Juan Bautista José Cabanilles (c.1644-1712)

Pavin of Albarti - Gallyard

In Nomine a5 'Crye'

The song called trumpets a6

Pavane de la Guerre

In Nomine a5 No. 1 (pub. c.1610)

Semper Dowland semper dolens (pub. 1604)

The King of Denmark's Galliard (pub. 1605)

Toccata di Durezza et Ligature

Canzon a4 sopra 'La Battaglia'

Browning my dear

Galliard No. 24

Fantasia No. 4

Pavane de la petite Guerre & Gaillarde

Bourrée d'Avignonez

Turkische Intrada

Four-note pavan

Galliard a6

The Bell Pavan

Tiento de batalla

Galliard Battaglia

Paven from *Consort Sett* a5 in C

The King's Morisco

Fantasia upon one note in F Z745 (c.1680)

Contrapunctus 9 from the *Art of Fugue*

BWV1080 (by 1742, rev. 1745-9)

Obertura - Corrente Italiana

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Consort music was the repertoire of small groups of instrumentalists at the Tudor, Jacobean and Stuart courts in England. The French used the term *concert*, the Italians *concerto*, but the idea was the same. The Germans hadn't a term of their own and referred to *das Englische Consort*. Instrumentation was either homogeneous or mixed. A viol consort, for instance, contained viols of different sizes; a broken consort comprised any bowed, blown, plucked or struck instruments. A typical consort was that which played for Elizabeth I at Elvetham (Eltham today) in 1591, consisting of treble and bass viol, flute, lute, bandora and cittern.

Consort music specialised in courtly dances. The pavan and galliard in variant spellings was the most popular dance combination of the 16th Century. The present concert of consort pieces opens with a pair. The former was slow and in four time, the latter quick and in three, with both conforming to four-bar or eight-bar phrase-lengths suitable for standard choreographic patterns. The dances, including the later corrente and bourrée (both played here with other pavans and galliards), were formal and the steps had to be taught. Two-legged creatures find it hard to improvise movement in three-time. Dancing masters commanded high salaries.

The music was secular although in the case of the 'In Nomine', it was derived from a religious work, the *Gloria tibi trinitas* mass by John Taverner, composed around 1520. In the then accepted manner of composition, Taverner constructed polyphonic lines around an ancient 56-note Gregorian plainsong melody attached to that Latin text ('Gloria tibi' etc) by the early church. Theoretically, a monk would recognise this underlying melody, the so-called *cantus firmus*, and call to mind the religious lyric even when it was absent as in Taverner's six-voice mass. In the Benedictus movement, he reduced the texture to four voices at the words 'In Nomine Domini' and this became a stand-alone section which Taverner himself extracted and, in non-religious contexts, gave to instruments to play. Other composers took up the idea and the 'In Nomine' became the first hit of the consort music tradition.

About 150 examples exist by composers from Taverner to Purcell, the most prolific being **Christopher Tye**, who gave his pieces titles like 'Crye'. When with the violent upheaval of the Reformation, Roman Catholic worship was banned, it must have amused the musicians that they had snuck through part of the mass under the noses of the censors. This was a 16th-century Shostakovich weaving a revolutionary song into a symphony which only initiates would recognise. Taverner employed the same technique with folk song in his 'Western Wind Mass' as does **Clement Woodcock** in 'Browning My Dear', which takes the folk song 'Madam Browning' as its *cantus firmus*.

The use of colourful, enigmatic titles is characteristic of the age and sometimes descriptive of the piece. **John Jenkins's** 'Bell Pavan' imitates slow tolling chimes in

downward scales. Tye's 'In Nomine Crye' trembles with frantic repeating quavers around the plainsong. This simple device came to be called the *stile concitato* ('agitated style') on the Continent where battles, whose tumult the music attempted to imitate, raged frequently. In Italy, the composer Claudio Monteverdi philosophised about the agitated style in his 1638 collection *Madrigali Guerrieri e Amorosi*, warlike and amorous madrigals, quoting Plato describing a music which imitates military speech and stated his intention to re-create it. **Scheidt's** 'Galliard Battaglia', **Aguilera de Heredia's** 'Tiento de Batalla' and **Attainant's** 'Pavane de la Guerre' exploit this terror-inducing feature.

The English had to wait until the Civil War in the next century to witness battles first hand. **Robert Parsons** knew religious strife but no wars and died young, drowning in the River Trent. His 'Trumpets à 6' envisages a genteel militarism which breaks into a cavalry gallop half-way through. **William Brade** spent his entire career in Germany and was caught up in the Thirty Years' War. He imitates the Turkish janissary bands associated with marching armies even if they weren't actually Turkish. **John Dowland** spent five years in Denmark at the court of King Christian IV, a reluctant war leader. The composer, greatest lute player of his age, writes a galliard for the King, combining a stiff march, even in three-time, with a catchy dance tune.

As the name suggests, the 'Fantasia' was a much freer composition than the dances and marches. Such pieces ranged from the rhapsodic and improvisatory to the episodic and tightly structured. By **Henry Purcell's** time, it was already a somewhat dated form but he was determined to demonstrate his skill not only in the modern Baroque idiom of theatre music for violins, but also in the antique sound world of the viol fantasia. He seems to have thrived on the intellectual challenge and nowhere is his genius more audible than in the 'Fantasia Upon One Note' in which he weaves complex lines of polyphony around a flatlining bleep.

By **JS Bach's** day, the term consort music was no longer current. However, much of his music was written with no particular instrument in mind and instruments which both predated his age like the viol or appeared after him like the moog synthesiser have proved effective in displaying his brilliance. Indeed, his last work *The Art of Fugue* ('Die Kunst der Fuge'), was entirely theoretical, written for no instrument, and dedicated solely to the intellectual exercise of writing a fugue, or as he called it, a Contrapunctus, on the page. There are 14 in total. Each uses the same simple subject – slow and expansive in Contrapunctus 1, but proudly heraldic in Contrapunctus 9, where it rings out in clear bell-like minims halfway through amid delirious running semiquavers in the finally exuberant consort instruments. Let's dance - a three-time corrente concludes!

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