

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 1 December 2023
7.30pm

The fire & tears of the Muse Elizabethan Consort Music

Hespèrion XXI

Elionor Martínez soprano
William Shelton countertenor
Jordi Savall director

Jordi Savall treble viol
Natalia Timofeeva tenor viol
Philippe Pierlot bass viol
Juan Manuel Quintana bass viol
Xavier Puertas consort bass
Xavier Díaz-Latorre guitar, lute

Innocentio Alberti (c.1535-1615)

Anon

Christopher Tye (c.1505-1572)

Anon

Pavin of Albarti - Gallyard

How can the tree (c.1580)

In Nomine a 5 'Crye'

The dark is my delight (1615)

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William Byrd (c.1540-1623)

In Nomine a 5

Ye sacred muses

Browning a 5

La virginella (pub. 1588)

Interval

Alfonso Ferrabosco (1543-1588)

Antony Holborne (1545-1602)

Anon

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Hear Me, O God (The four-note pavan)

The Teares of the Muses (pub. 1599)

O Lord, turn not away thy face (pub. 1561)

Lullabie (pub. 1599)

Born is the Babe (pub. c.1605)

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John Dowland (1563-1626)

Semper Dowland semper dolens (pub. 1604)

The King of Denmark, his Galliard (pub. 1605)

Now, O now I needs must part (pub. 1597)

Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)

In Nomine a 5 (pub. c.1610)

Richard Nicholson (1563-1639)

Joan, quoth John

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The Elizabethan era was one of great contradiction. Many consider it to be the Golden Age, the height of the English Renaissance. Politically, it is seen as a period of relative stability, between the turmoil of the Wars of the Roses, the early Reformation and the later Civil Wars. Regarding religion, it is considered to have been less violent than Edward VI's iconoclasm and aggressive Reformation and the persecution of protestants under Mary. Economically, the establishment of the royal exchange, comparatively low taxes and the new ventures in seafaring led engendered relative wealth and expansion. This fuelled a climate in which the arts could flourish: playwriting, the visual arts and – crucially for us – music.

However, things were not as shiny as they sometimes appear: England was fighting multiple invasion attempts by Spain; the expansion of seafaring laid the groundwork for centuries of colonial exploitation. The wealth accrued through economic gains only belonged to few, while many were living in outrageous conditions, plagued by poor health and poor hygiene. On the religious front, Elizabeth's claims to tolerance were scarcely convincing to a Catholic minority experiencing persecution; this was a period that saw many Catholic men and some women executed. For all the government's claims that they were executing Catholics for the political crime of treason, Catholics considered themselves persecuted for their faith. Two faiths fought for legitimacy, and this all-encompassing conflict found expression in art, literature and the everyday lives of individuals. A succession of genuinely treacherous plots was frustrated, most dramatically that of Anthony Babington.

This turmoil - political, religious, societal - clearly impacted the life and work of the composers in today's programme: famously **Byrd** was on the one hand highly regarded, employed and championed by the Queen, while on the other, as a Catholic in a Protestant country, he was forced to disguise some of his compositions and lived in relative isolation for much of his later life. The father of **Ferrabosco** the younger has often been accused, although never convincingly proven, of having been a spy for the English crown. In 1594 **Dowland** travelled to continental Europe, apparently in frustration over not being appointed as musician at Elizabeth's court. It remains unclear whether that was, as he maintained, due to his Catholic leanings. Once in Florence, he became acquainted with English Catholics in exile, who were planning a plot against Elizabeth. Upon hearing this, Dowland quickly moved on, eventually finding employment with the King of Denmark, honoured in one of this evening's pieces.

From a musical perspective, though, this was, indeed, a high point for composers and genres

developing in England; a time for musical expansion and innovation. Instrumental music flourished on multiple levels: the queen was a keen player herself and employed over 70 musicians during her lifetime. At the same time, it became increasingly common for English noblemen – and women – to play the lute in particular. Composers were keen to serve these different groups of performers, and some of the period's finest writing can be found in English consort song.

A particular curiosity of this time is the *In Nomine* tradition: around the middle of the 16th Century, composers started to rewrite one particular section from the Benedictus ('In nomine domini') from a mass by John Taverner. Keeping Taverner's slow *cantus firmus* from the tenor, they then composed instrumental polyphony around it. Soon this became a way to identify oneself as part of this generation of musicians, frequently referencing each other's work in playful intertextuality. The three versions in today's programme are roughly chronological – starting with **Tye**, who was among the first and most prolific composers of this sub-genre, before moving to Byrd and **Gibbons** later. Tye gave his many *In Nomine* settings different bynames – 'Crye', as we hear today, with its rapid repetitions refers to the cries of street vendors, transporting the originally sacred piece into the streets of early modern London.

Dances form another important strand in Elizabethan consort music. Influenced in part by Italian contemporaries – such as **Alberti** – soon English composers began writing in this art form, a particular favourite of the Queen, who was herself an avid dancer. Perhaps less known today than some of his contemporaries, **Holborne** was one of the leading composers of consort music. His dances' intricate writing and exquisite rhythms do leave us to question whether they were really meant to be danced or whether they were 'dances for the ears'. Included in his book of dances, the first to appear in print in England, was *The Teares of the Muses*, sitting prominently at the centre of the programme.

This piece also points to another noteworthy element of Elizabethan consort music – its intricate and frequent links to other art forms, in particular literature and poetry: *The Teares of the Muses* is also the title of a poem by Edmund Spenser, published a few years before Holborne's piece. Similarly, *Joan, quoth John* references a popular English romance and brings this evening to a close. Encapsulating the contrasts that define the Elizabethan era – the light and dark, the fire and tears – the moods of tonight's pieces range from jubilant and bright to sombre and pensive, the range of combinations of instruments and voice allowing for just as great a variation of sound.

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*The artists are grateful for the support of
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Innocentio Albarti (c.1535-1615)

Pavin of Albarti - Gallyard

Anon

How can the tree (c.1580)

Thomas Vaux

How can the tree but waste and wither away,
That hath not sometimes comfort of the sun?
How can the flow'r but fade and son decay,
That always is with dark clouds overrun?
Is this a life?
Nay death you may it call,
That feels each pain and knows no joy at all.

What foodless beast can live long in good plight?
Or is it life, where senses there be none?
Or what availeth eyes without their light?
Or else a tongue to him that is alone?
Is this a life? Nay death you may it call,
That feels each pain, and knows no joy at all.

Where to serve ears if that there be no sound?
Or such a head, where no device doth grow?
But all of complaints, since sorrow is the ground,
Whereby the heart doth pine in deadly woe.
Is this a life? Nay death you may it call,
That feels each pain, and knows no joy at all.

Christopher Tye (c.1505-1572)

In Nomine a 5 'Crye'

Anon

The dark is my delight (1615)

John Marston

The dark is my delight,
So is the nightingale's;
My music's in the night,
So is the nightingale's;
My body is but little,
So is the nightingale's;
I love to, love to sleep,
Against the prickle,
So, so doth the nightingale.

William Byrd (c.1540-1623)

In Nomine a 5

Ye sacred muses

Anonymous

Ye sacred Muses, race of Jove,
Whom Music's lore delighteth,
Come down from crystal heav'ns above
To earth, where sorrow dwelleth,
In mourning weeds with tears in eyes:
Tallis is dead, and Music dies.

Browning a 5

Anonymous

The leaves be green, the nuts be brown:
They hang so high they will not come down.

La virginella (pub. 1588)

Ludovico Ariosto

La virginella è simil' alla
rosa,
Ch'in bel giardin sulla nativa
spina,
Mentre sola è, sicura si
riposa.
Nè gregge, nè pastor, se le
avvicina:
L'aura soave e l'alba
rugiadosa,
L'acqua, la terra, al suo favor
s'inchina:
Giovani vaghi e donn'
inamorate,
Amano haverne e
seni e temple
ornate.

The virgin

The virgin has her image
in the rose
sheltered in garden on its
native stock,
which there in solitude
and safe repose,
blooms unapproached by
shepherd or by flock.
For this earth teems, and
freshening water flows,
and breeze and dewy dawn
their sweets unlock:
with such the wistful youth
his bosom dresses.
With such the enamored
damsel braids her
tresses.

Interval

Alfonso Ferrabosco (1543-1588)

Hear Me, O God (The four-note pavan)

Ben Jonson

Hear me, O God,
A broken heart
Is my best part;
Use still Thy rod,
That I may prove
There-in Thy love.

If Thou had'st not
Been stern to me,
But let me free,
I had forgot
My self and Thee.

For sin's so sweet
As minds ill bent
Cannot repent
Until they meet
Their punishment.

Who more can crave?
That Thou hast done?
Thou gav'st a Son
To free a slave
First made of nought;
With all since bought.

Sin, Death and Hell
His glorious Name
Quite overcame,
Yet I rebel
And slight the same.

But I'll come in
Before my loss
Me further toss
As sure to win
Under His Cross.

Antony Holborne (1545-1602)

The Teares of the Muses (pub. 1599)

Anon

O Lord, turn not away thy face (pub. 1561)

John Marckant

O Lord, turn not away thy face from him that lieth
prostrate,
Lamenting sore his sinful life before thy mercy gate,
Which gate thou op'nest wide to those that do lament their
sin;
Shut not that gate, against me Lord, but let me enter in.

And call me not to mine account how I have lived here,

For then I know right well, o Lord, how vile I shall appear.
I need not to confess my life, I am sure thou canst tell
What I have been, and what I am, I know thou know'st it
well.

O Lord, thou know'st what things be past, and'eke the
things that be;
Thou know'st what is to come, nothing is hid from thee.
Before the heavens and earth were made, thou know'st
what things were then,
As all things else that have been since among the sons of
men.

And can the things that I have done be hidden from the
then?
Nay, nay, thou know'st them all, o Lord, where they were
done, and when.
Wherefore with tears I come to thee to beg and to entreat,
E'en as a child that hath done ill, and feareth to be beat.

So come I to thy mercy gate, where mercy doth abound,
Requiring mercy for my sin to heal my deadly wound.
O Lord, I need not to repeat what I do beg or crave;
Thou know'st, o Lord; before I ask the thing that I would
have.

Mercy, good Lord, mercy I ask, this is the total sum;
For mercy, Lord, is all my suit; Lord, let thy mercy come.
(Mercy, good Lord, etc.)

Antony Holborne

Lullabie (pub. 1599)

Anon

Born is the Babe (pub. c.1605)

Anonymous

Born is the Babe, the only branch of peace,
The sweet Messiah, God's most holy Son,
Whose death our life, whose wounds our joys increase,
Who wrought our weal when all our hope was gone,
Whose grief our joy, whose lack reliev'd our loss,
Who cur'd our care by suff'ring on the cross.

Born is the Lamb, the sacrifice of joy,
The spotless Person, ransom of our sin,
The sweet Samaritan that cur'd annoy,
The Son in whom the Sire delighteth in,
The hav'n of peace when worldly troubles toss,
Who cur'd our care by suff'ring on the cross.

Born is the Shepherd, careful of his sheep,
The light of glory, bright of majesty,
The Father's power who hath our sins in keep,
The very beam of true divinity,
Whom praise we still when worldly troubles toss,
Who cur'd our care by suff'ring on the cross.

John Dowland (1563-1626)

Semper Dowland semper dolens (pub. 1604)

The King of Denmark, his Galliard (pub. 1605)

Now, O now I needs must part (pub. 1597)

Anonymous

Now, O now, I needs must part,
Parting though I absent mourn.
Absence can no joy impart:
Joy, once fled cannot returne.

While I live I needs must love,
Love lives not when hope is gone.
Now at last despaire doth prove,
Love divided loveth none.

*Sad despair doth drive me hence,
This despaire unkindnes sends.
If that parting be offence,
It is shee which then offends.*

Deare, when I from thee am gone,
Gone are all my joyes at once.
I loved thee and thee alone,
In whose love I joyed once.

And although your sight I leave,
Sight where in my joyes do lie.
Till that death doth sence bereave,
Never shall affection die.

Sad despair doth drive me hence ...

Deare, if I do not returne,
Love and I shall die together.
For my absence never mourne,
Whom you might have joyed ever.

Part we must though now I die,
Die I do to part with you.
Him despaire doth cause to lie,
Who both lived and dieth true.

Sad despair doth drive me hence ...

Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)

In Nomine a 5 (pub. c.1610)

Richard Nicholson (1563-1639)

Joan, quoth John

Anonymous

Joan, quoth John, when will this be?
Tell me when wilt thou marry me?
My cow and eke my calf and rent,
My land and all my tenement.
Say, Joan, say, Joan, what wilt thou do?
I cannot come every day to woo.

John, quoth Joan, is there such haste?
Look ere you leap, lest you make waste.
If haste you have with me to wed,
More belongs to a bride's bed.
Wherefore, wherefore thus must you do:
Day and night, come every hour to woo.

John if you will needs me have,
This is that which I do crave:
To let me have my will in all,
And then with thee I'll never brawl.
Say, John, say, John, shall this be so?
Then you need not come every hour to woo.