

WIGMORE HALL 125

Sunday 29 March 2026

11.30am

Dowland 400th Anniversary Weekend

Phantasm

Laurence Dreyfus director, treble viol

Emilia Benjamin treble viol

Heidi Gröger tenor viol

Chris Terepin bass viol

Markku Luolajan-Mikkola bass viol

Elizabeth Kenny lute

John Dowland (1563-1626)

Mistress Nichols Almand (1604)

Lachrimae antiquae (1604)

Lachrimae antiquae Novae (1604)

Mr Nicholas Gryffith his Galliard (1604)

Sir John Souch his Galliard (1604)

Lachrimae gementes (1604)

Lachrimae tristes (1604)

Mr Giles Hobies Galliard (1604)

The King of Denmark's Galliard (1604)

Lachrimae coactae (1604)

Lachrimae amantis (1604)

Mr Thomas Collier his Galiard (1604)

Mr Bucton's Galliard (1604)

The Earl of Essex Galliard (1604)

Lachrimae verae (1604)

Semper Dowland semper dolens (1604)

Captain Piper his Galliard (1604)

Mr Henry Noel his Galliard (1604)

Sir Henry Umpton's Funeral (1604)

Mr George Whitehead his Almand (1604)

Mr John Langton's Pavan



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When Dowland published his *Lachrimae, or Seaven Teares* in London in April 1604, he had not expected to be still in England. The previous summer he had taken leave from his post as lutenist to Christian IV of Denmark and come over 'on his own business', which probably meant attending to sales of the recently issued *The Third and Last Booke of Songes* and preparing for the publication of *Lachrimae*. Christian had expected him back by the end of 1603, but in the dedication of *Lachrimae* to Queen Anne – James I's wife and Christian IV's sister – Dowland declared that he had 'been twice under sayle for Denmarke, hastning my returne to my most royall King and Master, your deare and worthiest Brother; but by contrary windes and frost, I was forst backe againe and of necessitie compeld to winter here in your most happie Kingdome'. Diplomatic words: Dowland may have hoped to appease Christian, but by dedicating to Anne a work 'begun where you were borne, and ended where you raigne', perhaps also spotted a chance to renew his chances of gaining the English court appointment he had so long desired. In the latter, at least, he would once again be disappointed.

Lachrimae is a remarkable and unique achievement, certainly one of the most important instrumental compositions of the English Renaissance. Set for five-part consort and lute, it has at its heart seven powerful explorations of the harmonic, rhythmic and melodic subtleties of his earlier lute pavan, known in its subsequent sung version in the *Second Book of Songs* as 'Flow my tears', but also so famous across northern Europe that many composers transcribed it or even just used its first four falling notes as a ready-made allusive symbol for tears and grief. In *Lachrimae*, its seven treatments build to a near-half-hour sequence of separate pavans, each related to its companions by the four-note motif – present in one or other of the five parts at the beginning of each pavan – as well as by other thematic cross-references. Laurence Dreyfus has called it 'an extended process of reflection on a poetic-musical theme', but it is also a majestic passage of exquisitely drawn and closely summoned emotion, equalled in meaningfulness among pre-Romantic abstract instrumental cycles only by the 'Rosary' violin sonatas of Heinrich Biber and the solo violin partitas and cello suites of Bach.

The pavan was originally a dignified slow dance in duple meter typically consisting of three repeated strains, but by Dowland's time it had become a weighty instrumental genre in its own right, one that composers found particularly conducive to the expression of sustained, serious emotion. This was especially so in England, where titles such as *Pavana dolorosa* (Peter Philips) or *Pavan: The Funerals* (Anthony Holborne) reveal its wide association with melancholy, sorrow and weeping. The Latin titles of Dowland's tearful pavans suggest another level of nuance, although their exact significance is left to the listener to surmise, or perhaps just feel. 'Lachrimae

Antiqua' clearly refers to the fact that this is the pavan in its original form, and 'Lachrimae novae' to its renewal. 'Gementes' (sighing), 'Tristes' (sad), 'Coactae' (crocodile), 'Amantis' (lover's) and 'Verae' (true) are, however, harder to pin down, though the suggestion has been made that they stand for the anxious states of mind examined by many Elizabeth and Jacobean writers, most famously Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* of 1621.

Although Dowland set out his *Lachrimae* pavans at the head of his publication, he made no requirement for them to be played in sequence, and indeed he included three more pavans of great beauty in the set. *Sir Henry Umpton's Funeral* commemorates the cultured and music-loving man who served as Queen Elizabeth's Ambassador to France, and whose death in 1596 is said to have caused the French king much distress, but Dowland may not have known John Langton so well, since he failed to notice that he had been recently knighted. The third is the superbly moving, emotionally complex *Semper Dowland semper dolens* (Forever Dowland, forever doleful), also originally a lute solo, and seemingly some kind of self-portrait. (The punning title, by the way, gives cause to think that the composer may have pronounced his name 'Doeland').

Dowland did not intend his new publication to be unmitigatedly downcast, however, declaring that tears are not 'shed always in sorrowe, but sometime in joy and gladnesse', and that he had therefore mixed 'grave with light, that every ear may receive his several content'. What we get, then, is 14 assorted extra pieces, some drawn from his back catalogue of cheerful dance tunes (mainly galliards and almans) and some that were apparently new to the world. Several of the dance pieces had started out as lute solos but become known, like 'Flow my tears', as songs: *The Earl of Essex Galliard* appeared as 'Can she excuse my wrongs' in *The Firste Book of Songes* in 1597, as had *Sir John Souch his Galliard* ('My thoughts are winged with hope') and *Captain Piper his Galliard* ('If my complaints could passion move'). Some – *Mr Nicholas Gryffith his Galliard*, *Mr Thomas Collier his Galliard* and *Mr George Whitehead his Almand* – are not known from any other source and may have been specifically composed as consort pieces, perhaps for the violin band at the Danish court.

By the summer of 1604 Dowland was back in Denmark, where he would remain in King Christian's service for another two years. Little is known of the commercial success or otherwise of *Lachrimae*, but his name and that of his most famous composition were already inseparable: around this time he signed his name in a friend's autograph book as 'Jo: dolandi de Lachrimae'.

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