

“What does one do with a Chest of Vyolls ?”

LA SPIRITA

Viola da Gamba Consort

Mary Benton, tenor viol

Lynn Fergusson, voice and treble viol

Patricia Hlafter, treble viol

Judith Klotz, tenor viol

Amy Warren, bass viol

Sunday November 22, 2009

Lutheran Church of the Messiah
Nassau Street at Cedar Lane
Princeton

La Spirita is a member of the
Guild for Early Music
www.guildforearlymusic.org

Program

Browning	Elway Bevin 1554-1638
Maynard's Almain	John Maynard? 1577- after 1614
Lachrimae Antiquae Lachrimae Coactae	John Dowland 1563-1626
.....	
Susanne un jour	Didier Lupi Second c 1548
Susanne un jour	Alfonso Ferrabosco, Sr. c 1578-1628
Fantasia a' 3 No. 2	Orlando Gibbons 1583-1625
Gagliarde	Giovanni Francesco Anerio 1567-1630
.....	
If love's a sweet passion Fantazia a' 4 No. 12 When I have often heard	Henry Purcell 1659-1695
.....	
In Nomine	John Bull c 1562-1628
Take time while time doth last	John Farmer fl 1591-1601
.....	
Fantasia	Johann Sebastian Bach 1685-1750
Ricercar	Johann Pachelbel 1653-1706
.....	
Dowland's Almain	John Dowland
Alman Galliard	Will Ayton 1948-
This merry pleasant spring	Anon. 17th century
.....	
Fantasy a' 5 No. 9	John Jenkins 1592-1678

Notes on the Program

The traditional English “Chest of Vyolls” refers to a household’s collection of these instruments (and the cabinet they were kept in).. Playing viols together often comprised a very pleasant evening’s entertainment with one’s family and good friends.. Typically, the Chest included two each of treble, tenor, and bass viols. Our concert today includes five of these (only one bass). We invite you into our virtual household for some of the music we most enjoy playing together....and for you.

A common feature heard in Renaissance music is the use of existing, and often well known, melodies as a basis for a new composition. This was a practice inherited from medieval times when a fragment of chant melody was used as a *cantus firmus* for polyphonic compositions, and when a song melody might be borrowed for a dance or as one part in a two or three part piece. We open our program with a Renaissance example, Elway Bevin's **Browning**. This is a three part setting of a popular tune "The leaves be green" or "Browning Madame." There are a number of other settings of this melody, and most are for viol consort. You will hear the melody throughout, first in one voice and then in another.

John Dowland's "Lachrimae" or "Seven Tears" melody figured in seven of his Pavans. The first, **Lachrimae Antiquae**, we will do with the original text, along with the melody, taken from his song "Flow my tears fall from your springs" published in his "Second Booke of Songs or Ayres of 1600. We will also play no. 5, **Lachrimae Coactae**.

In Nomine by John Bull is an example of a *cantus firmus* melody or *ground*. This *In Nomine* melody, taken from a Sarum *antiphon*, was used more than 150 times by at least 58 different composers. You will hear the *In Nomine* line played by Lynn on the treble viol. Also, the melody in the **Gagliarde** by Anerio was based on a French *chanson* "Un gay bergier" by the early 16th century composer Thomas Crequillon. Yet another example is John Farmer's **Take time while time doth last** which is built around a *cantus firmus* in the tenor part composed of repetitions of an ascending and descending *hexachord* (a *hexachord* is a six note scale: whole step, whole step, half step, whole step, whole step.)

Renaissance composers borrowed texts as well as melodies. The two settings of **Suzanne un jour** are based on the biblical story of Suzanna and the Elders. The poem, by the early 16th century poet Guillaume Gueroult, was so popular that it was set by more than twenty different composers. In the setting by Didier Lupi, which we will perform instrumentally, the melody is heard in the tenor line. Ferrabosco's five part setting¹ is for voice and viols.

The most important instrumental form for a consort of viols is the Fantasia (Fantasy or Fantazia) - you might say the meat and potatoes of the viol consort repertoire. Christopher Simpson (1667) characterizes this *chiefest kind of musicke* as "when a musician taketh a point at his pleasure, and wresteth and turneth it as he list, making either much or little of it as shall seeme best in his own conceit...."

We have three Renaissance fantasias on our program today. During his lifetime, Orlando Gibbons' three part fantasies were among his best known works. His **Fantasy No. 2** is in the classic English style with each section beginning with strict imitation. Henry Purcell, usually thought of as an early Baroque composer, wrote twelve fantasias for viol early in his career.

These fantasies are in an earlier contrapuntal style, but with some striking chromaticism. **Fantazia no. 12** is in 4 parts. Viol players consider John Jenkins, who was a viol player himself, the premier composer of fantasies for viol. **Fantasy no. 9** for 5 viols has clearly defined contrapuntal sections of related melodic material.

The term *Fantasy* and *Ricercar* were often used interchangeably. We have included two transcriptions of later keyboard works, **Fantasia** by Bach and **Ricercar** by Pachelbel, who happened to be the organ instructor of J.S. Bach's older brother, Johann Christoff, who in turn taught Johann Sebastian. While not intended for viols, these pieces work well and are fun to play.

Dance music also figures prominently in repertoire for the viol. **Maynard's Almain** and **Dowland's Almain** are from a 17th century Masque. A masque was a court entertainment which included music, poetry, elaborate sets and especially dance. Masques often had allegorical or mythical themes and many were written by well known poets such as Ben Jonson. In the seventeenth century, dance music was sometimes treated as independent instrumental music rather than music actually meant for dancing - a tradition that continues to the present. Anerio's **Gagliarde** is one of these, but it retains the characteristic rhythm of a galliard, with six beats sometimes divided in two and sometimes in three. Will Ayton puts his contemporary spin on Renaissance dances, and his **Galliard** retains this rhythmic feature, while his **Alman** is in the traditional Alman walking tempo.

In addition to their own instrumental repertoire, viols have always been important as accompaniment for the voice. There was considerable flexibility in the use of viols with voices, and many songs could be performed either with all voices, all viols or a combination of voices and viols. This was encouraged by publishers anxious to sell more music. Dowland's **Lacrime Antiquae** and the two settings of **Suzanne un jour** have already been mentioned. Purcell's **If love's sweet passion** and **When I have often heard** are from his **Fairy Queen**. This semi-opera, which was an adaptation of an existing play, is another step, like the masque, in the development of opera. **Take time while time doth last** is by English madrigalist John Farmer. This song appears to be an instrumental work to which words of a moralizing character have been added. The anonymous **This merry pleasant spring** is a seventeenth century consort song, a form intended for solo voice and viols. This song is full of bird sounds - the nightingale, the sparrow, the robin and the lark.

Mary Benton