

Perchance to Dreame
Les Voix humaines

Charles Daniels, tenor
Susie Napper & Margaret Little, violas da gamba
Sylvain Bergeron, archlute

GUEST ARTIST SERIES
ORGAN HALL
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MUSIC

ASU Herberger Institute
FOR DESIGN AND THE ARTS
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Perchance to Dreame – program notes

The period between Dowland's Elizabethan era and Purcell's age of the Merry Monarch are relatively unknown musically despite a unique, rich and varied repertoire.

The brothers Lawes and their colleagues, Christopher Simpson and John Jenkins, were on the cutting edge of England's musical life in the first half of the 17th century! Virtuoso viol divisions and vocal music were their mediums. The Lawes' brothers, in a tradition immortalized by John Dowland, brilliantly set the greatest poetry of the time to music. It was an honour for poets such as John Milton, Thomas Carew, Abraham Cowley and Robert Herrick to be "heard" as well as read, in this 17th century form of "rap"! Poets would publicize the fact that a Lawes had set their poems to music. Meanwhile, Christopher Simpson, William Lawes and John Jenkins, perfected the art of virtuoso viol playing with brilliantly elaborate, usually improvised, divisions that are a form of musical acrobatics!

When Henry and William Lawes were active musicians, there was a fierce dispute about the role of music, especially in public life. Opinions were usually dependent on religious beliefs.

Anglicans (those following the national protestant church founded by Henry VIII) agreed with Luther that music was an essential part of church life and a means to express the glory of God. After the beheading of Charles I in 1649, Cromwell's puritanical regime saw an end to music in church. The distraction was removed from services except for the congregational singing of hymns.

In the secular sphere, music was also acceptable to Anglicans, in plays, for example, which had been accessible to the public since the 16th century. However, for hard-line Protestants, all music, public, secular and sacred, was sinful and a distraction from the constant duty to serve God. Theatres and other public entertainments were suppressed during the interregnum.

Music between friends for private enjoyment was, however, acceptable. Viol consorts or art songs might be enjoyed as an after-dinner entertainment at a private party of the bourgeoisie or aristocrats; thus the proliferation of spectacular chamber music, the only musical expression condoned during an otherwise dour era. Feasting however, was, unfortunately, not encouraged!

Henry Lawes was born in Wiltshire, England and was the leading English songwriter of the mid 17th century. He was employed by the nobility and at the Chapel Royal. In the Commonwealth period, when public entertainment was suppressed, he taught voice and viol privately. The nobility would also come to his house to hear his music. Henry wrote 434 songs besides church music and a lost opera. John Playford published over 200 of his songs in 4 books; his autograph songbook has many more. His songs are sympathetic to different styles of poetry and range from strophic, where the same tune is repeated for each of the verses of the poem, to declamatory, where the style is closer to recitative, based on the rhythms of spoken English.

William Lawes, Henry's younger brother, though best known for his highly original and prolific consort music that includes the Royall Consorts and the Harp Consorts, also wrote music for the stage and over 200 songs. They often have a catchy tunefulness and our programme includes two of his best known. He lost his life in 1645 fighting for King and Country during the Civil War and Charles I gave him the honorary title of Father of Musick. Thomas Jordan ended Will's epitaph with a pun on the composer's name and the fact that he died at the hands of those who denied the divine right of kings: "Will. Lawes was slain by such whose wills were laws".

...continued on back...

Perchance to Dreame

The brothers Lawes and their colleague, Christopher Simpson, were on the cutting edge of England's musical life in the first half of the 17th century! Virtuoso viols and voice were their medium. The Lawes' brothers brilliantly set John Milton and Robert Herrick's poems to music while Christopher Simpson and William Lawes perfected the art of virtuoso viol playing.

Paradise was lost when Charles I was executed in 1649, leaving a drab stage to the Puritans and a musical moratorium. After a decade, the Merry Monarch, Charles II, returned from Europe bringing a new musical dream to the Fairest Isle. The stage was set for Henry Purcell and a new golden age of English music.

Divisions on a ground in G
Gather ye Rosebuds while ye may

Christopher Simpson (c.1602-1669)
William Lawes (1602-1645)

O my Clarissa
Bird Song
One Charming Night

William Lawes
Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

See, see the bright light shine

John Jenkins (1592-1678)

Pavan of Alfonso William Lawes

Fear not dear love
Courante/Sarabande/Chacone

Henry Lawes (1595-1662)
Anonymous (Goess Lute Manuscript
c. 1650)

Union in love

Henry Lawes

...intermission...

Suite in dD: Ayre, Almand, almand
Mediocrity in love
No reprieve

John Jenkins
Henry Lawes

Coranto

Anonymous (Goess Lute Manuscript c. 1650)
Love's Constancy Nicholas Lanier (1588-1666)

Almaine of Alfonso
A despairing lover
A Dreame

William Lawes
Henry Lawes
William Lawes

Divisions on a ground in F
She Loves and She Confesses

Christopher Simpson
Henry Purcell

John Jenkins, who lived well into his 80s and witnessed the momentous political and musical transformations of the 17th century, was England's most famous viol virtuoso and a prolific composer who "wrote dances by the cart-load" according to his biographer, Roger North. A friend of William Lawes, ten of his songs have survived including See, see the bright light shines from one of Playford's collection of songs, The Treasury of Music.

Christopher Simpson was a brilliant improviser and theorist who left indispensable treatises for viol players today including The Division Viol, or the Art of Playing upon a Ground. As 21st century viol players, we actually perform the divisions written in his book, even though he explains that his examples are only to be considered exercises to learn to improvise divisions over a ground bass!

He wrote, "a viol in the hands of an excellent violist may (no doubt) be reckon'd amongst the best of musical instruments. To play extempore to a ground is the highest perfection of it".

Paradise was lost when Charles I was executed in 1649, leaving a drab stage to the Puritans and a partial musical moratorium during which private music, nevertheless, flourished. After a decade, the Merry Monarch, Charles II, returned from Europe, bringing, amongst other novelties, the concept of the public concert! The stage was set for new artistic dreams on the Fairest Isle and Henry Purcell's golden age of English music

Henry Purcell was England's most celebrated composer of the late 17th century. In his 36 years he wrote operas, church music, viol fantasias, organ music and hundreds of songs, many of which were gathered by his widow, Frances, into two volumes called Orpheus Britannicus, after his death. Purcell takes English song further along the path the Lawes brothers had taken, from wonderfully memorable tunes to exquisitely sensitive declamatory settings of longer poems. Come all ye Songsters and One Charming Night are both taken from the opera The Faëry Queen; She Loves and she Confesses too is a 1683 setting of Abraham Cowley's poem.

Charles Daniels and Susie Napper

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