



Sunday 7 July 2013

7.30pm

St Cecilia's Hall

The Marian Consort

Emma Walshe and Gwendolen Martin · soprano

Rory McCleery · countertenor and director

Nick Pritchard · tenor

Christopher Borrett · bass

Liam Byrne · bass viol

Jadran Duncumb · archlute

Masumi Yamamoto · harpsichord and organ

*'The Path to Heav'n above' – sacred chamber music by
Purcell and contemporaries*



The Sybert Summer Concert Series

'The Paths to Heav'n above' ~ sacred chamber music by Purcell & contemporaries

'Where Musick and Devotion joyn, The Way to Canaan pleasant is, We travel on with Songs Divine, Ravish'd with Sacred Extasies. No Longer do we pass, Thro' a dry Barren Wildreness, But thro' a Land where Milk and Honey flow, The Paths to Heav'n above, leads thro' a Heav'n below.'

(from the Frontispiece to Henry Playford's 'Harmonia Sacra, or, Divine hymns and dialogues', London, 1716)

Jehova, quam multi sunt hostes mei

Henry Purcell (1659-95)

Lord, how are they increased that trouble me.

Many are they that rise up against me.

Many there be which say of my soul, "there is no help for him in God".

But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of my head.

I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill.

I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me.

I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about.

Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek-bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.

Salvation belongeth unto the Lord: thy blessing is upon thy people.

How long great God, how long

Henry Purcell

Help, Father Abraham, help

John Blow (1648/9-1708)

Suite in C Major (from *Melothesia*)

Matthew Locke (c.1621-1677)

Prelude - Almain - Corant - Saraband - Jig

O bone Jesu

William Child (1606/7-1697)

O good Jesus, O sweetest Jesus, O most pious Jesus,

Son of the Virgin Mary,

O sweet Jesus, according to thy great mercy have mercy on me.

O that mine eyes would melt into a flood

John Blow

The earth trembled

Henry Purcell

Salvator Mundi

John Blow

O Saviour of the world, save us,

who by thy cross and blood hast redeemed us.

Help us, we humbly beseech thee, our God.

INTERVAL

Wilt thou forgive that sin (A Hymne to God the Father)

Pelham Humfrey (c.1647-1674)

Tell me, some pitying Angel tell (The Blessed Virgin's Expostulation)

Henry Purcell

How doth the city sit solitary

Matthew Locke

Divisions in F

Francis Withy (c.1645-1727)

Close thine eyes, and sleep secure

Henry Purcell

Now, that the Sun hath veil'd his light (An Evening Hymn)

Henry Purcell

Gloria Patri, qui creavit nos

John Blow

Glory be to the Father, who created us:

Glory be to the Son, who redeemed us:

Glory be to the Holy Ghost, who sanctified us:

Glory be to the highest and undivided Trinity,

whose works are inseparable, whose reign abides forever.

Praise is due thee, songs of praise are due thee,

to thee be all honour, blessing and glory,

to thee be thanksgiving, honour, power and might,

our God, throughout all ages. Amen.

This evening's programme explores various facets of 'private' devotional music-making in England in the late seventeenth century, and in doing so draws its music principally from two sources. The first, Manuscript 14 in the Library of Christ Church College, Oxford, is in the hand of the composer John Blow and dates from the mid 1670's, at a time when he was both Organist of Westminster Abbey and Organist and a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal. The manuscript is a clearly very personal collection of varied English and Italian sacred and secular music, including Blow's own compositions alongside English anthems and Latin motets by Christopher Gibbons, Matthew Locke, William Child, and madrigals by Claudio Monteverdi and Giacomo Carissimi among others. The Italian influence on many of the works by English composers in the manuscript is abundantly clear, and Blow was by no means the first of this group to copy Italian music: a surviving manuscript in the British Library in the hand of Locke, which describes itself as 'A Collection of Songs [made] when I was in the Low Countreys 1648', contains Italian, and specifically Venetian, motets which Locke is thought to have come across in their reprintings in Antwerp while serving in Charles I's royalist army. Even earlier than this, Child, in his only publication, 'The First Set of Psalmes of Ill Voyces' of 1639, described his music, which was 'fitt for private Chappels or other private meetings' as being 'newly composed after the Italian way'.

The other principal source for this evening's music is Henry Playford's seminal publication, the *Harmonia Sacra*. This two-volume collection of almost entirely English-texted devotional solo songs, duets and trios was first published in 1688 (volume I) and 1693 (volume II) and was popular enough to merit several reprintings by William Pearson, including one set in 1714 after Playford's death. The original printing was edited by Henry Purcell himself (Playford also printed Purcell's two-volume song collection *Orpheus Britannicus*) and the contents of the two volumes are strongly weighted towards Purcell and Blow. In addition to the English works, four Latin-texted items are included towards the end of the second book: two by 'Signior [Bonifatio] Gratiani' and two by 'Signior Giacomo Carissime'. The *Harmonia Sacra* has a strong Oxford connection: Playford dedicated the second volume to Henry Aldrich, then Dean of Christ Church and Vice-Chancellor of the University, and many of the chosen pieces have texts by men with Oxford affiliations, as is the case with Purcell's *How long, great God, how long...* ('words by Mr Norris, of Wadham Colledge Oxon') and Pelham Humfrey's *Wilt thou forgive that sin...* which sets a poem by 'Dr. Dunn' (John Donne, who spent three years at Hertford College, Oxford). The introduction to the second volume also features a poem in praise of Blow and Purcell by H. Sacheverell, 'of Magd. Coll. Oxon'.

Despite their differences, these two collections, manuscript and print, share a common repertoire, intended, as was Child's volume of psalms from earlier in the century, for private devotional gatherings, often small-scale domestic acts of worship which, as Playford makes clear from the text found on the Frontispiece of his first volume, were deeply enriched by the inclusion of music.

The most prominent of the private chapels in England in the latter part of the seventeenth century was Catherine of Braganza's Roman Catholic chapel, established on her marriage to Charles II in 1662. Initially based at St James' Palace, and from 1671 Somerset House, it is for this institution that Purcell's *Jehova quam multi sunt hostes mei* is thought to have been written around 1680. This Latin motet, one of three items in tonight's programme which is not found in either the Christchurch manuscript or Playford's collection, survives in the British Library manuscript Add. MS. 30930, and its setting of the text of Psalm 3 would have resonated with the Portuguese Queen, who was under constant attack for her religious beliefs, most notably in the fabricated 'Popish plot' of 1678. In his alternation of declamatory solo passages and dramatic choral writing, and his adventurous use of chromaticism, Purcell displays his debt to contemporary Italian compositional style, but fuses this with polyphonic part-writing redolent of English vocal music of the previous century.

This meeting of English and Italian influences is also found in Blow's Latin motets, as well as that of his colleague and elder Child. All three composers were well-acquainted, and shared the title of 'Organist of the Chapel Royal' following Purcell's appointment in 1682. Child's *O bone Jesu*, which likely dates from before the middle of the century, almost certainly had a profound effect on his younger peers: his chosen text is, like *Jehova quam multi sunt hostes mei* and Blow's *Salvator mundi*, a plea for intercession (whose entreaties would certainly have been familiar to those who were bearing the brunt of English anti-Catholic sentiment from the 1640's onwards) and Child's absorption of Italian musical rhetoric and expressive chromaticism, so evident in this work, is also, as previously mentioned, discernible in these later Latin settings. In *Salvator mundi*, this stylistic influence is manifest in Blow's employment of chains of overlapping, intensifying suspensions and shock shifts in tonality and key, as well as in the evocative descending chromatic motif at 'qui per crucem'. The *Gloria Patri* is something of a contrast to this: it sets an upbeat, laudatory Trinitarian text in a lighter, more straightforward manner, although still with recourse to the declamatory soloistic moments and expressive melodic and harmonic chromaticism of Child's 'Italian way'. The motivation for Blow's Latin settings and their intended audience are unclear, but it is entirely possible that these were also written for the Queen's private chapel.

Catherine's chapel was staffed chiefly by Italian musicians, including the noted organist, Giovanni Battista Draghi, but Christopher Gibbons describes Matthew Locke, who by the time of the Restoration had risen to become England's leading composer, as 'ye Queenes-Organist' in a letter of 22 June 1663, and the seventeenth-century English music historian Roger North attests that 'He was organist at Somerset hous chappell as long as he lived'. North goes on to say that 'the Itallian masters, that served there, did not approve of his manner of play, but must be attended by more polite hands', likely a reference to his employment of often striking chromaticism, as is heard in the organ part for his anthem *How doth*

the city sit solitary. While Blow presents the full score of the work in his manuscript collection, the organ part survives separately in Locke's hand as an unbound single sheet in the Christchurch library, giving us an insight into the idiosyncrasies of the composer's own continuo playing, which according to North he performed for Catherine's chapel 'on a small chamber organ by'. Like the Latin motets by Purcell, Blow and Child, Locke's english-texted anthem, which sets verses from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, combines harmonic daring and bold writing for solo voices with emotionally-wrought polyphony, with the repeated statements of 'woe now unto us' rising in tessitura and building in intensity as the upper voices are added one by one. As with the English Recusant composers of several generations prior, this text may have carried special significance for Locke, who, it is conjectured, converted to Catholicism while abroad in the late 1640's.

Locke's *Melothesia*, issued in 1673 by John Carr, was one of a number of sets of rules for figured bass which appeared around this time, and although Sir Joh Hawkins claimed in his *A General History of the science and Practice of Music* of 1778 that 'the world is indebted to Locke for the first rules ever published in this kingdom on the subject of continued or thorough-bass', the collection may have been preceded by William Penny's *Art of Composition, or, Directions to play a Thorow Bass*, and is certainly later than several manuscript sets of rules, including one by Locke himself. As well as his didactic examples, Locke includes in *Melothesia* a large number of keyboard suites and organ pieces by a variety of composers, and it is from here that his *Suite in C Major* is taken. This evening's other instrumental item is by the little-known Oxford musician Francis Withy, who was both a bass viol player and 'singing-man' in the choir of Christ Church, and wrote five complete sets of Divisions (improvised variations on a given bass pattern or 'ground') for solo bass viol, all of which are preserved in Oxford's Bodleian Library.

The influence of Italian music on the pieces found in Playford's *Harmonia Sacra* is nowhere more clear than in the dialogues, which continue a pre-Restoration tradition of musical settings of these biblical texts. Blow's *Help, Father Abraham* narrates the conversation between Dives and Abraham, with the former asking for clemency for his excesses and selfishness as he burns in hell. He is firmly rebutted by Abraham before a moralising chorus, admonishing the listener to change their ways before it is too late, finishes the work. This piece and Purcell's *Tell me, some pitying Angel*, which extends the tradition of biblical dialogues to solo song, are both heavily indebted to the Italian dramatic religious cantatas and oratorios of Carissimi and his contemporaries, and it is certainly no coincidence that two of the Roman composer's works are found in the second volume of *Harmonia Sacra*. Purcell's setting of Nahum Tate's text 'is an astonishingly vivid and human portrayal of a mother who has lost her child' and its Italian cantata-like sectional divisions afford Purcell the opportunity to display the full variety of his affective devices.

The other items from Playford's collection set texts which are centred on common themes: Blow's *O that mine eyes would melt into a flood* and Purcell's *The earth trembled* are both very personal meditations on the Passion, full of graphic imagery and concerned with man's unworthiness; Humfrey (a contemporary of Blow's as a chorister of the Chapel Royal) sets John Donne's *Wilt thou forgive that sin*, which is also centred on a desire for personal absolution, involving a great deal of word-play on the poet's name; Purcell's *How long great God, how long* is an expression of a hoped-for salvation after the struggle of mortal life; and the exquisite duet *Close thine eyes, and sleep secure*, with a text by King Charles I, and *Now, that the Sun hath veil'd his light*, better known by its subtitle, 'An Evening Hymn' are affirmatory statements of faith, assuaging the doubts raised by the other solo songs through their absolute certainty of divine protection. This latter, with its text by 'Dr. William Fuller, late Lord-Bishop of Lincoln' is, like Withy's Divisions, based on a ground, over which Purcell ingeniously weaves his vocal line, overlapping and dovetailing it to disguise the repetitions of the disarmingly simple five bar descending bass pattern, and ending with a wonderfully joyous extended 'Hallelujah'.

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Taking its name from the Blessed Virgin Mary, a focus of religious devotion in the sacred music of all ages, **The Marian Consort** is a young, dynamic and internationally-renowned early music vocal ensemble, recognised for its freshness of approach and innovative presentation of a broad range of repertoire. This 'astounding' (The Herald) ensemble has given concerts throughout the UK and Europe, has been featured on BBC Radio 3's *The Early Music Show* and *In Tune*, was a finalist in the 2009 York Early Music Festival International Young Artists' Competition, and is a former 'Young Artist' of The Brighton Early Music Festival.

Known for its engaging performances and imaginative programming, the group draws its members from amongst the very best young singers on the early music scene today: individually, they perform as consort singers and soloists with all of the major UK early music groups, including The Sixteen, The Monteverdi Choir, The Gabrieli Consort, The Cardinall's Musick, The Dunedin Consort and The Tallis Scholars. They normally sing one to a part (dependent on the repertoire), with smaller vocal forces allowing clarity of texture and subtlety and flexibility of interpretation that illuminate the music for performer and audience alike. The Marian Consort is also committed to inspiring a love of singing in others, and has led participatory educational workshops for a wide range of ages and abilities.

Recent performances have included recitals at King's Place, the Barcelona Early Music Festival and the Festival de Música Antiga Valencia; concerts for the Brighton Early Music Festival and the La Caixa concert series in Girona; and performances at the Wellcome Collection and the British Academy.

The Marian Consort has released two CDs with Delphian Records: the first, of Marian Devotional music of the Spanish Renaissance, invited praise from reviewers for its 'fluent performances' and 'flawlessly executed programme', and was singled out by Andrew McGregor on Radio 3's CD Review for its 'attractive and arresting sound'. The second, of English and Continental Renaissance music from the Dow Partbooks, received outstanding reviews in all of the major broadsheets, with the Scotsman giving it 5 stars for 'performances that glow with golden purity and soul' and the Sunday Times calling it 'exquisite...the ensemble sings with eloquence and expressive finesse'.

Forthcoming projects include The Marian Consort's debut at the Rye, Little Missenden and Newbury Spring Festivals; performances for concert series in Kendal, Cheltenham and Edinburgh; a dramatic concert with actor exploring the life of Carlo Gesualdo at the Brighton Early Music Festival; and the release of their third CD, of music by the French Renaissance composer Jean Maillard.

The Marian Consort is directed by Rory McCleery, a freelance singer, choral director and academic currently engaged in doctoral research at Oxford University.

The harpsichord used in this evening's performance was made by Thomas Barton of London in 1709. It is one of the earliest surviving English harpsichords; few remain from before the Georgian era. The instrument is quite unlike the later English instruments. The case is of solid walnut with comparatively thin sides, and the instrument is strung with brass wire throughout its compass. In Britain this is found only in the transitional instruments built from around 1690 to 1725, a small group of surviving examples made by native-born craftsman, whose style was eclipsed when the continental-born makers Kirckman and Shudi arrived. Brass stringing is a characteristic commonly found on Italian harpsichords, and the Barton harpsichord has several other features - solid deep "box" registers and scrolls on the keywell sides which are also very typical of Italian instruments. There is one keyboard with natural keytops of ebony and "skunktail" accidental tops, and a GG/BB-d3 (broken octave) compass. It has two sets of strings, both at 8' pitch. The sound of the instrument has certain Italian characteristics, as might be expected, but generally more sustain and a timbre which has been described as "woody" or "nutty". It is a sound which lends itself to a range of music well without imparting too much personality from the instrument itself.

Dr Darryl Martin, University of Edinburgh Curator, EUCHMI

The 'Sybert Summer Concert Series' is generously supported by Dr George and Dr Joy Sybert.

Thanks also to the Friends of St Cecilia's Hall.

The University of Edinburgh is a charitable body, registered in Scotland, with registration number SC005336.