



(LEMS 8014)

WILLIAM BYRD MUSIC FOR VOICE AND VIOLS

Russell Oberlin, Countertenor

With

THE IN NOMINE PLAYERS

Denis Stevens, Director

THE IN NOMINE PLAYERS:

Maxwell Ward, Michael Mitchell, Denis Stevens, viola da braccia, Desmond Dupre, Dennis Nesbitt, viola da gamba, Francis Baines, basso da gamba

Even to connoisseurs, the name of William Byrd (1543-1623) means first and foremost the Masses, the Great Service, some of the motets from the Gradualia, and the keyboard music in My Lady Nevell's Book. Byrd's great contribution to the field of chamber music is not generally known, though this contribution includes not only a fine and varied body of consort music for groups ranging from three to six viols, but also a wealth of compositions for voice and viols.

There was a strong element of tradition in the voice-and-viols texture, for among its predecessors were the continental chanson of the early Renaissance, the Italian frottola, and the German polyphonic lied. All these forms and styles used stringed instruments (sometimes even winds) to accompany a solo line in three, four, or five parts, and England took over this idea at a late stage, developing it in a unique manner just as later it was to take over the madrigal.

In the following notes on individual works, a reference has been given to E.H. Fellowes' Collected Works of Byrd, though it will be noted that most of the versions her recorded have been restored to their original pitch.

TRACKS:

1. Prelude & Fantasia a 5 [XVII, 38] - 6:00

This is called simply Preludium in the manuscript sources, but the true form is that of ground bass preceded by a short introduction. The opening point of the introduction foreshadows the contour of the ground bass theme, which is unusual in several ways. It is always divided between one of the four upper instruments and the bass, with a twice-repeated pattern of four bars above and below. Much of the writing is virtuoso in style, and makes full use of available contrasts in texture. (British Museum, Add.Ms. 17792-6).

2. La Verginella, "The fair Young Virgin" (XII, 124). - 2:15

Grouped among the 'Sonets and Pastorals,' this is the only composition with Italian text in the entire book. But this stanza from Ariosto's Orlando Furioso (I, v. 42) was a favorite one, and Byrd may well have been appealing to the growing public for Italian madrigals both through his choice of text and his use of part of the Ruggiero bass in the opening bars. (1588; also in Oxford, Christ Church Library 98 4-8).

3. My Sweet Little Darling, consort song for voices & 4 viols (XI, 105) - 1:21

This is the shorter of Byrd's two lullabies, and may well have been written in order to follow up the success of Lullaby my sweet little baby. This "short" lullaby, with its flowing triple metre, has great charm and elegance. (Christ Church 984-8).

4. Fantasia, a 3 [XVII, 6] - 4:25

An eloquent work for treble, alto and bass viols. This Fantasia is incomplete in the part-books at the Royal College of Music, but the entire work is fortunately preserved in a keyboard version at the British Museum. (R.C.M. 2093; B.M. Add.Ms. 29996).

5. What Pleasure Have Great Princes, madrigal for 5 voices (XII, 96) - 3:32

Another of the 'Sonets and Pastorals,' contrasting the simple rustic life with the existence of the corrupt and careworn courtier. The lyric has five verses, of which the first and the last have been recorded. (1588).

6. Though Amaryllis Dance in Green, madrigal for 5 voices (XIII, 60) - 2:25

The second of the 'Sonets and Pastorals,' and a fine example of Byrd's use of cross-rhythms to express dancing. Once again there are five verses in the complete lyric, reprinted in England's Helicon (1600), but only the first and last have been recorded. (1588; also Christ Church 984-8).

7. In Nomine a 5 [XVII, 58] - 2:43

One of Byrd's most popular consort pieces, and a magnificent example of the heights that could be reached with a simple cantus firmus and four surrounding polyphonic parts. (Oxford, Bodleian Ms. Mus.Sch.D 212-6; and 10 other sources).

8. Blessed is He that Fears the Lord (XII, 44; XV 7). Sacred song for voice & viols - 1:46
One of the ten 'Psalmes' in Byrd's publication. The text is that of Psalm 112 in Sternhold and Hopkins' Old Version, and the vocal part is comparatively unadorned though the accompaniment is active in imitation and cross-rhythm. (1588; also Harvard University Ms. 634.1.703).

9. O Lord, How Long Wilt Thou forget (XII 26; XV, 35) Anthem for 5 voices - 1:45
"If thou be disposed to praye," said Byrd in his Epistle to the Reader, "here are Psalmes." Once again the vocal line is simple and straightforward, though beautifully poised amid the polyphony of the strings. The text is from Psalm 13; only the first two verses have been recorded. (1588; also Harvard University Ms. 634. 1.703).

10. Fantasia a 6 [XVII, 81] - 6:15

This is one of the best of the six-part Fantasias, exhibiting Byrd's extraordinary skill in 'orchestrating' his polyphony and his instinctive feeling for contrast. After the meditative slow introduction (introducing the tune 'Waslingham) there is a splendid climax when 'Greensleeves' appears in a four-square homophonic version, only to be followed by yet another change of mood – a flowing tripla – with a grave and sustained coda to end. (B.M.Add.Ms. 17786-91).

11. The Man is Blest (XV, 59), sacred song for voice & 4 viols - 1:59

William Kethe's metrical text of Ps. 112 may be profitably compared with the version of Sternhold and Hopkins recorded as item No. 8 (B.M. AD.Md. 29401-5).

12. Why do I Use My Paper, Ink and Pen? (XII, 183), consort song for voice & 4 viols - 3:18

An epitaph on Edmund Campion, a priest who was executed in 1581 and subsequently canonized. The poet, Henry Walpole, wrote some thirty verses for the epitaph in its original form, but Byrd used only the first one together with two others. (1588; also Christ Church 984-8).

WORDS TO SONGS CONTAINING WORDS

2. La Virginella

La virginella e simil' alla rosa
Ch' in bel giadin sulla nativa spina
Mentre sola e sicura si riposa.
Ne gregge, ne pastor, se le avvicina:
L'aura soave, e l'alba rugiadosa,
L'acqua, la terra, al suo favor
S'inchina:
Giovani vaghi, e donn'innamorate
Amano haverne e seni e tempie ornate.
Ludovico Ariosto – Orlando Furioso, I.v.42

A version of this madrigal, with English translation, appeared in Nicholas Yonge's *Musica Transalpina*, 1588):

The fair young virgin is like the
Rose untainted;
In garden fair, while tender stalk doth
Bear it
Sole and untouched, with no resort
Acquainted;
No shepherd nor his flock doth once
Come near it
They're full of sweetness, the morning fresh
Departed,
The earth, the water, with all their
Favours cheer it
Dainty young gallants and maidens most
Desired
Delight to have therewith their heads attired.

3. My Sweet Little Darling

My sweet little darling, my comfort and joy,
Sing lullaby lulla,
In beauty surpassing the princess of Troy,
Sing lullaby lulla
Now hush, child, now sleep, child, they mother's sweet boy,
Sing lullaby lulla,
The gods bless and keep thee from cruel annoy,
Sing lulla lulla lulla
Sweet baby, lulla lulla,
Sweet baby, lullaby, lulla.

5. What Pleasure Have Great Princes

More dainty to their choice,
Than herdmen wild who careless

In quiet life rejoice,
And fortune's fate not fearing
Sing sweet in summer morning?
O happy who thus liveth,

Nor caring much for gold,
With clothing which sufficeth

To keep him from the cold;
Though poor and plain his diet,
Yet merry it is and quiet.

6. Though Amaryllis Dance in Green

Through Amaryllis dance in green
Like Fairy Queen,

And sing full clear
Corinna can, with smiling cheer,
Yet since their eyes make heart so sore

Hey ho, chill love no more.
Love ye who list, I force him not,
Sith Got it wot;
The more I wail,
The less my sighs and tears prevail;
What shall I do but say therefore,
Hey ho, chill love no more.

8. Blessed Is He That Fears The Lord

Blessed is he that fears the Lord
He walketh in His ways
And sets his great delight therein,
The length of all his days.
His seed and those which of him come
Might on earth shall be,
The race of such as faithful are
Men blessed shall them see.

9. O Lord, How Long Wilt Thou Forget?

O Lord, how long wilt Thou forget
To send me some relief?
For ever wilt Thou hide Thy face,

And so increase my grief?
How long shall I with vexed heart

Seek counsel in my sprite?
How long shall my malicious foes
Triumph and me despite?

11. The Man Is Blest...

The man is blest that God doth Fear

And that his law doth love indeed
His Seed on earth God will uprear

And Bless such as from him proceed.
His house with riches He will fill.
His righteausness endure shall still,
Unto the righteous doth arise.

In trouble joy, in darkness light,
Compassion great is in his eyes.

And mercy always in his sight,
Yea, pity moveth him to lend,
He doth with judgement things expend.

12. Why Do I Use My Paper, Ink And Pen

Why do I use my paper, ink and pen,
And call my wits to counsel what to say?
Such memories were made for mortal men;

I speak of Saints whose names cannot decay.
An Angel's trump were fitter for to sound
Their glorious death if such on earth were found.
Henry Walpole;

RUSSEL OBERLIN

Russell Oberlin, The Thomas Hunter professor of music emeritus and director of the Collegium Musicum at Hunter College, is an internationally acclaimed singer widely recognized as America's foremost countertenor. A graduate of the Juilliard School of Music, Oberlin was a founding member of the legendary New York Pro Musica. He had recorded extensively, given recitals, and appeared as soloist with leading orchestras throughout this country and abroad. Operatic roles include appearances at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, where he sang the part of Oberon in the London premiere of Benjamin Britten's "A Mid-Summer Night's Dream." A senior Fullbright research scholar, Oberlin had taught and lectured extensively in the U.S. and England.

CREDITS

This consort Music has been specially edited for this disc by Maxwell Ward; the songs, by Denis Stevens.

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