

PARTHENIA

Rosamund Morley, treble viol

Lawrence Lipnik, tenor viol

Beverly Au, bass viol

Lisa Terry, bass viol

MUSIC WITH HER SILVER SOUND Viol Consorts in the Age of Shakespeare

**You are a fair viol, and your sense the strings;
Who, finger'd to make man his lawful music,
Would draw heaven down, and all the gods, to hearken.**
Pericles, Act I, Scene i.

A Voluntarie for My Ladye Nevell

William Byrd (1543-1623)

Early Elizabethan Dances

Pavan of Albarti

Anonymous

Gallyard

Anon

Allemana d'amor

Anon

Hugh Ashton's Maske

Hugh Ashton ? (c.1485-c.1558)

**And frame your mind to mirth and merriment,
Which bars a thousand harms and lengthens life.**
The Taming of the Shrew, Induction, Scene ii.

A Merry Conceit; The Queenes Delight

Tobias Hume (c1569-1645)

Harke, harke

Hume

A Gigge: Dr Bull's Myselfe

John Bull ((c.1562-1628)

Fantasia a4

William Byrd

Fantasia a3

Byrd

Fantasia a4

Alfonso Ferrabosco II (c1575-1628)

INTERMISSION

**Why dost thou not go to church in a galliard and come home in
a coranto? My very walk should be a jig.
*Twelfth Night, Act I, Scene iii.***

From *Pavans, Galliards, Almains* (1599)
As it fell on a holie eve
Paradiso
The night watch

Anthony Holborne (c.1550-1602)

Pavan in d
Fantasy on *All in a garden green*

John Jenkins (1592-1678)

**Close up his eyes and draw the curtain close;
And let us all to meditation
*Henry VI, Act III, Scene iii.***

Come heavy Sleep
Ut re mi fa sol la

John Dowland (1563-1626)
Robert Parsons (c.1535-1572)

**Let the sky rain potatoes; let it thunder to the tune of 'Green Sleeves';
*Merry Wives of Windsor, Act V, Scene v.***

Browning Madame
Fantasy on Browning
Divisions on Greensleeves

Thomas Ravenscroft (c.1582-1635)
Elway Bevan (c.1554-1638)
Anonymous 17th century

FINIS

PROGRAM NOTES

Music echoes insistently in Shakespeare's work. Yet it does so with conspicuous silence in the plays as their texts have been passed down in the centuries since they were first performed. Much like the biography of the enigmatic playwright, the music of Shakespeare's plays is accessible only in outline. Musical notation, if and when theatrical companies used it at all, circulated on loose-leaf sheets too ephemeral to have survived the vicissitudes of time. Nobody then imagined that the musical accompaniment was worth preserving for posterity. The plays' wealth of musical imagery notwithstanding, scant performance cues and song lyrics are the only direct traces of the music that

regularly accompanied their Elizabethan and Jacobean performances.

The musical silence can be misleading. Those early performances, witnesses often attested, were thoroughly musical—if boisterously noisy—affairs. Some of Shakespeare's contemporaries, such as the anti-theatrical polemicist William Prynne, objected to the musical din of the stage, which they perceived as a threat to the precarious English social order in the early seventeenth century. Among the "concomitants or circumstances of Stage-playes" that Prynne decried in his broadside *Histrionomastix* (1633) were "Lascivious dancing" and "Amorous obscene songs: Effeminate lust-inciting Musicke." Prynne's

partial catalogue of music's social evils merely hints at some of the many uses to which theatrical companies put instrumental music, song, and dance in their performances.

On and off the stage in Shakespeare's England, viols represented a genteel order. They were emblematic instruments of domestic sociability and pedagogical rectitude, following their introduction to England during the reign of Henry VIII. A detailed inventory of Henry's nineteen viols "greate and small," compiled after his death in 1547, evinces his enthusiasm for the instrument and suggests a wider popularity in court circles. Throughout the Tudor and Jacobean periods, prominent viol players—such as Anthony Holborne, Alfonso Ferrabosco the younger, and later John Jenkins—held regular appointments at court or enjoyed direct royal patronage.

The instrument was not the sole domain of professionals. The extent to which sixteenth-century amateurs played viols remains somewhat uncertain, but the evidence affirms that as early as Henry's reign, the London choir schools incorporated the instrument into their curriculum. Robert Parsons and William Byrd were among those who must have received early instruction on the viol in the choir schools. Some of the choirboys, such as those of St. Paul's, also participated in the so-called choirboy dramas performed at court with the Gentlemen of the Chapel Royal. Shakespeare pilloried the viol-accompanied consort songs those dramas featured, most memorably in the interlude to the rude mechanicals' play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Yet when his plays called for viol accompaniment—as even this parody may have done—it was probably to musicians trained at the same choir schools that his company turned.

As the sixteenth century progressed, viol ownership and amateur performance on the instrument spread well beyond the immediate spheres of the royal household and the choir schools. The narrative portrait of Sir Henry Unton that survives at London's National Portrait Gallery is exceptional in its vivid representation of an amateur viol consort—Unton no doubt among its number—in performance. In general, little such visual evidence of consort playing survives from the period. Yet Henry Peacham's famous injunction in *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622) suggests the extent to which performance on the viol was integral, by the early seventeenth century, to proper domestic sociability: "I desire no more in you then to sing your part sure, and at the first sight, withall, to play the same upon your Violl, or the exercise of the Lute, privately to your selfe." The complete gentleman performs his part well

enough to play well with others, in consort. And, of course, there is the rich repertory of Elizabethan and Jacobean music for viol consort. Much of this repertory circulated in the market for amateurs like Unton, or William Byrd's elusive "Ladye Nevell," which helps account for some of the remarkable range in its level of difficulty. The repertory also manifests many points of contact with Shakespeare's plays: both, for example, often featured popular tunes such as "Greensleeves." It is harder, perhaps, to imagine the contrapuntal intricacies of pieces like Byrd's four-part "Fantasia" put to service in the rowdy confines of Shakespeare's Globe Theater—but this view may underestimate the capacity of the groundlings for attending to its imitative opening.

Many pieces for viol consort are based on dance forms. In general, though, these pieces betray a certain distance from the "lascivious dancing" that so disturbed William Prynne. They include Jenkins' "Pavan in G" and the three pieces from Holborne's *Pavans, Galliards, Almains* (1599): such pieces are far stater than the dance tunes of the theaters, which were played not by viols but rather by violins. Stately though the viol may have been by comparison, its versatility is put on full display in Tobias Hume's "Harke, harke," which calls for extended techniques: the player must "strike the string with the back of the bow," and perform the pizzicato (plucked strings) that Hume colorfully calls a "thump."

One common feature of music composed for amateur performance is adaptability. Byrd's "A Voluntarie: for My Ladye Nevell," the first piece on tonight's program, will be familiar to many listeners as a keyboard piece. In the manuscript that preserves it, however, the piece is arranged in open score, meaning that each of the four contrapuntal parts is notated separately. Such an arrangement easily allows for ensemble performance on four instruments. John Dowland's "Come heavy sleep," meanwhile, is most often performed as a lute song with text. But performed entirely on viols, the music still communicates the melancholy for which its composer is famous, thanks to his judicious use of chromaticism and a staid, near-homophonic texture.

Similarly meditative, but in a different compositional idiom entirely, is Robert Parsons' "Ut Re Mi Fa Sol," which takes its name from the solmization syllables that early-modern musicians used to name the notes of the diatonic scale. The piece is woven around a series of repeating scalar ascents and descents by long notes in the treble. Beneath the scales, the contrapuntal variations in the lower parts explore some of the metric and

harmonic permutations permitted by the simple structural device. The end of Ferrabosco's "Fantasia a 4" deploys a related device in the form of a long pedal point. Variations took many forms: the repeating patterns of the "ground bass" such as that of Hugh Ashton's Maske, and folk melodies like "Greensleeves," which provide the basic harmonic framework for the anonymous seventeenth-century divisions that close the program, also serve a similar function.

Byrd and Shakespeare both enjoyed significant patronage from court circles, and there were many possibilities for personal contact between them, or between the playwright and other composers represented in tonight's program. If such meetings occurred, records of them do not survive. But whether or not they met, the affective variety of music for viol consort composed during Shakespeare's lifetime affords insight into the world that fed his musical imagination. Brought to life again in performance, this music cannot restore the original music to Shakespeare's plays. But it reanimates something of their musical richness, just as Shakespeare's verse can guide us through the repertory.

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