

Early Music Society OF THE ISLANDS



Airs de Cour & Courtly Airs

Gwen Jamieson, *soprano*

Doug Hensley, *lute, vihuela, theorbo*

Martin Bonham, *viola da gamba*

Program

What if a Day or a Moneth or a Yeare	<i>Thomas Campion</i>
Richt Soir Opprest	<i>Anon Scotland</i>
Lancashire Pipes	<i>Anon Northern England</i>
Joy to the Person of my Love	<i>Anon Scotland</i>
I Saw my Lady Weep	<i>John Dowland</i>
Dowland's Adew for Master Oliver Cromwell	<i>John Dowland</i>
Fine Knacks for Ladies	<i>John Dowland</i>
Enfin la beauté que j'adore	<i>Étienne Moulinié</i>
Cessés mortels de soupirer	<i>Pierre Guedron</i>
Non ha sott'il ciel	<i>Étienne Moulinié</i>
Toccata IV and Corrente prima	<i>Alessandro Piccinini</i>
Consert de differents oyseaux	<i>Étienne Moulinié</i>
Usurpator tiranno	<i>Giovanni Felice Sances</i>

The Music

Although he wrote an important treatise on musical counterpoint, much of the music associated with Thomas Campion was written by others. His published books of ayres were collaborations with other composers, who set his poems to music. The piece featured on this program has obscure origins. Campion was also a collector of popular tunes of the day, and the song's resemblance in character to Elizabethan broadsheet ballad tunes and the later dance tunes published by Playford, suggest that Campion may have adapted a popular tune of the time to suit his poem about love, pleasure and mortality. The tune also appears as an anonymous lute tune in Jane Pickering's Lute Book of 1616.

We are indebted to a Scottish vicar named Thomas Wode, who set about collecting and publishing the music of his country between 1562 and 1592 in a set of part books, without which much of Scotland's sacred and secular music of the time might have been lost. Secular art songs were very much a part of the musical scene in the Renaissance courts of James V, Mary and James VI of Scotland. Written in Scots vernacular, the two songs featured from the part books, "Richt Soir Opprest" and "Joy to the Person of My Love" are very much in line with the popular themes of unattainable love that dominated secular songs at the time.

Up until the second half of the 17th Century, the viol (also known as viola da gamba) was largely a consort instrument, consequently not much was written for solo viol. An early example of solo viol music, "Lancashire Pipes" comes from a collection of tunes for solo bass viol, known as the Manchester Manuscript (ca. 1640-1660). The manuscript was rediscovered at the beginning of the 20th Century. The virtuosic tunes have a lively, rustic feel, written in a manner that imitates the bagpipe. The melodies themselves are drawn from Northern English and Scottish pipe tunes, and the variations sound a distant echo of the noble Scottish pibroch.

The importance of John Dowland's contribution to the art of lute songs cannot be overstated. Initially spurned by the English court, presumably because of his Catholic faith, he was, for a time, a highly paid court composer for Denmark's King Christian IV, later returning to England and the court of James I. He was a prolific composer of songs and lute music, publishing several collections of his music over more than 20 years. His trademark melancholic streak is very evident in "I Saw My Lady Weep" from his *Second Book of Ayres*, but "Fine Knacks for Ladies", from the same book, shows a more lively, playful side, treating a lady's charms as a street vendor's wares. The instrumental offering, "Dowland's Adew for Master Oliver Cromwell" was a rare instance of Dowland specifically adding a bass viol line to a lute tune. The title of the piece refers to Sir Oliver Cromwell, great-great nephew of the infamous Thomas Cromwell of the English Reformation, and the uncle of the other more famous Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of the Commonwealth after the English Civil War. The "adew" must have been geographical, not mortal, as Sir Oliver outlived Dowland by some 30 years, dying at the ripe old age of 93!

The French publisher, Le Roy and Ballard, published several collections of secular songs in the first half of the 17th Century, forming the core of what are referred to as *Airs de Cour*. Composers included court musicians Étienne Moulinié, Pierre Guedron and Antoine Boësset among several others. Central to the texts was the theme of unrequited love so prominent in art songs at the time. Like Dowland, these composers took the simple musical form of the strophic love song and turned it into high art, setting passionate poetry to soaring and sighing melodies, charged with emotion and longing, sometimes despairing, sometimes uplifting, sometimes, as in "Non ha sott'il ciel", slightly self-mocking. The "Consert de differents oyseaux" takes a metaphorical turn, transforming the music of human love into the songs of birds. What is common to all of these French masterpieces is the beauty of the melodic lines. It is hard to imagine more perfect vehicles for voice, lute and gamba.

The sighing and long-suffering melancholy of the French and English airs find a foil in the Italian song, “Usurpator tiranno”. Still on the theme of unrequited love, this lover mopes less and finds more solace in the very human reactions of resentment and jealousy. In contrast to the languorous French and English songs, the music has a sense of energy and restless passion. The composer Giovanni Sances was born in Italy and later became Kappellmeister in the Austrian imperial court. His name implies Spanish roots, and the piece is an early passacaglia, a musical form with a repeated bass line that originated in Spain and became increasingly popular with composers throughout the Baroque period.

The other Italian composer on the program, Alessandro Piccinini, was a lutenist at the court of Ferrara for much of his career. Like Dowland, his virtuosity on lute led to writing and publishing several successful collections of lute music. The “Toccatà IV and Corrente prima” is well suited to the magnificent theorbo, (as is “Usurpator tiranno”). As his other claim to fame, Piccinini is credited with – or rather credited himself with – developing the archlute, a member of the lute family that has some of the extended range of the theorbo, but is significantly smaller.

The Musicians

Gwen Jamieson, *soprano*

This is Gwen Jamieson’s debut performance with EMSI. Her passion for early music is reflected in her musical work in Victoria, with frequent solo performances with the Ancient Music Society of Victoria, including a gala concert in 2019 with Benjamin Bagby. She has regularly been featured as part of the annual UVic Medieval Conference and has been a member of the medieval-folk ensemble Banquo for several years. Gwen has appeared in the Victoria Conservatory of Music’s Oratorio Program and Advanced Vocal Performance Program, including solo work in Handel’s *Solomon*.

Gwen’s evident talent and interest in early music attracted the attention of the late Michael Jarvis, who invited her to become a Choral Scholar with St. Barnabas Anglican Church. Under his mentorship, she has been immersed in sacred Renaissance polyphony.

In 2019, Gwen made her debut as solo soprano in Handel’s *Messiah*, with the Bach on the Rock choir and orchestra under the direction of Michael Jarvis. Her performance earned a review that singled out her performance, saying, “The soprano soloist’s voice and wonderfully expressive face was one of the highlights of the performance.”

Gwen has a Diploma in Vocal Performance from Camosun/VCM and is about to complete her Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance at UVic.

Douglas Hensley, *lute, vihuela, theorbo*

Douglas Hensley, a resident of Victoria since 1995, performs on and teaches a variety of instruments, including various guitars and lutes, ukulele, banjo, and mandolin, as well as several classical Persian instruments (târ, setâr, oud, and santur, which he studied with a number of Iranian masters).

He is a founding member, with soprano Elizabeth MacIsaac, of the Continuum Consort, which specializes in both early and modern music and has released several Cds. He is also a founding member of the classical Persian ensemble Daryâ.

In addition to being the “on-call multi-plucker” with the Victoria Symphony and Pacific Opera Victoria, he frequently accompanies the award-winning women’s choir Ensemble Laude, and is a member of several ensembles, including the Vancouver Inter-Cultural Orchestra, folk/rock band Big Speck, the Klez, Windan Wood Quartet and Raven Baroque.

He teaches at the Victoria Conservatory of Music and St Margaret's School.

Each kind of music has its own instrumentation; for this program: a 7-course Renaissance lute built in the 1970s by Vancouver luthier Brian Fitzgibbon, a 10-course Renaissance lute built in 1976 by the influential Portland Oregon luthier Robert Lundberg, a 6-course vihuela (in place of a 5-course baroque guitar), made by Clive Titmuss in White Rock around 1998, and a 14-course theorbo, whose back was made by Robert Lundberg and the rest of the instrument by Ray Nurse in Vancouver.

Martin Bonham, *viola da gamba*

Martin Bonham, a member of the Victoria Symphony from 1978 to 2019 and during that time, one of Victoria’s leading chamber musicians, also established himself as one of the top early music specialists in Western Canada, with performances for Vancouver Early Music, the Early Music Society of the Islands and Victoria Baroque.

Cofounder with Kazue Kazahaya Seki of Les Violes de Saint-Colombe, a founding member of the Pacific Baroque Orchestra and the Musick Masters, he has appeared frequently on stage throughout BC, Alberta and Washington State. His interest in recreating early dance led to a role in the 1990’s as Music Director and one of the dancers in *Movimento!*, Victoria’s early dance and theatre company at the time.

In this concert, Martin plays a Renaissance viola da gamba made by Ray Nurse in Vancouver in 1983 and owned by Joan Riecken as well as 2 of his own viols, one made in Joachim Tielke’s shop in 1719 and a 7-string viol made by Peter Hüttnann in 2004.

Lyricism with Love Sickness

by Dr. Hélène Cazes, member of the board of EMSI

The colourful, lively set of pieces gathered for this concert illustrates a golden age of lyricism, one that shone on the whole of Europe in the wake of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, a set of 366 “songs” composed in Italian and addressed to Laura, the beloved one that the poet had briefly met in 1327 and loved for his whole life, without seeing her again and long after her death. The success of this lifelong work, manifest in the success of the sonnet and in the now called “petrarchist” inspiration, changed the way we write poetry, sing, dream and love. It transformed the legacy of medieval courtly love — a spiritual aspiration to an amorous union that would transcend its own fulfillment— with a new sense of the self, defined by longing, melancholy and art. For, the unrequited love that has inspired poets and musicians, but also artists, philosophers and scientists in the 16th and 17th centuries, is first of all a celebration of creation, through self-discovery and transcendence of the world.

The “airs” on our program represent the acme of this sensibility, which infused the medieval heritage with a new personal, lyrical dimension. Meant to be sung, as the “songs” of the *Canzoniere*, the poems were to find melodies (also called “airs”) for their performance and the same “air” was often used for different texts. Written in the vernacular languages (Italian, French, Spanish, English...) that had been considered for a long time less apt than Latin to express elevated thoughts and feelings —in spite of the wealth of medieval literature in these very languages—, they were part of literary programs of the times to bring

nobility and dignity into the spoken languages. For instance, the poets of the Pleiades, in France, had rallied around the *Defense et Illustration de la langue française* (Joachim du Bellay, 1549) for “enriching” and “elevating” the French language. By the end of the 16th century, poets but also readers had found a new expression of their personal inner life: no longer low, worthless nor “medieval”, the words of their daily life were made able to attain abstraction, ideal, and ... the emotion of music.

The airs were met with immediate success across the social classes, as a "noble" genre, requiring the most elevated register, made accessible to a much larger audience than the courts: nobility, here, is the one of the emotion, of the art, and of the interpretation. Written by court musicians, the airs were circulated among the middle-class amateurs and among ... women! Thanks to the relatively new technology of the printed book and the success of the lute, which had become popular in private homes, they were performed in small ensembles for the enjoyment of the performers and their households. Fortunes were made, for lute-makers and for music printers. New forms of musical notation were developed, as this new audience could not rely on professional training —mostly based on memorization up until that time— for disseminating the music. Chamber music became a wide-spread practice. The "courts" evoked in the titles of the printed scores, *Airs de cour*, indicate both the new dignity of vernacular songs and the courtly pursuits of love, one of the most shared and most personal emotions. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has characterised the Early Modern period as "the emergence of the self": the "airs" provided the perfect form for such an emergence, being both personal (one singer) and universal through their lyrics.

The constant theme of this new poetry set to music appears to us as the melancholy brought by unrequited love: a perpetual state of desire and adoration for a distant, unattainable woman. A perpetual suffering for the lover, who holds the speaking part in this unequal dialogue, where the addressee seldom replies and, conventionally, declines the entreaties of her suitor. As in courtly love, this desire will never be fulfilled, the request never granted. The suffering of this love without hope of return does not entail, though, what we call "sentimentality". The complaint of the lover is already beyond the anecdote: the poet “sighs”. In French, in Italian, in Early Modern English, a “sigh” is an emotional expiration, but also a musical indication for silence, inspiration or pause, and, very aptly, a verb signifying “to long for something”. All these meanings are mingled in our pieces, which do not fail to evoke the sighs of the “souponnant” (suitor).

Now, in our modern world where entertainment productions provide fast stories of simple fulfillment, the lyrical narratives that “sigh” are not exactly popular. In Early Modern times, though, they held a spiritual dimension where the “self” could explore depth, art, introspection. The “maladie d’amour” (love sickness) was not considered as bad luck, nor a degrading pathology, but was described by physicians and philosophers as a form of melancholy, the noblest kind of ailment characterized by sadness, loneliness and... genius. Defined as a “furor” of the heart, the amorous melancholy elevated the soul and led to heroic prowess, artistic creation, enhanced awareness of the self and of the world. It related to the neo-platonist theories of love according to which the lover be "elevated" by the pursuit of “a beauty” and would worship not a woman but the Ideal of beauty that she embodied. That Petrarch never had a “relationship”—as we would now say— with Laura was not a failure but an apotheosis of this ideal and prestigious love. Hence, the "beauty" of the loved one, in our program, is never described; it is an abstraction, a step towards the Idea, that inspires the movement of the soul. The same applies to the elements of the world evoked in the songs (sun, earth, stars, birds), all ordained to guide the elevation of the heart. The despair of the lover is not a bitter disillusion, then, but a perseverance in his progress towards a "higher" perception and a deeper love.

"Love sickness" could be dangerous for health, though, and was described at length in the medical treatises. The easiest recommended cure was sexual intercourse, which would have, precisely, ended the love along with extinguishing the longing. Completion as a remedy to love... and to art! Rather our poets and composers exalt their sorrow and delve into new dimensions of the self. This theory of love, which infused the ancient medical theories of humours with the modern emphasis on emotion, saw the first elements of what will become psychology. The fascination for love sickness culminated with the

publication of a whole treatise, *De la maladie d'amour ou mélancolie érotique*, by the physician Jacques Ferrand, in 1623: condemned by the Inquisition in its earlier versions, the book was a scientific description of the causes and symptoms of the disease, along with a collection of possible cures; more importantly, it read as a celebration of love sickness, which was presented as a fatal although sacred election of the noble souls, recognized by their sensibility and by their endurance in suffering. Around the same years, in England, Robert Burton enclosed the whole world's experiences in the *Anatomy of Melancholy* (first published in 1621, revised and emended 5 times up until his death in 1640), where he assigned to melancholics most of human achievements. The passionate interest in melancholy, inherited from classical Antiquity and rekindled by Early Modern humanists, was then reaching its peak and the airs were the music for its songs.

Already, in the 17th century, the modern rationalism had begun to rearrange these lyrical dreams of transcendence, vision and genius: the pathologies of depression and hysteria (for women, only) were in the first stages of their elaboration, and they would propose more social and controlled models for emotions and for the inner life. Freedom would seem a better ideal than sorrow.

Children of the Enlightenment, we have assigned other scientific causes to sadness and other descriptions to the torments of love, as we gradually abandoned the melancholic models that had, at times, been ubiquitous. Indeed, we have lost most of the cultural context that gave depth and meaning to the unending and conventional pleas of Early Modern suitors. Listen to their sighs, though: they are echoed through our modern sensibilities, well beyond the golden age of the airs. We hear the poignancy in the claim for freedom that bursts in the flamboyant song, "Usurpato Tiranno". Even the ostensibly more cheerful airs performed in this concert, such as "Non ha sott'il Ciel", let the shadow of the love disease creep into their light-hearted lyrics: despair is never far when love is at stake. Indeed, the joyful tone of "Fine Knacks for Ladies" indicates that love is not to be found there... The moment of these airs and their performances may have passed; the association between music, love, privacy and melancholy did not. Lute and viola da gamba, first as *basso continuo*, then as soloists, will become the voices of personal, lyrical sadness with a repertoire, developed in the 17th c. that already relates melancholy to musical practice and appreciation. Romanticism returned, with passion, to the inspiration of unrequited love, celebrating Goethe's young Werther and the "black sun of Melancholy", while music was even more firmly considered the absolute expression of inner suffering. Our poetic and musical emotions have kept an ear to sad self-reflection and to ideal. Sigh. There are delights, indeed, in love sickness.

...et mon luth constellé
Porte le Soleil noir de la Mélancolie

(and my starred lute
wears the black Sun of Melancholy).

[Gérard de Nerval, *Chimères*, 1854]

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