EARLY ENGLISH SONG

Cain Budds, guitar • Michael Austin, haute-contre

Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

Tonight at Nachtmusik guitarist **Cain Budds** and vocalist **Michael Austin** share with us music of the English renaissance, specifically songs and solo lute works by the distinguished composers John Dowland, Robert Johnson, Philip Rosseter, and Thomas Campion. Each of these composers made their own distinctive contributions to these repertoires, as these notes will explore, which was part of a larger flourishing in English music in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. This, of course, was also the time of William Shakespeare, other great poets like Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, as well as the defeat of the Spanish Armada which secured English dominion over the seas and soon enabled the island nation to become the leading colonial power in the Americas. Although tonight we hear the guitar, this music was written for its relative, the lute, another plucked string instrument which was popular across Europe from the Middle Ages into eighteenth century. The lute, with its distinctive pear shape, was, in turn, descended from the Arabic *'ud*, introduced to Europe by the Moors during their seven-century occupation of the Iberian Peninsula. The lute, as its players and others who wrote for it discovered, was a capable soloist and accompanist. The composers whose music we hear tonight certainly knew this when they wrote their solo pieces and songs; so did other composers who integrated the lute into the ensemble textures of their operas, masses, and instrumental concerti.

Lutenist and composer **John Dowland (1563-1626)** was the chief innovator of the English lute song which pairs a singer with lute accompaniment. This genre synthesizes the popular ballad, including songs like "Barbara Allen" which we encountered at January's Nachtmusik, with instrumental dances like the pavan and galliard, the consort song, and the expressive text setting of the madrigal, recently imported from Italy. Trained in music at Oxford and likely at Cambridge too, Dowland integrated into his lute accompaniments all the complexities of learned counterpoint whereas most of his contemporaries would opt, on the other hand, for simpler homophonic textures, relying on the beauty of the melodies and merit of the texts to attract interest to their songs. Dowland, aware of the newness of the lute song, also provided instructions for how his songs might be performed as madrigals—with several vocalists sharing the text—or as consort songs—with a group (i.e. consort) of instruments playing the multiple lines of the lute accompaniment. Dowland's main collections of lute songs are his three *Bookes of Songs or Ayres*, published in 1597, 1600, and 1603, respectively. These volumes contain a total of sixty-four songs and not only secured the renown of their composer but also defined their genre. Dowland's solo lute works, meanwhile, remained unpublished, and many have survived in several different versions. Despite the preeminence his songs and lute works gained him, Dowland struggled to find royal patronage in England, so that, instead, he spent eight years in Denmark in service to that country's King Christian IV. Dowland's wife, however, remained in England for these years and acted as liaison to his publisher and raised their children. Only in 1612, late in the composer's life and well into the reign of King James I, was the special court post of fifth lutenist created for him.

We hear five songs tonight by Dowland, including "Flow, My Tears," by far his most famous. In its day, this song from Dowland's *Second Booke* was well-known both in England and on the continent, especially in its original form as a pavan for solo lute titled *Lachrimae*. Dowland himself wrote variations on its theme as did many other composers. Indeed, its melancholic mood became widely associated with his artistic persona, and Dowland took up the motto "Semper Dowland, semper dolens," Latin for "Always Dowland, always doleful." Both the music and text evoke the song's melancholic mood. The four-note descending motif which opens the song and recurs throughout has been likened to falling tears. Meanwhile, the text provides mournful imagery, including such remarks as "No nights are dark enough for those that in despair their lost fortunes deplore" and "From the highest spire of contentment my fortune is thrown." The next song on our program—and also in Dowland's *Second Booke*—"Sorrow, Stay," echoes these feelings. Additional songs,

"My Thoughts are Wing'd with Hopes," "Come, Heavy Sleep," and "Now, O Now, I Needs Must Part," are from Dowland's *First Booke* and evoke several different moods. We also hear solo lute pieces by Dowland, specifically three galliards each written in tribute to a different person at the English court. The dedication of the first, to Queen Elizabeth herself, is perfectly clear from the title; she was evidently a skilled dancer of the galliard, a lively dance characterized by its leaps. The others are to the Earl of Essex, a favorite courtier to the Queen until he led an unsuccessful coup and was executed, and to another suitor who Elizabeth dubbed her frog, for she found he was short and ugly with a face scarred by small pox, but made for an excellent dancing partner all the same.

If Dowland struggled to find patronage in England, then **Robert Johnson (c.1583-1633)** seemed to come by it almost too easily. Johnson, a lutenist and composer like Dowland, was the son of Elizabeth's lutenist, John Johnson. When this Johnson died in 1594, his post was left vacant—Dowland effectively having been passed over—until the younger Johnson could come of age and accede to his father's throne. This happened in 1604, yet, as a child, Johnson had already been taken into the household of Lord Chamberlain, patron to the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the same theatre company with which Shakespeare was associated throughout his career; at the ascendancy of King James, the company became the King's Men. Thus, Johnson received the patronage of both King James and his theatre company. "Full Fathom Five," which we hear tonight, and "Where the Bee Sucks" are settings from *The Tempest*, the late play by Shakespeare which tells of the sorcerer Prospero's attempts to take revenge on his brother, Antonio, who had usurped his dukedom. Prospero's servant, the spirit Ariel, sings "Full Fathom Five" as a taunt to Ferdinand that his father has perished in the sea storm which has, likewise, stranded him on Prospero's island. Scholars debate whether Johnson's settings were written for the premiere or a slightly later production; significantly though, these two songs as well as those Johnson composed for *A Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* are some of the only surviving music written for Shakespeare's plays during this playwright's life or shortly thereafter. Like much of Johnson's music, "Full Fathom Five" is declamatory in style with a catchy melody and simple accompaniment. These attributes distinguish Johnson's music from Dowland's more esoteric manner and align his aesthetic with operatic developments in Italy.

Like Johnson, **Philip Rosseter (1568-1623)** benefited from royal patronage, serving as court lutenist from 1603 onward, and was also involved with the theatre, as manager of the Whitefriars playhouse and the boys' troupe, Children of the Queen's Revels. His great musical accomplishment, however, was *A Booke of Ayres*, a collection of songs co-published with Campion in 1601. This volume includes twenty-one songs each by Rosseter and Campion as well as an aesthetic statement in its preface which thoroughly distinguishes their songs from those of Dowland. They praise simplicity and admonish the complexities of counterpoint and the word-painting of madrigals—the very elements which had brought art to Dowland's songs. In other words, the emotional extremes of "Flow, My Tears" would have been unacceptable to them as too were that composer's intricate, interweaving accompaniments. The song we hear by Rosseter, "When Laura Smiles," is from *A Booke of Ayres* and displays these chosen characteristics. Its melody is graceful and plainly beautiful; all attention, furthermore, is drawn to the singer and his melody as the lute is diminished to simple accompaniment, echoing parts of this melody and filling-out its harmonies. The text, a description of Laura's beauty, touches on her smile "which revives both night and day," her speech with its "ever-flowing music," the wondrous tresses of her hair, and the power of her eyes. Later we hear a galliard by Rosseter, one of only a dozen solo lute pieces by this composer to survive.

Thomas Campion (1567-1620) was a close friend to Rosseter, and, upon his death, Campion left his entire estate to this friend and colleague. Campion came from wealth, so that, unlike the other composers on tonight's program, he did not make his career as a musician. Initially, he trained in law and medicine, but increasingly devoted more time to music and poetry. He is unique among these composers for having written his own texts; indeed, the first modern scholarship focused more on his poetry than his music. In addition to the volume he co-authored with Rosseter, Campion went on to publish another four books of songs separately. In total, over a hundred songs survive by Campion, far more than any of his English contemporaries save Dowland. Campion also studied classic Latin poetry, wrote his own poetry in Latin, and sought to extend the meters of Latin poetry to the English poem. This fondness for classic poetry helps explain the aesthetic pronouncements made in the preface to *A Book of Ayres*; it likewise aligns him with Italian contemporaries who were looking to classic Greek theatre as a model for opera. We hear three songs by Campion tonight: "When to Her Lute Corrina Sings" is from the initial volume with Rosseter while "Author of Light" and "Never Weather-Beaten Sail" are from Campion's first solo effort which

appeared twelve years later in 1613 and, according to its title, contains “Divine and Morall Songs.” In “When to Her Lute,” the singer claims that Corrina has just as much power over him as she does her instrument: “And, as her lute doth live or die, let by her passion, so must I.” “Author of Light” reflects on God’s power to forgive sin, whereas “Never Weather-Beaten Sail” asks the Lord for rest.

About Jackson. Jackson Harmeyer graduated with his Master of Music in Music History and Literature from the University of Louisville in May 2019 following the completion of his thesis, “Liminal Aesthetics: Perspectives on Harmony and Timbre in the Music of Olivier Messiaen, Tristan Murail, and Kaija Saariaho.” There he was the recipient of the Gerhard Herz Music History Scholarship and was employed at the Dwight Anderson Memorial Music Library where he did archival work for the unique Grawemeyer Collection which houses scores, recordings, and documentation for over five thousand entries by the world’s leading contemporary composers. Jackson is active as a concert annotator and serves as Director of Scholarship to the Sugarmill Music Festival in Alexandria, LA. A project he is developing for the 2020 festival, “A Scholarly Presentation in Lecture and Music: Solomon Northup in the Central Louisiana Sugarhouse,” has recently been awarded a prestigious Rebirth Grant by the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. He has shared his research at the American Musicological Society South-Central Chapter’s annual meetings in Asheville, NC and Sewanee, TN; the University of Tennessee Contemporary Music Festival in Knoxville, TN; and the University of Louisiana System Academic Summit in Thibodeaux, LA; in March 2020, he will present at the Music by Women Festival in Columbus, MS. Aside from his studies, Jackson is a composer, choral singer, music blogger, avid reader, and award-winning nature photographer.

Read additional program notes by Jackson at www.JacksonHarmeyer.com.