

FLORA GAVE ME FAIREST FLOWERS

Elizabethan madrigals

Members of the Cambridge Singers + directed by John Rutter



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The sixteenth-century madrigal was an Italian form. The term 'madrigal' was loosely applied to a wide variety of music, but generally denoted a polyphonic setting for four or more voices of an amorous or pastoral text which was closely depicted in the music. Thomas Morley transplanted the form into England in the 1590s; this marked the beginning of the brief but brilliant flowering of the English madrigal. Between the 1590s and the early 1620s, twenty composers published a total of 36 books of madrigals, after which the form virtually disappeared. Some of these composers, such as Morley and Weelkes, followed the Italian model closely; others, such as Byrd and Gibbons, mostly stayed with the simpler English form of the consort song, where the tune remains in one voice, word-painting is not used, and strophic form is preferred to the continuous structure of the madrigal proper. Among the twenty-five items selected for this recording there are examples of several types of piece, ranging from true Italianate madrigals such as *Too much I once lamented*, via more popular 'balletts' such as *Fyer, fyer!*, to simple part-songs like *A little pretty bonny lass*. The variety, imagination, and inspired blending of poetry and music characteristic of the best of the 'English Madrigal School' (as it was called by Edmund Fellowes, who rescued it from long neglect) afford a particular kind of delight in performance, shared equally by singer and listener.

FLORA GAVE ME FAIREST FLOWERS

English madrigals

sung by members of The Cambridge Singers • directed by John Rutter

Total playing time: 71' 40"

Pastoral and mythological

- 1 Hark, all ye lovely saints above (3' 15") **Thomas Weelkes**
- 2 Though Amaryllys dance in green (2' 12") **William Byrd**
- 3 Round about in a fair ring (0' 55") **John Bennet**
- 4 Adieu, ye city-prisoning towers (2' 14") **Thomas Tomkins**
- 5 Flora gave me fairest flowers (1' 33") **John Wilbye**
- 6 Sweet Suffolk owl (2' 33") **Thomas Vautor**
- 7 As Vesta was from Latmos hill descending (3' 24") **Thomas Weelkes**
- 8 Lullaby (2' 08") **William Byrd**
- 9 This sweet and merry month of May (2' 30") **William Byrd**
- 10 Now is the month of maying (1' 58") **Thomas Morley**

Amorous and convivial

- 11 A little pretty bonny lass (1' 55") **John Farmer**
- 12 Fyer, fyer! (2' 17") **Thomas Morley**
- 13 Too much I once lamented (6' 22") **Thomas Tomkins**
- 14 My bonny lass she smileth (2' 08") **Thomas Morley**
- 15 Ha ha! This world doth pass (1' 50") **Thomas Weelkes**
- 16 Quick, quick, away, dispatch! (3' 10") **Michael East**
- 17 Dainty fine bird (2' 00") **Orlando Gibbons**
- 18 Come again! Sweet love doth now invite (3' 27") **John Dowland**
- 19 Mother, I will have a husband (1' 35") **Thomas Vautor**

Elegiac and melancholy

- 20 Draw on, sweet night (4' 58") **John Wilbye**
- 21 Sleep, fleshly birth (6' 08") **Robert Ramsey**
- 22 Weep, weep, mine eyes (4' 28") **John Wilbye**
- 23 Death hath deprived me (2' 56") **Thomas Weelkes**
- 24 The silver swan (1' 45") **Orlando Gibbons**
- 25 Adieu, sweet Amaryllys (3' 12") **John Wilbye**

Singers taking part:

Sopranos

Caroline Ashton, Donna Deam, Ruth Holton, Nancy-Jane Rucker, Mary Seers

Altos

Alex Donaldson, Peter Gritton, Nicola-Jane Kemp, Melanie Marshall

Tenors

Paul Gordon, Richard Wilson

Basses

Gerald Finley, Charles Pott, Nicholas Sears

Pastoral and mythological

- [1] **Hark, all ye lovely saints above** (SSATB) (Thomas Weelkes, *Balletts and Madrigals To five voyces*, 1598)

Hark, all ye lovely saints above,
Diana hath agreed with Love
His fiery weapon to remove. Fa la.
Do you not see
How they agree?
Then cease, fair ladies; why weep ye? Fa la.

See, see, your mistress bids you cease, _And
welcome Love, with love's increase;
Diana hath procured your peace. Fa la.
Cupid hath sworn
His bow forlorn
To break and burn, ere ladies mourn. Fa la.

- [2] **Though Amaryllis dance in green** (SSATB) (William Byrd, *Psalmes, Sonets, & songs of sadnes and pietie*, 1588)

Though Amaryllis dance in green
Like fairy queen;
And sing full clear
Corinna can, with smiling cheer.
Yet since their eyes make heart so sore,
Heigh ho, 'chill love no more.

Love ye who list, I force him not,
Sith, God it wot,
The more I wail,
The less my sighs and tears prevail.
What shall I do but say therefore,

Heigh ho, 'chill love no more.

- [3] **Round about in a fair ring** (SSAT) (John Bennet, included in Thomas Ravenscroft's *A Briefe Discourse*, 1614)

Round about, round about
In a fair ring-a,
Thus we dance, thus we dance
And thus we sing-a,
Trip and go, to and fro
Over this green-a,
All about, in and out
Over this green-a.

- [4] **Adieu, ye city-prisoning towers** (SSATB) (Thomas Tomkins, *Songs of 3.4.5. and 6. parts*, 1622)

Adieu, ye city-prisoning towers;
Better are the country bowers.
Winter is gone, the trees are springing;
Birds on every hedge sit singing.
Hark, how they chirp, come, love, delay not,
Come, sweet love, O come and stay not.

- [5] **Flora gave me fairest flowers** (SSATB) (John Wilbye, *The First Set of English Madrigals to 3.4.5. and 6. voices*, 1598)

Flora gave me fairest flowers,
None so fair in Flora's treasure.
These I placed on Phyllis' bowers,
She was pleased, and she my pleasure.
Smiling meadows seem to say:
Come, ye wantons, here to play.

- [6] **Sweet Suffolk owl** (SSATB) (Thomas Vautor, *The First Set . . . Apt for Yvols and Voyces*, 1619)

Sweet Suffolk owl, so trimly dight
With feathers like a lady bright,
Thou sing'st alone, sitting by night,
Te whit, te whoo, te whit, te whoo.
Thy note, that forth so freely rolls,
With shrill command the mouse controls,
And sings a dirge for dying souls,
Te whit, te whoo, te whit, te whoo.

- [7] **As Vesta was from Latmos hill descending** (SSATTB) (Thomas Weelkes, included in *The Triumphs of Oriana*, 1601)

As Vesta was from Latmos hill descending,
She spied a maiden Queen, the same ascending,
Attended on by all the shepherds' swain,
To whom Diana's darlings came running down
amain,
First two by two, then three by three together,
Leaving their goddess all alone, hasted thither;
And mingling with the shepherds of her train,
With mirthful tunes her presence entertain.
Then sang the shepherds and nymphs of
Diana:
Long live fair Oriana.

- [8] **Lullaby** (SAATB) (William Byrd, *Psalmes, Sonets, & songs of sadnes and pietie*, 1588)

Lulla la, lulla lulla lullaby.
My sweet little baby, what meanest thou to cry?

- [9] **This sweet and merry month of May** (SSATTB) (William Byrd, included in Thomas Watson's *The First sett, Of Italian Madrigalls Englished*, 1590)

This sweet and merry month of May,
While Nature wantons in her prime,
And birds do sing, and beasts do play
For pleasure of the joyful time,

I choose the first for holiday,
And greet Eliza with a rhyme:
A beauteous Queen of second Troy,
Take well in worth a simple toy.
[Attributed to Thomas Watson]

- [10] **Now is the month of maying** (SATTB) (Thomas Morley, *The First Booke of Balletts to Five Voyces*, 1595)

Now is the month of maying,
When merry lads are playing, fa la,
Each with his bonny lass
Upon the greeny grass. Fa la.

The Spring, clad all in gladness,
Doth laugh at Winter's sadness, fa la,
And to the bagpipe's sound
The nymphs tread out their ground. Fa la.

Fie then! why sit we musing,
Youth's sweet delight refusing? Fa la.
Say, dainty nymphs, and speak,
Shall we play barley-break? Fa la.

Amorous and convivial

- 11 A little pretty bonny lass** (SATB)
(John Farmer, *The First Set Of English Madrigals: To Foure Voices*, 1599)

A little pretty bonny lass was walking
In midst of May before the sun 'gan rise.
I took her by the hand and fell to talking
Of this and that, as best I could devise.
I swore I would, yet still she said I should not
Do what I would, and yet for all I could not.

- 12 Fyer, fyer!** (SSATB)
(Thomas Morley, *The First Booke of Balletts to Five Voyces*, 1595)

Fyer, fyer! my heart! Fa la.
O help! Alas! Ay me! I sit and cry me
And call for help, alas, but none comes nigh me!
Fa la.

- 13 Too much I once lamented** (SSATB)
(Thomas Tomkins, *Songs of 3.4.5. and 6. parts*, 1622)

Too much I once lamented,
While Love my heart tormented. Fa la.
Alas, and Ay me, sat I wringing;
Now chanting go, and singing. Fa la.

- 14 My bonny lass she smileth** (SATTB)
(Thomas Morley, *The first Booke of Balletts to Five Voyces*, 1595)

My bonny lass she smileth
When she my heart beguileth. Fa la.
Smile less, dear love, therefore,
And you shall love me more. Fa la.
When she her sweet eye turneth,

O how my heart it burneth! Fa la.
Dear love, call in their light,
O else you burn me quite! Fa la.

- 15 Ha ha! this world doth pass** (TTB)
(Thomas Weelkes, *Ayeres Or Phantasticke Spirites for three voices*, 1608)

Ha ha! ha ha! This world doth pass
Most merrily I'll be sworn,
For many an honest Indian ass
Goes for a unicorn.
Fara diddle dyno,
This is idle fyno.

Tie hie! tie hie! O sweet delight!
He tickles this age that can
Call Tullia's ape a marmasyte
And Leda's goose a swan.
Fara diddle dyno,
This is idle fyno.

So, so! so so! Fine English days!
For false play is no reproach,
For he that doth the coachman praise
may safely use the coach.
Fara diddle dyno,
This is idle fyno.

- 16 Quick, quick, away, dispatch!**
(SSATBB) (Michael East, *The Fourth Set of Bookes*, 1618)

A song made upon the marriage of the right
worshipful, and my very good friend Edward
Oldisworth of Lincoln's Inn Esquire.

Quick, quick, away, dispatch!
Be nimble, quick, away!

Bells are a-ringing,
Maids are singing,
The priest for you doth stay.

An holiday, a happy day, a merry day!
The last of nothing,
The first of something.
Be nimble, quick, away!

No haste but good, yet stay!
A while of free
I bound must be,
But bound to him that's bound to me;
Such bondage makes me free.

- 17 Dainty fine bird** (SSATB)
(Orlando Gibbons, *The first Set of Madrigals and Mottets of 5 Parts*, 1612)

Dainty fine bird that art engaged there,
Alas, how like thine and my fortunes are.
Both prisoners be; and both singing, thus
Strive to please her that hath imprisoned us.
Only thus we differ, thou and I,
Thou liv'st singing, but I sing and die.

- 18 Come again! Sweet love doth now invite** (SATB) (John Dowland, *The Firste Booke of Songs* . . . 1597)

Come again! sweet love doth now invite
Thy graces that refrain to do me due delight,
To see, to hear, to touch, to kiss, to die
With thee again in sweetest sympathy.

Come again! That I may cease to mourn
Through thy unkind disdain, for now, left and
forlorn
I sit, I sigh, I weep, I faint, I die

In deadly pain and endless misery.

Gentle Love, draw forth thy wounding dart,
Thou canst not pierce her heart,
For I that do approve by sighs and tears
More hot than are thy shafts
Did tempt while she for triumph laughs.

- 19 Mother, I will have a husband**
(SSATB) (Thomas Vautour, *The First Set . . . Apt for Vyols and Voyces*, 1619)

Mother, I will have a husband,
And I will have him out of hand.
Mother, I will sure have one, have one,
In spite of her that will have none.

John a Dun should have had me long ere this,
He said I had good lips to kiss, to kiss, to kiss,
Mother, I will sure have one,
In spite of her that will have none.

For I have heard 'tis trim when folks do love,
By good Sir John I swear now I will prove,
For Mother, I will sure have one, have one,
In spite of her that will have none.

To the town therefore will I gad,
To get me a husband good or bad.

Mother, I will have, &c.

Elegiac and melancholy

- 20 Draw on, sweet night** (SSATBB)
(John Wilbye, *The Second Set of Madrigales to 3.4.5. and 6. parts*, 1609)

Draw on, sweet Night, best friend unto those cares

That do arise from painful melancholy.
My life so ill through want of comfort fares,
That unto thee I consecrate it wholly.

Sweet Night, draw on! My griefs when they be
told
To shades and darkness, find some ease from
paining.

And while thou all in silence dost enfold,
I then shall have best time for my
complaining.

[21] Sleep, fleshly birth (SSATTB)
(Robert Ramsey, unpublished ms.)

Sleep, fleshly birth, in peaceful earth,
And let thine ears list to the music of the
spheres,

While we around this fairy ground
Thy doleful obit keeping,
Make marble melt with weeping.

With num'rous feet we'll part and meet.
Then chorus-like in a ring thy praises sing,
While showers of flowers bestrew thee,
We'll thus with tears bedew thee.

Rest in soft peace, sweet youth, and there
remain

Till soul and body meet to join again.

[22] Weep, weep, mine eyes (SSATB)
(John Wilbye, *The Second Set of
Madrigales to 3.4.5. and 6. parts*, 1609)

Weep, weep, mine eyes, my heart can take no
rest.

Weep, weep, my heart, mine eyes shall ne'er be
blest.

Weep eyes, weep heart, and both this accent cry:
A thousand deaths, Flamminia, I die.

Ay me, ah cruel Fortune! Now, Leander, to die I
fear not.

Death, do thy worst! I care not!
I hope when I am dead in Elysian plain
To meet, and there with joy we'll love again.

[23] Death hath deprived me (SSATBB)
(Thomas Weelkes, appended to *Ayeres Or
Phantasticke Spirites*, 1608)

*A remembrance of my friend
Mr. Thomas Morley*

Death hath deprived me of my dearest friend;
My dearest friend is dead and laid in grave.
In grave he rests until the world shall end.

The world shall end, as end all things must
have.

All things must have an end that Nature
wrought;

That Nature wrought must unto dust be brought.
[John Davies of Hereford]

[24] The silver swan (SATTB)
(Orlando Gibbons, *The first Set of
Madrigals and Mottets of 5. parts*, 1612)

The silver swan, who living had no note
When death approached unlocked her silent
throat;

Leaning her breast against the reedy shore,
Thus sung her first and last, and sung no more:
Farewell, all joys; O death, come close mine
eyes;

More geese than swans now live, more fools
than wise.

[25] Adieu, sweet Amaryllis (SATB)
(John Wilbye, *The First Set of English
Madrigals to 3.4.5. and 6. voices*, 1598)

Adieu, sweet Amaryllis,
For since to part your will is,

O heavy tiding,
Here is for me no biding.
Yet once again, ere that I part with you,
Amaryllis, sweet, adieu.

NOTES ON THE COMPOSERS

John Bennet (c.1575/80–?), of whose life little is known, published one book of madrigals in 1599.

William Byrd (1543–1623) was the greatest English composer of his age. After early studies with Thomas Tallis, he became organist and choirmaster of Lincoln Cathedral in 1563. On being appointed a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1570 he moved to London, where he gained the favour of Queen Elizabeth. Most of his time must have been occupied with composition, but he was also active in administering a 21-year monopoly in music printing granted to him and Tallis by the Queen in 1575. In 1593 he acquired an estate in the Essex village of Stondon Massey, where he spent progressively more of his time thereafter. The majority of Byrd's huge output was of church music, much of it for the outlawed rites of the Catholic church to which he clung throughout his life. He published three partly secular collections, *Psalmes, Sonets, & Songs of sadnes and pietie* (1588), *Songs of Sundrie Natures* (1589), and *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets* (1611); the first of these in particular enjoyed wide popularity.

Michael East (c.1580–1648) was for much of his career choirmaster at Lichfield Cathedral. He published two sets of madrigals, in 1604 and 1606, and five subsequent 'Bookes' of various vocal and instrumental pieces.

John Farmer (c.1570–?), organist of Dublin Cathedral, later resident in London, published one book of four-voice madrigals in 1599.

Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625), composer, Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, and organist, concentrated mainly on sacred music and published only one secular collection, *The First Set of Madrigals and Mottets*, in 1612. It shows little Italian influence, most of its contents being in the style of consort songs, noteworthy for rather serious and melancholy texts. Several items (including *Dainty fine bird* and *The silver swan*) are justly prized.

Thomas Morley (1557/8–1602), founder of the 'English madrigal school', was born in Norwich, where he was appointed organist of the cathedral in 1583. He studied under William Byrd (when and where is not clear) and moved to London, becoming organist of St Paul's Cathedral in about 1590 and a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1592. He was prolifically active as a composer of sacred and secular music, music publisher, and promoter of the new Italian madrigal style. His own madrigal adaptations and compositions (over 100 in all) outnumber those of any of his contemporaries. They were

published in four collections between 1593 and 1597; he also edited *The Triumphs of Oriana*, published in 1601. His *A Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music* (1597) is the most important English musical treatise of the period.

Robert Ramsey (dates unknown) was organist of Trinity College, Cambridge, from 1628–44. *Sleep, fleshly birth* is one of the very few English madrigals to have survived only from a manuscript source.

Thomas Tomkins (1572–1656) was born in Wales and studied with William Byrd, dedicating *Too much I once lamented* to him in homage. He was appointed organist of Worcester Cathedral in 1596, later becoming organist of the Chapel Royal. Active mainly in church music, he published his only book of madrigals in 1622. Conservative in style, showing little influence of the newer Italian baroque, his music at its best is none the less imaginative and impeccably crafted.

Thomas Vautor (dates unknown) worked as musician-in-residence to the Duke of Buckingham and is remembered only for his single volume of madrigals published in 1619. They are of remarkable quality, showing a variety, resource, and responsiveness to text comparable with Weelkes or Wilbye. The reference to Queen Elizabeth in *Mother, I will have a husband* ('her that will have none') suggests that this madrigal may have been written before 1603.

Thomas Weelkes (c.1576–1623), one of the most prolific, accomplished and imaginative madrigalists, was organist of Winchester College from 1598 to 1602 (the period of most of his madrigal composition) and then organist and choirmaster of Chichester Cathedral; his later years were overshadowed by drunkenness. He published books of madrigals in 1597, 1598 and 1600, and a lightweight collection called *Ayres or Phantasticke Spirites for Three Voices* in 1608, to which is appended the magnificent elegy on the death of Morley, *Death hath deprived me*.

John Wilbye (c.1574–1638) spent most of his career at Hengrave Hall in Suffolk, home of the noble Kytson family, initially in service as a household musician, but later as an honoured and prosperous retainer with land and property of his own. Virtually his entire known output consists of two books of madrigals, published in 1597 and 1609; nevertheless he is ranked as possibly the greatest English madrigalist, able to absorb Italian influences within the framework of a subtle and introspective personal style.

THE ENGLISH MADRIGAL

The long reign of Elizabeth I, from 1558 to 1603, was a period of intense musical activity in England. Political and religious conditions were relatively stable; economic prosperity prevailed, with a newly-educated merchant class providing a wider market for music than ever before; music printing was becoming firmly established, spreading the latest compositions among the growing numbers of lay people able to read and perform music; and a new awareness of Renaissance culture, especially that of

Italy, was inspiring a brilliant rising generation of English composers.

The English madrigal reflected all these factors: it was modelled directly on an Italian counterpart, disseminated by printed editions, and performed by amateurs for their own pleasure. The date of its birth is usually given as 1588, the year in which Nicholas Yonge (later a member of the choir of St Paul's Cathedral) published *Musica Transalpina*, a collection of over fifty Italian madrigals adapted to English texts. Madrigal singing had been going on in England before this, however, as Yonge relates in the preface to his influential volume:

...Since I first began to keepe house in this Citie, it hath bene no small comfort unto mee, that a great number of Gentlemen and Merchants of good accompt (as well of this realme as of forreine nations) have taken in good part such entertainment of pleasure, as my poore abilitie was able to afford them, both by the exercise of Musicke daily used in my house, and by furnishing them with Bookes of that kinde yeerely sent me out of Italy and other places, which beeing for the most part Italian songs, are for sweetness of Aire, verie well liked of all, but most in account with them that understand that language...

Yonge goes on to say that similar English compositions being 'not many in number', he was delighted to find 'certaine Italian Madrigales translated most of them five yeers agoe by a Gentleman for his private delight'; these form the bulk of his 1588 publication – which might well have appeared earlier if there had not been a virtual ban on the publication of secular music in England until then.

Italian madrigals such as those in *Musica Transalpina* have several clearly recognizable features that define them as madrigals: amorous or pastoral texts, often by considerable poets such as Petrarch, filled with opportunities for the composer to indulge in word-painting; a polyphonic texture of four, five or six equally important voices, with much use of imitation; a continuous but sectional structure, with each new phrase of the text set to new music (as in a motet); sometimes, in the lighter madrigals (known as *balletti*), dance rhythms, *fa la* refrains and sectional repetitions resulting in overall ABB or AABB structures.

English composers were not slow to react to the new Italian import. In 1588 William Byrd published his first partly secular vocal collection, *Psalmes, Sonets, & Songs of Sadnes and pietie*, which consists of adaptations of various of his earlier solo songs. As he explains in the preface 'heere are divers songs, . . . originally made for instruments to express the harmonie, and one voice to pronounce the dittie . . . now framed in all parts for voices to sing the same'. Although the fitting of words to all the voices shows Byrd's awareness of the new vogue for madrigal singing, the pieces in *Psalmes, Sonets & Songs* (among them the lovely *Lullaby* and the sprightly *Though Amaryllis dance in green*) are not madrigals but consort songs, mostly strophic, with the melody in the top voice and the accompaniment – often, admittedly, with touches of imitation – sung by the other voices. The texts are mostly of secondary interest, and word-painting is rare. Byrd was too set in his ways, or too stubbornly independent, ever to adopt the new style;

though when he was asked to contribute a piece 'after the Italian vaine' to a 1590 collection called *Italian Madrigalls Englished*, he wrote his only two real madrigals, one of them being the resplendent *This sweet and merry month of May*, thus proving that he could match any other madrigalist, Italian or English, if he so chose.

Byrd's younger contemporary and pupil Thomas Morley was the composer who established the English madrigal proper. In the 1590s he began to publish, with great success, madrigal collections of his own and various Italian composers' work. At times the dividing-line became blurred: his *First Booke of Balletts to Five Voyces* of 1595 (which includes *My bonny lass she smileth*, *Fyer, fyer!*, and *Now is the month of maying*) consists of altered and improved reworkings of unacknowledged Italian originals by the madrigalist Gastoldi. Doubtless Morley's enthusiasm for the Italian style was responsible for the borrowing; paradoxically, he also had a streak of chauvinism:

...such be the new-fangled opinions of our countrymen who will highly esteem whatsoever cometh from beyond the seas (and specially from Italy) be it never so simple, condemning that which is done at home though it be never so excellent...

(*A Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music*, 1597)

Uncomfortable, perhaps, with the thought that he was actually the musician mainly responsible for popularizing the new form 'from beyond the seas', Morley hit on the patriotic and commercially astute idea of linking the English madrigal to the person of Queen Elizabeth (as Byrd had already done in *This sweet and merry month of May*, with its final section 'O beauteous Queen of second Troy'). He commissioned twenty-three composers to write madrigals in praise of the Queen, and published the result in a collection called *The Triumphs of Oriana* in 1601. As a public relations exercise it was a masterstroke: to this day the madrigal is associated with Elizabeth, even though it was essentially a domestic rather than a courtly form.

The last six years of Elizabeth's reign saw an extraordinary outpouring of madrigal publications by Weelkes and Wilbye, lesser composers such as Kirbye, Farmer and Bennet, and of course by Morley himself. Morley died in 1602 and the Queen the following year; thereafter madrigals began to pass out of fashion, to be replaced by lute songs on the one hand and more 'popular' ditties by such composers as Ravenscroft on the other. Post-Elizabethan 'madrigals' sometimes embrace one or other of these influences: Gibbons's *The silver swan* (published in 1612) is similar to Byrd's earlier consort songs, with the melody clearly in the top voice; Weelkes's *Ha ha! this world doth pass* (1608) is a roistering ale-house song far removed from the cultivated world of the madrigal. The last books of madrigals were published in the 1620s, completing the impressive total of 36 volumes of *The English Madrigal School* (the name given to it by Edmund Fellowes, the English clergyman who transcribed and republished it all between 1913 and 1924). Fellowes summed up the English madrigal thus:

Nothing is more astonishing in the whole history of music than the story of the English school of madrigal composers. The long delay of its

appearance, lagging behind the Italian school by no less than half a century: the suddenness of its development: the extent of the output: the variety and the originality as well as the fine quality of the work: the brevity of its endurance, and the completeness with which it finally collapsed: all these factors combine to distinguish the madrigal school as the strangest phenomenon in the history of English music.

(Orlando Gibbons, 1951, p. 74)

For such an apparently familiar form, there is much that is still not known about the English madrigal. No clear evidence exists about performance, though some general conclusions are possible. Unlike the Italian madrigal, which was intended for professional singers to perform at court and so was sometimes quite elaborate and virtuosic, it seems likely that the English madrigalists envisaged domestic amateur performance: rather little overt technical virtuosity is found in the individual voices of the English madrigals, though the *musical* difficulties of co-ordinating the sometimes complex textures can be considerable. In a domestic environment, music must be adapted (and adaptable) to available resources: the phrase 'apt for voices or viols' appears on the title pages of several madrigal publications. The present recording opts for unaccompanied vocal performances, though the instrumental substitution or doubling of voices was no doubt common. The number of singers per part seems unlikely to have been fixed. Some madrigals clearly work best with solo voices on each line; others, such as *Draw on, sweet night*, seem to call for choral performance. A maximum of ten singers is here used for these items.

The best clue to performance style was given by Morley, in his *Plain and Easy Introduction*. The English madrigal was never as 'literary' as its Italian model, yet texts are all-important – though curiously, hardly any English madrigal texts can be identified, except where they are translations of an Italian original; possibly it was customary for the composers themselves to write them. Morley advises the would-be composer of madrigals (and also, surely, the performer) to 'possess yourself of an amorous humour (for in no composition shall you prove admirable except you put on and possess yourself wholly with that vein wherein you compose), so that you must in your music be wavering like the wind, sometime wanton, sometime drooping, sometime grave and staid, otherwhile effeminate . . . and the more variety you show, the better shall you please'.

JOHN RUTTER

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