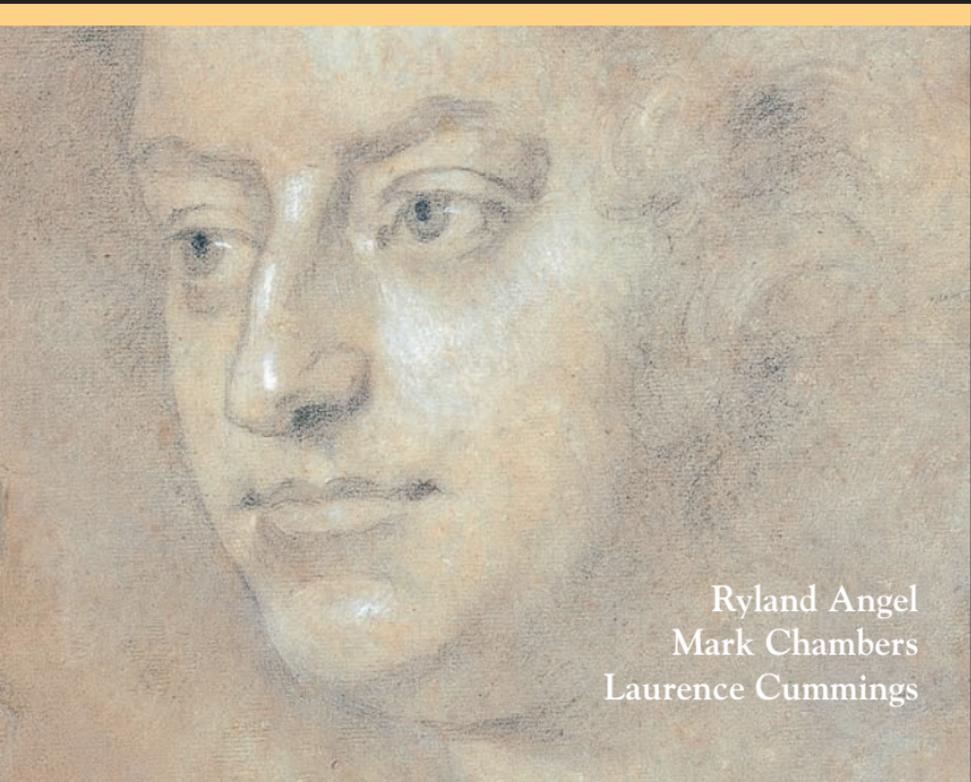


Deux-Elles

Counter-Tenor Duets and Song
Purcell and his contemporaries



Ryland Angel
Mark Chambers
Laurence Cummings

Continuo song – scored for one or more solo voices with theorbo or harpsichord accompaniment – was perhaps the most universal musical genre in late seventeenth-century England. It formed an integral part of ceremonial Court odes; of incidental music for public plays; and of domestic music-making in noble (and aspiring) households – Samuel Pepys’s diary regularly records his singing activities and lessons.

The roots of the genre lay in the early seventeenth-century lute song, from which it gradually developed during the 1630s. It was still in its infancy when Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660, but already enjoyed considerable popularity. Following the abolition of cathedral choirs and the disbanding of the royal household (between 1642 and 1645), composers increasingly turned their attention to song writing, whilst many former Court musicians eked out a living as singing teachers.

During the second half of the seventeenth century, the leading singers became much sought-after stars, none more so than the best counter-tenors: Evelyn praised the virtuoso skills of John Abell in his diary, whilst in 1714 Richard Elford merited an obituary in the *Post Boy* newspaper. The modern term

‘counter-tenor’ denotes an adult male singing falsetto; but in seventeenth-century England it simply referred to the highest of the three adult voice parts (bass, tenor, counter-tenor). Prior to the Restoration, counter-tenors were ‘natural’, high-voiced tenors; then, as now, they were in relatively short supply. During the early 1660s, a lack of trained boy choristers meant that the treble part in the Chapel Royal had to be supplied by men using ‘feign’d’ voices. This measure – taken out of practical expediency – and the arrival in London of Italian castrati apparently combined to set an important precedent, and a new breed of ‘counter-tenor falsettists’ emerged.

Falsettists did not immediately replace the ‘natural’ (counter-)tenors; rather the two techniques coexisted throughout the remainder of the century. Purcell’s counter-tenor parts fall into two categories, high and low: these were written for falsettists and high tenors respectively. ‘Sound the trumpet’, a movement from *Come, ye sons of art*, the 1694 Birthday Ode for Queen Mary, is one of several works in which Purcell cast the two types of counter-tenor alongside each other.

During the 1660s and 1670s, continuo songs took one of two forms: dance songs (tuneful, triple time works, frequently to pastoral texts), and declamatory airs. The latter is exemplified

by *A hymne to God the Father* by Pelham Humfrey (c.1647-74): above a static, chordal accompaniment, the vocal line subtly mirrors the inflections of the text. It was intended for religious use in a private setting. There was a considerable market for such works during the 1640s and 1650s, since they allowed Royalist sympathisers to maintain a semblance of formal Anglican worship within their households. Several leading composers (including Henry Lawes) published collections of psalms intended for domestic performance, and the tradition continued after the Restoration.

Humfrey was choirmaster of the Chapel Royal and England’s leading song composer, and was succeeded in both roles by John Blow (1649-1708). Although lacking Humfrey’s melodic facility, Blow was a skilled contrapuntalist, and in his duet settings – such as *Ah heav’n! What is’t I hear?* – he exploited the rhythmic and harmonic interplay between the two voices to great effect. Nowhere is this more apparent than in *Quam diligo legem tuam*, one of a set of consciously Italian works which Blow composed in the mid-1670s (intended for domestic-sacred use). It relies for much of its effect on the dissonances created by the constantly overlapping voices, particularly at the words, ‘a judiciiis tuis non recedo’. The

companion work, *Parratum cor meum*, is altogether more upbeat and employs a ground bass, one of the most common structural devices of the period. Above a short, continuously-repeating bass melody, the two voices engage in endless melodic variation.

The master of the ground bass was Henry Purcell (1659-95). One of the best known examples is his *Evening hymn*, which dates from c.1688: the endless tread of the repeated, ‘walking’ bass, combines with the gently lilting ‘alleluias’ to create a poignant lullaby. Its sheer scale, and the emotional intensity of the vocal line illustrate the degree to which, and ways in which, Purcell single-handedly transformed English song. This testifies to his genius, but also partly reflects his varied career.

Like his teachers, Humfrey and Blow, Purcell held major court appointments, requiring him to compose lavish ceremonial odes, as well as anthems for the Chapel Royal. The texts of the Welcome Odes (written to celebrate the Court’s return to Whitehall following its summer progresses) and the Birthday Odes for Queen Mary usually engaged in shameless flattery, and Purcell’s music was often overly triumphal, even bombastic. But those written to celebrate St Cecilia’s day tended to be more subtle affairs. ‘Here the deities approve’ forms

part of the 1683 Cecilia ode, *Welcome to all the pleasures*. This graceful solo movement was one of Purcell's most popular works, and he published his own keyboard arrangement of it in 1689. Characteristically, the syllabic writing gives way to melismas to emphasise important words in the text – in this case, 'music'.

The most sumptuous of all Purcell's Cecilia odes is *Hail, bright Cecilia* (1692). Brady's text is full of rich musical imagery, which Purcell exploited to the full. 'In vain the am'rous flute' contrasts the flutes vain attempts to 'inspire wanton heat and loose desire' with the 'chaste airs' played on the organ by Cecilia. Sighing figures, suspensions and rich chromaticisms combine to create a passage of great intensity, which modulates to the relative major, C. But the superficial sensuousness is ultimately defeated: Cecilia's 'chaste airs' herald an immediate return to the tonic key, A minor.

When William and Mary succeeded to the throne in 1689 they scaled down the musical activities of the Chapel Royal. From 1689 onwards, Purcell devoted most of his time to composing for the theatre. Between then and his death in 1695, he wrote almost 150 play-songs (many of which included obligatory instrumental accompaniment), as well as *Dido*

and *Aeneas* and four semi-operas. It was within this context that he stretched the boundaries of song.

Since play-songs frequently occurred as part of on-stage entertainments, Purcell did not entirely abandon the tuneful 'dance' song favoured by his contemporaries. But even in these 'simple' works, such as the triple-time air, 'Since from my dear' – a movement from his semi-opera *Dioclesian* (1690) – the affective qualities of Purcell's vocal writing are clearly apparent.

Songs also accompanied religious ceremonies or supernatural scenes within plays. 'One charming night' occurs towards the end of Act II of *The Fairy Queen* (1692), an adaptation of Shakespeare's *A midsummer night's dream*. It is set in fairyland, as Titania prepares for sleep, and this gently lilting movement is sung by 'Secrecy' as part of an elaborate, masque-like lullaby sequence. Another 'supernatural' number is *Music for a while*; written for the 1692 revival of Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus*, it is possibly Purcell's best-known song. The lyrical opening disguises the work's more sinister undercurrent. It is sung by a priest as he summons up the ghost of Oedipus's father, Laius, and at the words, 'eternal bands', the oscillating semitones in the vocal line combine with the rising appoggiaturas in the

ground bass to create an air of impending menace.

During the 1690s, Purcell's songs gradually expanded in scale, and were increasingly made up of two or more contrasting sections. In 'I see she flies me everywhere' – from Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe* (1693) – the music mirrors the sentiments of the text. The anger of the fiery opening (written to exploit the virtuoso talents of Mrs Ayliff, Purcell's star stage soprano) gives way to more reflective writing at the words, 'were she but kind'.

The duet, 'No, resistance is but vain' – composed for Southerne's, *The maid's last prayer* (1693) – is full of vivid word-painting. The rhythmic urgency of the opening exchanges ('no, no, no') is contrasted with both exuberant coloratura ('he kills the strong with joy') and aching suspensions ('the weak with pain'). Structurally, the return of the opening material shows Purcell foreshadowing the emergence, in the early eighteenth century, of the *da capo* aria.

Written early in 1695, *If music be the food of love* was Purcell's third setting of Henry Heveningham's poem. Once again, key words in the text are set to expansive melismas, whilst the contrast between the free, rhapsodic opening and the energetic arioso ('pleasures

invade both eye and ear') further anticipate the soon-to-be-standard pairing of recitative and aria.

Purcell did not live to complete this process of structural development, but the next generation of composers – including his brother, Daniel (c.1660-1717) – rapidly built on his achievements. The younger Purcell's 'O ravishing delight', part of his 1700 opera *The Judgement of Paris*, moves closer still to the classic recitative-aria pattern, whilst its opening recitative makes affective use of chromaticism and suspensions. The opera was Daniel Purcell's entry in a public competition to find the best setting of William Congreve's text: he was awarded third prize, behind John Eccles (2nd) and John Weldon.

Queen Mary's accession had marked a turning point in Henry Purcell's career; her death – less than a year before Purcell's own – was also a significant event, and inspired some of his most moving works. The music that he wrote for her funeral is well known but he also wrote two private, Latin-texted memorial songs. The outer sections of *O dive custos* possess an air of poignancy and restrained grief, whilst its overall scale and emotional intensity serve as a fitting summation of Purcell's remarkable abilities as a song composer.

Keri Dexter

Sound the trumpet

Henry Purcell

from *Come, ye sons of art* (Z 323.3);
1694 birthday ode for Queen Mary;
text anonymous.

Ryland Angel
Mark Chambers
Laurence Cummings
Reiko Ichise
Taro Takeuchi

Sound the trumpet till around
you make the list'ning shores rebound.
On the sprightly hautboy play,
all the instruments of joy
that skilful numbers can employ,
to celebrate the glories of this day.

If music be the food of love

Henry Purcell

(Z 379C);
text Henry Heveningham.

Mark Chambers
Laurence Cummings

If music be the food of love
Sing on, till I am filled with joy.
For then my list'ning soul you move
To pleasures that can never cloy;
Your eyes, your mien, your tongue declare
That you are music ev'rywhere.
Pleasures invade both eye and ear,
So fierce the transports are they wound
And all my senses feasted are,

Tho' yet this feast is only sound.
Sure I must perish by your charms;
Unless you save me, in your arms.

Music for a while

Henry Purcell

from *Oedipus* (Z 583.2).

Ryland Angel
Laurence Cummings
Reiko Ichise

Music for a while
Shall all your cares beguile:
Wond'ring how your pains were eas'd
And disdain'g to be pleas'd
Till Alector free the dead
from their eternal bands,
Till the snakes drop from her head
And the whip from out her hands.

In vain the am'rous flute

Henry Purcell

from *Hail, bright Cecilia* (Z 328.10);
1692 St Cecilia's day ode;
text Nicholas Brady.

Ryland Angel
Mark Chambers
Laurence Cummings
Reiko Ichise
Taro Takeuchi
Becky Davey
Laura Hird

In vain the am'rous flute and soft guitar
Jointly labour to inspire
Wanton heat and loose desire.
Whilst thy chaste airs do gently move
Seraphic flames and heav'nly love.

Here the deities approve

Henry Purcell

from *Welcome to all the pleasures* (Z 339.3);
1683 St Cecilia's day ode;
text Christopher Fishburn.

Ryland Angel
Laurence Cummings
Reiko Ichise
Taro Takeuchi
Rodolfo Richter
Claire Duff
Emma Alter

Here the Deities approve,
The God of music and of love;
All the talents they have lent you,
All the blessings they have sent you,
Pleas'd to see what they bestow,
Live and thrive so well below.

O dive custos

Henry Purcell

from *Ode on the death of Queen Mary* (Z 504);
text by Henry Parker.

Ryland Angel
Mark Chambers
Laurence Cummings
Taro Takeuchi

O dive custos auriacae domus
Et spes labantis certior, imperi.
O rebus adversis vocande,
O superum decus in secundis.

Seu te fluentem pronus ad Isida
In vota fervens Oxonidum chorus.
Seu te precantur quos remoti
Unda lavat properata cami.

Descende caelo non ita creditas
Visurus aedes praesiditis tuis.
Descende visurus penates
Caeseris et penetrale sacrum.

Maria musis flebilis occidit,
Maria gentis delicae brevis.
O flete Mariam! flete Camoenae!
O flete, Divae, dea moriente.

One charming night

Henry Purcell

from *The Fairy Queen* (Z 629)

Ryland Angel

Reiko Ichise

Taro Takeuchi

Becky Davey

Laura Hird

One charming night
Gives more delight
Than a hundred lucky days.
Night and I improve the taste
Make the pleasure longer last
A thousand sev'ral ways.



Taro Takeuchi

A hymne to God the Father

Pelham Humfrey

text by John Donne.

Mark Chambers

Laurence Cummings

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which is my sin though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive those sins, through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When thou has done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin by which I've won
others to sin?
And made my sin their door?
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun a year
or two:
But wallow'd in, a score?
When thou has done, thou has not done,
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear,
that when I've spun my last thread,
I shall perish on the shore,
but swear by thy self,
that at my death
thy Sun shall shine as he shines now,
and heretofore;
and, having done that, thou has done,
I fear no more.

No, resistance is but vain

Henry Purcell

from *The maid's last prayer* (Z 601.2).

Ryland Angel

Mark Chambers

Laurence Cummings

Reiko Ichise

Taro Takeuchi

No, resistance is but vain
And only adds new weight to cupid's chain.
A thousand ways, a thousand arts
The tyrant knows to captivate our hearts.
Sometimes, he sighs employs,
and sometimes tries the universal language of
the eyes.
The fierceness he destroys
The soft with tenderness decoys.
He kills the strong with joy
The weak with pain.
No, resistance is but vain.
And only adds new weight to cupid's chain.

I see she flies me ev'rywhere

Henry Purcell

from *Aureng-zebe* (Z 573.1).

Mark Chambers

Laurence Cummings

Reiko Ichise

Taro Takeuchi

I see she flies me ev'rywhere,
Her eyes her scorn discover;
But what's her scorn or my despair,

Since 'tis my fate to love her.
Were she but kind whom I adore,
I might live longer,
But not love her more.

O ravishing delight

Daniel Purcell

from *The judgement of Paris*;

text by William Congreve.

Ryland Angel

Laurence Cummings

Reiko Ichise

Taro Takeuchi

Becky Davey

Laura Hird

O ravishing delight!
What mortal can support the sight!
Alas too weak is human brain
So much rapture to sustain.
I faint, I fall, O take me hence,
E're ecstasy invades my aching sense;
Help me Hermes or I die,
Save me from excess of joy.

Ah, heav'n! What is't I hear?

John Blow

*Ryland Angel
Mark Chambers
Laurence Cummings
Reiko Ichise
Taro Takeuchi*

Ah heav'n! What is't I hear?
The warbling lute enchants my ear.
Now beauty's pow'r inflames my breast again.
I sigh, I languish in a pleasing pain;
The note's so soft, so sweet the air
The soul of love sure must be there
That mine in rapture charms,
And drive away despair.

Since from my dear

Henry Purcell

from *Dioclesian* (Z 627).

*Ryland Angel
Reiko Ichise
Taro Takeuchi*

Since from my dear Astrea's sight
I was so rudely torn,
My soul has never known delight,
Unless it were to mourn.
But Oh! Alas, with weeping eyes,
And bleeding heart I lie;
Thinking on her whose absence 'tis
That makes me wish to die.

Quam diligo legem tuam

John Blow

text from Psalm 119

*Ryland Angel
Mark Chambers
Laurence Cummings
Reiko Ichise
Taro Takeuchi*

Quam diligo legem tuam,
tota die est meditatio mea,
inimicis meis, sapientiorum
me redit praeceptis meis
nam in seculum ad est mihi.
Senibus prudentior sum
quia mandata tua custodio
ab omni semita mali cohibeo pedes meos
ut observem verbum tuum.
A judiciis tuis non recedo,
quia tu doces me.

Evening hymn

Henry Purcell

text by William Fuller

*Mark Chambers
Reiko Ichise
Taro Takeuchi*

Now that the sun hath veil'd his light
And bid the world goodnight,
To the soft bed my body I dispose,
But where shall my soul repose?
Dear God, even in thy arms, and can there be
Any so sweet security?
Then to thy rest, O my soul, and, singing, praise
The mercy that prolongs thy days!
Alleluia.

Paratum cor meum

John Blow

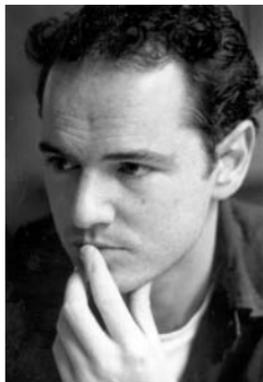
text from Psalm 108

*Ryland Angel
Mark Chambers
Laurence Cummings
Reiko Ichise
Taro Takeuchi*

Paratum cor meum Deum
cantabo et psallam in gloria mea.
Exurge psalterium et cithara,
exurgam dilicolo.
Confitebor tibi in populis Domine
et psallam tibi in nationibus.
Quia magna est super caelos misericordia tua
et usque ad nubes veritas tua.
Exaltare super caelos Deus
et super omnem terram gloria tua.



Mark Chambers
Counter-tenor



Ryland Angel
Counter-tenor

Laurence Cummings
Reiko Ichise
Taro Takeuchi

Becky Davey, Laura Hird
Rodolfo Richter, Claire Duff
Emma Alter

Harpsichord, Organ
Bass Viol by David Rubio
Archlute after Italian model by K. Jacobsen
Theorbo after Sellas by K. Jacobsen
Baroque Guitar after Voboam by M. Hodgson
Recorder
Violin
Viola

Recording Producer
Recording Engineer
Booklet Notes

Michael Surcombe
Patrick Naylor
Keri Dexter

Cover image of Henry Purcell by John Closterman by courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

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