

For the Love of the Viol

Program Notes by Yayoi Barrack

In England, the viol was a preferred instrument among court musicians and the households of the nobility from the 1530s, becoming extremely popular with amateurs from about 1600. The rise of music for one or two solo bass viols, generally with organ accompanying and doubling the parts, although many, including the ones chosen for this concert, have come down to us without an organ part, is considered to have begun in the Jacobean era. John Coprario, William White and Ward are the composers, between 1617 and 1625, of the earliest documented pieces in this genre, which include airs and divisions or variations on ground basses. This latter type of composition forms the chief subject of Christopher Simpson's *The Division-Violist* (1659).

Almost all the great English composers for the viol, including Lawes, Jenkins and Locke, composed bass viol duos. Although the period of the Commonwealth is generally seen as a time when certain types of music were not allowed to flourish, by contemporary account, Puritans "loved the viol" also, and Protestant and Catholic gentlemen met regularly to play the viol together.

John Jenkins (1592-1678) was one of the leading English composers in the middle decades of the seventeenth century, and an acclaimed theorbo and viol player. In addition to the large body of consort music that he produced, he was one of the most prolific composers of bass viol music, composing more than 50 pieces for one or two bass viols, many of which are hard to date accurately, and most of which are in a mature instrumental style requiring advanced technique, as is the suite from which three movements have been selected for this concert.

Jenkins spent the greater part of the Commonwealth period as teacher and resident musician in the establishments of such Norfolk families as Sir Hamon L'Estrange, Sir Dudley North, Edward Benlowes, and Sir Philip Woodehous. So beloved was he by these and other gentlemen that, according to Roger North, in most of the noble houses where he spent time "there was a chamber called by his name."



John Hingeston (b. sometime between 1610 and 1615, d. 1683). He was a pupil of Orlando Gibbons, and like Gibbons he became a distinguished organist. In addition to trios, and music for viol consort,

sixteen virtuoso pieces for two bass viols, in four suites, each Fantasia-Alman-Alman-Corant, have come down to us from John Hingeston.

The first mention of Hingeston as organist and composer is from the Commonwealth era, during which he was held in high esteem as Cromwell's favorite musician, as well as music teacher to Cromwell's daughter.

It is interesting to note that John Hingeston was one of the few musicians who served Charles I, Cromwell, and Charles II. This was no doubt due as much to his documented generous and amiable personality and his wit, as to his accomplishments as a composer and musician, since well-known musicians such as Jenkins and Locke left London during the Commonwealth, unwilling to serve both sides. With the Restoration, he was appointed to the Court as viol-player, taking Alphonso Ferrabosco's place in 1660, and Charles II held Hingeston in high regard as one of his best musicians, singling him out together with nine other prominent musicians to be retained as His Majesty's "private musick."

Hingeston was not only a favorite of kings and rulers, he was also a musician's musician. He was associated with the Musicians' Company, for which he was sometimes a spokesman, and he petitioned for musicians who were less well off than he was to be clothed and paid in a timely manner. Among his pupils was John Blow, and it is likely that Henry Purcell also learned some things from him. In 1673, at the age of fourteen, Henry Purcell was appointed to be Hingeston's assistant, a post which had no fee, but which must have held such an attraction that Purcell kept it up to Hingeston's death when he took it over, even though Purcell had already succeeded John Blow as organist of Westminster Abbey in 1679.



Christopher Simpson was a Catholic, and household musician to the Bolles family of Scampton, Lincolnshire. Sir Robert Bolles (1619-63) reestablished a London base from about 1653, and Simpson was probably in London regularly until his death in 1669. He published his ground-breaking Division-Viol treatise in 1659, dedicated to his patron, with introductory recommendations from John Carwarden, Charles Coleman, Jenkins and Locke.

The art of the Division was in fact the art of improvising on a ground, and was very popular in England, particularly on the viol. During the 17th century, the most virtuosic musicians of the moment improvised impromptu and daring Divisions, and composers wrote out highly virtuosic divisions for skilled players. Christopher Simpson's book "The Division-Viol", explains in detail for the amateur

how to learn to improvise on a ground. Simpson also mentioned John Jenkins as a great master of the style: "... you should want written copies of Divisons ..., no one has done more in this way than the well-known and outstanding composer of all styles of music, Mr. John Jenkins."

A great teacher as well as an accomplished musician, Simpson wrote for viol players of all levels, including "Short and Easie Ayres Designed for Learners" as well as written sets of divisions for one or two viols on a ground bass, such as the one chosen for this concert. In these divisions, Simpson wrote, "excellency of the Hand" could be displayed as well as in improvisations, "and the Musick perhaps better, though less to be admired, as being more studied."



Nicholas Lanier (1588-1666)

Nicholas Lanier was an English composer, singer, lutenist, viol player and painter, who is credited with having introduced the Italian recitative style, or *stylo recitativo*, into England. In 1617, together with Giovanni Coperario, Alfonso Ferrabosco II and others, he wrote the music for Ben Jonson's masque *Lovers Made Men*, incorporating the new monodic recitative style. He also painted the scenery for the masque and took part in it as a singer. His skillful experimentation with speech rhythms, characteristic of Italian recitative, became part of the English Baroque style that was developed by John Blow and Henry Purcell. From 1616, he served as lutenist to Charles I, who appointed him as the first Master of the King's Musick in 1626, a position he took up again in 1660 under Charles II.

"Fire, fire," is a setting of a poem by Thomas Campion in the new Italian recitative style.

Alfonso Ferrabosco II (1572 [?] - 1628)

English composer, viol player and lutenist, he was the illegitimate son of Alfonso Ferrabosco I. Queen Elizabeth I had him educated in music and he served as a court musician until his death. The music he composed for viol consort is justly acclaimed. He married Ellen Lanier, aunt of Nicholas Lanier, the artist-musician, with whom he collaborated on music for Ben Johnson's masques. No doubt influenced by Lanier, he frequently wrote in the new "*Stylo Recitativo*," as Jonson called it. Although he may never have visited Italy, he was well aware of contemporary Italian music.

He wrote music for several of Ben Jonson's masques and also set several poems of John Donne and Thomas Campion to music, including the song in this program.

"So, so leave off this lamenting kisse" from *Ayres 1609* is a setting of John Donne's poem, *The Expiration*.

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From the late 16th to the first half of the 17th century, many outstanding English musicians found employment in Germany, Austria, the Low Countries and Spain, including virtuoso viol players who had a considerable effect on the development of continental viol playing and composing. According to the French viol player Jean Rousseau, it was the "English who were the first to compose and play chordal pieces on the viol, and who exported their knowledge to other Kingdoms." This shows that at least one important non-English gambist associated his instrument with England.

August Kühnel (1645-1700)

Born in Delmenhorst, Kühnel was the son of the Mecklenburg chamber musician Samuel Kühnel. After being educated in Germany and France, in 1661, at the age of sixteen, he was appointed viol player in the court orchestra of Maurice, Duke of Saxe-Weitz, a position he held until 1681. He also played the baryton. In 1681 he was in Munich, but he refused a position that he was offered there because it would have required him to change his religion. A composer as well as a virtuoso performer, after the duke's death in 1682, Kühnel went to England to study, and we know from Samuel Pepys' diary that he gave concerts and also taught in England. He composed some of his sonatas for one or two bass viols and continuo there, as the *London Gazette* in November 1685 advertised concerts of "Several Sonata's, composed after the Italian way, for one and two Bass Viols, with a Thorough Bass...are to be performed on Thursday next, and every Thursday following, at Six of the clock in the Evening, at the Dancing School in Walbrook." In 1686, he was appointed director of instrumental music at the Darmstadt court by Countess Elisabeth Dorothea von Sachsen-Coburg, where he remained until 1688. After holding posts in Weimar and Dresden, his last appointment was in 1695 at the court of Charles I, Landgrave of Hesse-Kassel.

In 1698, Kühnel's collection of trio sonatas for viola da gamba, *14 Sonate à Partite ad una o due viole da gamba, con il basso continuo*, was published in Kassel. This collection contains six sonatas for two bass viols and eight sonatas for one bass viol, and has been called the first printing of German trio sonatas in Germany. Some have seen in Kühnel a forerunner of Bach, for his skillful blending of French dance rhythms, Italian melodic writing and German polyphony. Additionally, many of his pieces show the influence of English division viol music, the study of which may have been the reason for his visit to England. This can be seen in the sonata with its numerous variations, from which selections have been made for this concert.

Christoph Schaffrath (1709-1763) was a German harpsichordist, composer, and teacher.

Born near Dresden, he received a position in 1734 as harpsichordist and composer in the orchestra of the Crown Prince Frederick who later became Frederick the Great. In 1741, a year after Frederick's accession to the crown, he was appointed musician to the king's sister, Amalia, a title that he kept until the 1760s. As court harpsichordist, he would no doubt have worked with the composers and performers Johann Quantz, the Grauns, C.P.E Bach, and Georg Benda. Although his main interest lay

in composing for the keyboard, he also composed chamber music and orchestral works, and several duets for two bass viols. He favored the Italian sonata form, and Vivaldi's style, but his music also shows the influence of C.P.E. Bach and Johann Hasse. Reflecting the transitional era in which he lived, the duet in D Major is typical of his music with its characteristic galant style, quick mood changes, lavish use of triplet figures, and short phrases punctuating longer melodic lines. His skill in counterpoint and his frequent use of imitation is also apparent in this duet.