



## A Chicago Consort of Viols

Ken Perlow, Phillip W. Serna & Russell Wagner, viols

Friday, December 1, 2006, 7:30 PM

Church of Saint Paul & the Redeemer

4945 South Dorchester Avenue, Chicago, IL 60615

Wednesday, December 13, 2006, 12:10 PM

Saint Peter's Church in the Loop

110 West Madison Street, Chicago, IL 60602-4196

Performance Pitch – A415

Suite No.2 in c à3

[Aire]

Ayre

Ayre

Corant

William Lawes (1602-1645)

Browning

Tander naken

Elway Bevin (1554-1638)

Henry VIII (1491-1547)

Fantasias No.1 à3

Fantasias No.3 à3

Fantasias No.2 à3

Henry Purcell (c.1659-1695)

Fantasia No.2 à3

Fantasia No.3 à3

Orlando Gibbons (1583 – 1625)

Fantasia No.2 for Treble, Bass & Great Bass

Fantasia No.4 for Treble, Bass & Great Bass

Orlando Gibbons

Fantasias for Three Bass Viols

Thomas Lupo (1571-1627)

The Spirit of Gambo

Tobias Hume (c.1569-1645)

## Spirit of Gambo Program Notes:

The turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century marked an expansive period for England and a flourishing of its music and art. Largely through the inspired machinations of her court magician, John Dee, Queen Elizabeth had become the object of great veneration—a cult of Oriana—through which her majesty would bring peace and prosperity to all the world. England’s recovery from the internecine War of the Roses had been slow, but the solidification of the Tudor monarchy, coupled with the fantastic tales of discovery by late 16<sup>th</sup>-C explorers such as Francis Drake, Martin Frobisher, and Walter Raleigh, made the inchoate empire of “Britannia” more than mere fantasy.

And at that time, “mere fantasy” would have been oxymoronic. A neo-Platonist revival had swept through Europe in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century; the notion of a well-ordered and harmonious cosmos permeates the literature and music of the period, and the science, too, such as it was. (It’s a vision still drives scientists today.) The Aristotelian axiom of balanced bodily humors and moderation in all things was thrown aside in exultation of melancholy, the particular humor about which Plato himself had associated the “divine frenzy,” in which a person so possessed could enter into direct contact with his muse, hear the harmony of the spheres, and commune with the seraphim. Microcosm and macrocosm, “as above, so below”—the entire universe was completely reflected in the depth of the soul. It was an age where an educated person might set out to learn everything, because everything was interconnected.

Modern eyes may regard such a notion as an amusing conceit, but the philosophy behind it was multifaceted and heartfelt, a desperate search for meaning in an age of great discovery and profound technological change. The musical composition called the “fantasia” developed in this context. Unlike the well-defined forms generally used to create music in the service of God, the state, or other patrons, the fantasia was an unstructured polyphonic piece for the composer—at last!—to insert the first person singular, to strut his stuff. Thus did the artist transcend, through the frenzy of melancholy, his position as humble guild craftsman and make his work simultaneously “about everything” and “about me”. That paradigm of personal suffering for true art is yet familiar to us.

English fantasias adopted the characteristics of the national style; the harmonies are rich with so-called cross-relations, jarring dissonances in passing lines that make no attempt to get out of each others’ way. This is the sort of musical accident waiting to happen when writing in parts—before the mid-17<sup>th</sup> c. scores were not common, nor were bar lines—and English composers clearly relished each such harmonic collision. The earliest fantasias were ornate variations on a theme. “Browning” or “The leaves be green” was a popular English song set by at least half a dozen composers, with the theme passed around all parts. Another European favorite to embellish on was the Flemish song “Tandernaken”, apparently a pun on a phrase that (when spoken in old Flemish) could mean either to gnash one’s teeth or to proceed to the town (still in existence) of Andernach-am-Rhein. Quite a knee-slapper there! Well, I guess it loses a lot in the translation. Did Henry VIII really write this one? It’s possible. Music was one of his great passions; it was he who jump-started the whole English tradition by importing many accomplished musicians from Burgundy and the Low Countries. Indeed, when he died there were enough string and wind instruments in his personal collection to equip several orchestras. On the other hand, it’s also possible that one of those musicians, in an attempt to curry favor from a king infamous for irascibility, simply placed Henry’s name on the piece. Whatever, once it was identified as Henry’s, there were few who’d have deigned to object.

Orlando Gibbons is best known today as during his life as a composer of verse anthems, a distinctly English idiom wherein solo and instrumental verses are juxtaposed with sections for full choir. But he also wrote stunning instrumental music in two to six parts, most certainly for viols, as in some pieces there are parts explicitly for “the great dooble bass,” which was what on the Continent would be called a violone, a bass viol on steroids sounding a fifth or an octave below the regular bass. Gibbons wrote his consort music in barless parts and took full advantage of this notational form, with intricate syncopations and highly irregular strong beats. Caged in by bar lines and scores in modern editions, Gibbons’s fantasias appear tame, but they’re actually quite devilish to play.

Thomas Lupo, who served in the households of both Prince Henry and Prince Charles, was one of the principal developers of repertoire for the viol in Jacobean England. He composed almost 100 fantasias for the instrument in three to six parts. His father Joseph was a renowned violinist and composer from Venice who had moved first to Antwerp before being invited to London. He was Jewish. Although Jews had been expelled from England in 1290, not to be let back in—officially—until Cromwell lifted the ban in 1656, there had been a small number of “secret Jews” at court going back to Henry VIII. When Henry was selecting musicians from the Continent to entertain him, all that concerned him was musical excellence. Indeed, Henry had gone so far as to consult with Continental Rabbinical

scholars when he was trying to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. No one thinks Henry an ecumenical man; he looked out for very few other than himself. But as Shakespeare scholar Roger Prior has suggested, “It was doubtless realized at an early stage that Jews would make more reliable servants precisely because they owed loyalty neither to the Pope nor to Luther.”

William Lawes is revered as the quintessential composer for the viola da gamba; the 3-part music in this program is derived from his grander 5- and 6-part fantasias beloved by all viol players today. But his music was shocking for its time, often violating rules of composition known then and now to all students of music theory. The odd and unequal lengths of sections of his dance movements do give the distinct impression, as Peter Schickele once noted of his alter-ego PDQ Bach, that one of Lawes’s legs may have been shorter than the other. Lawes grew up with Prince Charles and became court musician when Charles became king in 1616. Charles I was a magnanimous patron of the arts, but, like all the Stuarts, an egregious politician. Civil war broke out in 1642, and Lawes insisted on joining the Army to defend his king. Charles, not wanting to lose a dear friend, and knowing the sensitive and refined Lawes was not cut out for military life, made sure that he received a commission in a supply unit. Lawes died at the Battle of Chester in 1645 when the Royalist forces were attacked from behind.

Henry Purcell’s fantasias, among the last music believed to be written for viol consort until the modern rediscovery of the instrument, reveal the fantasia already out of its time, entering a Newtonian universe. The style is witty yet reverent and retrospective. At the age of 21 Purcell wrote 15 (and an unfinished 16<sup>th</sup>) in the space of two months, perhaps as an exercise. They were never performed during his lifetime. Purcell was regarded as the finest composer of his day, and perhaps the finest lyricist in the English language until... Arthur Sullivan? Cole Porter? Tom Lehrer? English is a fiendish language to write songs in. That there have been so few who could do it may be the main reason that the Baroque idiom in England, unlike the rest of Europe, turned out more instrumental than vocal.

In the early 1600’s London was treated to a series of published debates over which was the superior instrument, the lute or the viol. The lute was defended by perhaps its greatest composer for all time, John Dowland. The cause of the viol, by contrast, was taken up by an eccentric and extravagant mercenary soldier, Tobias Hume, who claimed the rank of Captain in Sweden, and ultimately, as an old man back in England losing what was left of his money and mind and begging for a commission to put down the Irish rebellion, Colonel. In a word, Hume’s music is “quirky”. He wrote in an old style, so-called “lyra-way” in the tablature (a snippet of which you can see in our logo) used more commonly for lute and guitar. But there’s a kind of raw passion running through his pieces that is truly “the spirit of gambo”, and thus do we take that particular composition for our name. As he wrote in the preface to his 1605 collection, “Captaine Humes Musicall Humours”:

*“I Doe not studie Eloquence, or profess Musicke, although I doe love Sence, and affect Harmony: my Profession being, as my Education hath beene, Armes, the onely effeminate part of me, hath beene Musicke; which in mee hath beene alwayes Generous, because never Mercenarie. To prayse Musicke, were to say, the Sunne is bright. To extoll my selfe, would name my labors vaine glorious. Onely this, my studies are far from servile imitations, I robbe no others inventions, I take no Italian Note to an English dittie, or filch fragments of Songs to stuffe out my volumes. There are mine own Phansies expressed by my proper Genius, which if thou dost dislike, let me see thine...”*

Ken Perlow

## **Spirit of Gambo Artists' Biographies:**

**Ken Perlow** – Ken Perlow is the manager of the Newberry Consort and plays viola da gamba with Ars Musica Chicago. He has been a guest artist with the Catacoustic Consort, Second City Musick, Ensemble Musical Offering, and the Illinois Philharmonic, having studied viola da gamba performance at Roosevelt University with Mary Springfels. Ken is treasurer of the Viola da Gamba Society of America and served as the Interim Executive Director of Early Music America in 2001-02 after retiring as a computer engineer and business planner from Lucent Technologies' Bell Laboratories. He is an avid student of Renaissance neo-Platonism.

**Phillip W. Serna** – Phillip W. Serna is rigorously completing the Doctor of Music degree in double bass performance at Northwestern University, studying double bass with international soloist DaXun Zhang, formerly with Chicago Symphony Orchestra member Michael Hovnanian, as well as viol with Newberry Consort founder Mary Springfels. Phillip performs regularly throughout the Midwest with the Bach Chamber Orchestra & Choir, Chicago Symphony Orchestra's Civic Orchestra of Chicago, Elmhurst Symphony, Fort Wayne Philharmonic, Illinois Philharmonic, Illinois Symphony, Kenosha Symphony, New Philharmonic, Northbrook Symphony, Racine Symphony, Rockford Symphony, Southwest Michigan Symphony, Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra as well as the Memphis Symphony. Phillip has also with period instrument ensembles and organizations such as the Apollo Chorus, Ars Antigua, Chicago Early Music Consort, Period Opera Cosi fan Tutte with Chicago Opera Theater, Classical Arts Orchestra, Comic Intermezzo, Early Music Chicago, the Janus Ensemble, the Newberry Consort, the Evelyn Dunbar Memorial Early Music Festival at Northwestern University, the Oriana Singers, the Second City Musick, the Viola da Gamba Society of America Conclave Consort Cooperative, as well as the Concert for Compassion Viol Consort & the Forces of Virtue Ensemble and Choir, dedicated to raising money for disaster relief and other charities. Phillip lives in Plainfield, IL with his best friend and wife, Magdalena.

**Russell Wagner** – Russell Wagner began his studies in early music performance at the College Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati. As a founding member of Musica Camerata, he toured throughout the Midwest and made appearances on The Prairie Home Companion Show and with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. He is a frequent performer in Chicago's early music community including appearances with The Newberry Consort, Bella Voce, The Forces of Virtue, The Second City Musick, and the Catacoustic Consort. Wagner is a leading restorer of cellos in this country, working from his studio, Chicago Celloworks.

## **For more information on the Spirit of Gambo's artists:**

Ken Perlow – <http://www.newberry.org/consort/>  
Phillip W. Serna – <http://www.phillipwserna.com/>  
Russell Wagner – <http://www.chicagocelloworks.com/>