

Ferdinando
RICHARDSON
(1558–1618)

Complete Works for Harpsichord

Glen Wilson



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In 1575 the first important collection of sacred music ever printed in Great Britain appeared, and sold badly. This tremendous monument was entitled *Cantiones Sacrae* and, contained in a small bundle of part books, comprised seventeen works (a number celebratory of the years its dedicatee Queen Elizabeth had reigned) by each of England's two greatest masters: a retrospective of the venerable Thomas Tallis, and the first fruits of the young genius William Byrd. It was prefaced by laudatory poems in Latin, the second of which, prominently displayed opposite the first page of music in all the part books, was composed by a mere stripling aged seventeen, who signed himself *Ferdinandus Richardsonus*. The choice may have been influenced by the fact that the lad was born in the year of the queen's accession to the throne, but I think the two partners in the queen's music printing monopoly also knew a comer when they saw one. Young Ferdinando Richardson, the son of minor gentry, would later rise to a knighthood and the coveted post of Groom of the Privy Chamber. A highly influential *intimus* of Her Majesty, a person whom magnates petitioned for personal favours, he was never a professional musician, which makes the quality of his few surviving works all the more astonishing.

Richardson already had a post at court at the time of the publication of *Cantiones Sacrae*. In his poem, Richardson (a *nom de plume* from his mother's side; his father's name was Heyborne) calls Tallis his "great master", thus implying that he had had composition lessons; Tallis had been a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal for thirty years at that point. He also says that if God should ever grant him the grace to compose vocal music, he will strain every nerve to be worthy of the task. No such productions have come down to us, and it seems the busy Ferdinando never found time to progress beyond his first love – music for the harpsichord. One can easily imagine Richardson's virtuosity on the queen's favourite instrument, as evidenced by these pieces, recommending him strongly to that melomane.

This astounding virtuosity bears the unmistakable stamp of another, younger, great master, Dr John Bull. We see it especially in the brilliant variations (added later?) on two of the pavane/galliard pairs – a continental practice probably imported via Bull, whose visits to European countries before his ultimate exile for sexual misbehaviour "and other grievous

crimes" are only sketchily documented. We will never know exactly to what extent Bull had a hand in shaping this and other aspects of Richardson's art, but I would go so far as to say that the unprecedented second repeat of the final strain of the variation to the *Pavane in G major* [3] is entirely by Bull. The resemblance of this piece to the *Pavana Philippi* by Bull's Amsterdam friend Sweelinck, consisting of variations on a work by Bull's fellow-exile to the Southern Netherlands, Peter Philips, is striking. We also see Bull's influence in the extended chromatic range of Richardson's bass-lines. Bull is on record as opposing "short octave" basses.

Bull was almost as close to the court as Richardson; he taught Princess Elizabeth, the daughter of Richardson's second sovereign in the Privy Chamber, King James I, and composed the anthem for her wedding to the prince of the Rhine Palatinate in 1613, the most spectacular celebration London had seen in decades. There is some reason to think that the greatest source of English virginal music, the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, later returned to England via Holland. Its most logical owner there would have been that same princess, who kept the title Queen of Bohemia long after her husband had been driven from that throne, his ill-starred acceptance of which had started the Thirty Years War. The "Winter Queen" lived four decades as an impoverished exile in The Hague, selling and pawning possessions to feed her numerous children, before returning to London to visit her nephew, the restored King Charles II, where she died.

And this brings us back around to Richardson. Recent research has shown that the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book* was copied at Westminster Palace, as a piece of government work. Who would have been more likely to guide the compilation of this huge anthology than the harpsichordist Richardson, from his position at the centre of the web? Indeed, we find all his pieces in a single consecutive cluster very near the beginning, sandwiched in between two of John Bull's most outstanding works with others by the court organists William Byrd and John Munday. I personally think it was intended from the beginning as an eventual wedding gift for Elizabeth, perhaps one of Richardson's last projects before being pensioned off in 1611.

Speculating further, I would say that the *Pavane and Galliard in A minor* [5]–[6] is Richardson's *tombeau* for Queen Elizabeth, an early example in an English tradition of such

memorial pairs. The pavane is heavy with grief and signs of mourning, including bells at the end and four long tolls on E. The galliard begins with a melodic and harmonic gesture nearly identical to Purcell's *Music for the Funeral of Queen Caroline*, a synthesized version of which attained an unlikely fame on the soundtrack of Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*. Its last strain is particularly elegiac, an echo of galliards past; you can almost hear the rustling of her silks as the great queen withdraws with her gentlewomen down a corridor at Nonsuch.

This masterpiece was copied into a manuscript which is the other main source for Richardson's pieces, compiled by the roistering, blasphemous Thomas Weelkes, who somehow found time to compose many of England's finest madrigals. It contains a number of anonymous arrangements of vocal and instrumental works which could be from Richardson's hand; in any case it is the logical place to look for material to fill out the scant half hour that Richardson's surviving works yield. There is one such arrangement securely attributed to him elsewhere – in fact, in a book luxuriously prepared for John Bull but never used by him – that of the *Pavane and Galliard* for lute by Thomas Morley [8], who obtained a music printing monopoly with the help of Richardson's brother. Here is more evidence of Ferdinando's political power.

Among these unattributed arrangements, the three fantasias originally for gamba or flute consort stand out; of them, two, tracks [9] and [11] would have been lost but for the present versions for keyboard. The Italian Alfonso Ferrabosco, who left England under the shadow of an unsubstantiated murder charge after long years of service to the Crown, is listed in Richardson's aforementioned poem as one of the great composers of the time. Even if he had not left a tremendous, sadly neglected corpus of vocal works, this splendid piece would almost justify his inclusion. James Harding served both Elizabeth and James as flautist; little of his music survives, all of it very fine. Near the close of this brilliant fantasia four themes are deconstructed and reassembled like the planes of a cubist painting. Another Italian, Renaldo Paradiso [13], was briefly a member of Elizabeth's flute consort. This is his *only* surviving work. Happy days, when even men of such middling stature could contribute treasures like these serious, complex contrapuntal fantasias to circles of friends and colleagues at homes all over Britain, and find themselves appreciated by benevolent monarchs.

The other two arrangements are of a consort song by Byrd [10], surely the most enchanting lullaby ever composed, and a

joyful ensemble galliard [12] presented to Queen Elizabeth one New Year's Day by her Gentleman Usher, "the most famous, Anthony Holborne" (as John Dowland referred to him), friend of Morley and Farnaby.

Our final group of five pieces is apropos of nothing, except that they are all very interesting and difficult to fit into a normal CD programme. Three of them provide some measure of connection, since they are found in the Richardson sources. The Weelkes manuscript preserves *Wakefield on a Green* [15], a popular Robin Hood tune, a snippet of which is sung by Justice Silence in Part II of Shakespeare's *Henry IV*. It yielded a ground bass for the anonymous variations heard here, which I would not hesitate to call an early effort in a favourite form by William Byrd. Weelkes is an important Byrd source, including some *unica* and other pieces known to be his but transmitted here anonymously. The suppleness and balance of the four parts point clearly to Byrd.

From the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book* come our two final tracks. Of the *Praeludium* [17], an eminent English musicologist writes, "As to the identity of 'El. Kidderminster', the reputed composer of a wretched '*Praeludium*' (No. 23) we are not likely to be curious". Nothing could be more calculated to arouse my curiosity. I think "El." is an abbreviation for "Elementum", "beginnings" or "member of the elementary class at a Latin school". The market town Kidderminster had one of the closest of such institutions to Radnorshire, John Bull's likely Welsh home. It was founded by the Lord of the Manor of Kidderminster, a member of the Council of the Marches whose President recommended Bull for the position of organist at Hereford Cathedral.

My conclusion is that Kid(d)erminster is not a person's name at all (it is not to be found in the telephone books of a number of major English cities), but a note on a manuscript that Richardson received from Bull, apologizing for the little work's occasional awkwardness. But – wretched? Not at all. Somewhat ungainly, perhaps, but adventurous, harmonically bold, well narrated, and already containing some characteristic virtuoso figurations with clever fingerings added. Other anonymous pieces grouped around the Richardson block in this early section of the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book* can be ascribed to Bull, especially the magnificent *Galliard No. 21*. Hence, if this theory is correct, we have here what may be Bull's earliest surviving work, and a possible new link in his almost non-existent early biography.

The *Fantasia* [18] (FVB No. 89) by the London organist

Nicholas Stogers is one of the earliest surviving examples of the fully-fledged, three-part English version of the form: strict counterpoint, followed by dance- or masque-like music, closing with keyboard pyrotechnics.

The little overture to this final group 14 is a trumpet fanfare composed or copied by a monk of Evesham Abbey, which was shut down by agents of Henry VIII at the moment *Deposuit potentes* from the *Magnificat* was being sung — timing, one hopes, of unintentional irony.

Upon la mi re 16, often ascribed (erroneously, in my opinion) to Thomas Preston, uses a canon at the fifth on an A-E-D as its ostinato bass. Above this, an amazing melody is spun out that has no parallel in European keyboard music. No explanation has ever been offered for what sometimes resembles nothing so much as an aria from *Porgy and Bess*, so I will attempt one here. A clue might be found in the piece's extremely extended range (although it must be said that there is some uncertainty as to what octave the bass should be played in). The only instruments on which it could have been rendered at the time of its composition (before 1550) were Venetian harpsichords. It so happens that Henry VIII had a Venetian keyboard-player in his service, and that Italian harpsichords are recorded in an inventory of his possessions. Dionisio Memo, who had been recruited from San Marco in Venice, brought with him "a most excellent instrument", and became a great favourite of the king, but had to flee the country when it was discovered that he was spying for the *Serenissima*. Indeed, it is unlikely the Republic would have

released him from his duties at the Doge's chapel without the promise of a bit of espionage on the side.

But this still does not explain the exotic flavour of the soaring melody line. It reminds me more than anything of an imam I once heard improvising during Friday prayers at a mosque in Istanbul. It was the greatest performance by a human voice I ever heard. If Gentile Bellini could be sent to Istanbul to paint the portrait of Mehmet II, why not Memo, with a portative organ and a *spinetta* to show off another aspect of Venetian art? There were Turks in Venice, too, for that matter, living around the Zanipolo.

Ferdinando Richardson Heyborne died in 1618 at the age of sixty. He was buried at All Hallows church in Tottenham, near his retirement residence. A fine stone monument (our cover image), next to that of his in-laws, shows him kneeling in knight's armour opposite his wife. It was carefully reassembled and replaced after Cromwell's cronies dashed it to pieces and took a chisel to its nose. His enviable epitaph reads:

Here also resteth in peace the body of Sir Ferdinando Heyborne, Knight, justice of the peace and coram in the county of Middlesex. He waited at the feet of Queen Elizabeth of famous memory and our sovereign Lord King James in their privy chamber. He was a careful magistrate without respect of persons and a true friend to the cause of the poor.

Glen Wilson

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Glen Wilson was born in Illinois in 1952. He studied at The Juilliard School before moving to Holland in 1971 as a student of Gustav Leonhardt. He was active in Dutch musical life for twenty years (harpsichordist of the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, Netherlands Opera, Quadro Hotteterre and duo-partner of Leonhardt, Wieland Kuyken, Alice Harnoncourt, Michael Chance, Mienke van der Velden and many others) before moving to Bavaria as professor at the Music University of Würzburg. He has since conducted his edition of Monteverdi's *Ritorno di Ulisse in patria* for the Netherlands Opera over sixty times on three continents (DVD on BBC Opus Arte). The production was called "by far" the outstanding event of the season by *The New Yorker*. Wilson's recordings include seven solo CDs for Teldec/Das Alte Werk, a continuing solo series for Naxos, the Mozart/da Ponte operas with Nikolaus Harnoncourt, and many chamber music discs. His edition of the *Préludes* of Louis Couperin, which he now ascribes to Louis' brother Charles, was awarded the German Music Publishers' Prize for best scholarly edition. For more information, visit www.glenwilson.eu

Photo: Volker Schneider



Ferdinando Richardson was a remarkable figure in the history of English music. As Groom of the Privy Chamber he held one of the most prestigious political offices at the court of Elizabeth I and is thought to have overseen the compilation of the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*. The outstanding virtuosity of his few surviving works suggests not only that he himself was a supremely accomplished performer but that his music embodies the best qualities of his probable teachers, Thomas Tallis and John Bull. This recording concludes with a fascinating selection of rare works by his contemporaries.

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Complete Works for Harpsichord

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| <p>1 Pavane and Variation in D minor 5:36</p> <p>2 Galliard and Variation in D minor 4:05</p> <p>3 Pavane and Variation in
G major/minor 6:38</p> <p>4 Galliard and Variation in G minor 4:10</p> <p>5 Pavane in A minor 6:02</p> <p>6 Galliard in A minor 2:27</p> <p>7 Allemande 1:21</p> <p>8 Thomas MORLEY (1557–1602):
Pavane and Galliard for lute in
D minor, arr. Richardson 7:50</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Anonymous Harpsichord Arrangements
from the Weelkes manuscript</p> <p>9 Alfonso FERRABOSCO I
(1543–1588): Fantasia 5:01</p> <p>10 William BYRD (1543–1623):
Lullaby, my sweet little baby 3:23</p> | <p>11 James HARDING (1550–1626):
Fantasia 4:32</p> <p>12 Anthony HOLBORNE (1545–1602):
Galliard ‘The Queen’s New Year’s
Gift’ 2:14</p> <p>13 Renaldo PARADISO (d. 1570):
Fantasia 3:38</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Five Earlier Pieces</p> <p>14 Anonymous: The Trumpet 0:36</p> <p>15 Anonymous (William BYRD?):
Wakefield on a green 3:34</p> <p>16 Anonymous: Upon la mi re 3:32</p> <p>17 El. Kiderminster (John BULL?
(1563–1628)): Praeludium 1:22</p> <p>18 Nicholas STROGERS (fl. 1560–1575):
Fantasia 2:59</p> |
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Cover Image: Monument to the composer at All Hallows Church, Tottenham, London (Photo: Glen Wilson)