

PROGRAM NOTES

According to the writings of the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates, melancholy was caused by an excess of black bile, one of the four humors. An imbalance of blood, phlegm, yellow bile, or black bile could cause disease—or even determine personality traits. Albrecht Dürer’s famously allegorical “Melancholia I” of 1514 on the program’s cover most likely portrays a morose being who is rendered idle by inspiration’s absence. But for an artist, who can imagine a more destructive affliction than waiting for ideas that just won’t come? During the 16th and 17th centuries, a curious cultural and literary cult of melancholia swept England—in music epitomized by John Dowland’s *Lachrimae*, or by Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*—although the Dane’s melancholy probably arose from his paralyzing indecision. And yet, music was considered a cure for melancholy. According to the 17th-century scholar Robert Burton, “Besides that excellent power [music] hath to expel ... diseases, it is a sovereign remedy against despair and melancholy...” In any case, depressing subjects certainly stimulate composers’ quirkier ideas and sad music often has a cathartic effect on listeners. It is interesting to note that two of the funeral odes on this program do not rely on Christian imagery, but turn to the humanistic Greek mythology of ages past.

Although little is known about **Anthony Holborne’s** life, he was employed by Queen Elizabeth and also admired by his contemporaries. The esteemed John Dowland dedicated “I Saw My Lady Weepe” from his *Second Booke of Songes* to him. Holborne composed sixty-five dances that comprise the collection *Pavans, Galliards, Almains*. Two of the three dances reflect our melancholic programming: “**Pavana Ploravit**” and “**The Teares of the Muses.**” “Pavana Ploravit’s” opening “lachrimae” theme, the dotted-note falling fourth, is a direct quote and tribute to Dowland, taken from the beginning of his wildly popular “Flow my Tears.” “The Teares of the Muses,” a galliard and our signature song, is perhaps inspired by Edmund Spenser’s lengthy 1597 poem of the same title (see our website, tearesofthemuses.com, for the full text). It has a sprightly ascending theme that belies its sad name. “**Muy Linda**” (“very beautiful” in Spanish) is a quick galliard with a hint of castanets toward the end. The piece’s spirited rhythm and those castanets provide a playful conclusion.

The composer, violist, and lutenist **Giovanni Coprario** (John Cooper), worked in London, eventually joining King James’ Private Musick band that also included John Dowland, Thomas Lupo, and Orlando Gibbons. He composed *Funeral Teares* in 1606 for the death of the distinguished Thomas Blount, Earl of Devonshire. Although Coprario wrote the *Funeral Teares* for two vocalists and lute, in the preface he suggests an alternative using only one singer. We have expanded upon his suggestion, arranging the lute tablature for viol consort. The second half of “**My Joy is Dead**” quotes Dowland’s “lachrimae” tune. The text of “**In Darkness Let Me Dwell**” is unusual: it paints ghastly surroundings to envelop the mourner’s distracted musings. They form an actual room with a floor, ceiling, and walls; and inside it, food, drink, and even the mourner’s wardrobe. As in many funeral odes that aim to express grief’s extremes, Coprario exploits angular vocal lines, irregular rhythms, and boldly dissonant harmonies. The lyrics border on the excessive—for example, “Hard craggy rocks, that death and ruin love,” or “The walls of marble black, that moisten’d still shall weep.”

As the name implies, instrumental fantasies offered composers a degree of musical freedom, releasing them from the restrictions of more measured dance music. But whether by Coprario, William Byrd, or the host of other English composers who wrote them, these pieces follow certain rules, nicely described in 1667 by Christopher Simpson: “In this sort of Musick the Composer ... doth employ all his Art and Invention about the bringing in and carrying on of ... Fuges.... When he has tryed all the several ways which he thinks fit to be used therein; he takes some other point, and does the like with it: or else, for variety, introduces some Chromatick Notes ... or what else his fancy should lead him to....” Coprario’s *Fantasy à3* begins with grave descending lines rhetorically reminiscent of the two songs that surround it. But soon new themes burst forth with rapidly ascending notes—only to regain a somber pace at the conclusion.

Because of the unfettered nature of fantasy writing, the program’s three examples bear little resemblance to one another—even when penned by the same composer. **William Byrd’s** elegiac *Fantasia No.1* is similar to a hymn as it embraces a theme of repeated minor thirds that move in slow-paced elegance. It is soon countered by passionate ascending scales that overlap and intertwine. His jaunty *Fantasia No.3* flies by in a mere minute, displaying three extensively developed imitative themes. Byrd composed the consort song *Ye Sacred Muses* in 1585 to commemorate the death of the great Thomas Tallis, his teacher and music publishing partner. Tangible word painting enriches the text that is further colored by the low *tessitura*. The always affecting vocal line, subtly imitated by the four viols, reaches an unforgettable culmination

on the last phrase, “Tallis is dead, and music dies.” The influential William Byrd preferred the purely English consort song to the Italian-style madrigal and lute air, which undoubtedly contributed to the consort song’s longevity.

Few facts remain to illuminate the life of **Sainte-Colombe**, the seventeenth-century French viol player and composer. We do know that he lived a reclusive life in Paris in the late 1660s, residing near one of his most successful students, the young Marin Marais. Instrumental *tombeaux*, a uniquely French type of composition, were written for fellow musicians or famous personages. What is one to make of Sainte-Colombe’s unattributed *Tombeau les regrets*? Perhaps the piece expresses sorrow for an unnamed friend. Or could Sainte-Colombe be lamenting the death of his own lost pleasures? The five theatrical movements tell two stories in a split-screen narrative, starting with a meditative overture that is followed by a funeral procession’s tolling bells (*Quarrillon*) that encompass the falling fourth interval of the passacaglia. In a rather jolly episode, the scene shifts to the banks of the River Styx (*Appel de Charon*)—although for a moment the bells can be heard above. Then, in a tear-drenched movement (*Les pleurs*), we view the afflicted mourners. Meanwhile, the spirit of the departed reaches the Elysian Fields, a robustly cheerful locale (*Joye des Elizées*). Sainte-Colombe could have ended his meditation at this point. He does not—returning instead to repeat *Les pleurs*.

During the reign of Louis XIV, the best composers were in service at court, working in Paris and Versailles. So we are surprised to find the remarkable **Pierre Bouteiller** employed as director of music at cathedrals in Troyes and Châlons-sur-Marne in the Champagne region of Northern France. All that remain of his compositions are thirteen *petit motets* and a Mass for the Dead. His lengthy motet *Consideratio de vanitate mundi* is in a contemporary italianate style with soaring vocal lines enhanced by the expressive sonority of two non-stop violas da gamba and continuo. The Latin text that paraphrases Ecclesiastes 6:12 and other texts with similar sentiments describes the brevity of earthly existence: “Man was created like an emptiness, and he perishes like smoke, and passes like a shadow.” In a livelier section, a fast 2/4 symbolizes laughter. Hamlet’s comments over Yorick’s skull come to mind: “Where are your jibes now? your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar?” To hark back to the many symbols in Dürer’s “Melancholia,” the hourglass with the sand that has run half through offers a stark reminder of life’s approaching end.

Samuel Capricornus led a short and rather dreary existence that began in Bohemia. After his family fled to Hungary to escape persecution and the devastation of the Thirty Years War, he held various posts in Germany, eventually attaining the prestigious position of Kapellmeister to the Württemberg court at Stuttgart. Plagued by frequent illnesses, he died at age thirty-seven. Nonetheless, Capricornus was praised by important contemporaries. Upon receiving a collection of his music, the impressed Heinrich Schütz said, “Your remarkable works ... fill me with delight.”

Capricornus’s Lenten meditation, *Ein Lämmlein*, touches upon another aspect of our melancholic theme. The story relates the ritualized grief of the Passion through the suffering of the Lamb (the symbol of Jesus crucified). Capricornus was strongly committed to the principles of musical rhetoric, wherein melody, harmony, and rhythm—when joined to a vocal text—embodied every nuance of meaning and feeling in the lyrics. Jesus’ red blood figures prominently throughout, first as proof of his ordeal, and later, as the substance of redemption. Other examples of descriptive writing are found in the swirling sixteenth notes accompanying the word “Lachen” (laughter) of the fourth movement and “Schifflein treibet” (tossing boat) of the fifth movement. The rhetoric throughout is filled with drama—for example, in the forceful “Weg, weg, mit Gold Arabia!” (Away, away, with the gold of Arabia!) from the fourth movement. The text was written by the justly famous poet and hymn writer, Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676). But as the poem’s five verses progress, the Lamb’s suffering vanishes altogether to be replaced by intimate scenes describing Jesus as savior. The warmly compassionate music is not gloomy despite the pitiable mistreatment of the Lamb; much of it is optimistic—even cheerful.

—Margaret Panofsky