Voices and instruments: the period-performance dilemma
Performing the English Pre-Restoration verse anthem

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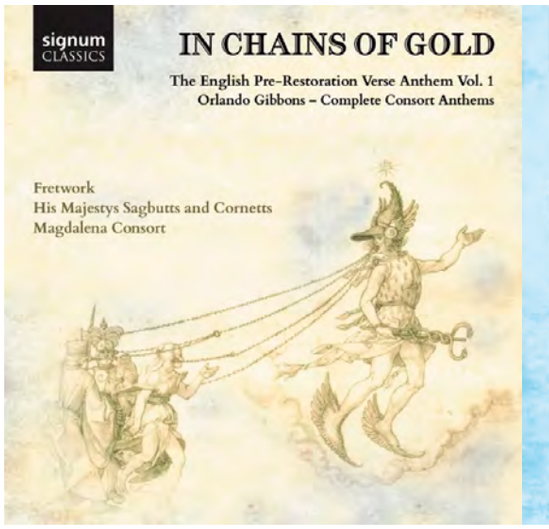
Founder member of Fretwork Viol Consort
Director of Fretwork Editions

Martin kindly invited me to address this conference because of my work as artistic director of the Orlando Gibbons Project, which has produced two CDs in a series focusing on a particular repertoire of English music: the pre Restoration verse anthem

SLIDE OF CDs



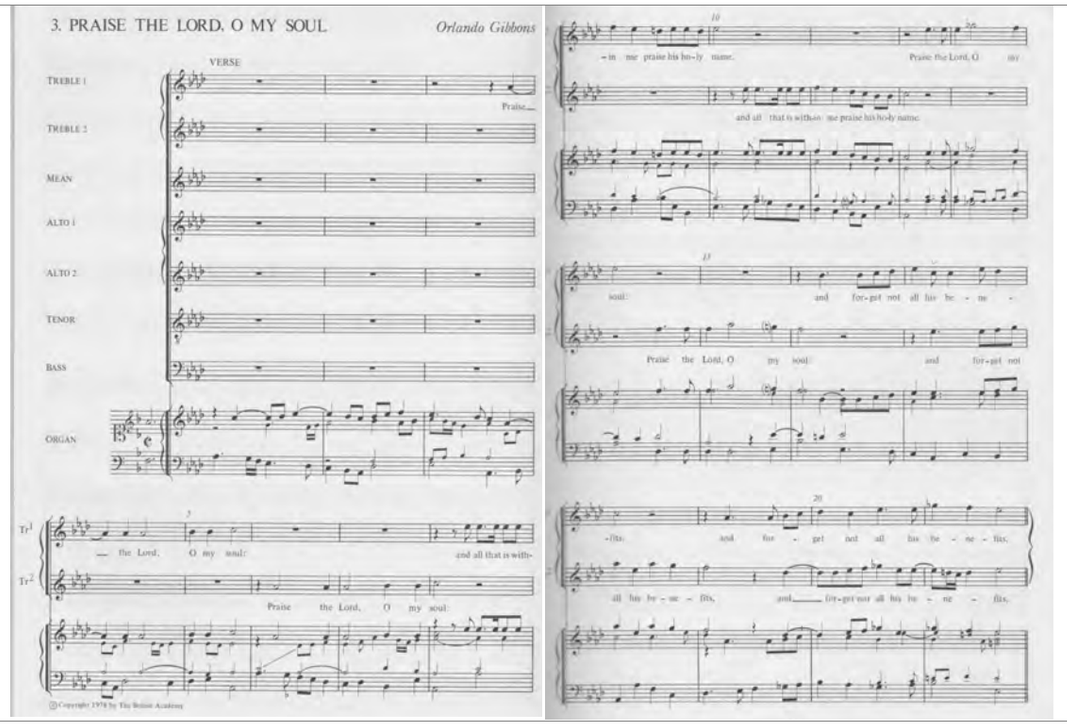
The series is entitled *In Chains of Gold*, a phrase taken from Thomas Morley's famous Plain and easy introduction to practical music published in 1597 just as this fascinating repertoire was beginning to flower. It's a phrase that I think is full of significance for the way in which we should view and perform sacred music of this period and one to which I'll return later. Last month we recorded a third and final CD in the series and over the course of it I completed doctoral research into performance issues in the verse anthem repertoire, during which I corresponded with Martin about his own research into particular vocal matters, such as training of boys' voices in the period of this music, so I'm particularly grateful to him for that and glad to be here to share with you some of the conclusions that I've reached from my own experience with performing it.

I have to admit that I feel a bit out of place here, because I am not a choir director, even though I have now directed quite a few workshops of amateur musicians, both singers and instrumentalists, enthusiastic to explore this repertoire. But I can say that I come to it from both the vocal and instrumental angle, which is I think very important because it is one of the key features of much of the music, namely that voice and instrument perform from exactly the same material — the one is frequently doubling the other, so to speak — so they need to understand it in the same way. I am principally a player of the viol, or Viola da gamba to give it its Italian term. But before that I had a period when I was also a singer, having a minor choral scholarship at a Cambridge. During my time as a Alto chorister, I was exposed to Pre Reformation service music, such as Byrd and Gibbons canticles and even the odd verse anthem, but I mainly remember being puzzled by how remote it seemed from the much more straightforward secular music of the period with which I was becoming familiar as a viol player. I couldn't understand why this sacred music needed to be in such remote and inaccessible keys and why, for an Alto, the vocal lines seemed to lie so awkwardly for the voice. Only much later did all this become clear to me. Nevertheless, I remember being hugely attracted to the first verse anthem that I ever encountered — Gibbons' O God, the king of glory, as sung by the Purcell Consort of Voices, an ensemble directed by my teacher at the time Grayston Burgess. That recording remained a huge influence and fascination for me, drawing me towards the repertoire and eventually the to project with which I've been involved.

Now, this talk is not intended to be about me but about the verse anthem repertoire and how attitudes to its performance have changed over the past few decades. So I

think it may be helpful to see that in relation to the timeline of my own involvement with it since I first encountered it some 50 years ago. After Cambridge, I went on to study the viol in the postgraduate early music course at the Guildhall school and became a professional player. It was whilst I was there that I was delighted to be engaged to be one of a viol consort in a recording by David Wulstan's Clerkes of Oxenford of Gibbons verse anthems. At last, I thought, I might come to understand how this all worked in practice. Well, how wrong I was and how utterly surreal was the whole experience, even though it was, in retrospect, quite formative. Seated in the freezing cold of Merton College Chapel we were presented with manuscript parts of his various reconstructions of fragmentary verse anthems, all in hideously impractical keys. I remember discussing with a fellow player landed with the treble part how to finger a G flat, a note that is hardly ever encountered in the instrumental music of the period. You need to understand, those who have no acquaintance with the viol, that it is an instrument whose tonal quality relies to a great degree upon the sympathetic resonance its of open strings (tuned to white notes such as D, A, E, C, F and G), and in keys such as A flat, let alone B flat minor, with which we were presented, you barely touch upon any of them, with the result that the sonority of a whole consort doing this is unsurprisingly strangulated and intonation becomes much more difficult. But what of the vocal sound? Well, due to the wonders of the digital music age, the whole experience can be resurrected in this recording from 1976, so you can get an idea for yourselves.

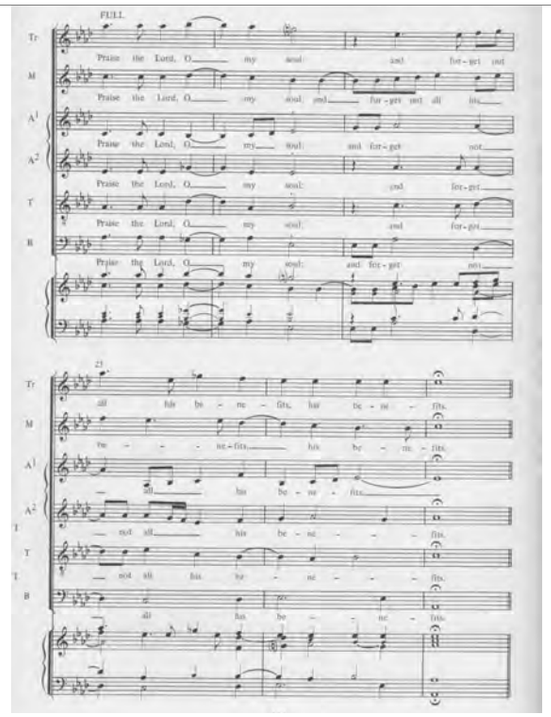
WULSTAN CLERKES 'PRAISE THE LORD'



These squeaky sounds, comforting though they may have been to passing bats, resulted from a belief that was widely held by Wulstan and others of the time, that the music needed to be transposed up by a minor third from its written key in order to reach the original performing pitch of the period. It was a theory based upon misinterpretation (as it later turned out) of the surviving written and physical evidence of organs of the later Tudor period, for the organ is indispensable in much of the verse anthem repertoire and therefore affords one of the very few fixed points in our understanding of its original performance. Another novel feature of this bizarre recording was that of ‘soprano burnout’. Such were the stratospheric heights that the poor young treble Clerkes were required to endure that few could make it longer than about 15 minutes before the next victim had to be brought in as replacement. The whole experience served to illustrate the degree of mismatch between our two worlds: vocal sonority derived from academic theorising and instrumental sonority derived from the practical constraints of the viol, an instrument that we can be sure took part in verse anthems when they were accompanied by an instrumental consort.

In 1985 I and four other viol players formed the five-part consort Fretwork. We were soon being engaged to accompany prominent choirs to accompany them in performance of verse anthems. At this point, it's worth clarifying the size of the repertoire that we are talking about, even though hitherto we had still encountered only a minute proportion of it.

TABLE OF VERSE ANTHEM COMPOSERS



Orlando Gibbons, *Praise the Lord, O my soul*
The Clerks of Oxenford, dir David Wulstan
'Tudor Church music' 1976

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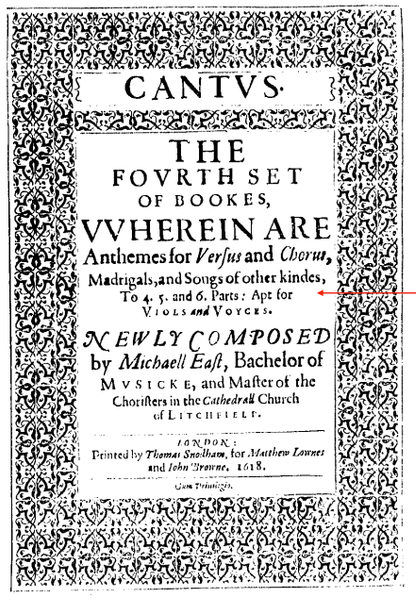
ANON	3	
ALISON, Richard (c. 1560–1570- pre 1610)	1	An Howres Recreation in Musicke (1606)
AMNER, John (1579-1641)	5	Sacred Hymnes (1615)
BENNET, John (?1575~80-1614)	1	
BULL, John (?1562~3-1628)	3	
BYRD, William (c.1540-1623)	5	Songs of sundrie natures (1589), Psalmes, songs & sonnets (1611)
CRANFORD, William (pre 1590-c.1645)	1	
EAST, Michael (c.1580-1648)	9	The Third set of Bookes (1610), Fourth set of Bookes (1618), Sixt set of Bookes (1624)
FORD, Thomas (?-1648)	1	
GIBBONS, Edward (1568-c. 1650)	1	
GIBBONS, Orlando (1583-1625)	12	
HILTON, John (1599-1657)	1	
HINDE, Richard (fl. early 17th C)	1	
HOOPER, Edmund (c. 1553-1621)	3	
JEFFREYS, Matthew (c.1558-c.1615)	3	
MUNDY, John (c.1555-1630)	1	
NICHOLSON, Richard (1563-1639)	1	
PEERSON, Martin (c.1572-1651)	16	
PYSING[E] Sr, William (*c.*1599-1684)	1	
RAMSEY, Robert (1590s-1644)	2	
RAVENSCROFT, Thomas (c.1592-c.1635)	10	
SIMMES, William (fl. 1607-1620?)	2	
STONNARD, William (?c.1575-1631?)	2	
STUBBS, Simon (fl. c.1620)	1	
TOMKINS, Thomas (1572-1656)	7	
WARD, John (c.1589-1638)	6	
WARWICK, Thomas (fl. c.1615-50)	1	
WHITE, William (1571-1634)	1	
WILKINSON, Thomas (fl. 1575-?1612)	10	

It has been estimated that from the origins of the English verse anthem around 1580 up until the civil war, there exist about 300 such works which are either fully intact or reconstructible with confidence. Of those, As a viol consort, Fretwork were concerned with a little over 100 those — the ones for which full sets of instrumental consort parts, mostly in five parts but sometimes in six, survive or again are reconstructible with confidence. These can be called ‘consort verse anthems’, or ‘consort anthems’. About twice that number survive with organ accompaniment, and there is a substantial number that survive in both formats. It's a slightly complicated picture that still needs a lot more research, but it is a large repertoire that attracted several of the finest composers of the period — you can see here William Byrd, Orlando Gibbons and Thomas Tomkins for example — and it is still largely neglected. This table shows the list of consort anthem composers and the number that survive for each, which totals a little over 100, as I said. As you can see from the listing of publications on the right hand side, very little of the music was ever published. But amongst those few publications are some by Michael East, showing the clear connection between verse anthems and viols, these being much the most likely instruments to accompany such music.

MICHAEL EAST 1618 TITLE PAGE


CANTVS.

THE
FOVRTH SET
OF BOOKES,
VVHEREIN ARE
Anthemes for *Versus* and *Chorus*,
Madrigals, and Songs of other kindes,
To 4. 5. and 6. Parts: Apt for
VIOLS *and* VOYCES.
NEWLY COMPOSED
by *Michaell East*, Bachelor of
MVSICKE, and Master of the
Choristers in the *Cathedrall* Church
of LITCHFIELD.

LONDON:
Printed by *Thomas Snodham*, for *Matthew Lownes*
and *John Browne*. 1618.

Cum Priuilegio.

Michael East, *The Fourth set of Bookes* (1618)

In this title page from 1618, he describes his “anthems for versus and chorus” as “apt for viols and voices”.

When we set out in our role as verse anthem accompanists, it was the same story as before: sets of parts in impractical keys. But as we explored more of the instrumental repertoire and became experienced in consort playing we found better ways to bridge the gulf between how we thought the instruments worked and sounded best and how choirs still wanted to sing the music. In 1995, for example, we accompanied the choir of Trinity College, Cambridge, in a complete Gibbons recording. Richard Maunder wanted to perform the music at Wulstan’s high pitch — up a minor third. Instead of playing in those ridiculous keys, we devised a system that allowed us to play in simpler ones, better enabling the natural resonance of the instruments to come through. We did this by tuning to a pitch one tone below A440 (which is arguably a secular pitch that might have been widely used at the time) and transposing the music up a fourth instead of a third. But, whatever the advantages of the better keys, the result was still acoustically compromised, because now the bassline scarcely descended below the middle of the lowest instrument in the consort and the whole sonority of its bottom register was missing.

There had to be a better way, and fortunately a huge step forward was made around the turn of the Millennium. In 1999 and 2000, the Early English Organ Project, pioneered by the historical organ makers Goetze and Gwynn, reconstructed two so-called ‘Tudor organs’. Although they were based on early 16th century models, they were of a kind that would have still been known during the late 16th and early 17th centuries, during which verse anthems began to appear and rapidly flourish. The difficulty of making such reconstructions with any confidence lay principally in the lack of surviving physical evidence. Not only had organ-making largely halted following the Reformation, due to doctrinal opposition to the use of music in public worship in most places, but the few that survived destruction during the Reformation and later the civil war, were incorporated into later organs in which their original form was obscured. Nevertheless, with painstaking analysis of the few surviving pipes together with 16th and 17th century documentary evidence of organ dimensions and construction, Goetze and Gwynn produced some amazing results which have radically changed our understanding of how these instruments sounded and worked. The story of it all is fascinatingly documented in an excellent article by Dr Andrew Johnstone in Early Music of November 2003.

AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING

Andrew Johnstone

‘As it was in the beginning’:
organ and choir pitch in early Anglican church music

THE latest instrument to have been reconstructed for the Early English Organ Project presents modern interpreters of early Anglican church music with unprecedented challenges and opportunities (illus.1). It is based on an early 16th-century soundboard discovered at Wetheringsett in Suffolk,[1] and is the first organ in three centuries to be adapted to the peculiar method of choral accompaniment cultivated by English organists in the post-Reformation period. It provides the most authentic possible conditions for that method to be tried out in conjunction with facsimiles and faithful transcriptions of old organ parts. Experience of doing this prompts a reassessment of existing theories about old English pitch, and of the present-day editorial methodology and performance practice that result from those theories. Performances using the Wetheringsett organ turn out to be at odds—sometimes strikingly so—with the widespread conviction that transposing the entire early Anglican repertory upwards by a minor 3rd brings historic and present-day pitch standards into alignment. To explain this, the organ's credentials as an authentic instrument, the intricacies of accompaniment-playing that it clarifies, and the background to the minor-3rd-higher theory must all be placed in context.

The following discussion will necessitate precise identification of notes, and the various systems of note nomenclature that will be used and referred to are shown in table 1. In the text, diagrams, captions and endnotes, notes belonging to specific octaves will be given in italics (e.g. *c'*), while pitch classes and colloquial pitch names will appear in quotation marks (e.g. 'C' major, 'C fa ut').

Primary evidence for old English organ pitch

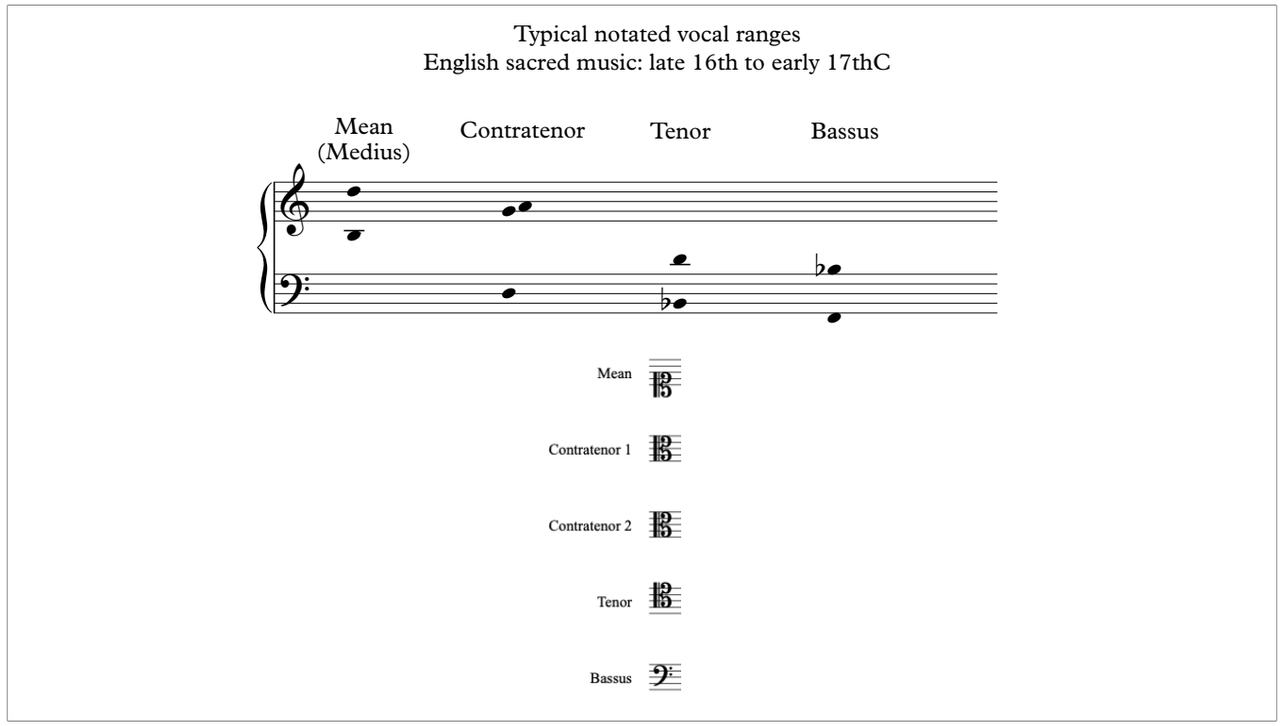
Everything that can be deduced from the Wetheringsett soundboard corresponds closely to the only two organ specifications that survive in Tudor archives. These specifications appear in the form of contracts for new instruments to be made by Anthony Duddyngton for All Hallows by the Tower of London in 1519, and by John Howe and John Clynmowe for Holy Trinity, Coventry, in 1526. Both instruments were to be provided with 27 'plain keys' (i.e. naturals) extending upwards from 'double C fa ut' (i.e. *C*). The contracts further specify that at All Hallows C was to be sounded by a Principal pipe at least 5 feet long, and that at Holy Trinity the keyboard was to include 19 'musics' (i.e. sharps). These particulars seem to have been generally applicable to English organs of the period, for the Wetheringsett pipe holes turn out to be commensurable with a maximum pipe length of roughly 5 feet, while the number of holes, 46, tallies exactly with the sum total of naturals and sharps implied by the specifications.[2]

Though corroborative, such details of pipe length and note nomenclature do not in themselves constitute sufficient evidence for the sounding pitch at All Hallows, Holy Trinity and Wetheringsett. While the statutory English foot has not changed since the time of the contracts, the *quoted* or *nominal* length of organ pipes has hardly ever matched their *actual* length. Hence, though designated according to an '8-foot' standard, the pipes of a present-day organ

Andrew Johnstone, ‘As it was in the beginning’
Early Music November 2003

An important by-product of their research was a reassessment of the likely performing pitch of such instruments. This relates directly to vocal performing pitch by virtue of the organ’s role in accompanying anthems and particularly in its obbligato role in verse anthems. The new research suggests that there was a common standard that turns out to be just more than a semitone higher than A440. This is therefore about a tone lower than the ‘minor third’ standard that had been earlier proposed by Wulstan and scholars of his era. A difference of a tone may not sound like much to those who are not singers, but, as Johnstone points out, it has huge implications for the use of historical voice-types rather than the ones that are normal in the modern SATB choir.

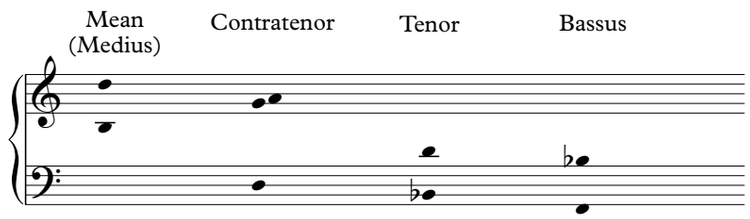
TABLE OF STANDARD VOICE RANGES



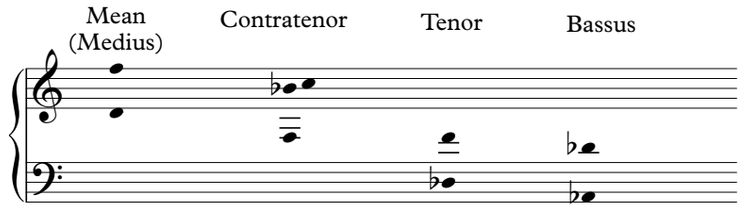
To understand this we can look at a table that shows the commonly notated voice ranges in which English sacred music of this period is usually written: Mean, Contratenor, Tenor and Bassus, to give them their historical names. Below that are shown the corresponding clefs used in the most normal verse anthem scoring of five parts. You will notice that the Treble voice range is missing here. Certainly, treble parts were still being written (you can think of Weelkes Trebles service, for example) but they are far less common than the normal top voice range of Mean. Other notable points are that the second voice shown here, Contratenor, has a range that is clearly equivalent to a modern Tenor voice using his upper register, whereas the third voice, historically called Tenor, is more equivalent to a modern baritone. If we now turn to those same voice ranges after they have been transposed up by a minor third to the pitch which Wulstan and others of his era thought to correspond to the actual sounding pitch of the period, the roles are significantly changed.

TRANSPOSED VOICE RANGES

Typical notated vocal ranges
English sacred music: late 16th to early 17thC

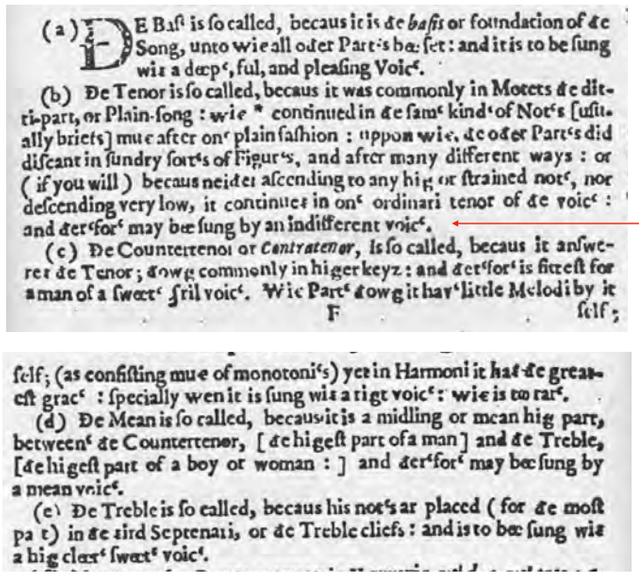


Typical notated vocal ranges,
English sacred music: late 16th to early 17thC
Transposed up by a minor 3rd



The Mean now looks much more like a treble, though with a couple of high notes missing, the Contratenor now corresponds much more closely to the modern concept of the falsettist countertenor, albeit with the lowest notes usually requiring transition to broken voice, the historical Tenor now corresponds more closely to the modern concept of a tenor voice, though again missing its highest notes, and the Bassus is more equivalent to the modern baritone, missing the lowest notes of a ‘real bass’ voice. But in comparing the two, we need to bear in mind that the historical sounding pitch now being proposed by the organ project research is about a semitone higher than A 440, so, as I said previously, the difference between the two pitch theories is in effect about 1 tone. However, that does mean that at this lower pitch, those Contratenor parts are entirely feasible when taken by light, tenor voices who use the upper register, whereas in Wulstan’s ‘high pitch’, they are completely unfeasible. Wulstan’s theory of the ‘high pitch’ was based principally on his understanding of Tudor organ pitch, and he adhered to this even in the face of significant evidence for that theory being wrong. More or less the same result as was reached by the early organ project had been reached a century earlier by Alexander Ellis but subsequently ignored, namely that the actual standard of the time was about a semitone above modern A440. The fact was that, by transposing the music up a minor third from its original key, it much better fitted the typical voice ranges of the modern SATB choir, which is why it is still widely used today for this period of music, and it also conformed to Wulstan 's concept of ‘vocal colour’. He strongly believed in the concept of the modern falsettist countertenor, being strongly influenced by Alfred Deller, and he clearly didn't believe that the English choirs of the time used a light, high tenor form of voice production, even suggesting that the natural English vocal sound was quite dull in colour.

CHARLES BUTLER



(a) DE Baſs is ſo called, becaus it is de *baſis* or foundation of de Song, unto wic all oder Parts bær ſet: and it is to be ſung wit a dæp, ful, and pleaſing Voic.

(b) De Tenor is ſo called, becaus it was commonly in Motets de dit-part, or Plain-ſong: *wic* * continued in de ſam kind of Not's [uſually briefs] mue after on plain faſhion: upon wic, de oder Parts did diſcant in ſundry ſorts of Figurs, and after many different ways: or (if you will) becaus neider aſcending to any hig or ſtrained not, nor deſcending very low, it continues in on ordinari tenor of de voic: and der'for may bæ ſung by an indifferent voic.

(c) De Countertenor or *Contratenor*, Is ſo called, becaus it anſwerer de Tenor; dowg commonly in higer keyz: and der'for is fitteſt for a man of a ſwet ſtril voic. Wic Parts dowg it hav little Melodi by it ſelf;

F

ſelf; (as conſiſting mue of monotonis) yet in Harmoni it hat de greateſt grac: ſpecially wen it is ſung wit a rigt voic: wic is too rar.

(d) De Mean is ſo called, becaus it is a midling or mean hig part, betwen de Countertenor, [de higeſt part of a man] and de Treble, [de higeſt part of a boy or woman:] and der'for may bæ ſung by a mean voic.

(e) De Treble is ſo called, becaus his not's ar placed (for de moſt pa t) in de 3ird Septenari, or de Treble clief's: and is to bæ ſung wit a hig clar ſwet voic.

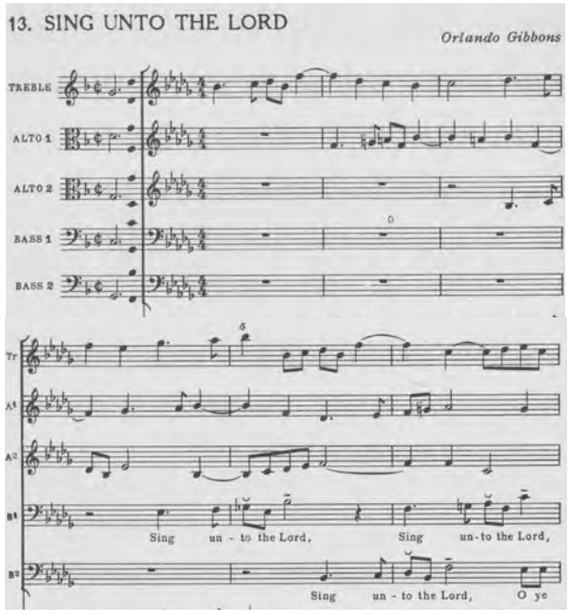
Charles Butler, *The Principles of Musik, In Singing and Setting* (1636)

It's interesting here to note what an important writer of the time says about these different voice types. As we have seen, the historical Tenor does not correspond to the modern concept of the vocal tenor but rather to that of the baritone. Charles Butler, writing in 1636, describes the Tenor part as one that “may be sung by an indifferent voice”, with the implication that there is an abundance of men able to sing in this range, just as there is today; whereas he describes the Contratenor as a “sweet shrill voice” — so definitely bright in colour, not dull or hooty — and “one that hath the greatest grace, specially when it is sung with a right voice, which is too rare”.

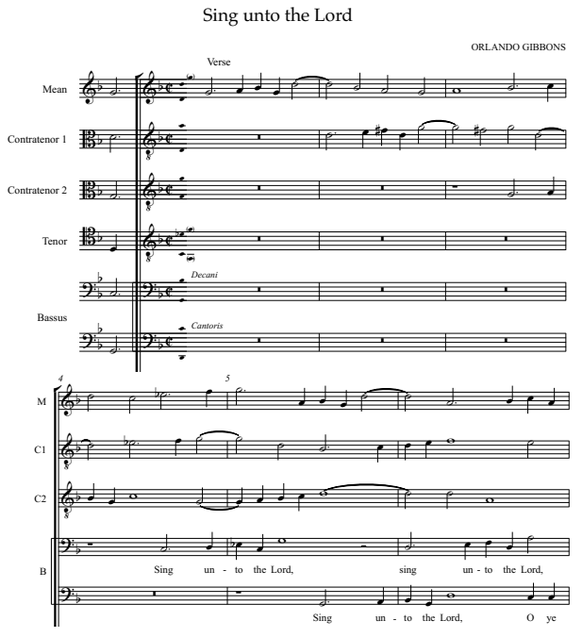
I'll return later to what I think are the major implications here for the sonority of the true Tudor choir or vocal consort, but for now let's continue with the timeline that I had been following, leading up to the recording of our first CD in the In Chains of Gold series.

Following the Early English Organ Project’s reassessment of historical performing pitch, I was able, as director of the group’s growing publishing activity Fretwork Editions, to start persuading choirs whom the group was invited to accompany in consort anthems, to try singing them at this more historical pitch level. This had the great advantage that it enabled us to achieve that pitch level by playing from parts transposed up only by a tone, rather than by a minor 3rd, resulting in keys which are much more accessible and idiomatic to the viol. By tuning the instruments to A415, a semitone below A440 (a pitch which is now widely used by viol consorts for playing the large instrumental repertoire of the period) we were able by playing from anthem parts transposed up a tone to achieve a resultant performing pitch of a semitone above A440, very close to the one that the Organ Project had proposed. Additionally, Fretwork Editions was able to make available to these choirs practical performing editions of the music, for the first time in the original key and note values. I don't think that the significance of this should be underestimated.

GIBBONS SING UNTO THE LORD



From Volume 3, Early English Church Music
Stainer & Bell 1964



From Volume 2, Orlando Gibbons Consort Anthems
Fretwork Editions 2003

If we look at two editions, side by side, of the Gibbons verse anthem *Sing unto the Lord*, the one on the left from the Early English Church Music series edited by Wulstan in 1964, still widely in use today, and on the right the same in a complete edition by David Pinto of the Gibbons anthems published by Fretwork Editions in 2003, the difference is clear. I say this not for vulgar commercial motives, of course (although I hasten to point out that Fretwork Editions of this wonderful repertoire are easily available to anyone who wants to contact me) but because I think it has a huge effect on one's whole attitude to the musical language. The use of original note values, which are generally halved by older editions such as those of Wulstan and Edmund Fellowes, makes the whole appear immediately more open and transparent; and the removal of that forest of flats in the signature, replacing it with the original signature of a single flat, together with the restoration of the original accidentals, now relates the performer to the original modal language that is so vital to our understanding of the musical structure. But this is a big subject best left for a different discussion.

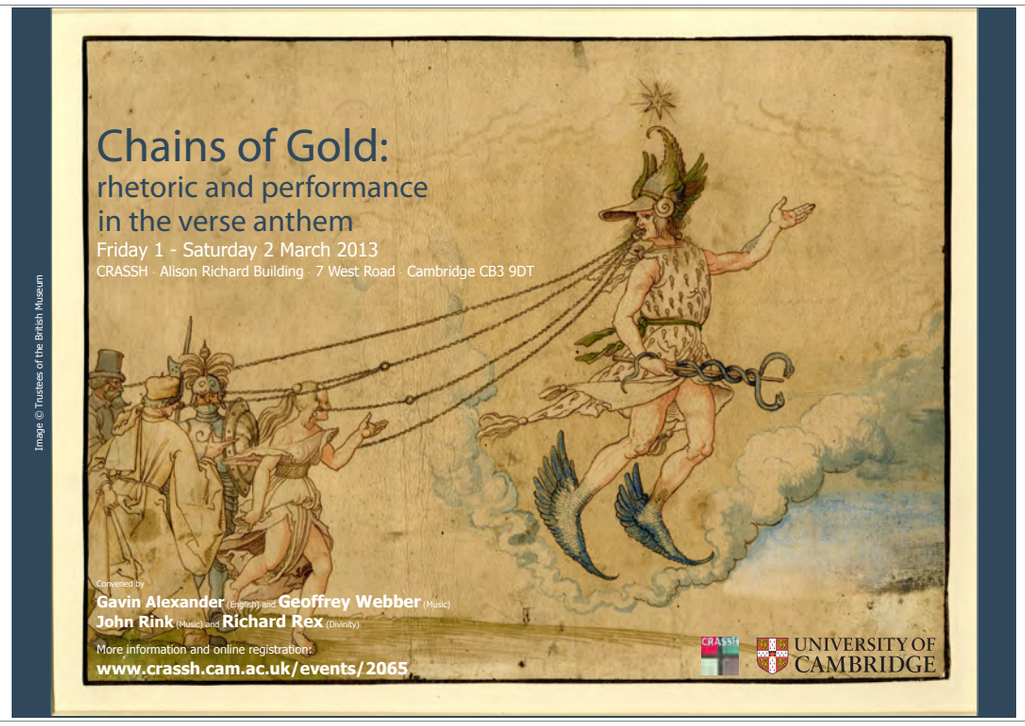
At about the same time, David Skinner, then of Magdalen College Oxford and now of Sidney Sussex College Cambridge, began to produce a number of hypothetical reconstructions of major Tudor service music, to be accompanied by viol consort rather than by their original organ parts. These consort reconstructions were musicologically controversial, since there is no good evidence that the combination of choir with viol consort would ever have taken place in public worship, due to the kind of doctrinal objections I mentioned earlier. But the these reconstructions (incidentally available through Fretwork Editions!) had the great benefit of encouraging choirs to explore consort anthems at the same time as engaging a viol consort to accompany canticles in a choral Evensong. In 2003, Fretwork accompanied Magdalen choir in David Skinner's consort reconstruction of the Gibbons Second Service, both the morning and evening services. I personally found the experience hugely valuable, however musicologically suspect, since it reacquainted me with repertoire that I had understood only from a distance when I was a chorister at Cambridge, and enabled me to understand for the first time its relationship to the verse anthem repertoire in which I was principally interested. David Skinner went on to produce and record consort reconstructions of the Byrd Second Service and the Tomkins Fifth Service, again accompanied by Fretwork.

Choral evensong performances on these lines became more common, although rarely venturing beyond a fairly small number of well-known consort anthems such as Gibbons This is the record of John, Behold thou hast made my days or See, see, the word is incarnate. And although it was always a pleasure to play such wonderful

music, it was nevertheless frustrating to conclude each time that the results were in so many ways unsatisfactory and surely did not represent how these works would originally have been expected to sound. For a start, balance issues when accompanying a large choir with a viol consort are legion. A viol consort is not loud, much less so than a string quartet could be, for example, and since its sonority is based upon natural resonance, exploited by many open strings, rather than on the forcefulness of overhand bowing, it becomes easily confused in the resonant acoustic of a chapel or church. The problems of balancing the viols with insufficiently experienced solo voices in the verse sections of an anthem too often required us to underplay, in order not to obscure the text, whilst in full sections the viols' sound was entirely lost against the overwhelming numbers of a choir often of 30 or more. Such problems could of course be corrected by microphones in a recording. In 2007, for example, Fretwork accompanied the choir of Kings College Cambridge under Steven Cleobury in a CD of early 17th century English repertoire, including a rare Tomkins verse anthem (though together with the now inevitable Record of John) but the result sounded absurdly artificial. We were drawn increasingly to the conclusion that the only way to achieve something that convinced us would be to assemble all the necessary forces ourselves.

A key element in this would be to find singers who really understood how the music should work, and in the right numbers to make it balance properly, which meant a consort of experienced solo voices rather than a choir. Such voices were certainly to hand. On all too rare occasions, we were able to perform consort anthems with singers such as Charles Daniels and with the group Red Byrd, formed by two pioneers of historical singing, Richard Wistreich and John Potter. John's name may be known to many here both as an academic at York University and as author of some important books and articles on historical singing.

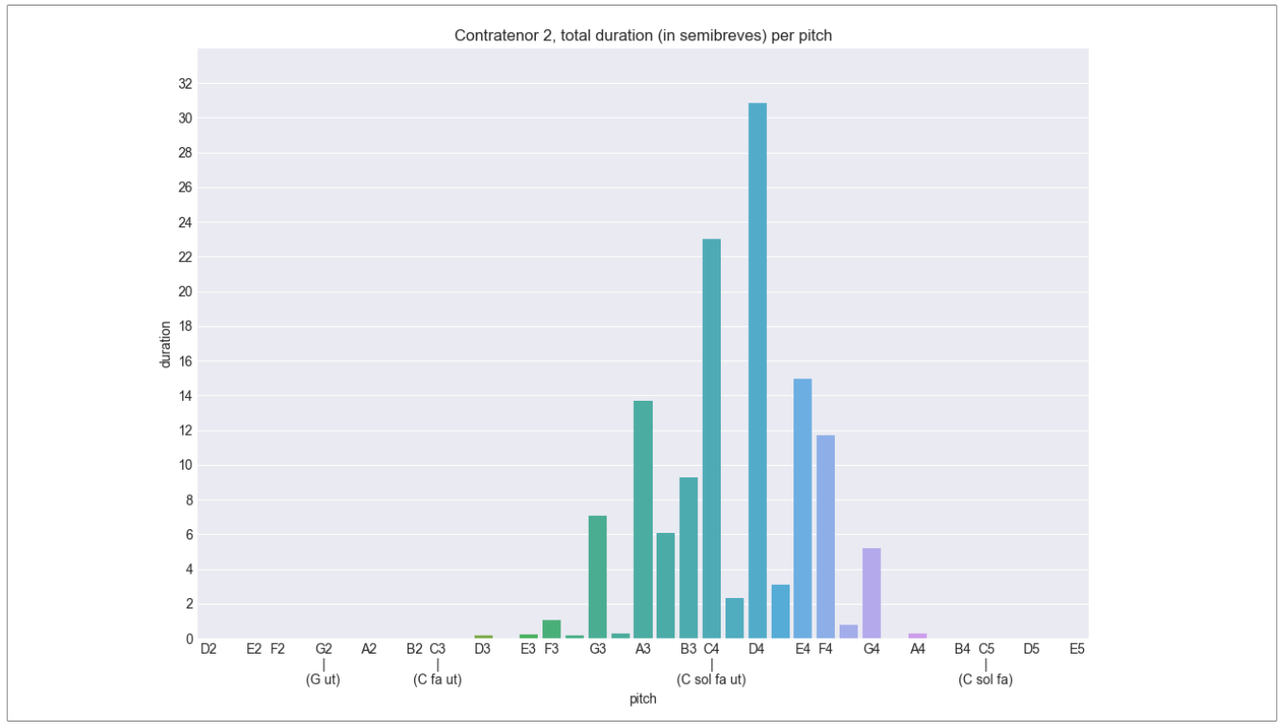
CRASSH POSTER



In 2013, I was privileged to contribute to a research conference and practical workshop at Cambridge University on the subject of ‘rhetoric and performance in the verse anthem’, in which John was the advisor on how to realise this in vocal terms and I provided repertoire and assembled a viol consort of colleagues to accompany young singers from various university choirs. On the first day of the conference, leading academics discussed the significance and relevance of the later Renaissance understanding of Rhetoric in the construction and development of the verse anthem. On the second day, John and I and the students explored how this might be realised in practice, and the conjunction of the two days proved extremely fruitful. I became convinced that an understanding of how verse anthem composers used musical rhetoric was an essential prerequisite for eventually putting together our own performance and recording.

So it was that in 2016 we finally achieved this. It was a year both auspicious and deeply inauspicious — full of optimism in that it marked celebration of Fretwork’s 30th anniversary yet utterly depressing in the disastrously backward step that the country took in that infamous political event. Indeed, the irony of those two events coinciding could hardly have been made more stark by us celebrating our anniversary in a concert at Kings Place the day after the vote that was to shatter the careers of so many of our freelance colleagues. But let's not get diverted down that avenue. A ray of light was provided by our opportunity to make a first complete recording of all the Gibbons consort anthems that September, drawing together what I considered to be all the necessary elements. In discussion the bass baritone Peter Harvey, hugely experienced and interested in text-centred performance of Baroque vocal repertoire and director of an ensemble of like-minded colleagues with whom I had already worked, I assembled a consort of ten specialist singers. This did not include boys voices, such as the Mean that Charles Butler describes, but experienced mezzos, for a number of reasons which we could discuss later. But it was an attempt to come as close as possible to the historical voice types that Butler and others of the time describe. In particular, it included four high tenors to take the crucial Contratenor lines. To my mind, this has a transformative effect upon the overall vocal consort sonority. Instead of the weak and muddy sound that too often mars the centre of the typical five part vocal scoring in this music, there was a huge gain in clarity and intensity.

CONTRA 2 DIAGRAM



The fact is that close analysis of the way that Contratenor writing generally uses the vocal range of these parts makes clear that it is centred, especially when the Contratenor has solo material in verse sections, in exactly the area around middle C and D where the modern countertenor technique requires the transition from falsetto into chest voice to be hidden. Here is a diagram showing analysis of the Contratenor 2 parts in all 10 of Gibbons' consort anthems. This is this part that sings all the solo material in *This is the record of John*, and *Behold that has made my days*, as well as in several of the other anthems. The chart shows the amount of time in semibreves spent on each step of its vocal range, from tenor d up to a above middle C. You can see quite clearly that by far the longest time is spent on these very notes, middle C and D. It seems quite clear to me that such writing could never have been intended for this modern technique and for reasons of textual clarity alone absolutely requires a high tenor voice, and similar analysis that I made of Contratenor parts in all the other consort anthems in the repertoire shows the same thing.

On the instrumental side, the pioneering early wind ensemble His Majestys Sagbutts and Cornetts seemed to me essential participants for the two anthems which were originally royal occasional pieces (I mean originally, before their texts were substituted in the 19th century with rather dreary replacements for church use). The combination of larger scale vocal music with these wind instruments is a sonority that has been sorely lacking in our understanding of vocal music of the period. Silas Woolston would accompany them on a period style organ and Fretwork would accompany the majority of the anthems on viols. But one important compromise remained to spoil this picture. We still were obliged to play from the same parts that we had been using for several years, transposed up one tone from the original keys in order to arrive at a resultant performing pitch one semitone above A440, as I have earlier explained. Surely it would be so much more satisfactory to be able to play the music in the written key? Quite late in the day I had a kind of Eureka moment of realisation. This is a bit technical and may not be very meaningful to those who are not string players, so I apologise for that, but I need to explain why it seemed to me to be an important missing part of the jigsaw.

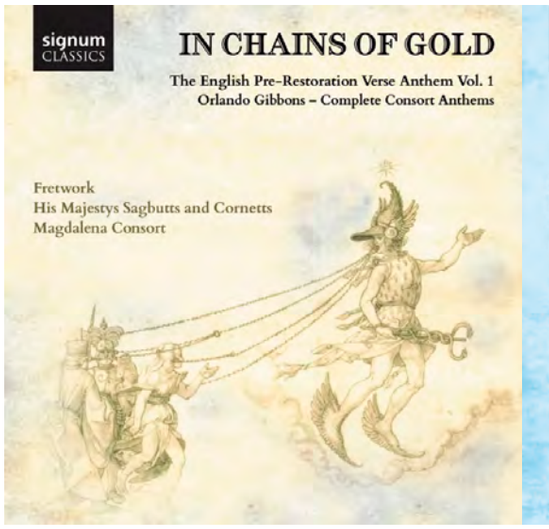
Back in the early days of Fretwork's formation, we were very lucky to be able to borrow an antique instrument from a generous private owner, an original treble viol made by probably the most famous maker of the early 17th century, Henry Jaye.

HENRY JAYE TREBLE

Henry Jaye treble viol, 1630

Here is a photo of a colleague playing it, though I realise you can’t tell anything much from it other than that it’s pretty small! It's dated 1630, so you could hardly get closer to the music than that. But the significant thing is that its small size made it out of scale with the comparatively large tenors and basses that we were playing at the time when we were borrowing it. It was clearly a wonderful instrument, yet we didn't realise at the time quite why it seemed a bit out of place tuned to the low secular pitch that we were using to perform English viol consort music (as do most professional ensembles). This was normally A415, a semitone below A440. I think we even tuned it occasionally even lower than that. What occurred to me in the summer of 2016 was that perhaps its small size indicated that it was originally intended to be tuned at a much higher pitch, say a semitone above A440, in fact at the very pitch we wanted to use for our recording. The wind instruments used by our colleagues His Majestys Sagbutts and Cornetts were already at this pitch, since early wind players had for some time been using reconstructions at this pitch for playing other repertoire of the period, mainly German or Italian. But nobody had hitherto, at least to my knowledge, ever suggested that smaller English viols of the period might also have been made specifically for that pitch. Clearly, it was necessary to try this out. I asked the owner of the Jaye treble for permission and a highly experienced luthier friend, Jane Julier, took the instrument and completely restrung, then brought it up to London so that a Fretwork treble player could play it and see how it worked. The result was wholly and amazingly convincing. It seemed to have a completely new voice and resonance. The next step was therefore to assemble tenor and bass instruments of correspondingly smaller scale to make up a consort of five. This too proved wholly convincing and the overall consort sonority had a translucence that seemed ideal to complement the voices that we had assembled and bring the necessary clarity to the dense intricacy of Gibbons’ writing. I should add that there is good historical basis, as I later discussed in my own research, for tuning viols to this pitch in other musical contexts throughout the 17th century and even into the period of JS Bach.

CD SLEEVES



We recorded our first CD, of the complete Gibbons consort anthems, in 2016 and the reception was enthusiastic enough to encourage me to assemble a second CD in 2019. This contained some of the earliest consort anthems, including a number by William Byrd specially reconstructed, as well as others by his contemporaries and some fascinating ones by the little known Edmund Hooper, which I had myself reconstructed as part of my research. And last month we recorded a third and final CD which features the third of the great composers of this repertoire, Thomas Tomkins, including his monumental verse anthem *Know you not* for the funeral of Prince Henry in 1612, together with examples by later Jacobean composers, some of them being heard for the first time in over 400 years. It completes a quite wide-ranging survey of the Pre-Restoration verse anthem and my hope is that it will encourage more investigation of a repertoire which has too long been neglected. Anyone who is interested will be glad to know that I have copies for sale afterwards!

THOMAS MORLEY

... they ought to study how to vowel and sing clean, expressing their words with devotion and passion whereby to draw the hearer, as it were, in chains of gold by the ears to the consideration of holy things.

Thomas Morley
A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke (1597)

But I want to end by returning to where I started, with that wonderful image from Thomas Morley: *Chains of gold*. Here is the context from which it comes, in his *Plain and easy introduction to practical music* of 1597. He has been talking about the importance of good word setting and has criticised those who sing in church choirs for paying too little attention to it, preferring simply to *cry louder in the choir than their fellows*. He goes on to advocate that *they ought to study how to vowel and sing clean, expressing their words with devotion and passion whereby to draw the hearer, as it were, in chains of gold by the ears to the consideration of holy things*. We might think that this is simply a colourful way of telling them to sing nicely in tune with neat consonants and proper enunciation, but his use of the word *passion* tells us that it is much more than that, as does his striking reference to *golden chains*, apparently attached to the hearers' ears. They both belong to the vocabulary of classical *Rhetoric* and they would have brought to the mind of his educated reader, and indeed to any educated composer, an image that would have been very well known to all who had studied that most important of disciplines in Renaissance thinking – as we know they did in English grammar schools of the period. Hence the relevance of the picture on the front of our CDs here:

DURER

Albrecht Dürer, *Allegory of Eloquence (*copy c. 1503)

An early 16th drawing by the artist Durer depicts Hermes, the God of Eloquence, rising upwards to the heavens whilst addressing a group of transfixed listeners on the ground, his speech represented by chains of gold emitting from his mouth and attached to their ears. It's a wonderful representation of the power of rhetoric, and the fact that Morley refers us to it tells us just how important he regards its place in sacred vocal music. It's not about beauty of sound for its own sake, but about the complete investment of the singer in the devotional text that he or she is singing, so that the listener may be moved and persuaded. This is why, in my view, the verse anthem secured its place in English sacred music following the Reformation, despite the antipathy of so many of the more Calvinist reformers to the very presence of music in worship, and why it became so rapidly popular. It's all about the use of rhetoric skill to persuade the listener of the truth of the reformist message, to make the listener think about the deeper meaning of the text being expressed, now newly accessible in the vernacular of English. The verse anthem makes this possible in a new way by casting the solo singer as *orator,* and that is above all what we need to rediscover when we perform them today.