

# Paper, Ink, and Pen

The five partbooks of the calligrapher Robert Dow:  
a musical self-portrait (1581/88)



Open Livestream: Sun 28 February 2021 17:15 & 19:15 CET  
Audio and Video recording and streaming - [orenkirschenbaum.com](http://orenkirschenbaum.com)  
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## Paper, Ink, and Pen

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Miserere\*

William Byrd (c.1539/40 or 1543-1623)

«*Cantores inter, quod in aethere sol, bone **Birde**:  
Cur arctant laudes disticha nostra tuas?»*  
(Good **Byrd**, [who are] among singers as the sun [is] in the aether,  
Why do our couplets confine your praises?)

Why do I use my paper, ink and pen William Byrd

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«*Dies lunae  
Ut lucem solis sequitur lux proxima lunae  
Sic tu post Birdum **Munde** secunde venis.»*  
(Monday  
As the moon's light follows next after the sun's light,  
So you, **Mundy**, come second after Byrd.)

Sive vigilem

William Mundy (c. 1529-1591)

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«*Musica capitur omne quod vivit si naturam sequitur.»*  
(Everything that lives is captivated by music if it follows nature.)

Though Amaryllis dance in green  
Browning\*

William Byrd  
William Byrd

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*Maxima musarum nostrarum gloria **White**,  
Tu peris, aeternum sed tua musa manet.*  
(Greatest glory of our muses, **White**,  
You perish, but your muse remains for ever.)

O lord of whom / In nomine  
In nomine\*

Anon.  
Robert White (ca. 1538 - 1574)

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«*Qui tantus primo **Parsons** in flore fuisti,  
Quantus in autumnis ni morerere fores?»*  
(**Parsons**, who were so great in your first flowering,  
How great should you have been in your autumn, had you not died!)

In nomine\*

Robert Parsons (ca. 1535 - 1571/72)

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«*Musica mentis medicina moestae.*»  
(*Music is the medicine of the sad mind.*)

Ah, alas, you salt sea gods

Richard Farrant (ca. 1525 - 1580)

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«*Talis es et tantus **Tallis** musicus, ut si  
fata senem auferrent musica muta foret.*»  
(*Such and so great a musician are you, **Tallis**, that if  
the Fates took you off in your old age, music would be mute.*)

O lord, how vain  
O sacrum convivium\*

William Byrd  
Thomas Tallis (1505 - 1585)

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«*Non est harmonice compositus qui Musica non delectatur.*»  
(*He is not harmoniously compounded who does not delight in music*)

My mind to me a kingdom is

William Byrd

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«*Galli cantant Itali caprizant Germani ululant Angli iubilant*»  
(*The French sing, the Italians bleat, the Germans howl, the English  
whoop.*)

La Deploration de Jehan Okenheim

Josquin de Prez (ca. 1450/1455 - 1521)

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(Pieces marked \* are instrumental)

Monika Mauch - Soprano  
Brigitte Gasser - Tenor viol  
Randall Cook - Tenor viol  
Tabea Schwartz - Bass viol  
Caroline Ritchie - Bass viol  
Elizabeth Rumsey - Treble viol, Director

## About the programme

Robert Dow's set of manuscript part books, found today in the library of Christ Church College, Oxford, are among the very few sets of Tudor part books to survive complete, intact, and most importantly, legible! Available since 2010 in a beautiful facsimile reproduction, they are a treasure trove of material for singers and viol players. Dow's books contain a wide selection of repertoire - sacred and secular, old and new, including several continental composers and some unica. Alongside this cross-section of tastes and styles is an overarching plan, with the books initially divided into three sections: motets, consort music, and consort songs. Dow was an active and interested copyist, occasionally changing text underlay where he saw fit - interestingly, many of his decisions present a more modern concept of strong and weak syllables than in much of the published repertoire of the time. The books take great delight in visual pleasure - the staves are red, with striking black notation. For the vocal pieces, Dow seems to have copied the text in first, in elegant italic calligraphy, only then fitting the notes to the words, which gives a sense of space on the page and allows him to indulge in beautiful lozenge-shaped noteheads. To complement this, the books are annotated with Latin mottos and epigraphs, in the same beautiful calligraphy, praising a specific composer or reflecting on the place of music in a divinely ordered universe. On a more mundane note, an inscription on the second page of each partbook asks the user kindly (and with a slight double-entendre) to only handle them with clean hands!

### **Miserere - William Byrd (instrumental)**

*«Cantores inter, quod in aethere sol, bone Birde:  
Cur arctant laudes disticha nostra tuas?»  
(Good Byrd, [who are] among singers as the sun [is] in the aether,  
Why do our couplets confine your praises?)*

### **Why do I use - William Byrd**

Dow's partbooks were copied probably between 1581, the date he inscribed on the second page of each book, and his death in 1588, aged just 35. Having grown up in a merchant family in London (his father had trading interests in Russia and Spain), he graduated BA at Corpus Christi college, Oxford in 1574, becoming a fellow of All Souls the following year. Although Dow's position (and the current location of the books) suggests a link to the University and its music, it's just as likely that the repertoire was gathered during regular trips to London, or even abroad - in the mid 1580s, he was frequently absent from Oxford. The number of pieces by Byrd, many of them copied by Dow before they first appeared in print, suggest that he might also have had a personal and as yet unknown link to the composer. Mundy, White, Parsons and Tallis also feature heavily, each receiving their own tribute in the Latin inscriptions.

*«Dies lunae  
Ut lucem solis sequitur lux proxima lunae  
Sic tu post Birdum Munde secunde venis.»  
(Monday  
As the moon's light follows next after the sun's light,  
So you, Mundy, come second after Byrd.)*

## **Sive vigilem - William Mundy**

Viols appear to have been played in England and Scotland since at least the early 16th century. Initially cultivated at court and in aristocratic households, the instrument gradually became an important element in the education of choirboys, who then grew up not only to careers as professional musicians, but to join the academic and legal professions, thus creating a thriving amateur consort scene. The viol-maker John Rose the younger, active from the 1560s onwards, seems to have been responsible for developing the form of the instrument familiar to us today. We are fortunate that instruments by Rose and by his younger colleague Henry Jaye survive, many with beautiful decoration (for example, the 1598 Rose tenor viol held now in the Ashmolean museum in Oxford, a copy of which will be used in this performance) and today's consort is built entirely from copies of these instruments. One can easily imagine that Dow and his contemporaries among the merchant/scholarly classes would have invested in such viols, which tap into the same sensibility as Dow's partbooks - not only useful for good music-making, but things of great beauty in themselves.

«*Musica capitur omne quod vivit si naturam sequitur.*»  
(*Everything that lives is captivated by music if it follows nature.*)

## **Though Amaryllis dance in green - William Byrd**

### **Browning - William Byrd (instrumental)**

The second section of the partbooks features a selection of consort music fairly typical for the period, but with a few surprises (Lassus' chanson *Susanne un Jour*, for example, makes an unexpected appearance). Two consort settings of the popular tune *Browning* are copied in side-by-side, of which Byrd's is by far the most complex and rhythmically challenging. The preponderance of *In Nomine* settings is likewise typical; originating in the *Benedictus* of Taverner's *Missa Gloria Tibi Trinitas*, from which the section setting the text *In nomine Domini* was separated and used, textless, as an instrumental piece, the consort *In Nomine* sparked a genre that continued almost uninterrupted until Purcell's time. The scope of *In Nomines* in Dow, and throughout the 16th century, is extraordinary: from pieces in 5/4 metre, to complex rhythmic structures, to *In Nomines* that also function as a consort song, as here in the anonymous setting of *O Lord of whom I do depend*. Various theories explain the popularity of the *In Nomine*, one being that the form functioned as a test piece for composers to show their mettle - or that the more obscure rhythmic variants were intended to teach choirboys how to count! The upshot is an extraordinary corpus of instrumental music quite unlike anything else, spanning a century and a half of religious, social and political change.

## **O lord of whom / In nomine - Anonymous**

«*Maxima musarum nostrarum gloria White,  
Tu peris, aeternum sed tua musa manet.*»  
(*Greatest glory of our muses, White,  
You perish, but your muse remains for ever.*)

### **In nomine - Robert White (instrumental)**

«*Qui tantus primo Parsones in flore fuisti,  
Quantus in autumno ni morerere fores?»*  
(*Parsons, who were so great in your first flowering,  
How great should you have been in your autumn, had you not died!*)

### **In nomine - Robert Parsons (instrumental)**

If, as seems likely, Dow's partbooks were compiled for his personal use, he must have been an accomplished singer and viol-player. No details of Dow's musical education survive, but if he had trained as a choirboy at one of the London churches or chapels, he would certainly have grown up with the music of White, Parsons and their contemporaries. Eight pieces that are copied consecutively into Dow's partbooks are also found in the table-book Add MS 31390, now in the British Library and titled "In Nomines and other solfaing songs". The possibility of vocalising the instrumental pieces in Dow would solve one major mystery - the fact that page-turns are necessary in many of the consort pieces. If these were to be performed vocally with solmization syllables, this would naturally not present a problem. Equally likely is that Dow's musical gatherings were social occasions, with interested (and musically literate) onlookers easily able to reach over and turn a page. If the performers were seated around a table in the centre of the gathering, this could be done simply and would emphasise another aspect of the partbooks - that their visual beauty, and Latin inscriptions, were not only for the performers to see, but for the audience to look over and admire. On the second page of the part books we find a Latin motto: *vinum et musica laetificant corda*, which perhaps gives us a further insight into Dow's convivial musical evenings.

«*Musica mentis medicina moestae.*»  
(*Music is the medicine of the sad mind.*)

### **Ah, alas, you salt sea gods - Richard Farrant**

Also interesting are the range of consort songs, which may have appealed to Dow's literary tastes. The consort song originated in the plays put on by companies of choirboys on high days and holidays - a dramatic song (typically a lament) would be sung by a solo character, accompanied by four viols. Farrant's *Ah, alas, you salt sea gods* is one such song, from a probably lost play featuring a character called Abradad. The genre grew to be a favourite vehicle for setting both sacred and secular texts, from pastoral romance (Though Amaryllis dance in green) to those with a political subtext: for example, *Why do I use my paper, ink and pen*, a poem associated with the controversial execution of the Jesuit Edmund Campion. *My mind to me a kingdom* encapsulates the spirit of Dow's books, a pleasure and satisfaction in the internal life of the mind. There is an introspective aspect to many of Dow's chosen texts, a sense that this earthly joy is fleeting, as we shall hear in the next song.

### **O lord, how vain are all our frail delights - William Byrd**

*«Talis es et tantus Tallisi musicus, ut si  
fata senem auferrent musica muta foret.»  
(Such and so great a musician are you, Tallis, that if  
the Fates took you off in your old age, music would be mute.)*

### **O sacrum convivium - Thomas Tallis (instrumental)**

*«Non est harmonice compositus qui Musica non delectatur.»  
(He is not harmoniously compounded who does not delight in music)*

### **My mind to me a kingdom is - William Byrd**

After Dow's death, the partbooks found their way to Windsor, where they were briefly added to by the copyist John Baldwin, before returning to Oxford and landing eventually in the library at Christ Church. There they remained, relatively ignored, until coming to the attention of Charles Burney, who spent time in Oxford researching his 1776 General History of Music. Extraordinarily, Burney was allowed to take the partbooks home to his house in London, where he kept them for some eight years whilst copying a number of their contents into score.

Burney's History contains, of course, a number of transcriptions of music by earlier composers, and we will finish the concert with his version of a piece by Josquin, who died 500 years ago this year. Burney found the piece in "a set... published in Antwerp in 1544" which is presumably Susato's print of 1545, and clearly had some issues with the transcription: he writes that "the difficulties I encountered in scoring this composition are not to be described...". Fascinatingly, Burney also includes a "fac-simile" of the tenor part of the chanson, so as "to afford the Learned Musical Reader an opportunity of exercising his sagacity in its resolution". It would be nice to think that Burney's "Learned Musical Reader" was of the same ilk that enjoyed the beauty and wit of Dow's partbooks, 200 years earlier.

*«Galli cantant Itali caprizant Germani ululant Angli iubilant»  
(The French sing, the Italians bleat, the Germans howl, the English whoop.)*

### **La Deploration de Jehan Okenheim - Josquin de Prez**

Programme notes: Caroline Ritchie

Instruments:

Treble viol: After Henry Jaye, c.1615. Francis Beaulieu, 2010

Tenor viol: After John Rose, 1598. Günter Mark, 1996

Tenor viol: After John Rose, 1598. Francisco Pecchia, 2013

Small bass viol: After Henry Jaye, 1624. Francisco Pecchia, 2016

Big bass viol: After Henry Jaye, 1611. John Pringle, 1983