



the Purcell Album

Alfred Deller & Consort

includes from
Music for a While
Come Ye Sons of Art
The Bell Anthem
Hail Bright Cecilia
The Fairy Queen
My Beloved Spake
Dido's Lament
Fairest Isle

alto

HENRY PURCELL – Alfred Deller & Consort

1. Oedipus (1692, Z.583) – Song: Music for a while	4:04
2. King Arthur (1691, Z.628) – Venus’s Song: Fairest isle, all isles excelling	2:41
3. Pausanias (1695, Z.585) – Sweeter than roses	3:34
4. The Indian Queen (1695, Z.630) – I attempt from love’s sickness to fly	2:17
5. Song: If Music be the Food of Love (1st version, 1692, Z.379A)	2:36
6. Welcome to All the Pleasures “Ode On St. Cecilia’s Day”, Z. 339 – Here The Deities Approve	4:39
7. Rejoice in the Lord Alway “Bell Anthem”, (c.1682-85, Z.49) from The Fairy-Queen (1692, Z.629)	9:24
8. Mystery’s Song 0:54	9. Secrecy’s Song 2:01
10. Epithalamium: Thrice happy lovers 3:03	11. The Plaint 7:25
from Dido and Aeneas (c.1688, Z.626)	
12. Overture 2:44	13. Fear no danger to ensue 1:45
14. Thy hand, Belinda – When I am laid in earth (Dido’s Lament) – With drooping wings ye Cupids come	6:30
from My Beloved Spake (1677, Z.28)	
15. Overture (Sinfonia) 1:03	16. My Beloved Spake 0:54
17. My Beloved is Mine 3:02	
from Hail! Bright Cecilia (1692, Z.328)	
18. The Fife and all the Harmony of War 3:04	19. Hail! Bright Cecilia 4:57
from Come Ye Sons of Art (1694, Z.323)	
20. Sound the Trumpet 2:40	21. Come, Come, Ye Sons of Art 1:29
22. Strike the Viol 5:11	23. See Nature Rejoicing 2:46

Originally issued by Vanguard and Bach Guild

Alfred Deller’s complete Purcell recording for Vanguard are available as

Musical Concepts / Vanguard set MC195 (6 CDs)

Project Consultants: Chris Parsons (eboracoumbaroque.co.uk) and David Ponsford

“Here lyes Henry Purcell Esqre, who left their lyfe and is gone to that Blessed Place where only his Harmony can be exceeded.” –
– his epitaph

For several centuries England suffered from a musical inferiority complex. To a considerable extent this was due to political conditions, the upheavals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when deposed rulers were forced to take refuge abroad, or were educated in foreign lands before coming into their kingdom. Nor did the great nation recover its musical pride in the long years of complacency and empire under Queen Victoria. Foreign artists still found welcome and profit in England while native musicians were forced to hide their lights under continental bushels. It was tacitly acknowledged that the greatest date in all history, musically speaking, was 1710, when Handel first visited. At least, if England could not produce a genius, she could attract one and make him feel at home! In everything but birth and training Handel became an Englishman: indeed, it was he more than any who set the styles and established the traditions that were to be known as typically British. This, to be sure, was by no means an unmixed blessing, as witness the scores of lesser geniuses who could never emerge from under his shadow.

To all this one exception was admitted. Before the coming of Handel England had produced one musical giant. If he didn’t quite match the very tallest in other lands, he certainly came up to their shoulders. And

in his own country he was a towering, lonely figure. His name was Henry Purcell: unfortunately that name was for many years the best-known thing about him. Even his parentage and the date of his birth could be established only by conjecture. Not until 1937, with the publication of the now standard biography by J. A. Westrup was the evidence carefully weighed to make a case for Thomas Purcell, as the father of the boy, and not his brother Henry, also a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal but Master of the Choristers at Westminster Abbey. The date of young Henry's birth can be set only in relation to entering the choir in 1669 and breaking his voice in 1673. Westrup laments that so little can be learned about his character and personality; that the authentic portraits we know are so unsatisfactory.

We know that in the Chapel Royal the young Purcell came under the influence of Captain Cooke and of Pelham Humfrey, and that he also studied with Dr. John Blow. Dr. Burney, the eighteenth century historian, is amusingly skeptical on this point: "He had a few lessons from Dr. Blow, which were sufficient to cancel all the instructions he had received from other masters, and to occasion the boast inscribed on the tomb-stone of Blow, that he had been 'Master to the famous Mr. Henry Purcell'.

Another legend, probably at best an exaggerated fact, has it that when, in 1679, Dr. Blow as organist of Westminster Abbey, the elder musician, stepped aside in recognition of Purcell's greater genius.

Nevertheless, it is true that on Purcell's death in 1695 Blow returned to the post.

Purcell was not a travelled man. Unquestionably it is to a large extent due to the fact that his whole life was spent practically in one place that so little personal knowledge has come down to us. As for his music, aside from a few well-known examples, it was for the most part more revered than played. Purcell was the great English composer: this was enough. Most of the pieces that were known became familiar in unreliable editions, for after the arrival of the great German in England it was the accepted practice of an editor to make all music sound as much as possible like Handel. The light began to dawn with the formation of the Musical Antiquarian Society in 1840 and of the Purcell Society in 1876, the latter with the avowed purpose of publishing the works complete, a project which remained unfinished even by the time these recordings were made. Perhaps an even greater service has recently been rendered in the recordings that have been made, the best of them – like those of Alfred Deller – in the true spirit and as authentic a manner as possible for modern scholarship in the 1950's to establish it.

In 1691 Purcell collaborated for the first time with the great John Dryden in the "opera" of *King Arthur*. Dryden, who in 1685 had worked with a French composer named Luis Grabu, and whose high hopes for their joint effort, Albion and Albanus, had not been realized,

was now enthusiastic about Purcell's music. In the dedication to King Arthur, Dryden wrote: "There is nothing better than what I intended, than the Musick; which has arrived at a greater perfection in England, than formerly; especially passing through the artful hands of Mr. Purcell, who has composed it with so great a genius, that he has nothing to fear but an ignorant, ill-judging audience.." To which Professor Allardyce Nicoll, in his Restoration Drama, adds a benediction:

"Had all operas such beautiful libretti as these two [Albion and Albanus and *King Arthur*] have, there would be small cause for complaint."

Dryden had actually written his libretto some seven years earlier, but due to the death of Charles II, to whom it was designed as a tribute, the poet put his work aside. When it saw the light again it was practically re-written to do honour to William III. The plot is concerned with King Arthur's battle against the Saxons. What is chiefly remembered from the work is the justly admired air, Fairest Isle, one of the most moving apostrophes ever addressed to England.

The next year, 1692, saw the production of *The Faery Queen*, an extremely free adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The adapter, believed to have been Elkanah Settle, was obviously a man of imagination and resource, and the work received a sumptuous production with no expense spared. Such is the source of the song *Epithalamium. Oedipus* (1692), with text by Dryden and

Nathaniel Lee, was made notable by the superb song, *Music for a While*, an example of Purcell's favourite device of ground bass. Westrup considers it, "apart from Dido's lament, the most satisfying, in technique and expression, that Purcell ever wrote, if only because of the continual re-creation of energy in the bass."

One more "opera" and three plays with music dating from 1695, Purcell's last year, concern us here. *The Indian Queen*, by Dryden and Robert Howard, is the setting for **I Attempt from Love's Sickness to Fly**, with its descriptively upsoaring melodic line. *Pausanias*, by Norton, contains the lovely **Sweeter than Roses**.

A remark or two should be made about the independent songs. **If Music Be the Food of Love**, which must not be confused with the Shakespeare lyric, is one of three settings Purcell made of a verse by one Colonel Henry Heveningham, in 1692, 1693 and 1695 respectively.

- Philip L. Miller

The latter half of the seventeenth century brought important changes to English music, changes that were to stifle native expression for many generations to come. Though Puritan inhibitions were cast aside with the accession of Charles II, art, newly emancipated, yielded to the extravagance and vanities of a sovereign who had acquired strong

French leanings. Charles modelled his court on that of Louis XIV; he imported foreign musicians, and introduced lavish entertainments in the French manner, setting the pattern for the re-opened public theatres where respectable old plays were turned into glorified musical revues.

The Restoration theatre, given a new lease on life, revived Shakespeare, and other renowned Elizabethans, “adapting” them to the taste of the time. Every opportunity was taken to make use of song, dance, and the elaborate machinery of the Parisian stage. Purcell’s *The Faerie Queene*, is such an adaptation, a masque-like opera and a complete distortion of the original play. The anonymous librettist has rearranged scenes, invented verses for musical interludes and generally disfigured Shakespeare’s text so that it has become hardly recognizable. Yet for such a vehicle Purcell provided some of the finest and most effective music he ever wrote for the theatre.

Mystery’s Song and **Secrecie’s Song** appear successively in Act II of *The Faerie Queene* (Purcell Society Edition, 1903). The former is accompanied by cello and harpsichord, the latter by two recorders and harpsichord. The *Plaint* was added to Act V for its revival in 1693. It is a song of pathos sung over a chromatic ground bass with a beautiful obbligato line for violin.

– Sydney Beck, Music Division. New York Public Library

Dido and Aeneas. Henry Purcell is the leading English representative of the Heroic Age but Purcell created only one real opera on the traditional heroic theme; and that was a miniature affair intended not, as a ritual of humanism, for the Court, but as entertainment for a girls’ school. In Louis XIV’s France heroic opera was closely associated with heroic verse tragedy; in England our failure to produce the one was consequent on our failure to produce the other.

The book of *Dido and Aeneas* was a rewriting for music of a heroic tragedy by Nahum Tate, Public Poet and Laureate. The idea may have been prompted by *Venus and Adonis* which Purcell’s teacher, John Blow, had produced in 1683. But whereas Blow’s work was conceived as a court masque and turned into an opera, *Dido* was conceived as a drama which, transformed into an opera, became more dramatic because Purcell’s music could reveal the true passions.

The central pole of the human and musical experience is Dido’s arioso: She sings the music of the personal life, for she is a queen because she is a woman capable of an intensity of passion that lesser mortals would be scared of; and although she tries to subdue her personal distress and elevate herself to godlike heights by singing her initial arioso over a ground bass, we shall find that she can succeed in thus disciplining the violence of her feeling only in death.

There is another character in the opera whose function is more complex than we might at first imagine. Belinda provides us with our opportunity

for identification: We know we're not as heroic as Dido; we hope we're not as craven as Aeneas; and however "common" we may be we like to think we are superior to hoi polloi. Belinda is an ordinary Girl; yet she is Dido's serving maid, and although she spends time trying to persuade Dido, in simple social dance rhythms, that she's making an absurd bother over her emotions, she can at times rise, in sympathy. It is interesting too that Belinda's dance-song **Fear no danger**, in which unimaginatively she advises Dido to stop worrying for it may never happen, also includes a prophetic invitation to Cupids to strew the lovers' path with flowers.

Purcell's *Dido* sees through the sham of Restoration heroism. When she discovers that Aeneas is, in her sense, no hero at all, she has no further reason to live.. Aeneas is the traditional man-god gone seedy, as he certainly had in Restoration England; Dido's heroism consists in her being a woman who can still be imaginatively a queen. The conditions of temporal mortality would seem to be such that private passion can never be completely fulfilled; so the only "cure" for Dido is death. It is as though, in the orchestral ritornello the essence of Dido herself – melts away, to be succeeded by strict vocal polyphony, sung by a chorus of Cupids. They are, of course, gods of love and also the plump fruits that a paradise of sensual fulfillment was liable to leave around; and they scatter the sexual rose upon Dido, as Belinda had said in her "Fear no danger" song.

Dido and Aeneas, being written in 1689 for Josias Priest's school, is not only short, but also modest in its resources. A small string orchestra and smaller chorus suffice. Belinda's part calls for considerable agility, but was and still is effectively sung by a sensitive school-girl. Dido's part is a different matter, for no school-girl can be a Dido.

– Wilfrid Mellers

Rejoice in the Lord Alway (the "Bell Anthem"), composed in the early 1680's, reflects the taste of Charles II. Thomas Tudway, a musician and commentator of the time, wrote that the king "was soon tired with the grave and solemn ways" of the music inherited from Tallis and Byrd. His Majesty, a "bright and airy prince ... ordered the composers of his chapel to add symphonies with instruments to their Anthems." Such changes suited Purcell, and his *Rejoice in The Lord Alway* has the extroverted splendour and dignity of Restoration church music. Formally, as in his beautiful fantasias for strings, the anthem still has some texture of the older free polyphony. The string introduction, its splendid effect made by the repeated descending scales, inspired the title, "Bell Anthem," although whether this was Purcell's title is not known.

– Sidney Finkelstein

Also composed in the early 1680's was the anthem **My Beloved Spake**, which is a setting of verses from the *Song of Solomon* (ii,10-13,16). Purcell used his four soloists, after an introductory Symphony for strings, in a kind of multiple recitative the phrases of which are closely related to the natural stresses and rise and fall of good reading aloud. In listening, it is important to realize that the composer was trying to reflect directly the mood and character of each successive verse, at the same time using the orchestra to stabilize his structure.

In 1683 a group of gentlemen amateurs and professional musicians started a "Musical Society" in London to celebrate the "Festival of St. Cecilia, a great patroness of music," on 22nd November. They asked Henry Purcell then only 24, to be the first to write an ode for their festivals. **Welcome to all the Pleasures** is the result. This work is the best of Purcell's early odes, surpassing others in charm and grace. The beautifully flexible countertenor solo, **Here the Deities approve**, together with the orchestral ritornello that follows, is written on a ground bass three bars long in quaver rhythm. This movement became popular and was published in a harpsichord arrangement in Musick's Handmaid, Part II (1689), and after the composer's death the vocal was included in the collection *Orpheus Britannicus* (1689).

"The 22nd of November, being St. Cecilia's day, is observ'd through all Europe by the Lovers of Musick." In seventeenth-century London, the annual festival in honour of music's patron saint was organized by the

gentlemen of the Musical Society. The company gathered in the morning at St. Bride's Church, where a musical service was performed, and a sermon preached defending Cathedral Music, which had been suppressed by the Puritans. The assembly then repaired to Stationers Hall to hear the new ode composed in Cecilia's honour, after which they sat down to a banquet. "The feast is one of the genteelest in the world," the Gentleman's journal of 1691 informs. "Whilst the Company is at Table the Hautboys and Trumpets play successively." It was for the festival the following year that Purcell wrote the last and greatest of his Cecilian odes. The poem, by Nicholas Brady, Chaplain to the Queen, gave ample scope for Purcell's unrivalled gift of illustration. It follows the conventional pattern of praising in turn each musical instrument and ending with the "fife and all the harmony of war."

Although Purcell died at the age of 36, he stands as a giant in the history of English music. At an early age, as a choir boy in the Chapel Royal of Charles 11 he had been taught to play lute, violin, and organ. At age fourteen, he was appointed "keeper, maker, mender, repayer and tuner of the regalls, organs, virginals, flutes and records and all other kind of wind instruments whatsoever, in ordinary, without fee, to his Majesty." At the age of eighteen, in 1677, he succeeded Matthew Locke as composer for the "King's Violins," a band of 24 string players.

Unlike earlier anthems, in which the orchestra consists of the "King's

Violins,” *Come Ye Sons* adds festive brass and woodwinds. And unlike his earlier free-flowing fantasia style, Purcell here writes more in the multi-movement form of high baroque. The spirit of this magnificent opening is carried on by the duet for two countertenors, **Sound the Trumpet**, with its lilting melody and evocation of trumpet sounds in the vocal lines. Two flutes play obbligato for the countertenor solo **Strike the viol**. Then soprano and bass begin the joyous last movement, **See Nature rejoicing**, and when the chorus enters, with trumpets, oboes and timpani, a climax is reached where, as Westrup writes, “The whole world seems to be singing.” ***Come Ye Sons of Art*** is a beautiful example of Purcell’s art at its most mature. Purcell had written a birthday ode for Queen Mary each year, from 1689,. This one, for April 30, 1694, was the greatest and the last. The following year Purcell composed funeral music for the Queen, and soon after, John Blow composed his touching Ode on the Death of Henry Purcell.

- Watkins Shaw

Alto is a label of Musical Concepts: www.altocd.com

ALTO Distribution, Magnus House, 8 Ashfield Rd, Cheadle SK81BB, UK

Cover image: "The Music Party" (1861-5) by Arthur Hughes, courtesy Just Images

Design produced by Imergent Images (peter@imergent.co.uk)

Project Co-ordinator: Robin Vaughan
(musicalmerit@blueyonder.co.uk)

ALTO ALC1402 5055354414022

©&© 2019 Musical Concepts

Digital edition © 2019, Musical Concepts

All rights reserved. No part of this sound recording and its component audio, text, or graphics files may be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, or shared electronically in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, file sharing, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, contact the publisher, using the subject line “Attention: Permissions Coordinator,” at the address above.