



(LEMS 8060)

DR. BULL'S JEWEL

Keyboard Music of John Bull

Kathryn Cok, harpsichord and virginal

There is much mystery and speculation surrounding the life and creative genius of John Bull. While he is considered an important member of the English Virginalist School of the late 16th, early 17th centuries with the likes of Sweelinck, Gibbons and Byrd to mention but three, his inventiveness and the virtuosity of his keyboard writing sets him apart from the rest.

Bull's biographical details are scant and clouded in mystery, largely due to a lack of documentary evidence. However, it is safe to state that his life and work touched two important eras in keyboard music: the renaissance and the baroque, and that he was active in England and on the Continent.

Born in 1563, Bull was associated with the Chapel Royal from the early age of 11. The name not only referred to a place of worship in the Royal Palace, but also to an organization of priests and singers established to serve the spiritual needs of the sovereign. Bull was eventually sworn a Gentleman of the same in 1585/6, holding the position of organist alongside his teacher William Blitheman. His first official appointment was that of organist of Hereford Cathedral in 1582. Bull was awarded degrees from Oxford and Cambridge respectively, earning the title "Dr." in 1589. He was made Reader in Music at Gresham College, London when it was founded in 1596, aided in large part by a letter of recommendation from the Queen.

His association with British royalty spanned two reigns, that of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and James I (1603-1625). Under the former, his duties included that of Gentleman and organist of the Chapel Royal, and under the latter he was music teacher to the royal children and later head of Prince Henry's household musicians.

Bull's departure from England in 1613 still sparks much speculation. If it was for reasons of religious conviction, employment, or the more well-known charge of adultery is still open for debate. After initially being employed by Archduke Albert in Brussels, followed by a period of near poverty, Bull was appointed organist of Antwerp Cathedral, a position he retained until his death in 1628.

With my choice of pieces, but a selection from Bull's vast opus for keyboard, I aim to give a representation of the rich variety of styles prevalent in his keyboard music, from his imaginative interpretation of the fixed form of the pavan and galliard to his settings of secular tunes and variation sets, and a splendid example of his take on the keyboard plainsong setting, *In Nomine*. What is quintessentially Bull is his ability to take a well-known style and transform it into something harmonically rich and technically virtuosic. He was constantly pushing the borders in what was then quite a conservative genre.

There are currently thirty known extant sources for Bull's music. Many of the works on this cd can be found in the Fitzwilliam Virginal book. This well-known compilation of composers from the English Virginalist School is the second largest source of Bull's music and opens with the monumental *Walsingham*. After viewing manuscripts contemporary with his age present in the British Library, and consulting the relevant modern editions, I in the end made a personal decision as to which versions of pieces should be included on the recording, and/or which ornaments, cadential endings and accidentals would be most appropriate for each individual work.

Aside from the esthetical appeal experienced by viewing manuscripts of Bull's music, I was particularly interested in a confirmation of fingering practice of the time. What I encountered was a consistent use of "old fingering": not the modern scale patterns with a passing under of the thumb, but an hierarchical use of the stronger fingers with a preference for paired fingerings in scale patterns. I believe following these historic fingerings does justice to the notational structure prevalent in the music, and once sufficiently mastered, helps determine the perfect tempo for each piece.

While Bull was not the official court virginalist of Elizabeth I, he was known to have written virginal music for her and performed on the organ during festivals and state receptions for royal visitors and foreign dignitaries. While the keyboard music of Bull is frequently interpreted on the organ, I have chosen to use the rich, resonant sound of the harpsichord for the more serious and densely harmonic pieces on the cd, and the crisp, light sound of the virginal for the secular settings and variation sets.

The cd opens with Bull's *Goodnight*, a work that along with *My Self* belongs to a collection of pieces representing Bull's various characters and states of mind. *My Jewel* and *The King's Hunt* are both original compositions, not based on secular melodies. The

latter, a descriptive piece with a double variation structure filled with demanding repetitive figuration. Bull was a well-known keyboard player, and it is possible that his eventual rise in recognition in this area brought a need for showpieces such as this one.

Bull was a master of the art of variation. The monumental Walsingham and the short but sweet Bonny Peg of Ramsey are both variation-grounds that were set to well-known tunes of the time. Although drastically varying in scale, they show the endless rhythmic and harmonic possibilities Bull used in his creative process. In Walsingham in particular Bull throws meter changes, syncopations and virtuosic passagework at the player while at the same time conservatively adhering to the melody.

The lack of a cantus firmus or tune on which to set a variation pattern in the fixed form found in pavans and galliards demanded another type of approach than one of rhythmical figuration. Bull ingeniously accomplished this with harmonic inventiveness and cadential patterns, creating an endless variety of texture. I have chosen three of his strongest sets. The Chromatic Pavan and Galliard, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth may have been written in memoriam, as he was known to have been present at her funeral on the 24th of March 1603 as one of the Gentlemen of the Chapel Royal. The Fantastic Pavan and Galliard is notable for its soaring harmonic development and invention, and the Quadran Pavan and Galliard for its rhythmical figuration.

Bull wrote twelve In Nomines. These liturgical plainchant settings use the antiphon Gloria tibi Trinitas as their cantus firmus. The origin of the keyboard version developed largely from the transcription of consort settings, possibly written for liturgical use when the Act of Uniformity eliminated the organ from its role during the Mass and Office in 1559. As with the other keyboard genres mentioned above, Bull made it his own, introducing melodic elaboration and rhythmical complexities that would propel the genre far beyond its origin as a function for liturgical use.

-- Kathryn Cok

THE SELECTIONS:

- 1) Bull's Goodnight 2:57 (virginal)
- 2) Chromatic Pavan (Queen Elizabeth's) 6:04 (harpsichord)
- 3) Chromatic Galliard 3:40(harpsichord)
- 4) The King's Hunt 3:28 (virginal)
- 5) Walsingham 17:34 (virginal)
- 6) Bonny Peg of Ramsey 1:27 (virginal)
- 7) Fantastic Pavan 5:37 (harpsichord)
- 8) Galliard to the Fantastic Pavan 2:12 (harpsichord)
- 9) My Self 2:20 (virginal)
- 10) In Nomine 7:22 (harpsichord)
- 11) My Jewel 7:22 (virginal)
- 12) The Quadran Pavan 2:16 (harpsichord)
- 13) Galliard to the Quadran Pavan 7:00 (harpsichord)

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Harpsichordist and fortepianist Kathryn Cok was born in the city of New York, USA. She now lives in The Hague, Holland where she completed a Masters degree at the Royal Conservatory as a student of Ton Koopman and Tini Mathot on the harpsichord, and Bart van Oort on the fortepiano.

Kathryn recently won first prize in the first solo competition for baroque instruments in Brunnenthal, Austria. She regularly works with the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra and other important early music ensembles in Europe, and performs as a soloist in many of the world's most renowned Early Music Festivals and important keyboard collections. She is co-founder of the Anglo-Dutch ensemble Het Caecilia-Concert, a dynamic international group of four instrumentalists specialising in performance and research of 17th century music for instruments and voices, and an active member of the English cornett and sackbutt ensemble Quintessential, and the Etesian ensemble, performing works for piano and winds by Mozart, Beethoven and their contemporaries. In addition to her activities as a performer, Kathryn is busy as a researcher, and was recently made a fellow of the Scaliger Institute of the University of Leiden, where she compiled a catalogue of printed music up until the year 1800, found in the University Library's collection. She is also pursuing a PhD at the University of Leiden.

INSTRUMENTS:

Two manual harpsichord: Titus Crijnen, Amsterdam, after I. Ruckers 1638

Virginal: Willem Kroesbergen, Utrecht, after Andreas Ruckers

Special thanks to Ton Koopman for the use of his virginal

Tuner: Kathryn Cok

Temperament: 1/4 comma mean-tone

CREDITS:

Recording Producer: Wouter Verschuren

Sound Engineer: Daniël van Horssen

Editing: Daniël van Horssen

Recording Date: November 2006

Recording Location: Laurentiuskerk, Mijnsheerenland, the Netherlands

Cover photo of Kathryn Cok: Marco Borggreve

Back Photo: Max Koot Studio, Den Haag

Graphic design: Nick Fritsch



The Lyrichord Early Music Series

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station

New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291

email: nick@lyrichord.com Web: www.lyrichord.com

© and (P) Lyrichord Discs Inc. These texts (including images) are published under copyright by Lyrichord Discs Inc. All rights are reserved.
The texts, and the music associated, with them, may only be republished, duplicated or sold, with written permission from Lyrichord Discs Inc.