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Music for Donne*

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It had been my intention, in the early stages of thinking about this paper, to begin by focusing on some of the 17th-century settings of texts by Donne and then to turn, towards the end, briefly, to some remarks about latter-day approaches, specifically, those of Benjamin Britten. Indeed, the comments on the music will follow that arrangement, but will be prefaced by some observations I had not originally intended to include—a deflection of a rather practical kind which has to do with the whole business of getting at the material in the first place.

Much of my work, as some may know, over the last twenty-five or so years, has indeed had to do with getting at material in the area of literary-musical bibliography, and at the annual meeting of the International Association of Music Libraries in 1994 in Ottawa I delivered a paper entitled "The Researcher's Problem: Routes and Rewards" which outlined briefly some of the headaches which scholars in my area might encounter in piecing together the rich tapestry of text and text-inspired music, offering such comments and potential solutions to the problems as I thought were temperate and practical. The situation which generated the production of catalogues of music associated with British literature from the Romantics forward and, more recently, Shakespeare, was simply that apart from a few sources—all incomplete—the information was in bits—in the hands of composers and publishers, in reviews and journal articles, in scores, and so on. Existing library catalogues did not take care of the difficulty. Access to scores could be gained, usually, through composers' names, not writers' names; there was no comprehensive outline of who had written music inspired by whom. Brief lists offered partial pictures—

useful up to a point, but both tantalising and, for me at least, irritating. Now I have to say that several of the questions in response to my Ottawa paper seemed defensive, offering the view that access points were now much improved and that the difficulties I identified had been largely surmounted. I fear that such optimism may have been rather unfounded, however well-intentioned. Jeremiah is back! The fact is that in looking at the situation involving music for Donne I was reminded of a statement attributed to Yogi Berra: "It was déjà vu, all over again." For example: *Grove 5* contains a brief note—nearly all of the settings (13 composers) listed were written in the 20th-century—and *Grove 6*, unfortunately, provides no list at all. Helen Gardner's Appendix B (in her edition of Donne) offers a useful though brief survey of extant 17th-century material. Desiree de Charms and Paul F. Breed in *Songs in Collections: An index* list only one piece, Ferrabosco's "So, so leave off...," and Noni Espina in *Repertoire for the Solo Voice* lists pieces by 7 composers, but only three from the 17th-century; of those three, one entry concerns Dowland's "Sweet, Stay A While" (attributed to Donne and printed by Gardner under Dubia, with the title "Stay, O sweet, and do not rise"). Even the British Library's *Catalogue of Printed Music* infrequently lists authors and librettists, and the CD-ROM version produces only five titles—all from the 1980s without indexing vocal and instrumental specifications. The Library Congress music catalogue on CDROM lists 15 items; however, OCLC Worldcat holds 133 entries with full details, yet even this list is incomplete. What is needed is another catalogue—this one running from the end of the 16th-century up to (but not including) Burns and Blake. The preparation of such a reference work would take a few years at least—time, despite extraordinary contrivance, not available before the date of this presentation.

However, something of a picture of the Donnian music has emerged, and its sketchy outlines will, I think, surprise no one. There are some 17th-century settings, some anonymous and others by Giovanni Coperario, William Corkine, Alfonso Ferrabosco, Thomas Ford, John Hilton, Pelham Humfrey, Henry Lawes, William Lawes, and John Wilson, but none of these is listed in *Grove 5*. The eighteenth

and nineteenth composers display little interest, apparently, but the twentieth century, given the renaissance of interest in Donne, has seen much more activity. Cursory preliminary searching (outside OCLC) reveals, for instance, the following: John Adams' *Harmonium* (for chorus and orchestra), a piece which includes words by Emily Dickinson as well as Donne's "I never stooped so low...;" Michael Berkeley's *At the round earth's imagined corners*; Havergal Brian's setting of "The Message;" Benjamin Britten's treatment of 9 of the Holy Sonnets; Geoffrey Burgeon's *At the round earth's imagined corners*; H. Walford Davies' *Noble Numbers* (for solo voice, chorus, cello, and orchestra, which includes a setting of Donne's "Christ's Cross"); 3 love songs by Ross Lee Finney; William Flanagan's "Send home my long strayed eyes" and "Go and catch. . ." for high voice and piano;Peter Racine Fricker's *Whispers at these Curtains*; Bernard Heiden's *Divine Poems of John Donne* (for mixed voices a capella); a choral suite and a song by Peggy Glanville Hicks; Iain Hamilton's *Nocturnal* (for 11 solo voices); Ernst Krenek's song *The Flea*, *Five Prayers* (for women's voices, setting the *Litanie* XV, XVI, XX, XXIII, and XXVII), *Holy Ghost* (for voice and 4 instruments), and *Corona* (7 sonnets for vocal duet); Hal McDonald's *Daybreak* (setting "Stay, my love...," for voice and piano); a choral song by Robin Milford; *Three Sonnets...* by Douglas Moore (for high voice and piano, setting "Batter my heart...," "Death be not proud...," and "Thou hast made me..."); music by Elizabeth Poston for a radio biography; William Presser's *A Hymn to God the Father* (for voice and piano); a motet by Edmund Rubbra; a choral suite by K. Salomon; Hale Smith's *Two Love Songs* (for piano and nine instruments); *Kavita II* (for soprano, suspended cymbal, flute, and piano) by Naresh Sohal; 3 songs by Bernard Stevens; Louise Talma's choral work (for mixed voices, SATB, a capella) *Holy Sonnets* (7 texts); Virgil Thomson's *Consider Lord* (for voice and piano, setting "Since I am coming to that holy room"); Arthur Wills' *Nativity*; and 4 songs—Holy Sonnets—by William Wordsworth. This list only reflects printed material, available from publishers and from libraries, and it contains a number of particularly distinguished names; in fact, this is the easily detectable top of a rather intriguing corpus. Signifi-

cantly, even this group suggests a musical response to Donne across the century, in a variety of styles, and absent from it is any major representation of work from non-English-speaking countries (Krenek is a particular exception). I am struck, indeed, by the absences as well as by the inclusions. Once again, there is much useful work to be done, especially given that composers often offer singular and thoughtful responses to texts before them, interpretations which can provoke stimulus to literary commentary.

Let me now come to some comments about the early settings. Here the situation has been helped remarkably by the work of John Cutts, Jean Jacquot, André Souris, Vincent Duckles, and Frederick Sternfeld, and for those wishing to pursue an interest in the area, perhaps the best starting points are Gardner's Appendix B (mentioned earlier) and André Souris' *Poèmes de Donne*[,] *Herbert*[,] *et Crashaw*, drawing on research by John Cutts, with an introduction by Jean Jacquot, and published in Paris by CNRS in 1961. Jacquot's introduction is useful, sensible, and nicely documented, and he also provides critical notes to each song, noting H.J.C. Grierson's page numbers, manuscript and, as applicable, printed sources for the music, and textual variants. André Souris is responsible for careful transcriptions and realisations of the single-line bass parts, providing lute tablature as well as keyboard parts."..dans l'esprit des Elisabéthains [*sic*—I might add Jacobeans], des pieces pour chant et basse seule, ce qui a permis de conférer un unité à ce cycle, où l'ordre des chansons a été choisi également pour des raisons d'esthétique musicale et poétique" (Jacquot, xiii). Here is a group of songs, ready for a recital. As an interesting touch, the volume includes, for each song, both the transcriptions of the original melody and bass as well as the realised versions, so one can see at least the adjusted basis (see Souris' note on the realisations) from which Souris worked. The songs included are: I. "Song"—"Dearest love I do not goe..." (Anonymous, and quite possibly not the music which Donne had in mind when he wrote the poem); I.a. the same, with the melody ornamented, probably later, perhaps even by some decades, I should think, given the character of the gracing—BL Add. MS 10337 contains post-1650 copies, mostly from Elizabeth Rogers'

Virginal Book; II. "Song"—"Go and catch..." (Anonymous); III. "The Message"—"Send home my long strayde eies to me..." (Coperario, a.k.a. John Cooper, who thought, after his sojourn in Italy, that the Italianate form would have more commercial value in England); IV. "The Expiration"—"So, so, break off this last lamenting kisse" (Ferrabosco, published in *First Book of Ayres*, 1609); V. "The Expiration"—"So, so break off..." (Anonymous); VI. Crashaw's "Love now noe fire" (Wilson, based on Cavalier Marin's "Foco d'Amore diviso," *La Lira, Parte Seconda*, published in Venice in 1615); VII. "Break of Day"— "'Tis true, 'tis day, what though it be?" (Corkine, *Second Booke of Ayres*, 1612); VIII. "A hymne to God the Father"—"Wilt thou forgive that sin..." (Hilton); IX. Herbert's "Peace muttering thoughts, and do not grudge to keepe" (Wilson); and X. Crashaw's "Lord when the sense of thy sweet grace" (Anonymous).

The music—and let me concentrate only on the settings of texts by Donne—is, on the whole, of remarkable quality and very much of its time. These are all solo pieces though, yet some, for example, the Coperario work, do not display the tunefulness of the ayre that is usually associated with, say, Ford, Hume, or Rosseter, perhaps a reflection of the difficulty of treating sometimes complex material and/or intellectual/emotional patterns. Hopkins offers the same dilemma for the modern composer, and it is well to remember that Donne wrote some of his poems, as Gardner suggests (p.238), with specific melodies in mind (about which speculation will prove diverting and possibly even fruitful) and was clearly sensitive to music as well as to verbal harmonies and rhythmic patterns, clusters, and variations; like Hopkins, Donne had a superb ear—I.A. Richard's observation that Hopkins wrote more for the ear than the eye comes to mind—and Hopkins was also a musician of no mean capacity. Equally, though there is evidence of rhetorical conventions—both Gardner and Duckles find Coperario's "The Message"—"Go and catch..." "over-rhetorical" (Gardner, App. B. p.240)—there is generally less evidence of the principles of the *Seconda Pratica*, particularly word-painting (e.g., *anabasis*, *catabasis*, *hypotyposis*, etc.) than one might expect, given the prevalence of Italian influence and the difficulty of musical-linear treatment of some

of Donne's lines. Put another way, if straight-on phrasing, even using tripla variation, is not always an option (and it is not in Donne's more mannerist work, especially), the more rhetorical response appears not to have been adopted either, in some cases, at least. Coperario, though, caught the bug. While others were less affected (forgive the pun), they usually have displayed the good sense to listen to Donne's metrics rather than to confound them with distracting and potentially destructive divergencies.

Souris' collection at least provides variety. The first two anonymous songs—I. and I.a.— which set "Dearest love..." are identical except for the ornamentation of the variant. The first is totally syllabic, in phrasing, melodic structure, and harmonic implication very much in the style of the lute song or ayre which marked the period from 1595 to 1615, though the potential shift from the major to minor dominant in m.3 and from major to minor tonic in mm.9-10 (see Ex. 1) tends to set it earlier rather than later. (Even so, both Humphrey and Purcell were to use such shifts late in the century.) The style is English rather than notably Italianate. As noted above, the ornamentation in I.a.— in this case, virtuosic melisma rather than *hypotyposis* (except for "fained" in mm.16 and "Death" in m.17)—is reflective of conscious artfulness (see Ex. 2). The repetition of each half could suggest that one cannot have too much of a good thing; however, convention would suggest that the first statement of each section might not have been performed the same way, the first being less decorated than the restatement. The anonymous "Go and catch" (II.) is also a typical ayre; syllabic and tuneful, it reflects more charm than the cynicism of the text suggests, though it catches nicely in the 2/4 of m.8 the accentuation of each of the last lines in the three stanzas, creating emphasis and allowing a stress on the last syllable (see Ex. 3). It has companion pieces from distinguished hands, Ford, Hume and Campion among them, but may come from as late as c. 1635. (BL Egerton MS 2013 contains mostly anonymous mid- century songs; the MS apparently comes from the 1660s.)

Coperario's setting of "The Message"—"Go and catch..." (III.)— offers a rather different approach. The rhetorical technique is obvious

in the opening bars—*auxesis* in m.1 and *epizeuxis/ecphonesis* in m.3 (see Ex. 4)—and the manner throughout (potentially *prosopopoeia* writ large) is more reflective of recitative than of a structured song-like form, both in melody and vertical patterns. Here the text clearly holds sway, both in terms of accent and points for decoration: the melisma of "good" in the 3/2 m.10 is a happy example (see Ex. 5). Yet the overall effect—and here I am on the side of Duckles and Gardner—is that the piece is less convincing musically than it might have been. (That is, of course, not to discount Coperario's importance—his work is, even in moments like this, interesting and revealing, and he was certainly in the fashionable swim as teacher of Jacobean offspring and, indeed, of both Henry and William Lawes.) Ferrabosco's "The Expiration"—"So, so, break off" (IV.)—also displays both a recitative-like manner and rhetorical touches (e.g., *pathopoeia* in m.2 ["lamenting"] and *hypotyposis* in m.7 ["turn"]) (see Ex. 6), but the effect on the whole is more song-like in this almost exclusively syllabic setting; the last four measures constitute an identical refrain, for both textual and musical emphasis. The anonymous setting of "The Expiration" offers a nice contrast; it also has rhetorical hallmarks, and while it does not decorate the two uses of "turn" individually, the whole statement of "turn thou ghost that way, and let me turn this," with its contrasting *catabasis* and *anabasis*, is a clever and successful touch; notable also is the identical treatment (in both rhythm and pitch—as in *palillogia* of "lamenting" (m.2) and "as saying" (m.10), as is the suggestion of *aposiopesis* with the *epizeuxis* of "So, so" in m.1 (see Ex. 7). Corkine's "Break of Day"—"'Tis true, 'tis day" (VII.) is again more song-like in character in its lively, segmental declamation; Corkine catches perfectly the spirit of the text, employing obvious decoration for "rise" (*anabasis*) (mm.4-6) and "down" (*catabasis*), medial repetition (*epigeuxis*) for "What will you rise" (mm.5-6) (see Ex. 8) and a final refrain ("In spight of lights should keep us together"), though in this case the repetition is textual rather than melodic or harmonic.

John Hilton's "A Hymne to God the Father"—"Wilt Thou Forgive That Sin" (VIII.)— brings one back to a syllabic, plain tune, punctuated in the manner of a sung hymn except for the last two lines.

Metrical accent is carefully preserved; the harmonies suggested by melody and bars are basic—I, V, III, VI—and there are none of the unprepared shifts that one might expect early in the century. If there is adornment, it will normally appear in the accompaniment (Souris' realisation suggests this), although the melody as written does not deny opportunity for judicious gracing; however, one needs to note that Hilton specifically avoids decorating/enhancing "runne" and its re-statement in the score (though not in the text as Souris gives it), perhaps because, in this strophic piece (like others), the device would work only for the first verse and not the second or third. This could well have been written before Donne's death—Hilton, born in 1599, became organist at St. Margaret's, Westminster in 1628, two years after receiving his B.Mus. (Cantab.)—and there is plenty of evidence here of a secure, controlled style, the harmonic progressions and structure placing the piece (BL Egerton MS 2013 is undated—it is probably a post-1660 MS), in my view, in the mid-1620s at the earliest. As to the contention that this is the setting to which Walton alludes there must really be some doubt. Ian Spink (p.69) rather favours the possibility as does Jacquot (p.xiii); Gardner (p.246) offers no opinion either way. Walton's passage is striking; if this is not the hymn tune in question, where is the other one? Burnt in the destruction of Donne's St. Paul's, perhaps?

> I have the rather mentioned this *Hymn, for* that he caused it to be set to a most grave and solemn tune, and to be often sung to the *Organ* by the *Choristers* of *St. Pauls* Church, in his own hearing [suggesting a piece for more than unison voices?]; especially at the Evening Service, and at his return from his Customary Devotions in that place, did occasionally say to a friend...*O' the* power of *Church-musick*! *that Harmony added to this Hymn has raised the Affections of my heart, and quickened my graces of zeal and gratitude*; and I observe, *that I always return from paying this public duty of* Prayer *and* Praise *to God, with an unexpressible tranquility of mind*, and a willingness *to leave the* world. (Walton, p.205).

A setting which might well have moved Donne in such a way, had he been alive to hear it, comes from a later hand—that of Pelham Humfrey, who was despatched to the Continent by Charles II in 1664 to learn the latest in musical fashions (from Carissimi, et al.) and returned (Pepys says as an "absolute Monsieur") to join the Chapel Royal, taking over in 1672 from old Henry (Captain) Cooke as Master of the Children; it was under Humfrey's tutelage that Henry Purcell found himself for a year or so until his voice broke and he left the Chapel in 1673 (or as late as 1674, when Humfrey died). This piece is also available in a modern edition by Walter Bergmann and Michael Tippett and is therefore readily accessible, with the kind of impeccable realisation for which that duo is renowned (apart from other reasons and individual talents) in the Purcellian world as well; it was first published in 1688 in the first volume of Henry Playford's *Harmonia Sacra: or Divine Hymns and Dialogues with a Through-bass for the Theorbo-Lute, Bass-Violin, Harpsichord, or Organ.* (Playford's first volume was followed by a second in 1693; *Harmonia Sacra* became widely known and well used, and both books appeared in a third edition in 1714—this is a case of music carrying text to a wide audience.) Though there are melodic and rhythmic correspondences between the three verses—the match between the opening (m.1 and the first part of m.2) and the beginning of the second verse is a good example of *synonymia*—this is clearly through-composed, the melody and the bars varying at most points—in sensitive response to the text. Wilfred Mellers, whose adjective for Humfrey's treatment is "great" (p.117), devotes an entire (though relatively short) chapter to an analysis of the text and music in *Harmonious Meeting* (pp.118-123), and it is not my intention to duplicate his insightful comments here. However, I would note a potential contradiction in his observation that Humfrey ."..treats the poem strophically....Each stanza follows the same pattern; but none is identical" (p.120). I would argue that Mellers seems to be hedging his bets and that this, by reason of the variations between stanzas, which he admits, is not a strophic setting; further, the statement that "We see and hear Donne - Humphrey [*sic*] praying to his God, as the King in *Hamlet* struggles to pray, on the stage, for

forgiveness" (p.121) is true enough except for the motivational implications of the analogy: I, for one, am unaware that either Donne or Humfrey indulged in fratricidal instincts. The piece is full of subtle touches; the text does not lead itself to egregious word-painting (a point which Hilton obviously recognised); nevertheless, the repetition of "run" (m.7) is gently reflected as is the portrayal of "Wallowed in a score?" (mm.19-20) (see Ex. 9); note, as well, the tied quarter notes of "still." More obviously, the diminished fourth drop of "that sin" (mm.1-2) (see Ex. 10) becomes a harmonic motif for the entire piece also marking "not" (m.10), "Sin" (m.13), "not" (m.21), and "fear no" (m.34). Even the harmonies suggested by the bass and treble lines are reflective; the sudden shift after the tonic major tonality of m.24 (at the beginning of the third verse—"I have a sin of") to the original minor on "fear" in m.25 (see Ex. 11), and the dramatic (Mellers says "operatic" [p.122]) diminished seventh plunge on "done that" (mm.32-33) (see Ex. 12) are marks of a highly original and much more vigorous approach than Hilton's more conventional and unvaried statement from stanza to stanza. Mellers, in my view, becomes a trifle too inclusive when he remarks (pp.122-123):

> *We* [my italics] sense the defiant toss of the head, almost the clenched fist, on the final 'that' and on the second 'done'; and the last statement of the refrain-line 'I fear no more' is set to the same descending diminished fourth that, in the first line of the song, disturbs [*sic*] the ostensibly liturgical intonation with the burden of sin. [I had rather thought that not all of the liturgy was free of that.] The music of the last stanza perhaps fits the defiant better than the simply triumphant interpretation of the poem: as one might expect, since Humphrey [*sic*] is further removed than Donne from Christian mysticism. But the Christian meaning is by no means obliterated; and the music's tragic grandeur is inseparable from its wide range of emotional effects. (p.123)

In the first place, Mellers does not say how far Donne is from the mystical path; in the second place, Christian meaning is not dependent on, although it may be connected with, the mystic way; in the third place,

of course, "tragic grandeur" is "inseparable" from "its wide range of emotional effects" since such "grandeur" is one of the "effects."

It may well have been from Humfrey that Purcell gained at least something of a sense of deftness in text-setting which was to mark virtually all of the younger man's vocal pieces. By the latter part of the century rhetorical devices were still apparent—word painting (e.g., *anabasis* and *catabasis*) particularly—but was more a matter of conventional technique, of habit, I suggest, than conscious theoretical deployment.

While this set of comments is not a comprehensive survey of all the 17th-century scores involving Donne's words, it looks, really, at pieces which are available to a modern audience in relatively recent editions. Also, instructive is a study of the range of works from the 20th-century, an era which has seen the Donnian renaissance marked in musical quarters. There is not the space for that here, so let me offer only a few comments. As I have pointed out, the text-setting has taken place across the century; the pieces are marked by very different styles and sensitivities, and the judgment, in the end, as to effectiveness or rightness, will now be, in many cases, more a matter of taste than critical acumen. Given another hundred years, the latter may prevail. And of such settings few—from Havergal Brian to Robin Milford and beyond—have attracted such attention as those of Benjamin Britten, written for tenor Peter Pears by one of the most textually acute composers and brilliant accompanists of our time. Britten's treatments of nine of the Holy Sonnets have many singers and audiences in thrall, but it is well to remember that these are art-songs written for a gifted singer; they are not meant to be sung by those with average vocal skills. (Paul Gaston's "Britten's Donne and the Promise of Twentieth-Century Settings," in *The Eagle and the Dove*, pp. 201-213, contains some useful observations.) Britten's attention to vocal accent is impeccable and the tonal drama is stunning: here he is reminiscent of Purcell, whose work he so much admired. From the first driving octaves in the piano and the descent across a diminished ninth (mm.2-3) of the vocal line—"Oh my blacke Soule!"—one is potentially mesmerised by the angularity, the tension, the dissonance, the earnest

attempt by Britten to capture the mannerist presentation of the anguish of Donne's meditative torment (see Ex. 13). And dissonance can have a rhetorical effect as the songs go on. Yet the result for me, at least, is often more Brittensque than Donnian, more technical than textual. It is as if, in a way, the rhetorical *devices* which earlier composers sought to master had risen against one of their controllers; there is a potential for wonder at the artfulness rather than the art. The clues for me lie in the insistent tripla of the accompaniment of the second of the set, "Batter my heart" (God knocks in threes), against which the vocal line often moves in cross-rhythmic dislocation, in the astonishing *anabasis* of the opening of "What if this present were the world's last night?" and its tormenting melisma on "crucified" (mm.9-10) (see Ex. 14) or the ripple of "scatter'd" (m.5) in "At the round earth's imagined corners" (see Ex. 15). In some cases—perhaps "Since she whom I loved" and the meditational yet forceful "Death, be not proud"—Britten moves away from suggesting such an obvious sense of contrivance: in a way, those songs are moments of repose. *New* and *striking* and *different* do not mean *better*.

Setting Donne is not an easy task: the truth is, I suggest, that *great* poetry will always dominate, and an attempt at latter-day mastery, even at technical display, will end in both music and text losing a little—or more. Yet one's reactions as to why a setting works—or doesn't—will always be instructive, in both directions, that is in terms of the text and of the music, and will force one back to the text itself; hence efforts to come to terms with the widest range of musical reactions—including those of Britten and other modern composers—need to be encouraged. In the end, the best music for Donne will have understood and absorbed Donne's own music, not only of his medium but, through that, of his being.

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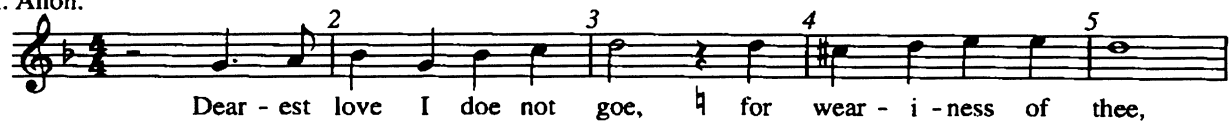
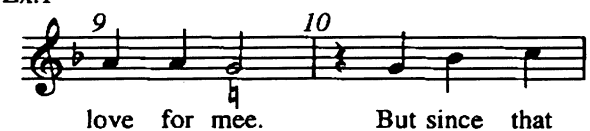
A. See Souris, André, ed. Poèmes de Donne, Herbert et Crashaw. Intro. Jean Jacquot. Paris: CNRS, 1961. (Examples by permission.) See also Gardner, App. B.

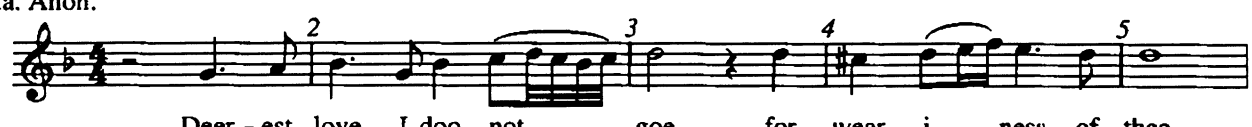
I. Anon.



Ex.1



Ia. Anon.



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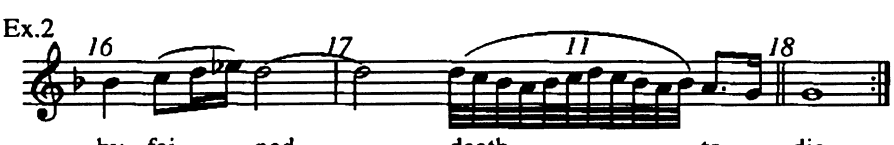
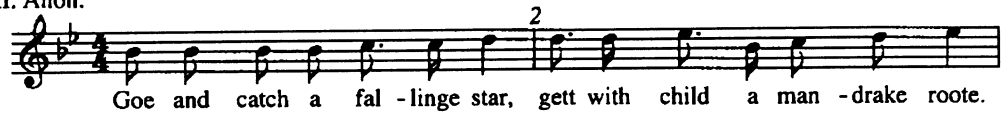


II. Anon.



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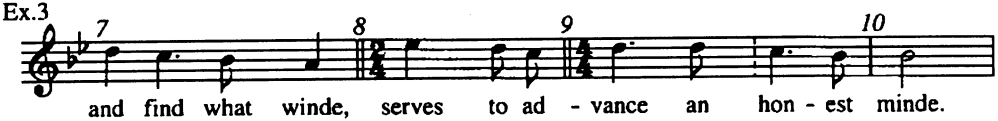
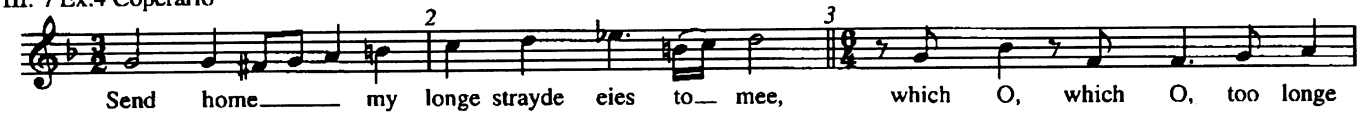
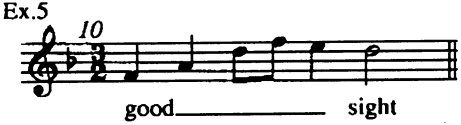


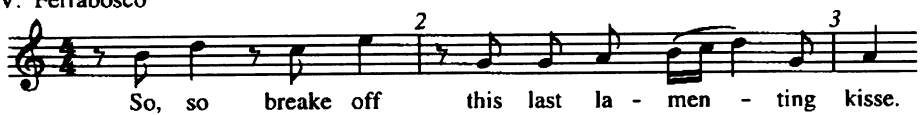
III. / Ex.4 Coperario



Ex.5



IV. Ferrabosco



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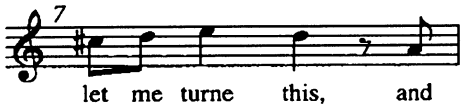
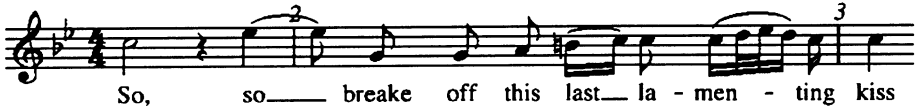


V. Anon.



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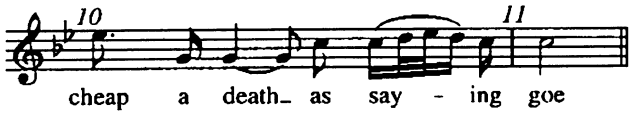
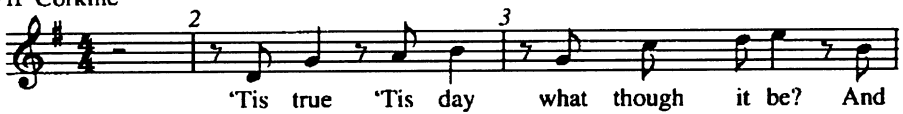


VII Corkine



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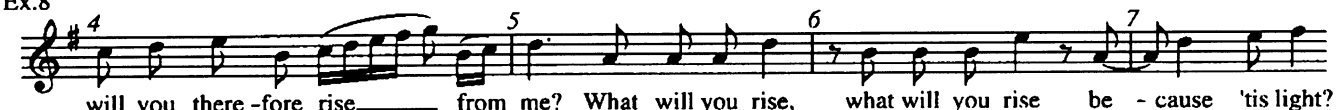
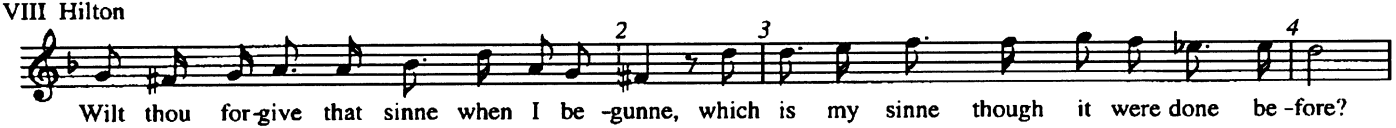
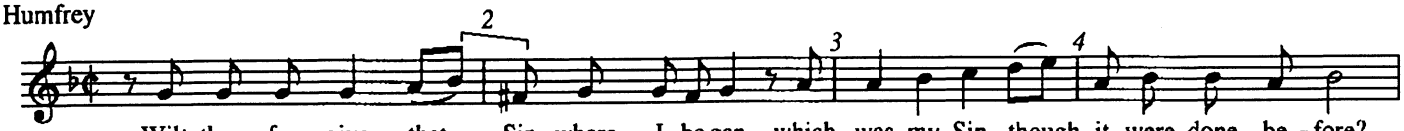


VIII Hilton

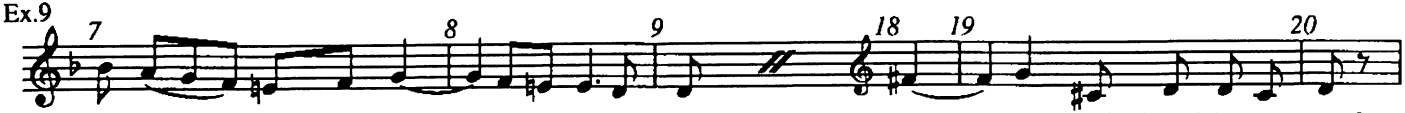


B See Playford, Henry. ed. Harmonia Sacra. London, 1688; 2d edn. 1714.

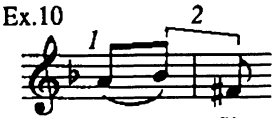
Humfrey



Ex.9



Ex.10



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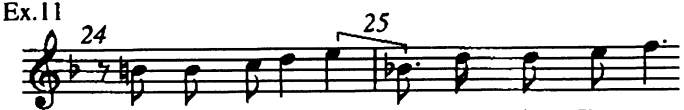
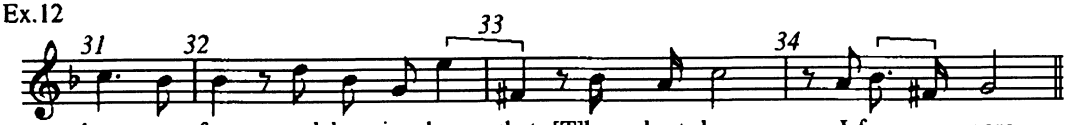
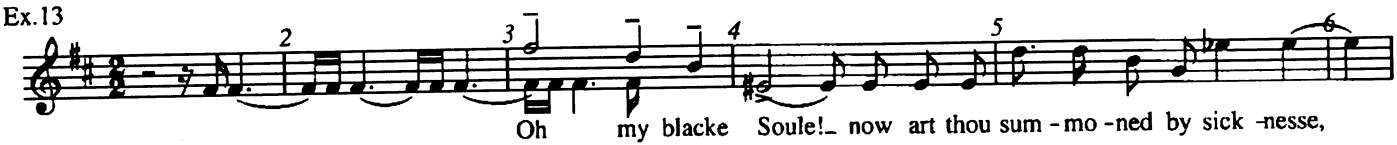


Ex.12

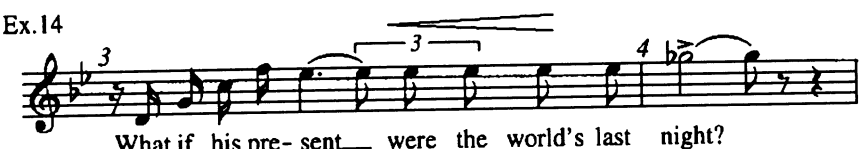


C See Britten, Benjamin. The Holy Sonnets of John Donne. London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1946. (Examples by permission.)

Ex.13



Ex.14



Ex.15