

JOHN CUNNINGHAM, *THE CONSORT MUSIC OF WILLIAM LAWES 1602–1645* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010). ISBN 978-0-9546-8097-8, xxiv+350pp, £55.

Among English composers of the seventeenth century, William Lawes is second only to Henry Purcell in the scholarly interest generated by his music. While we are increasingly well served by authoritative editions of a wide range of instrumental music in particular, when it comes to dedicated book-length studies of the composers and their music only perhaps Orlando Gibbons and John Jenkins come close to matching Lawes's total of three monographs (including the present book) and one important collection of essays, alongside near-complete coverage of his instrumental works in reliable modern editions.<sup>1</sup> Thus a composer of the stature of John Blow is covered only by articles (many of them now conspicuously out of date in their deference to Burney's famously acerbic dismissal of Blow) and a smattering of editions, while the situation is only slightly better for such a notable figure as Alfonso Ferrabosco II; both John Coprario and Matthew Locke merit (now aged) thematic catalogues alone, while similarly Peter Dennison's short study of Pelham Humfrey is nearly thirty years old. When one moves beyond these exalted figures the situation is considerably worse, with very little dedicated attention afforded John Hingeston or Christopher Simpson, for example.

All this is not to underestimate the gap filled by Cunningham's most recent addition to the Lawes bibliography. Prior to its appearance no-one had taken a complete overview of Lawes's instrumental music since Murray Lefkowitz's classic life-and-works study, published fifty years earlier. While David Pinto has greatly enriched our understanding of the Royal Consort in particular, recent studies have concentrated on Lawes's viol consort music to the detriment of the much more numerous pieces for various 'broken' consort figurations and music for lyra viols, resulting in an unbalanced picture of the composer's output that was only compounded by the increasingly urgent need for a re-evaluation of the sources according to modern codicological standards. With this in mind, Cunningham aims to take a broad view of all of Lawes's consort music, updating and taking stock of what is known about the sources and adding to this consideration of their function and the corresponding implications for our knowledge of Lawes's compositional process. The result is a thorough and highly authoritative account, which will no doubt long remain essential reading for anyone interested not only in Lawes but also in his close contemporaries (including

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<sup>1</sup> Murray Lefkowitz, *William Lawes* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960); David Pinto, *For ye Violls: The Consort and Dance Music of William Lawes* (London: Fretwork, 1995); Andrew Ashbee (ed.), *William Lawes (1602–1645): Essays on his Life, Times and Work* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998). For a basic list of editions see Pinto, 'Lawes, William', in *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed 18 April 2012).

most obviously Jenkins, Coprario and Charles Coleman), in seventeenth-century English music theory and its practical applications, and in mechanisms of court patronage and employment, whether relating to music or more generally.

Cunningham organizes his material by genre, treating each of the kinds of consort music to which Lawes contributed in six separate chapters. Each deals primarily with the relevant sources, the relationship of Lawes's music both to the wider genre and to specific music by other composers, and the implications of his findings for our understanding of the social practices surrounding musical composition, dissemination and performance in Lawes's lifetime and beyond. These specific studies build upon what are arguably Cunningham's most important contributions from the broader perspective of the seventeenth century as a whole: a chapter detailing the organization of the Private Music at the Caroline court and another documenting the surviving autograph sources of Lawes's music.

The first of these fills a conspicuous gap in the published history of seventeenth-century English music, providing a useful counterpart to Peter Holman's indispensable *Four and Twenty Fiddlers*, which dealt at length with the highly public functions of the royal violin band, by concentrating on the activities of the ensemble known as the 'Lutes, Viols and Voices' (LVV).<sup>2</sup> This group appears to have grown out of an earlier ensemble referred to as 'Cooperario's Musique' which had existed in the early 1620s at the court of Prince Charles. It was given a formal institutional footing after Charles I's accession with the granting of letters patent in July 1626, and remained in existence until the removal of Charles's court to Oxford in 1642. During this time its members, which numbered up to 29 at any one time, were charged with the provision of vocal and instrumental music for the entertainment of the King and his most distinguished guests in the most restricted areas of the court, including the Privy Chamber; they also provided vocal music for court masques in a more public setting. Cunningham greatly amplifies Andrew Ashbee's earlier study of the ensemble,<sup>3</sup> providing a comprehensive introduction to the origins of the LVV, its membership and duties, and the music it may have performed. Frequent insights into the social functioning of the court (and in particular the otherwise unusually high status, for a mere musician, achievable by virtue of membership of the ensemble) make this a valuable indepen-

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Holman, *Four and Twenty Fiddlers: The Violin at the English Court, 1540–1690* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Ashbee, 'William Lawes and the "Lutes, Viols and Voices"', in Ashbee (ed.), *William Lawes*, 1–10.

dent study of courtly musical patronage as well as providing essential context for the consideration of Lawes's music in later chapters.

Cunningham's second chapter, at 68 pages easily the longest in the book, sets out to provide an overview of the surviving autograph sources of Lawes's music together with the first detailed study of his handwriting, drawing on recent work on Henry Purcell in particular to propose that important information about source function and creative process has been overlooked in previous studies. In particular, Cunningham argues that earlier approaches to the chronology of the sources through handwriting characteristics were undermined by lack of attention to the differences between Lawes's hand according to function: whether he was composing in rough draft, in a more formal copying hand, or even for the purposes of presentation to a given patron. Given these complications, Cunningham resorts to close analysis of the composer's signature in an attempt to provide alternative chronological evidence. This is a strategy that has been criticized by Pinto in an earlier review, and it is true that there are potential dangers in attaching too much weight to this kind of evidence.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to understand this aspect of Cunningham's argument in the context of his broader insistence on the current insolubility of the problem of chronology among the extant sources: 'we have too few of Lawes's autographs, from too restricted a chronological range, to make definite conclusions about them' (89). The evidence from Lawes's signature is an attempt to rescue some of the sense of coherence that Cunningham's earlier observations concerning source function dismantle; he wields this tool with appropriate caution, and the result is a small number of specific points which, together with further information about source function and Lawes's biography and relationships with patrons, permit him to make a number of tentative revisions to existing accounts of the chronology of the sources.

Principal among these are the restriction of the copying in the Shirley Partbooks (*GB-Lbl* Add. MSS 40657–61) to before early 1633, the assignment of the lyra viol part-book *US-CAh* MS Mus. 70 to the period c1630–33, and the pinpointing of *GB-Ob* MSS Mus. Sch. B.2 and B.3, previously both assigned somewhat vaguely to the last decade of Lawes's life, as compositional scorebooks used more or less successively in the periods c1633–39 (B.2) and c1638/9–40 (B.3). Such suggestions appear to me to be cogently argued and internally convincing, to the extent that the heated opposition they provoke from Pinto seems somewhat surprising: for all that Pinto is one of very

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<sup>4</sup> David Pinto, review of Cunningham, *The Consort Music of William Lawes, 1602–1645*, in *The Viola da Gamba Society Journal*, 4 (2010), 127–51; <http://www.vdgs.org.uk/files/VdGSJournal/Vol-04.pdf> (accessed 18 April 2012).

few scholars with a knowledge of the sources in question to rival Cunningham's own, the differences between the two may well seem comparatively insignificant to many who will approach Lawes's music from a less specialist perspective. This is not the place for a defence of Cunningham's conclusions; nevertheless, I draw attention to Pinto's review since at least one of his criticisms seems to me to result not from methodological weakness, as Pinto argues, but from a regrettable ambiguity in Cunningham's use of the word 'presentation' to which readers might usefully be alerted. This word may refer either to the function of a source—a 'presentation volume' being one prepared to be given to someone else—or to its general appearance, with the two terms often appearing in close proximity. Even given the careful use of quotation marks to distinguish the two, terms such as 'Lawes's "informal" presentation style' (88) do require vigilance on the part of the reader. Despite Pinto's apparent determination to read such phrases as oxymoronic, however, this linguistic infelicity is no reason to dismiss the whole of Cunningham's otherwise convincing and helpful source typology as 'too vague at root to be heuristically rewarding'.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps, though, he may have been well served in this respect by a more interventionist copyeditor.

The later chapters build on the achievements of these two parallel studies in the context of their respective genres, with much useful insight into the workings of the music and its relationship to contemporary repertoire by other composers. It is probably in his emphasis on the importance of division technique in the *lyra consorts*, the two bass viol duets and the *Royal Consort* that Cunningham has most to offer in terms of a fresh appraisal of Lawes's music; in the organization of the book and the constant reference to such techniques as the corollary of increasingly public and listener-oriented performance situations, one is constantly brought back to the notion of division technique being at the heart of Lawes's compositional approach. This is something that would be interesting to explore more widely in the viol consort music: Pinto, for example, draws attention to the origins of one particularly angular fugal subject in compound melody outlined through division-like techniques,<sup>6</sup> and this kind of observation might be made equally elsewhere. It would also be possible to extend it to situations such as the opening of the *G-minor fantasia suite* for two violins in which the imitative opening is constructed from a long descant-derived expansion of a single tonic harmony; similarly, the frequent pedal effects exploited by Lawes towards the end of dance movements make good use of such derived techniques, even if in the

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<sup>5</sup> As note 4, 133.

<sup>6</sup> Pinto, *For ye Violls*, 83.

absence of the showy virtuosity that it is designed to achieve in the Harp Consort and bass viol duos.

Cunningham has provided an indispensable first port of call for all studies of Lawes's instrumental music and of music in the early Stuart Privy Chamber in general, which far surpasses its predecessors in breadth of coverage as well as usefully updating information about sources and early performance circumstances. The book is handsome in appearance, and the very few typographical slips and awkward turns of phrase are more than made up for by the abundance of illustrations—more than eighty figures and music examples. Given the secure foundations laid here in detailed source study and archival research, we can hope that Cunningham and others will take up his many hints for more detailed discussion of what makes Lawes's music so remarkable, so immediately recognizable and so powerfully expressive; an up-to-date study of the composer's vocal music is now also sorely needed.

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