

## Foreword to **A Bouquet of Elizabethan Ballad Settings**, edited by Clive Titmuss

The lutenist who studies the Elizabethan repertoire for the lute is bound to notice that many pieces have passages which seem not to fit the instrument very well. The best printed sources, *Varietie of Lute Lessons*, for example, are excellent in their clear editing, exploitation of the instrument, in their ergonomics and musical values. But many of the manuscript sources, the bulk of the literature, are rife with orthographic barriers, text errors, unidiomatic writing, confused rhythms, poor layout and other editorial obstructions. Because of these ubiquitous impediments, studying the works of Johnson, Batcheler, Dowland, Cutting and others can be a very frustrating activity. Modern reliance on facsimiles and the resulting lack of modern editorial technique renders the sources hard to read.

Modern editions creditably solve many problems of editing but often do not venture far from simply correcting obvious errors in the sources, rarely suggesting changes which make the pieces truly playable. Editors who publish tablatures either in facsimile or edited versions naturally wish to present the music in an accurate image without any intent to make the performer any more comfortable.

I offer this collection of ballad tune settings partly as a model for those who may feel justifiable fear in altering the sources radically in order to create a performable version of some of the best Elizabethan lute music. The process of generating better performing editions might be compared to cleaning and restoring paintings. The addition of fingering, though an individual matter, greatly improves the music's readability. The idea of practical editions is well entrenched in the literature of other early instruments, but seems not to have found much favour among players and scholars of the lute.

These four pieces present a series of variations to ballad tunes and represent a variety of approaches taken by the composers to the form. The writing of variations to previously existing material not related to dance forms (such as the *Passemezzo* or *Spanish Pavan*) is observed in these four pieces to stem from keyboard models. John Dowland's variation technique is comprehensive in its presentation of the possibilities offered by the melody. Two of most inspired settings, *Loth to Depart* and *Walsingham* build on the tradition of the virginal composers, especially Byrd, Bull and Gibbons, expanding the rhetoric of the piece far beyond the conventional divisions found in many lute sources. In the former particularly, Dowland begins with more or less conventional variations, but quickly shows his mastery by ranging into Italianate early baroque oratory, straying far from the melodic germ but adhering to its intrinsic modal harmony. Many of my changes are minor, confined to altering the placement of notes in the tablature. The result is much easier to realize without fundamentally altering the work. The re-cast opening statement is more strictly observant of voice leading and improves the metrical placement of the bass and important chords.

In contrast, Dowland's *Walsingham* suffers from being transmitted in a confused and disordered source. Many of the variations present a good shape and substance but seem to have missing or poorly placed notes and are sometimes almost incoherent. The underlying piece is wonderful in its conception, but the scribe's copy greatly dims its impact. Here I occasionally performed radical surgery and re-construction.

*La Jeune Fillete*, attributed to Dowland, is probably spurious. It is in a pleasing linear style but is uncharacteristic of his work. I elected to pare the piece down to preserve its vividness and I adapted it to seven course lute from its original nine-course version so that all four pieces may be performed on one lute.

William Byrd's own setting of *The Woods so Wild*, found in the Euing Lutebook transcribed for lute can be found in two other keyboard versions: Lady Neville's Virginal Book and the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. It is a worthy effort by the scribe to translate the work into a lute piece. The piece presents a significant challenge to the lute transcriber, as the cantus-firmus keyboard style of Byrd derives from the earlier four-voiced style of Antonio Cabezon, among others. The variations put the melody into the tenor and soprano; there is an unaltered preponderance of idiomatic keyboard texture. As a lute piece the transcription fails the test of smooth execution. There is inconsistent voice leading and unnecessary doubling; the pedal bass is preserved without discrimination; in many sections the implied fingering is clumsy. That virginals specialty--playing the third above the bass--is found in several variations and this does not lend itself to clarity on the lute. I removed some of the clutter, taking advantage of the lute's efficiency in suggesting greater density with fewer notes, making the work much easier to realize in performance.

Clive Titmuss, Kelowna, January 21, 2010