

TWO NEW ENGLISH LUTE DUETS

BY LYLE NORDSTROM

Late sixteenth and early seventeenth century English lute duets have been some of the most popular of all duets for modern lutenists. The quality of the duets themselves as well as the fact that their existence has been mentioned in many articles accounts for this.¹ Recently, two more complete duets that deserve mention have been discovered.

The most important of the two is also possibly one of the earliest of the true duets. (A true duet is one in which both the parts take an equal role, as differentiated from the treble-ground duet in which one part has diminutions, and the other has the harmonic “ground.”) One of the parts is that puzzling composition found on folio 6v of the Hirsh Lute Book (British Museum Ms. M.1353). This composition has caused much comment because it commences with a bar and a half of rest. The other lute part is hidden on page 15 of the Brogyntyn Ms. 27 (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales). This piece has all the appearances of a solo composition; it was even catalogued that way by Lumsden.² Nevertheless, the two parts do fit perfectly together, including a matched two-beat irregular bar at bar 20 of both parts. The Brogyntyn manuscript lists the composer as

¹The following articles are the most helpful and probably identify nearly 80 percent of the English duets literature:

- (1) Richard Newton, “English Lute Duets,” *The Lute Society Journal*, 1959, p. 26. (An early, rather incomplete survey, but rather useful as a starting point.)
- (2) Lyle Nordstrom, “The Cambridge Consort Books,” *Journal of the Lute Society of America*, Volume 5, 1972, p. 70. (The largest list of treble-ground duets yet published.)
- (3) John Ward, “The Fourth Dublin Lute Book,” *The Lute Society Journal*, 1967, pp. 28-46. (Another good source of treble-ground duets.)
- (4) Thomas Forest Kelly, “Notes on the Jane Pickering Lute Book, with Special Emphasis on the Music for Two Lutes,” *Journal of the Lute Society of America*, Volume 1, 1968, pp. 19-23.
- (5) Robert Spencer, “The Tollemache Lute Manuscript,” *The Lute Society Journal*, 1965, pp. 38-39. (This, combined with Thomas Kelly’s above-mentioned article, gives a fairly good representation of the true duet.)

A complete list of all the English lute duets will follow in a later publication.

²David Lumsden, *The Sources of English Lute Music (1540-1620)*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1955.

“Mr. Marchant.”³ The duet starts as a fantasy but evolves into a very typical English dialogue with many short answering phrases. It is quite a lovely composition.

The second duet is one of the many anonymous pieces of the treble-ground genre. The ground is found in the Brogyntyn manuscript on page 7 (the second ground), while the treble is contained in the Sturt Lute Book (British Museum Add. 38539) on folio 6v. This ground has a very interesting harmonic structure – the second through the fourth bars are descending root position major chords.

Hopefully, the emergence of these two duets, long buried in obscurity, will enrich the repertory of lutenists who enjoy playing together.⁴

³Mr. Marchant is probably the John Marchant who was associated with the Chapel Royal in 1593. Maitland and Squire in their preface to *The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book* say that he was “a musician in the service of Lady Arabella Stuart” (Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1963, p. *x*). Besides keyboard works and solo lute works, he is associated with two other duets: “an allman for ij lutes (by) Mr Marchant” in the Tollemache manuscript, folio 11. The other half of this duet is in the Brogyntyn manuscript, page 31, but it is entitled “Eccho for 2 luts by Mr. Fra: Pilk:(ington).” The second duet is an incomplete duet found in University Ms. Dc.5.125. in Edinburgh with the inscription “A Fancy by Mr Marcant for ij lutes.” Obviously Mr. Marchant is a known composer of duets. In fact, he ranks third behind John Johnson and Thomas Robinson in the number of duets ascribed to him.

⁴These two duets are soon to be published in a *Lute Society of America* edition.