



William Byrd  
Keyboard Works

STEPHEN FARR  
organ

William Byrd (1540–1623)

## Keyboard Works

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Stephen Farr *organ*

The Taylor & Boody Organ of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge

1. <b>Voluntary [C]</b> (H11/MB26)	[9:02]
2. <b>Fantasia [a]</b> (H4/MB13)	[8:12]
3. <b>Miserere [I]</b> (MB66)	[1:07]
4. <b>Miserere [II]</b> (MB67)	[1:08]
5. <b>Fantasia [C]</b> (H8/MB25)	[6:26]
6. <b>Verse</b> (H12/MB28)	[2:06]
7. <b>Fantasia [G2]</b> (H7/MB63)	[5:48]
8. <b>Gloria tibi Trinitas</b> (MB50)	[2:09]
9. <b>Fantasia [G1]</b> (H6/MB62)	[9:26]
10. <b>Ut re mi fa sol la [G]</b> (H13/MB64)	[8:42]
11. <b>Voluntary [a/C]</b> (H10/MB27)	[3:41]
<b>O quam gloriosum est regnum</b> (EKM48)	
12. Prima pars	[4:35]
13. Secunda pars	[3:39]
Total playing time	[66:06]

H – Hunter/Barenreiter edition  
MB – Musica Britannica  
EKB – Elizabethan Keyboard Music (Musica Britannica, Vol. 55)



### William Byrd: Keyboard Works

A telling aide memoire to the profound cultural disruption that followed Henry VIII's break from Rome, the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and establishment of the Reformation in Great Britain, is — a silence. It is the silence with which the defining prayer book of the new church, *The Book of Common Prayer*, first published in 1549 under the severely Protestant monarch, Edward VI, treats what had just happened. Through each successive early edition of this epochal document, the ecclesiastical calendar was partially re-written to manage the tricky subjects of saints and martyrs. But it was not brought up to date. No Reformation events were mentioned. Alec Ryrie, historian of the Reformation, notes adroitly that 'If our only source [...] for sixteenth-century English religion were *The Book of Common Prayer*, we would not know that the English church had suffered a dramatic and violent upheaval in its structures, doctrines, and practices.' Soldiers returning from the First World War characteristically said nothing. About the traumas of the Reformation, so painstakingly laid out by modern historians including Eamon Duffy, the crucial founding document of the new church said nothing either. Such had been, and was, the awfulness.

This is, and is not, Byrd's world, the greatest English composer of his time. It is his world because Byrd retained, at least for most of his life, allegiance to the old faith (there is a lack of evidence about his early beliefs, which have been assumed Protestant). At its most fraught, Byrd's mature choral music, for example from the *Cantiones Sacrae* (1589/1591), expresses the torments of being a religious exile in one's own land. The music ruminates on harrowing notions of banishment from Jerusalem, Egypt, or Babylon, or on martyrdom. All such pieces — like the setting of a few verses by (St) Henry Walpole commemorating the violent execution of the priest Edmund Campion in 1581 — were risks. Iain Fenlon, historical musicologist, captures the mood surrounding such compositions, created, as he describes it, amid 'constant harassment, the house searches, and the distrains levelled against Byrd [which] all took their toll'. We know that Byrd was fined for recusancy (essentially, non-attendance at Church of England services) and other worries must have been constant. The divided world deftly unmentioned by *The Book of Common Prayer*, however, is not Byrd's in the sense that this extraordinary musician, as a keyboard player and composer, largely flourished in, and from, the distracted times.

Counter-intuitively, for those who remember Catholic persecution during this period as its chief feature, Byrd continued in good relations with many church authorities and, of course, with Queen Elizabeth I. She granted him a publishing monopoly though it didn't prove very successful. And he continued, more or less, in the service of (and, in turn, paid by) Protestant establishments: notably, Lincoln Cathedral, where Byrd served as Organist, 1563–72, and the Chapel Royal, where he was employed from 1572 and kept a long connection. Byrd might, records allow, have annoyed the Puritan-leaning clerics at Lincoln for over-use of the organ in worship, by the way: it was an instrument about which they were, for sure, gravely doubtful if not actively hostile. Even the sounding of an organ note, in this respect, could invoke contention; it made an ecclesiastical or denominational statement. Drawing a stop could be figuratively like drawing a sword.

Listening to Byrd, now, is to hear music that is in some ways public (and influential and celebrated). But music which also belongs to the hidden, fugitive, and endangered. His writing makes from secrecy a peculiar strength and he ponders — serious and refined writer that

he almost always is, usually untouched by the madrigal — on musical puzzles that, even in his keyboard music, are furtively alert to theological arguments. If merely drawing an organ stop could emblematically be a risk, Byrd's music itself is imaginatively informed by, and responsive to, danger.

As a keyboard player, Byrd presents us with some basic conundrums. There is the problem of what his marks of ornamentation mean, still unresolved: *le bon goût*, 'good taste', must be the best guide. But there is also the question: what instrument is he writing for? Harpsichord, clavichord, muselar virginal, organ, and chamber organ were each available and, of course, each sounds very different. Specifically, where the organ music is concerned, it is no surprise to know that a substantial seventeenth-century instrument creates a notably different effect with this sometimes richly chordal, sometimes dashing rapid writing, from a chamber one. Even this question of instruments, though, is not remote from Byrd's religious world. Recusant services needed to be at home (the Masses for Three, Four, and Five voices belong there, sung in celebrations of the sacrament *sub rosa*) while public worship was the terrain of the Church of England (in England, that is).

A piece of music that could serve in either home or beyond, like a Fantasia or a Voluntary for the organ, could have been, had Byrd been so inclined to view it, suggestive of a happy freedom unavailable to Catholics in the real world. Such music envisions implicitly an ideal culture where, it might be, not only music could pass without obstruction between home and public space but worship could too.

The most substantial pieces on this recording aptly suit instruments large or small. And the listener will hear, in pieces of modest or substantial scale, Byrd's remarkably accretive imagination. Byrd, in his most elongated works, like the **Fantasias** and the *Ut re mi fa sol la*, is a writer building structures patiently: this is music that, like the fugues of the Baroque period, depends on accumulation for its climaxes and, as it were, narrative fulfilment. Small melodic components, or small musical motifs, are brought together — Thomas Tomkins is another memorable English example of this at the keyboard — with increasing force and, as we would say, intensity. Within the terms set by the melodic component or motif, Byrd is at once rigorous in keeping that material in mind while being dazzling in his independent treatment of it. This is music slowly opening up so that the detail

becomes more and more clear while the overall effect becomes increasingly capacious and arresting. No extra-musical commentary is needed. Yet, given Byrd's context, it is hard not to think of the composer obliquely meditating, in such pieces, on that bulky religious-political question that helped define his life and much of Europe's: the relationship between, on the one hand, the given and authoritative, and, on the other, the individual mind. Does the Pope have control — and, if so, of what? Does the King? Do the priests? What of individual believers' convictions? What of believers' relationship to scripture? How does conscience relate to authority? These were some of the at-root ancient but, now in the Early Modern Christian world, newly pressing questions helping turn the continent upside down.

Take the **Ut re mi fa sol la**, a form which involves the melodic 'development', as later composers would say, of the first six notes of the major scale. It could not be simpler. Byrd's title, though it relates to the names of the notes, is also an allusion to the eighth-century Vesper hymn: 'Ut queant laxis resonare fibris [...]': Byrd writes with this Catholic origin in mind as, explicitly, he does with, say, **O quam gloriosum**. Yet he is also teasing the ear

of his listeners with something more involved about faith. He offers a sustained dialogue between inventive independence and formal architecture, finding a way of bringing both together as scintillating music, as bright as the wings of Fra' Angelico's angels. These are musical resolutions, played to the ear, of enormous theological and ecclesiastical problems. The question: 'What is the relationship between the individual and authority?', is 'answered' in a Fantasy or *Ut re mi fa sol la* with highly-wrought evidence that music knows. It is music, such writing proposes, that has a place for the permanent and unquestioned (e.g., a motif) and for individual freedom (e.g., the composer's elaboration and 'development' of those motifs). Byrd asks his listener for acute attention which is both about the musical and religious; for an ear that attends to how his art forms at the keyboard imagine authority and individuality cohering together.

Byrd is in his time and not. Another way of looking at that which has just been described is to think how the composer gestures to a less fraught time than his own by gesturing out of it. Byrd was hardly the only musician, let alone the only person, to survive the Tudor upheaval relatively well, even as its religious

fractures remain evident in the twentieth-first century still. Musically, all was not anguish. Byrd's radiantly turned keyboard writing speaks of resolutions, harmonies, and completions that are an audible alternative to the division and anger that the church and court were bitterly staging. In the end, there is something surprisingly Protestant in Byrd's readiness to find his own way through this turmoil—to be part of things while himself.

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#### **Stephen Farr (organ)**

Stephen Farr's career as a soloist and ensemble and continuo player has taken him throughout Europe, to North and South America, and to Australia. He has performed with some of the world's leading ensembles and conductors, and has appeared in venues including the Berlin Philharmonie (where he performed with the Berlin Philharmonic in the world premiere of Jonathan Harvey's *Weltethos* under Sir Simon Rattle), the Royal Festival Hall, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Symphony Hall Birmingham, Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, Notre Dame de Paris, and the Royal Albert Hall. He appears frequently at the BBC Proms: he gave a solo recital in the 2011 season, including the world premiere of Judith Bingham's *The*

*Everlasting Crown*, and made a concerto appearance with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sakari Oramo in the 2015 season. He is Director of Music at All Saints Margaret Street, and teaches organ at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. In 2017 he succeeded Patrick Russill as Chief Examiner of the Royal College of Organists.

Stephen Farr was Organ Scholar of Clare College, Cambridge, graduating with a double first in Music and an MPhil in musicology as a postgraduate student of John Butt's. He then held a number of cathedral appointments before embarking on a freelance career. In 2014 he completed a PhD on the organ works of Judith Bingham.

A prize-winner at international competition level, he has an established reputation as one of the leading recitalists of his generation, with an impressive stylistic grasp of a broad range of repertoire and a particular commitment to contemporary music. His extensive and wide-ranging discography for Resonus encompasses music from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century – recent releases include the complete organ works of Kenneth Leighton and James MacMillan, and works by J.S. Bach and Judith Bingham – and has received unanimous critical acclaim.

#### **The Taylor and Boody Organ of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge (Opus 66)**

8' Principal (co – d<sup>'''</sup>, bass common with Gedackt)  
8' Gedackt  
4' Præstant  
4' Flauta  
3' Nasat (c'- d<sup>'''</sup>)  
2' Octave  
8' Vox Virginia  
Tremulant

Compass: C, D, E – d<sup>'''</sup>, 49 notes  
Gedackt pipes of Black Cherry.  
Præstant pipes of 85% tin, hand planed.  
Other metal pipes of 28% tin, hammered.  
Soundboard of solid Yellow Poplar, Western Red Cedar, White Oak and White Pine.  
Case of solid White Oak, fumed in ammonia and stained Keyboards of White Pine, Turkish Boxwood, Gabon Ebony.  
Single wedge bellows and blower in base of the organ.  
Wind pressure: 65mm  
Pitch: A=465Hz

Temperament: "Norden" is based on a series of seven fifths narrowed by 1/5th Pythagorean Comma.

*With special thanks to David Skinner for his assistance in making this recording.*

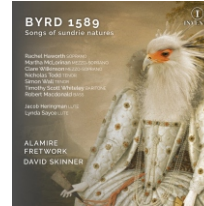


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Recorded in Sidney Sussex College chapel, Cambridge on 4 & 5 July 2023

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Producer, engineer & editor: Adam Binks

Organ maintained by Gary Owens

Recorded at 24-bit/192 kHz resolution

Cover Image: Detail of The Taylor & Boody Organ of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge

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