Lunchtime Recital Friday 6th November - Augustin Cornwall-Irving and Ignacy Gołąb – Lutenists.



A lute duet was a 'first' for us - as was I suspect the immersion in Renaissance Lute Music.

Intended for small groups (*ideally an audience of three or four*) sitting around a table, perhaps with a glass of wine or beer; the music was relatively quiet, favouring those sitting close up. And it really was scene-setting music, taking you back to the 16th century; big country houses or palaces, and the galliard a lively dance for couples, with complicated turns and steps. None of us took up that challenge, however!

Having two lutenists brought the pleasure of the interplay between the two as the melody passed back and forth at times. Plenty of eye contact to get the timing perfect.

No recital or ours ends without a 'grilling' by Rod, and this time Stephen Jones was with us to add his questions.



Programme

John Dowland (c.1563-1626)
- My Lord Willoughby
- Chamberlaine's Galliard

Thomas Robinson (c.1560-c.1610)
- Twenty Waies Upon the Bells
- A Toy
- A Plainsong
- Fantasie
- The Queen's Goodnight

John Johnson (c.1545-1594)
- The Flat Pavan and Galliard
- The Queen's Dump
- Short Almaine
- The Leaves be Green

Bernardo Monzino
- Contrapunto 1 & 2

Anon.
- La Rossignol
- Greensleeves

We learned that the words *lute* and *oud* probably derived from Arabic *al-ʿoud*. During the 8th and 9th centuries musicians from across the Islamic world had flocked to Iberia, which by the 11th century had become a centre for instrument manufacture. Medieval lutes had been four- and five-course instruments (*course = strings or sets of 2 strings played together*), plucked with a quill as a plectrum.



In the last few decades of the fifteenth century, to play Renaissance polyphony (*two lines of simultaneous independent melody*) on a single instrument, lutenists had gradually abandoned the quill in favour of plucking the instrument with the fingers. The number of courses had increased to six or more, and by the end of the Renaissance it had grown to ten. Ignacy's lute had 7 courses and Augustin's had 10 (*well 9, it appeared - Augustin cited "budget cuts")*.

Lutes were made almost entirely of wood. The soundboard was a thin flat plate of resonant wood, typically spruce. The back or the shell was assembled from thin strips of hardwood - maple, cherry, ebony, rosewood - joined to form the deep rounded body, with braces inside to give it strength. The neck was made of light wood, with a veneer of hardwood - usually ebony. The frets were made of loops of gut tied around the neck. A few additional partial frets of wood were glued to the body of the instrument, to allow stopping the highest-pitched courses. The frets on the neck could be moved to change the temperament of the instrument. The courses were usually tuned in unison for high and intermediate pitches, but for lower pitches one of the two strings could be tuned an octave higher.



Back to the music. We never quite found out the meaning of 'Dump' as in The Queen's Dump, but one source had thought the dump to be a slow dance. The two pieces by Bernardo Monzino had come from a book published by Vincenzo Galilei, the father of the astronomer and himself a lutenist. As part of a written dialog between teacher and student these pieces were at the end of the book with a challenge to "come and play these duet pieces and you will see how good they sound" – so no pressure for our recitalists then!

Vincenzo Galilei had also commented on how convenient the lute was to play: you could even play it on horseback.
A challenge not taken up by our two lutenists - but perhaps next time?

Because we hope there will be a next time!