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# A CELLULOID MUSIC LIBRARY

(Written for "The Listener" by ZILLAH and RONALD CASTLE)

Part I.

The Division Violist.

WHEN the pioneers arrived in New Zealand little more than a century ago, they brought with them a culture rooted in the traditions of the Old World, and although time and our nearness to America and Asia may have caused these traditions to be modified, Europe will always be recognised as our main source of inspiration in music, art and literature. There is always a possibility, however, that the debt we owe to European culture may one day be forgotten.

About 10 years ago we, as musicians, decided to find out what we could about the subject of early music and instruments. At first our investigations were just a pleasant pastime, but later, as we became more deeply involved in what we realised was a field little known to most New Zealanders, they developed into an enthralling pursuit.

Because there is little local material available to work on, we have had to carry on most of our research during these years by "remote control," involving much correspondence with musical institutions and collectors overseas. But gradually we have succeeded in building up a library of early music and a collection of early instruments.

One day when we were talking to C. R. H. Taylor, librarian at the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, we remarked on the poverty of New Zealand libraries in early music manuscripts and reference books, and suggested that it would be of benefit to the future musical life of this country if the position were improved. With all the facilities for photographic reproduction now available, we saw no reason why the wonderful collections in European libraries could not be made available in microfilm form, and built up into a New Zealand music library of considerable value.

## Nucleus Existed

Mr. Taylor pointed out that there already existed in the Turnbull Library the nucleus of a collection such as we visualised, in the form of several music

volumes of great rarity. He proposed to assemble these in a separate group, to be called the Alexander Turnbull Library Collection of Early Music. To these could be added, in the first place, the books which we thought necessary for effective research, especially catalogues of the music manuscript sections of such libraries as the British Museum, the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, and the Bodleian Library at Oxford. From these catalogues we could then select items suitable for microfilming, so that copies of many precious manuscripts could be made available for local study on a few hundred feet of film.

Recently Mr. Taylor informed us that the first of our suggested list of titles had become available in London. It is the monumental 1899 edition of the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, published in modern notation under the editorship of Fuller, Maitland and Barclay Squire. The original manuscript volume is in the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge (named after Viscount Fitzwilliam, who bequeathed his collection to the University in 1816).

The eminent Belgian scholar Charles Van den Borren ranks this work as one of the most significant in musical history. According to his findings, keyboard music had its origins in England, where it coincided with the cultivation of the virginals, an instrument of the plucked string family which also includes the harpsichord and the spinet. The fact that English virginals achieved a high level of virtuosity is quickly revealed by a glance at some of the pages of this book.

The question of its origin is one that has never been satisfactorily solved. From certain clues in the manuscript, and the fact that it is written in one hand from beginning to end, it seems probable that it was compiled by one Francis Tregian, a member of a rich and powerful Cornish family. He was convicted of rebellion against the Crown about 1608, and was imprisoned until his death in 1619. As was sometimes the case with political prisoners, he was permitted to pass his



How the Virginal is Toned and Applied to the Scale of Music.  
It is supposed you understand some, and consequently the Scale of eighth, sixteenth, and thirty-second notes, the Tuning of your Virginal appears in each order as you see the Virginal.

PAGE THREE of "The Division Violist" (1659) enlarged from a British Museum microfilm in the possession of Zillah and Ronald Castle

time in reading, and very likely had his own "paire of virginals" (as the instrument was sometimes called) to soothe his mind with music. Having many friends to visit him, he would no doubt ask them to borrow the manuscripts of the best virginal music of the day, and from these he would have been able to copy for his own use the large collection so fortunately preserved.

Whether this theory of its origin is correct or not, the *Fitzwilliam Book* must certainly have been compiled by a lover of the instrument, and a player of no mean ability. In it will be found about 300 compositions by the most celebrated masters of the 16th and early 17th Centuries. Among the English names we find those of Tallis, Byrd, Morley, Philips, John Bull, Giles Farnaby, and Orlando Gibbons. (It may be of interest here to note that the Turnbull Library has a very early treatise on harmony, once the property of Dr. John Bull.)

## The Parthenia Book

Other manuscript collections of virginal music still in existence are *My Ladye Nevell's Booke*, containing compositions by William Byrd, *Will Forster's Virginal Book*, now in the possession of the Royal Family, and *Benjamin Cosyn's Virginal Book*, which is also in the Royal Library. We are fortunate in having in our own private collection excellent reprints of several rare volumes

(continued on next page)



ILLUSTRATION from a medieval treatise on harmony once the property of Dr. John Bull, the Elizabethan musician, and now in the Turnbull Library