

The music

Orlando Gibbons: *Fantasia a6 no1*
Fantasia a2 no5
Fantasia a3 with dooble bass no1
Fantasia a6 no3
Fantasia a6 no4
Fantasia a4 'for the great dooble bass' no1
Pavan a4 'Lord Salisbury'
Fantasia a6 no5
Fantasia a6 no9

INTERVAL

Fantasia a6 no2
Fantasia a2 no6
Fantasia a3 no7
Fantasia a3 with dooble bass no4
Fantasia a4 'for the great dooble bass' no2
In Nomine a5 no2
Pavan and Galliard a6

Orlando Gibbons was baptised in Oxford on Christmas Day 1583, and died in Canterbury in 1625. In his 41 years he composed the most extraordinarily varied collection of music, and some of our favourite pieces in the whole viol consort repertoire. In this his 400th anniversary year we have been celebrating all aspects of that output, and today we focus exclusively on the instrumental works.

Many composers published collections of 2-, 3-, 4-, 5- and 6-part music for viols, but to us one of the most notable things about Gibbons is that all of it is unfailingly good! In fact, it's more than good, it's brilliant. With some composers their 3-part pieces are fine, pleasant, enjoyable, but it isn't until they get five or six parts to work with that they write pieces that have you completely engaged from the very first note to the very last.

Not so with Gibbons. I don't think we have ever programmed a full-length concert in two halves where every piece is by the same composer, every piece is brilliant, we haven't included any vocal music, and we still have a list of items we wanted to include but couldn't because we're worried you might want to go home before midnight!

Something else we have never done is construct a programme where so many pieces are titled 'fantasia'. We would usually

prefer to vary things a little by interspersing fantasias with plenty of dances, in nomines, and maybe an air or two. If you're worried that all these fantasias might start to sound a bit similar, fear not!

Gibbons may have been younger than several members of the consort when he died, but his music seems to embody several decades of stylistic approaches. There are moments that are positively old-fashioned, harking back to a sound like that of William Byrd, but there are others of such wildly contrasting, clearly defined and labelled sections within some of the fantasias that you can really hear the foreshadowing of Henry Purcell and Matthew Locke.

And what about the title of the programme – The Best Hand In England? Gibbons was an organist – at the Chapel Royal, Westminster Abbey, and in a group that played in the privy chamber of Prince Charles (later to be King Charles I). He was also one of three contributors to *Parthenia or the Maydenhead of the first musicke that ever was printed for the Virginalls* which was the first printed collection of music for keyboard in England, published around 1612. *Lord Salisbury's Pavan* which you will hear today is from that publication and has been arranged for viols by our own Ibrahim Aziz.

The programme title itself is from a letter from John Chamberlain (1553 – 1628), a prolific letter writer from whose correspondence we learn much about the social history of the time. We know Gibbons was held in high regard as an organist, and in a letter following his death Chamberlain wrote that 'he had the best hand in England'.

Notes by Alison Kinder

The artists

CHELYS: Ibrahim Aziz, Jenny Bullock, Kate Conway, Alison Kinder, Timothy Lin, Sam Stadlen

"The haunting sound of gut strings has rarely been captured with such beguiling fidelity, nor the unique tonal proclivities of a viol consort so exquisitely voiced." *The Strad*

Described by *Gramophone* as having released 'unquestionably the most beautiful recording' of Dowland's *Lachrimae*, **Chelys** have garnered a reputation for their faithful yet fresh interpretations of the consort repertoire. They take their name from an ancient Greek word which referred to a bowed lyre, said to have been invented by the god Hermes.

The members of Chelys are among the UK's leading exponents of the viol, particularly as a consort instrument, and their consort viols are strung entirely in gut (not strings overwound with metal), which lends them a particularly distinctive sound. They frequently collaborate with other period instrumentalists and singers, especially enjoying repertoire for voices and viols. A recent highlight has been recording songs and consort music by William Byrd with mezzo-soprano Helen Charlston in Byrd's 400th anniversary year.

A collaboration with vocal consort *Fieri* saw Chelys performing and recording the complete 5-part viol fantasias of Michael East alongside some of East's compositions for voices and viols, where the two ensembles also commissioned a piece from composer Jill Jarman. Chelys have continued their association with Jill in an exciting current project 'The Language of Bells', a major new commission alongside percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie and four singers.

The consort record for the *BIS* label, and their version of the complete fantasias and in nomines by Henry Purcell received a 5-star review in *BBC Music Magazine*, as well as *The Strad*, praising its 'beguiling fidelity' and 'in-depth luxuriousness'.

The members of Chelys can be found in all sorts of other places in the wider Early Music world, playing with ensembles such as the *Rose Consort of Viols*, *Fretwork*, *Musica Secreta* and *Ensemble Moliere*. They teach on courses, including for the Benslow Trust, NORVIS, Dartington, the Irish Recorder and Viol Summer School, and the Easter Early Music Course. They also coach viol consorts at Morley College, the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music.

chelysconsort.co.uk

Visit www.little-missenden.org

Festival Patron: David Matthews

Grateful acknowledgements

We thank all those who have helped with the Festival or supported us financially and in other ways. Special thanks to the funding bodies, sponsors and supporters listed below, without whose generous help there would be no Festival.

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Next Year's Festival

The 2026 Little Missenden Festival will run from Friday 2nd to Sunday 12th October.

Festival Website little-missenden.org

- See the full **2025 Festival Programme**
- **Book Tickets** (or phone 0333 666 3366)
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Booking Information

- Email: tickets@little-missenden.org
- Phone: 01494 958148 between 11am and 8pm

General Information

- Email: contact@little-missenden.org

Little Missenden Festival Executive Committee

Chair: Dick Ware

Committee: Angela Bishop, Polly Buston, Martin Cunningham, John Glasson, Beth Neill, Liz Wager, Dick Wells, Rachel Wilcox



Programme Notes

CHELYS VIOL CONSORT

Orlando Gibbons

– 'The Best Hand in England'



3pm, Sunday October 12th, 2025
Little Missenden Church

65th Little Missenden Festival