An Exploration of the Influences on the Fantasias of Henry Purcell, 1659–1695

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Abstract

This article will address the various influences upon the Fantasias of Henry Purcell. Using a mix of manuscript sources and recent scholarship, I will explore the ways in which the Fantasias, which were written for three- and four-part viol consorts, were influenced by events and contemporaries of the composer, including the religious situation in England after the restoration of the monarchy, with particular focus on the conflict between the Anglican and Catholic churches. The purpose of this music will also be examined, a combination of instruments that was already quaint at the time of composition, with the treble viol quickly becoming out of fashion in favour of its more popular cousin, the violin. Specific musical examples taken and transcribed from Purcell's manuscript book of the Fantasias will be examined, alongside examples of works with which links can be drawn, in order to gain a wider understanding of the influences upon the music.

Introduction

Henry Purcell (1659–1695) is considered one of the greatest composers in English musical history, and his music is widely regarded as representative of the English Baroque period. Born into a world characterised by religious and political tension at the start of the Restoration period, the young Purcell was surrounded by musicians at the forefront of music for the Church and Chapel Royal. In this article, external (non-musical) events will be explored in their relation to the development of Purcell's musical style, with particular focus on the friction and hostility that was so prominent upon the restoration of Charles II to the throne of England.

Two Fantasias transcribed from the composer's manuscript book of instrumental music will be examined, both in how they have been recently presented and in their purpose in the musical world of England in the 1680s. Purcell's musical style within the set of Fantasias as a whole will also be examined, both with regard to his contemporaries and his predecessors in England and abroad. The purpose of the attached transcriptions is to ensure an understanding of the musical style, and how this set fits within Purcell's oeuvre. Before the preparation of this article, no publicly available editions of the Fantasias could be sourced that were comprehensively faithful to the manuscript. Through analysis of these and other primary sources, and through consideration of recent scholarship, primarily from Martin Adams, Peter Holman and Bruce Wood, the following research will seek to evaluate the effect of societal tension on Purcell's musical style, along with a review of the Fantasia's place in respect of this.

Part One: External Influences

In 1660, Charles Stuart returned to England from exile in France and relieved the English people of the oppressive Puritan values that were enforced during the Interregnum. While the population was tentatively hopeful for the start of a new era, King Charles II's 'indifference' to the restoration made the public reaction to the coronation more subdued.[1]

Prior to the Civil War in the 1640s, the gradual divergence between music in cathedrals and in smaller parish churches had begun to cause tension among the population. This, combined with Charles I's marriage to a Catholic, made the King and everything that he liked (entertainment, music, choirs) unpopular.[2] Cathedral worship had become strongly associated with the King and his high-Anglican beliefs, and the music that was sung seemed to be increasingly remote from the firmly held beliefs of the largely Protestant population. One writer at the time, Nathaniel Holmes, is quoted in Andrew Gant's *O Sing Unto the Lord* as having said that Cathedral choirs (in reference to singing the psalm in antiphonal style) were 'tossing the word of God like a tennis-ball', followed by 'yelling

together with confused noise'.[3] Such criticism was not uncommon. Though during the Interregnum even Cromwell himself occasionally enjoyed entertainment by trumpets or violin bands, almost all organised music-making came to a halt. When the monarchy was restored in 1660, this previous dislike of all things high-Anglican created a degree of 'uncertainty' around how the newly restored king was going to be perceived, both upon his return and in the long-term.[4]

As the 1660s continued, this developed into an underlying tension between the Government and the King. While the Government sought to represent the views of the population, who were still largely Protestant, Charles created more tension when, in 1663, he attempted to extend the tolerance of religious acceptance to include Nonconformists and Roman Catholics. This motion was stubbornly rejected by the House of Commons,[5] on the grounds of the steadfast Anglican values held by the majority of the population at the time. In England, the largest branch of Christian faith was Anglicanism, who regarded the Catholic church as the 'bitterest enemy' of their own church,[6] and Scott Sowerby has neatly analysed this anti-Catholicism as the English viewing this bitterness as 'anti-popery'.[7] 'Popery', as Sowerby emphasises, was not simply defined as Catholicism; it was heightened into a stereotype of what many Protestants believed was the image of a Catholic.[8] Thus 'anti-popery' developed, which Sowerby goes on to describe as an opposition to a distinct set of values stereotypically believed to be held by Catholics.[9]

Opposition to anti-popery was a much less fixed ideology supported by many Protestants in the 1660s and was mistakenly dismissed as a kind of 'crypto-Catholicism';[10] it was not simply 'back to popery' but was a more nuanced idea that in essence sought to define anti-popery. Anti-popery was not new to English Protestants: Laudian followers had opposed anti-popery in the 1620s and 1630s; Tories and Whigs continually returned to the idea, accusing each other of 'popish' or 'anti-popish' sentiments.[11] This bitterness and suspicion that many English Protestants felt towards Catholics (particularly Catholics in positions of power) was exacerbated by a fear that the king's Catholic brother James Stuart would accede to the throne after the death of King Charles II, who had no heirs. While James's accession brought with it a 'precarious unity' during the early part of his reign,[12] many Anglicans and other English Protestants were reluctant to fully trust a Catholic king.[13]

Distrust of Catholics had been a characteristic of the English people's conscience since early in Charles's restoration to the throne. In 1668, he brought an end to the Triple Alliance, which, although appeasing English Protestants in an agreement with Sweden and the Dutch United Provinces,[14] had prevented Charles from reaching any arrangement with King Louis XIV of France. During the late 17th century, France was one of the most powerful countries in western Europe, and an alliance with Louis provided Charles with a significant annual pension and French military support in the event of rebellion. In return, Charles agreed to provide a contribution of English infantry to the French army upon Louis's request, [15] and he was to publicly declare his Roman Catholic faith. This was what became known as the Secret Treaty of Dover, signed by representatives of both kings in 1670, and it was this last clause that was the most contentious of the agreement. To aggravate the already significant distrust of English Catholics in the 1670s, a conspiracy developed that theorised that a group of Catholics planned to murder Charles so that James could take the throne. Known as the Popish Plot of 1678, it was an 'elaborate tissue of fictions',[16] and it gripped the nation's attention, further demonising Catholics and dividing English society.

Considering this religious situation in England in the late 17th century, it is perhaps surprising to note that Henry Purcell, working for the Chapel Royal and a key representative of court music, married the Catholic Frances Peters in 1679. Organists and composers of that era, and perhaps somewhat today, were supposed to uphold and represent the values of their churches; Purcell was directly contravening this in a 'very anti-Catholic atmosphere'.[17] A marriage between an Anglican organist and a Catholic would have been a contentious issue, possibly creating a moral dilemma for his employers. However, King Charles, having signed the Secret Treaty of Dover in 1670, was rather Catholic-leaning (to the further aggravation his subjects) and so would not have been in a position to question the match. After James II came to the throne, Anglican music became much less relevant to public worship in comparison to the preceding years, as James had his own private Catholic chapel,

and many musicians—Purcell included—turned to the theatre for employment. This suggests that Purcell developed a musical style that could be moulded into the purpose of the occasion.

Overall, one of the most significant external contributors to the musical style of Henry Purcell was the heated and 'entrenched' conflict between the established Church of England and the Roman Catholic church.[18] After King Charles II signed the Secret Treaty of Dover and the threat of the accession of his Catholic brother James became apparent, the royal contribution to the argument was clear: they were Catholic, and this caused uproar in the population. Religious instability was a distinct characteristic of this period in English history, and it was not until the Protestant Queen Mary and her Dutch husband William ascended the throne in 1689 that some religious stability was achieved.

Part Two: Musical Style

There is little doubt that, throughout history, the composers of England have been influenced strongly by those who came before them. Henry Purcell's direct predecessors were suppressed by the Interregnum (1651–60), and links between his own style and that of composers preceding this period can be drawn.

Little is known about Purcell's early life and childhood. His birth is recorded as 10 September 1659 in Westminster, where he was to live his whole life.[19] He was a chorister in the Chapel Royal under the instruction of Captain Henry Cooke, Master of the Children.[20] Following this, he was briefly taught by Pelham Humfrey, a former pupil of Cooke, and by Humfrey's fellow chorister Dr John Blow, who is remembered chiefly for Purcell's musical education.[21] When his voice broke in 1673, Purcell became apprentice to the Keeper of the King's Musical Instruments, John Hingston, who was also his godfather, until later becoming a copyist at Westminster Abbey, aged eighteen.[22]

Purcell was to become one of the most significant musicians of English musical history,[23] and his most prominent influences can be roughly divided into two main categories. In the first category are the musicians of England, both those with whom Purcell came into direct contact, and those who were a little more distant. Dr John Blow (1648–1708) was his primary teacher, and as Organist of Westminster Abbey and the Chapel Royal; he paved the way for his star pupil's career.[24] Blow's musical influence on Purcell was primarily in the old style of harmony and counterpoint,[25] evident in Purcell's Fantasias, and it was this solid grounding in established practices that prepared him for developing his unique musical style.

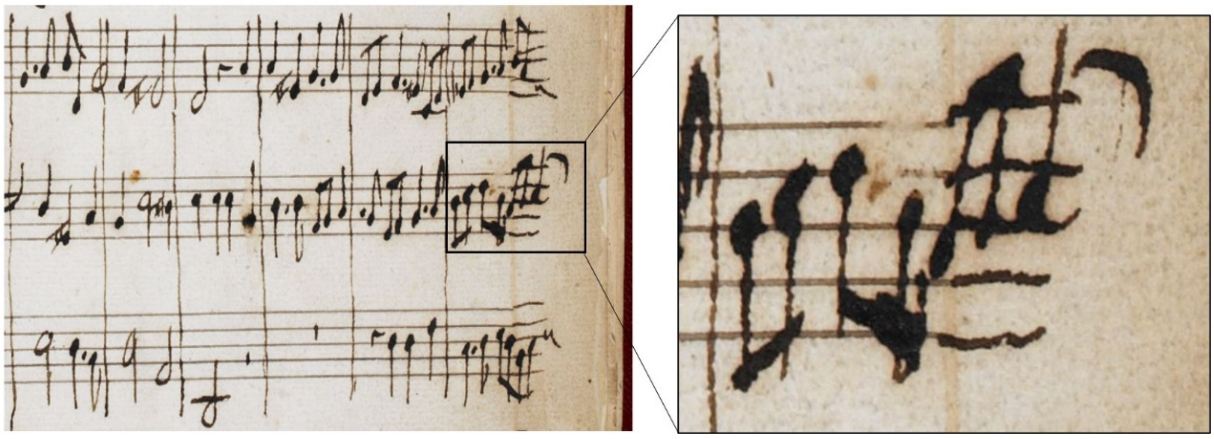
Other English composers working at this time included Christopher Gibbons (1615–1676), with whom he studied after leaving the choir of the Chapel Royal in 1673,[26] and Matthew Locke (1621–1677), a friend of the Purcell family who encouraged Purcell to develop his 'quirky and individual 'musical language.[27] Evidence can be seen of influence from the work of earlier composers such as William Byrd and Thomas Tallis, particularly in their style of counterpoint. Thomas Tallis (1505–1585) was a renowned church composer of his time and was one of two prominent sixteenth-century English composers whose fluid polyphonic style was a conclusive influence on the young Henry Purcell. William Byrd completes this pair and, despite his stubborn Catholicism causing arguments with his Anglican employers at Lincoln Cathedral,[28] it is his Anglican music that has held the highest status among his output.[29] However, his influence on Purcell can be seen clearly in the second Fantasia for Six Viols, referred to later, specifically the fluid, overlapping phrases that were so characteristic of this 'old-style' of counterpoint.

Second, among the English musicians to have influenced Henry Purcell, is a handful of 'hybrid' church-music composers whose own musical constitution consists of both English and either French or Italian inflection. The first of these is Alfonso Ferrabosco the Elder (1543–1588), an almost direct contemporary of Byrd. Byrd was very familiar with Ferrabosco's style, and it is possible that the two met on occasion, as Ferrabosco frequently travelled between Bologna, his birthplace, and England, where he worked for Queen Elizabeth I.[30] He would have been familiar with the musical style of the Renaissance masters, such as Palestrina (1525–1594) and Orlando de Lassus (1530–1594), and it is through travelling musicians such as Ferrabosco that the polyphonic style became

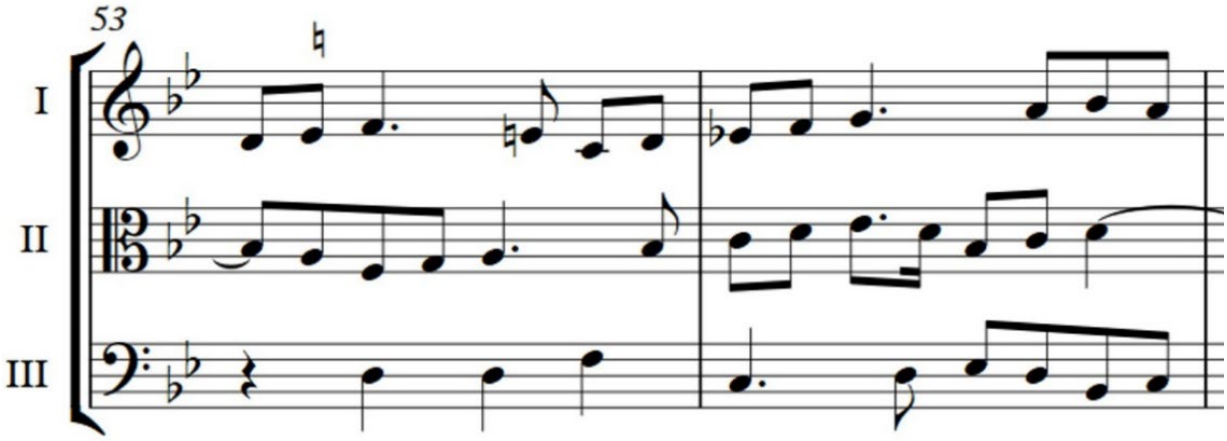
embedded in the English polyphonic tradition. Another of the hybrid-style composers was Pelham Humfrey (1647–1674), who was sent abroad during the 1660s by King Charles II. He was to study French and Italian musical styles, studying with Jean-Baptiste Lully,[31] and upon his return, he took over from Cooke at the Chapel Royal.[32] While Purcell's skill in the old contrapuntal style came from previous generations of church musicians, it is the influence of Pelham Humfrey who contributed much towards the composer's harmonic language. His travels put him at the forefront of the English Baroque style, 'enriched' with 'progressive' inflection from study in Italy and France.[33] Holman has also suggested influence of Claudio Monteverdi on the young Purcell, as a result of copies of the former's *Cruda Amarilli* found in Purcell's hand,[34] although substantial evidence of this in the composer's early work is elusive.

The Fantasias, found in a British Library manuscript (Add MS 30930), are accompanied by some of Purcell's vocal music for up to five voices, other fantasias, some sonatas, a pavan, a chaconne and an overture, all by Purcell. There are thirteen Fantasias, scored for three and four viols (the thirteenth incomplete), with a five-part Fantasia, 'Upon One Note', at the end. The viol is a bowed, fretted string instrument most popular during the 15th and 16th centuries, that largely fell out of fashion during the 17th century. Treble, tenor and bass viols were the most commonly used, but alto viols and the violone (a contrabass viol) were also used.[35] Composing for viol consort in the 17th century was unusual and, even by Purcell's birth in 1659, had fallen out of fashion. With the new basso continuo style came an art for more colourful, stylistic writing, and this raises questions over the purpose of these pieces for viols. The answer to this, at least in part, is that the Fantasias may have been an exercise in harmony and counterpoint. Distinct similarities can be drawn between Purcell's work and the sacred vocal music of William Byrd and Thomas Tallis, both English composers of the Reformation period.

Ex. 1: Henry Purcell, *Anthems, Fantasias, Sonatas*. Autograph manuscript. c. 1678-1690. British Library, Add. Ms. 30930. Excerpt from f.69v



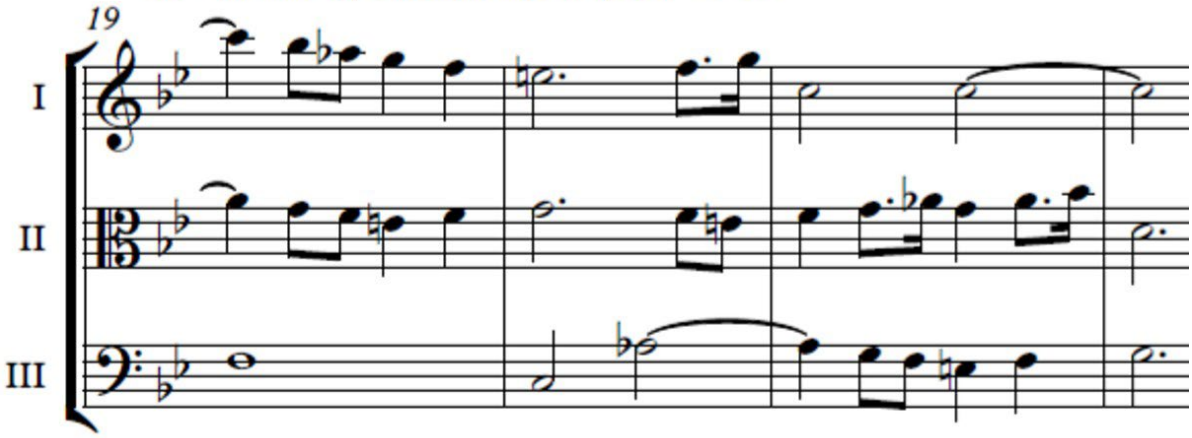
Ex. 2: Henry Purcell, Fantasia No. 3, edited by the author, 2020. Bar 53-54



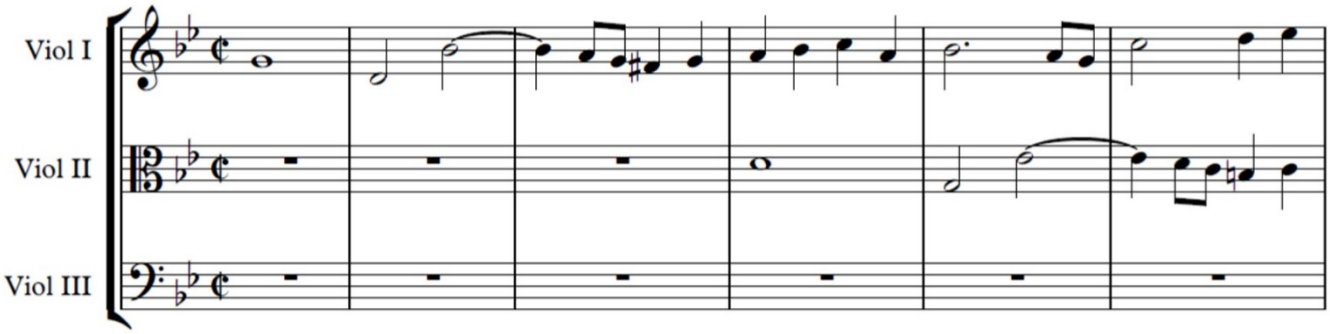
Perhaps surprisingly, due to their universally playable qualities, no transcriptions of the Fantasias that are faithful to the manuscript book were available before the preparation of this article, and therefore the pieces relevant to this project have been transcribed from Add MS 30930, in order to both examine the manuscript and understand the inner workings of Purcell's musical style in these Fantasias. Concerning the third Fantasia, found on folio 69v-69r, one of the main differences in this transcription is that in bar 54 of the second viol part, the third and fourth notes have previously been interpreted as two quavers. However, upon closer examination, one can see that the paper of the manuscript has been scratched, causing the top two stave lines to fade significantly, along with what is clearly a dot—lengthening the third quaver (Ex. 1). Taking this into account, one can also see that the beam that initially looks like a rather thickly drawn single beam in fact has a second beam for the fourth note of the bar, making it a semiquaver and altering the rhythm (Ex. 2).

Instances of this dotted rhythm occur in other places in this Fantasia too, supporting the above argument. For example, the first viol introduces the dotted quaver–semiquaver pair in the first section in bar 20 (Ex. 3), which is imitated by the second viol in the following bar. In the second section, the quaver–quaver–dotted quaver–semiquaver figure also occurs in the first viol part in bar 60, further supporting the argument that the rhythm dot is not merely show-through, nor the beam a slip of the quill, but that this figure is a genuine dotted rhythm. The first theme (Ex. 4) of the third Fantasia is defined by a rising minor sixth, falling to the leading note before another part takes over.

Ex. 3: Purcell, Fantasia No. 3, bar 19-22



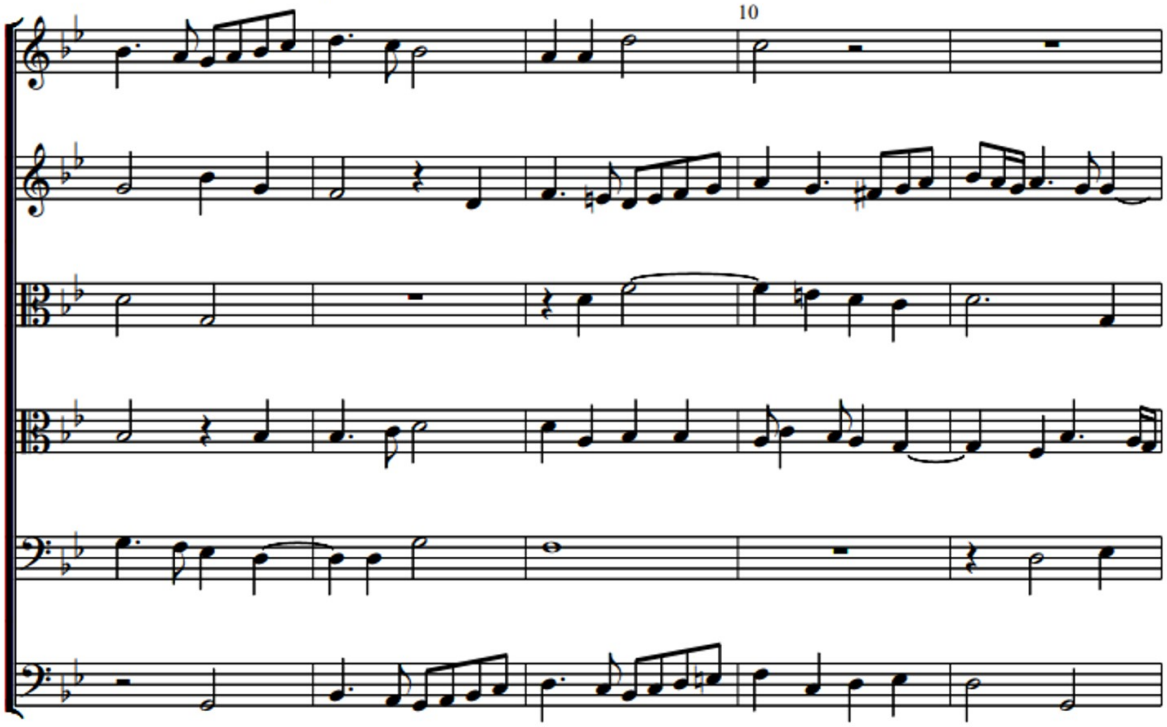
Ex. 4: Purcell, Fantasia No. 3, bar 1-6



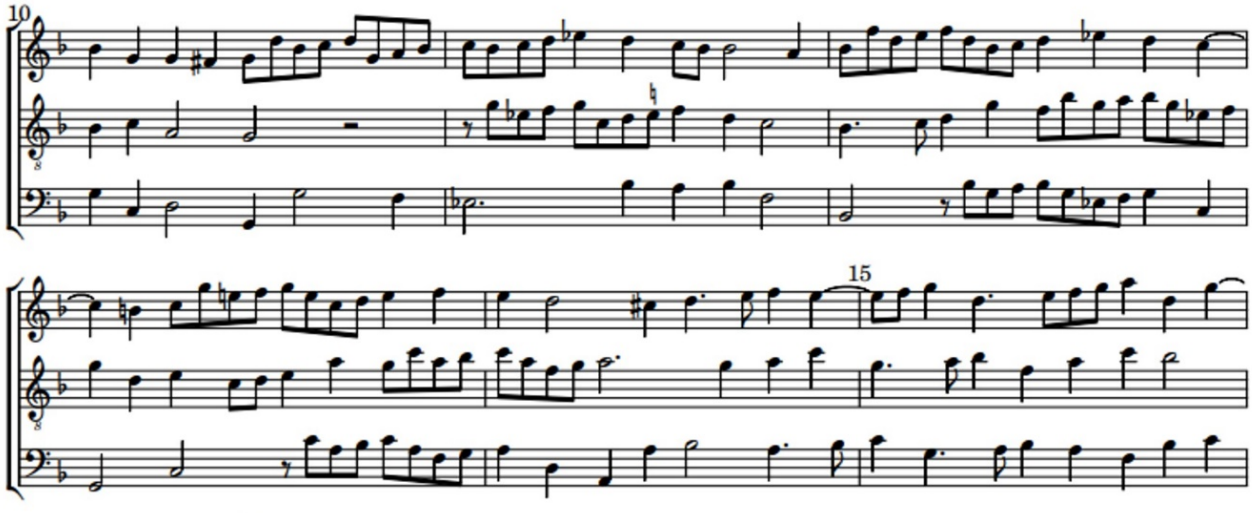
It is developed throughout the first section, passing through multiple keys—including C minor and F minor—before returning to the tonic; each statement is imitated by another part, often overlapping, imitating the polyphonic style of Reformation-era composers such as Tallis and Byrd (Ex. 5). A similar

style can be seen in the third Fantasia of Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625) (Ex. 6), also for viols, in the often-continuous quaver movement that made this music remarkably virtuosic for its time. An example is also shown here from Palestrina's *Sicut Cervus* (Ex. 7), which is an exemplar of the Italian Renaissance style, and which also shows the distinct similarities between the English style and that of the Italian polyphonic masters.

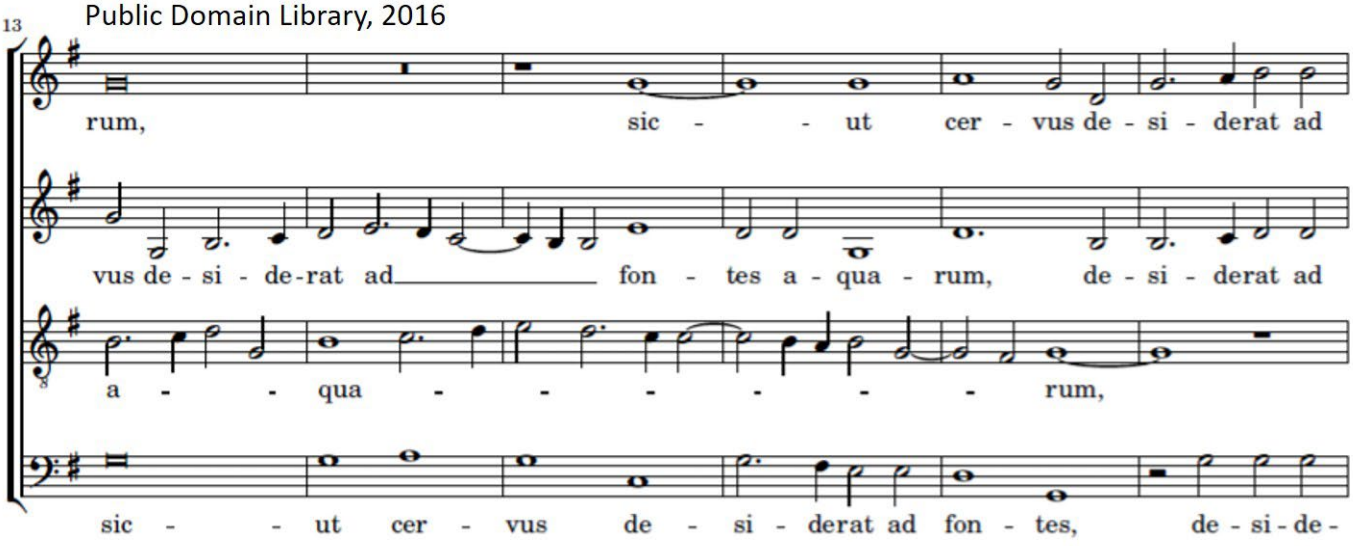
Ex. 5: William Byrd. Fantasia No. 2 a6, edited by Albert Folop (Online: Folop Viol Music Collection, 2011) bar 7-11



Ex. 6: Orlando Gibbons. Fantasia No. 3 a3, edited by Allen Garvin. (Dallas: Hawthorne Early Music, 2015) bar 10-15

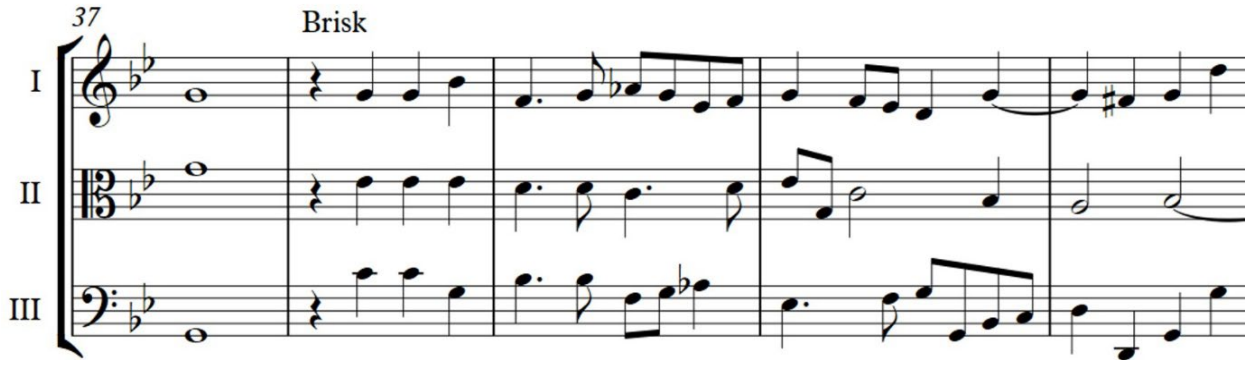


Ex. 7: Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, *Sicut Cervus*, edited by Potharn Imre. Online: Choral Public Domain Library, 2016

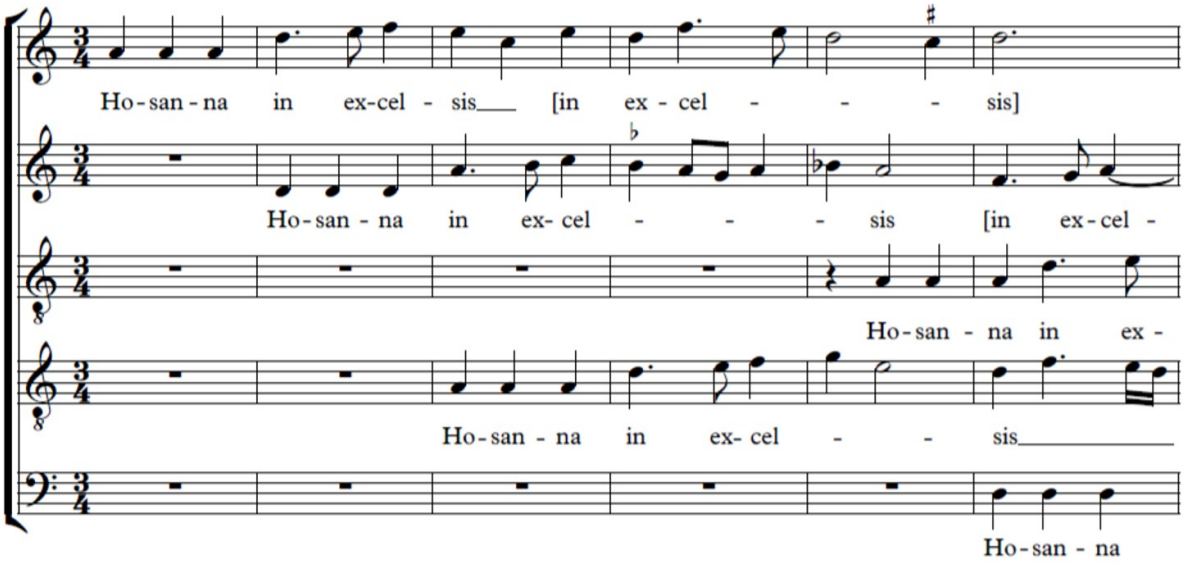


Returning to Purcell's third Fantasia, the second theme is introduced at the start of the second section, marked 'brisk' (Ex. 8), and is characterised by a crotchet rest and three homorhythmic crotchets, purposefully driving the music towards the next strong beat.[36] This theme is heard at least sixteen times throughout the second section, passing through many keys. The first deviation is to E-flat major, followed by B-flat major, D minor, F major, and A minor before returning to G minor, and ending with a Palestrina-like resolution onto a bright tierce de Picardie in the tonic. The faster, more lively character of this second section could imply a more one-in-a-bar impression, which is remarkably similar in style to the 'hosanna' sections of Renaissance sacred music, taking as an example Palestrina's *Missa Eripe Me de Inimicis Meis* (Ex. 9). This fast triple-time character can be traced back even further to the work of Josquin des Prez (1450–1521),[37] also in the 'hosanna' section of his *Missa L'Homme Armé super voces musicales* (Ex. 10). This suggests that using triple time as a contrast with previous sections was a well-known technique used by composers of sacred music, one that was passed down through the generations from teacher to student. This evidence of influence from the Renaissance period and earlier shows that musical styles travelled geographically as well as through generations. The link between Purcell and Palestrina is compounded by the fact that the latter knew Alfonso Ferrabosco the Elder in Rome.[38] While there is no reason to believe that Ferrabosco worked at Lincoln Cathedral with William Byrd, he must have travelled around the country during his time in England as Byrd's music shows direct influence of the Italian style, with Kerman and McCarthy showing that Byrd was perhaps the first English composer to truly understand Italian Renaissance-era imitative polyphony.[39]

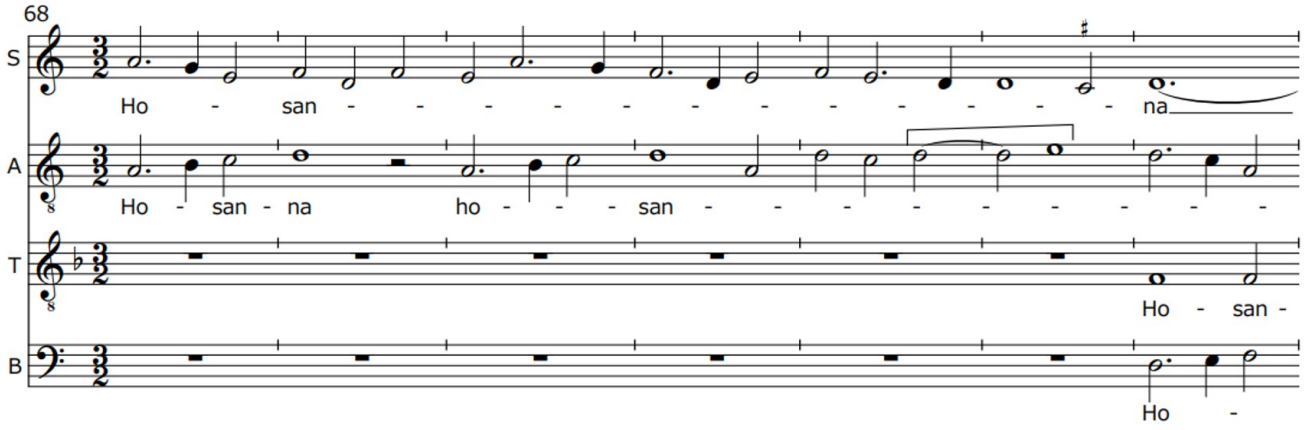
Ex. 8: Purcell, *Fantasia No. 3*, bar 37-41



Ex. 9: Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, *Missa Eripe Me De Inimicis Meis*, edited by the author, 2020. Bar 76-81



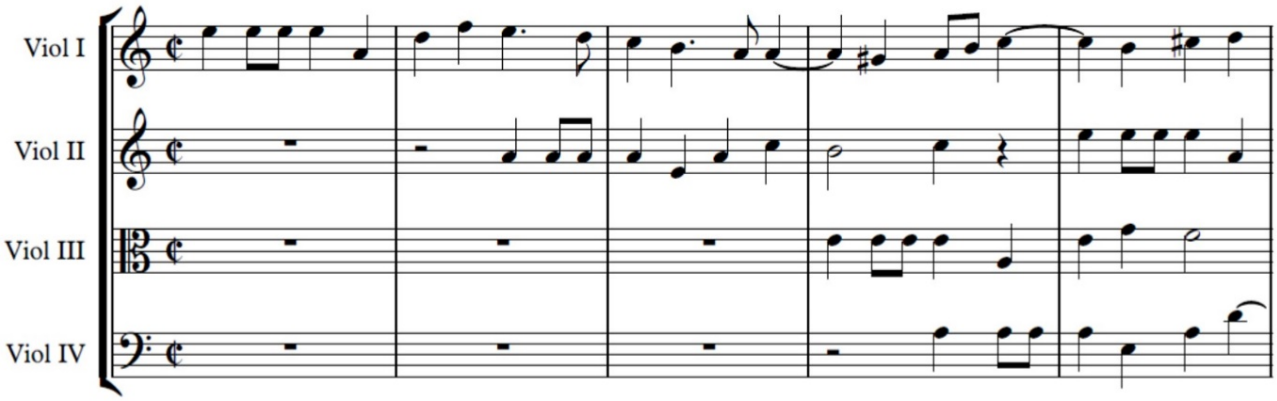
Ex .10: Josquin des Prez. *Missa L'Homme Armé super voces musicales*, edited by Hitoshi Yamamoto. Online: Hitoshi Yamamoto, 2016. *Sanctus*, bar 68-74



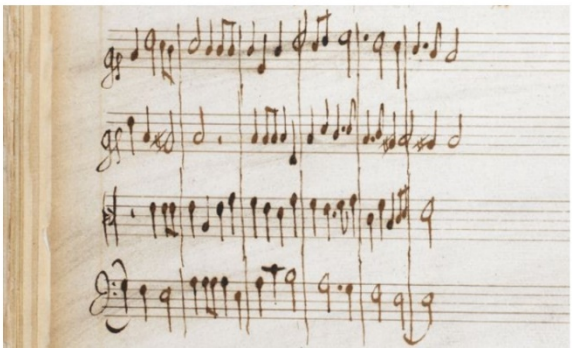
Another of the Fantasias transcribed specifically for this article is the thirteenth, incomplete Fantasia. There is only one theme in this short work (Ex. 11), which is introduced by the first viol and works its way down the other three parts. Remarkably, it is heard at least 28 times over the course of the 31 bars of the piece, passing through many related keys**.** Found on folio 58r in Add MS 30930, it is dated 'Feb. ye 24th 1682/3' (confirmed by Martin Adams as 24 February 1683),[40] making it the only piece in the book to be dated after 1680. This suggests that, while the Fantasias are generally regarded to signify Purcell's early work and musical development, he returned to the set to add more pieces, leaving this task unfinished, as shown by this Fantasia. Only one publicly available edition of the incomplete work exists, and while it is largely faithful to the manuscript, the last bar of the transcription is the main difference between this edition and the transcription provided for this article. The manuscript (Ex. 12) shows the final bar as complete in the first and second viol parts, and incomplete in the third and fourth. The previous edition has completed this final bar with a C-sharp in the third viol part and lower A in the fourth, creating a *tierce de Picardie*. This seems an unlikely eventuality, had this bar been finished, for one main reason: assuming that this piece is unfinished,

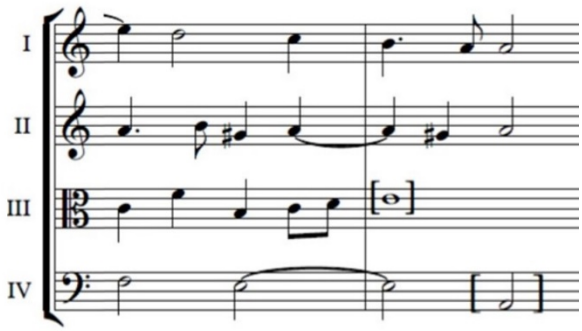
and was intended to be the first of multiple sections, the cadence would not have been a *tierce de Picardie*. The piece is in A minor, and so the raised third of the tonic chord would be saved for the final cadence. In the definite knowledge that this is an incomplete work, the final chord has been transcribed into the new edition with as few additions as possible, adding only the minim lower A in the fourth viol part, and extending the minim E in the third viol to a semibreve; this single addition to what we have of the piece provides closure for the purpose of performance, but also ensures there is some sense that there would have been more to come after this section, had the work been finished.

Ex. 11: Purcell, *Fantasia No. 13 (incomplete),* edited by the author, 2020. Bar 1-5



Ex. 12: Purcell, *Fantasia No. 13*, final bars of folio 58r and transcription of b. 30-31





These examples, taken alongside Purcell's third and thirteenth Fantasias, show a clear development of the English polyphonic technique and demonstrate that Purcell was indeed writing in what may have been considered a rather antiquated style. Polyphony like this, as much as over the previous hundred years, would have been intended to be as flexible as possible, so that it could be performed by any combination of voices or instruments that were available. The music has fluid phrases, and the lack of cadences makes the music feel very continuous to both performer and listener. This suggests that it does not draw attention to itself and makes it ideal for background music, and perhaps this means that it may not have even been intended for public performance. While it would not have been the most common or fashionable style to be composing in, it would have been very useful to Purcell, a composer who was highly skilled in multiple areas of composition. This versatile quality in the music would have influenced his style of writing as it may have needed to be performed with little rehearsal, and in a style that was familiar to all of the musicians.

Overall, Purcell's Fantasias may have been remarkably old-fashioned for the era in which they were written, but their adaptable nature shows that Purcell was resourcefully and somewhat ingeniously taking an established form and stretching it to its extreme. Analysis of the manuscripts

of these Fantasias has shown that despite their ingenious qualities, they have not been frequently transcribed with accuracy. The contrapuntal style demonstrated in the pieces can be clearly marked as a distinct development of the form, placing Purcell at the pinnacle of English polyphonic development.

Conclusion

Many people and events influenced the musical style of Henry Purcell, both musical and non-musical. Among the external influences was a deep-rooted conflict, during the 1660s, between the Anglican church and the non-conformist groups, which included the Catholic church, and this was characterised by embedded divisions within late seventeenth-century English society. This religious instability meant that musicians who were in employment of either the Court or the Church needed to be flexible, both in their approach to composition and their musical style. The Fantasias were written in the 'old style' of English polyphony, which was very versatile, and this is reflected in Henry Purcell's overall musical style, which spanned many of the genres and forms of the period.

In this article, the analysis of Purcell's manuscripts has shown discrepancies between transcriptions of the pieces and the manuscripts themselves. As a result of this project, it is clear that further research could include transcriptions of the rest of the Fantasias and *In Nomines*, which are also found in Add MS 30930, in order to understand how the third and thirteenth Fantasias are representative of the style. Previous research has shown that much of Purcell's foreign influence came from Italy, via Monteverdi (Holman), and from France, via his teacher Pelham Humfrey (Wood). At the centre of this article is the analysis of two Fantasias, which show how the research of Holman and Wood is applicable to the pieces.

In conclusion, Purcell's musical style was influenced by external factors, including the significant religious tension between the established Anglican church and the Roman Catholic church; the political tension created as a result exacerbated this until the accession of William and Mary in 1689. Musical influences included the composer's teachers during his childhood and early professional development, and there is clear evidence of the effects of his musical predecessors in the progression of his musical style, particularly visible in the Fantasias. Henry Purcell was certainly the most significant composer of the English Baroque period, and his prominence and impact can still be seen today.

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[3] Andrew Gant, O sing Unto the Lord. (Great Britain: Profile Books Ltd., 2015), 186
[4] Jenkinson, *Culture and Politics,* 71-72
[5] Henry Godfrey Roseveare, "Charles II." Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2020; Accessed 18 Dec 2020. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-II-king-of-Great-Britain-and-Ireland
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[7] Scott Sowerby, "Opposition to Anti-Popery in Restoration England." Journal of British Studies. 51 no. 1 (January 2012), 28
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., 29-30
[12] Ibid., 31-32
[13] Godfrey Roseveare, *Charles II,* Encyclopaedia Britannica
[14] The Triple Alliance had been created after a tough three-year war with the Dutch, which had resulted in, using the concise words of Hutton, 'the breakdown of Charles's finances, the paralysis of his war machine, military humiliation, and a treaty by which his country secured none of the objectives for which it had fought'. All credited to Hutton, *Secret Treaty of Dover*, 298
[15] Hutton, *Secret Treaty of Dover*, 303
[16] Godfrey Roseveare, *Charles II,* Encyclopaedia Britannica
[17] Bruce Wood (Henry Purcell (1659-1695)), interview with Donald Macleod, *Composer of the Week*, podcast audio, 9 June 2014, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p020mscp.
[18] John Spurr, "Style, Wit and Religion in Restoration England," in The Nature of the English Revolution Revisited, ed. Stephen Taylor and Grant Tapsell (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 239 - 240
[19] Martin Adams, *Henry Purcell: The Origins and Development of his Musical Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3
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[32] Gant, *O Sing Unto the Lord*, 199
[33] Wood, "Humfrey, Pelham," *Grove Music Online*.
[34] Peter Holman. *Henry Purcell*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 9
[35] Ian Woodfield and Lucy Robinson, "Viol." *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 11 Dec 2020. https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000029435.
[36] A strong beat is defined as the first or third beats of a common-time bar; the weak beats are the second and fourth.
[37] Patrick Macey, Jeremy Noble, Jeffrey Dean, and Gustave Reese. "Josquin (Lebloitte dit) des Prez." *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 14 Jan. 2021. https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000014497.
[38] Cockshoot and Field, "Ferrabosco family," *Grove Music Online*.
[39] Kerman and McCarthy, "Byrd, William," *Grove Music Online*
[40] Adams, *Henry Purcell*, 106