

Mr. Dowland's Midnight
Lute Music of John Dowland

Paul O'Dette, Lute

A Fancy (P 5)
Pavin (P 18)
The Frogg Galliard
A Fancy (P 7)

John Dowland
(1563-1626)

My Lady Hunnsdon's Puffe
Pavan
Mr. Knights Galliard
The King of Denmark's Galliard

Semper Dowland semper dolens
Go from my window
Forlorne Hope Fancye

Intermission

Walsingham
A Galliard (upon Walsingham)

A Coye Toye
Mrs. Vaux's Jigge
Mistris Winters Jump
The Right Honourable Robert, the Earl of Essex, his Galliard

Farewell

Mr. Dowland's Midnight
Lachrimae
Sir John Souch's Galliard
A Fancy (P 6)

8-course lute after Venere by Paul Thomson, Bristol, England 1991

Program Notes

Known to his contemporaries as “The English Orpheus”, John Dowland was the most celebrated lutenist of his time and one of England’s greatest composers. His music was extraordinarily popular throughout Europe and was published in more cities than that of any other composer of the time. The celebrated *Lachrimae Pavin* alone survives in over 100 different versions. Nevertheless, Dowland’s career was filled with shattered dreams and frustrations, resulting in his adoption of the motto “Semper Dowland semper dolens” (“Always Dowland, always sorrowing”). The intense melancholy that pervades much of his music is a personal expression of the bitterness he felt due to the lack of a royal appointment and the dearth of respect shown him by younger players. At the same time, the modern preoccupation with Dowland’s melancholy creates a one-sided impression of a multi-faceted personality. Though his doleful works are justly famous, Dowland’s lively pieces, particularly his galliards and jigs, evoke a humor and wit unmatched by any of his contemporaries. Tonight’s program includes some of his least frequently performed pieces alongside some of his most famous works.

Dowland’s life unfolded as a colorful series of restless moves and wanderings. He had converted to Catholicism during his late teens, while serving the English ambassador in Paris, and he contended until the end of his life that this conversion was the cause of his exclusion from Queen Elizabeth’s court; but it seems possible that his volatile temperament and outspokenness may have played an equal role. After a six-year apprenticeship in France with Sir Henry Cobham, he returned to England around 1585, receiving a BMus at Christ Church, Oxford, on 8 July 1588. He soon established himself as one of the most important musicians in England, so that when the Queen’s principal “lewter” John Johnson died in the summer of 1594, Dowland expected to be chosen as his successor. When the position was left vacant, Dowland received a permit to travel abroad for the express purpose of meeting the famed Italian composer Luca Marenzio in Rome, stopping along the way at illustrious courts in Germany and Italy, meeting and performing with numerous influential musicians and patrons. Unfortunately, Dowland stumbled upon a conspiracy against Elizabeth by English Catholic ex-patriots in Florence, and he was forced to abandon his visit to Rome, along with any hope of being appointed to the Queen’s court. In 1598, Dowland accepted a post at the court of King Christian IV of Denmark, a position he held for eight years. Finally, in 1612, in the decline of his career, he was granted a position at the court of Elizabeth’s successor, James I, a post he held until his death in 1626.

Dowland was one of the foremost composers of lute songs (his four books of ayres are unsurpassed) as well as of music for lute alone. His outstanding gift for both memorable and expressive melodies served him well in both genres, but ultimately it is the pervasive contrapuntal skill, the imaginative ornamentation, and the moody chromaticism of his music that make his works so fascinating and affecting. Many of Dowland’s lute solos were later made into songs, including *The Earl of Essex Galliard* (Can she excuse my wrongs), *The Frog Galliard* (Now o now I needs must part), *Lachrimae* (Flow my tears), and *Sir John Souch’s Galliard* (My thoughts are winged with hopes). While many of Dowland’s dances survive with written out ornamentation,

Sir John Souch's Galliard and *Mr. Knights Galliard* are only preserved in a simple ABC form inviting today's lutenists to improvise their own ornamented repeats in the style of the master. The *Pavan* in the second group of pieces is taken from Johann Daniel Mylius's *Thesaurus Gratiarum* of 1622, making it one of the latest works of Dowland to survive. It features an extravagantly rhapsodic style of ornamentation which truly shows Dowland at the peak of his creative genius.

Dowland made use of all the instrumental forms current at the time including Fantasias, Pavins, Galliards, Almaines, jigs, toys and variations on ballad tunes like *Walsingham* and *Go from my window*. Dowland's fantasias were inspired more by the keyboard and viol fantasias of the time rather than by continental lute fantasias which provided the models for most other English lutenists of the time. The use of proportions, cantus firmus, chromaticism and antiphonal effects enable the lute to sound like a miniature consort without necessitating the outrageous left-hand contortions of much continental lute music. Indeed, it is Dowland's ability to expand the scope of lute music while maintaining a natural, idiomatic approach to the instrument that makes his music so satisfying for player and listener alike. No other lutenist was able to get so much out of the instrument so efficiently.

Farewell is Dowland's contrapuntal masterpiece. The eerie ascending chromatic lines and gripping dissonances moved Thomas Weelkes to borrow the final section for his madrigal *Cease sorrows now* set to the text, "I'll sing my faint *farewell*." For the lute, these words turned out to be all too prophetic. Just 50 years after Dowland's death, the lute was considered a "neglected and abused instrument." Thomas Mace' words of encouragement to the lute in 1676 could not be any more appropriate today: "*Chear up, Brave Soul! And know that some Yet Living, who for Thee will take such Care, (there are) That Thou shalt be Restor'd Thy former Glory, And be Eterniz'd to Eternal Story.*"

Paul O'Dette

Paul O'Dette – Biography

“...should I come to meet Saint Peter at the pearly gates, I hope he will say, ‘Welcome, good and faithful servant! By the way, be sure to hear Paul O'Dette—he's leading the angel band.’” Early Music America, Spring 2011

Paul O'Dette has been described him as “the clearest case of genius ever to touch his instrument.” (Toronto Globe and Mail) One of the most influential figures in his field, O'Dette has helped define the technical and stylistic standards to which twenty-first-century performers of early music aspire. In doing so, he helped infuse the performance practice movement with a perfect combination of historical awareness, idiomatic accuracy, and ambitious self-expression. His performances at the major international festivals in Boston, Vienna, London, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, Munich, Prague, Milan, Florence, Geneva, Madrid, Barcelona, Tokyo, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Melbourne, Adelaide, Los Angeles, Vancouver, Berkeley, Bath, Montpellier, Utrecht, Bruges, Antwerp, Bremen, Dresden, Innsbruck, Tenerife, Copenhagen, Oslo, Cordoba, etc. have often been singled out as the highlight of those events.

Paul O'Dette has made more than 150 recordings, winning three Grammys, receiving nine Grammy nominations and numerous other international record awards. “The Complete Lute Music of John Dowland” (a 5-CD set for harmonia mundi usa), was awarded the prestigious *Diapason D'or de l'année* and selected as the “Best Solo Lute Recording of Dowland” by BBC Radio 3. while “The Royal Lewters” has received the *Diapason D'or*, a *Choc du Monde de la Musique*, a 5-star rating in *BBC Music Magazine*, 5-star rating in *Goldberg* and a perfect score of 10 from ClassicsToday.com. “The Bachelor’s Delight: Lute Music of Daniel Bacheler” was nominated for a Grammy as “Best Solo Instrumental Recording of 2006.”

Mr. O'Dette is also active conducting Baroque operas. His recording of Charpentier's *La Descente d'Orphée aux Enfers* with the Boston Early Music Festival Chamber Ensemble won a Grammy for “Best Opera Recording of 2014,” as well as an *Echo Klassik Award* in the same category. In 1997 he directed performances of Luigi Rossi's *L'Orfeo* at Tanglewood, the Boston Early Music Festival (BEMF) and the Drottningholm Court Theatre in Sweden with Stephen Stubbs. Since 1999 they have co-directed performances of Cavalli's *Ercol Amante* at the Boston Early Music Festival, Tanglewood, and the Utrecht Early Music Festival, Provenzale's *La Stellidaura Vendicata* at the Vadstena Academy in Sweden, Monteverdi's *Orfeo* and *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* for Festival Vancouver, Lully's *Thésée*, Conradi's *Ariadne* (Hamburg, 1691) Mattheson's *Boris Goudenow*, Lully's *Psyché*, Monteverdi's *Poppea*, Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, Steffani's *Niobe*, Handel's *Almira*, Campra's *Le Carnaval de Venise*, Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona* and *Livieta e Tracollo* for the Boston Early Music Festival. Seven of their opera recordings have been nominated for Grammy awards: *Ariadne* as “Best Opera Recording of 2005,” *Thésée* in 2007, *Psyché* in 2008, *La Descente d'Orphée aux Enfers* in 2015, *Niobe* in 2016, *Les Plaisirs de Versailles* in 2020, and *Ino* in 2025. *Niobe*, *Ino*, and both Lully recordings were nominated for Gramophone awards. Steffani's *Niobe*, was awarded a *Diapason D'or de l'année*, an *Echo Klassik Award* and the prestigious *Jahrespreis der Deutscheschallplattenkritik*. Paul

O'Dette has guest conducted numerous Baroque orchestras and opera productions on both sides of the Atlantic.

In addition to his activities as a performer, Paul O'Dette is an avid researcher, having worked extensively on the performance and sources of seventeenth-century Italian and English solo song, continuo practices and lute music. He has published numerous articles on issues of historical performance practice and co-authored the Dowland entry in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

Paul O'Dette is Professor of Lute and Director of Early Music at the Eastman School of Music and Artistic Co-Director of the Boston Early Music Festival.