Sonnets and Epigrams
for voice and lute

David Protheroe
Sonnets and Epigrams for voice and lute
by David Protheroe

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Introduction

There is something magical about the sound of a plucked lute accompanying a voice. The hundreds of lute ayres published by Dowland and others are of course inimitable. I was prompted to compose "Of Orpheus" for a lute song course when Jacob Heringman invited us to bring lute songs of all periods including modern. I also transcribed a favourite Quilter piano song for lute. These suggested to me that the sound world of the lute song would be an apt way to express my own responses to Elizabethan poetry.

The poems
"Amoretti" is a cycle of 88 sonnets written by Edmund Spenser in 1595, addressed to his future wife Elizabeth Boyle. They were written on successive days in the period around Easter, and each sonnet refers loosely to the church liturgy for that day. For example, the word "snare" in "Her golden tresses" (28 February) occurs in both psalms 140 and 141, and the idea of washing in "Her name upon the strand" the baptism rituals surrounding Low Sunday (the first Sunday after Easter).

Shakespeare's sonnet 130 is a send-up of courtly lute songs which favourably compare a lover's attributes with nature's beauties.

"Orpheus with his lute" was the set text for a Lute Society composition competition, which led me to compose for the lute for the first time. The version in this book has been revised and includes a bass viol part.

"Variation" is a poem about how a subject can be variously expressed in poetry and music. I'm grateful to Lynda Sayce for finding the poem.

Collections of epigrams modelled on Martial's, making fun of contemporary figures thinly disguised by classical names, were popular around 1600. I've chosen two epigrams related to the lute.

"Sevens" is based on the traditional riddle "As I was going to St. Ives". I've set it in 7/8 time, and invented a second verse to make it a dialogue between two singers.

Joanna Tyldesley has been a member of the Lute Society since it started in 1956. She wrote the poetic fragment "Of Cupid" during the lute song course, and asked me to set it.

Vocal part
The songs at written pitch suit a medium to high voice (range c'-f'"), but a lower voice can sing them with an appropriately pitched lute.

The voice should be almost conversational, light enough to blend with the lute, but still expressive with dynamic variation and clear enunciation.

Metronome marks are indications only. You may well decide on a completely different tempo!

Lute part
Except for "Variation", which is for a trio of six-course lutes, the lute parts are written for a seven-course renaissance lute in G with the 7th course tuned to D, but can be played on lutes at other pitches. If playing a six-course lute, play the low D and F an octave up rather than omitting them.

Right hand fingering is marked only occasionally: one dot for the index finger, two dots for the middle finger, and a vertical dash for the thumb. Otherwise, follow 16th century practice by alternating the thumb middle finger with the index finger to differentiate strong and weak notes. Where arpeggios are marked (a sloping line) play them slowly and distinctly. Elsewhere, arpeggiate as you wish.

Left hand fingering (finger numbers and barres) are helpful suggestions: in general, notes are held as long as practicable.

I've included a few short "lute songs in disguise" for lute solo.

David Protheroe, Farnham, June 2019
Her golden tresses

Edmund Spenser
Amoretti: Sonnet 37

David Protheroe
2019

What guile is this, that those her golden tresses She doth attire under a net of gold: And

with sly skill, so, so cunningly them dresses That which is gold, or hair, may scarce be told?

Is it that men’s frail eyes which gaze too bold, She may entangle, she may entangle in that golden snare: And, being caught, may craftily enfold their weaker hearts, which are not well aware? Take heed, take
Her name upon the strand

Amoretti: Sonnet 75. To his future wife Elizabeth Boyle

One day I wrote her name upon the strand, But came the waves and wash'd it away (Ssh...)

A-gain I wrote it with a second hand, But came the tide and made my pains his prey. Vain man (said she) that

dost in vain assay, A mortal thing so to immortalise, For I myself shall like to this death

cay, And eke my name be wiped out like wise, Not so, (quod I) let
Base-er things devise to die in dust. But you shall live by fame; My verse your

turer

de-verise
to
die
in
dust.

But you shall live by fame;

But you shall live by fame; My verse your

vir-tues rare shall et-er-nise, And in the heav-ens write your glori-ous name Where when- as death shall

vir-tues rare shall et-er-nise, And in the heav-ens write your glori-ous name Where when- as death shall

all the world sub-due, Our love shall live, and lat-er life re-new.

1) Bar 32: If the lute is only fretted up to "n", play fret "o" on the table, just beyond "n".
2) Bar 34: eternise: make eternal
The rolling wheel

DAVID PROTERO

Edmund Spenser

Amoretti: Sonnet 18
My mistress' eyes are... are nothing like the sun; Coral is far more red than her lips' red; If snow be white, why then her breasts, - - her breasts - - are dun; If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.

I have seen roses da-mask'd, red - and white, But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.

I love to hear her speak yet well—I know that music hath a far more pleasing sound:—

I grant I never saw a goddess more fair than my mistress.

My mistress when she walks,She treads on the ground:

And yet, by heav’n, I think my love as rare As any she, as any she belied with false compare.
Orpheus with his lute

For voice, lute and bass viol

Shakespeare Henry VIII Act 3 Scene 1

DAVID PROtheroe
Eve rything that heard him play, Ev'n the bil lows of the sea,
Hung their heads and then lay 

In sweet min sic is such art.

Kil ling care and grief of heart Fall asleep, or hearing.

see next page for Bass viol part
Orpheus with his lute

DAVID PROTHEOE

Bass viol

---

play these four bars 5 times

---

Voices

For voice and three lutes

DAVID PROTHEOE

Variation

Joshua Sylvester

Voice and Lute 2

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Voice

---

Tenor

lute 2 (G)

---

10

---

15

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Epigram: Silus

Henry Porter
from The Mousetrap (1606)

DAVID PROTHEROE

Lute song in disguise: A flourishing age

apologies to Sermisy
Epigram: of Orpheus
Edward Guilpin
from Skialethia (1598)

DAVID PROOTHEROE

1st time cheerful, 2nd time exasperated

Orpheus hath wed a young lusty wife,
And all day long up-

on his lute doth play;
Doth not this fellow lead a merry life,

Who plays continually both night and day?

with abandon

Lute song in disguise: If she can excuse my complaints

apologies to Dowland
Sevens, or 2,802?
Traditional
A Dialogue
DAVID PROTHEOE

1. (1st voice) As I was going to St. Ives,
   I met a man with seven wives,

2. (2nd voice) As you were going to St. Ives,
   You met a man with seven wives,

Each wife had seven sacks,
Each sack had seven cats,
Each cat had seven kits,
Kits, cats, sacks,

...that they were all going the other way!

wives: How many were going to St. Ives?
...
1st voice

3. As I was going to St. Ives, I met a man with seven wives,
each wife had seven sacks,
each sack had seven cats,
each cat had seven kits.

2nd voice

3. As you were going to St. Ives?
Kits, cats, sacks, wives: How many were going to St. Ives?
One!

Kits, cats, sacks, wives: How many were going to St. Ives?
One!
Lute song in disguise: Lagrimas (tango)

apologies to Dowland
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