John Dowland
(1563 – 1626)

Lachrimae

(or *Seven teares)*

Lyrics assembled (based on the testament of migrants from the last three centuries) by Peter Oswald (b.1965)

The genesis of this version of the *Lachrimae* lies in a collaboration between Stile Antico and the Folger Consort at Washington National Cathedral in January 2016. As part of the programme, the Consort performed John Dowland's famous set of pavans for viols and lute: *Lachrimae*, or *Seaven Teares*. Dowland provided a text for only one of the these pavans – the opening *Lachrimae antiquae* became his signature work, the lute-song *Flow, my teares*.

Following the 2016 collaboration, and prompted by the heart-rending images and stories emerging from the refugee crisis across the Mediterranean, Stile Antico contacted Joanna MacGregor at Dartington International Summer School with the germ of an idea: to create new texts for the remaining pavans, highlighting issues of displacement and exile through the prism of this extraordinarily expressive music. The project fired her imagination, and together Dartington and the Stile Antico Foundation commissioned the poet Peter Oswald to provide texts based on the first-hand accounts of modern-day migrants and refugees. The premiere took place at Dartington on August 3rd 2017, when the Dowland was interspersed with performances by Joanna and the Egyptian-German singer Merit Ariane.

Why Dowland? The profound and troubling music of the *Lachrimae* seems peculiarly well-suited to this new purpose. Any Elizabethan music lover opening Dowland's 1604 *Lachrimae* publication would have been familiar with *Flow, my teares*; its characteristic falling motif pervades all seven pavans, which seem gradually to deconstruct the original, leading us to ever darker and more expressive musical worlds. It is as if Dowland is challenging us to consider the words of his song from every possible perspective, just as Peter Oswald's new texts circle the central issues of migration and displacement in multiple and contrasting ways. Peter writes:

> Stile Antico asked me to provide some new lyrics for Dowland's *Lachrimae*. I was to use the words of refugees, and follow as precisely as possible the rhythms of Dowland's existing lyric. This I have done as best I can in modern language. In two of the lyrics I have interwoven Dowland's words with the contemporary words, first in alternate verses then in alternate lines, so there is a progression out of Dowland. Occasionally I have changed the rhyme scheme, out of forgetfulness, but I reckoned this would not affect the connection with the music. I was more concerned with trying to replicate the weight and measure of syllables. I have followed as faithfully as I can the music of Dowland's words. Of course in adapting Dowland to this new purpose, the expressive thrust of his music is somewhat altered. As originally conceived, this set of 'Seavan Passionate Pavans' stands as the last word in musical melancholia, much in vogue in the Elizabethan period. The pavan itself was a sedate courtly dance, described by Thomas Morley as "a kind of staid music, ordained for grave dancing, and most

> commonly made of three strains, whereof every strain is played or sung twice". Each of Dowland's pavans carries a Latin title suggesting a different 'passion', or affect – 'old tears', 'new tears', 'tears of sighing', 'sad tears', 'forced tears', 'lover's tears', 'true tears'. As he makes clear in his preface, Dowland's intention is ultimately to beguile, not to depress, the listener: "And though the title doth promise teares, unfit guests in this joyfull times, yet no doubt pleasant are the teares which Musicke weepes".

Peter Oswald's texts make no attempt to beguile. Instead they offer a series of honest, provocative, and challenging voices. Four of the new texts reflect interviews with refugees; one is derived from a published poem by a Syrian girl; and one (*Lachrimae Amantis*) is based on an eighteenth-century newspaper source, which describes the uncomfortable experience of a (rather prejudiced) Londoner in Plymouth. There is at times a startling and powerfully expressive sense of fracture between the comforting regularity and historical distance of Dowland's pavans, and the contemporary directness of the words that we hear. And yet conversely, Dowland's music seems also to contextualise these modern-day voices as part of a far longer story, reminding us that today's issues of exile and displacement are only the latest in a long and painful history.

In a sense this adaptation extends the typically Renaissance tradition of 'contrafactum': the texting or re-texting of existing works, which could often produce results aesthetically quite different from the original. Extreme examples include Gombert's passionate lament *Lugebat David Absalom* (itself a contrafactum of a chanson about lost love), which received the Eastertide text *Tulerunt Dominum meam*, or the transformation of some of Monteverdi's sultrier madrigals into sacred works by Agostino Coppini. In England, Latin-texted works were regularly fitted with vernacular texts to rehabilitate them for post-Reformation use – for example, Tallis' *Spem in alium* became the decidedly more upbeat *Sing and glorify*. Evidently it was believed that the same music could express more than one character, depending on its context, and these new textings often shine new and unexpected light on familiar works. Something similar occurs when singing Dowland's music to Peter Oswald's words: for example, the down-to-earth narrator of Oswald's *Lachrimae Coactae* ("Now, good friends, wisdom for free!") seems on paper far removed from Dowland's disturbingly chromatic lines, and yet the combination has an alchemy all of its own.

Somerville College Choir is very grateful to Peter Oswald and Stile Antico for allowing us to use these editions.

Index