John Blow's "Arise, Great Monarch, and Ascend the Throne"

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Following restoration to his throne in 1660, King Charles II initiated the regular practice of having a specially written ode set to music for performance at the English Court in celebration of New Year's Day and royal birthdays. It was maintained until 1820, but its heyday lies in the last twenty-five years of the seventeenth century during which it was responsible for such fine works as Purcell's six Birthday Odes for Queen Mary, 1689-1694. After some rather inchoate efforts during its first ten years, definition was given to the genre by Pelham Humfrey. On his premature death in 1674 his post as one of the royal composers fell to John Blow (1649-1708) who was to become the doyen of the late-seventeenth-century English school, combining in plurality all the leading musical appointments save that of Master of the King's Music. From 1680 he was joined in the duty by his former pupil and younger colleague in royal service, Henry Purcell, the greatest ornament of that school. Blow is known to have written at least twenty-five court odes, those still extant, nineteen in number, running from 1678 to 1700. His contributions certainly represent a gradual development in organization and idiom from where Humfrey left off; nevertheless it must be recognized that these odes are very far from representing his best work as a composer of secular music. In this connection it seems significant that whenever one comes across a good movement in them, it is an instrumental one. Perhaps, unlike Purcell, whose genius was able to transcend the all too feeble verbal texts, he could make little or no response to the words.

Blow attempts nothing sophisticated in his musical setting of "Arise, Great Monarch," which is cheerful, not a little superficial, eschewing counterpoint but with plenty of the straightforward rhythm the king is known to have liked, including a brisk alla breve trio ("See how our troubles vanish") and a final chorus. All the choral movements are brief, bright, and homophonic, but the main burden of the nine short vocal sections is carried by a bass soloist and solo ensembles. The pervasive, all too predictable lilt of the greater part of the work is relieved by a rhetorical declamation for the bass, culminating in a fine flourish from E above middle C to D two octaves and a tone below at the words "Nor lagg'd ingloriously behind." Presumably this was brought off with éclat by John Gostling, the redoubtable Court and Chapel Royal bass. Strings contribute a competent opening "symphony" and keep spirits up with five ritornelli between vocal movements.

It is somewhat curious that each of Blow's court odes was the subject of one or more contemporary transcripts (sometimes as many as four and five) such as the present manuscript. These involve some dozen scribes, and most are contained in albums of mixed contents, one such anthology (British Library, Add. MS 33287) including no fewer than ten court odes by Blow together with one more transcribed by a later copyist. Humfrey's and Purcell's court odes, too, were the subject of such transcripts, the purpose of which is not readily explicable at present. Private study is by no means an adequate explanation covering all instances. And yet the possibility of repeat performances outside the court is in the highest degree unlikely.

In the first place, the words of such works were for the most part all too intimately connected with the single occasion and the audience for which they were written. Again, beyond the regularly constituted body of musicians at court, only Oxford (and then but fitfully) could command the resources needed for their performance: solo voices (particularly a good countertenor and bass), a small chorus, and an instrumental ensemble basically of four-part strings. Sporadic occasions outside Court, in celebration of St. Cecilia's Day, for example, must have required special arrangements, probably making use of royal musicians. Thus, at a time when public concerts were yet unknown, it is hard to understand why anyone should have troubled to make copies. As it is, we must accept the fact of these transcripts, among which the present manuscript is more than usually interesting.

For one thing, it is uncommon to find a transcript of an ode by Blow in the form, as here, of a single physical entity. The sole parallel exemplar is a copy of his New Year Ode, "My Trembling Song, Awake," now item 107 in the Memorial Library of Music at Stanford University, California. As we have seen, all other transcripts are contained in albums together with other material.

Furthermore, it is unusual in that, apart from William Croft (1678-1727, who, as a pupil-apprentice of Blow, may well have wanted to make a close study of his elder's work), its scribe is the only one to make these copies who has so far been identified. Comparison of its script with a well-authenticated specimen forming part of a music manuscript (Cap. VI/1/1) now in the Chichester Diocesan Record Office, West Sussex, reveals it as the work of John Walter (Walters/Water(s)), who became organist of Eton College in 1681. Allowing for the prevalent instability of surnames often phonetically transcribed, he is quite plainly to be identified as the "John Waters" who was a chorister of the Chapel Royal under Blow (in his capacity as Master of the Children, as the boys were known)

of a new born year. Ritor:

of a new born year.

Tres Solus:

hey: fun y: in times fruitful wonnt was to dry nolle Embassie dayes

to Read ye golden troop of dayes to come, Nor lag'd Jngle — nously Reline

from some time before 1674 and whose voice was certified as changed by February 1677.[1] He remained organist of Eton College until 1705, and then received what must be regarded as a sort of pension until 1708 when, presumably, he died.[2]

Walter was a minor--very minor--composer, but is interesting now on account of his work as a music copyist. At Eton there are some organ scores of church music which he wrote out, payments for which, over and above his stipend as organist, are recorded in the college accounts. But these, of course, arise from his professional duties and are of little import. Far more interesting is evidence of his copying activity wholly outside those duties and of which, besides the present manuscript, there is abundant evidence. It certainly reveals a close connection with Blow, reinforcing the presumption that Walter had been a Chapel Royal chorister. If its purpose were more fully understood than at present it might well shed some light on the attitude of cultivated amateurs of the time and on music making beyond the Court and Chapel Royal. As it is, its nature is such as to justify some general account to place the present manuscript in context.

First in scope and variety of contents stands British Library, Add. MS 22100, wholly in his hand. This is an extensive compendium of secular music ranging from solo songs, duets, and trios to larger-scale compositions. Apart from one minor item by Lully and a slight piece by Walter himself, it concentrates on music by composers associated with the court, circa 1676‹1684. It includes Purcell's court ode "Welcome, Viceregent" of 1680, and Blow's "Great Sir, the Joy of All Our Hearts" (1681) and "The Birth of Jove" (doubtless 1678). Also found is Blow's Oxford "Act Music" of circa 1677, "Awake, Awake, My Lyre," in a transposed version, thus suggesting a relation to some practical purpose. But what gives the album primacy as a source of text is a fair copy of "A Masque for the Entertainment of the King," Blow's highly interesting miniature opera "Venus and Adonis," to be dated circa 1683 and not later than 1684. This forms the final item of the manuscript, which is perhaps best understood on the hypothesis that it may have been compiled gradually from 1682, on behalf of "Mr Dolbin" whose name as owner in that year is found on the flyleaf. Gilbert Dolbin (1658-1722), afterwards a baronet, was a distinguished lawyer known for his active interest in music, and on this supposition the contents represent the taste of a cognoscente.

Uncertain in its purpose is the album, again wholly in Walter's hand, now King's College, Cambridge, Rowe MS 22,[3] which contains no date or mark of ownership. This, too, may have been compiled for a patron; equally Walter may have made it for his own use, a quarry from further copies might be taken for potential patrons. Its contents are a mixture

of contemporary secular music and specimens of the larger form of Chapel Royal anthem with string symphonies, together with some Italian cantatas. Blow is strongly represented, Walter supplying inter alia useful text of a number of his anthems, and the scores of three more court odes, "Arise, Great Monarch" (the present work: for date, see below), "Dread Sir, Father Janus" (doubtless 1683), and "My Trembling Song, Awake" (1684), in that order.

In 1683 he began to enter a copy of Blow's Morning Service in G into a thick volume, now British Library, Add. MS 17839, but did not quite complete it, leaving over two hundred leaves blank which much later were filled up with Blow's church music by Philip Hayes of Oxford (1738-1797).

British Library, Add. MS 31453, which can hardly be thought of as written for a patron but rather as a means of record, is later than these. Nor is it wholly the work of Walters, being in part in the hand of William Isaack who copied a score of Purcell's Ode for St. Cecilia's Day, 1692. Isaack was an older man, a singer in the choir of Eton College whose son Bartholomew had been a contemporary of Walter's in the Chapel Royal.[4] Walter contributed a score (not quite complete) of Blow's "Venus and Adonis" which differs somewhat from that in Add. MS 22100 and contains additional amendments. Evidently, then, he was in close touch with the composer as the work evolved under his hand.

Finally, Isaack and Walter were jointly concerned in copying what Bruce Wood[5] considers to be the performing score of Purcell's Birthday Ode for Queen Mary, 1693, now Bodleian Library, Oxford, U.K., MS Mus. c. 28.

This may not prove to be the complete tally of Walter's extant music copying. But it is enough for us to discern something of a picture. After initial training, and perhaps an informal apprenticeship, in the Chapel Royal he settled in the relatively minor post of organist of Eton College which he was to retain throughout his life. Concurrently, he almost immediately began to undertake independent work as a music copyist, no doubt for a fee, perhaps stimulated by the example of Isaack, with whom he conferred and collaborated. He was in a favorable position for this, having for some reason access to the primary sources of recent music by his former master Blow and other court composers. Besides working for independent patrons, he was in some unexplained way closely involved in copying for both Blow and Purcell in connection with performances, and his activities extend well into the final decade of the seventeenth century.

Turning now to the present manuscript, not only has the top of its first leaf been cropped, but its right-hand corner has worn away, so that at the end of the first line of the heading the figures of the year date are now incomplete. Obviously the first three must be "168," and judging from the lower fragment remaining of the fourth that is very likely to have been "3," almost certainly not "2." This raises a problem about the exact date of this ode. Blow's original holograph score (Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, MS 5001, pp. 53-91/ff. 52-31) bears no date. However, on an independent transcript (Royal College of Music, London, MS 1097, f. 119v) someone, closely contemporary but not the scribe of the music, has noted the year 1692. One is at first inclined to give the greater weight to what appears to be Walter's testimony, but on turning to the words it is impossible to find support for 1683. The final chorus reads:

See how our troubles vanish...
Propitious winds bear all our griefs away
And peace clears up the troubled day.
Not a wrinkle, not a scar
Of faction or dishonest war...

Any idea that this might refer to some military or naval event must be dismissed, for there was none either in the year ending 1681 (appropriate for the Royal College of Music manuscript date) or 1682 (for Walter's date). Moreover, there is a different ode, "Dread Sir, Father Janus," which may be assigned to New Year 1683 as being apt for events of the year 1682. On the other hand, up to February 1681, when he summoned and quickly dismissed a Parliament, Charles II had long been beset by troubles about Whig proposals to exclude his brother James, the heir-presumptive, from the succession. But then, by adroit maneuvers, he circumvented the opposition and engineered a Tory reaction. Thus the political tide turned in his favor and the problem seemed laid to rest by late 1681. One hardly hesitates, then, before concurring with Rosamond McGuinness's view[6] that the words quoted refer to this, making Blow's ode apt for the New Year, 1682, and rejecting the putative 1683. In Rowe MS 22 Walter's other transcript bears no date. If, however, we make the assumption that, as a kind of file copy, it was the source of the present manuscript, then he may have mistakenly supplied the date from memory. From the point of view of the music, however, the difference of a single year is of no moment.

Be that as it may, we have here an admirable specimen of his penmanship, with clearly formed, well-spaced musical notation and a good round hand for the words, speaking favorably of Walter's general education received as a boy in the Chapel Royal choir. The

manuscript apparently remained unbound until the twentieth century, with the result that the first page has become a little discolored. But nothing is known of its history from the time it left Walter's hands until it belonged to Nathan van Patten in the midtwentieth century, from whom it was acquired by the Moldenhauer Archives. Unfortunately, van Patten was misled into thinking it was in the composer's writing, hence its erronrous inclusion as item 310 of Otto E. Albrecht's census of autograph music manuscripts of European composers in American libraries (1953) in which it is unequivocally ascribed to the year 1683.

[1] Andrew Ashbee, *Records of English Court Music*, vol. 1, (Kent: Snodland, 1986), pp. 144 and 169.

[2] Watkins Shaw, *The Succession of Organists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 375.

[3] See Bruce Wood, "A Note on Two Cambridge Manuscripts and Their Copyists," *Music and Letters*, 61 (1975): 308-12.

[4] Ashbee, op. cit., pp. 144 and 166.

[5] Personal information.

[6] Rosamond McGuinness, *English Court Odes 1660-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 47.