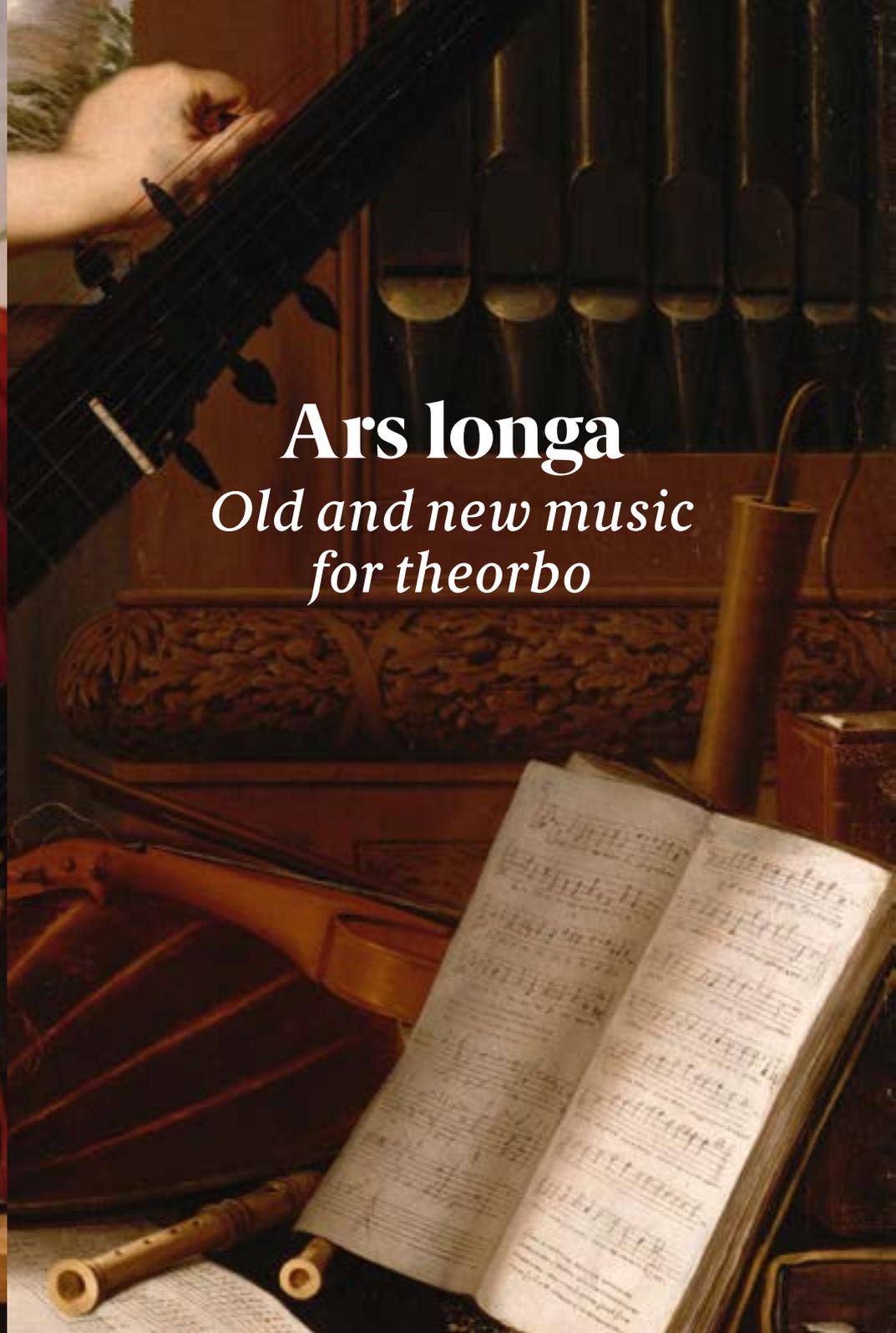




Elizabeth Kenny



Ars longa
*Old and new music
for theorbo*

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Ars longa

Old and new music for theorbo

75:34

MENU

ELIZABETH KENNY

Theorbo by Klaus Jacobsen
after Italian models, 1992

- ALESSANDRO PICCININI (1566–c. 1638)
- 1 — **Toccata III** 3:05
from *Intavolatura di liuto et di chitarrone*, 1623
 - 2 — **Toccata X** 2:09
from *Intavolatura di liuto et di chitarrone*, 1623
 - 3 — **Ciaccona** 1:42
from *Intavolatura di liuto et di chitarrone*, 1623
 - 4 — **Romanesca con partite variate** 6:26
from *Intavolatura di liuto et di chitarrone*, 1623
- SIR JAMES MACMILLAN (b. 1959)
- 5 — **Motet 1** 3:13
from *Since it was the day of Preparation ...*
- ALESSANDRO PICCININI
- 6 — **Corrente** 1:28
from *Intavolatura di liuto et di chitarrone*, 1623

- 7 — **Toccata XII** 2:00
from *Intavolatura di liuto et di chitarrone*, 1623
- 8 — **Romanesca folia con variate** 3:16
from *Intavolatura di liuto et di chitarrone*, 1623
- GIOVANNI GIROLAMO KAPSPERGER (c. 1580–1651)
- 9 — **Canario – Capona** 3:33
from *Libro quarto d'intavolatura di chitarrone*, 1640
- 10 — **Toccata prima** 6:03
from *Libro quarto d'intavolatura di chitarrone*, 1640
- 11 — **Passacaglia** 3:09
from *Libro quarto d'intavolatura di chitarrone*, 1640
- BENJAMIN OLIVER (b. 1981)
- 12 — **Extending from the inside** 8:20

ROBERT DE VISÉE (c. 1655–1732/3)

Suite in C minor

- 13 — Prélude en C sol ut mineur 0:54
- 14 — La Plainte, ou Tombeau de Mesdemoiselles de Visée,
Allemande de Mr. leur père 4:42
- 15 — Courante 1:40
- 16 — Sarabande 3:25
- 17 — Gigue 2:07

- 18 — **Prélude en G re sol majeur** 1:05
- 19 — **Les Sylvains de Mr. Couperin** 3:34

NICO MUHLY (b. 1981)

Berceuse with seven variations

- 20 — Cycle 1:38
- 21 — First Berceuse 1:48
- 22 — Second Berceuse 1:55
- 23 — Scattershot 1:30
- 24 — Lilt 2:30
- 25 — Stutter 1:33
- 26 — Coda 2:42

Ars longa

Old and new music for theorbo

The theorbo or chitarrone (they are the same instrument) made its appearance on the European stage during the 1590s. Though we associate it now with the move from calm Renaissance polyphony to tune-and-bass ‘in-your-face’ Baroque, it was a true child of the Renaissance. Welding old and new together – and using the one to justify the other – was a central topic of the intellectual talking-shops, or academies, of late sixteenth-century Italy.

Michael Praetorius in his magisterial *Syntagma musicum* (specifically volume II, *De organographia*) warned his readers off the theorbo: ‘Since constant changes take place in these various matters, nothing very definite may be stated about them here.’

He had a point: changes and modifications to the various shapes and sizes of lute from the sixteenth to eighteenth century were often driven by maverick individuals as much as the needs of player-composers and regional musical trends. But the story of imperfection and failure leading to something of great beauty is such a universal paradigm of technological development that it is worth exploring here. Vincenzo Galilei, father of the astronomer Galileo, conducted many experiments into string tensions and tunings in his quest to understand the emotive power of the music of the Ancients; his son was roped in to do the heavy lifting and measuring. Galileo was perhaps helped towards his extraordinary scientific discoveries by this early training, and in return he was able to support his financially indigent lute-playing brother and nephews with the proceeds of his telescope sales. Galilei senior produced a re-creation of the ancient kithara, the diatonically tuned instrument to which the Ancients declaimed their dramatic and epic poetry. The race was then on to extend the range of a bass lute and modify it for use in the experimental monodies of the circle around Count Giovanni de’ Bardi, known as the Camerata, in Florence; reviving powerful ancient declamation with new technology was the aim.

In 1589 the wedding festivities of the new Grand Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinando de' Medici, and Christine of Lorraine provided the perfect opportunity to stage lavish spectacles of humanist-inspired music and poetry between the acts of the drama. In one of these intermedii, *Armonia doria* appeared like this:

In this cloud was a lady descending slowly toward the earth playing a lute and singing the madrigal below to the sound of her own lute and of harpsichords, [with] chitarroni and harps behind the scene.

According to Cristofano Malvezzi this was the celebrated soprano Vittoria Archilei. One chitarrone player was her husband Antonio, the other Antonio Naldi, both salaried musicians of the Grand Duke. Emilio de' Cavalieri credits Naldi with the invention of the instrument: Galilei's kithara updated for the modern theatre.

With its second neck adding an octave of bass strings (diapasons), the new-old instrument was perfectly suited to accompanying the voice. Two chitarroni played in Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* in 1607, and were the backbone of continuo groups in operas by Peri, Corsi and Francesca Caccini. But in the hands of its players the solo possibilities that the new tuning revealed were being realized even faster: in Rome Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger had already rushed into print with his *Libro primo d'intavolatura di chitarone* in 1604.

By 1600 the chitarrone was becoming known by another name, the tiorba – which would give us the English theorbo and the French théorbe. John Florio’s dictionary (*A Worlde of Wordes*, 1598) translated tiorba as a ‘kind of musicall instrument used among countrie people’, modified in 1611 to ‘a musical instrument that blind men play upon called a Theorba’. Inigo Jones attempted to import one into England around 1605, but was stopped by customs at Dover, where they thought it a ‘Popish engine to destroy ye king’. Once it was allowed to reach the stage it became a good source of size-related comedy.

Tom. What che thinke thu wants a Viddle? chill fetch thee a Viddle, Man, is there be a Viddle in the house.

[He goes in and brings out a theorbo]

Che can borrow no Viddle but this, and here’s one aumost as long as a maypole.

[The shepherd takes the theorbo and sings]

(from The King and Queenes Entertainment at Richmond, 1636)

And so to the music. Though from Bologna, Alessandro Piccinini was familiar with the leading lights of the Florentine Camerata, and was an early adopter of the instrument. At the same time he was working towards his own kind of extended lute, driving his instrument-makers to distraction in the process:

In Padua ... even though the luthiers have made strong objections to building new lutes in this cold season they will nonetheless do the best they can. It is certain that if I had not gone to supervise them they would not have done a good job, since such a lute seems very eccentric to them.

New inventions are often preceded by failure, collaborative tension and false claims to originality. The Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien has one or two ghosts: failed attempts to extend the lute's body rather than the neck. It is easy to see why the lute makers were finding so many excuses. But Piccinini really wanted a coup as big as Naldi's chitarrone, and the higher-pitched 'arciliuto' was it. He published his *Intavolatura* for arciliuto and for chitarrone in Bologna in 1623. Like Kapsperger's, Piccinini's theorbo had the two 'top' strings tuned down an octave, as gut strings could not withstand the tension of being tuned higher on the large-bodied instrument. The top string in pitch is therefore the third in physical space. He gave detailed instructions of how this new tuning could sound beautiful in arpeggio patterns, how to play with fingernails, and where and how to play *tirate* (extended slurs not found in earlier lute music), trills and other innovations. His toccatas veer engagingly between old and new: sometimes a Gabrieli-style contrapuntal canzona will pop out of a series of improvisatory chords, and sometimes chromatic passages froth with unprepared dissonances and other rule-breaking figures. Familiar chord patterns like the ciaccona and romanesca emerge with great clarity at some points and at others are teasingly buried beneath cascades of imaginative figuration.

With the ‘nobile alemano’ Kapsperger (born in Rome, but his father was a colonel in the German army) we come to a new voice. A notoriously curmudgeonly character who was not averse to removing other composers’ music from the choir stalls of the Papal chapel in which he worked, his compositional range was impressive. In his motets and madrigals he explored the affective possibilities and sudden shifts of mood to which vocal virtuosity was being harnessed, and his theorbo music does no less. He published four books of music for chitarrone between 1604 and 1640. The Toccata prima from Book IV is a monument not only to his fierce technique but also to his musical daring. Again rules of harmony and counterpoint are frequently broken and the re-entrant tuning lends itself to clashing semitones. Kapsperger also uses popular forms like the canario and capona (‘blockhead’), showing that a three-chord trick is always full of possibilities.

In France the théorbe was a sophisticated, mellifluous creature. Player-composers like Robert de Visée combined solo activities with teaching aristocratic amateurs such as Jean-Étienne Vaudry de Saizenay, whose vast compendium of repertoire contains the pieces on this album. Visée also performed chamber music as one of Louis XIV’s Musiciens du roi, playing frequently for many hours during the coucher du roi, and in the operas of Lully; his music sits within a court culture where ideas – and pieces, such as the lovely *Les Sylvains de Mr. Couperin*, originally for harpsichord – were in daily exchange.

The French lute school had already established the habit of grouping pieces in similar keys together to avoid having to re-tune strings between them (especially irksome on this instrument for those with average-length arms who have to stand up to re-tune). The open bass strings of the theorbo enabled a melody to be sustained in the higher register over a coherent bass line, without the need for the left hand to stretch impossible distances. This, and a fondness for dance rhythms, gave the large instrument an unexpected grace and ease. The Suite in C minor includes an intense Allemande where the courtly and the personal collide: *La Plainte, ou Tombeau de Mesdemoiselles de Visée*. How many daughters are included in this memory is a private detail he reserved for himself.

Playing our versions of old instruments does not guarantee the truth of our imagining of a lost world, but it does stimulate imaginative possibilities that lie beyond our own habits. We may not be that much closer to the seventeenth century than they were to the Ancients. But exploring this technology – and the tablature that represented it – is like looking in the mirror at an image that is related to but not the same as ourselves: a fascinating place to be. The chitarrone/theorbo, with its slippery identity – serious and comic –, represents a key moment in intellectual history, but it is also just another big guitar, and I am privileged to play and record some twenty-first-century encounters with its sound.

Sir James MacMillan (b. 1959) uses it to conjure up old but transcendent histories. ‘Motet 1’ opens his 2011 work *Since it was the*

day of Preparation ..., written for the Hebrides Ensemble, Synergy Vocals and Brindley Sherratt as Christ. Five singers and five instruments tell the story of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. Each instrument has expressive soliloquies which can also be played – as here – as free-standing meditations. In the wider context of the piece the theorbo acts as an emblem of human fragility and sadness, while the other four instruments (clarinet, horn, harp and cello) dramatize the terrifying power, as well as the transforming hope, of the Resurrection.

Benjamin Oliver (b. 1981) hears a different character, at times a large version of a funk guitar, but one that speaks to the Baroque tradition of repeated or ground bass figures. He writes:

Extending from the inside is the first in a continuing series of works developed in response to the first part of Arvo Pärt's 'Ludus' in *Tabula rasa*, which I was analyzing for teaching purposes around the same time I composed this theorbo solo for Elizabeth Kenny. The opening of 'Ludus' consists of clearly defined sections in which four distinct materials are gradually extended and elaborated. The form is, in a way, a very simple additive structure but the nuanced repetition and elaboration of materials means that the listening experience is rather more complex than the idea suggests.

Although my musical language is somewhat different to Arvo Pärt, I took this formal idea of elaborated variation as the springboard for *Extending from the inside*, which consists of

six sections that contain three main musical materials. These materials are presented in their simplest forms in the opening page and are then gradually elaborated and extended as the work develops.

Hearing composers who are at home in both old and new repertoires is a particular revelation. Nico Muhly (b. 1981) writes:

Berceuse with seven variations is constructed around a cycle of twenty-four chords, spaced with maximum distance between the lowest and highest notes. Each variation explores various paths through this cycle, but always keeping the idea of a cradle-song, a berceuse, in the background. Some of the variations treat this music subtly and calmly, and other times, exploding the chords into fast-moving notes found at the extremes of the instruments. The piece ends with the chords dispersed, inverted, and made gentle again.

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Since it was the day of Preparation ...
published by Boosey & Hawkes.

Extending from the inside published
by Composers Edition / Benjamin Oliver.

Berceuse with seven variations published
by Chester Music Ltd.



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Elizabeth Kenny

Theorbo

Elizabeth Kenny is one of Europe's leading lute and theorbo players. Her playing has been described by the musical press as 'incandescent', 'radical' and 'indecently beautiful'. She has an extensive discography with chamber ensembles across Europe and the USA, including Phantasm, and with singers such as Ian Bostridge, Mark Padmore, Robin Blaze and Nicholas Mulroy. In 2016 *Shakespeare Songs* with Bostridge won the Grammy Best Solo Vocal Album Award; and in 2017 Phantasm and Kenny won the Gramophone Early Music Award for *Lachrimae or Seven Tears*. She has devised several critically acclaimed recordings of solo music from the ML Lute Book, and songs by Lawes, Purcell and Dowland.

In 2007 Kenny founded Theatre of the Ayre, whose various touring projects have sealed a reputation for an innovative and improvisatory approach to seventeenth-century music. Their collaboration with members of the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain, *Lutes and Ukes*, converted surprising numbers of people to the genre-crashing possibilities of plucked instruments in concerts across the UK and Germany.

In twenty years of touring Kenny has played with many of the world's best period instrument groups, including Les Arts Florissants and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. She continues to devise and direct theatrically inspired programmes in other contexts, such as *Le Malade Imaginaire* and *A Restoration Tempest*. She has given premiere performances of solo and chamber pieces by Sir James MacMillan, Benjamin Oliver, Heiner Goebbels and Rachel Stott.

Kenny taught for two years at the Universität der Künste Berlin, was Professor of Musical Performance at the University of Southampton from 2004 to 2018 and has been Professor of Lute at the Royal Academy of Music since 1999. She is currently Director of Performance and Performance Studies in the Faculty of Music, Oxford University.

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The Masque of Moments

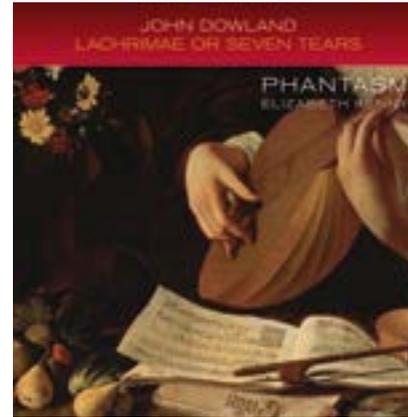
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Phantasm

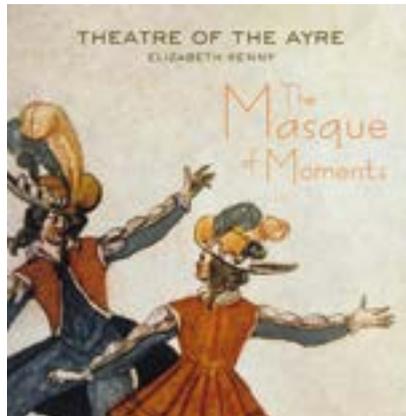
Lawes: The Royal Consort



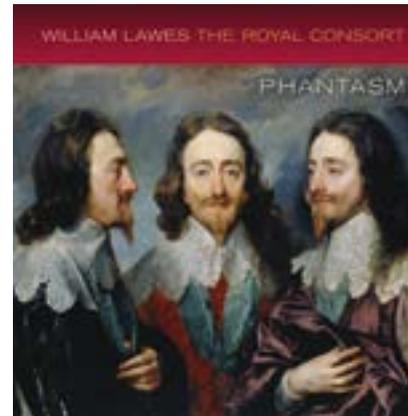
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