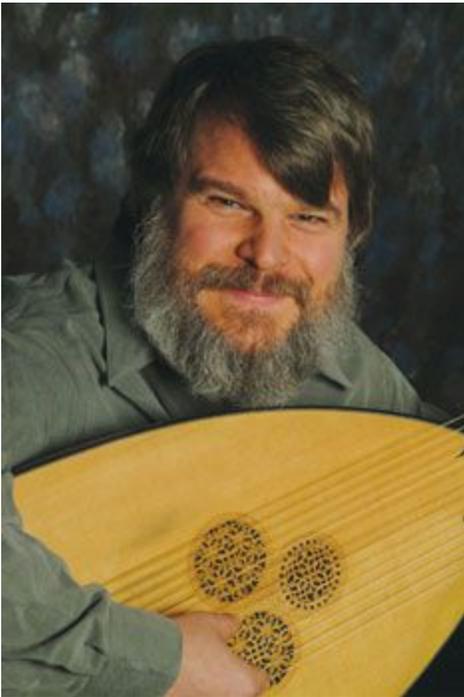


Cleveland Classical Guitar Society: Lutenist Paul O'Dette at Plymouth Church (Jan. 30)

by Christine Jay



A solo lute recital may be one of the most intimate concert experiences ever. Time seems suspended, and melody and harmony intermingle in sweet, soft pluckery. Producing such a sound-world takes skill, however, and Grammy Award-winning lutenist Paul O'Dette demonstrated his skill in spades during his January 30th recital in Herr Chapel at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights, presented by the Cleveland Classical Guitar Society

O'Dette's program, entitled "Sempre Dowland Sempre Dolens: Lute Music of John Dowland (1563-1626)," was a distinct pleasure to experience. The lutenist not only played with emotion and excellent musicianship, but also spoke to the audience with a unique warmth, offering witty quips between the proto-suites. O'Dette credited Dowland as a "a central figure" throughout his musical life in a recent ClevelandClassical.com preview. O'Dette's personality and love of Dowland created an uncommonly intimate concert experience.

An example of that concert experience came after O'Dette's first set, comprising *A Fancy (5)*, a *Pavin*, a *Galliard*, and *A Fancy (6)*. After hearty applause, O'Dette explained that both fancies are densely written counterpoint for five to six voices. Every musical idea has an entrance but not all have a termination, since O'Dette only has two hands to play five- and six-part counterpoint. "We don't have enough fingers for that," he said.

The next section again proved memorable for O'Dette's informative commentary. When describing *La Mia Barbara*, the lutenist harkened back to his electric guitar days, saying "these are some of the best diminutions ever written by Dowland." He then introduced *The King of Denmark's Galliard* and *Sir John Smith's Almaine*, both pieces heavy with

repetition. “These were played three times each for the dancers — they continue for a while,” he added with a chuckle.

His *La Mia Barbara* was filled with a sweet yearning. The described diminutions provided dramatic, head-banging effects. Both the Galliard and the Almaine, played with similar repetitive styles, became more exciting with each added layer of ornamentation, and fast, almost jazzy notes materialized. One expected Pocahontas to emerge from O’Dette’s twangs in *Sir John Smith’s Almaine*.

The next suite began with the piece that gave the program its name: *Sempre Dowland Sempre Dolens*, a motto translated as “Always Dowland, always sorrowing.” Although O’Dette wrote in his program notes that “Dowland’s career was filled with shattered dreams and frustrations,” the lutenist described the piece as anything but depressive. “There’s a musical game inside of it,” O’Dette said from the low, cream-colored stage. Inside, Dowland includes fifteen of his favorite compositions, “and how he makes a poignant work of this fifteen-piece puzzle is the magic of Dowland.” Poignant? Yes. Somehow he intermingles the loss, happiness, and passion of the human experience within his own works.

Moving from the profound to the comical, O’Dette programmed a series of Dowland’s lighter pieces. O’Dette chuckled and said he did so “to dispel any myth of Dowland being only depressed, and to show his cheeky side.” The names alone of some of the compositions are amusing: *A Coye Toye*, *Mrs. Vaux’s Jigge*, and *Mistris Winters Jump*.

The final suite, however, which began with a composition entitled *Farewell*, highlighted some of Dowland’s most virtuosic and emotional compositional abilities. *Farewell* was a chromatic climb of palpable and extreme dissonance. *Lachrimae* was similar, O’Dette furrowing his brow, emotionally invested in the work. The final *Fantasia* built to higher and higher climaxes, often changing meter and mood. It ended with a large flourish by O’Dette, producing yelps and a standing ovation from the audience.

O’Dette’s encore for the sold-out concert, a Passacaglia by Alessandro Piccinini, showed what O’Dette called Dowland’s “Italian flair.” Bold, strong accents filled the chapel, ending with the leading tone hanging in the air, its resolution a faint whisper. With this, Paul O’Dette must have stopped time for a second, so captured we were in his spell.

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