

**SIX SONGS: SELECTED
FROM THE AMPHION
ANGLICUS, 1700**

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Six Songs: Selected from the *Amphion Anglicus*, 1700 by G. E. P. Arkwright

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G. E. P. ARKWRIGHT

**SIX SONGS: SELECTED
FROM THE AMPHION
ANGLICUS, 1700**

The Old English Edition. No. xxiii.

SIX SONGS

BY

DR. JOHN BLOW,

SELECTED FROM THE

AMPHION ANGLICUS, 1700.

EDITED BY

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Preface.

THE object of this Edition is to present in an accessible form various works by English composers of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, which would otherwise be difficult to obtain.

It is intended to reprint a selection from the music hidden away in public and private libraries, which is almost unknown, except to antiquaries and collectors of rare books.

Each volume will be accompanied by Introductions, Biographical Notices, and references to the authorities whence information is obtained.

Introduction

To No. xxiii. Old English Edition.

JOHN BLOW is said by most of his biographers to have been born at North Collingham in Nottinghamshire, in 1648. But as the investigations of Mr. W. Barclay Squire have shown that there is no entry of his name, nor of that of any of his family, in the North Collingham registers, the probability is that Anthony Wood was well-informed when he notes that "Dr. Rogers tells me that John Blow was borne in London" [Dict. of National Biography]. He was one of the first set of Children of the Chapel Royal appointed after its re-establishment by Charles II. in 1660. Here he was trained by Captain Cooke, having as fellow-pupils Pelham Humphreys and Michael Wise. He is also said to have been taught by Hingeston (Oliver Cromwell's organist), and his tomb-stone mentions that "he was Scholar to the excellent musician Dr. Christopher Gibbons." Anthems composed by Blow were sung at the Chapel Royal while he was still a boy, for the words of three anthems by him are contained in Clifford's "Divine Services and Anthems," 1663, and the anthem, "I will always give thanks," known as the Club Anthem, was written by him with Turner and Humphreys, probably while they were choristers together. Pepys mentions having heard "Blaew" sing on August 21, 1667, when his voice had broken and he had left the Chapel.

The events of Blow's life may be briefly summed up in a chronicle of his musical appointments. He was appointed Organist of Westminster Abbey, 1669 [this post he resigned in 1680 to his pupil, Henry Purcell]: Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, March 16, 1673-4: Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal, 1674: Organist of the Chapel Royal, 1676: Member of the Royal Band and Composer in Ordinary to James II., 1685: Almoner and Master of the Choristers at St. Paul's Cathedral, 1687 [these appointments he resigned in 1693 to his pupil, Jeremiah Clarke]: he was re-elected Organist of Westminster Abbey on Purcell's death in 1695: and in 1699

he was appointed Composer to the Chapel Royal, with a salary of £40, afterwards raised to £73. His degree of Doctor of Music is said to have been a Lambeth degree conferred by Archbishop Sancroft.

Dr. Blow died at Westminster on Oct. 1, 1708, and was buried in the North Aisle of the Abbey. He had married (Sept. 4, 1674) Elizabeth, only daughter of Edward Braddock, Gentleman of the Chapel Royal; she died Oct. 29, 1683, aged 30. Three daughters, Elizabeth, Katharine, and Mary, survived him, two sons having died in childhood before their father.

[Fuller particulars about Dr. Blow's life will be found in Mr. Squire's article in the Dict. of National Biography (from which the facts and dates given above are mostly taken); also Burney's and Hawkins' Histories, and Rimbault's Cheque-book of the Chapel Royal.]

Of all the neglected English composers of merit, Blow perhaps is the most undeservedly forgotten. The reason for the neglect with which his music is treated is not hard to find. In his lifetime (as ever since) he was overshadowed by his great pupil, Henry Purcell. Even in some of the complimentary verses prefixed to his *Amphion Anglicus* he is particularly praised for being Purcell's master, and now-a-days the few who care to study late 17th century music very properly turn to Purcell rather than to the less important composers for examples of the best that the period could produce. In addition to this, not much of Blow's music is easily obtained; comparatively little was printed in his lifetime, and that is now rare, and little has been printed since—only I believe some services and anthems in Boyce's Cathedral Music, and some edited by Vincent Novello, and a little song printed by Hullah. Very probably also Burney's severe remarks on Blow's music may have deterred students from taking much trouble about becoming acquainted with it.

Burney, it will be remembered, deals particularly severely with Blow in his History [Vol. III. p. 447, &c.]: and though an examination of his strictures shows that they contain much truth, yet the reader is left with the impression that Blow has been treated rather unjustly. What Burney says is too long to quote in full, but the following passages show the tendency of his criticisms. "I shall point out a few instances of his great, and, to my conceptions, unwarrantable licentiousness, as a contrapuntist:" "I am as sorry to see, as to say, how confused and inaccurate a harmonist he was:" "Though

there are strokes of pathetic and subjects of fugue in Blow's works that are admirable; yet I have examined no one of them that appears to be wholly unexceptionable, and free from confusion and crudities in the counterpoint:" in the Anthem, *Lord, how are they increased*, "there are licenses in the harmony which look and sound quite barbarous. Indeed, these crudities are so numerous as to throw a doubt on his learning as well as genius. Whether they are notes of passion, effusions of an unruly spirit, or of ignorance and affectation, I will not venture to determine; but to my ears they have the full effect of jargon and want of principles."

No one can object to Burney's stating his opinions (although they are expressed in stronger language than he generally permits himself to use), especially as he illustrates his criticisms with several pages of "specimens of Dr. Blow's crudities." But he seems to single out Blow and hold him up for our special disapprobation for what he regards as faults, as if they were peculiar to him, and not the result of the tendency of the music of the period. Burney's point of view (that of the music-master of 1789) is very instructive, but he apparently fails to recognise that music towards the end of the 17th century was in a transitional state, and that Blow and his contemporaries were constantly trying experiments in writing, some of which were successful while others were not. Some of them are accepted in modern music, while some have not been heard for two centuries.

Of the crudities which Burney selects from Blow's works, there are few which cannot be paralleled from the writings of Purcell and other composers of the time: of the rest some are evidently misprints in the old editions or faults in the figuring of the bass, due to slovenly proof-reading, or carelessness in copying on the composer's part: one, at least, is an importation of Burney's own and does not exist in the original authority. Some of the devices (such as the clashing of a natural and a sharp to the same note in the same chord) were recognised as regular in music of the period, and had been accepted for a hundred years, though now not generally used; others (such as the chord of the 13th*) were commonly used

* This chord has had a much interrupted history. It was used experimentally as a duly prepared discord in Elizabethan music; the first example that I know being in a *Judica me Domine* by the elder Alfonso Ferrabosco. It was in common use for pathetic effects by the composers of the Restoration period; Matthew Locke, Pelham Humphreys, and Purcell, all use as well as Blow. In Burney's time it was disused, being regarded by him as a barbarism, against which he always protests. It has reappeared as something typically modern in the music of this century.