

Thomas Morley, *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke*, 1597

Special Collections featured item for August 2005 by Tim Eggington (former Rare Books Librarian)

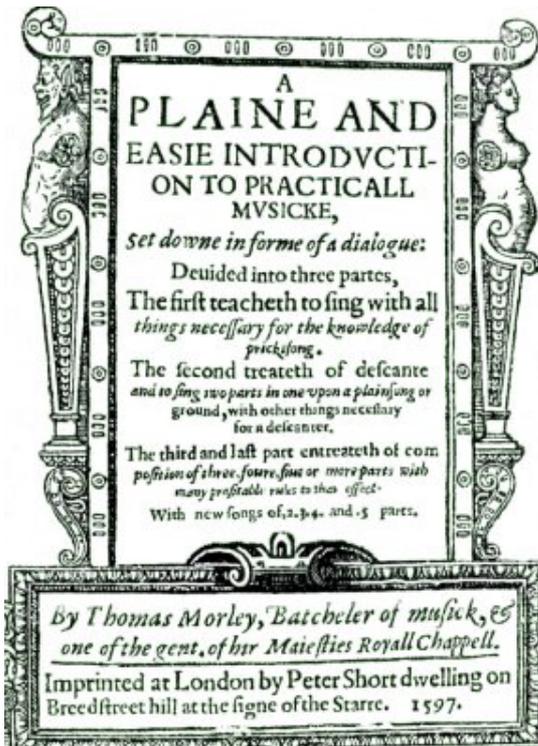
**Morley, Thomas, 1557 or 1558-1602. *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke*
London : Peter Short dwelling on Breedstreet hill at the signe of the Starre, 1597**

Item held in the Reserve Collection, University of Reading Library Special Collections

This month's featured item is the Library's first edition of Thomas Morley's *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (1597). As well as being the most famous musical treatise in the English language this work constitutes a prime example of the encroaching influence of Italianate culture over Elizabethan England and the role publishing had in advancing this.

Morley's father is thought to have been a verger at Norwich Cathedral where at some point Thomas Morley was a chorister, becoming Choirmaster and Organist by 1583. It was from these beginnings that Morley became one of the most revered figures in English Music.





As a composer Morley was a key figure in that golden period of English music occurring during the reign of Elizabeth I when a school of talented composers raised English music to a height unsurpassed before or since. The most important of these composers was Morley's teacher William Byrd (c 1540-1623) to whom *A Plaine and Easie Introduction* is dedicated[see below]. Arguably England's greatest ever composer, Byrd is famed for his learned style, most evident in his sacred music. In this Byrd forged a characteristically English version of the highly complex Renaissance musical language, thus reflecting an insularity typical of English cultural life in his day. As a composer Morley mastered this grave and erudite style, in a number of serious and highly regarded sacred works.

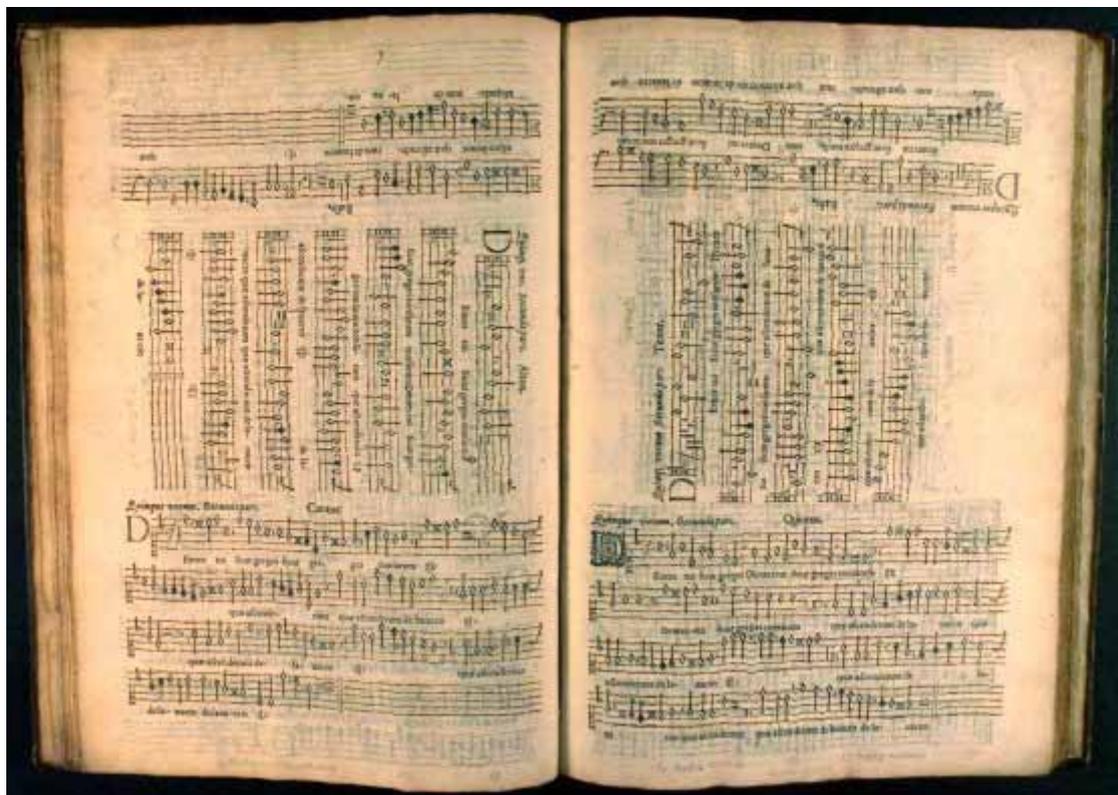


To the most excellent Mu-
 sician Maister William Birde
 one of the gentlemen of her
 Maiesties chappell.



Here be two whose benifites to vs can neuer be required: God, and our parents, the one for that he gaue vs a reasonable soule, the other for that of the we haue our beeing. To these the prince & (as Cicero tearmeth him) the God of the *Philosophers* added our maisters, as those by whose directions the faculties of the reasonable soule be stirred vp to enter into contemplation, & searching of more then earthly things: whereby we obtaine a second being, more to be wished and much more durable then that which any man since the worlds creatiō hath receiued of his parents:

In his *A Plaine and Easie Introduction* Morley included a number of vocal compositions. *Dentes tui sicut greges* is a motet (a sacred equivalent to the madrigal) for 5 voices (Cantus, Quintus, Altus, Tenor, Bass) printed in “table-book” format (Two parts are printed upside down and two sideways). If the volume is laid on a table, each of the five singers can stand around it and see their part [see below].

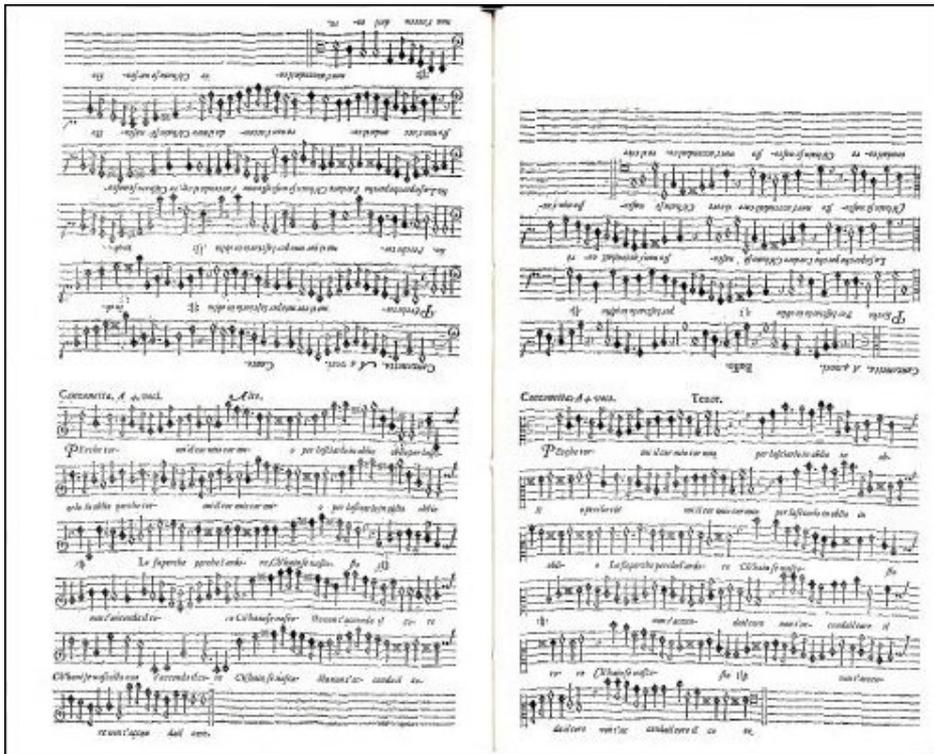


However, Morley’s principal contribution was in transforming English music by assimilating Italian influences. Inspired by the prevalent Italianate Renaissance ethos, Morley achieved this principally through his appropriation of an Italian form of part-song known as the madrigal. In the works of the greatest Italian composers the madrigal had become the most important musical genre of the late Renaissance. Morley propagated the madrigal in England by publishing both Italian examples and his own versions of the genre. Through the latter Morley established an 'English Madrigal' which represented a highly influential model for a whole generation of English composers. Well known examples of Morley’s madrigals included *Sing We and Chant it*, *April is in My Mistris Face*, and *Now is the Month of Maying*. Morley's role in this cultural shift is evident not only through his work as composer, editor and publisher, but also as a theorist.

In *A Plaine and Easie Introduction* Morley explained and promoted all the Italian musical forms along with their underlying aesthetic premises. The treatise is divided into three sections, with the more complex matters consigned to *Annotations* at the end. A remarkable feature of the work is the degree to which Morley was able to display his immense learning throughout, without seriously detracting from his instructive purpose. This was to train the average and ignorant music lover to the point where he could compose a madrigal or motet in Italian Renaissance style.

In his treatise Morley deploys a pleasing, if curious literary style fashioned in the form of a dialogue between a Master (Morley) and two pupils, Philomathes and his brother Polymathes. Interacting in a manner to be expected of a novel rather than a music treatise, the brothers study, discuss and mock each other whilst the Master patiently instructs and

encourages. Through these means Morley provides a highly effective elucidation of even the most complex aspects of 16th century music theory.



Perche torni il cor mio by Thomas Morley. An Italian madrigal composed for 4 voices, printed in table-book format. *Madrigal...is a kinde of musicke made upon songs and sonnets...to men of understanding most delightfull*

Here the Master explains to Philomathes the musical scale -

A note for fingering of *Vi*
Ma. Take this for a generall rule, that in one deduction of the fixe notes, you can haue one name but once vsed, although in deede (if you could keepe right tunc) it were no matter how you named any note. But this wee vse commonly in fingering, that except it be in the lowest note of the part wee neuer vse *ut*.

Phi. How then? Do you neuer fing *ut* but in *Gam ut*?

Ma. Not so: But if either *Gam ut*, or *C fa ut*, or *F fa ut*, or *G sol re ut*, be the lowest note of the parte, then we may fing *ut* there.

Phi. Now I conceiue it.

Ma. Then fing your fixe notes forward and backward.

Phi. Is this right?

Vt re mi fa sol la la sol fa mi re ut

Ma. Verie well.

Phi. Now I praie you shew me all the seuerall Keyes wherein you may begin your fixe notes.

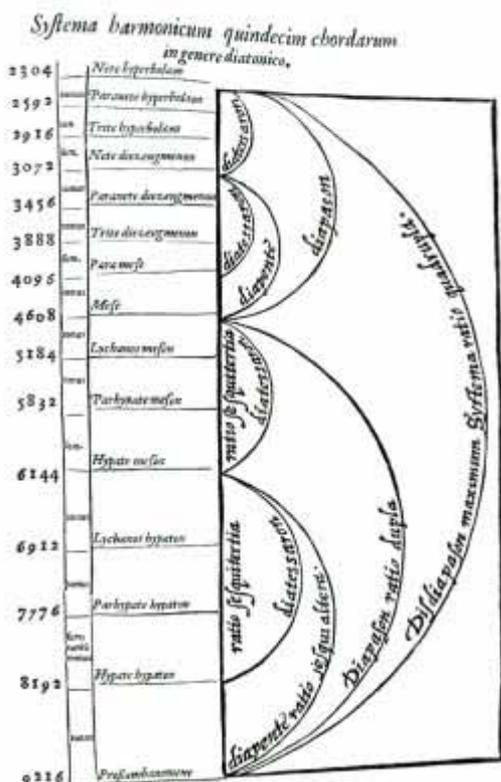
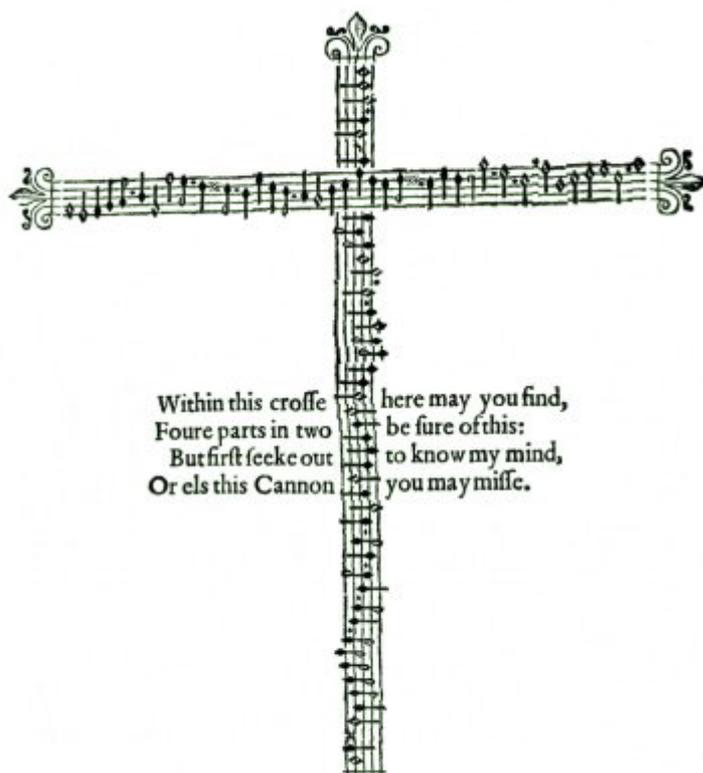
Ma. Lo here they be fet downe at length.

Phi. Be these all the wayes you may haue these notes in the whole *Gam*?

Ma. These and their eights: as what is done in *Gam ut* may also be done in *G sol re ut*, and likewise in *g sol re ut* in alt. And what in *C fa ut*, may be also in *C sol fa ut*, and in *C sol fa*. And what in *F fa ut* in Base, may also be done in *f fa ut* in alt. But these be the three principall keyes containing the three natures or properties of fingering.

Throughout, Morley includes musical examples and diagrams through which he brings his subject to life.

Here Morley illustrates a particularly learned form of composition known as canon. In this different parts take up the same subject one after another, either at the same or at a different pitch, in strict imitation. It was popular to present canons in the form of puzzles requiring 'resolution'. Following this example, Morley goes on to demonstrate how a 4 part composition can be deduced from this cross



In addition to explaining practical musicianship Morley sought to equate practical music of his day with speculative theoretical traditions dating back to ancient Greece. Here Morley illustrates the mathematical proportions fundamental to the two octave diatonic scale using ancient Greek note names.

In the table below Morley alludes to the Pythagorean notion of the “harmony of the spheres”. According to classical accounts, the planets made music as they travelled, each sounding a different pitch of the major scale, according to its distance from the earth. Thus it had been thought that the numerical relationships of the major scale manifested a principal underlying the make-up of the universe.

Γ vt. <i>Are.</i> B mi. C fa vt. D sol re. E la mi. F fa vt. G sol re vt	Terra Luna Mercurius Venus Sol Iupiter Saturnus Cœlum.	Elamy F fa vt G sol re ut A la mi re B fa ✳ mi C sol fa vt D la sol re	Saturnus Iupiter Mars Sol Venus Mercurius Luna
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Boetius.

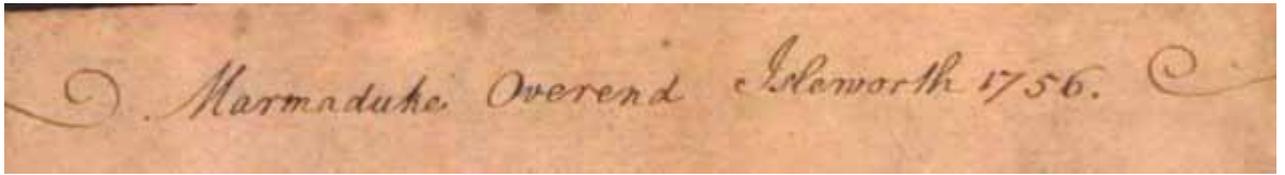
Ancient traditions of musical theory saw the notion of 'proportion' as central to both time and pitch in music. This illustration shows how the proportion 6:4:3 can result in the intervals between C, G and C an octave higher.

Thus you see what proportion is, and that proportion is not properly taken in that sense wherein it is used in the booke: yet was I constrained to use that word for lacke of a better. One whose booke came lately from the presse, called the *Pathwaie to Musick*, setting downe the proportions, calleth them a great proportion of inequality, & a lesse proportion of inequality: and a little after treating of *dupla*, he setteth down words which hee hath translated out of *Loquius* his Musicke, but it seemeth hee hath not vnderstood too well, for (saith he) *dupla* is that which taketh from all notes and rest the halfe value, &c. and giueth this example:

But if he had vnderstoode what he said, he would neuer haue sette down this for an example, or else he hath not knowen what a minime or a crotchet is. But if I might, I would aske him of what length he maketh every note of the plainlong? I knowe hee will answer of a semibreue time. Then if your plainlong be of a semibreue time, how will two minimes being diminished, make vp the time of a whole semibreue? A minime in *dupla* proportion being but a crotchet.

Morley never allows theoretical complexity to obscure the fundamental objective of music, a point which the pupil Philomathes makes through the following observation: *As for musick, the principal thing we seek in it, is to delight the eare, which cannot so perfectly be done in these hard proportions, as otherwise.*

The owner of the Reading University copy



A notable feature of Reading's copy of Morley's treatise is an inscription revealing it to have been owned by the 18th century theorist, organist and composer Marmaduke Overend of Isleworth (d. 1790).

A pupil of the composer William Boyce, Overend was one of a group of English 18th century musicians who combined a fascination for ancient Greek musical theory with a taste for 'Ancient music' by which they meant music of the previous 200 years. Although the notion of playing or listening to 'early music' was unusual at that time, these figures sought through these pursuits to define the principles upon which music in its highest manifestations had been founded. Through this they hoped to counter what they perceived to be the commercialisation and triviality of popular concert life at that time. To people such as Overend, Morley's treatise was revered as a manifestation of the theoretical principles upon which the music of England's greatest composers had been founded.

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