

Report on Concert for Angel Early Music Trust:

‘Angell’s Musick in Mortall’s dresse’ - The art of John Wilson; from Shakespeare’s Singing Boy to Oxford Professor: *Galliarda* – Concert 25th May 2024, St Mary’s Faversham

The grant from the Angel Early Music Trust enabled Galliarda to undertake and promote this concert in a church unused to early music performances and to introduce an audience to early music that was entirely unfamiliar. In particular the grant helped us to augment the group with three young singers embarking on their careers in music and to pay them a professional fee. With this concert secured we have been able to go on to find the resources to prepare to make CD of the music in the autumn of 2024 and to find other venues to take the programme.

Wilson and Faversham

John Wilson has special resonance for Faversham as he was born in town in 1595 only yards from the Church where he may have sung as a boy. Indeed, he may have attended the school that remains close the church which dates from the late 16th century. Today there is plaque on the building on the corner of Church Street and Abbey Street where he was born. We hope to return to the church in future years and build on the success.

Biography

John Wilson worked his way into the city and the theatre and was composing for masques by 1614 as his comic setting of ‘Kawasha comes in Majestie’ composed for the *Masque of Flowers*, was published in that year along with text of the masque. This setting seems to have given him some early success and notoriety as a composer. In February 1608, he was apprenticed for eight years to the actor John Heminges, a freeman of the Grocers’ Company and started his long association with the stage and in particular the Blackfriars theatre in London. It seems beyond doubt that the ‘Jacke Wilson’ mentioned on page 107 of the 1623 Shakespeare folio edition of *Much Ado* became the later doctor, and then professor, John Wilson. Certainly, by around 1615 Wilson was attached to the Kings Men company, where he would have worked alongside Robert Johnson, taking over from him as composer and musician for the troupe from 1617. In particular, Wilson provided music for a string of plays by John Fletcher, working at the theatre until the 1630s; though it is his early association with Shakespeare and the original settings of the bard’s songs that Wilson is probably best known.

The Concert

We used Wilson’s theatre links in the programme by introducing some of his play songs with readings from the plays with lines that lead directly into the songs. In this way we contextualised the programmes items. Each grouping of pieces was explained as we went along, and the programme had a chronological dimension such that I was able to narrate Wilson’s extraordinary life. Some of the pieces were promoted semi-dramatically. We gave a varied programme which included serious Odes and Psalms to show Wilson’s more sober vein, and introduced music by Hume, Jenkins and Lawes who were contemporaries know to Wilson. Instrumental items were interspersed with vocal pieces for one to four voices. The audience was in the region of 120 people all of whom seemed to greatly enjoy the concert and an encore was called for.

The Future

We will record the material in the autumn – most of which has not been performed for centuries and remain unknown. We have since the award found other venues to take the concert and contacted BBC (In Tune) with the possibility of performing live for them. We remain very grateful to the Trust for support us in this venture.

