



LATE NIGHT CONCERT

10pm, Friday 27 May 2022
Liam Byrne (viola da gamba)

“In this recital, I'd like to touch on some of the most exciting moments of the viol's history and share a few of my favourite pieces for the instrument alone.

One of the earlier solo repertoires where the viol really flourished was in English lyra viol music around 1600. Heavily influenced by lute music of the time, lyra viol pieces tend to be very chordal, incorporating multiple voices at the same time, and using alternative tunings to allow the instrument to play specific harmonies not achievable with normal tuning. If lute music is an ink drawing, and cello music an oil painting, the lyra viol repertoire is like ink that has been filled in and washed over with a delicate and transparent watercolour. The sound is all about secondary resonances and shades of sound. In this concert I'll play two sets of lyra pieces, some *Almains* and *Corants* by Alfonso Ferrabosco II (the greatest composer for the genre), and some more polyphonic fantasias by Daniel Farrant and an anonymous composer.

Across the channel a few years later, French viol players were developing their own solo repertoire, also influenced by lute playing but taking the instrument in a more extroverted and lyrical direction than their English counterparts. Sainte Colombe was one of the early composers, and I'll play a stately *Sarabande* and very swishy *Chaconne* from him, as well as a few movements from his most famous pupil, Marin Marais.

Another golden age in the viol's history began in the early 20th century, when it was brought out of practical extinction by generations of performers and, indeed, new composers. Tonight, I will play two of my favourite recent works for solo viol. Edmund Finnis's piece *Lines Curved Rivers Mirrored* is a flowing and sensual exploration of the instrument's topography. And Samuel Milea's mesmeric *Unvoiced* slips back and forth between wistful dreaminess and moments of lucidity, written in response to the composer's grandmother's battle with dementia.”

Liam Byrne, May 2022

LIAM BYRNE

Liam Byrne spends most of his time playing either very old or very new music on the viola da gamba. An obsession with the instrument's most obscure 16th and 17th century repertoire is a recurring theme in his work, whether in devising baroque performance installations for the Victoria & Albert museum, or in collaboration with the Appalachian fiddler Cleek Schrey, or creating new electronic works with Icelandic composer Valgeir Sigurðsson.

Liam's solo performances frequently combine old viol music with new works written for him by composers such as David Lang, Nico Muhly, and Edmund Finnis, among many others. His membership in Icelandic record label and artist collective Bedroom Community has led to the release of two massive studio-based works: Donnacha Dennehy's 40-minute long *Tessellatum* for multi-tracked viol and viola (with Nadia Sirota), and Valgeir Sigurðsson's *Dissonance*, a 23-minute deconstruction and explosion of a Mozart string quartet using many layers of Liam's improvisation.

In June 2017, Liam was commissioned by the Victoria & Albert museum to create a site-specific sound installation for their new Courtyard Gallery, which resulted in the 8-hour long piece *Partials*, an exploration of the space's resonance derived entirely from upper partial harmonics played on the viol. In 2015 Liam also collaborated with Nico Muhly on a sound installation for the National Gallery's *Soundscapes* exhibition, and in 2016 was commissioned by the Dulwich Picture Gallery to make an immersive work in their Mausoleum, in response to two 17th century paintings by Gerrit Dou.

Over the years, Liam has worked closely with a wide variety of musicians, from Damon Albarn to Emma Kirkby, and is a frequent guest of new music ensembles Stargaze, the London Contemporary Orchestra, and Crash Ensemble. With a background in Historical Performance and degrees from Indiana and Oxford Universities, Liam has played and recorded with many of Europe's leading Early Music ensembles, including the Huelgas Ensemble, Dunedin Consort, The Sixteen, i Fagiolini, and the viol consorts Phantasm, Concordia, and most notably Fretwork, with whom he toured and recorded extensively for several years.