

MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES AND DOCUMENTS

22

# LIFE AND WORKS

OF

ROBERT FAYRFAX

1464 - 1521

by

EDWIN B. WARREN



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AND DOCUMENTS

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## PREFACE

The present work is the culmination of a project which began many years ago with investigations into the life and works of Robert Fayrfax (1464-1521), one of England's least-known composers. As the investigation continued, it became more and more apparent that Fayrfax, even though recognized in his day as a leading British musician and though increasingly appreciated in recent years, was a composer of the first rank who deserves greater recognition than he has received.

Before that recognition could be forthcoming, however, it was necessary that his music, very little of which had ever been printed, be made available in a modern edition. Now that this has been accomplished with the publishing of all his music by the American Institute of Musicology: *Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae* 17: I. *Masses* (1959); II. *Magnificat Settings and Motets* (1964); and III. *Secular and Incomplete Works* (1966), the object of the present work is: (1) to revise the articles which appeared in *Musica Disciplina* XI (1957), XII (1958), and XV (1961) and to bring up to date the extensive research on Fayrfax; (2) to relate all that is known of his life; (3) to list all the works with the manuscripts in which they are to be found; and (4) to discuss the music historically and stylistically. It is to be hoped that the present study will lead to increased performance of Fayrfax's music, for only actual performance of the music itself can reveal him to be one of England's most significant composers.

The writer wishes to express gratitude to Dom Anselm Hughes, Denis Stevens, Frank Ll. Harrison, and Thurston Dart for invaluable assistance acknowledged in *CMM* 17: I, II, III;

To the Librarians of the libraries and institutions which supplied prints and microfilm of manuscripts, also acknowledged in *CMM* 17: I, II, III;

To the Trustees of the British Museum, to the Librarians of Oxford, Bodleian, and Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College Libraries, and to the Records Office, County Hall, Hertford, for photographs reproduced in facsimile in *CMM* I and the present volume;

To Southern Illinois University and the American Philosophical Society for financial assistance, which made it possible to work with the original manuscripts in Great Britain and to complete the present work;

## INTRODUCTION

Although the name of Robert Fayrfax, Doctor of Music, is to be found in all histories of English music from the time of Thomas Morley onwards<sup>1</sup>, he has aroused, until recently, only the casual interest of music historiographers, largely because writers in the past have known practically nothing about his music. One reason for this is that, except for the *Song Book* of 1530, which included two of his secular pieces, none of his music was printed during his lifetime, and until the last few years, very little had ever been published. Moreover, most of what did appear was not representative of his work, which led to a misleading comparison of his style as seen in a few pieces, mostly secular, with the technical methods of the Flemish composers who were beginning to be known in England shortly before Fayrfax died.

Until the publication of the Masses in Volume I (1959) of the *Complete Works of Robert Fayrfax*<sup>2</sup> and Denis Stevens' edition of *Missa Tecum Principium*<sup>3</sup> in *Das Chorwerk* (Vol. 97, 1965), only a few fragments of the Masses had ever appeared in print: the three-voice examples given by Burney<sup>4</sup>, Walker<sup>5</sup>, in their histories of music; fragments in the *Oxford History of Music*<sup>6</sup>; a five-voice excerpt quoted by H. B. Collins in the introduction of *O quam suavis*<sup>7</sup>; four short quotations in an article on Fayrfax by S. Royle Shore in the *Musical Times*<sup>8</sup>; and

<sup>1</sup> Dom Anselm Hughes, "An Introduction to Fayrfax", *Musica Disciplina* VI, (1952), 83.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Fayrfax, *Collected Works*, Volume I: *The Masses*, edited by Edwin B. Warren, No. 17 in the series *Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae* of the American Institute of Musicology.

<sup>3</sup> Edited by Denis Stevens, who has recorded the Mass and the motet, "Aeternae laudis liliium" on AMS 38.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Burney, *A General History of Music* II (1782), 561-62, *Albanus*, (1) Gloria m. 38-74; (2) 91-115; (m. 110-111: Burney omits Ten. & Bass, writing top three voices only; these 2 meas. are for 5 voices, not 3); (3) *Regali*, Sanctus, 38-46.

<sup>5</sup> Earnest Walker, *A History of Music in England* (3rd ed. revised and enlarged by J. A. Westrup (Oxford) 1952), 37: *Regali*, Sanctus: Benedictus 57-83 (3v), *Albanus*, Gloria, 30-37 (5v).

<sup>6</sup> H. E. Wooldrige, *The Polyphonic Period* II (1905), 320-21, *Albanus*, Agnus Dei, 113-124; New Oxford History of Music III (1960), 329-30, *Tecum Principium*, Sanctus 1-6, 20-24 (omits *Albanus* excerpt).

<sup>7</sup> *Missa O quam suavis* by an anonymous English composer circa 1500. Edited by H. B. Collins (1927), ix: *Tecum Principium*, Agnus Dei, 109-119.

<sup>8</sup> August 1, 1920, 527-29: (1) *Albanus*, Agnus Dei, 24-28 transposed down a minor 3rd: "The following is a wonderful example of modern feeling. The tenor has a *canto fermo* of plain-chant"; English text only (no Latin): "us, and write all these thy laws in our hearts we beseech thee" (adapted to the conclusion of the Responses to the Commandments); (2) Gloria, M. 1-4, 14-16; Agnus 113-115, 121-124; all transposed down min. 3rd with 2# signature, all tenor lines labeled "C. F.", which is not true.

## LIFE AND WORKS OF ROBERT FAYRFAX

Until 1952, the exact date and place of Fayrfax's birth was uncertain. The dates given have varied from 1460<sup>1</sup> to between 1465 and 1470. The locations have also varied. Thomas Tanner (1674-1735), Bishop of St. Asaph, is among the first to give Bayford, in Hertfordshire, as Fayrfax's birthplace<sup>2</sup>. Anthony à Wood (1632-95) says that Fayrfax "was one of the same family with those of Yorkshire"<sup>3</sup>. The *Dictionary of National Biography* also mentions this, and adds, "but his name is invariably written Fayrfax by his contemporaries, while that of the Yorkshire family was spelled Fairfax"<sup>4</sup>. However, no significance can be attached to the matter of fifteenth-century and sixteenth-century spelling of proper names, for spellings vary a great deal. In various manuscripts and documents of the period Fayrfax's name appears as Farfax, Farefax, Fairfaux, Ffayerfax, Feyrefax, Ffeyrfax, Ffeyrffax, Ffeirfax, Ffayrfax, Ffairefax, Ffayryfax, and Fferrfax, besides the two common spellings. According to Venn<sup>5</sup>, he was the fourth son of Sir Thomas Fayrfax of Walton, which is refuted by Scaife<sup>6</sup>. The coat of arms in the Fayrfax Book points towards Lincolnshire as Fayrfax's birthplace. Dom Anselm Hughes has carried research into Fayrfax's birthplace further and has sent the present writer the following information:

The coat of arms which the British Museum people thought pointed to Lincolnshire proved useful. The Yorkshire Fairfaxes have been so thoroughly studied by Scaife and others that I have no hesitation in saying that Venn was wrong. To my paragraph on p. 86 of

<sup>1</sup> Dom Anselm Hughes, "Robert Fayrfax". *The Listener* (June 2, 1949), 952.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Tanner, *Bibliotheca Britannico-Hibernica* (1748), 273: "Fairfax (Robertus) rei musicae pertissimus, et ejusdem facultatis doctor Cantabrigiensis, apud Bayford in agro Hertford, vitam degit. Composuit *Cantus quosdam* MMS in museo apud fanum S. Albani, et ibidem sepultus, *Fasti Oxon.* 1. 18."

<sup>3</sup>Anthony à Wood, *Fasti Oxonienses* (1691), 660: "June 26. Rob. Fairfax Doctor of Musicke of Cambridge . . . This person did afterwards live in Hertfordshire, and was buried in the church at St. Albans, near, or under, the seat, where the Mayor of that place usually sits. I have seen some of his Musical compositions of three, or more parts, which shew the Author to be eminent in his faculty in the time he lived. Among the said compositions, which were written in a large book, were mixed with them the compositions of William Newarke, Richard Davyes, Edmund Turges, (etc.) . . . All which lived in, or near, the time of the said Dr. Fairfax, who was of the same family with those of York-shire."

<sup>4</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by Leslie Stephen (1889), XVIII, 137.

<sup>5</sup> John and J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (1922), Part I, Vol. II, 117.

<sup>6</sup> Hughes, *Musica Disciplina*, *op. cit.*, 84.

## II

### MANUSCRIPT — AND OTHER SOURCES FOR THE MUSIC OF ROBERT FAYRFAX

“To the musical sources of his period in England Fayrfax is the most abundant contributor, but this does not necessarily imply that he was a more prolific writer than his contemporaries. It may very well be the case that his music, being more widely esteemed, was more frequently copied; and at any rate we know that he was the only one of the Henrician composers whose works went on being written into part-books for domestic use as chamber-music, vocal or instrumental or both, for something like a hundred years after his death”<sup>1</sup>.

Including all sources, dating from about 1490 to the present, Fayrfax's Masses are found in 10 manuscripts, his motets and Magnificat-settings in 24, and his secular pieces in 8 manuscripts and two printed books. Of these 42 manuscripts, 7 contain works of two categories: Masses and motets or Magnificat-settings. Hence, besides the two printed sources, all of Fayrfax's music is to be found in 35 manuscripts. In addition to these, two sources, one a manuscript and one a printed book, contain words only, and four others are known only by reference, the sources themselves having been lost. In two of these instances, the music is known from other, existing manuscripts.

These 41 sources are divided into the following eight categories:

I. Choir books	10
II. Part-books	16
III. Treatise	1
IV. Lute tablature	1
V. Printed books	2
VI. Transcriptions	5
VII. Words only	2
VIII. Lost; known only by reference	4
	<hr/>
	41

<sup>1</sup> Dom Anselm Hughes, “An Introduction to Fayrfax”, *Musica Disciplina* VI (1952), 89. The present compilation of the sources of Fayrfax's music will correct and bring up to date Dom Anselm Hughes's invaluable listing and discussion on which all subsequent work on Fayrfax has been based.



## B. Incomplete

13. Cambridge, Peterhouse, 40, 41, 31, 32 (ca. 1540-47) <sup>15</sup>

<u>Work</u>	<u>Trp. (40)</u>	<u>Med. (41)</u>	<u>C. ten. (31)</u>	<u>Bass (32)</u>
a. <i>O Maria Deo grata</i>	—	5v	7v	6
b. <i>Maria plena</i>	—	7	9v	7v
c. <i>Ave Dei Patris</i>	31v	29v	36	30
d. <i>Missa Tec. P.</i>	45v	42	49v	41
e. <i>Missa O q g</i>	49(1)	38	44v	37
f. <i>Missa Albanus</i>	49(2)	46	54v	44
g. <i>Magnifi- cat Reg.</i>	89	80v	98v	78(2)v
h. <i>Aeternae laudis</i>	89v	81	100	79(1)
i. <i>Magnifi- cat O b J</i>	91	82(1)	101(1)v	79(2)
j. <i>Lauda vivi</i>	92	83v	102v	79(2)v
k. <i>Missa O b J</i>	95v	82(2)	101(2)v	79(3)

<sup>15</sup> In 1856, John Jebb compiled "An Index to Church of England Services and Anthems, belonging to the age which preceded the Great Rebellion, and contained in part books, preserved in the College of St. Peter, Cambridge". This is a bound, hand-written volume of 81 numbered pages plus several blank, unnumbered pages. It contains "A list of motetts, Masses, etc. of the early part of sixteenth century before the Reformation . . . This Collection is very fairly and legibly written on good paper, in four small folio volumes". "Triplex", "Contratenor", and "Bassus" are written on the parchment covers of three. The parchment cover of the fourth, which is the Medius, is torn off . . . A well written, though not altogether complete Index, precedes the beginning of each of the volumes except the Triplex, which also wants the first twelve leaves, and ends at fol. 106. "The Collection consists of Masses, Magnificats, and Hymns. The latter are chiefly addressed to the Virgin Mary: a striking evidence of the need of a Reformation at that time . . . From the clean state of these books, they do not appear to have been much used: and it is not unlikely that the new Liturgy was established not long after the volumes were completed." (pp. 73-74). These part-books contain the works of 28 composers, including 11 works of "Fayrefax": four Masses, five motets, and two Magnificats. Jebb's Index takes up pp. 77-81 in four columns, headed Triplex, Contratenor, Medius, Bassus. In listing the works of Fayrefax on p. 78, he did not name Magnificat "O bone Jesu" and he missed Magnificat "Regali", so included only 10 works of Fayrefax instead of 11. Dom Anselm Hughes, in his *Catalogue of the Musical MSS at Peterhouse, Cambridge* (1953) corrected Jebb's listing. Jebb did not realize that some of the pages in the part books repeat numbers: the Triplex has two pages numbered 49 ((1) and (2) in the listing above); the Medius has two pages numbered 82; the Contratenor, two numbered 101; the Bass, three pages numbered 78, and three numbered 79.