

signum
CLASSICS

Music to hear...

Alfonso Ferrabosco
Music for Lyra viol from
1609 Volumes 2 and 3

Richard Boothby
with Sam Stadlen &
Joanna Levine



MUSIC TO HEAR...ALFONSO FERRABOSCO:

Music for Lyra viol from 1609 | Volumes 2 & 3

Lessons for 1, 2 & 3 Viols	source		21 Coranto		[1.22]
CD 1			22 Almaine	p. 18	[3.49]
1 Galliard	p. 23	[3.19]	23 Coranto		[1.13]
2 Coranto		[1.19]			
3 Almaine	p. 15	[3.33]	Total timings:		[1.03.24]
4 Coranto		[1.20]			
5 Pavin	p. 8	[4.32]	CD 2		
6 Coranto		[1.13]	1 A Fancie ***	p.32	[4.23]
7 Galliard *	p. 27	[3.10]	2 Pavin	p.21	[5.10]
8 Coranto *		[1.18]	3 Coranto		[1.08]
9 Almaine	p. 20	[2.46]	4 Almaine	p.16	[3.09]
10 Coranto		[1.15]	5 Coranto		[1.27]
11 Pavin	p. 13	[6.24]	6 Galliard *	p.29	[3.06]
12 Coranto		[1.09]	7 Coranto *		[1.38]
13 Galliard	p. 9	[3.58]	8 Almaine	p.5	[2.20]
14 Coranto		[1.26]	9 Coranto		[1.29]
15 A Pavin for three Viols ***	p. 33	[4.55]	10 Galliard	p. 19	[3.19]
16 Almaine	p. 6	[3.33]	11 Coranto		[1.19]
17 Coranto		[1.34]	12 Almaine	p.22	[3.19]
18 Almaine *	p. 26	[3.00]	13 Coranto		[1.35]
19 Coranto *		[1.41]	14 Almaine *	p.28	[2.23]
20 Pavin	p. 10	[5.32]	15 Coranto *		[1.01]

16 Almaine	p.7	[3.56]	20 Almaine	p.24	[4.04]
17 Coranto		[1.36]	21 Coranto		[1.12]
18 Galliard	p.4	[3.51]	Total timings:		[52.58]
19 Coranto		[1.28]			

RICHARD BOOTHBY, VIOL | SAM STADLEN *, JOANNA LEVINE **, VIOLS

www.signumrecords.com

Alfonso Ferrabosco II 'Lessons for 1. 2. & 3 viols'

In an age when composing was considered more akin to an artisan skill, rather than a result of quasi-divine inspiration, there were several musical dynasties where sons learned their trade from their fathers, and passed it on in turn to their offspring.

Perhaps the last significant one was the Mozart family; then we have a whole host of Bachs, several Scarlatti's and many Couperins. I suppose the nearest to this in later years might be the Strausses, or the Wagners: Richard's only son, Siegfried was a composer (though hardly a genius), and his grandsons were theatrical

directors. The Bayreuth Festival became the family business in a way.

But the Ferraboscos were a large, important Bolognese family and, though there were several generations at the Bentivoglio court in Bologna in the 15th century, none were musicians. Until, that is, Domenico Maria, born in 1513. He was our Alfonso's grandfather, and worked in Bologna, then sang in the papal chapel in Rome, before both he and Palestrina were 'retired' for being married. He was then briefly in Paris before finishing his life back in Bologna.

His son, Alfonso, father of our composer, born in Bologna in 1543, went with his father to Paris in 1558, while he was under the patronage of the

powerful Charles de Guise. As a young boy of fifteen, his voice was clearly remarkable. Ronsard waxed lyrical about hearing Alfonso and his two brothers sing:

*Et du geste, & du son, & de la voix ensemble
Que ton Ferrabosco sur toi lyres assemble,
Quand les trois Apollons chantant divinement,
Et mariant la lyre à la voix doucement.*

It's not clear what these three lyres were, but it's tempting to see a forerunner of the lyra viol, that was to become so important for his son. They performed for several important weddings, including for that of the Dauphin & Mary, Queen of Scots.

By 1562, still only 19 years old, he had made it across the channel and had become one of the Queen's Musicians, receiving a salary of 100 marks. But a year later he was back in Italy, in Rome working for Cardinal Farnese; but then he wanted to return to England, and had to leave secretly, as the Cardinal wouldn't authorise his leave.

He stayed in London, and was paid a handsome salary of £100, but left for Bologna again in 1569, and found that the Inquisition had taken an interest in his comings and goings, and would punish his family if he returned to England.

Nevertheless, this is exactly what he did, and enjoyed great favour at court, until 1577, when it seems it had been reported that he had attended mass with the French ambassador, and even that he had robbed and murdered a young man in the service of Sir Philip Sidney. It is a measure of the depth of his connections that it was Sidney himself who cleared his name.

In 1578, when he was 35, he married Susanna Symons, daughter of Balthasar de Simonises of Antwerp, who may have had Jewish roots. It seems they already had two children, our Alfonso and his sister. Soon after marrying, they left both children in the care of Gomer van Oosterwijck, also from Antwerp, who was a flute player in the queen's flute consort.

He went initially back to Paris and to Cardinal de Guise, which was reported by the papal nuncio, to whom Ferrabosco confessed that he wasn't going to return to London, despite his children being there, and that he had received confession while there and attended mass, and wanted the church's pardon. But he was suspected of being a spy, and watched.

27 I For two Viols.

Aliard.

Continuo.

The image shows the musical score for page 27 of 'Lessons 1609'. It is titled 'For two Viols.' and is marked 'I'. The score is for two violins and a continuo. It features a large decorated initial 'C' for 'Aliard.' and a smaller initial 'C' for 'Continuo.'. The music is written on five-line staves with various notes, rests, and ornaments. There are numerous downward-pointing arrows above the staves, likely indicating fingerings or bowings. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

28 I For two Viols.

Lmaine.

Continuo.

The image shows the musical score for page 28 of 'Lessons 1609'. It is titled 'For two Viols.' and is marked 'I'. The score is for two violins and a continuo. It features a large decorated initial 'L' for 'Lmaine.' and a smaller initial 'C' for 'Continuo.'. The music is written on five-line staves with various notes, rests, and ornaments. There are numerous downward-pointing arrows above the staves, likely indicating fingerings or bowings. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

He returned to Italy and imprisoned in Rome on the orders of the Pope. He spent two years in jail, and on release obtained a position with the Duke of Savoy. In 1585 he went to Zaragoza with the Duke for his wedding, before returning to the ducal seat in Turin. Ferrabosco died a few years later, while visiting his native Bologna. He was 45 years old.

For a relatively short life, it is packed with incident and restlessness - he had hardly arrived in one place before seeking to leave for another. This is in complete contrast to his son, who was employed at Elizabeth's court from a young age, and who, as far as we can tell, never left the country. He was born in Greenwich and died there.

We can only speculate what effect his father and mother abandoning him at an early age, but there was nothing in Alfonso the younger's life that suggested psychological trauma. He was no more than 3 or 4 when his parents set off, so perhaps his memories of them were distant.

Yet he could hardly have been unaware of the great reputation of his father in England: Byrd, Tallis, Baldwin and Morely all praised his father's music; yet his son's was in many ways the greater achievement, excelling in several genres of music and being an important and fundamental

member of the royal musical establishment for most of his life.

But he was nevertheless clearly proud of his father and imitated some of his works, setting of the same texts: e.g. the Lamentations of Jeremiah which took his father's own setting as his model. He was also very aware of his Italian heritage, at a time when all things Italian were of great fascination to Elizabethan and Jacobean society.

The range of his music is wide and his musical imagination deep, something we can hear in these pieces for lyra viol: serious, lengthy, sometimes profound dances, especially Pavans, are always followed by a Coranto, that is a light and tripping parody of the former piece. Ferrabosco takes the same material and makes something popular and easy to listen to from music that he had used to construct something that was the equivalent of Shakespeare's 'deep-brained sonnets'.

And we see the same range throughout his career: dense and intense consort music of four, five and six parts, written no doubt for the court and his fellow musicians to play, are contrasted with entertaining music for the masques of Ben Jonson, where tickling the ear of the aristocratic audience was essential.

It seems that Ferrabosco, while employed by the court, was also close to Queen Anne, James's Danish wife. Not only did she buy a lyra viol herself, but some of her circle also had one: the Earls of Salisbury and Cumberland are recorded as purchasing lyra viols, made to their specification. Another Earl was part of her group - Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, but we don't know if he played or possessed a lyra viol. But he was the dedicatee of Ferrabosco's 1609 publication, in which Ferrabosco states that 'I made these compositions solely for your Lordship' which certainly suggests that Southampton played the lyra viol.

He fathered five children: three boys and two girls, all of whom went on to some kind of musical life. Alfonso (iii) and Henry were to take over two of the four positions he held at court on his death in 1628, and John, after working for the King during the Civil War, became organist and master of the choristers at Ely Cathedral after the Restoration.

Both his daughters married musicians, and Katherine, who had married Edward Coleman, son of Charles, had claim to be the first woman to appear on the English stage, in the role of lanthe in Davenant's opera *The Siege of Rhodes* in 1656. When she visited Pepys in 1665 and sang some of

the opera to him, he thought she sang '*very finely, though her voice is decayed as to strength; but mighty sweet*'.

Thus this dynasty of musicians span the centuries and the continent of Europe, taking us from 16th century Bologna to Restoration England.

© Richard Boothby, 2025



© Cosimo Boothby

TO THE PERFECTION
OF HONOUR,

My Lord
HENRY,
EARLE of South-hampton.

W^Hilst other men study your Titles (Honourable Lord) I doe your Honours; and finde it a nearer way to giue actions, then words: for the talking man commonly goes about, and meetes the iustice at his erroneous end, not to be beleued. Yet, if in modest actions, the circumstances of singularitie, and profusion hurt not, it is true, that I made these Comparisons solely for your Lordship, and doe here profite it. By which time, I haue done all that I had in purpose, and returne to my silence:

Where you are most honored

by

Alfonso Ferrabosco.

TO THE WORLD.

W^Hen I fall vnder the Character of the vaine-glorious Man, in some opinions, by thrusting so much of my indolence in Prayn I would all knew, how little fame I hope for, that way: when beside his, for, and to whom the a-c, I say'd at no mans suffrage in the making; though I might praise him, that could not hurt him, which I was contented had pleased him. But, as it is the error, and misfortune of young Children, oftentimes to stray, and looting their dwellings be taken up by strangers and these loud and proud: So these, by running got them to be Parents and sons, that, on my face, would challenge them; I had bene a most vnatural Father, if I had not corrected such impudence, and by a publicke declaration of them to be mine (when other meanes abound'd me) acknowledg'd it. This is all the glory I affected, to doe an act of Nature and Justice. For their sake, they had it in the Minor, not at all: I knowe, if they want it, I will eate my felicitie the vice of commendation.

Alfonso Ferrabosco.

TO MY EXCELLENT FRIEND,
ALFONSO FERRABOSCO.

W^Hen we doe giue, Alfonso, to the light
A worke of ours, we part with our owne right.
For then, all mouths will iudge, and their owne way:
The Lesse'd haue no more prouidence, than this Lay.
And, though we could all men, all centuries heare,
We ought not giue them taile, we had an care:
For, if the numerous World will talke, at large,
They should be fooles, for me, at their owne charge.
Say, this, or that man they to thee preferre;
Euen those, for whom they doe this, know they erre:
And would (being ask'd the truth) be ashamed say,
They were not to be nam'd, on the same day.
Then stand vnay thy felie, nor feeke without
For Fame, with breath foone kindled, foone blowne out.

Ben: Jonson.

In lode dell'arte, & dell'Aurbore,
SONETTO.

S'ogni arte tanto piu da noi l'approca,
Quanto ha piu nobilitate per oggetto,
E quanto e' piu degno il soggetto.
Vince l'altre arti harmonica dilectata.
Quella a dar gusto e' contenta l'anima
Al tutto vna, che tanto il piu proferta
Per soggetto ha numero vniuersale, e resto,
E di bella arte, e tanto la nobilitata.
Quella arte dunque e' quella di tal natura,
Alfonso mio, chi d'Orpheo parsi il suono,
Cantata pregarli, e' quella con concerti
Tanto piu d'alti con doppo concerti,
A d'istromenti accento il dolce canto,
Di piacer doppo ne appaion le menti.

Qual: Quin.

The dedication to Henry Wriothesley, The Earl of Southampton from 'Lessons 1609'.

RICHARD BOOTHBY
viola da gamba

Richard Boothby has been playing the viol ever since David Fallows handed him a tenor viol in 1977. He was trying to help him with a thesis entitled 'Wagner's Ring and it's tonality' at Manchester University. After further study with Nikolaus Harnoncourt in Salzburg, he helped to found The Purcell Quartet in 1984 and Fretwork in 1985.

With Fretwork, he has endeavoured to enrich the viol-consort repertory with new music from today's finest composers, from Elvis Costello to George Benjamin, from Alexander Goehr to Nico Muhly.

And with the Purcell Quartet, he recorded nearly 50 albums for Hyperion and Chandos; and with Fretwork over 70 albums for Virgin Classics, Harmonia Mundi USA and most recently, Signum Classics.

He has arranged and transcribed much of the great keyboard music of J. S. Bach for viols, which were recorded under the title 'Alio Modo'; and then his arrangement of the Goldberg Variations was recorded by Fretwork.

In 1998 he directed performances of Monteverdi's "L'Inconrazione di Poppea" with the Purcell



© Paul Tschornow

Quartet; and in 2001 directed them in a fully-staged production of "L'Orfeo" in Japan, with Mark Padmore in the title role.

In 2016, he performed a programme of the fabulous French & English repertory for two bass viols with Christophe Coin, and his recording of the complete lra viol music of William Lawes for Harmonia Mundi, USA, was released in the same year.

The following year he recorded Telemann's recently-discovered Fantasias for Signum Records. He recorded the first volume of Alfonso Ferrabosco's major lra viol publication of 1609, the result of a lockdown project.

In 2024 he performed all the Telemann solo Fantasias in Germany and Slovenia, and in 2025

he taught a course for viol players in the beautiful Schloß Seehaus in Frankonia in Germany.

He is professor of Viola da Gamba at the Royal College in London.

THE VIOLS AND PITCHES

As all lra viol music is written in tablature, when playing without other instruments the choice of pitch is left entirely up to the performer. We have few indications of what was used in the 17th century, but this is from John Playford in 1661:

To begin to Tune it, Raise, or screw up the Treble or first string as high as it will conveniently bear with out breaking, then tune the other to it.

It was not until later in the century that gut strings overspun with metal were developed; so all strings were made of the intestines of sheep or cattle. These were (and are) expensive, and the thicker the string, the more expensive it was. Thick strings are also less flexible, so the higher your general pitch, the better sounding the lower strings were.

In this recording, I have used my copy of a viol by Bertrand, made by the great Jane Julier in 1992, and strung it in gut. I have tuned it thus:

1st tuning: F, C, A flat, E flat, A flat, E flat.

2nd tuning: F#, C#, G#, C#, G#, C#

3rd tuning: F#, C#, F#, C#, F#, C#

So the lowest two strings are only a semi-tone away from the standard tuning of G and D.

But for the two pieces for three viols, we decided to play them on three tenor viols.

The Pavin is in the second tuning:
B flat, F, C, F, C, F

and the Fancy in the third tuning:
B flat, F, B flat, F, B flat, F

© Richard Boothby

This recording would not have been possible without the magnificent support of Linda Hill, who has done so much over the years to help viol players, young and old alike.

Recorded 11th & 12th March, 4th & 5th April and 17th & 18th April 2024 at St Mary Magdalen Church, Sherbourne, Glos. GL54 3DZ
Producer and Editor – Nicholas Parker
Recording Engineer – Tom Lewington

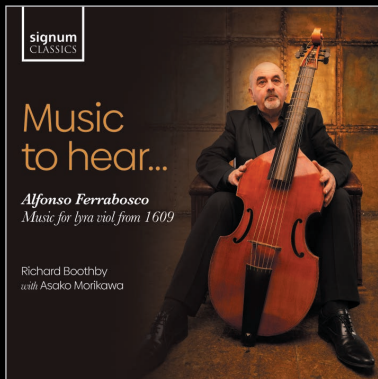
Cover Image – Robi Valenti
Design and Artwork – Woven Design www.wovendesign.co.uk

© 2026 The copyright in this sound recording is owned by Signum Records Ltd
© 2026 The copyright in this CD booklet, notes and design is owned by Signum Records Ltd

Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording of Signum Compact Discs constitutes an infringement of copyright and will render the infringer liable to an action by law. Licences for public performances or broadcasting may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd. All rights reserved. No part of this booklet may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission from Signum Records Ltd.

SignumClassics, Signum Records Ltd., Suite 14, 21 Wadsworth Road, Perivale, Middlesex, UB6 7LQ, UK.
+44 (0) 20 8997 4000 E-mail: info@signumrecords.com
www.signumrecords.com

ALSO AVAILABLE ON SIGNUMCLASSICS



SIGCD757

"These are intimate performances of intimate music, yes; but the writing and the playing are such that chordal and contrapuntal textures, beefy bass lines and flute like cantabiles just about do the job of an entire consort of viols...There are some juicy pizzicato passages redolent of the lute..."

Gramophone

★★★★ Performance ★★★★★ Recording

"The preludes and dance numbers are played with vigour and stateliness, and with just the right amount of rustic edge. Boothby also brings out the melancholic quality of Ferrabosco's music – a style that was highly fashionable in late-Elizabethan and early-Jacobean England"

BBC Music Magazine

RECORDINGS OF THE MONTH *"He has also made a number of excellent recordings of music for solo viol...Now we have a very impressive disc. ...Just how beautiful and subtle such music can be is evidenced perfectly on this disc"*

Musicweb International