

***Persuasions*** for soprano, flute, oboe, bassoon, and harpsichord by Richard Wilson

*Persuasions* is a solo cantata with instrumental interludes. There are six sections, three of which (sections 2, 4, and 6) involve settings of love poems by Thomas Carew (c. 1595- c. 1639). Four players employ a total of six instruments--alto flute, oboe, English horn, bassoon, contrabassoon, and harpsichord--but in ensembles of different size and makeup, ranging from solo harpsichord in part 5, to a quartet of alto flute, oboe, bassoon and harpsichord in part 6. No two sections have the same instrumentation. The purely instrumental portions provide contrast of mood and style but are not thematically related to each other or to the vocal settings.

Despite the chromatic melodic and harmonic idiom, listeners may notice several distinctly baroque features: the melismatic treatment of salient words and syllables in the vocal line, the ornamented reprise within the harpsichord solo, toccata-like keyboard figuration in sections 3 and 5, as well as the use of harpsichord in the first place. These features seemed appropriate to the setting of texts from what might be considered the early baroque.

With respect to the poetry of Thomas Carew, it is well to refer to Henry Lawes (1596-1662), court composer to Charles I, whose oeuvre includes over 400 songs, and who seems to have had a special sympathy for the poetry of Carew. Nearly forty of Lawes' songs are settings of poems by Carew. These settings, such as I have been able to see, are largely homophonic and extremely clear in their declamation. They show a loving concern for weighting and nuance, for the telling communication of the subtleties and ironies of the text. John Milton, in a well-known sonnet "To My Friend Mr. Henry Lawes", praised this composer, who "First taught our English Music how to span Words with just note and accent." Advertisements for books of poems by

Milton, Suckling, and many other poets of the time make clear that collaboration with Lawes was a point of prestige. Charles Burney, on the other hand, found it suspicious that Lawes was so well regarded by literary figures, evidently thinking this to be a sign of weak musical content. In any event, I have tried to bear in mind the model of Lawes--his lucidity-- despite the melismas and considerably more complex textures of my settings.

The voice of the poet is, presumably, masculine directed toward a feminine object ('Celia'). But these matters may not have been any simpler in the 1600's than they are now. My setting, while singable by a tenor, is intended for a soprano because of the registration and timbral affinity with the winds. I am counting on the enlightened listener to set aside gender stereotypes.

--RW