

03. The Hunt is Up

John Bennet

(1575-1614)

arr. *William Melton*

Bennet, John

(born c. 1575, probably near the border of Lancashire and Cheshire; died after 1614)

The enigmatic Bennet left few biographical footprints. Though not a professional musician, he published a set of seventeen *Madrigalls to Foure Voyces* in 1599 and made a contribution to the gala 1601 edition *The Triumphs of Oriana* in honour of Queen Elizabeth I. Jeremy Noble suggested that Bennet was probably acquainted with Thomas Morley and the latter influenced the style of Bennet's madrigals. Contemporary composer Thomas Ravenscroft praised 'Maister Iohn Bennet, a Gentleman admirable for all kindes of Composures...in all his workes, the very life of that Passion, which the Ditty sounded, is so truly exprest, as if he had measured it alone by his own Soule...'

As John M. Ward wrote in his survey of thirty pieces called 'The Hunt's Up', the title denotes 'different things: a [bass] ground, a type of song, a few pieces of instrumental music, a musical genre, a custom'. The first surviving example is a ground and discant by an anonymous Tudor scribe from about 1560. The text survives in several variants, like the following tribute to the hunting prowess of Henry VIII:

The hunt is up, the hunt is up,
And it is well nigh day,
And Harry our King is gone hunting
To bring his deer to bay.

This may be a sanitised form of another version that touts the King's bedroom pursuits, and the text would undergo even more transformation in a later Scottish rendering in which 'Jesus, our King, is gaine in hunting', the quarry now the human soul. Composers attracted to 'The Hunt's Up' over the years included William Byrd, Anthony Holborne, Orlando Gibbons

and John Gay, and the expression survived for centuries in the tradition of 'hunsupping', where a wandering fiddler blessed households with a tune on Christmas morning.

John Bennet's 'The Hunt is Up' was one of his six contributions to Ravenscroft's *A Briefe Discourse of the True (but Neglected) Use of Charact'ring the Degrees...Examples Whereof are Exprest in the Harmony of 4 Voyces* (London, 1614). The original ground and variant of the discant are referenced only briefly in the chorus. Scholar David Brown noted John Bennet's 'command of a forthright festive manner', and commented that 'The Hunt' and its fellows 'reveal a vigorous native character...forthright and humourous'.

Text by William Melton