



# EDWARD DE VERE NEWSLETTER NO. 20

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## Did the author of the Langham *Letter* have pronounced musical interests and abilities?

Evidences of the author's musical interests and abilities are found throughout the Langham *Letter*. The passage in which he describes his manner of spending his afternoons and evenings while at Kenilworth, for example, shows him to be an accomplished performer on several musical instruments, and a popular entertainer among the ladies in the court circle:

In afternoons and a nights, sumtime am I with the right woorschipfull Syr George Howard, az good a Gentlman az ony lyvez: And sumtime at my good Lady Sydneys chamber, a Noblwooman, that I am az mooch boound untoo, az ony poor man may be untoo so gracioous a Lady: And sumtyme in sum oother place: But allweyz amooing the Gentlwemen by my good wyll (O, ye know that cumz allweyz of a gentle spirit) and when I see cumpany according, than can I be az lyvely too: sumtime I foot it with daunsyng: noow with my Gyttern, and els with my Cyttern, then at the Virginallz: Ye kno nothing cums amiss to me: then carroll I up a song withall, that by and by they cum flocking about me lyke beez too hunny: and ever they cry, anoother good Langham anoother. Shall I tell yoo? when I see Misterz — (A, see a mad knave, I had allmost tolld all) that shee gyvez onz but an ey or an ear: why then, man am I blest: my grace, my coorage, my cunning iz doobled: She says sumtime she likez it, and then I like it mooch the better, it dooth me good to heer hoow well I can do. And too say the truth: what, with mine eyz, az I can amorously gloit it, with my spanish sospires, my french heighes, mine Italian dulcets, my dutch hovez, my doobl releas, my hy reachez, my fine feyning, my deep diapason, my wanton warblz, my running, my tyming, my tuning and my twynkling, I can gracify the matter az well as the prowdest of them, and waz yet never staynd I thank God. By my troth cuntreman it iz sumtime hy midnight ear I can get from them (Kuin 78-9)

Another indication of Langham's interest in music is his appreciative critical commentary on the instruments used in the pageant which welcomed the Queen on her entrance to Kenilworth:

[The Porter] cauzd hiz Trumpetooorz that stood upon the wall of the gate thear, too soound up a tune of wellcum: which, byside the nobl noyz, waz so mooch the more pleezaunt too beholld, becauz theez Trumpe-toourz being six in number, wear every one an eight foot hy, in due proportion of parson besyde, all in long garments of sylk sutabl, each with hiz sylvery Trumpet of a fyve foot long, foormed taperwyze, and straight from the upper part untoo the neather eend: whear the diameter waz a 16. inchez over and yet so tempered by art, that being very eazy too the blast, they cast fourth no greater noyz nor a more unpleazaunt soound for time and tune, then any oother common Trumpet be it never so artificially foormed. These armonioous blasterz, from the foreside of the gate at her highnes entrauns whear they began: walking upon the wallz, untoo the inner: had this muzik maynteined from them very delectably while her highnes all along this Tiltyard rode untoo the inner gate next the baze court of the Castl . . . This Pageant waz clozd up with a delectabl harmony of Hautboiz, Shalmz, Cornets, and such oother looud Muzik, that held on whyle her Maiesty, pleazauntly so passed from thens tooward the Castl gate. . . . On the seaventh Posts, the last and next too the Castl, wear thear pight, too fayr Bay braunchez of a fourfoot hy, adooomed on all sides with Lutes, Viollz, Shallmz, Cornets, Flutes, Recorders and Harps, as the presents of *Phoebus* the God of Muzik, for rejoysing the mynd, and also of Phizik for health to the body (Kuin 40-2).

The two foregoing passages illustrate Langham's musical ability and his familiarity with musical terms and different types of instruments. In addition, Langham evidences an extraordinary receptivity to music. This deep appreciation of the power of music is best illustrated through the final paragraph of his

description of an evening pageant performed for the Queen beside the lake at Kenilworth. In this passage, the author speaks from the heart and his passionate love of music is plainly evident.

Noow syr, the ditty in miter so aptly endighted too the matter, and after by voys so delicioously deliverd: the song by a skilful artist intoo hiz parts so sweetly sorted: each part in hiz instrument so clean and sharply tooched, every instrument again in hiz kind so excellently tunabl: and this in the eeving of the day, resoounding from the callm waters: whear prezens of her Majesty and longing too listen had utterly damped all noyz and dyn: the hole armony conveyd in tyme, tune, and temper thus incomparably melodioous: with what pleazure (Master Martin) with what sharpnes of conceyt, with what lyvely delight this moought pears into the heerers harts: I pray ye imagin yoor self az ye may, for so God judge me, by all the wit and cunning I have, I cannot express, I promis yoo. *Mais jeo bien vieu cela Monseur, que forte grande est la pauvoyr qu'avoit la tresnoble science de Musique sur les esprites humains.* Perceyve ye me? I have tolld ye a great matter noow. As for me surely I waz lulld in such liking and so loth too leave of, that mooch a doo a good whyle after, had I, to finde me whear I waz. And take ye this by the way, that for the small skyl in muzik, that God hath sent me (ye know it is sumwhat) ile set the more by my selfe whyle my name is Langham, and grace a God. A, muzik iz a nobl Art (Kuin 57-8).

Langham's attachment to the "nobl Art" of music is thus one of the distinctive features which sets him apart from his contemporaries. The number of individuals connected with the life of Queen Elizabeth's court who were possessed of a marked proficiency in music is perforce limited, and it is among this relatively narrow field of candidates that the author of the Langham *Letter* must be sought.

Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford was a courtier with pronounced musical tastes. A favourite of Queen Elizabeth for a brief period in the early 1570's, Oxford was intimately familiar with life at court, and had been in attendance on several of Elizabeth's progresses. There is thus nothing regarding court life in the above-quoted passages which could not have come from his pen. Moreover, Oxford's musical talent was of such a high calibre as to receive the notice of professional musicians. In dedicating his *The first set of English madrigals* to the Earl in 1599, for example, John Farmer wrote:

I have presumed to tender these Madrigales onlie as a remembrance of my service and witness of your Lordships liberall hand, by which I have so long lived, and from your Honorable minde that so much have loved all liberall Sciences: in this I shall be most encouraged, if your Lordship vouch safe the protection of my first frutes, for that both of your greatness you best can, and for your judgement in Musicke best may: for without flattrie be it spoken, those that know your Lordship know that, that using this science as a recreation, your Lordship have overgone most of them that make it a profession. Right Honourable Lord, I hope it shall not be distastfull to number you heere amongst the favourers of Musicke, and the practisers, no more than Kings and Emperours that have been desirous to be in the roll of Astronomers, that being but a starre faire, the other an Angels Quire (Miller 491-2).

The pronounced musical interests and abilities of the author of the Langham *Letter* thus afford further support for the hypothesis that the author of the Langham *Letter* is Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

### Works Cited

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