

Edmund Hooper, Gentleman of the Chapel Royal

By Andrew Gant

Edmund Hooper was one of the most celebrated and successful musicians of his day. He moved effortlessly into all the leading positions in London musical life, working alongside Byrd, Gibbons, Morley and Tomkins as their equal. His music was written for the leading choir and the most important occasions of the age. However, compared to many of his contemporaries, his name and music are not well-known today. Only a handful of his pieces are available in modern editions, and of those only two, the “short” and “verse” Evening Services, have anything approaching a regular place in the repertoire of church and cathedral choirs. One or two of his longer pieces do occasionally get an outing from enterprising choirmasters: Hooper’s current successor at Westminster Abbey, James O’Donnell, has broadcast and recorded the “Great” (or “Full”) Evening service, but the rest of Hooper’s work, including three verse anthems unique in their style and scope, is largely unknown today. This relative neglect makes this project by David Allinson all the more welcome and timely. Hooper’s critical fate is not dissimilar to that once accorded to Purcell. For the two-and-a-half centuries after his death, Purcell was regarded as the great genius whose music everybody admired but nobody knew. Vaughan Williams remarked, “we all worship Purcell, but what do we really know of him?” The reasons are the same too: Hooper and Purcell both took an existing musical style and pushed the boundaries of form and language further than their contemporaries, so that musicians who were used to the work of, say, Gibbons and Blow, found their respective colleagues Hooper and Purcell frankly a little odd.

Biography

Edmund Hooper was born around 1553 in North Halberton, Devon. He may have been a chorister at Exeter Cathedral. By 1582 he has become a member of the choir at Westminster Abbey, and 3 December 1588 he becomes Master of the Choristers there. The best, best-paid, most prestigious and most secure place of employment for the musician was the Chapel Royal, and Hooper followed a well-established practice in becoming first a “Gentleman-Extraordinary”, that is he is elected to a sort of part-time membership of the choir on the understanding that he will have the next full-time vacancy to occur on the death of an incumbent. The Chapel Royal Cheque Book (the document recording administrative records) notes his appointment as “Extraordinary” in 1602/3: “Edmund Hooper of Westminster was sworne the first of Marche in mr Randolls roome”.

Very shortly after occurs the sort of major public event which has always punctuated the routine of private worship of the Chapel Royal. Queen Elizabeth died at Richmond on 24 March 1602/3. Her funeral took place at Westminster Abbey on April 28. The relative importance of the musicians present is judged by their mourning liveries, newly made for the occasion and given to them as their fee: the 25 Gentlemen of the Chapel Royal (including Byrd and Giles) each get 7 yards for themselves and 2 each for their servant. Only the senior Organist, Doctor Bull, gets more: he is ranked with the clergy at 9 yards. The singing-men of Westminster are much less important- 4 yards and no servant. There is a vast array of instruments: 60 altogether, including 22 trumpets. There are 12 children of the Chapel Royal, as usual not listed by name, who get “1

yard a piece". Oddly, "The Quiristers of Westmr" are listed, including Walter Porter, later a notable Chapel Royal Gentleman. Unlike their adult counterparts, at junior level the Abbey boys seem to be better treated than their Chapel counterparts: their allowance of livery is "to each 1 ½ yards a piece". There are four "Gent of the chappell extraordinary" including "Edmund Hoop". There is a "James Hoop" among the Abbey singing-men, Edmund's son James who was a lay vicar there until his death in 1652. Among the Abbey boys is "John Hoop", maybe a younger son or even grandson of Edmund.

The coronation of James I followed at Westminster on 25 July, much restricted in scale by a severe outbreak of plague which killed possibly 30,000 people. For the very first time there is a reasonable amount of surviving documentary evidence of the music at an English coronation:

*"Birds second preces & 2 of the psalms
Gyles Tedeume and o be joyfull
I call and cry after the Kinge comethe at second service
The Lettany
O lord of whom I do whiles the ls take ther places
Morleyes cread
Christ risinge for ye last anthem"
It seems rather modest fare for a coronation, perhaps because of the plague. As usual, the Chapel Royal Gentlemen are listed meticulously in order of seniority:
"Nathanaell Gyles, master of the children.
Thomas Sampson clerke of the check.
Jo: Bull doctr in Musicke
Robert Stone.
William Birde...
Crue Sharpe...."*

And Edmund Hooper among the "Extraordinaries", 25 adult musicians in all. On 1 March 1604/5 Hooper gets his promotion to be a full Gentleman of the Chapel Royal. His name then appears on the list of "The names of the gentn Lyvinge at the tyme of this Augmentaçon graunted" on "quinto Decembris 1604" On 19 May 1606 his position at Westminster Abbey is regularised as "Organist", the first person to hold that title. This is confirmed for life in 1616. It was certainly not unusual for a musician to hold posts at two places of employment concurrently: many did so throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, several being, like Hooper, concurrently organist of the Chapel and the Abbey (including Gibbons, Purcell and Blow, who at one stage was Organist of the Chapel Royal, Westminster Abbey and St Paul's cathedral at the same time. Those were the days). Hooper also proceeded up the ranks of seniority at the Chapel Royal, becoming one the two organists (with Orlando Gibbons). In 1615 there is a dispute between the two men about who is to play at which services, resolved by an entry in the Cheque Book:

"Be it remembered that in the yeare of our lord 1615 ther arose a controvrisie betweene the Organistes for the mannre of their waytinge at Principall feastes. It was theruppon ordered by the Revrend father in god the Lo: Bishopp of Bathe and Welles, Deane of his mates Chappell yt always hereafter, the auncient custom should be observed, wch was and still must be, yt the most auncient Organist shall serve the Eeve and daye of evry principall feast: as namely the Eeves and daies of the feastes of All Saints Christmas Easter St George and Whitsontide: the next Organist in place to serve the second daie; and soe likewise the third, for the third daie, if ther be so many

Organistes: & for all other festival daies in the yeare, those to be pformed by the Organistes as they shall fall out in their sevrall weekes of wayetinge: the feastes beinge ended, he yt did or shoulde begin the saterdaie before, shall finishe up the same weeke accordinge to formr custom, & the other to followe: except the feast of Christmas, for then they change evry daye as the Quier dothe duringe the whole twelve dayes.

Ja: Bath et Well:

Md that wheras ther is a Rasure in the sixt line above written, it was rased & putt out, by consent of the Lo: Deane the Subdeane & the now Organistes Edmund Hooper and Orlando Gibbons In testimony wherof they have subscribed their names the second of November 1615:

Leonrd Davies Subd:- Edm: Hooper

Orlando Gibbons”

On his death Hooper was succeeded by another musician making the step up from “Extraordinary” to “Ordinary” membership of the Chapel Royal (while still hanging on to an appointment in the provinces): “1621. Edmund Hooper died the xiiijth daye of July. And Thomas Tompkins, organist of Worcester was sworne in his place the second daye of August followinge”. Hooper was buried in the Abbey cloister on 16 July. His wife Margaret outlived him by more than thirty years and was buried alongside him in 1652, the same year their son James, Abbey lay-vicar, also died. Edmund and Margaret’s stone can still be seen in the Abbey cloisters.

The Chapel Royal

The Chapel Royal was well established as the best place to work. Pay was relatively generous, and the new King made efforts to keep up with the ever-present problem of inflation, increasing the gentlemens’ salary by a full 25% early in the reign, on 5 the fifth of December 1604:

“Be it remembered that...in the second yeare of the reigne of oure most graciuous soveraigne Lord James...after a longe and Chargable sute continued for the increase of wages...of Nathanaell Gyles then Mr of the Children, with other auntientes of this place; The Kings most excellent Ma.tie, of his Royall bountye and regard, pleased to ad to the late intertainement of the Chappell ten powndes p annu to evry man, so increasinge there stipends from thirtie to ffortie powndes p annu, and allso augmented the twelve Childrens allowance; from Six pence to ten pence p diem.”

There were many perks in the form of gifts of sinecures, honorary positions elsewhere with an income attached, for example: “6 March 1618/19. Licence to Thomas Day, gent.,...for 99 years to convey the spring in Hyde Park and other places adjoining to Westminster for the necessary use of his Majesty”s subjects there, and to have the benefit therof, paying 6s. 8d. yearly rent”: “12 March 1618/19 A presentation to the Rectory of Newberry, Berks, for Nathaniel Giles, MA”: “May 1622, A privilege to Orlando Gibbons,...Thomas Daye, Willm Heather and John Clarke, for the sole making of all strings for musical instruments, called Venice, or Romish manikin, and Catlin strings, for 14 years”: “3 July 1623, Signet warrant for the preservation of his Majesty”s game within the manor of Bexley and the river of Craye, from Orpington to the river Thames: to William Heather, doctor in music and one of the gentlemen of his Majesty”s Chapel.”

There were grants of title to land and manors, extra services with extra fees, handsome dinners provided by the monarch, and a far from onerous timetable (there were around 32 adult musicians

in the choir, with a rota whereby each attended only one month in two except on important occasions, with long periods when the choir was not in session at all and a reduced choir in attendance when the King was away from London. The organists and Masters of the Children had to attend more regularly, but it was still a comfortable enough arrangement). Even more importantly, because of its pre-eminence the Chapel had long been the magnet for the country's best musical minds, so an able and ambitious composer would find himself working on a daily basis with the best singers, organists and composers in the world, sometimes, as in the case of Byrd and Purcell, from earliest childhood. The world has yet to devise a more thorough or better system of musical education.

In addition to the regular services in whichever Palace the monarch chose to call home (meaning principally Whitehall Palace), there were occasional special events, some public, some family occasions, all designed to reinforce public perception of the monarch's personal relationship with the Almighty as His divinely appointed representative. One of the earliest was a christening:

*“The order and manr of the service pformed in and by the Chappell at the Christeninge of Marye the daughter of the mightie Kinge James &c: the ffyrste of Maye Anno: 1605:-
At the tyme when the Royall Infant should be brought to the Chappell: the gentn of that place...went out of the Chappell two and two in ther surplesses unto the Nurcerie doore: ...ther was a generall silence, neither voice nor instrument was heard in the way...At the same instant did the Organest begine and continew playinge aloud, until the Child was placed in the Traverse, and the Gossips on the right side...When all were placed, then began an Antheme...(the Chorus whereof was filled with the help of Musicall Instrumentes)....”*

1612 saw the funeral of Henry, Prince of Wales, a much-admired young man clearly skilled in music and other arts. Many musicians contributed laments and dirges, and the funeral itself was celebrated with pomp and splendour. Queen Anne died on 2 March 1618/19. At her funeral at Westminster on 13 May the traditional formalities are observed: 22 Gentlemen of the Chapel are listed, 12 children. Giles is Master, Hewlett is Clerk. Hooper and Gibbons, naturally, take part as Chapel Royal Organists, not in any junior Abbey capacity. All receive yards of mourning livery as part of their fee. Perhaps the most important “extra” event, however, was one of the first. In November 1604 Fawkes and his mob unleashed their plot. Its failure was a sign that God favoured his appointed representative on earth, and the people must be left in no doubt about the King's enhanced authority. In the first instance, James convened a special Thanksgiving ceremony in the ancient room giving off the nave of Westminster Abbey at first floor level where, according to tradition and to Shakespeare, Henry V had died: the Abbey records have payments for “the getting up of the mewsick in the Jerewsalem Chamber”. This was a personal statement by the King, so it is the Chapel Royal who provide the music. Edmund Hooper, by now a full Gentleman of the Chapel, provides a magnificent verse anthem on a scale unseen before, some eight minutes long, with viols. He sets a splendid, blood-thirsty text, unashamedly rejoicing in the overthrow of Fawkes and his mob:

*“This day the Lord from foes” blood-thirsty ire
Hath given us brands new taken from the fire”*

Hooper's work: texts

It is a curious feature of the musical history of the Chapel Royal that its leading musicians tend to come in pairs. Two men, working together on a daily basis to manage the Chapel's affairs and at

the same time explore and develop prevailing styles and push them on, as if the job of resident genius was too much for one musical mind alone. Fayrfax and Cornyshe, Tallis and Byrd, Morley and Weelkes, the Lawes brothers, Henry Cooke and Christopher Gibbons, Henry Purcell junior and John Blow, Croft and Clarke, Greene and Boyce. Hooper's service at the Chapel Royal coincided more or less exactly with that of Orlando Gibbons. They proceeded through the rank of seniority together, attended the same events, sang and played each other's music, learning and teaching as that earlier great double-act between Tallis and Byrd had done. Hooper's music is of a quite different stripe from Gibbons'. He composes in all the same forms, but brings a quite different musical personality to bear. Hooper is a true original. His musical voice is genuinely unique, connected to but apart from the lingua franca of his Chapel Royal contemporaries, rather as Purcell's was to be later in the century. For a start, his choice of texts is highly idiosyncratic. Not for Hooper the familiar cadences of the Book of Common Prayer with its Collects and Psalms: his three surviving verse anthems set devotional poems notable for their length, colourful language and intricate verse and rhyme structure. The text of "The Blessed Lamb", a verse anthem "for Good Friday" is worth quoting in full:

The Blessed Lamb, the holy promised seed,
Sent in time's fullness sinful man to save,
For our sins guiltless on the Cross did bleed,
Scourged, wounded, spit on as a slave
Never was sorrow like his sorrow known,

Never was love like his by mother shown

His eyes wept tears of blood to see their blindness
His heart was pierced with spear, but more with grief
In agony of soul, for their unkindness,
That for their Jesus they should choose a thief
He bore God's wrath, freely his life did give

That freed from sin we might not die, but live.

This is the day of blessed memory,
O keep it holy to the Lord, the King.
From death he rose, no more to die.
To whom the host and choir of heaven do sing:
Holy, O Holy, and the angels cry:

Blessed is the Lamb that for the world did die. Amen

This is a carefully-crafted poem in three stanzas, each with the rhyme-scheme ABABCC, the last couplet summing up the verse like a sonnet in miniature. In each stanza Hooper sets the first four lines for solo voices, varying and increasing the texture as the piece goes on, reserving the full choir for the final couplet of each stanza. The range of the vocal lines is carefully-controlled, too: like Gibbons he paces the placing of the highest note of each section with great care. One example: the treble chorus line reaches its highest note, G, just once, at the beginning of the very last line, the angels' exultant cry of "Blessed is the Lamb". Coming after the full choir's pealing cries of "Holy, O Holy" it is an architectural moment of great grandeur. The piece as a whole

shows an almost symphonic sense of overall structure which is unmatched probably until Purcell, possibly Handel, and is crowned by one of Hooper's trade-marks, a fine polyphonic Amen.

The text of "Hearken ye nations", another of the three surviving verse anthems, is referred to above, and takes great glee in evoking the revenge to be heaped on the heads of Guy Fawkes and his colleagues. The third verse anthem, "O God of Gods", is rather more straightforward in character, being an uncomplicated paean to the personal and political qualities of the monarch, in good Chapel Royal fashion. Hooper gets some splendid fun out of evoking the sounds of a typical "broken" consort, however:

"with trumpets, hoboyes, flutes and shawms" the music surely suggesting that the piece might well have been accompanied by these very instruments at least on one grand occasion when the King attended his Chapel in state. "O God of Gods" presents one rather intriguing historical conundrum: the surviving material refers to the anthem being "for the King's Day", and the text makes it clear which King this is: "our Sovereign Lord, King Charles"

Hooper, though, died in 1621, four years before Charles came to the throne. This must, then, be an example of a Chapel Royal anthem being composed in honour of a reigning monarch, in this case Hooper's employer James I, and then being adapted by later generations to include the name of the current incumbent. There are plenty of examples of this practice, beginning with Banester's nameless 15th-century King, referred to only as "N."

These devotional poems are so unusual, so personal, and so skilful that they must be by the same writer. They also fit Hooper's musical structures and melodic style so well that in the absence of a named collaborator it is at least possible to believe that he wrote them himself (often anthems and songs of the period do not credit the poet).

Hooper's other surviving music touches most of the prevailing forms of the day: an unassuming four-part setting of the Collect for Christmas Day, two quirky contributions to William Leighton's "Tears and Lamentations of a sorrowful soul", one tiny keyboard piece and, interestingly, three settings of the Evening canticles, one in each of the three main styles, Verse, Great and Short, in addition to the present work, the "Flatt" service.

Hooper's work: musical language

Alongside his textual ambition and structural mastery, the musical language itself is remarkable. Vocal lines are varied and expressive, with surprising twists and turns. Word-painting features at the obligatory moments like the evocation of trumpets or the rising scales to portray the Resurrection. Above all, Hooper's harmony is unique. No composer of the period loved the false relation and its cousin the English cadence quite so much, but there is nothing arbitrary about his use of them. Sometimes he will turn a false relation the wrong way round, sounding a chord with its minor 3rd and then sharpening the 3rd to create a major triad. Suspensions are often held while the note of resolution is being sung in a different part, creating an exhilarating harmonic pile-up at cadences. Distantly-related chords are placed right next to each other: E major to G major. And it is all done in a way which is completely consistent and of a piece, giving the music huge integrity. The last two pages of his magnificent five-part full anthem "Behold, it is Christ" must contain more false relations than any other similar passage of the period, not to mention a point of imitation based on the melodic interval of a diminished fourth. Glorious.

Perhaps paradoxically, however, it is this very individuality which has caused Hooper's music to fade from the repertoire in a way which Gibbons' more domesticated genius has not. Hooper's music is hard to sing, his anthems are long and the texts require the listener to do some work to understand them. His harmony and vocal lines are, frankly, sometimes a bit odd. His harmonic unpredictability has not helped his own case, either: "Behold, it is Christ" was the most popular anthem of its day, judging by the number of contemporary sources. Such is the harmonic richness of the work, however, that the scribes who made the many copies carted round the country all made slightly different decisions about an accidental here, word underlay there, so that all the sources are different. Modern scholars have had an absorbing task in collating all the possible options, and of course no one solution can be said to be definitive.

Hooper and Gibbons defined the work of James's Chapel Royal. There is no evidence either way as to whether or not they got on. The dispute about organ playing is not evidence of a rift- it's just a document defining work practices. Perhaps their musical personalities were too different for them to be friends in the way that Tallis and Byrd and later Purcell and Blow certainly were. There is no heart-felt musical eulogy by Gibbons on the death of Hooper, as there is in several other great Chapel Royal musical double-acts. Perhaps, on the other hand, they were sufficiently different not to be rivals, but to inspire each other. If Hooper wrote his own texts, did he also write "See, see the word is incarnate" for his friend Gibbons?

Accompaniment in the Chapel Royal: "the windy instruments"

There is, intriguingly, a good deal of evidence that instruments accompanied the Chapel Royal choir on special occasions. Choruses in "verse" anthems would be filled out with the sonorities of sackbuts, cornets and other "windy instruments" as the records have it. Later, there is a rota for the attendance of these players at Chapel on a regular basis. An anthem like Hooper's "O God of Gods" lends itself so perfectly to this treatment that we are surely denying ourselves an insight if we continue to assume that all liturgical music was sung either a cappella or with organ alone. The sound-world becomes that of Gabrieli, choirs of voices and instruments answering each other across the galleries and spaces of Whitehall chapel. The Italian influence was certainly important and popular, not least through the example of a composer like Walter Porter, Hooper's former Westminster Abbey and later Chapel Royal contemporary, who studied with Monteverdi in Venice and brought the new style back with him to the English Chapel Royal.

Conclusion

Gibbons' polished mastery and secure Englishness has ensured his immortality. Hooper's idiosyncratic genius has made his road into posterity a less straight one. In this respect the comparison with Purcell is well-made: revered in his day, Purcell's music baffled following generations by its sheer individuality until modern scholarship restored it to its rightful place at the very top of the world's esteem. Hooper deserves nothing less.