

JOHN SYKES

HOMAGE

to

JOHN DOWLAND

settings of verse

by

RANDALL SWINGLER

MMXVIII
The JOHN SYKES PROJECT

John Austin Sykes (1909 – 1962)



John Sykes was born in India in 1909 - in India because his father was in the Indian civil service. Back in England he won a music scholarship to Clifton College, Bristol, and whilst still a schoolboy gained his A.R.C.O. and F.R.C.O. In 1928 he went up to Oxford as organ scholar at Balliol. In those days, undergraduates were not able to read Music as a first degree, so Sykes read Modern History, and followed it up with a B.Mus. One contemporary source considered him to have been the most distinguished musical undergraduate of his time. He was president of the famous Oxford University Opera Club and active in the Music Club and Union. He was sufficiently important to be given a full-page spread in the undergraduate newspaper 'Isis' – which referred to his ability to 'make a piano do anything but swim'. He was a friend of the left-wing poet Randall Swingler, and also a contemporary of W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender and C. Day Lewis, whom he knew, so it is perhaps not surprising that he was a fluent, though not distinguished, poet. After Oxford, he went to London, to the Royal College of Music, where he studied composition under Ralph Vaughan Williams, R. O. Morris and Gordon Jacob. In 1936 he was appointed to the staff of Kingswood School, and there he stayed, except for war service as a conscientious objector in the Pioneer Corps, until he died of cancer in the school Sanatorium in the summer term of 1962.

The John Sykes Project is an informal group of former pupils who are transcribing and publishing his music on the internet, and encouraging its performance.

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Homage to John Dowland and other settings of Randall Swingler's verse

The John Sykes archive at Kingswood School, Bath, holds manuscripts of nine settings of seven poems by his friend Randall Swingler (two were set twice), some of which originally came from the Randall Swingler archive. Three of them are given the collective title 'Homage to John Dowland', and there is good reason to believe that a fourth belongs to the same set, so in this edition I have treated it as such and added the Roman numeral 'IV' before its title.

Andy Croft writes, in 'Comrade Heart', his biography¹ of the communist poet Randall Swingler, that in early 1957 "He [Randall Swingler] was ... writing a series of songs for John Sykes, in homage to John Dowland..." and that shortly after this he wrote to John Sykes, enclosing some of the Dowland poems. However, Swingler sent the words of one ('My Mistress Played') to his wife Geraldine in July 1949, making it many years earlier than the Dowland idea. At this stage, it is difficult to establish how many poems Swingler wrote for the Dowland sequence, and which they were. The four original settings by John Sykes, with dates and places of their composition, are:

Homage to John Dowland:

I. Jean with her Golden Grace	30 April 1957, Hermitage
II. My Mistress Played	24 April 1957, Pebmarsh
III. The Jealous Lover [Lachrymae]	19 April 1957, Hermitage
To a Dahlia in the Sun	19 April 1957, Hermitage

(During term, John Sykes had accommodation at the school, but during the holidays had to stay with family or friends. His sister Christal Sykes had a house in Hermitage near Newbury and Randall Swingler lived with his wife Geraldine in the small village of Pebmarsh in Essex, and it is clear from the dates on the manuscripts that Sykes divided the Easter holiday of 1957 between these two places.)

Some sixteen months later, he made new settings of the last two songs.

The Jealous Lover [Lachrymae] - 2nd setting	August 1958, Pebmarsh
To a Dahlia in the Sun - 2nd setting	August 1958, Pebmarsh

We do not know why he did this, but the later settings are simpler, especially in their harmonic structure and it is possible that Swingler (who was a knowledgeable musician - a flautist of professional standard) suggested that simpler settings might fit better with the concept of homage to John Dowland. Assuming that the poet/composer partnership intended the later versions as replacements, I have used that order in this edition rather than follow date of composition.

The archives hold two more settings of poems by Swingler (both composed at Swingler's home in Pebmarsh) which were probably suggested by the seasons in which they were written ('New Year Song' and 'Easter Song'). The second of these is notable in that the manuscript has no tempo indication and few expression marks. This is unique in Sykes' work: from this, the somewhat subversive words, the repetitive structure and the untidy writing, I am inclined to think it was a joint late-night product when the wine bottles were empty. The only other Swingler setting ('Carol' for unaccompanied four part choir) was published by OUP² in 1958 as 'The Child of the World'.

P.J.C.

1. 'Comrade Heart', Andy Croft, Manchester University Press, 2003, ISBN 0719063345
2. 'The Child of the World', Oxford Choral Songs X41, OUP, 1958

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Homage to Dowland

I. Jean With Her Golden Grace

Randall Swingler

John Sykes

Allegretto grazioso *mf*

Jean with her gold-en grace Does

Allegretto grazioso *mf*

13 me so please Her lark-spur locks un-lace my long-ing's lease And

24 heart's un-ease From its cold car-a-pace.

35 Jean with her gold-en grace Does me en-trance

mp *p* *mf*

47

— Rea - son may not out - face — That cas - u - al glance — Whose silv - er lance De -

57

flects — his parr - y - ing mace.

69

Jean with her gold - en grace — And ver - it - y's in - souc - i - ance So sways

81

— my wits a - skance — That love's en - trance is time's — and calm's de - cease. —

92

f
Grace, glance and care-less - ness of

105

youth out - pace with just and gent - le ease our meas - ured

114

poco f *mf*
dance And fal - con chance stoops on

123

slower *p* *pp* *poco lento*
our trem - bling peace

Homage to Dowland II. My Mistress Played

Randall Swingler

John Sykes

1 **Poco Andante**

Poco Andante

p dolce *sf* *pp*

5 *cresc.*

My mist - ress played And ev - ery fing - er to one jew - elled note was

p

9

pearled. You might have thought each phrase A tend - - ril of her

sf

13 *p*

hair trans - lat - ed In - to a curl of air. And

17

yet her face _____ so still and rapt As if the riv - u - let of sound

pp *sf*

21

Washed its fine gloss in - to a wat - ered stone.

f *dim* *poco rit.* *pp*

f *dim* *poco rit.* *pp*

25

Oh when she is

a tempo *p*

a tempo *p* *sf* *pp* *p*

30

caught In that com - plete _____ and limp - id at - mos - phere, I know She

sf *pp*

34 *sf*

is no long-er— mine Nor ought— to be, but with all

38 *p*

hum - an Kind is— in - - tim - ate. I know, yet

42

still in vain pro - test, Be-cause her frond and dapp-led grace To

45 *f* *dim* *rit.* *pp*

me is— most, is most of— all de - sir - - ab - le then!

Homage to Dowland

III. The Jealous Lover [Lachrymae]
(1958 setting)

Randall Swingler

John Sykes

1 **Moderato**

Musical score for the first system, measures 1-3. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part has a "Moderato" tempo marking and a dynamic marking of "mp".

4

Rath - er to watch her die I'd sit in twi - light of de -

Musical score for the second system, measures 4-6. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part has a dynamic marking of "p".

7

sire And feel her mould up-on my bo - dy - pressed And

Musical score for the third system, measures 7-9. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part has a dynamic marking of "f".

10 *mf* *cresc.*

know her quite poss - essed though lost; At

mf *cresc.*

13 *cresc.* *f*

last, at least, at best, a will - ing ghost To rest for ev - er

cresc. *f*

17

there — and steal, — and steal — my death, my

p

21 *poco rit.*

death from time —

poco rit.

24 **a tempo** *mf*

Than here, quick heart a - flame To

a tempo *pp* *mf*

28

sit up-on my crumb - ling cliff And see the sep - ar - at - ing

31 *f* *mf*

dis - tance grow, Her care - less sail be - low the

f *mf*

34 *cresc.*

false hor - i - zon On a fresh wind blow

p *cresc.*

37 *f*

and nev - er know, And nev - er know what

40 *f* *dim.*

fruit she gath - ers from that tree, that tree that

43 *mp* *pp*

once, that once was I.

46 *rit.* *pp*

rit. *pp*

Homage to Dowland

IV. To a Dahlia in the Sun
(1958 setting)

Randall Swingler

John Sykes

1 **Poco Allegro** *f*

Van-it-y un - dis guised! How

Poco Allegro
mp leggiero *mf*

7
I com- mend Time's san-it- y, Whose lab - our-ing cent - ur -

f *sf*

12
ies have been con- tent - ed To mould this creat - ure simp - ly for all - ure

mp *mf* *p* *f* *f*

18

mf

A danc-ing sin - e - cure To

23

mock our grim hu - - - man - it - y And drive

f *sf*

27

the pres - byt - er - ian bees a - sund - er At nat - - - ure's

mf

31

gay - in - con - se - qent en - ter - prise.

f *f* *mp*

37 *f*

Teach her who would be pure That there's no sin,

mf

40

no sin in van - it - y when by her simp - le

f *sf*

44

bount - y beau - ty's vaunt - ed In the live mirr - or of a

mf *mp*

poco rit. *a tempo*

48 *f*

lov - er's eyes.

poco rit. *a tempo*

ff *f* *f*

Homage to Dowland

III. The Jealous Lover [Lachrymae]
(1957 setting)

Randall Swingler

John Sykes

1 **Poco Moderato**

Poco Moderato

mf

4 *mf*

Rath-er to watch her die I'd sit in twi - light of de - sire And feel her mould up-on my

mf *sf* *p*

9

bo - dy pressed and know her quite poss- sessed though lost; at

mf *mp*

13 *accel. cresc.* *f* *rit.* *a tempo mp*

last, at least, at best a will - ing ghost To rest for ev - er

accel. cresc. *sf* *p* *a tempo*

17 *rit. mf* *molto moderato p*

there and steal my death from time.

rit. molto moderato

21 *tempo primo mf*

Than here, quick heart a -

tempo primo pp mf *mf*

26 *mp*

flame, To sit up - on my crumb - ling cliff And see the sep - ar - at - ing

sf *p*

30 *mf* *dim. poco*

dist - ance grow; Her care - less sail be - low the false hor - iz - on

34 *accel. cresc.* *rit.* *mf a tempo*

On a fresh wind blow, And nev - er know and nev - er know what

accel. *rit.* *a tempo*

cresc. *f* *sf* *mf*

38 *f* *rit.*

fruit she gath - ers from that tree that once was

rit.

mp *f*

41 *molto moderato e smorz.* *rall.*

p

I. *molto moderato e smorz.* *rall.*

p *pp*

Homage to Dowland

IV. To a Dahlia in the Sun
(1957 setting)

Randall Swingler

John Sykes

1 **Animato**

Animato

f *mp* *p*

6 *mf*

Van-it - y un - dis - guised How I com - mend time's san-it - y, Whose

10 *f* *p* *mf*

lab - our ing cent - ur - ies have been con - tent - ed To mould this crea - ture simp - ly for all

15 *f* *mf*

ure? _____ A _____

20 *f*

danc - ing sin - e - cure To mock our grim hu - man-i - ty And

24 *f* *p*

drive_ the pres - by - ter - ian bees de - ment - ed At nat - ure's gay in -

28 *mf* *f* *mp* *p*

con - se-quent en - ter - prise. _____

33

mf

Teach her who would be pure That there's no

36

sin in van - it - y when by her simp - le bount - y beau - ty's

40

rall.

vaunt - ed In the live mirr - or of a lov - er's

a tempo

44

eyes.

a tempo