

Tudor & Jacobean Composers

Composer	Born	Died
Henry VIII	28 June 1491, Palace of Placentia	28 January 1547, Palace of Whitehall, London
John Bull	1562	1628
William Byrd	1539/40 or 1543	4 July 1623
Thomas Campion (sometimes Campian)	12 February 1567	1 March 1620
John Dowland	1523	1626
Orlando Gibbons	1583	1625
Thomas Tallis	1505	1585

Queen Elizabeth 1st died in 1603 and marked the end of the Tudor Era of the monarchy but taste and fashion in music evolved more slowly. James Ist and VIth was a Stuart and reigned until 1625 but English music changed little during this time.

Henry Purcell lived from 1659 to 1695 and was an English composer. Purcell's compositions incorporated both Italian and French stylistic elements but it was essentially an English form of Baroque music and different in character when compared to Tudor music. We can probably consider English music from about 1500 until the time of Purcell to be essentially "Tudor" music.

Apart from the names on the list above there were many other significant composers in the "Tudor" period. When we think of the "Renaissance" we tend to think of Italy and cultural gems like Florence, Venice and Pisa. We might also think of the Low Countries and the wave of enlightenment that spread through Holland and Belgium but we often neglect England and its intellectual and cultural developments. England might have been a bit of a backwater as far as art and architecture were concerned but not as far as music was concerned.

Many people think of Henry VIII as an overweight, diseased old man who ate and drank to excess. There may have been some truth in this in the later years of his reign but he was also a polymath being a linguist, and a skilled musician, with an interest in science, manufacturing and commerce. His economic policies lead to the country becoming much richer and he set up a series of national standards of measurement long before this was done in other European countries. Henry played several instruments; while at Lille in September 1513 with Margaret of Austria before the siege of Tournai, he was then 22 years old. Contemporary records state that he performed on the lute, harp, lyre, flute, and horn. Four bagpipes, with ivory pipes belonging to Henry VIII are reputed to survive; all at Westminster.

King Henry VIII was a skilled recorder player and he wrote several songs. Historians agree that he is on record as having composed and played numerous songs and melodies of his own composition although there is no direct evidence to attribute particular pieces directly to him. He may have written the popular *Greensleeves*. The song was probably written for Anne Boleyn during their often troubled courtship. If this is true then he had considerable talent as a musician.

As well as the ever popular recorder, other Tudor instruments included the cornet and the trumpet, which was often used by soldiers. The tambourine, bagpipes and violin were widely used. The virginal as well as the harpsichord were played by the wealthy. The viol was a popular stringed instrument first used in Spain in the late 1400s.

There were several popular Tudor musicians and composers. One of the most well-known was John Dowland, whose *First Book of Songs* was a best seller and made him a lot of money. For the sake of some simplicity we are going to consider composers in alphabetical order.

John Bull was quite a character. He showed considerable musical talent as a youngster. As a child he sang in the Chapel Royal and learned to play the organ and virginal. Later he became a renowned organ builder. He was a favourite of Queen Elizabeth the first and may have been used by her on spying missions abroad. He fell from grace by fathering a child out of wedlock. He had to leave England where he fled to Antwerp escaping charges of adultery which was then a very serious charge for those around the court.

His music is varied and different when compared to more modern composers. I think it is accessible. We have to remember that much of his music was composed for instruments that are much more primitive than modern instruments and that much of his music was not written as concert pieces but more as a background to everyday life. Note that J S Bach, 1685 to 1750, is often considered to be the "father" of modern music but Doctor John Bull was composing comparable music one hundred years earlier.

William Byrd wrote in many of the forms current in England at the time, including various types of sacred and secular polyphony, keyboard (the so-called Virginalist school), and consort music. Although he produced sacred music for Anglican services, sometime during the 1570s he became a Roman Catholic and wrote Catholic sacred music later in his life. He was married and had at least seven children. He spent his early professional life writing sacred music at Lincoln Cathedral but got into trouble at one point with the Puritans. His over-elaborate polyphonic choral music and his organ playing were both considered to be distracting to the essential message of church services.

As well as church music he also produced a great deal of secular music including pavaues, galliards, and fantasias. Byrd obtained the prestigious post of Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1572. Almost from the outset Byrd is named as 'organist', which however was not a designated post but an occupation for any Chapel Royal member capable of filling it. This career move vastly increased Byrd's opportunities to widen his scope as a composer and also to make contacts at Court. Queen Elizabeth (1558–1603) was a moderate Protestant who eschewed the more extreme forms of Puritanism and retained a fondness for elaborate ritual, besides being a

music lover and keyboard player herself. Byrd's output of Anglican Church is surprisingly small, but it stretches the limits of elaboration then regarded as acceptable by some reforming Protestants.

Thomas Campion (sometimes Campian; 1567 – 1620) was an English composer, poet, and physician. He wrote over a hundred lute songs, many compositions for dancing, and an authoritative technical treatise on music.

It seems he was foremost a poet and songwriter who was also an excellent musician. Much of his music still speaks to us today. (His original Tudor spelling is challenging but once translated into modern English it is very accessible.

John Dowland (1563 1626) was an English Renaissance composer, lutenist, and singer. It is believed that he was born in Westminster, London. He was one of the most famous musicians of his time and was an almost exact contemporary of William Shakespeare.

Nothing is known of Dowland's childhood, but in 1580 he went to Paris as a "servant" to Sir Henry Cobham, the ambassador to the French court. In 1588 he received a bachelor of music degree from the University of Oxford. His conversion to Roman Catholicism, he believed, caused his rejection for a post as a court lutenist to Queen Elizabeth I in 1594, and after that disappointment he left England to travel on the Continent. He visited the duke of Brunswick at Wolfenbüttel and the landgrave of Hesse at Kassel and was received with esteem at both courts. His travels also took him to Nürnberg, Genoa, Florence, and Venice, and by 1597 he had returned to England.

In 1598 Dowland became lutenist to Christian IV of Denmark, but he was dismissed for unsatisfactory conduct in 1606. Between 1609 and 1612 he entered the service of Theophilus, Lord Howard de Walden, and in 1612 he was appointed one of the "musicians for the lutes" to James I.

Dowland wrote a number of fantasies or fancies. These were always instrumental pieces designed to show of the skill of the musician and did not follow any system or convention as did the dances. The most popular dances at the time were the pavan and the galliard. The pavan or pavane (there are many versions of the spelling in Europe) is a slow, stately, processional dance popular at the time of the Renaissance. The galliard is an athletic dance, characterised by leaps, jumps, hops and other similar figures. The galliard was a favourite dance of Queen Elizabeth I of England.

Orlando Gibbons (1583 – 1625) was an English composer, virginalist and organist of the late Tudor and early Jacobean periods. He was a leading composer in England in the early 17th century and composed a wide range of music both sacred and secular and for a range of instruments and voices.

Between 1596 and 1598 he sang in the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, where his brother Edward Gibbons (1568–1650), eldest of William's four sons, was master of the choristers. The second brother, Ellis Gibbons (1573–1603), was also a promising composer, but died young. Orlando entered the university as a sizar in 1598 and achieved the degree of Bachelor of Music in 1606. That same year he married Elizabeth Patten, daughter of a Yeoman of the Vestry, and they went on to have seven children (Gibbons himself was the seventh of 10 children).

King James I appointed him a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, where he served as an organist from at least 1615 until his death. In 1623 he became senior organist at the Chapel Royal. He also held positions as keyboard player in the privy chamber of the court of Prince Charles (later King Charles I), and organist at Westminster Abbey. He died suddenly at age 41 and some considered his death to be "suspicious".

Thomas Tallis (c. 1505 –1585) was an English composer who occupies a primary place in anthologies of English choral music, and is considered one of England's greatest composers. He is honoured for his original voice in English musicianship. Little is known either about Tallis's childhood and his musical reputation at that age. However, there are suggestions that he was a Child (boy chorister) of the Chapel Royal, St James's Palace. This was the same singing establishment which he later joined as a Gentleman.

Throughout his service to successive monarchs as organist and composer, Tallis avoided the religious controversies that raged around him, though, like William Byrd, he stayed an "unreformed Roman Catholic." Tallis was capable of switching the style of his compositions to suit the different monarchs' vastly different demands.

Spem in alium is considered to be a masterpiece of polyphonic music with 40 parts. I have heard it said that it was composed to be played in the large, octagonal, dining room of the, now demolished, Nonsuch Palace in Surrey. Eight groups of five choristers would have been singing in each of the eight angles of the octagon. The work builds up to an impressive crescendo.