

Little is known about William Corbett's youth. He was born in the parish of St. James in Westminster, just west of London, probably as son of Henry and Sarah Corbett, whose son William was baptised on 18 July 1680 at St Margaret, Westminster. It is possible that he went to Italy for his musical education. An early benefit concert took place on 17 March 1699 in London. His Trio Sonatas op. 1 were published by Roger in Amsterdam around 1700/1702. As a violinist, from 1705 on he was the band leader of the orchestra at the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket: among the musicians there were William Babell, Nicola Francesco Haym, Jean-Baptiste Loeillet, Jacques Paisible and Johann Christoph Pepusch. At the end of 1709 he received a further position in the Royal Orchestra. In 1703 he had married an opera singer, the widow Anna Lodi, née Signoni, from Milan, but the marriage was kept secret. Their daughter was born in 1713. However, before May 1716 Mrs. Lodi moved back to Italy, leaving her daughter behind in London, where Corbett was compelled to place her upbringing in the care of relatives. From September 1716 on, the couple lived together again in Milan and later in Rome, although Corbett was often absent for concert tours. It was not until 1723 that he finally brought his daughter from England to Italy. Frequently travelling, Corbett remained in Italy, where he managed to achieve certain affluence, until returning to London in 1734, where he died on 7 March 1748. He left behind a collection of musical instruments including several violins by Amati and Stainer.

In addition to numerous songs and works for the stage, Corbett composed mainly trio sonatas and quartets. The Sonatas op. 2 and the first part of op. 4, set for recorders or flutes, are actually suites, for their movements are primarily dances. Corbett later arranged his *Bizzarie Universali* op. 8, which he had conceived as quartets, into concerti for orchestra.

The first edition of op. 4 (preserved only in the British Library) contains a dedication that allows the work to be dated. The title page reads: *SIX | Sonata's a 3^o | for two | FLUTES | or two | GERMAN FLUTES | and a Bass, | Consisting of | Preludes, Allemands, Corants, Sarabands, Gavots & Jiggs. | Dedicated to ye Right Hon[our]able | Henry Brentinck Earle of Portland, Viscount | Woodstock, Baron of Cirencester, Capt. | of her Majesty's First Troop of Guards &c. | by | William Corbett. | Opera Quarta. Libro Primo | Enterd in ye Hall according to Act of Parl.mt. | Printed for ye Author, Engrav'd & Sold by L. Pippard at the Orpheus in Rus-sell Street Covent Garden, and at other Musick Shops.*

A second impression contains an addition at the end of the title page: "and at the Authors the Corner of Warder Street Old Soho". This reprint, of which the "Fluto secondo" and the bass parts are preserved in the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, is interesting, because both parts were slightly

corrected and the bass ("Basso Continuo") amended through the addition "o Violoncello".

The dedicee Henry Bentinck (1682–1726) was an opera lover and a wealthy patron until he lost immense investments through the crash of the South Sea Company in 1720 and was compelled to flee England, becoming governor of Jamaica in 1721. The titles mentioned in the dedication make it possible to date this edition, which hitherto has been considered to be from ca. 1713, probably on account of the second edition by Walsh. Bentinck's father William, the first Earl of Portland, died on 23 November 1709, giving Henry his title, until Henry became Duke in 1716. Henry was captain of her Majesty's First Troop of Guards under Queen Anne, who reigned from 1702 to 1714, prior to his promotion to colonel on 26 July 1710. For these reasons the first edition must have been printed between December 1709 and July 1710. Incidentally, Bentinck's sister Francis was the second wife of William Lord Byron (1668–1736), Baron of Rochdale, to whom Corbett's op. 1 is dedicated.

Luke Pippard's edition is inaccurate and inconsequent, particularly in the use of slurs. The new edition by Pippard's former master Walsh, of which only the first flute part has survived (Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia), is more finely engraved, but it contains few corrections and a couple of new errors: *Six | SONATAS | for 2 Common | FLUTES | or two | GERMAN FLUTES | and a | BASS | Consisting of | Preludes, Allmands, Corants | Sarabands, Gavotts, and Jiggs | Compos'd by Mr: Wm: Corbett. | Opera Quarta | London Printed for I: Walsh Servant in Ordinary to his majesty at the Harp & | Hoboy in Catherine Street in the Strand and I: Hare at the Viol and Flute in | Cornhill near the Royall Exchange.* Whereas Pippard also printed a *Libro Secondo* with six further sonatas, these being set for two violins and bass, Walsh does not mention the second part of op. 4.

The six trio sonatas of the first book of op. 4 can be performed by recorders as well as by flutes. However, the second flute part contains, in addition to the page header "Fluto Secondo", some specific indications, such as "German Flute" (Sonata I), "Violino o Tarversa" [sic] (Sonata III) and "Traversa Violino" (Sonata V). The bass part may be played on the harpsichord *or* violoncello: both are unnecessary. The present edition has eliminated a number of errors and inconsistencies. In addition, in Sonata II a few dots were added where suggested. However, we have left untouched the occasionally surprising false relations and dissonances for reasons of counterpoint. Since the University of Virginia Library has generously made a reproduction of its copy available on its web page, a list of variants may be considered unnecessary.

COVER

Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625): *Allegory of Hearing*