



John Farmer

John Farmer, born c.1570 in England, flourished as a composer during the years 1591-1601. It was typical of the time to be employed by a patron such as the church or a wealthy nobleman. Farmer performed as organist and Master of Children at Christ Church Cathedral, in Dublin. He held this position from 1595-1599. During this time, he also maintained the post as vicar-choral in 1596 and 1597. Farmer was somewhat of a rebel. For instance, he almost lost this job due to leaving without permission. From Dublin, he moved to Broad Street in London, England. This move played a role in his compositional output.

Farmer became acquainted with Thomas East, the owner of East Printing Company. Printing companies often hired composers to contribute to collections of sacred and secular music. Throughout Farmer's career, he contributed to East's *Whole booke of Psalmes*, a psalter, which is the Book of Psalms accompanied by music for congregational singing. He also contributed to a collection of madrigals. One collection, actually compiled by Farmer and published in London in 1599, was his *First Set of English Madrigals: to Four Voices*. "[Fair Phyllis I saw sitting all alone](#)" comes from this collection as do "You pretty flowers," "Take time while time doth last," "Cease now thy mourning," and "A little pretty bonny lass."

During the 16th century, public concerts did not exist as they do today. Rather, performance of secular music was done in the home. Thus emerged the madrigal, one of the foremost forms of secular music of the English Renaissance. After dinner, families and their guests used part books to sing and fill their evenings with music. Part books are collections of music containing a single stave of music used by each voice part. Large homes, such as Hengrave Hall near Bury St. Edmunds, were the perfect setting for singing. Composers such as John Farmer were hired by the wealthy to produce music for performances in their homes. Collections such as his *First Set of English Madrigals: to Four Voices* were made available for regular use by the wealthy.

written by TJ

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