

PROGRAMME NOTES: This is the second of “Three Portraits” (1991) which I wrote to poems by John Ferns. It actually tells about not one, but two English lutenists, who lived four centuries apart from each other.

The celebrated Julian Bream of our own time is portrayed playing in recital a piece, by his Elizabethan forebear John Dowland, with the title “Semper Dowland semper Dolens” (Ever Dowland, ever grieving).

At times the piano accompaniment leans towards the texture of the Elizabethan lute, for instance in the small repeated chords which open the song. The music’s atmosphere hints at the apparently melancholy artist’s temperament of John Dowland whose music, in the hands of Julian Bream, enraptures the room.

Text:

Julian Bream Playing

Text: John Ferns (excerpt from complete poem)

Dowland semper dolens fills the hall
like some uncharted melody
heard by an unknown, darkly running sea,
and notes like soft sea flowers curl
melodious round earth-stranded ears.

The yellow, curving belly of the lute
like a deep-loaded treasure ship
floats in the depths of sea-pellucid light
and when he bows she softly sends
quick, silver clouds to dance upon the tall,
darkly glowing, wooden-panelled wall.
Dowland semper dolens, soft, melodious.