

Celebrating Giovanni Gabrieli in 2012

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Giovanni Gabrieli died 400 years ago in August 1612 and the musical world should, in my opinion at least, stand up and take note with appreciation of, and gratitude for, his glorious music. Surely there's scarcely a brass player anywhere who did not, at some stage in their musical pathway, sit down and play a little of this groundbreaking repertoire. Some of Giovanni's instrumental output is written for four or five players; most of the best-known pieces are in eight parts; others require 14, 15 or even 22 players, each on an independent part. Having the opportunity to play many of these pieces in modern brass groups is something that thrilled and inspired me from the age of 13. And still it continues to thrill and inspire after more than 35 years of professional playing in historic brass ensembles, most

notably, for me, His Majestys Sagbutts & Cornetts.

HMS&C was born 30 years ago in 1982. We played some of Gabrieli's small-scale instrumental pieces at St Martin in the Fields as a part of our inaugural recital there in September that year and we have been playing his music ever since. This year however, with the 'double celebration' of Gabrieli's 400th and His Majesty's 30th anniversaries in mind, we have concentrated on his output with renewed joy, energy and concentration and, uniquely for us, in programmes devoted exclusively to his music. To this end we have collaborated with Jeffrey Skidmore's choir Ex Cathedra and with Bruce Dickey's cornett and sackbutt ensemble Concerto Palatino. We have known and played with

Jeffrey's superb singers for nearly the full 30 years of HMS&C's life, usually (although not always) at concerts and broadcasts in Birmingham. Brass groups, however, have a tendency not to collaborate with one another often at all, or even ever - I suppose its the same with string quartets! Like His Majestys, Concerto Palatino has been playing and recording for some decades and, again like us, they have always been considered to be at the cutting edge of the field. The two groups are comprised of the same forces - two cornetts and three sackbutts - and so it seemed like a wonderful opportunity (or excuse perhaps) to join together for the first time. Now that we are nearing the end of the year and with the collaboration all but complete, we have a string of wonderful concert performances to remember, along with three

