

What is a viol?

What is a viol? The viol, or viola da gamba, is a six-stringed instrument played vertically, much like a cello. It predates the modern violin and was a staple of Renaissance and early Baroque music. Its rich, mellow tone and expressive capabilities make it ideal for the repertoire The Purcell Ensemble is currently exploring.

The ensemble has been studying *Lachrimae*, a profound collection of seven pavans by Renaissance composer John Dowland. The first movement, *Lachrimae Antiquae* (Old Tears), is based on Dowland's famous lute song *Flow My Tears*. It features a haunting descending motif that symbolises falling tears and sets the emotional tone for the entire suite. Each pavan reflects a different aspect of sorrow, inspired by the Seven Last Words of Christ from the Easter liturgy.

Emilia guided the Purcell Ensemble through Dowland's masterpiece, delving into bowing techniques, ornamentation, improvisation and the expressive language of the period with remarkable clarity and depth. Her insights helped illuminate the emotional and spiritual weight behind the music, encouraging the ensemble to play with greater sensitivity and historical awareness.