

**William Croft** [Crofts] (b. 1678, Warwickshire, England; d. 1727, Bath, England)

William Croft was born into a wealthy family at the Manor House, Nether Effington, in Warwickshire. He became a Child of the Chapel Royal, where one of his teachers was the composer John Blow. Croft remained at the Chapel as a “Child” until age 20—an indication that he was among the most talented students. By age 19 his interest in composition was evident, early influences being Scarlatti and Carissimi. From 1700 to 1712, Croft was organist at St. Anne, Soho (London). From 1704 on, he served as organist of the Chapel Royal (jointly with Jeremiah Clarke). In 1708, he was appointed Master of the Children at Chapel Royal and organist at Westminster Abbey. He received a Doctor of Music degree from Oxford University in 1713. Croft composed music for the funeral of Queen Anne in 1714 and for the coronation of King George I the following year.



In 1724, Croft published *Musica Sacra*, a collection of church music that includes 31 anthems. *The Burial Service* included in the collection has been used at state funerals ever since. Some of his anthems are also still performed today. He composed many well-known hymns, most notably *St. Anne*, “O God Our Help in Ages Past,” which provided the subject for one of Johann Sebastian Bach’s most famous organ fugues. Many of Croft’s sacred works combine the older polyphonic choral style with the newer Baroque idiom, not previously seen in England.

Although considered by many to be the foremost church musician of his time, Croft also wrote a number of secular instrumental works, including music for cembalo, harpsichord pieces, and recorder sonatas. Many of his compositions featured solo voice or chorus and instruments, such as “Songs With Violins,” “By Purling Streams,” “Suite: Comedy Call’d the Funeral” and “Te Deum Laudamus.” His compositions reveal melismatic vocal writing and dissonant harmonies; some critics have termed them “reminiscent of Purcell.” His ode “With Noise of Cannon” is a substantial work for trumpet, soloists, chorus and orchestra. Croft wrote the ode as a doctoral composition and later published it, along with the ode “Laurus Cruentas,” in the volume *Musicus Apparatus Academicus*. He wrote in the volume’s Introduction that since the odes were performed at Oxford “they have lain by neglected, as having done their Work and answered the end for which they were Compos’d; and had still done so, had not the Importunity of some Friends . . . prevailed with me to make them publick.” Some musicologists claim this is the earliest example of a doctoral submission in music to survive in its entirety.

Croft died in 1727 in the town of Bath, where he had gone to take the waters in hopes of improving his deteriorating health. He was buried in the north aisle of Westminster Abbey, close to Purcell and Blow.

**This composer's works in St. Martin's Chamber Choir's repertoire:**

The Burial Service

I heard a voice from heav'n (from The Burial Service)

The Lord is King