

Le Tombeau de M. Froberger
for Webb Wiggins

The clavichord against that shadowed wall
stands open still. The duchess played last night,
a Sarabande—my work, of course. Her small,

strong fingers traced the edge of dark and light,
deferring cadence, holding dissonance
as I had written, gave the notes the right

to hold the lovely tension of their dance.
It glimmers for an instant – major – then
falls back to dark. I always seized the chance

to make the dark my light. In Paris, when,
atop a flight of steps, a lutenist
slipped, and fell, and never played again,

I, strangely moved by any fatal twist,
made it my music—his memorial.
Darkness has always led me to resist

despair; I never listened to the call
of nothingness. Famine and sickness, war –
the world's contingencies—for me were all

a rich geography: land to explore;
atlas of intricate calligraphies;
imagination's deep-mined fearful ore;

anthology of fertile tragedies;
my melancholy burden; my soul's ease.

—Nicholas Jones

Johan Jakob Froberger (1616-1667) wrote hundreds of pieces for the keyboard (harpsichord, organ, clavichord), characterized by rich harmonic imagination and expressive dissonance. Among the most famous are occasional pieces representing crises in his life and that of his friends, such the *Tombeau fait à Paris sur la mort de Monsieur Blancrocher*, about a lutenist who, in Froberger's presence, fell to his death down a flight of stairs at an aristocratic entertainment, and *Plainte faite à Londres pour passer la melancholie*, representing the desperate condition in which Froberger arrived in England after being twice robbed and beaten crossing the Channel. He lived through the terrible Thirty Years War, in part as a diplomat, or, possibly, at the same time, a spy. He ended his life in retirement in France at the château of a duchess, where he died of a stroke on 6 or 7 May 1667. This poem imagines him in bed, paralyzed and unable to reach the keyboard. The sarabande referred to is from Suite XXII in E minor. The manuscripts of his music are noted for the beautiful calligraphy with which they are ornamented.