

Words and Music by DM Denton

I am listening to *The Plaint: O Let Me Weep* by **Henry Purcell** (1659 – 1695), playing it over and over, a mantra while I'm writing. Even vocal music doesn't distract me if it's fluid and expressive, like the current under a boat, sending a narrative on its way. In the liner notes of soprano Nancy Argenta's *Songs and Airs* CD, Adelaide de Place writes that "Purcell liked to compare music and poetry with two mutually supportive sisters." The 17th century Italian composer, Alessandro Stradella (1639 – 1682), the focus of my novel, *A House Near Luccoli* would have appreciated the comparison, perhaps smiling mischievously, preferring to create a little rivalry. Never discord. Even his Italian 'sisters' would have bowed gracefully to his designs, side by side, arms entwined, differences reconciled as their voices blended into one sound so beautiful no man could put asunder.

English lawyer, biographer and "Renaissance man" Roger North (1653 – 1754) wrote that "poetry called" his grandfather, the 1st Lord North, "to music." For me it was the other way around, music expressing almost everything I couldn't until I picked up a pen like a violinist lifts his bow and interpreted it into something so personal, beyond thought and emotion. Without music I may never have written a word, never realized I had to write, never lost track of time until I found myself alone in its company having forgotten how to speak—except silently.

Both words and music are about playing with silence, like birdsong or breezes or rain or thunder, our breathing or someone else's, heartbeats and heartaches, love-affairs and loneliness. As with the chicken and the egg, their collaboration employs a circular cause and consequence, no way and no need to answer the question of which came first or is more important. As music inspires me to write, I desire to make music of my writing.

As I write now I am thinking of ghosts and not minding the melancholy, for it sounds so pleasing I question there is anything more joyful. It's as if I'm enveloped in a prayer. O let me weep ... or smile ... or dream ... or despair as I please; let me never be at a loss for words and music. Amen.