



PARTHENIA
Alina Rotaru
HARPSICHORD

Unlike all my other projects, *Parthenia* captured my interest long before having the opportunity to discover the high quality of its music. The wedding between Elizabeth Stuart and Frederick V, which was only the beginning of a happy love story, could not have deserved a better documentation than this excellent collection of harpsichord works. While navigating through this intriguing and wonderful world of *Parthenia's* music, I carried the young princess in my head and in my heart, imagining her experiencing with great intensity and grace all sorts of feelings, from the exuberance of the galliards to the deepest melancholy of the pavans. She loved Frederick, but had to separate in her heart from her mother. She had to leave her homeland but was sure to find her home in her husband. So far, *Parthenia* is the most romantic repertoire I had the opportunity to work on, and it does not cease to amaze me.

I am happy that my friend, harpsichord enthusiast and excellent musicologist John Moraitis accepted to write the liner notes, as he understands so well this repertoire as well as my sentimental approach to this fantastic music. —Alina



for Darius

PARTHENIA

Parthenia, or the Maydenhead of the first musicke that was ever printed for the Virginalls is perhaps the most important early publication of English keyboard music. It was first published either late 1612 or early 1613 and, as its title indicates, was the first printed collection of keyboard music to appear in England. The “mastermind” behind *Parthenia* was the engraver William Hole, who conceived it as a wedding gift to Princess Elizabeth Stuart (the second child and eldest daughter of James VI and I) and Frederick V, Elector Palatine of the Rhine. The extravagant wedding, whose costs almost bankrupted King James, took place on Valentine’s Day, February 14, 1613; stage plays, musical performances, mock naval battles on the Thames, and fireworks were included in the festivities accompanying the ceremony.

Elizabeth Stuart and Frederick only stayed in London for two

months after the wedding, thereafter leaving for Frederick’s court in Heidelberg (with the wedding celebrations continuing along the way). After their departure, William Hole apparently decided to offer *Parthenia* to a wider public: while the first issue bears a dedication specifically addressed to the royal couple, in subsequent printings the original dedication was removed and the volume re-dedicated “to all the Maisters and Louers of Musicke.” Of the fifteen surviving copies of *Parthenia*, there is only one of the first print containing the original dedication; all the remaining copies are from subsequent prints published between 1613 (issued later in the year than the first print, after Elizabeth Stuart and Frederick had left England) and 1659. The popularity of *Parthenia* is reflected both in its multiple reprints and the fact that it made its way in other parts of Europe and several pieces were copied into other continental manuscripts.

The title “Parthenia,” originating from the Greek word for “virgin,” has multiple connotations. First, it highlights the groundbreaking nature of the publication itself, as, in addition to being the first printed keyboard collection in England (and, indeed, anywhere

else in Europe), it was also the first music publication in England to be printed from copper plates. Second, it reflects the name of the instruments upon which the pieces were meant to be played (“virginalls” is also derived from the word “virgin”). Third, it pays tribute to the fascination of that time with antiquity, and possibly alludes to the character of Parthenia in Sir Philip Sidney’s romance *Arcadia*. Finally, it refers to Elizabeth Stuart herself, named in honor of the “the Virgin Queen” Elizabeth I, who may be regarded as the true recipient of this collection—the dedication clearly states that the pieces had been especially selected for her to play for her soon-to-be husband Frederick.

Parthenia consists of twenty-one pieces by three different composers (referred to as “three famous Masters” on the title page): William Byrd (c. 1540-1623), John Bull (c. 1562-1628), and Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625). It is divided into three sections, with each section presenting the music of a single composer. There are eight pieces by William Byrd, seven by John Bull, and six by Orlando Gibbons. John Bull’s inclusion was doubly significant, since, in addition to “a famous Master,” he was also Eliza-

beth Stuart’s teacher. In terms of choosing an appropriate instrument for performance, “virginalls” at the time was a generic term that referred to any plucked keyboard instrument.

The pieces represent a rich variety of genres and compositional styles. The collection begins, appropriately enough, with a prelude; rather surprisingly, it also ends with a prelude—a symbolic tribute, perhaps, to the royal dedicatees’ beginning of married life. The majority of the intervening movements belong to dance genres, and more specifically the pavane and the galliard. Historically, pavane-galliard pairs provide one of the first instances of dance movements consistently grouped together. While formally both dances contain three repeated phrases (AABBCC), they have contrasting characters: the pavane is a stately processional dance in duple meter, while the galliard is a lively, athletic dance in triple meter (and it is said that Queen Elizabeth I practiced galliards for her morning exercise). When the two dances were grouped together, it was common for the galliard to be based on musical ideas belonging to the preceding pavane. In *Parthenia*, all five pavanés are indeed followed by

one or two galliards, but there are five additional galliards that appear independently. Another genre prevalent at the time, variations based on popular tunes and grounds, appears in three pieces: Orlando Gibbons' "The Queen's Command," and John Bull's pavane and galliard pair "St. Thomas Wake" (where variation technique is wedded to the tripartite dance form). Finally, the imitative contrapuntal style of Gibbons' "Fantazia of four parts"



provides the perfect counterbalance to the improvisatory nature of the preludes.

The variety of genres in *Parthenia* is matched by the presence of different compositional styles. The early seventeenth century was a transitional time when the *stile antico* of the Renaissance coexisted alongside more modern idioms. Gibbons's "Fantazia of four parts" provides an excellent example of the "old-fashioned" musical language of academic, strict counterpoint, while the preludes and some of the dance movements contain elements that point towards the emerging Baroque aesthetic. The performer must also traverse a considerable range of technical demands that encompass digital dexterity, rhythmic complexities, and the ability to elucidate the polyphonic strands inherent in several pieces. Judging from *Parthenia's* contents, Elizabeth Stuart must have been a highly accomplished performer.

The original dedication to *Parthenia* contains a somewhat cryptic passage that singles out the "neighbour letters E and F, the vowell that makes so sweet a Consonāt, Her notes so linkt and wedded together seeme liuely Hieroglyphicks of the harmony

of mariage..." The author has linked these two letters together because they represent the royal couple: "E" refers to Elizabeth Stuart, and "F" to Frederick. This symbolic association musically comes to life in Gibbons's "The Queen's Command," where the two "liuely Hieroglyphicks" take on the guise of the pitches E and F. These two pitches play a central role in the piece: they are the two opening notes, and each section begins alternately on either E or F. After this musical reenactment of the union of Elizabeth Stuart and Frederick, the final prelude bursts in joyous celebration through a stream of exuberant figurations and cascading scalar passages.

John Moraitis

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ALINA ROTARU

Alina Rotaru studied piano and choral conducting at the music conservatory in her hometown Bucharest, where she came into contact with Early Music and founded her first ensemble. After moving to Germany in 1999, she studied harpsichord with Siegbert Rampe and Wolfgang Kostujak in Duisburg, Carsten Lohff and Detlef Bratschke in Bremen and Bob van Asperen in Amsterdam. She plays concerts and gives master classes inside and outside Europe and works as a harpsichord instructor at the University of the Arts in Bremen (Germany). Her solo recordings with harpsichord works of J. P. Sweelinck and J. J. Froberger have earned excellent reviews in the music press which has placed her into the list of the most illustrious harpsichordists of the newer generation.

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The Plains, Virginia, after Christian Vater, 1738, Hannover; GG-e'''
(a=392/415/440), 2 x 8', buff.


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A black and white photograph of a grand piano with its lid open. The piano is positioned in a dark room, with light streaming in from the left, creating strong shadows and highlights on the piano's surface and the floor. The piano's lid is propped open, revealing the internal mechanism and the keyboard. The overall mood is dramatic and artistic.

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