

## The Flaming Fire: Mary Queen of Scots and Her World

Parthenia (Beverly Au, Lawrence Lipnik, Rosamund Morley, Lisa Terry, viols), with Ryland Angel, tenor and countertenor; Dongsok Shin, virginal

MSR MS 1490



The collection of songs, dances, and psalm settings drawn together for Parthenia’s latest CD release, *The Flaming Fire*, offers a glimpse into the musical world of 16th-century Scotland and England. Much of the repertoire, illuminated by Lucy Cross in excellent liner notes, reflects the political and religious struggles of that period in history. Although this translates into few opportunities for toe tapping, listeners can look forward to many rewards. Parthenia’s successful navigation through countless details—such as the ordering of 27 fairly short tracks, the balance of secular music with sacred, and the balance of music by known composers with unknown—enables the performers to focus on the heart of the matter: excellent ensemble playing and interpretations rich in depth. Guest tenor and countertenor Ryland Angel renders texts clearly and with a pure approach appropriate for these simple, reverent songs. On virginal, Dongsok Shin accompanies with a similar simplicity, introducing variety to the texture without intruding. *The Flaming Fire* includes several pieces worth singling out. The recording opens and closes with arrangements of four songs by Scottish poet Robert Burns. These delightful pieces—arranged specifically for Parthenia and vocalist Ryland Angel by Richard Einhorn—blend with and enhance the disc’s 16th-century repertoire. The other highlights include works by beloved composers. Referencing Queen Mary, William Byrd’s lone contribution is the exquisite “The Noble Famous Queen.” Fans of Ralph Vaughan Williams will relish hearing the psalm setting by Thomas Tallis, the inspiration for Vaughan Williams’s *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*. And finally, the sequence of contrasting versions of Psalm 18 creates a beautiful set.

—*Patricia Halverson*