

# PARTHENIA

Rosamund Morley, treble viol

Lawrence Lipnik, tenor viol

Beverly Au, bass viol

Lisa Terry, bass viol

## AS IT FELL ON A HOLIE EVE: Music for an Elizabethan Christmas

with

Sherezade Panthaki, soprano

Prelude and Voluntary	William Byrd (1543-1623)
Remember, O Thou Man	Thomas Ravenscroft (c.1582-1635)
From Virgin's Womb this Day did Spring	Byrd
From <i>Pavans, Galliards, Almains and other short Aeirs</i> (1599)	Anthony Holborne (c.1550-1602)
As it fell on a Holie Eve	
The Cradle	
The Night Watch	
From <i>Gradualia seu cantionum sacrarum</i> (1607)	Byrd
O magnum misterium	
Vidimus stellam	
Puer natus est	
Gentil Madonna	Dublin Virginal Ms. (c.1600)
Sweet was the Song the Virgin Sung	Anonymous (c.1600)
Fantasia a 4	Byrd
Out of the Orient Crystal Skies	Byrd
Fantasia a 4	Giovanni Coprario (c.1570-1626)
Fantasia a 3	Byrd
Lully, lulla	Shearmen & Tailors carol (1591)
Gigge	John Bull (c. 1562-1628)
Fantasia <i>La sampogna</i>	Thomas Morley (1557-1602)
Fantasia a 4	Alfonso Ferrabosco the younger (c. 1575-1628)
Divisions on <i>Greensleeves</i>	Anonymous (mid 17 <sup>th</sup> century)
The Old Year Now Away is Fled	Traditional Waits' carol (1642)

## PROGRAM NOTES

Queen Elizabeth I of England spent much of her reign juggling to retain her own power and independence, and to maintain peace and prosperity in her realm. Realizing that marriage to anyone at all would make England subject either to a foreign power or to a domestic faction, she skillfully warded off all suits, whether they were tendered as peace offerings or as passionate proposals (which in some cases happened at once.) She also had to balance the antipathies between Catholics and Protestants in England: as the daughter of Henry VIII she was herself a Protestant and recoiled at the idea of recognizing papal authority, but she also knew from experience that the persecution of Catholics could lead to bloody insurgency.

Fortunately for us, in the field of music a truce seemed to hold which allowed the preservation of a treasure trove of musical riches. One of Elizabeth's most respected and beloved "Gentlemen of the Chapel Royal," William Byrd, was known to be a devout Catholic, but he composed motets and liturgical music for both Protestant and "Popish" rites, with texts in either English or Latin. It seems that Elizabeth liked to hear the English service in Latin herself! Byrd was born in 1543, perhaps near Lincoln Cathedral where his first adult employment was as organist and Master of the Choristers. His post required that he teach the choirboys not just singing but also how to play the viola da gamba, so a consort of viols like ours, joined by a voice, inevitably steers us towards his music. In 1570 Byrd came to Elizabeth's court and over the next decades, despite his Catholicism, he apparently maintained close relations with many of the most powerful English lords. In 1575, in partnership with his former teacher, Thomas Tallis, who was a Protestant, Byrd secured a monopoly for the publishing of music. Their first venture was a set of Latin motets dedicated to the Queen, but over the course of many years, their biggest financial successes were Byrd's *Psalmes, Sonets and Songs* of 1588 and his *Songs of Sundrie Natures* of 1589, in which

were published the joyful "carowles" for the Christmas season on our program.

Although Byrd's influence inevitably extended over all the other composers represented here, much less is known of their personal lives. Thomas Ravenscroft was a chorister at St. Paul's Cathedral – and perhaps he played the viol too - at a time when the "St. Paul's company of child actors" was famous in London. It was for boys who were educated in the choir schools that songs for a solo voice and consort of viols were first written. In adult life Ravenscroft turned to collecting and editing popular songs. "Remember, O thou man" comes from his 1611 compilation *Melismata: Musically Phansies fitting the Court, Citie and Countrey Humours*. Anthony Holborne, described by the lutenist and composer John Dowland as a "Gentleman Usher to the Queen," published about seventy 5-part Pavans, Galliards, Almains in one collection in 1599 – virtually the only music of his that survives – from which we have culled three dances and arranged them for 4 viols.

The accession of James I in 1603 united England and Scotland after decades of struggle between the two realms and two religions. Perhaps this event brought a certain hope for an end to this mistrust since James' son, Henry, was a much loved Prince, said to have been popular even among Elizabethan courtiers who were otherwise not inclined to support the Stuarts. When Henry was made Prince of Wales in 1610, he set up his own court and continued the tradition of strong patronage of music, aspiring to an establishment as glorious as the Medicis. Alfonso Ferrabosco the younger, who was Henry's music teacher, was one of the composer-performers at the center of this court where Prince and courtiers were entertained by concerts in the privy chamber, glorious masques in the Banqueting Hall at Whitehall and anthems in his chapel. Henry's sudden death in 1612 made his younger brother Charles heir to the throne, and Charles set up a musical court of his own. Playford tells us that Charles loved the instrumental music of his viol teacher, John Coprario, and that in this music the Prince

“could play his part exactly well on the bassviol.” From among the extensive surviving work of these composers we have chosen just two fantasies which well represent the most common kind of abstract instrumental music from the time.

A student of Byrd’s, Thomas Morley, was Gentleman of the Chapel Royal from 1592. He was a prolific composer of secular vocal and instrumental music and like Byrd, turned out both Latin and English church music as well. The little duet with its Italian title *La sampogna* (the bagpipe), reminds us of the Elizabethan passion for all things Italian – a taste that has hardly waned over the centuries. As a madrigalist, Morley was England’s chief exponent of the Italian style. We thought that since bagpipes are associated with shepherds, the piece would be appropriate for Christmas! Keyboardist and organ builder Dr. John Bull, although officially also a “Gentleman” and accorded great respect by his contemporaries

as a musician, seems to have been something of a rogue – good fodder, perhaps now, for a novel. He was forced to flee England in 1613 to escape prosecution for adultery, and sought asylum and employment in Brussels claiming to be a Catholic refugee. The Archbishop of Canturbury wrote of him, “The man hath more music than honesty and is as famous for marring of virginity as he is for fingering of organs and virginals.”

Finally, into this, as into so many Christmas programs, the ever-popular song “Greensleeves” finds its way. On a broadside sheet of the early 17th century, a text beginning “The olde year now away is fled” is indicated “to be sung to the tune of Greensleeves.” We wind down the program with a set of “divisions,” or variations, written by an anonymous Jacobean viol player on the same tune.

—*Rosamund Morley and Lucy Cross*