

Harpsichord by Andrew Garlick after Andreas Ruckers (1644, Vleeshuis, Antwerp).

Harpsichord by Colin Booth after Italian models; kindly loaned by Colin Booth.

Muselar virginal by Malcolm Greenhalgh after J. Couchet (1650, Vleeshuis, Antwerp); kindly loaned by Malcolm Greenhalgh.

Pitch: A396, mean-tone temperament.

Instruments tuned by Malcolm Greenhalgh

A NOTE ON INSTRUMENTS, TEMPERAMENT AND INTERPRETATION

From the many possible types of plucked-string keyboard instruments suggested by the generic term "Virginals" on the title page of *Parthenia*, three styles of harpsichords were chosen for this recording because of their markedly contrasting sounds and characters. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, muselar virginals were valued for their unique sound quality. With the keyboard on the right-hand side of the instrument, the strings were plucked mid-way along the string, giving a rich, warm sound quite unlike conventional harpsichords wherein the strings are plucked close to the bridge. The muselar contrasts well with the brilliance of the Flemish-style harpsichord (after Andreas Ruckers) and also with the Italianate harpsichord. It is likely that Byrd, Bull and Gibbons would have been familiar with all three types, and as well as using each instrument to suit the character of each piece, I have used them to distinguish between the internal groupings (e.g. Prelude - Pavan - Galliard) within the collection as a whole. The individual pieces were played on the following instruments:

1,2,3: harpsichord AG

4,5: harpsichord CB

6,7,8: muselar

9,10,11: harpsichord CB

12,13: harpsichord AG

14: muselar

15,16: harpsichord CB

17: harpsichord AG

18,19: harpsichord CB

20: harpsichord AG

21: harpsichord CB

We do not know at what pitch and temperament these pieces were originally played, and so the pitch for the recording was somewhat arbitrarily chosen at A396 - a plausible Jacobean domestic pitch, which suited the instruments. Temperament was based on mean-tone, but the poor quality of quarter-comma mean-tone fifths was avoided whilst endeavouring to retain the beautiful quality of pure major thirds as much as possible. With both instruments and temperament, we have attempted to capture the essential English sound world of the early seventeenth century.

I have consciously adopted fingering techniques that would have been familiar to Byrd, Bull and Gibbons - a system that was based on strong fingers for strong beats and weak fingers for weak beats. This is fundamentally different from modern fingering, which aims to encourage equal strength from all fingers so that a perfectly even legato touch is possible. Thus Byrd, with his right hand, may well have fingered a C major scale 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4, as opposed to the modern 1 2 3 1 2 3 4 5. The implications of touch, articulation and phrasing are enormous, revealing more inner vitality in the music than modern techniques.

In this period, the magnificent pavans and galliards were almost always provided with fully composed repeated sections that amplified and decorated the texture, as in Byrd's Pavan and Galliard for his patron Sir William Petre. Therefore the absence of such fully written-out repeats in Byrd's Pavan and two Galliards for the Earl of Salisbury (Nos. 6,7,8), as well as in Gibbons's *The Lord of Salisbury his Pavin* (No. 18) has posed questions about how these repeated sections should be played. Previous writers have assumed, plausibly, that Byrd and Gibbons required players not to vary the repeats.

However, there could be many reasons why these pieces were not fully written out - perhaps for reasons of space in the publication, perhaps because Robert Cecil took a pride in improvising his own repeats - but we shall never know. For this recording, therefore, I have taken the opposite view and have composed, humbly, my own varied repeats, matching, as closely as I am able, the musical style of those great masters for whose music I feel, in Thomas Morley's words, "*entire love and unfeigned affection.*"

David Ponsford