

Thoughts on Parthenia 1613

Carpe Diem Records (Released June 2013)

Catalina Vicens – Virginalls & Harpsichords

Last content update: November 2013

Revised: July 2016



Contents

- I- Introductory Description
- II- PARTHENIA (1613) – The Source
 - i- The Print
...about revolution, freedom and creativity
 - ii- The Monarchy
...about idiosyncrasy, icons and patronage
- III- PARTHENIA (2013) – The Recording
 - i- The Choice of Instruments *...about canvases, styles and colors*
 - ii- The “Original” Instrument *...about standards, antiques and cars*
 - iii- The Sound *...about projection, space and intimacy*
- IV- Bibliography and related literature

I- Introductory description

Parthenia (Greek for virgin) is an anthology of English keyboard music published for the first time in 1613, on occasion of the marriage of Princess Elizabeth Stuart (daughter of James VI and I, King of Scotland, England and Ireland) and Frederick V, Elector Palatine (Germany).

As its subtitle suggest, it was the first collection of keyboard music to be printed in England. It consists of 21 pieces (free pieces, pavans and galliards) composed by William Byrd, Dr. John Bull and Orlando Gibbons.

(A beautiful text on the history and context of *Parthenia* can be read in the booklet text by Anthony Rooley. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Rooley
To read the Booklet Online <http://www.highbresaudio.com/artist.php?abid=102688>)

II- PARTHENIA (1613) – The Source

i- The Print

...about revolution, freedom and creativity

I was first attracted to this anthology of keyboard music, *Parthenia*, for it being the first print of keyboard music that was ever made in England.

In the last 5 years or so, I've grown a great interest for the first keyboard prints made in Italy in the early 16th century, devoting many practice hours and some recital programs to them (Andrea Antico 1517, M. A. Cavazzoni 1524, Musica Nova 1540, Intabolutura Nova 1551, etc...). On the other hand, I had found much enjoyment and a special respect for English music from the 16th and early 17th centuries since I first started playing the harpsichord. The combination of both led me to find *Parthenia*...

A social revolution

What excites me the most about early prints is to imagine how controversial and revolutionary they must have been at the time, in the moment when they just started to emerge. After centuries of transmitting music orally or through the time-consuming art of copying, (often done exclusively by trained scribes), there was the new method to make notated music accessible to a wider range of society.

The impact of technology in every day's life is well known to us.

The art of printing, slowly developed during the 15th and 16th centuries, meant a social explosion: it was a tool for knowledge and thus a tool for freedom. Whereas it's true that prints were still very expensive during the 16th and early 17th centuries, making them exclusive to the wealthier circles, it still meant that this newly literate social class could interpret the books critically and creatively on their own. It also meant that people in power who were deeply afraid of the power of books, couldn't fully control the fast networking of ideas emerging from their dissemination anymore. (I think of how familiar this is for us today in a certain way, where we are being confronted on a daily basis with the conflicts of power caused by virtual communication, open sources and social media).

In the realm of music this would not only mean a growing commercial thinking by composers and publishers, but also a change in the context where music was performed with the rise of a wider social class that was musically educated. It also generated a growing critical approach by amateur and professional performers as well as a quick dissemination of newly developed musical ideas and theories.

Despite the music printing battle initiated by Petrucci at the turn of the 16th century in Italy, the first keyboard publication in England had to wait for over a century after the first continental keyboard print. Last but not least, '*Parthenia, or The Maydenhead of the first musicke that ever was printed for the Virginalls*', certainly revolutionized the musical scene in many ways.



Those awkward fingers
 ...When I first took a look at *Parthenia*, I realized that this book looked familiar for some reason. Nevertheless, I wasn't really aware of its content, besides the fact that I knew that Byrd, Bull and Gibbons had composed some pieces for this collection. Its cover-page engraving (see left) showed a beautiful lady sitting in front of a stringed keyboard instrument, with closed eyes, long wavy hair and a tender smile. Aside from her archaic beauty I also noticed that her fingers were almost as wavy as her hair – a hand position that certainly didn't look very comfortable at the keyboard! This quickly reminded of the awkwardness I felt during my first lessons on historical fingerings. I also recalled the popular *Dover* edition of the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book (probably the best known source of late Renaissance keyboard music from England), that used this image as the cover-page for its two volumes.

During the first music printing century, England was falling behind with regard to music publishing in relation to the continent, but this delay was not totally in vain. In the case of the first keyboard print, the publisher waited until the happening of a special occasion: the wedding of the English King's daughter, Elizabeth Stuart, in the winter of 1613. The princess was known to be an excellent keyboard player, having studied the virginals under the tutelage of the keyboard virtuoso John Bull. She was the perfect personality for making the printed collection popular and successful: a charming princess who knew how to show off her skills and virtues to her prince by playing the virginals, by then a symbol of purity and nobleness.

Parthenia became in fact a great success, and was reissued shortly after its first publication. The second edition was printed with the same set of pieces but without the royal

dedication. It was instead directed to a wider public: “*to the masters and lovers of musick*”. Indeed, this keyboard anthology was published several times throughout 17th century in England (as discussed below), it was also copied abroad and some of its pieces were even used for educational purposes by great masters such as Henry Purcell (1659-1695).

The print may have fulfilled the purpose of earlier English instrumental prints to serve as self-tutors for advanced amateur musicians, or as Barley states, “(it) will sufficiently serve as a Schoolmaster”.¹ This would mean that the instrumentalist would gain independence from his/her tutor as well as gaining another level of interpretation through the direct access to the sources.

In the case of *Parthenia* or *The Maydenhead*, it is likely that it was most widely used by young women learning to play the harpsichord and virginals, a befitting instrument for a young lady. At this point, I dare to emphasize that intense musical training was an important part of education in privileged circles, and that the technical level attained by an ‘amateur’ musician could easily be compared to some of the skills of a professional musicians today.

ii- The Monarchy

...about idiosyncrasy, icons and patronage

What could have made *Parthenia* so successful? (It was reissued 7 times after its initial publication date, a considerable amount compared to any other successful music print of the time. In fact it remained to be the only keyboard print in England until the publication of John Playford’s *Musick’s Handmaid* in 1663).

What was so special in this collection of rather old fashioned dances, such as Pavans and Galliards? (The *pavans* and *galliards* were quickly replaced by *almains* and *corantos* by the 2nd decade of the 17th –century).

During the early modern period, where neither recordings nor trained musicologists preserved the music of the past, there was a natural tendency that led musical forms and composers fall into oblivion. Even after the invention of music print, publishers in the continent made sure that their publications were up-to-date with the latest musical fashion. *Parthenia* was still printed about 50 years after its first issue in 1613 and copied even into the 18th century – more than a lifetime back then. Was there a fundamentally different idiosyncrasy in England, that would promote the preservation of old musical traditions compared to the forward-looking continent? All these questions made me look further into English history. (I must admit that I still consider myself an ignorant in the subject, but the questions that started to appear along the process made it impossible to find this as an excuse).

Looking from the distance

Coming from a country as isolated as Chile, the idea of ‘kings and princesses’ can be something very distant, superficial, iconic and unavoidably influenced by the weighty “fantasy culture” of today. (The post-conquest Chile has a rather short history and is organized as a constitutional Republic since the 1800s). By reading books and articles, and watching the rhetorically loaded documentaries by David Starkey on the English monarchy, I got a different perspective on it.

¹ Pollack, p. 26.

In England, the figure of the king was not necessarily the one I had of a distant ruler; a man simply owning lands, collecting money and misusing slaves and servants while being hated by these. It seems to be that in Britain the relation of king and folk was one of accepted interdependence. The people needed the king to administrate and organize their lands and the popularity of the king among the people was crucial to his success.

Emotional bond

From my spontaneous research I also learned that the happenings in the royal nest were not only crucial to other members of the royal court, but also to the more distant courtiers and to the non-noble folk. These groups also had an emotional bond to the life of the monarchs and their closest family members, as well as to the higher administrators of the state and church. On the other hand, the likability of the present and future monarchs was crucial to the stability of the Kingdom. And without out going much further in the complex sociology of the Brits, I adventure to say that it is here where the success of *Parthenia* may lie. Within the 21 pieces it contains, 10 of them have reference to a member of nobility, ranging from the dedication to one of the most loyal Secretaries of State the Kingdom may have ever seen, to the subtle musical allusion to the King and Queen-to-be (I will expand on this point in the essay of '*Parthenia* as a Lamento'). This emotional relation from the middle and lower classes to the individual political figures in our modern world is far from being accepted or internalized (at least in democratic nations). Is England perhaps, due to the particular development of its monarchy, one of the last countries to be sentimentally connected to their royals?

Being a nation isolated from the continent, the kingdom forged social paradigms and traditions that distinguished its people from the rest of Europe. As it still depended on trade and needed allies to ensure political stability, it was able to keep a controlled exchange with the continent. Although England had to look across the channel for finding newly developed technologies and artistic innovations, it was able to cultivate its national pride and to preserve its "untouched" traditions. (In the 16th-century this was probably enhanced by the separation of the Anglican Church from the continental institutions, which became a main source of cultural patronage). This also signified that two artistic fashions coexisted and were developed simultaneously in the Kingdom of England during the 16th and 17th – centuries: On one hand many artists and artisans were "imported" to the court and the musical innovations coming particularly from Italy were sought after and disseminated (being Prince Henry Stuart, the eldest brother of Elizabeth, one of its most engaged patrons). On the other, national artists were generously supported, esteemed and contrary to many continental contemporaries, many British composers rejected stylistic influence from overseas. In the artistic and educational *milieus*, there was a constant cultivation of old English styles alongside newer ones, and the fundamentals of a virtuous life where to be found in the cultivation of the local tradition.

Photo by Jonas Niederstadt, 2013



III- PARTHENIA (2013): The Recording

i- The Choice of Instruments

...about canvases, styles and colors

(If you don't know the difference between harpsichord, virginal and spinet, please click on the links for a simple definition)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harpsichord>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginals>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spinet>

Before going into detail about the instrument I chose for this recording, I feel obliged to give some background information on how this recording project took shape in first place. It all started after a recital I gave in 2010 at the Bad Krozingen Castle, a 16th century Palace in south-western Germany. At the historical keyboards collection housed in this place I had been awarded the 1st prize of the *Fritz Neumeyer International Competition* (harpsichord and fortepiano) few years earlier. As in most other competitions, one is obliged, if not encouraged, to perform the showiest pieces of the standard baroque and classical repertoire, something that by the way fits this collection very well: it houses some of the largest fortepiani collections in Europe. Nevertheless, as my interest had already been shifting towards the earliest keyboard repertoire for some years by then, I decided to be consequent and play a prize winner programme of 16th and early 17th century pieces. I was already given the chance to select the number of instruments from the collection I desired, so I dared to ask for some instruments that were hardly ever played in this castle. Taking this risk (which was a luxury at the same time) paid back. Right after the concert I was asked if I wanted to do a recording with the earliest instruments of the *Fritz Neumeyer Historical Keyboards Collection*.

The instruments I wanted to showcase were the earliest "original" keyboards in the collection: An early 17th century Italian spinettino (a tiny square spinet), a 17th century Swiss virginal and an "extra-large" late 17th century (debated early 18th century) Florentine harpsichord. How to exploit the diversity of these instruments and still be concise with a repertoire that falls into redundant variety? That's where I thought that *Parthenia* would serve as a nice musical platform to paint with all these instruments colors. This English keyboard anthology was soon to become 400 years old, so it was a good moment to render it homage.

Then, the first difficulty appeared: there's no English harpsichord or virginal in the Bad Krozingen collection! On the other hand, this is the case for almost any (!) collection. English keyboard instruments have survived in a relative small number, and most of the original harpsichord/ virginal types that exist are dated 1700 or later. This is not a surprise, as England was probably one of the countries that hosted more foreign harpsichord builders in Europe. Dutch and Italian instrument makers were highly regarded and known to have resided in England for longer periods of time. Still, in expectation of critical approach to this point by experts, I had another element on my side: the fact the *Parthenia* served a key role in the internationalization of English keyboard music in the continent, demonstrated by musical copies in the continent and inventory documentation.

So I decided to complement these 3 “original” instruments with 3 copies that would serve as a counterpart, and complement the stringed keyboard families that were popular in 17th century England: A copy of the Flemish *Mother & Child* virginal by Hans Ruckers (1591) made by John Koster in 1974; a copy of the Flemish harpsichord by Andreas Ruckers (1620) made by John Dowd in 1975 and an underrated but delightful anonymous late 17th century Italian harpsichord made by the less known Anderson H. Dupree in 1978.



Then, the choice of instruments for the recording was not only a challenge in terms of repertoire, but also a technical one. There were some natural limitations that I had to consider, as the keyboard range and the extension demanded by the pieces (to put it in simple words, not all harpsichords/ virginals have the same amount of keys. The pitches were different, so I had to make sure that I picked the instruments having a view of the whole so that the transmission from one pitch to the other could be smooth for the listener.

ii- The “Original” Instrument

...about antiques, standards and cars

Playing on “original” instruments is indeed not always easy, but for me it has become a great source of inspiration and one of the main motivations for playing early music.

I started playing the harpsichord almost by chance in my teens, but from the start I had the chance to learn on good instruments. They were copies made mostly during the 70s and early 80s by some of the pioneering harpsichord makers of the late 20th century. Today, most of the historical harpsichords used by performers are copies of original instruments which were selected during this period as the basic models to copy from. The diversity of the original instruments they aim to replicate tends to be limited to just a few popular exemplars, chosen by their historic significance, their conservation state, or simply, for the sake of standardization (a tradition probably implanted in instrument-making since the industrial revolution). The result of this, is that in student and professional life the amount of types of instruments that harpsichordists are confronted with is very reduced compared to the wide variety of types that was to be found three or even five centuries ago.

When making use of the surviving harpsichords dating back to the early modern period, performers get confronted with a vast range of instrument types. It can range from a small spinet of the size of a chess-board to a harpsichord with the length of a grand piano. This and many other technical differences demand a great deal of technical adaptation from the performers side. (My respect on this point to organists, who are constantly confronted with a humongous variety of instruments).

The Experience

First of all, and although this might be obvious, all these “museum” instruments are very, very old! The experience playing such an old artifact and learning to work with it is something unique and hard to describe. Following, I’ll try to make this experience tangible for those who have not had this type of encounter.

I remembered the unforgettable experience of riding my grandfather’s vintage car as a child. At first it felt funnily awkward and very slow. Try to simply make it get started took ten times longer than a car from the 80s. But then, once we were driving on the streets of Santiago de Chile my imagination started to travel in time. I imagined the boulevard decorated with newly planted trees and the dusty streets circulated by some horses and ladies wearing fancy clothes. This simple experience released a series of images, sounds and paces that I had never seen with my handful of years.

I imagine that the difference between playing on an original harpsichord and a (historical) copy is similar to the difference between driving a vintage car and a modern car: the vintage one is certainly not perfect nor can it run as fast, plus it’s probably much more difficult to control than an hydraulic car... but if you are into “old school”, simply enjoy of an “authentic” experience or simply enjoy some imaginative time travel, driving a vintage car will be something unforgettable. It will connect you to the act of driving itself differently of what you are used to, you’ll feel the contact with the road differently and you might see things that you had never seen before. I think that this is similar if you are into antique instruments. When playing and “original” you can smell the trees growing centuries ago; the keys you touch often show the signs of long use, as the fingertips of dozens if not hundreds of people have carved a hole in the wood with the power that water has to carve a hole in a rock. And slowly you’ll start seeing (hearing) colors that you had never seen; the imagination gets unleashed – sensory and emotionally.

On the less romantic side you may also notice that there is much more mechanical noise than what you are used to, each key feels different to the fingers, the keys are way too long or too narrow and your hands get disoriented, or you might get annoyed when every single string sounds different. It is at this point that many performers get disenchanted and will quickly move to flawless harpsichord copies. But as with many things, you have to adapt and this is a process that takes time and patience – but I think it’s really worth it!

iii- The Sound

...about projection, space and intimacy

One of the things that fascinates me of making music is simply experiencing sound.

The sound projection

I personally could stay hours practicing the simplest things on an instrument just for the sake of immersing myself in the sound that is being produced. This is in fact one of the things that captivates me the most of playing on small keyboard instruments such as the virginals. Due to the characteristics of their construction, the player itself is the one that

gets the best sound coming out of the instrument (as one's head is right above the soundboard compared to harpsichords, which project the sound away from the performer and towards the audience). The virginals were in fact not conceived for performing in front of large audiences, but for the private study and enjoyment, or for the amusement of a small audience.

The Wish

When I knew that I was going to record in this vast range of instruments, I had a strong wish: I wanted to have the listener experiencing the instrument at its best; I wanted to have them in the privileged position, that us performers, are lucky to have. Jonas Niederstadt, sound engineer and head of Carpe Diem Records shared this view and had the skill to capture the acoustical experience.

The space

Achieving a good recording sound and still being true to the instruments' qualities was not all that easy. We were using instrument of a public collection, as in many museum, instruments can not be taken out of their space. The rooms at the Castle of Bad Krozingen are quite small and have low ceilings: a nightmare for most sound engineers! Today, most harpsichord recordings are recorded in churches or big halls where the acoustic is rich and forgiving. Nevertheless, solo harpsichord (and more so virginal music) was not meant to be played at church, but rather in a small castle. Like the one we were to record in the small southern German town. So what we saw initially as technical limitations could be used to our advantage: in *Parthenia* we "had" to capture that authentic intimacy of these original instruments and of the music by these outstanding late-Renaissance composers.



IV- Bibliography and related literature

Primary Sources

- Bull, John, William Byrd, and Orlando Gibbons. *Parthenia or The Maydenhead of the First Musicke That Ever Was Printed for the Virginalls*. Facsimile. Performers' Facsimiles 1. New York: Performers' Facsimiles, 1985.
- Dart, Thurston, ed. *Parthenia: William Byrd, John Bull, Orlando Gibbons*. New York: Stainer & Bell, 1969.
- Hole, Robert, ed. *Parthenia in-Violata: Or, Mayden-Musicke for the Virginalls and Bass-Viol, Facsimile of the Unique Copy in The New York Public Library*. Facsimile. New York: The New York Public Library, 1961.
- Parthenia in-Violata or Mayden-Musicke for the Virginalls and Bass-Viol or Violoncello Ad Libitum*. New York: Peters, 1961.

Secondary Sources

- Bailey, Candace. "Orlando Gibbons, Keyboard Music and the Beginnings of the Baroque: New Considerations of a Musical Style / Orlando Gibbons, Glazba Za Instrumente S Tipkama I Počeci Baroka: Nova Razmatranja O Glazbenom Stilu." *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 37, no. 2 (2006): 135–56.
- Boalch, Donald H., Charles Mould, and Andreas H. Roth. *Makers of the Harpsichord and Clavichord, 1440-1840*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Brennecke, Ernest. "'Parthenia Inviolata': The Second Book of Keyboard Music Printed in England." *The Musical Times* 75, no. 1098 (1934): 701–6. doi:10.2307/917713.
- Brown, Howard Mayer, and Stanley Sadie, eds. *Performance Practice*. The New Grove Handbooks in Music. Basingstoke London: The Macmillan Press, 1989.
- Brown, Howard Mayer, and Louise K. Stein. *Music in the Renaissance*. 2nd ed. Prentice-Hall History of Music Series. Upper Saddle River (N.J.): Prentice Hall, 1999.
- "Elizabeth Stuart, Queen of Bohemia." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, July 6, 2016. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Elizabeth_Stuart,_Queen_of_Bohemia&oldid=728620185.
- Fleming, Michael. "An 'Old Old Violl' and 'Other Lumber': Musical Remains in Provincial, Non-Noble England C. 1580-1660." *The Galpin Society Journal* 58 (2005): 89–99.
- "Frederick V, Elector Palatine." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, May 7, 2016. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Frederick_V,_Elector_Palatine&oldid=719149662. Caldwell, John. *English Keyboard Music before the Nineteenth Century*. Blackwell's Music Series. Oxford: Blackwell, 1973.
- "Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, June 7, 2016. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Henry_Frederick,_Prince_of_Wales&oldid=724180757.
- Hubbard, Frank. "Two Early English Harpsichords." *The Galpin Society Journal* 3 (1950): 12–18. doi:10.2307/841897.
- "James VI and I." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, July 6, 2016. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=James_VI_and_I&oldid=728567030.
- "John Hayward (historian)." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, April 3, 2016. [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Hayward_\(historian\)&oldid=713276481](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Hayward_(historian)&oldid=713276481).

- Johnson, Edmond. "The Death and Second Life of the Harpsichord." *The Journal of Musicology* 30, no. 2 (2013): 180–214.
- Koster, John. "The Importance of the Early English Harpsichord." *The Galpin Society Journal* 33 (1980): 45–73. doi:10.2307/841828.
- Van Der Meer, John Henry. "The Keyboard Works in the Vienna Bull Manuscript." *Tijdschrift Der Vereeniging Voor Noord-Nederlands Muziekgeschiedenis* 18, no. 2 (1957): 72–105. doi:10.2307/1947665.
- Deutsch, Otto Erich. "Cäcilia Und Parthenia." *Festschrift Alfred Orel Zum 70. Geburtstag*, n.d.
- Dolmetsch, Mabel. *Dances of England and France from 1450 to 1600*. London: Routledge & Kegan, 1959.
- Glaisyer, Natasha, ed. *Didactic Literature in England, 1500-1800: Expertise Constructed*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.
- Greer, David. "Manuscript Additions in 'Parthenia' and Other Early English Printed Music in America." *Music and Letters*, 1996.
- Kämper, Dietrich. *Studien Zur Instrumentalen Ensemblesmusik Des 16. Jahrhunderts in Italien*. Analecta Musicologica, Bd. 10. Wien: Böhlau, 1970.
- McGeary, Thomas. "Early English Harpsichord Building A Reassessment." *The English Harpsichord Magazine* 1, no. No. 1 (October 1973).
- Peacham, Henry. *The Garden of Eloquence: Conteyning the Figures of Grammer and Rhetorick, from Whence Maye Bee Gathered All Manner of Flowers, Coulors, Ornaments, Exornations, Formes and Fashions of Speech, Very Profitable for All Those That Be Studious of Eloquence, and That Reade Most Eloquent Poets and Orators, and Also Helpeth Much for the Better Vnderstanding of the Holy Scriptures. Set Foorth in Englishe, by Henry Pecham Minister*. Early English Books Online. London: Anno. 1577. Imprinted at London, in Fleetestrete, beneath the Conduite, at the signe of Saint Iohn Euaungelist, by H. Iackson, 1577.
- Pollack, Janet. *A Reevaluation of Parthenia and Its Context*. Duke University, 2001.
- Russell, Raymond, and Howard Schott. *The Harpsichord and Clavichord*. 2nd ed. rev. London: Faber & Faber, 1973.
- Schlosskonzerte, Bad Krozingen. *Fritz Neumeyer Und Seine Sammlung: Im Auftrag Der Schlosskonzerte Bad Krozingen*. Edited by Susanne Berkemer. Freiburg i.Br: Rombach, 2014.
- Stiftung, Historischer Tasteninstrumente Neumeyer-Junghanns-Tracey. *Verzeichnis Der Sammlung Neumeyer - Junghanns - Tracey Im Schloss Bad Krozingen*. Edited by Susanne Berkemer. Bad Krozingen: Stiftung Historischer Tasteninstrumente Neumeyer-Junghanns-Tracey, 2013.
- The History of Argalus and Parthenia: Being a Choice Flower Gathered out of Sir Phillip Sydney's Rare Garden*[.]. London: Printed and sold in Aldermary Church-Yard, London, 1770.
- Van den Borren, Charles. *The Sources of Keyboard Music in England*. Handbooks for Musicians. London: Novello & Co, 1913.
- Walls, Peter. *Music in the English Courtly Masque, 1604-1640*. Repr. Oxford Monographs on Music. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000.
- Wilson, Michael I. *The Chamber Organ in Britain, 1600-1830*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001.