



## Fires of Love

**29 November 2014**

A highly successful MAAA concert was held in the Parish Church, Lochgilphead, last Saturday comprising a varied programme of songs and wind instrument items from the 30 years period immediately before the 1603 Union of the Scottish and English Crowns. This bold choice of Renaissance music was presented by the quartet, "The Fires of Love"- with lutes, guitar, a range of recorders and 16<sup>th</sup> century percussion instruments providing an authentic backing for the fine selection of songs, ballads and solo lute and wind items.

The songs were delightfully performed by soprano, Frances Cooper, and with superb stage presence, and ever expressive singing, she brought out to the full the period music's dramatic and poignant nature.

As the generous programme unfolded, we were drawn into and fascinated by the musical world of Shakespeare over 450 years ago. Jonathan Hugh-Jones, playing second lute and woodwind, with the occasional vocal, was an enlightening compère for this journey in time, and his informative introductions conveyed a wealth of historical facts to illuminate the musical and artistic life in 16<sup>th</sup> century England and Scotland.

We learnt that France provided much of the poetic and musical influence in Scotland at this time, while the English court followed the fashion of all things Italian – particularly solo and duet music for the lute. Skilfully and seamlessly, the moods changed from melancholy to joyful love and all stages in between. Scotland's Alexander Montgomerie led the way in providing verse and texts to be set for voice, lute and guitar, whilst England's John Dowland wrote music as poignant and moving today as it was when written, notably "I Saw My Lady Weep" and a lively duet set of lute variations.

Gordon Ferries, renowned as a leading UK exponent of the lute and guitar, was equally beguiling in the fast intricate fingerwork of "The Queen's Table" and the slow melancholy of "Rest Sweet Nymph". Marcus Claridge captured the authentic spirit of the period percussion style with his Renaissance long drum, and other instruments including the bodhran.

The first half concluded with lively music from Act 3 of Shakespeare's "As you Like It" with Frances' lovely soprano voice transporting the audience back to the Globe Theatre with "O Sweet Oliver". And one hour later, contrasting songs from "Hamlet", including "Tomorrow is St Valentine's Day" and "Bonny Sweet Robin" brought this highly original and ever fascinating evening's entertainment to a satisfying close.

The church setting was most appropriate for the quiet, subtle nature of this Renaissance music, and this was appreciated both by the musicians and by the highly attentive audience.

John Holt.