



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Songs and Catches from Purcell to Arne by The Merry Companions; Hilliard Ensemble
John Milsom

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'Sett numbers', without distinguishing between five- and six-part music, so that both items on side 1 are called 'Sett No 3'. The notes, on the other hand, make no mention of 'Sett numbers' and discuss first the five-part, then the six-part, pieces, in a completely different order from that on the record. None of this is exactly calculated to help one to understand some of the most 'difficult' viol music ever written, but fortunately the recently published *Thematic Index* (reviewed in *EM* April 81 pp.248-50) came to the rescue.

All this sorting-out meant that I heard the record many times over, and I must admit that the music began to grow on me. The last 'sett' on the record seems the easiest to come to terms with, and includes an In Nomine where the plain song is transmogrified into the major. Despite my background reading, I am still unsure why Lawes was writing such contrapuntal music in the late 1630s. The viols of the Consort of Musicke are at their most sober, as befits 'Grave Musick' like this, but there are enough discrepancies in intonation between them and the organ to cause beats from time to time, leading to the occasional 'harmonium effect'. However, I am sure that this record will repay even more concentrated listening, though it is not the one to give as an introduction to English viol music.

A large part of the platform appeal of the City Waites is visual, so their impact is bound to suffer when, unlike good little boys, they are heard but not seen. Their impact is further reduced by a slightly distant recording. Instant intelligibility is essential for extended doggerel ballad verse, and in live performance the Waites achieve it admirably. But listening to the record, I had to keep referring to the words, printed in full on the sleeve, together with Douglas Wootton's mainly helpful notes. (Robert Johnson, incidentally, was never lutenist to Queen Elizabeth; he only finished his apprenticeship in 1604.) The music spans nearly the entire 17th century, from Ravenscroft to William Croft, much of it from the

popular broadside ballads of the time (see *EM* Oct 81 pp.427-37). Many of the arrangements are by the Waites themselves, who perform on selections from their large armoury of plucked, bowed and blown instruments. They all sing as well as play, and their lusty rustic style is just right for this music. I am less happy about their short excursions into more 'arty' realms, such as dance movements by Matthew Locke, Maurice Webster and Cuthbert Hely, played on two violins, curtal and *liuto attiorbato*. There is nothing wrong with the basic sound, but the tuning is just not good enough. This is a great pity, as a 'Sonata' by Croft for treble recorder, with bass viol and *liuto attiorbato*, is beautifully played and quite enchanting, whether it is really by Croft or by Godfrey Finger (as the sleeve note suggests). All in all, this record is a rather pale reflection of the real thing; but it will serve as a reminder if you have seen the City Waites in the flesh, or spur you to do so if you have not.

IAN HARWOOD

The Merry Companions

SONGS AND CATCHES FROM PURCELL TO ARNE
Hilliard Ensemble
Saga 5477

After the success of the Hilliard Ensemble's 1978 issue *Songs for a Tudor King* (*Saga* 5461), this collection of catches and accompanied songs comes as something of a disappointment. Catches rarely sound well on record, perhaps because their success depends so much upon the spontaneity of live performance and the sense of rapport which singers can establish with an audience; these qualities are replaced here by slick ensemble and contrived interpretations that gain little on repeated hearing. The atmosphere of tavern and coffee house so evocatively described in the sleeve notes is lacking, replaced by the air of Oxbridge choral singers aiming to impress. Least effective of all are two partsongs by Ravenscroft, sung in a cultured manner and with modern English pronunciation. Catches by Purcell, Eccles and Arne (including a couple of mild obscenities)

fare rather better; but could anyone bear to listen to them more than once or twice?

The record is saved by a selection of seven solo and ensemble songs with continuo (harpsichord and gamba), which draws some spirited singing from individual members of the group. Best of these are Purcell's madrigal-esque duet *I spy Celia*, which succeeds in sounding both stylish and affectingly human, and Paul Elliott's soft, lyrical performance of Boyce's *On thy banks, gentle Stour*. They add a certain amount of substance and convey a little more spirit of period and occasion than the catches. On the whole, however, this is music which is much more fun to sing and play yourself.

JOHN MILSOM

Music of the Gothic Era

The Early Music Consort of London, directed by David Munrow
Archiv 2547 051

Music of the Gothic Era is a single-disc reissue of highlights from the Early Music Consort of London's three-record set released in 1976 under the same title. Although the contents are declared to 'trace the history of polyphonic music based on plain-song through a period of just over 200 years', there is a jump of more than a century from Pérotin's *organum quadruplum* to the *Roman de Fauvel*: this ignores the enormous repertory of the Ars Antiqua motet, so well represented in the three-record version.

The first side is devoted to two settings of the Christmas gradual *Viderunt omnes*, the first from Léonin's *Magnus liber*, the second by Pérotin. The latter is extremely successful in giving all the melodic lines a sense of shape and flow despite what might be considered superficially rhythmic monotony. Léonin's setting is given a performance which did not have the benefit of Edward Roesner's recent research ('The performance of Parisian organum', *EM* April 79 pp.174-89) so that we still hear major 7ths resolving to octaves where the dissonant note should really be unaccompanied: the first consonant

sonority is then an octave.

The second side contains motets by Philippe de Vitry, Machaut and Roellart and an anonymous work from the Ivrea Codex; Machaut's *Hoquetus David* is also performed (on a medley of early wind instruments). Most of the performances are elegant in a style which we have come to accept, using two voices for the upper parts and instruments for the tenor and contratenor. However, I know of no 14th-century justification for performing a work such as Roellart's *Rex Karole* with upper parts, tenor, contratenor and *solus tenor* as well. The most attractive item on this side is the sensitive performance by voices alone of Machaut's *Lasse! comment oubliera*. Completely vocal performance rediscovers so many musical subtleties which are lost when parts are taken by instruments with limited control of timbre and intonation: this performance demonstrates the large degree of dynamic contrast that this music will take.

A record such as this should appeal to anyone who wants to hear polished performances of polyphony from the 12th to the 14th centuries but is unwilling to invest in the whole three-record set.

MARK E. EVERIST

Celebration of the Feast of St Ivan Monks of the Monastery of Rila, Bulgaria

Archiv 2533 457

One of Bulgaria's most popular saints, St Ivan Rilski (876-946) founded a monastic community at Rila around 930, from which the present monastery claims direct descent. The Bulgarian church commemorates him three times a year; this live recording was made on the 834th anniversary of the translation of his remains from Sofia to Ternovo (then the capital of the country) on 19 October 1145. As in the Western church, the celebration of a major feast begins with the evening service on the preceding day; this occupies the first side of the record, the second side being devoted to morning service on the day

itself. Both of these services are lengthy and have been abbreviated on this recording by, for example, omitting five of the six *stichera* to the saint from the evening service and all six of the psalms from the morning service. While this makes it impossible to appreciate the full effect of the services, the extracts have been carefully chosen to give the listener an idea of their essential features and to demonstrate to him some of the most important liturgical forms and methods of singing. I think that the couple of minutes of 'sound effects' are completely justified; ringing bells and swinging censers are part of the ritual and create a sense of atmosphere, and most listeners will probably never have another opportunity to hear a *klepalo*.

The singing of the chant will astonish those who know only the Solesmes style. Speeds tend to be deliberate, with heavy accentuation and sometimes an overall heaviness of effect, as in *Priidite pravoslavnye* (item 2); some pieces, however, are sung in a more lively manner with regular syllable stresses which almost produce a truly metrical performance, as in the troparion at the beginning of the second side (item 9). Some of the solo chants, such as *Prepodobne otce Ioanne* (item 12), are profusely ornamented, as such pieces may once have been in the Western rites. The melodic character of the chant is often far removed from what we are used to, especially in the mode 6 compositions (for example items 2 and 10b), in which chromaticisms such as *c'-b-aflat-g* and *g-a-b-asharp-b* often occur. Even in more familiar diatonic modes the tuning is frequently unlike our own, with very sharp minor 3rds and minor 7ths.

One of the most striking features of the singing is the use of drones. In some pieces the drone note remains unchanged throughout and acts as a kind of musical anchor, stabilizing the melody; in other chants the pitch of the drone changes in accordance with the shifting tessitura of the chant phrases. It is interesting to notice how similar to late 12th-century organum this lat-