

Renaissance Easter Festival

Doncaster Choral Society's early spring concert (15 March), which took place at the Minster, was entitled "Renaissance Music for Palm Sunday", but this title did not quite tell the whole story in all three respects. The theme of the programme was extended from Palm Sunday into Easter Day and all that it entails; it included, besides music, a substantial proportion of appropriate, stimulating and imaginatively chosen readings delivered by Jan Townend and Kevin Spence. The latter excelled himself in the closing sequence from Dennis Potter's *Son of Man*, though I – and perhaps others – were surprised, in view of its strongly male associations, that he did not also declaim Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream*, done here by Ms Townend.

Not quite all the music was from the Renaissance era. Besides the astringent, but striking and joyful, *Palm Sunday Antiphon* by DC Morgan (b1946) at the very beginning, we had fine choral settings by JS Bach (2) and Handel, all of a Passion connotation and Purcell's marvellous anthem *Thou Knowest Lord*. I enjoyed all these and they did serve to put the rest, which came from the 16th and early 17th centuries, "Renaissance" in musical terms. These were British and continental motets or anthems; the Choral Society, directed by Alan Eost and singing from various positions within the Minster's generous acoustic, delighted a gratifyingly substantial audience with their carefully prepared, well balanced, beautifully poised singing. To give a taste of the range of repertoire I can best list a few composers' names: Thomas Mudd, Adrian Batten, Thomas Morley, Richard Farrant, represented by no fewer than three anthems, including the popular *For Thy Tender Mercies' Sake*, and the great William Byrd (*Ave Verum Corpus* and *Sacerdotes Domini*) for the English ones, Giuseppe Pitoni, Lassus Schütz and Victoria (three motets, all superb) for the continental practitioners.

David Houlder (organ) supplied the few accompaniments needed and also played five interludes, by Pachelbel (showing he did compose other things besides that infernal *Canon*), Josquin des Prés, John Bull (by his name an archotypically English figure though this was written in the Netherlands) and two little known figures, the Spaniard Santa Maria and, from the North German school, Delphin Strungk; all well executed and together showing Mr Houlder's wide, enterprising sympathies.

Doncaster's own early music group, The Doncaster Waites, provided three groups of instrumental items from either side of the 1600, mostly continental. I have long admired the devoted work of the Waites and I was delighted with their polished playing here (if the harsh-sounding shawms can ever be regarded as polished instruments!). Perhaps the marvellous surroundings – I should have said previously that this concert was one of many celebrations this year of the 150th Anniversary of the Minster building – inspired them as they surely did the Doncaster Choral Society.

A fine concert, then, if maybe just a tad too long for a programme of (almost fifty) short items, and one appealing to both music specialists and the more general listener.

Orpheus