

# Early Music

# REVIEW

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2 Reviews of Music     *Duncan Druce* (p.8), CB  
10 Reviews of Books                     AJ-B, CB  
13 All fur Coat & No Knickers         David Hill  
19 Messing about                         Mike Diprose  
21 ♪ Monteverdi *Jubilet tota civitas*  
26 Home & Away                     Andrew Benson-Wilson  
35 CD Reviews  
50 Salut! Baroque                         BC  
51 Fund-raising concerts etc.  
52 † Ian Harwood MBE                     CB

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Sometimes one encounters completely out of the blue an amazingly powerful musical experience. I generally go to part of the Cambridge Early Music Summer School end-of-course concert: I'm not insulting the performers to say the events are usually interesting rather than fully-polished performances. What I heard this year was better than usual, but one item was absolutely amazing. I knew that Willaert's *Inviolata* at was an outstanding work – I've Alan Lumsden to thank for this, since he edited it for a Beauchamp House summer school a few years ago, and I was involved in the somewhat anachronistic role of organ accompanist. As always, Philip Thorby inspired us, and he had the same effect at Cambridge. There were seven fine singers, admittedly not all summer-school students, since they included Selene Mills, Linda Gower and Nick Webb, who are organisers (and were members of the *Messiah* choir photographed in our last issue).

The motet is for SSAATTB (in terms of clef, at least, though the top two parts sing no higher than an octave above middle C). Three of the voices form a canon. It isn't an unrhythmic cantus firmus and the performers made no didactic attempt to make this structure particularly audible, though one could sense the difference between the slower and more active parts. The music held the audience spellbound. I was sufficiently aware of the singers to sense that this was one of those performances that got everything right but with nothing forced; even Philip's direction was restrained. I can imagine all sorts of Philipisms being called into play at the rehearsals, but nothing sounded exaggerated or imposed. It seemed a perfect performance of a marvellous work. The music was at the centre: the voices emitted it, without the listener being aware that it was representing any particular vocal style. The phrases were shaped but not overtly; the tactus was observed but barely noticeable. The voices were distinctive enough for the listeners to follow the lines but well blended. I don't know how much this was a one off, the effect of the occasion that could not be repeated – and if it had been recorded, I'm not sure that I would want to have heard it again in case it disappointed. The surprise was part of the effect. So often I find that the most memorable experiences are those one was not expecting or seeking. CB