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A view from the sofa: THE PALLADIAN ENSEMBLE

Helen Garrison discusses a familiar group of people.

Sharing a flat is a bit like being married, in that you take on somebody else's life style, friends, career worries and successes, emotional ups and downs and, in my case, two cats. Along with my particular flatmate comes an entire musical ensemble – the Palladian Ensemble. The flatmate in question is Pamela Thorby, virtuoso recorder player and teacher. I confess that I am perhaps one of the Palladian Ensemble's biggest fans; for over three years I have shared with Pamela, and before that with the Ensemble's violinist Rachel Podger. I therefore have had a unique view on the development and rise of one of Britain's most exciting Baroque chamber ensembles and I make no apologies for my inevitable bias.

With a busy schedule of concerts and foreign tours, four CD recordings all selling well and another one in production, the Palladian Ensemble has now reached the stage where they could relax a little and rely on their reputation. However, this is certainly not their style. They are constantly developing their repertory, searching for new areas of music to explore, commissioning new music and seeking out new audiences.

Pamela Thorby grew up principally in Perthshire, studying at the Royal Scottish Academy as a junior trombone student. 'Playing the trombone gave me a tremendous social life and a well-rounded musical education', she says 'but I soon found that I was more comfortable with my other study – the recorder'. So whilst at the Guildhall School of Music in London, she gave up the trombone for the recorder. As instruments go, the recorder can suffer a certain amount of derision, especially amongst those not versed in Baroque repertory. 'When I tell people what I play, they often say, "Oh I did that as a kid too".'

Rachel Podger could not be more different from Pamela, except for her determination to succeed. On first meeting her she comes across as extrovert and bubbly, perhaps a little unsure of herself, whereas Pamela seems more quiet and reserved, not giving much away. It is only when the two musicians play together that the real characters come to the fore. Their ability to set the stage alight with their mind-boggling virtuosity has wowed audiences all over Europe and, more recently, America. Both exude a supreme confidence and joy in the music they play, and the instinctive manner in which they fly through scales and arpeggios almost as one, and bounce ornamented phrases back and forth, could make you believe they must be telepathic.

Rachel was born in England, starting to learn the violin at a young age via the Suzuki method. Three years later the family moved to her mother's native Germany. There she went to what is known as a Steiner school, where the teaching is holistic, encouraging the performing arts and creativity as well as providing a spiritual environment in which to learn. Singing was her first love until she returned to England to study modern and Baroque violin at the Guildhall. After a while she was in great demand outside the school to play in various Baroque orchestras which seemed a glamorous and lucrative reason to leave. 'I could have earned lots of money, but I was given very good advice by my teachers and completed the course instead. I knew I wanted to be a soloist and in order to do that I had to continue my studies.'

The theorbo, lute and Baroque guitar is played by William Carter. Even in this enlightened age, when early music has become mainstream, theorbists are still relatively rare, and so Bill is rarely short of engagements. He appears in numerous groups and ensembles both in this country and abroad. He has a distinctive appearance: shiny bald pate, pale complexion and a slow smile which belies a wickedly dry sense of humour. Bill clearly derives a great pleasure from performing Baroque and Renaissance music, but it is a fairly recent discovery. A few years ago, he had already been enjoying a career as a classical guitarist in his native America when he heard Nigel North performing on the theorbo in a concert. The effect was startling. It was not that Americans were not acquainted with the repertory, but Bill would often have to drive a hundred miles to buy a record or hear a concert. One evening he drove for five hours to hear the English Concert – 'I still remember it, it was a good performance'. The theorbo was new to him, though, 'it was really weird and deep sounding'; after subsequently meeting Nigel North, Bill came to England to study, giving up a university teaching job in order to do so. 'It was completely different', Bill says, 'in the States I was playing Spanish music on the guitar, and here suddenly I was thrown into a new world of early music which I had never experienced before'.

The gamba player Susanne Heinrich completes the line-up and is the most recent member of the Palladians, having replaced Joanna Levine two years ago. Brought up in Germany, it has taken her a while to become accustomed to the somewhat odd sense of humour displayed by her Palladian colleagues. Her family was totally immersed in the Renaissance, her mother having visited Oxford during the seventies when early music was the thinking person's rock and

roll. She brought back a viol, and all the children were encouraged to learn to play. Susi was surrounded by a world of music which reached only to about 1750; Emma Kirkby was a household name in the same way as Pavarotti is now to most other people. 'I had never heard Berlioz or Tchaikovsky, I was completely blank about that kind of repertory'. It may have been a rather narrow field of vision in which to grow up, but perhaps that gives her an edge in playing in a truly authentic manner. 'Now when I play pre-Classical music, I am approaching it from the other way, rather than learning modern repertory and having to go back. Baroque music is quite modern for me.'

The four original members of the Palladian Ensemble all met at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Pamela was the prime mover, 'I was always annoying students, grabbing people and forcing them to participate in concerts which they didn't want to do. Then Rachel appeared with a Baroque bow.' Bill and Joanna Levine were soon to join them and, known then as the Guildhall Baroque Ensemble, they started doing small gigs – outside engagements at weddings and celebrations. The first sign of things to come was when Pamela entered the group for the Celia Bizony prize for Early Music at the Guildhall. 'We did it because we knew we could win, and there was the lure of a cash prize of £12, enough for a decent curry.'

After graduating from the Guildhall, the group continued practising and building up a repertory. They found music in various libraries by such composers as Falconieri, Castello, Turini, Locke, Merula, etc. 'We dug out the music because we simply liked the repertory', explains Pamela, 'we tried out lots of sonatas until we found things that worked, learning how to play together and discovering what the instrumental limitations were'. In 1991 they entered the Early Music Centre International Young Artists' Competition. Bill still maintains that at the time there was no great plan for the future. 'We certainly weren't thinking in terms of conquering the world, we just wanted to play these two pieces we'd found without breaking down.' They did indeed win, and it proved a turning point, starting

with an Early Music Network tour. Bill was nevertheless sceptical of their victory. 'I'm always suspicious when things are going well, I don't think I enjoyed any of it hugely at the time.'

Despite his pessimism, within twelve months the Palladians went on to win the South East Young Artists' Platform. Meanwhile, a producer from Linn Records had heard them playing in the Barbican foyer, offered to help make a demo tape, and on the strength of that signed them up for their first CD recording. Suddenly the Palladian Ensemble had a two-year schedule of concerts and recordings ahead of them for which to find repertory, 'we had to work like demons' reflects Rachel.

Four years on the Palladian Ensemble has established itself as a leading light in interpreting the seventeenth-century Italian repertory – an acquired taste perhaps? Bill disagrees, 'It's very elaborate and highly ornamented music but it's not cerebral, quite the opposite. It's all about feelings which are portrayed in an intricate way, which, so long as you don't overdo it, go down very well. Recently we went on a tour and were playing exclusively seventeenth-century music of this nature where you give your all in tiny little units of music, and both the audience and us found it exhilarating.' On the whole, audiences are eager to hear music they have not come across before, and go away furiously scribbling down the names of composers for future reference. Uccellini is one of the most popular in this respect.

Although the seventeenth-century Italian repertory has become second nature to the Palladians and has won them tremendous respect, they are not averse to trying out music from other countries and other centuries. Susi's love of the French Baroque has inspired them to begin exploring a new area of music. 'It's an opportunity to find new colours and nuances, which is good for the sound of the group as well.' Germany, too, has not escaped the Palladian treatment, and their third disk of Bach trio sonatas was a critical success; it was their first release with Susi Heinrich as the gamba player – 'I really loved the Bach', she confirms, 'it's perhaps the most we can do with this combination. In England Bach is played like Baroque music and not like in Germany where he is treated like a god, and is played very slowly.' Jumping ahead a few hundred years to the present day, the group has also had the odd new piece written for it, and they took the latest – *Over and Under* by Tim Risher – with them to America on a recent tour. I have even heard them play jazz, a piece specially arranged for them by Risher called Roly Poly served as a dazzling and innovative encore in a recent Wigmore Hall recital.

The mix of violin and recorder on the treble line and the lack of a keyboard gives the Palladian Ensemble a distinctive timbre. It also gives them a headache when searching for music to play, as very few pieces were actually written for this combination. They have to make their own editions of things because everything is an arrangement, but as Pamela agrees, every trio-sonata group does that to a certain extent. 'We hope that we're level-headed about whether or not something works. Even if at the concert stage it really is not cohering then we give up. We go to the limit of what our instruments can do and if it is convincing in performance then we're happy. It's usually obvious fairly soon if it isn't working.' Certain composers really do benefit from the transparent texture of the Palladian mix. Not having a harpsichord in works by Matteis, for instance, whom the group has championed, brings out his almost folky element, especially with the lucidity of the recorder. Bill Carter feels that his instrument, usually drowned by a keyboard, is allowed to contribute much to the overall homogeneity of sound produced, and it must be emphasized that this is in no way straying from the authentic performance bracket. 'What we're doing is exploring the practice of what was done by a minority in the Baroque period. It's just as important, of course, to know what the majority was doing, how a Corelli sonata was performed, for instance, but with that as a back drop, what we're doing is really interesting and there were plenty of groups in that time who had the stangest instrumental combinations. In the present day, therefore, we sound distinctive, but in the Baroque period it was normal.'

The particular mix of instruments in the ensemble obviously has an effect on the way in which the instruments are played, and Rachel agrees that they are influenced by each other, 'with other strings, one can get to bogged down with the stringiness of it all; with a wind instrument as a partner, you can try and imitate turns of phrase which are uniquely woodwindy'. It is the lute that Pamela notices has an effect, 'the quickly dying notes and the spread chords on the lute make us phrase things in a different way than with the harpsichord, which must have had an influence on the way we play. Characterization is really important because homogeneity is not easy with such different instruments.'

Performance style on stage is important to the Palladians as well as the actual music they play. They are renowned for having an extrovert personality, never hiding behind their instruments, always communicating their enjoyment of the music they are playing. 'We're all extrovert players and we like to bop around a bit in performance', admits Rachel. The openness of each individual character on stage is perhaps one of the reasons the Palladians have won many hearts over the years. Pamela's theory is fairly straight forward, 'our personalities suit what we play, just like pet owners are supposed to grow to be like their animals, we embody the characteristics of our instruments'.

Although it was the 'Young' Artist's Competition which the Palladians won, it is five years since that happened and now they prefer to drop the description 'young'. Bill is now in his mid-thirties and the other

three are all heading rapidly for thirty. Nevertheless, when it comes to prioritizing what is important on a foreign tour, a youthful outlook helps to lessen the repetitive and exhausting schedule. 'We remember the good meals rather than the venue', said Pamela on her return from America. 'The concerts are rather a blur, unlike the list of concert halls we played in as part of the Rising Stars series. For that we performed in places like the Birmingham Symphony Hall and the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. That was amazing, a real high point, we felt like proper musicians.'

All four have all benefited in their personal careers thanks to the high profile of the Palladian Ensemble. They appear in most of the Baroque orchestras in this country and on the Continent. Pamela is beginning to make her name as a soloist and can be heard featuring on the successful pop record *Adiemus, Songs Of Sanctuary,* written by Karl Jenkins. She has just recorded the sequel to this chart-topping project and will soon be appearing at the Albert Hall. Concerto projects and a recording of solo sonatas with harpsichordist Richard Egarr are next on the agenda.

Rachel Podger is already in the midst of recording solo violin sonatas by Telemann and Bach, and work with her other principal chamber group – Florilegium, in which she shares the spotlight with her partner, the flautist and recorder player Ashley Solomon – fills what gaps are left in her diary.

William Carter is in demand all over Europe, but both he and Susi have chosen Britain as their home, even though there is no doubt they could earn a lot more money abroad. However, Bill is adamant that Britain is the place for him, 'because I can speak English really fluently', he adds dryly, 'I have a definite resonance here that I don't have anywhere else, and of course the food and the weather in Italy, for instance, is terrible'. For an American he has a refreshingly British sense of humour.

Susi's choice to remain in Britain is partly dictated by her marriage to the harpsichordist Kah Ming Ng, who is continuing his research in Oxford, but there are also artistic reasons for staying. 'Here all the ground work is done already. For instance, people know what a viol is whereas on the Continent few people know. The fees are low and you have to work more for your money, but you have more opportunities to play, all the little concert series are still in existence. In Germany concerts only happen at weekends and, because the fees are so high, they can't afford to have any others. Here you have to work harder, but that is balanced by the fact that we don't rehearse so much'.

And what of the future? 'It's nice that after all this time it's still fun', assures Bill, 'that's not always something you can count on in a group this size'. The initial euphoria of winning a succession of large competitions and awards, and enjoying the fruits of a predestined network of concerts, has now passed. Pamela's time is freer since they have employed an agent, but she is not complacent about how well things are going. 'We don't know any more than anybody else – we try not to be big headed and really we're only as good as the last thing we did, so the work still has to be done'. ❖

Helen Garrison is a producer on BBC Radio 4's Kaleidoscope, presenter of Radio 3's Music Restored, and a professional singer

Breeding lilacs out of the dead land: the importance of early music in 2001

CHRISTOPHER PAGE

The Chairman presented the first Margot Leigh Milner Address to NEMA's AGM, 1996.

It is a great honour to be giving the first address in memory of Margot Leigh Milner, a loyal friend to so many musicians and now sorely missed. Margot's musical tastes were broad – they even encompassed medieval music – and I do not think she would have objected to seeing a medievalist rise to give the first address. There is a kind of appropriateness in it. We face the beginning of a new millennium, and we share that with our medieval ancestors of the tenth century. What remarkable decades those were in Europe around the year 1000, and how extraordinary the men who chronicled them! I think particularly of a remarkable monk who lived in Burgundy and many other places during those years, Ralph Glaber. Like so many monks, Ralph was a historian to the core of his being. He knew that human history had begun at a specific moment with the Creation of the World, and that it would end at a specific moment to be heralded by dire marvels: fires burning on the sea; trees collapsing and waving their tangled roots in the air. Ralph looked back over his shoulder to Adam and felt that this great story this struggle between good and evil, could not last much longer. In his book, the *Universal History*, he laments the feuds of nobles in their primitive wooden castles on earthen mounds; he recoils with alarm from the heresy, then recently discovered, of some clergy at Orléans. And yet, for all this, he is an optimist. In one of the most famous passages to be found in any medieval book, he proclaims that the world is being covered over with a white robe of churches; he is confident that literate men like himself have a role to fulfil.

A thousand years later there is much for a modern Ralph Glaber to celebrate. Recent advances in medicine and technology are too numerous and obvious to labour; but it is exactly where Ralph is confident that I am anxious. He believes that the forces of literacy and historical memory in his civilization are in the ascendant; in our civilization they are in decline. The appetite for poetry, and for reading, is waning as our inner spaces are jammed with raucous trivia. A national quality newspaper now runs a column whose sole purpose is to provide a quick guide to the contents of a famous book, presumably so that one can pretend to have read it. Few students come to university with any real knowledge of pre-modern history, of Latin or of liturgy and worship in the past.

One of the most literate and unquiet writers of our time, George Steiner, has an essay on this theme, first published in 1978 but now reprinted in a remarkable collection entitled *No Passion Spent*. Professor Steiner claims that our attention span has been irreparably damaged and contracted by the telephone and that we do not have the mental poise to read deeply; he insists that we do not have the cultural 'lexicon' any more because, for example, the Authorised Version of the Bible is widely neglected (indeed there are many Anglican priests who barely encounter it from one year to the next). We no longer learn poems by heart, memorizing them in reflective stillness to acquire a shared literary culture, and yet this practice was common, in Steiner's view, 'from classical antiquity to, roughly, the First World War'.

These are sweeping and provocative ideas, but I suspect that much of what Steiner says is true. The Great War, for example, was fought by men who, from our vantage point, may seem remarkably literary. We know how much poetry came out of the trenches, Wilfred Owen, among others, is still admired but it is easy to forget how much poetry went *into* the trenches. 'The *Oxford Book of English Verse* presides over the Great War in a way that has never been sufficiently appreciated.' Many young men received the anthology as a present or as a school prize in the poignant decades before 1914 and took comfort from reading it; Paul Fussell has shown that one of the extracts printed there, the passage from *Paradise Lost* on Milton's blindness, is 'echoed countless times' in soldiers' memoirs.

The *Oxford Book of English Verse* was compiled by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, a Professor of Classics at the time when he wrote the Preface to the collection, dated 1900. When did this high-Victorian anthology cease to become a standard piece of furniture in the English, middle-class house – or mind? By way of an answer, let me briefly describe a scene from a famous British film, released in 1945 and so at the end of the second great European conflict of our century. Picture the living room of a middle-class couple, husband and wife. The time is evening; a fire burns in the grate; music by Rachmaninov comes from the large gramophone, but all is not well; the wife has developed a passion for another man. Her unsuspecting husband notices that she seems weary. 'You look tired, old girl', he says; 'come and sit by the fire in the library and relax...'. He begins *The Times* crossword. 'You're a bit of a poetry addict', he says to her in a kindly way, as if to raise her spirits: 'see if you can help me with this; it's Keats':

> When I behold upon the night-starred face
> Huge cloudy symbols of a high...

His wife replies at once, and correctly: 'romance...it'll be in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*'.

The film from which I have taken this dialogue is, of course, *Brief Encounter*, scripted by Noel Coward, directed by David Lean. The years have turned it into a museum of a vanished England: there are station buffets where cakes are laid out on three-tiered stands; there are Kardoma cafes with music from a piano trio. Those things are fairly obvious to anyone who watches the film, and I have often noticed them; but I had not noticed what a remarkable period-piece Noel Coward has given us in that conversation between a husband and wife. Did the middle-class houses of England in the 1940s really have a room called 'the library'? Few of them do now. Did *The Times* crossword at the end of the War really have clues that relied upon the reader's acquaintance with Keats and a common literary culture? Julian Barnes has recently declared that '*The Times* crossword...has abandoned the assumption of a popular bank of familiar quotations (let alone any common knowledge of the ancient world...)' (*The Sunday Times*, 10 November 1996).

Now that the British Empire has gone, the Preface of 1900 to the *The Oxford Book of English Verse* seems merely chauvinistic and bombastic. Would anyone in the 1990s care to describe the English language as the one which the Muse of poetry 'most delights to honour'? No doubt this nationalistic pride in literary achievement meant something in the trenches of Flanders, or in the suburban homes of England in 1945, but it now seems as antiquated as the cakestand or the Kardoma orchestra and I, for one, do not mourn it.

Nor, perhaps, do we need to lament the disappearance of the domestic library. That room, with its reassuring coal fire and easy chairs, seems a patriarchal place where the wife is only a guest. That is perhaps how domestic libraries have always been. Mr. Casaubon's library in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* is a vault that symbolizes Casaubon's lonely and almost funereal bachelorhood, a place where his wife, Dorothea, comes with a fluttering heart and an ardent desire to break through the toy-box education of a Victorian woman. Or we might turn to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, where the still centre of Netherfield is Mr Bennet's library, a private domain of books set down amidst the commotion of five daughters and an excitable wife. It seems that there are only sexist images of the domestic library to be had.

We may have many doubts about 'shared literary culture', most of them political in the simple sense that we want to know who shares that culture with whom and how they are using it to exclude or dominate others. With its nationalistic sense of English poetry, supposedly cherished over the centuries and brought to a position of pre-eminence, *The Oxford Book of English Verse* helped to urge the soldiers of 1914–18 over the top. And yet it is obvious that we have lost something in recent decades which they possessed, both the officers from the public schools and the lower ranks who had studied literature at the Workmen's Institutes or who benefited from schemes such as the National Home Reading Union. As we approach the year 2000 we may be able to dispense with that Preface which seemed appropriate to the *Oxford Book of English Verse* exactly one hundred years ago, but we need the poems collected there more than ever.

Perhaps you are thinking that these are the typical sentiments of a man writing in his private library. I suppose they are; at my shoulder I sense the imposing shade of Boethius, the Roman patrician who sat in *his* private library in the fifth century, striving to preserve the remains of Greek and Roman learning for posterity as the last few lamps of Antiquity were extinguished all over Europe by barbarian tribes including, of course, the English. Let us motion him to go, for the age we are about to enter is not as dark as the one he contemplated. In at least one important respect it is not as dark as George Steiner would have us believe. Commenting upon the thinness of the reading experience in our times, and the disappearance of any room in our houses that could be called a 'library', Steiner says 'it is striking to what extent the cabinet for long-playing records and the record shelf now occupy spaces formerly reserved for books'. With its reference to long-playing records, this remark seems as dated as the steam-trains of *Brief Encounter*, but that is not Professor Steiner's fault; his essay was first published in 1978 when there were no compact discs. Yet I believe that his comment is out of date for a much more important reason than its reference to black vinyl LPs.

Preparing this address, I assembled on my desk some twenty-five compact discs almost at random, most of them performances of music ranging from the twelfth century to the seventeenth. Virtually all of them have accompanying booklets that run to a dozen pages. Some of the CDs have booklets with much more than this, and the largest examples extend to over a hundred pages. Even when we allow for the same introductory material being presented in three or even four different languages, and the same for the translations of the texts, it is obvious that these CD inserts deserve to be called *book*lets. Extract the booklets from twenty-five CDs and you have a small library. The LP may have banished the book, as Steiner maintains, but the CD is at least putting the booklet back on the shelf. I open some CD inserts at random and find a substantial amount of Latin poetry and prose, usually with facing page translation; the full text of the Ordinary of the Mass appears over half a dozen times, twice with the Proper chants for the first Mass of Christmas, the Mass at Cock Crow. There are other liturgical chants, their texts often taken from biblical passages, sometimes given facing-page translations taken from the Authorised Version whose

disappearance from English life is so deeply regretted by Steiner. From more than a dozen of these booklets I can assemble a large amount of poetry, in various languages, in praise of the Virgin, for example, or of various saints. In addition to these texts, many of the booklets contain brief but authoritative essays by leading scholars who have come to recognize the importance of this new genre of musicological writing.

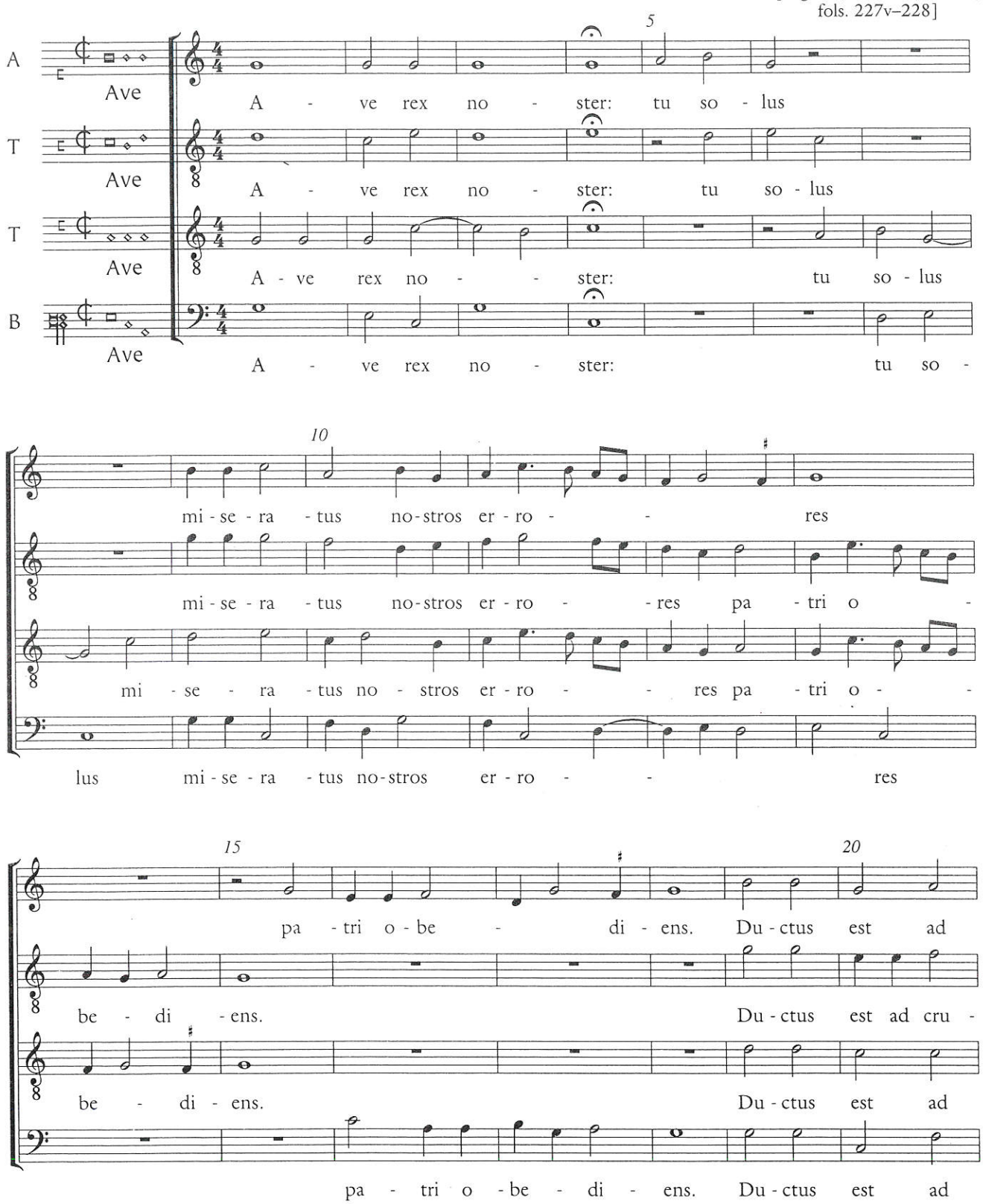
We have dismantled most of the class and other social attitudes on which a possession of a 'shared literary culture' used to rest. If the classical education of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries has now vanished from European schooling, we may console ourselves that colonialism, racism, sexism and class have tended to fade with it. On the verge of a new millennium, we now have the opportunity to decide how we can bring some of the old cultural lexicon back into our lives. The CD booklet, with its scholarly notes, texts and translations, is an epitome of what the early music revival can contribute and is a quintessentially post-modern creation: cool, distanced, fragmented and right for our times. Introducing my first paraphrase from *The Waste Land*, I would say that these are fragments we may shore against our ruins.

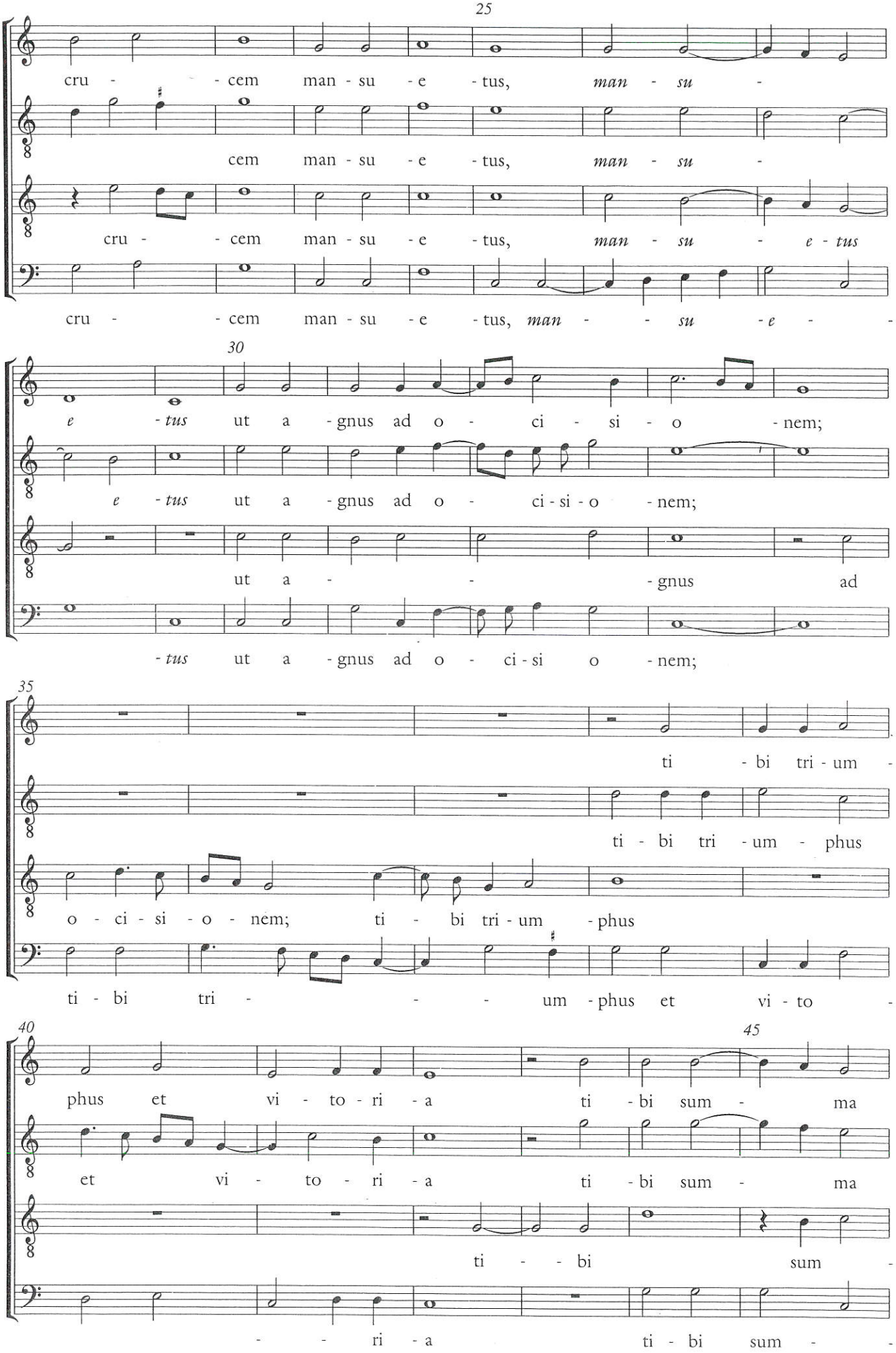
Do not mistake me: I am primarily involved with early music because I love the sound of it, not because it can help to save us from barbarism. Once or twice I have become involved in academic controversies over some matter of early music history, and I have always remembered the words of W. B. Yeats as I do so: 'A lonely impulse of delight/drove to this tumult...'. But our interest in historical performance does express a desire to maintain a compassionate and literate interest in the past, without sentimentality or sensationalism, at a time when antiquarian interests are being threatened on all sides. In comparison with that concern, our current quarrels about the *idea* of authenticity, and the theory of what we are doing when we perform early music, take their place as important but subsidiary concerns. To paraphrase *The Waste Land* again – and this is positively my last quotation – a new millennium opens before us and these are some of the lilacs we can hope to breed from what may seem an unpromising soil. ❖

Ave Rex Noster

Alonso de Mondejar

[Segovia, Catedral, MS 55, fols. 227v–228]

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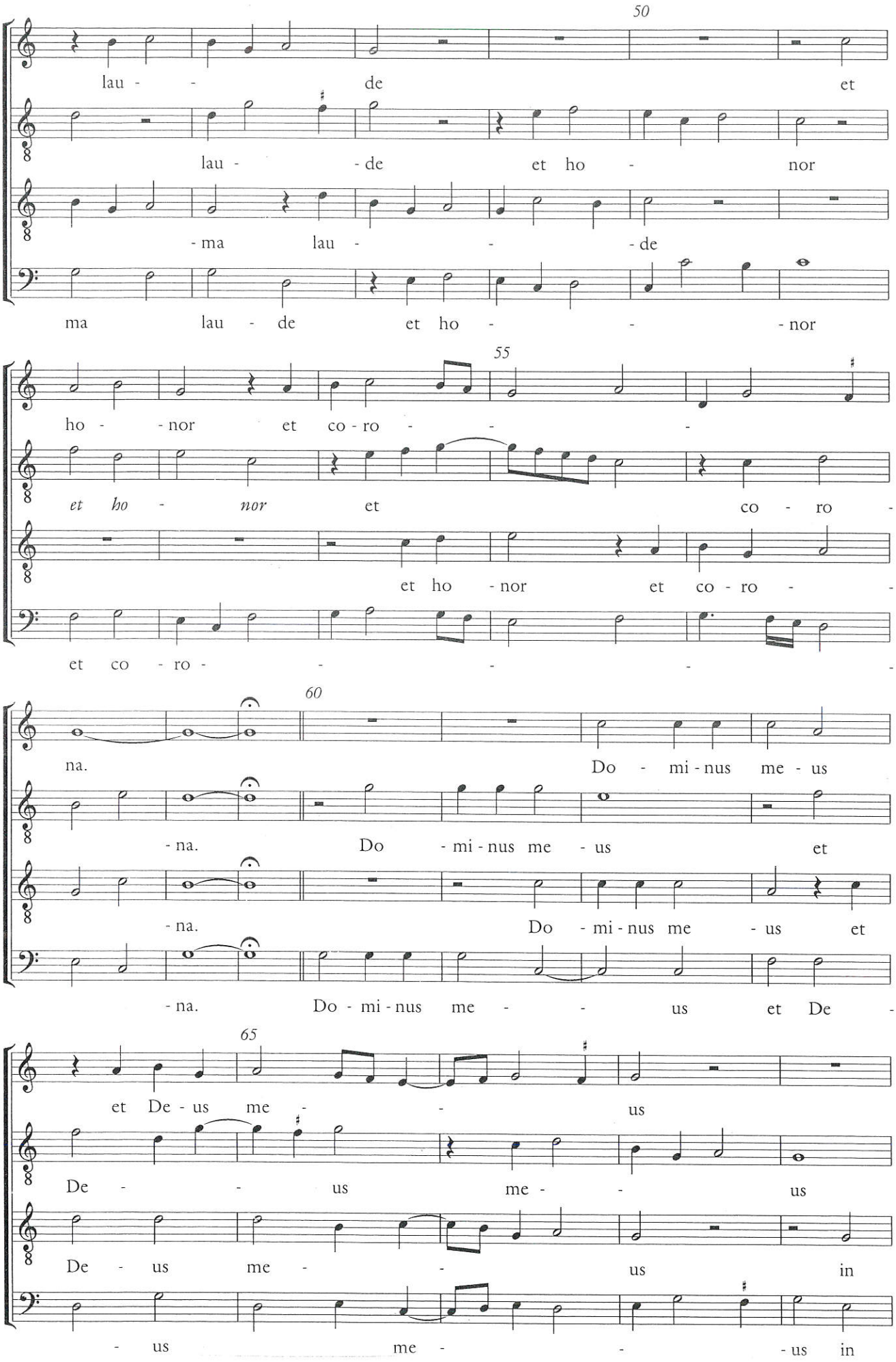
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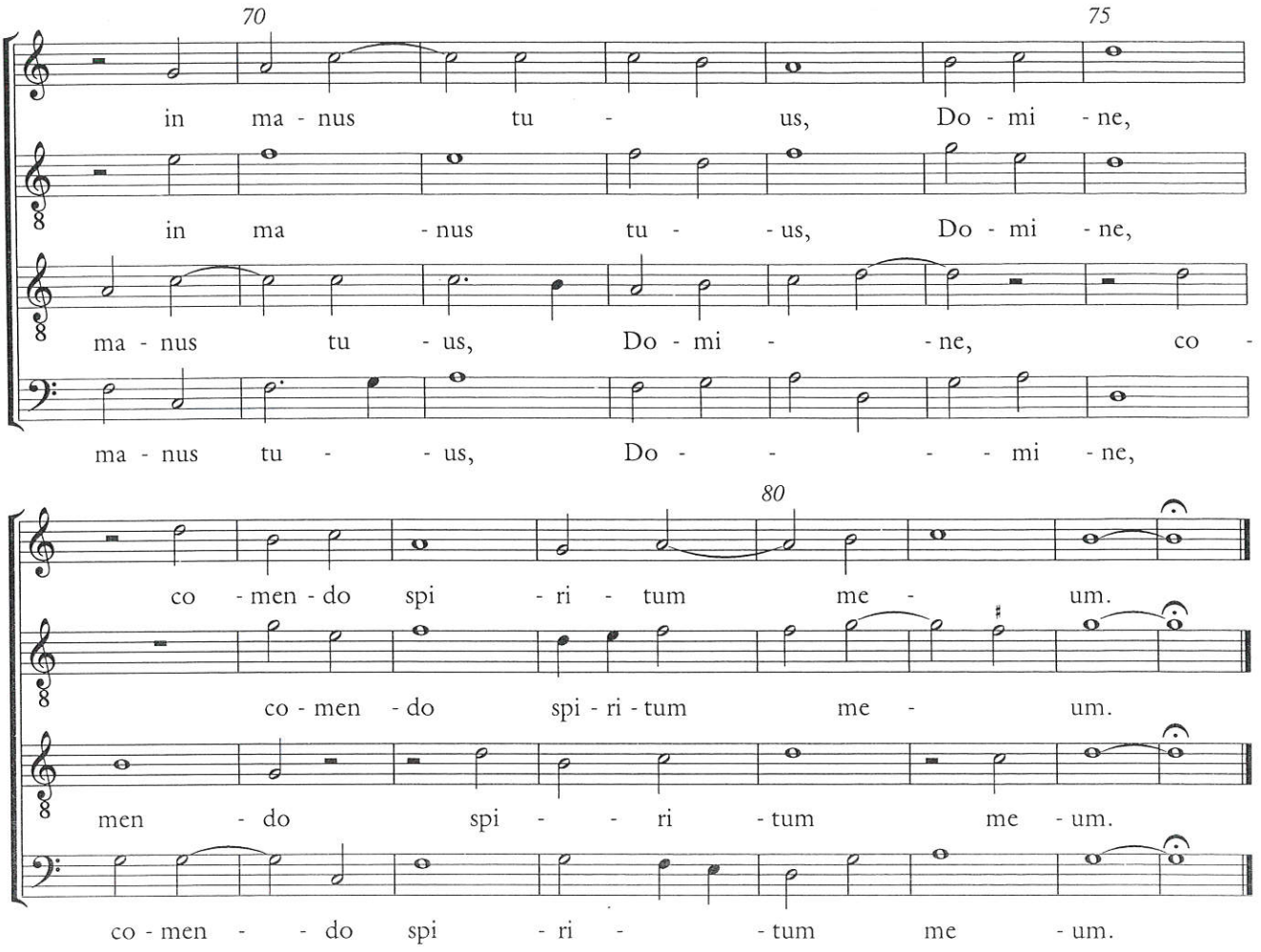

Edited by Tess Knighton

SURELY, BOYS SHOULD BE BOYS?

PETER GILES

I read 'A Yank at Oxford' with great interest and mostly with empathy, especially concerning David Skinner's sensitivity and the implication that there is a magic (he used the word 'superstition') associated with 'place' – particularly places of inherent significance and past influences – into which musicians and artists can tap in a psychic or mystic way. I find this refreshing in the usually fridge-cold world of musicology.

I feel, however, that a response must be made in print to his assertion that women sopranos are closer to the original sound of (in this case, sixteenth-century) boy singers. It is not a new claim, and is usually encountered when someone is attempting to justify the replacement of boys' by women's voices in that same early-music arena from which is usually heard screams of 'heretical anachronism!' if so much as a lute string is from the wrong kind of animal for the historical period! David Skinner's claim that twentieth-century women sopranos are nearer, vocally, to boy singers of the sixteenth century can be no more tenable now than similar claims made by other before him. He, like other claimants pushing the same line, does not appear to have thought the matter properly through.

Though many boys now leave cathedral-type choirs at 13-plus because of educational demands and not, even in the late twentieth century, because their voices have gone (readers wishing to explore the subject of pubertal voice-change might begin with Charles Cleall's *Voice Production in Choral Technique* (Novello, rev. ed. 1969), sixteenth-century boys seem to have retained their voices for longer than their counterparts today. But we are told constantly that children are now bigger and more mature for their age – physically, emotionally and perhaps intellectually – than in previous centuries. This rather negates the Skinner argument: sixteenth-century lads of, say, fourteen or fifteen would probably equate in physique and maturity with those of twelve in the late twentieth century, for example.

I imagine that Stephen Darlington will not exactly welcome David Skinner's seeming suggestion that

most of the Christ Church boys are trained, or allowed, to produce an ineffective, breathy tone! The listener's impression is that, as in many other well-trained choirs Darlington's boys enjoy a well-produced, strong timbre!

There is, of course, more than one way to train boy singers. It has been fashionable for some years in some quarters to encourage a rather young-sounding (though not necessarily weak) tone, even from today's burly lads of twelve and thirteen. This tone-quality can be very attractive, though it sometimes apears to encourage the voice to fade earlier. This type of training is, of course, by no means common to all choirs and, in any case, however trained, many boys are capable of singing on well into their teenhood with superb, mature tone and musicality. Aled Jones was merely one outstanding example.

Unfortunately, some choirmasters today do not seem to teach the traditional technique which helps the constantly growing boy to adjust his voice gradually and naturally to match his physical development, and thereby to take advantage of that gloriously rich, large-ranged vocal capability available to be enjoyed by the lad's increasingly mature ego! This technique was the traditional method of not only helping boys to take the pubertal voice-change gradually, but also to prepare them for the sophisticated methods they would need as adult singers – the 'composite' vocal technique which involved the use of pure head-register by all male singers, not merely counter-tenors, and which became unfashionable in the early nineteenth century, particularly from the 1830s onwards. Interestingly, of course, the English boy training-style contined, largely unaffected by these radical changes in adult male voice-production which at first took place purely in the secular singing world, then increasingly in the sacred sphere. Tonal adjustments in the training of English boys began to be tried in some choral quarters (though by no means all) mainly from the 1950s onwards.

Those of us who have been associated with all-male choirs and boys' vocal-training for rather longer than David Skinner know without doubt that a very few boys of varying size, trained in the traditional manner with strong fundamental registers, and rich, confident head-registers (which emphatically do not need to be hooty!) can easily balance the men's voices – just as they could and did in Fayrfax's, Ludford's and Shephard's time. Virile, English traditional technique still remains available to boys' choir directors if they would but use it (assuming that they know how to, that is!). If, on the other hand, bodily development alone is claimed to be the only criterion regarding a boy's vocal dimensions and tonal quality – an idea with which I happen not to agree – then, as we have noted, twentieth-century lads simply reach that size earlier than

their sixteenth-century predecessors. To all these considerations add the often astonishing musicality to the trained boy singer, and the intensified awareness possessed by the average, fast-growing child today, thanks to nutrition, the pace of life, computer-speeded intelligence and communication and, of course, the various dictats of the late twentieth century.

For small, professional vocal ensembles seeking to perform originally all-male repertory there are, of course, several undeniable and seldom mentioned advantages associated with employing women sopranos. One is that the adult soprano is usually a trained musician already, so the time-hungry 'teaching' element which has always been necessary when dealing with boy singers, be they of the sixteenth or twentieth century, is minimal or non-existent. In addition, it is difficult to arrange essentially adult-weight rehearsal, recording and concert schedules regularly to include boys at times and in places compatible with the demands of school or parents. Connected with this, today's 'sick' society makes necessary and essential a web of rules and regulations for adults entrusted with the care of children. There is also the matter of professional fees and contracts. It is far easier in all ways if every ensemble member is engaged on the same adult footing, probably as a member of Equity or the I.S.M. The social side of the coin cannot be discounted, either.

Obviously, all journalism tends to promote that which a high proportion of its expected readers wish to read. There is usually a 'background agenda', as the phrase is; a 'house orthodoxy'. This can be true of specialist magazines – even learned, worthwhile journals which, in normally avoiding the term 'journalism' (one would reasonably imagine), seek to epitomize academic integrity, and publish 'papers' together with serious, searching interviews. We would do well always to bear this in mind as a general rule! At no time is it more advisable than when asked to consider the *raison d'être* concerning the use of women sopranos in music written for boys. In truth, concerning original male-choir repertory and indeed, when apposite, that of the soloist, we can never be entirely unaware of the seeming insults – purely imagined – to adult women singers when they find boys preferred to them.

Bear all these considerations sympathetically in mind, but please let us stop trying to rationalize or justify the use of a substitute in place of the genuine, exept purely on the basis of a number of convenience-factors and as a musical alternative. ❖

LETTERS

Dear Madam,

Dr Dolmetsch (*Leading Notes*, Spring 1996, p. 32) will find from my documented account of the nineteenth-century English gambists (*The Galpin Society Journal*, 48, 1989, p. 3) that I have already considered what involvement they may have had in the development of the 'cellamba heresy' and that there is at present insufficient evidence to arrive at any conclusions. The twentieth-century cellambists he cites are not relevant to that problem.

The cellist and cellambist van der Straeten, who settled in England around 1880, included an informative account of continental gamba players in the previous century in his *History of the Violoncello* in 1914, and by courtesy of his former pupil Mr Edgar Hunt I have been able to examine the author's proof copy with his manuscript notes for a possible future edition. They seem all to have been cellambists. Van der Straeten, surprisingly, says nothing about the English players I have listed from about 1780 to 1889. The last of them, Payne, firmly refuted the assertions of his contemporaries Heron-Allen and van der Straeten (later reasserted so forcibly by Henry St George, Döbereiner and Grümmer) that the frets were a 'hindrance' and merely an aid for tyros: '...many existing compositions for the viola da gamba prove that very complicated music was played on that instrument across the strings in higher positions...on a fretted instrument the use of the shift presents no difficulty. The viol music of the 17th century proves that players were familiar with the art of shifting throughout the lower octave...' (*Grove I*, articles 'Violin' and 'Shift'). Payne also owned two old viol bows. But it would be quite unwarrantable to conclude therefore that he played 'historically'. He may or may not have done so; we just don't know.

I have no evidence whatever for Pettit or Henry Webb (1831–66). Webb, curiously, was a fellow quartet-player with Henry Holmes, to whom Arnold Dolmetsch went for violin lessons in 1882/3. But John Cawse (*c*1779–1862) provides an interesting case. He was born within the lifetime of K. F. Abel and owned and played the ?Tielke viol which was played for Queen Victoria in 1845 ('Her Majesty expressed Herself much pleased with it'). This viol was acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1882; it still has thirteen rather coarsely fitted frets, and those frets are shown in a photograph of it reproduced by Sandys and Forester in 1864. It was almost certainly Cawse who provided the diagram inside the cover of the 'Countess of Pembroke Book' (Lbl Add. MS 31, 697), showing ten frets. That seems to have been in 1835, so it seems likely that the viol was played fretted in 1845. *Á propos* of my belief that we have still something to learn about early music and old instruments in nineteenth-century England, let me mention one or two other curious little-known facts. A

Contributions

The editor would be pleased to discuss possible submissions for *Leading Notes*. Major articles, comments and short articles on any aspect of early music are welcome. Music examples can be set by us, and copyright-cleared line-art illustrations are allowed; however, the extensive use of photographs is limited because of their production cost.

If you have an article prepared, or are considering writing an article which would be suitable for *Leading Notes*, please contact the administrator on Cambridge (01223) 315681, or write to *Leading Notes* at 8 Covent Garden, Cambridge CB1 2HR.

young organ student about 1830 had 'an old harpsichord with pedals and two rows of keys, on which [he] practised at all available times' (*Grove I*, article 'Cooper, George'). Is there any other record of a two-manual and pedal harpsichord in England, at any period? A Haward spinet was still used as a practising instrument by Chapel Royal boys up to 1810–20, and perhaps later; so I am willing to believe (what I had sometimes doubted) that Mary Graham's instrument in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, about 1840, was indeed a harpsichord. 'The last clavichords that were made were constructed by Hoffmann, Stuttgart, in 1857, on the pattern of one belonging to Molique. They were made for the late Joseph Street, of Lloyds' (A. J. Hipkins in *Grove I*, article 'Clavichord' in the Appendix, date about 1889). Who played them, and where are they now, one wonders?

Is it worth while recording minutiæ such as these? I believe that it is, if we are not to be content with an over-simplified view of history.

JOHN R. CATCH, Great Missenden, Bucks.

Dear Madam,

Michelene Wandor's perceptive review of *The Cambridge Companion to the Recorder* (Spring 1996) prompts certain questions. Does the recorder really have 'a relatively marginal place in the professional world' and is it truly held in 'contempt' by other musicians? My answer to the first question is a qualified one, for after the advent of Frans Brüggen in the 1960s no one could dismiss the recorder to the back of the stalls. Moreover there were several fine English players who would have won respect and admiration whatever instrument they happened to be playing. I have never heard a sensitive professional musician summarily dismiss the recorder and most certainly never with 'contempt'. They may find it elusive and in the past may have found difficulty in finding excellent players but may they not also have childhod recollections of it ubiquitous awfulness when played *en masse*? This was not the fault of the instrument – rather of those who so distorted its essential nature.

As Michelene Wandor points out there is undoubtedly a strong tendency for recorder players to isolate themselves within the confines of their repertory rather than see they are within a total musical context. One of the driving motives in the preparation of this book was to help place the recorder more securely within the overall musical firmament. The instrument will always have its devotees with a strong appeal to sociability in the form of groups and societies, rather like the flute. For some reason obscure to me, neither the clarinet nor the bassoon, for instance, have attracted quite the same attention. I would not willingly agree with Eve O'Kelly's prediction of decline because I feel it may be too sombre given other more

invigorating signs. The best response of recorder player to our book will be for them to become more curious about the history and repertory of their instrument and so gain an increased perception of the ways it crosses many musical boundaries to join in and form an honoured part of our European heritage.

JOHN MANSFIELD THOMSON, Wellington, New Zealand

Apologia

Our apologies to all of our readers, and especially to the authors represented in this issue, for the lateness of Autumn 1996'.
An extraordinary combination of events conspired to pile week upon week (eventually month on month !), and before we knew it, Spring 1997 was almost upon us.
An outgoing editor, an (as yet unknown) incoming editor, new printers, and a host of one-time circumstances is now behind us, and we hope that the Spring 1997 issue will be in your hands on time. Special apologies to Dr Ian Payne, whose article on continuo realisation will appear in the next issue, along with articles from our recently-held conference, Mime and Gesture in 18th-century Theatre.