

## BEMP REVIEW – 4 MARCH

An intrepid group of singers and instrumentalists braved ice, snow and tempest to rehearse over three days and then perform an unusual and fascinating programme of early music in St John's Church Wellington on 4 March.

The first work was the *Missa dum Sacrum Mysterium* by Scotland's greatest 16<sup>th</sup>-century composer Robert Carver. This is a work probably composed for a great ceremony - of extreme contrapuntal and rhythmic intricacy, with varied textures ranging from full choir in 10 parts to solo duos, trios and other combinations. The singers, under the vigilant and precise direction of Andrew Parrott, rose for the most part successfully to the considerable technical challenges; the relief on many faces at the end spoke volumes. Congratulations to all for recreating a distinctive and intriguing world of sound.

Between the sections of the Mass, the amazingly virtuosic Nicholas Perry played secular music of the period on bagpipes, pipe and tabor, and hurdy-gurdy, providing a welcome and entirely appropriate contrast.

The second half of the concert was devoted to the 1612 Vespers of Lodovico Grossi da Viadana, who worked at the Cathedral of Mantua while his great contemporary Monteverdi was composer for the Court. While clearly influenced by, and adopting, the emerging Baroque style, Viadana looked back to the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Venetian practice of combining several choirs (in this case, four) in different parts of the building. Here the singers were joined by the admirable Sue Addison and the Birmingham Conservatoire sackbut ensemble, supported by Martin Perkins on chamber organ. Compared with the Carver Mass, this was music of relative harmonic and rhythmic simplicity, but with impressive tonal opulence which the singers generated with gusto. Perhaps the polychoral antiphonal effects would have been more effective had the choirs been further apart? Between the choral items the sackbuts delighted the audience with sprightly and rhythmical canzonas.

For anyone open to a widening of musical horizons this was a concert to savour, and grateful thanks are due to the organisers of Blackdowns Early Music Projects.