

REPORT ON SOMERSET SRP MEETING – SATURDAY 21ST APRIL 2007

We had an excellent turnout of 23 players for the visit of our ‘Pastoral’ conductor, Alex Ayre. Alex had organised all the music for the afternoon into folders and the time saved in not having to hand out and collect in sheets after every piece meant we had a very full afternoon’s playing. All the music was arranged by Alex.

The pieces were also organised and played in chronological order, which meant we started with **William Mundi’s ‘O Mater Mundi’**. Mundi was born in about 1529 and died in 1591 and although a ‘shadowy’ figure nowadays, he was quite well known in his time. The title suggests the piece originally had words, although it could be a pun translating as ‘Mundi’s Mother’. ‘O Mater Mundi’ is arranged for 5 parts, A, A/T, T, T/B1, B2. We began by clapping a practice piece to get the feel of 2 semibreve beats to a bar which was the time signature for this piece. After playing the piece through we identified where each of 5 separate themes began. Alex pointed out the ‘English’ cadence (so called because it is commonly found in early English music) in bar 52 characterised by a ‘false’ relation (unexpected note) and falling scale. The group coped well with the semibreve beat and produced a nice balanced sound on the final play through.

Our next piece, which was **Monteverdi’s (1567 – 1643) ‘Gloria in Excelsis Deo’**, had the same time signature but a different style to ‘O Mater Mundi’. The piece, which is scored for A, A/T, T, B, begins with an ‘Intonation’ a series of notes with no bar lines which sounds exactly like monks chanting. It ends with an open 5th (G’s and D’s). This piece was quite tricky in places, with plenty of accidentals to keep us on our toes but the initial run through was well sight read. After working on the timing and on some of the harder sections we gave a reasonable final performance.

We tackled the longest and hardest piece of the day next – **Handel’s ‘Concerto Grosso’** – scored for A, A2, A3, A4, T, B. The first of 5 movements is marked ‘tempo giusto’ or strict time. Alex described the effect required as ‘rather pompous’. There were some difficult tied notes for the higher parts to contend with.

Movement 2 ‘Allegro’ – again there were some very tricky passages and nasty accidentals. Care was needed with the dynamics which should be alternating soft and loud. This movement comes to an abrupt end.

Movement 3 ‘Adagio’ – The tenors have an interesting rhythm at the start of the movement. In places all parts had to trill in unison and we practised doing this and stopping together without carrying on into the dotted part of the note.

Movement 4 ‘Allegro’ – Care needs to be taken when tonguing the semiquavers and Alex suggested that we ‘back-tongue’ these. It is also important to emphasise particular quavers in each bar.

Movement 5 ‘Allegro’ – This can be played very fast, and we tried the first few bars at high speed to see the effect. However, Alex opted to conduct it as a minuet as there are some difficult arpeggios to deal with at the end of each section. The emphasis should be placed on the first beat of each bar.

After working on individual movements we played the entire piece through. Apart from some problems in the middle of movement 3, and the tricky bits in movement 5 we made a good attempt at this quite challenging but very nice piece.

We next worked on two short pieces of similar style by **Brahms – ‘Waldesnacht Opus 62 No. 3’, and ‘Ach, Arme, Welt, du Trugest Mich’**. Both pieces were slow and gentle and much easier than what had gone before. A nice way to start winding down at the end of the afternoon.

We just had time to play through one more piece, **Hubert Parry’s ‘Never Weather Broken Sail’, and ‘More Willing Bent to Shore’ from ‘Songs of Farewell’**. These lovely melodic pieces were written towards the end of Parry’s life. The rits. and diminuendos in the middle and end of the piece are particularly important to the feel of the music.