

1. NWEMF report for 23rd October workshop.

On a cold, drizzly day in mid-October I made my way to Huddersfield University and parked by just after 10am only to find when I reached St Paul's Hall that there was already a queue of people waiting to register. That augered well for numbers and indeed it was very well attended by both singers and

instrumentalists with the extra injection of a number of music students from the University joining us for the day. There were hot drinks available at a very reasonable price and the hall itself seemed an ideal venue for workshops. The day was getting brighter by the minute.

We were gathered to sing (and play) a work by Giovanni Croce (1556 – 1609), *Sacre Cantilene Concertate*, 1610, The Ripieno Chorus. The eagle-eyed amongst you will have spotted that it was published posthumously just 400 years ago. It is a large work written for three ripieno choirs with soloists supported by three ripieno groups of instruments, viol family, violin family and wind. Each of the ten sections has a different group of soloists and a chorus to be sung after each verse. For most of the sections this chorus part was either the same each time or had only small variations. Some more experienced singers might well have found just the chorus a little tedious but there were plenty of soloists needed and anyone who wanted a challenge could have it without any problem. For simple souls like me it proved to be an ideal format for a one day workshop.

Let me explain myself. I am not a musician. If you talk to me about keys it really doesn't mean a lot. Even worse is when you tell me that the C minor chord in the bar before my entry will give me my note. Pardon? Sorry, not me it won't. This being the case I have often come away from workshops feeling that my capabilities have been stretched to breaking point and wondering if I have truly enjoyed my day.

Not this time though! In part that was, of course, down to Michael Proctor who was not only our tutor for the day but also the editor of the work. He had a delightfully light touch and though he is a musician par excellence he didn't make me feel inadequate. For the most part he didn't expect me to do more than I felt capable of and that was just fine by me! Mostly though it was down to the work itself. Surrounded by some very secure and capable singers in the

choir I was soon able to settle into my stride and really enjoy the music. Indeed I so enjoyed listening to the beautiful voices of the soloists that more than once I forgot that I would be singing again soon and, horror of horrors, don't I beg of you tell anyone, I missed an entry! Will I be drummed out of NWEMF? Will I be forever consigned to the outer darkness? I do hope not.

The day was not totally perfect. I do have some comments which I offer in the hope of being constructive not critical. We worked straight through all ten parts before lunch, which was very good going, and then went over most of them again before our final sing through. Unfortunately one of the parts we didn't look at a second time was No. 8, *Tres Sunt*, which for the chorus was suddenly more complex in that we weren't just singing the same thing each time. We managed but it felt rather hairy and another look at it would have been more comfortable. Incidentally there is a lot to be said for working through a piece like this in reverse order as very often the more complex parts are towards the end and you therefore learn them while you are still fresh.

The hall was excellent and very comfortable apart from one serious drawback. The acoustic was such that the choir, sitting on the stage had considerable difficulty in hearing what Michael Proctor or David Allen, or anyone else wanting to speak to us as a group, was saying. This led to some confusion from time to time about just what we were supposed to be doing. In the afternoon when we were divided into our three separate choirs and dispersed around the hall the problem was exacerbated.

My final point is in relation to the prior organisation. David had done a magnificent job of organisation so I feel that I am being rather harsh to say that I wish something could have been done beforehand to sort out which soloists were to sing each section. Perhaps it wasn't practicable to do so, but it did feel as though a lot of time was spent discussing who was going to sing what and asking for volunteers for some parts. If it had been possible we

would have been able to spend even more time with the glorious music. Incidentally it was really good to have the input of the music students. They were all eager to sing the solo parts, they all had beautiful and versatile voices and were a joy to listen to.

Having moaned my moan I come back to the point that it was a wonderful day, well organised in practically every aspect, well hosted by the University and with a great balance of music between the challenging for the capable and singable for the rest of us.

Frances Burditt

2. Venice comes to Huddersfield

As a violinist who is just dipping his toes into the world of early music, I approached the joint NEEMF/NWEMF Giovanni Croce* Day with some uncertainty. However, I was soon swept up with the infectious enthusiasm of Michael Procter, under whose expert guidance we rehearsed. In the elegantly proportioned St Paul's, Huddersfield Michael re-created the sounds as he had heard them when conducting the same work in St Mark's, Venice last year (*Sacre Cantilene Concertate*, published 1610).

Two of the three ripieno choirs were situated in distant galleries for the final playthrough, while the three groups of instrumentalists - viol consort, wind band and violin band - were in separate locations. I was particularly intrigued to see the 2 curtalls, 2 sackbuts and cornet of the wind band. Although our violin parts were not demanding, I enjoyed being part of a very different sound world and being able to listen to the vocal soloists.

The success of the day was also due to John Bryan and the Music Department at Huddersfield University, not only for provision of their facilities but also for the enthusiastic involvement of students. they contributed 4 instrumentalists and at least 6 singers, including some very able soloists.

I will be back soon to sample some more early music. Thank you to David Allen for the organisation.

Roger Dillon

3. Croce Workshop

I was very pleased to be able to 'host' the memorable workshop co-organised by NEEMF and NWEMF in which Michael Procter directed some sixty or so participants in the first modern performances of Giovanni Croce's *Sacre cantilene concertate* of 1610 which he has recently edited. Devised for a group of solo singers plus continuo organ, with ritornelli that can be doubled by further 'choirs' of voices and/or instruments these ten motets lent themselves to experimentation with varied scorings for the different choirs, and once the notes were familiar, with spatial separation of choirs in various corners of St Paul's, the University's concert hall in a converted late Georgian church.

Second year BMus (Hons) student Andy McAllister was one of the dozen or so Music Department students who sang or played at the workshop. He reports:

'I thoroughly enjoyed this workshop exploring some of Croce's music. I thought that Michael Procter was very friendly and extremely talented at what he does. He gave an insightful overview of the music before we sang it as well as being very inspiring in directing us in performing the music. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of performing with period instruments, something that is not always possible in performances of this type of music. I was also very privileged to be asked to sing numerous solos during the day, which helped tremendously with my sight singing and was also a valuable experience to take part in, as a performer at the University. Everyone who was there was very friendly and made the entire day most enjoyable, I hope a similar opportunity arises again soon.'

John Bryan Head of Music & Drama