

### **AGM Workshop**

“Praetorius is glorious!” I forget who said that, but Philip Thorby proved the truth of it at the NWEMF AGM workshop held in the Chaplaincy Centre of Lancaster University on the 7<sup>th</sup> March. The first work of the day showed the forces available to us. It was a 4-choir setting of *Lob sei den allmächtigen Gott*, which we performed with choirs consisting of 4 recorders + 1 voice, viols + 2 voices, sackbutts + 3 voices and a vocal choir which accommodated the remaining 25-30 singers. Throughout the day we were supported by an organ, played by Ann Bond. This setting of a Lutheran hymn showed Michael Praetorius in workmanlike mode and made an enjoyable starter.

Praetorius is well-known for his *Syntagma musicum*, an in-depth study of Italian and German performance practice, to which Philip referred many times. Having held the penultimate chord of the first piece for a very long time he explained that this was in accordance with Praetorius, who maintained that there should be an improvised instrumental toccata during this chord (we were excused the improvisation).

With much of the music being in triple time it was interesting to learn that most triple time music derived from the galliard, which in original notation begins with a 1-beat rest; the effect of this is to

throw the emphasis onto the second note, which is on a stronger beat than the first. Another interesting point was that, as singers would originally have sung from parts, when the vocal choir had a long rest the last chord before it came in was generally the same as the chord of its entry.

The second work of the day was *Veni sancte spiritus/Komm heiliger Geist*, a polychoral setting of the Latin chant and the Lutheran hymn. The Lutheran hymn was sung by 2 sopranos and bass, alternating with the Latin chant sung by a large body of singers (the aptly-named 'chorus plenitudinis'), with other choirs of viols and brass. This was a challenging and magnificent work.

More pearls of wisdom from Praetorius informed us that (a) if there are too many singers it is acceptable to underlay words to the instrumental parts, (b) the beat can be varied to suit circumstances: in particular, when the trumpets come in the conductor should accelerate the beat as the players will speed up anyway.

Next we looked at a 2-choir setting by Lassus of *In convertendo Dominus captivitatem Sion*. One choir was higher than the other and in some sections of the music only the lowest voice of the top choir and the top voice of the lower choir sang, which was very effective.

Finally, in the last half hour of the day, we tackled a wonderful but difficult setting by Praetorius of *Atollite portae capita vestra*, for 2 choirs: SSAT and ATTBB. This 'taster' served to convince us that the work would repay further study.

All in all it was an enjoyable, informative, challenging and exhausting day.

Janet Evans